

**A Space of Her Own:
Literary Representations of Female Subjectivity and Space-Time,
1868-1915**

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Abstract

This thesis begins with the premise that, in order to express their subjectivity, women need a space of their own. Teresa de Lauretis calls this space an ‘elsewhere’ space of discourse outside male narratives. Here I consider literary representations of different ‘elsewhere’ spaces with their own space-time which compromises notions of the gendering of space as female and time as male. Applying a theoretical framework based on the work of Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz, both of whom argue for a new space-time framework for women, I argue that by reading the selected texts through the lens of a non-gendered ‘elsewhere’ space, more nuanced and multi-dimensional expressions of female subjectivity emerge. A complex, and sometimes problematic, interaction between discourses on evolution, religion and gender is involved in finding women a space of their own and an active role in shaping history. Chapter 1 considers changing conceptions of space and time, and the contribution of Irigaray and Grosz to my thesis. Chapter 2 explores expressions of female subjectivity and feminism in the conceptual spaces of the spirit world and séance room in the Spiritualist novels of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *Beyond the Gates* (1883) and *The Gates Between* (1887), and Florence Marryat’s *The Dead Man’s Message* (1894) and *There Is No Death* (1891). My discussion of Marie Corelli’s *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886) in Chapter 3 centres on celestial spheres as a conceptual space in which to re-imagine femininity combining genius and divinity. In Chapter 4, the hyperspatial world of Charles Howard Hinton’s *Stella and an Unfinished Communication* (1895) offers a representation of female subjectivity in which matter and spirit are reconciled. In Chapter 5, I explore the problem of freedom of expression in the feminist utopias of Mary Bradley Lane’s *Mizora* (1880-1), Elizabeth Corbett’s *New Amazonia* (1889) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915). I conclude by employing the idea of ‘positive negative space’ to re-emphasise changing conceptions of space and time in the nineteenth century and the continuing challenge for women to find a space to call their own.

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INTRODUCTION

Suppose that Truth is a woman – what then? Is there not ground for suspecting that all philosophers, in so far as they have been dogmatists, have failed to understand women – that the terrible seriousness and clumsy importunity with which they have usually paid their addresses to Truth, have been unskilled and unseemly methods for winning a woman? Certainly she has never allowed herself to be won; and at present every kind of dogma stands with sad and discouraged mien – if, indeed, it stands at all!¹

This thesis is about female subjectivity – the quality or condition of experiencing life through the mind and body of a woman. It is about women in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century seeking a space in which to explore the behaviour and qualities that contribute to a sense of identity, and that are characteristic of a self-prescribed femininity.² As difficult to pin down as Nietzsche's Truth, so the concept of femininity eludes being fixed in space and time, and evades definition. In what follows, I argue that for women to express their subjectivity they need a space they can call their own and, by situating women in imaginary conceptual spaces with their own space-time, new and diverse expressions of femininity and selfhood become possible. One of the central organising principles of my argument is the 'elsewhere' space of the literary imagination. I take the term 'elsewhere' from Teresa de Lauretis, who argues that women must find spaces of discourse outside male narratives in order to represent themselves: 'I think of [elsewhere] as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus'.³ The conceptual spaces of the spirit world, the celestial spheres, the fourth dimension and utopia are 'elsewhere' spaces that seek to exist outside the patriarchal framework of Victorian and early Edwardian life. They are all, in a way, hyperspatial or extra-dimensional spaces, existing in their own ungendered space-time, another central organising principle of this thesis. Taking a lead from Doreen Massey's essay, 'Politics and Space/Time' (2007), I use the term space-time to confer a move away from thinking of the

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by Helen Zimmern (New York: Macmillan, 1907), p. 1.

² I use the terms 'femininity' and 'feminine' to stand for meanings attributed to belonging to the female gender, differentiating between those expressions of femininity that arise from subjective experience and those that are socially constructed.

³ Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 25. Rita Felski writes of romantic fantasy's 'elsewhere' space which lies outside the consciousness central to modern experience, in *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 131. Sarah Willburn refers to the 'extra spheres' of mystical visions that exist beyond the public and private spheres, in *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 70.

world as three-dimensional to a world of four (possibly more) dimensions in which space and time are in active interrelationship with each other.⁴ This is a space-time that disavows the idea of space and time as separate modalities, with space gendered as female and time as male. Instead, space and time are fluid and intersecting, dissolving the gendered boundaries. The imaginary spaces considered here reflect the changing conceptions of space and time from the nineteenth century through to the early-twentieth century, exploiting new configurations of space-time and its effects on subjectivity. A significant thread woven through this thesis is women's engagement with Darwinian evolution, their re-working of evolutionary ideas of space and time to ensure that women not only survive, but succeed, in the fight for their own space and make their mark on history.

My theoretical framework is inspired by the work of Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz. Irigaray argues that, 'In order to make it possible to think through, and live, [sexual] difference, we must reconsider the whole problematic of *space* and *time*'.⁵ She refuses the oppositions that a patriarchal symbolic order generates – those of spirit and matter, reason and emotion, time and space. Women need a space they can call their own in which to generate their own social order. Echoing Irigaray, Grosz argues for 'the possibility of a different space-time framework' for women.⁶ What both these theorists argue for is something similar to 'unlearning', a concept central to the hyperspace philosophy of Charles Howard Hinton discussed in Chapter 4. Here, 'unlearning' refers to the dispensing of patriarchal conceptions of time and space for a more flowing and intersecting space-time. It is a process applicable to the 'elsewhere' spaces throughout this thesis. In the imaginary spaces that I consider, ones that exist outside traditional gendering of time as male and space as female, there is the opportunity to explore more nuanced and multiform conceptions of female subjectivity. The multiple subjectivities that emerge contribute to the vibrant *fin-de-siècle* discourse on women, subjectivity and feminism. The unique contribution that this thesis makes to scholarship is in the particular way it focuses on the complex intersection of imaginary space-time and subjectivity within the framework of an 'elsewhere' space. It brings together feminist theory, philosophy and the history of science to elucidate a fresh reading of non-canonical and often under-valued texts, at the same time as demonstrating the contributions made by early feminists to discourses on femininity, feminism and gender. Although space-time is a central

⁴ Doreen Massey, 'Politics and Space/Time', in *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 249-272 (p. 264).

⁵ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone Press, 1993), p. 7, original emphasis.

⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995), p. 100.

framing device, the focus is mostly on women's space, emphasising the significance of space in human consciousness and in structuring human relations.⁷ Time takes on a magnitude of its own in its fluid intersection with space, as space is transformed from having been a place of (female) immanence and stasis to one of agency and active engagement with history.

By focusing on female subjectivity and femininity, I am aware of the risk of essentialism. By essentialism, I mean the belief that women have essential characteristics or traits that define them and which are usually associated with their biology, or what is assumed to be their nature. My use of an Irigarayan methodology further risks a charge of essentialism, especially given the criticism in some quarters of Irigaray's early work.⁸ I discuss Irigaray's philosophy in more detail in the following chapter, but it is important to state here that Irigaray's later work on sexual difference has led to significant revision of these claims of essentialism. Both Naomi Schor and Ping Xu point to Irigaray's use of mimicry of male discourses on women and the feminine as a way of de-constructing and re-constructing ideas of sexual difference.⁹ Irigaray remains apologetically committed to the notion of difference at a sexuate level but, as Alison Stone points out, the natural duality of the sexes does not detract from the 'broader natural process of self-differentiation' in sexual, physical and cultural forms.¹⁰ Stone argues for a reading of Irigaray that envisages women as both self-differentiating and multiple. In my reading of Irigaray, the irreducibility of sexual difference is compatible with an anti-essentialist approach to finding a space between man and woman (Irigaray terms this the 'sensible transcendental') in which each sex is able to unfold their uniqueness outside a binary framework of subject and other. For the purposes of this thesis, a different way of thinking about space and time is central to locating this space.

The nineteenth century was a period in which scientists, philosophers and fiction writers were responding to changing conceptions of space and time. For centuries, Isaac Newton's theory of time and space had presided. Newtonian time was figured as absolute, true and mathematical, flowing along regardless of the external world. Space, too, was

⁷ Isobel Armstrong, 'Spaces of the Nineteenth-Century Novel', in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature*, ed. by Kate Flint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 575-597 (p. 577).

⁸ For criticism of Irigaray as essentialist, see Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 127-149; and Monique Plaza, "'Phallographic Power" and the Psychology of "Woman"', *Ideology and Consciousness*, 4 (1978), 5-36.

⁹ Naomi Schor, 'This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray', in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 57-78 (p. 66); Ping Xu, 'Irigaray's Mimicry and the Problem of Essentialism', *Irigaray's Mimicry and the Problem of Essentialism*, *Hypatia*, 10.4 (1994), 76-89 (pp. 77-78).

¹⁰ Alison Stone, *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 9.

considered to be both absolute and immutable. By the time Einstein articulated his theories of Special Relativity and General Relativity in the early twentieth century, space and time were already being conceptualised as flowing and dynamic, as interconnected rather than as separate modalities. This conception of space and time offered literary opportunities to re-think the body in space and time. It became possible to consider in a more open-ended way the nature of subjectivity, particularly female subjectivity. Once time and space are no longer considered as separate modalities, they resist the gendering that they have been subject to throughout history – of time as male and space as female, thus making it possible to re-think what it means to be a woman in space and time. Changing notions of time and space were part of a wider nineteenth-century context in which theories about the relative nature of life were increasingly common. New developments in science intersected in rich and dynamic ways with other social, political and cultural transformations.¹¹ One of the most significant shifts in thinking about space and time came from Charles Darwin in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), changing the understanding of time and its relation to space. His theory of evolution spawned various readings and interpretations, including a challenge by some nineteenth-century feminists keen to insert women into the agency of evolutionary progress. The idea of the relativity of space and time emerged out of developments in physics and mathematics, technological inventions such as the telegraph and telephone that promised the annihilation of space and time, challenges to orthodox religious beliefs, and sociological and anthropological developments that suggested a plurality of spatio-temporal experiences. At the same time, social and political changes, including movements for civil rights and women's rights and the fight for suffrage, placed within the far reach of women a vision of their own space and time.

The nineteenth century was also a time when notions of the self were changing. The concept of a post-Enlightenment rational subject gave way to the notion of the multiplicity of selfhood. In his work at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, Pierre Janet revealed through hypnosis the existence of multiple selves in some of his patients. In Britain, through investigations for the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), the poet, classicist and founder member of the SPR, Frederic Myers, the psychologist, Edmund Gurney, and the philosopher and economist, Henry Sidgwick, found that multiplicity of selfhood, or co-consciousness, was not confined to the 'abnormal' mind. Myers theorised the concept of subliminal and supraliminal consciousness, suggesting that not only could the subliminal consciousness of one person invade that of another but also, in *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily*

¹¹ See Christopher Herbert, *Victorian Relativity: Radical Thought and Scientific Discovery* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), for the history of Victorian relativistic thinking.

Death (1903), that some portion of personality could survive death. In his *Principles of Psychology* (1890), the American psychologist, William James, proposed that the self was split into two parts, the Ego, the felt personal identity, and the Me, which was itself split into empirical, spiritual and social selves.¹² James also believed that each individual consciousness was part of a larger cosmic consciousness.¹³ This idea of a higher selfhood was replicated in German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche's, concept of the superman and French philosopher, Henri Bergson's, vitalism, and further reflected in Charles Howard Hinton's hyperspatial self, and the higher self of Theosophical astral space. In the light of these observations, it was difficult to hold fast to mechanistic explanations of human functioning. British psychologist, William McDougall, was later to favour a form of animism to explain the vitalization of the body by the soul.¹⁴ It seemed that a spiritual dimension remained important to the idea of selfhood, further undermining the notion of the rational self. According to Alex Owen, the revival of interest in the occult in the *fin de siècle* was an attempt to find a way through these new ideas of consciousness, to understand a self that 'transcended in graphic terms the conceptual dualisms of subject/object, and inner/outer' that were under attack from all sides.¹⁵ Extending the concept of the occult to the 'elsewhere' spaces situated beyond the familiar known world, it is possible to imagine within these spaces the exploitation of a fragmenting and multiple selfhood, allowing for a re-negotiation of (female) subjectivity.

Choice of texts

The texts that I consider in this thesis engage with these cultural developments in different ways. They represent one small part of a much greater challenge to the nature of knowledge, and the moving away from a sense of absolute truths towards an understanding of a world in which truth is of a much more contingent nature. The literary imagination exploited this fluidity and the opening of gaps in knowledge. I am interested in literary representations of women and how writers used these gaps and interstices to create spaces in which multiple versions of subjectivity could emerge – how, in fact, the cultural opens up space for the literary and, in turn, literary intervention becomes cultural intervention.¹⁶ These conceptual spaces did not originate solely from the literary imagination – they reflect a complex interaction, on both sides of the Atlantic, between the literary, the scientific and the

¹² William James, *Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols (New York: Holt, 1890), I, p. 292.

¹³ William James, *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1909), pp. 289-290.

¹⁴ William McDougall, *Body and Mind: A History and Defence of Animism* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), pp. 162-163.

¹⁵ Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 145.

¹⁶ Brenda R. Weber, *Women and Literary Celebrity in the Nineteenth Century: The Transatlantic Production of Fame and Gender* (London & New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 18.

metaphysical. Just as the spaces of the afterlife and séance room were familiar to followers of Spiritualism, and the late-nineteenth century saw a revival of interest in the occult, so was the fourth dimension already a cause for speculation amongst mathematicians and scientists. At the same time utopian ideas were being promulgated and experimented with in socialist and communitarian circles. My chosen texts reflect these movements and interests. Spiritualist spaces are the focus of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *Beyond the Gates* (1883) and *The Gates Between* (1887), and Florence Marryat's *The Dead Man's Message* (1894) and *There Is No Death* (1891). The celestial spheres, with their debt to Theosophy, are central to Marie Corelli's *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886).¹⁷ In *Stella and an Unfinished Communication* (1895), the only text by a male author chosen because of the radical way in which he represents female subjectivity, Charles Howard Hinton speculates on existence in the fourth dimension. In the three feminist utopian novels, *Mizora* (1880-1) by Mary Bradley Lane, *Amazonia* (1889) by Elizabeth Corbett, and *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the authors' imaginary utopias are spaces in which matriarchal societies flourish.¹⁸

These texts sit on the margins of what is generally accepted to be the literary canon. In common with other marginalised literature, however, they have increasingly been recognised as making a significant contribution to an understanding of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century culture. Being situated on the outside can offer a valuable perspective: marginality has the advantage of allowing for the subversion of those cultural forces that govern society and behaviour. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, some of the most productive cultural work takes place on the boundaries of different cultural areas.¹⁹ bell hooks, writing as a black woman in a white patriarchal world, views marginality as not only a site of deprivation but also one of 'radical possibility, a space of resistance'.²⁰ Marginality becomes 'a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives', a site that offers 'the possibility of

¹⁷ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Three Spiritualist Novels* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Florence Marryat, *The Dead Man's Message: An Occult Romance* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2009), *There Is No Death* (London: Griffith Farran, 1893); Marie Corelli, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (London: Methuen, 1903).

¹⁸ Charles Howard Hinton, *Stella, and An Unfinished Communication: Studies of the Unseen* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895); Mary E. Bradley Lane, *Mizora: A Prophecy*, ed. by Jean Pfaelzer (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000); Mrs. George Corbett, *New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future* (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Lambert, 1889); Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, in *The Yellow Wall-paper, Herland, and Selected Writings*, ed. by Denise D. Knight (London: Penguin, 1999).

¹⁹ M. M. Bakhtin, 'Response to a Question from *Novy Mir*', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* ed. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, and trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 1-7 (p. 2), cited in Carol Farley Kessler, 'Consider Her Ways: The Cultural Works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Pragmatopian Stories 1908-1913', in *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*, ed. by Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), pp. 126-136 (p. 127).

²⁰ bell hooks, 'Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness', in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), pp. 145-153 (p. 149).

radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds'.²¹ I have chosen the above texts precisely because they offer an unusual and radical perspective on women's lives and the world they occupy. Alienated from conventional concepts of space and time, and focused on subject matter that was considered unorthodox – from Spiritualism and esoteric religion to fourth-dimensional space and matriarchal utopian society – they transgress the status quo and promise liberation from the constraints of the institutions and dominant ideologies that restricted women's lives. They each make a significant contribution to feminist discourse in the way that they challenge (male) scientific epistemology and Victorian gender ideology.

It is in the imaginary 'elsewhere' space that it becomes possible to re-think female subjectivity, making this 'elsewhere' space central to the cultural work of these texts. Each conceptual space can be considered as a unique chronotope. Mikhail Bakhtin ascribes the term, 'chronotope', 'literally, "time-space"', to:

the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature [...] Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot and history.²²

Bakhtin's 'time-space' is the expression of Massey's space-time in literary form. In this thesis, the chronotope acts as that 'optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring'.²³ The space-time of the spirit world, the celestial spheres, the fourth dimension and utopia serve to subvert traditional ideas about female subjectivity, pointing to the constraints that were placed on female self-expression. The chronotope reveals, on the one hand, how the forces of Victorian gender ideology shaped ideas about femininity and, on the other hand, how the cultural influences that enabled an epistemic shift in thinking, especially about space and time, also enabled new ways of thinking about women and their subjective experiences.²⁴ Space and time, and the traditional ways in which they were conceptualised, are defamiliarised. The hypothesis of the 'elsewhere' as a form of hyperspace with its own space-time is a central conceptual theme: each 'elsewhere' space acting as a hyperspace that takes the reader from a world bound by

²¹ hooks, p. 150.

²² Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 84.

²³ Bakhtin, pp. 425-426.

²⁴ When I refer to Victorian gender ideology, I mean the demarcation of male and female roles that became strengthened with the Industrial Revolution, the separation of public (male and work-oriented) and private (female and domestic) spaces – the separate spheres. This ideology emphasised the 'natural' differences between men and women, with women understood as being more sensitive and possessing weaker constitutions than men.

epistemology and ideology to a space outside. If, in hyperspace, it is possible to see an object on all sides and through it, then the 'elsewhere' space provides a privileged insight into female subjectivity. From within this space it is possible to shine a light on the injustices done to women by a gender ideology that delineated women as subject to biological vagaries and limited in their capacities. By taking a broader view and engaging in discourses on science and philosophy, individualism and collectivism, femininity and feminism, these texts work to destabilise established thinking.

The process of destabilising is emphasised further by an apparent blurring of genre boundaries between romance, Spiritualist, utopian and science fiction. In the way that science fiction aims to estrange the reader, so the resistance to generic classification provides a sense of estrangement. Bakhtin, however, argues that the chronotope is intrinsically related to genre and, if, as Tatiana Teslenko suggests, genres 'express space/time relations that reflect current social beliefs regarding the placement and actions of human individuals in space and time', then the 'elsewhere' space takes on its own generic significance.²⁵ It unites the texts considered in this thesis that both look backwards to the ways in which space and time delimited women's self-expression, and forwards to a space-time in which female subjectivity and social relations could be mapped differently. The texts point to multiple modes of expressions of subjectivity, and highlight the diverse forms of feminism that were part of the wider cultural climate in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.

It is important to mention one aspect of cultural work that is absent from these texts. The representation of women is, by and large, homogenous in terms of race and class. They are written by middle class, Anglo-Saxon authors representing their own class and race and writing for a mainly white, middle-class readership, although turn-of-the-century reading practices suggest that their work would have had a wider audience.²⁶ For example, the worlds that Corelli, Marryat and Phelps come from are worlds in which separate spheres ideology operates at its strongest, with women who were not compelled to work for their living expected to remain at home and make family life the centre of their existence. In his representation of female transcendence in *An Unfinished Communication*, Hinton comes closest to addressing the working-class woman's experience, suggesting that higher forms of consciousness are available to all women, regardless of social status. In the world where one

²⁵ Tatiana Teslenko, *Feminist Utopian Novels of the 1970s: Joanna Russ and Dorothy Bryant* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003), p. 89.

²⁶ There was a massive expansion of the printed word in the late-nineteenth century, with technological advances and improvements in printing and paper production, and new distribution networks including the railways. Rising rates of literacy, the end of the triple-decker novel and the availability of cheaper books all contributed to a demand for a broader range of reading material.

might expect a more radical treatment of class and race, the feminist utopian world, there is an egalitarian approach to the value of different forms of work that women undertake, suggesting that women are no longer defined by what they do but rather by who they are. But rather than address class issues, class is erased from this world. The only race that matters is the Anglo-Saxon race. To twenty-first-century eyes, the valorisation of the Anglo-Saxon woman may appear a highly racist and discriminatory practice that excludes difference, particularly in the case of women and children of colour and/or disability, and those who choose not to conform. This reflects a widespread belief in the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon as the highest form of humanity, the strength of the eugenics movement in the late-nineteenth century, combined with a desire on the part of women to be able to control their own lives. Although the anti-slavery and anti-vivisection movements had strong roots and associations with feminist activism on both sides of the Atlantic, and women's rights activism included working to alleviate poverty, there was little suggestion that black women or the working classes could aspire to be the equal of white middle-class women. This white middle-class perspective is reflected in other literature of the period. For example, although New Woman writer, Olive Schreiner, espoused socialism, she also emphasised the supremacy of white women in *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and *Dreams* (1895). This was one of the reasons socialist feminists like Eleanor Marx, daughter of Karl, were fairly sceptical of the bourgeois women's rights movement.²⁷

The exclusion of the representation of minority groups and working-class women from the texts examined in this thesis reflects the cultural context in which the writers were working, and a period when first-wave feminism generally favoured the concerns of white, middle-class women in Britain and America. My focus on space-time and a choice of texts that foreground the 'elsewhere' spaces of a particular type of women limits the extent to which I address issues of race and class. This is not to dismiss the important cultural forces at work, but to acknowledge that my focus, and the constraints of space in the thesis, operate to delimit the extent to which race and class are addressed. In Britain, women across classes were active in campaigning for the right to education and fair employment, as well as being involved in socialist and suffrage movements. In America, from the 1830s onwards, black women were campaigning on issues of race, abolition, and women's rights.²⁸ Sojourner Truth and Maria Stewart were prominent in this group of radical women, the latter being the first

²⁷ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 38.

²⁸ See Claire Goldberg Moses, "'What's in a Name?'" On Writing the History of Feminism', *Feminist Studies*, 38.3 (2012), 757-779.

black woman to speak publicly in defence of women's rights. As Beverly Guy-Sheftall points out, black American women's activism and writing addressed a vast range of issues from poverty and racism to imperialism and welfare.²⁹ It is important to recognise the significance of the range of these activities on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Literary Context

The mid- to late-nineteenth century was a time of turbulence on both sides of the Atlantic. The recent history of war and revolution in Europe and America, the spread of class unrest, the growth of Empire that promised wealth and prosperity whilst also threatening degeneration and collapse, promulgated a sense of turbulence and instability. The speed of scientific and technological developments induced the sensation that the western world was hurtling towards a modernity that was beyond control. The Christian church appeared unable to resolve this sense of unease, having already been unsettled by the impact of Darwin's evolutionary theory. Many people sought alternative solutions in the form of, for example, Spiritualism or utopian lifestyles. The American Renaissance from the 1830s to the end of the Civil War, a period of national expression, gave rise to prolific literary production from writers from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes to the Transcendentalists who included Henry Thoreau, Walt Whitman and Margaret Fuller. The Great Awakening of the 1880s to 1900s signified a period of religious and social activism which was not only associated with new religious movements, such as Christian Science, but also gave women a new voice in religious circles. Transcendentalism advocated the reform of society to allow men and women to develop fully, spawning alternative lifestyles and utopian communitarian projects. On both sides of the Atlantic, new ideas and movements proliferated in the form of socialism and communitarianism, civil rights and the anti-slavery movement, women's rights and the demand for female suffrage. Many women, both black and white, found their voice but they also, however, often found themselves up against social and political institutions and medical orthodoxy that ensured their continuing subordination. 'In periods of cultural insecurity, when there are fears of regression and degeneration', argues Elaine Showalter, 'the longing for strict border controls around the definition of gender, as well as race, class, and nationality, becomes especially intense'.³⁰ British colonialism, the growth of American immigration and the science of eugenics contributed particularly to concern about racial borders. The construction of the white Anglo-Saxon woman of the

²⁹ *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. by Beverley Guy-Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 2.

³⁰ Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 4.

Gilded Age literature of, for example, Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) points to some of the anxieties prevailing from the mid-nineteenth century.

Notwithstanding the desire for control and stability, this period of turbulence was also one of hope. The New Woman writers of the late-nineteenth century, criticised on both sides of the Atlantic for challenging male supremacy, advocated variously for women's political, social and sexual rights, and a right to free expression. The New Woman was also looking for a space of her own, well before Virginia Woolf coined the phrase, 'a room of one's own'.³¹ Where I make reference to New Woman texts in this thesis, it is to acknowledge that the New Woman was an important cultural phenomenon of the late-nineteenth century: she 'epitomised the spirit of the *fin de siècle*' according to Ann Heilmann.³² The New Woman reflected a crisis in authority and in issues of class, gender, race and sexual behaviour. She both pointed up society's apparent degeneration and proposed a way forward for moral regeneration. There were many variants of the New Woman but all were concerned, in one way or another, with personal, social and political change for women. New Woman writers sought out sites for transformation and, in so doing, reformulated notions of being that resisted the delineation of women from the position of (male) oppression. As a result, New Woman fiction affirmed the multiplicity of female subjectivity, and in this lies the comparison with the texts I consider here. Also, at a time when the prospect of degeneration was being promulgated by thinkers like the biologist, T. H. Huxley, philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, and physician, Max Nordau, both New Woman writers and my chosen authors were intervening in the discourse of Darwinian evolution to place women at the forefront of progress, thus challenging the notion that it is only (male) linear time that matters. Both in the feminist utopias of Lane, Corbett and Gilman, and the New Woman writing, for example, of Sarah Grand and George Egerton, women taking charge of their maternity signified an interjection of female, cyclical time and a reclamation of the space of their own bodies. In broad terms, however, the fictional New Woman was placed centre-stage in the contemporary world in order to address the material circumstances of women, also known as the 'Woman Question'.³³ In the fiction I discuss, versions of femininity emerge out of other discourses –

³¹ Ann Heilmann, 'Feminist Resistance, the Artist and "A Room of One's Own" in New Woman Fiction', *Women's Writing*, 2.3 (1995), 291-308 (p. 291).

³² Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 1.

³³ The 'Woman Question', first raised by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman* (1792), focused on the marginalisation of women in society, their lack of access to proper education and to a place in the public sphere. Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was a British philosopher, writer and women's rights activist. By the

on Spiritualism, the occult, the fourth dimension and the utopian dream. In the main, they are primarily concerned with the spiritual and phenomenological development of subjectivity rather than with material circumstances. The exceptions to this are the feminist utopian texts which, because of the way in which the biological body is foregrounded as a site of transformation, come closer to the New Woman text.

Women's writing was part of a 'transatlantic imaginary' according to Daphne Brooks, which functioned as a 'lively cultural space owing less to geographic cartography and more to the landscape of popular culture'.³⁴ Although Britain and America were divided in their politics, with the focus on traditionalism and class division in Britain, and meritocratic egalitarianism in America, Brenda Weber argues that there were 'commonalities that expressed themselves through tacit ideological imperatives about gender'.³⁵ It is from this cultural environment that the texts considered here emerge. The 'transatlantic imaginary' encapsulates the idea of British and American feminism being part of a wider network of ideas and forces. This network was facilitated by a print culture that disseminated discourses on feminism, religion and science, and by the transatlantic travel undertaken by numerous individuals and groups which included explorers, traders, emigrants and tourists.³⁶ All this was happening well before the construction of the Atlantic Cable made communication so much faster and easier, but the cable was to assume a metaphorical significance, particularly for feminism. It promised so much more than simply bringing together people and ideas across the ocean. In her address to the International Council of Women in 1888, the feminist, Ali Trygg-Helenius, spoke of the 'golden cable of sympathy' connecting women from the US and Europe.³⁷ And Henry Field, in his history of the cable, indicates that 'the slender cord beneath the sea had finer uses' than the merely monetary. It was also to 'link hearts and homes on opposite sides of the ocean, bearing messages of life and death, of joy and sorrow, of hopes and fears'.³⁸ Apart from its economic and business function, the cable forged a sympathetic community through the building of emotional bonds across the Atlantic. The idea

late-nineteenth century, the 'Woman Question' also encompassed wider women's rights issues including the right to vote.

³⁴ Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 7.

³⁵ Weber, p. 23.

³⁶ Brigitte Bailey, 'Transatlantic Studies in American Women Writers', in *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and Great Britain*, ed. by Beth Lynne Lueck, Brigitte Bailey and Lucinda L. Damon-Bach (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012), pp. xiii-xxvii (p. xx); Kevin Hutchings and Julia M. Wright, 'Introduction: Mobilising Gender, Race and Nation', in *Transatlantic Literary Exchanges 1790-1870: Gender, Race, and Nation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 1-13 (p. 7).

³⁷ Margaret McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), p. 1.

³⁸ Henry Field, *The Story of the Atlantic Telegraph* (New York: Scribner, 1892), p. 393, quoted in McFadden, p. 2.

of a sympathetic community was further strengthened by the simultaneous development of communication technology and a burgeoning interest in Spiritualism. Not only did women cross the ocean to speak at meetings. It seemed as though the spirits were also willing to make that journey: the spirit of Florence Marryat's daughter crossed the Atlantic to appear before her mother on a visit to New York.³⁹ This points to the cultural significance of both real and imaginary networks of wires and vibrations connecting people and ideas across vast expanses. The cultural forces that traversed the Atlantic, disseminating ideas about physics and philosophy, Spiritualism and socialism, together with a transatlantic print exchange, helped forge the strong connections between the British and American literary texts considered here.

Katherine Hayles suggests that, although nineteenth-century novelists and poets were unlikely to be familiar with the details of developments in physics and mathematics, nor with the complex ideas related to changing conceptions of time and space, they did respond to what she calls 'a more general set of ideas pervasive in the culture' that impacted on conceptions of time and space.⁴⁰ For example, not only did the Romantic imagination suggest the idea of the world as an organism that defied explanation by reason and mechanics alone, but Darwin posited a form of evolution that was as much at the mercy of chance and chaos as of design, thus also resisting the world as rational and ordered. Drawing on modern physics, Hayles uses the metaphor of a 'cosmic web' to refer to the interconnectivity of nineteenth-century ideas and phenomena, including the intersection of dynamic time and space:

In marked contrast to the atomistic Newtonian idea of reality, in which physical objects are discrete and events are capable of occurring independently of one another and the observer, a field view of reality pictures objects, events, and observer as belonging inextricably to the same field; the disposition of each, in this view, is influenced – sometimes dramatically, sometimes subtly, but in every instance – by the disposition of the others.⁴¹

This field view of reality, based on experiencing the whole, or *gestalt*, rather than its parts, is of considerable significance in thinking about women as part of the whole. Stephen Kern uses the phrase, 'positive negative space', to emphasise a view of space as 'active and full'.⁴² Positive negative space captures the idea of space as shifting and fluid, at the same time as suggesting the relative nature of reality, knowledge and truth. Its relevance to women is that it signifies a shift from seeing only the object in the foreground, with everything else fading into

³⁹ Florence Marryat, *There Is No Death*, p. 211.

⁴⁰ N. Katherine Hayles, *The Cosmic Web: Scientific Field Models and Literary Strategies in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 25.

⁴¹ Hayles, pp. 9-10.

⁴² Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 152.

the background. Instead, objects relegated to the background come to assume the same significance as those in the foreground. Women, who usually occupy that background space, begin to emerge into sight. Hayles's 'cosmic web' metaphor is a powerful one, for it encapsulates the idea that the shift from Newtonian physics to a physics of relativity did not occur in isolation – it had enormous social and political consequences. It was part of a wider cultural and thematic transformation that included advances in technology, ideas about time and space that were influenced as much by philosophy and psychology as by physics, and a gradual acceptance of the heterogeneity of 'culture'. To be part of this network was to experience a sense of transformative possibilities, and it is this sense that pervades the literary texts that I consider in this thesis.

The texts I have chosen were not alone in exploring different configurations of space and time. They constitute a part of a growing body of literature which set out to challenge, to varying extents, the scientific epistemology, religious orthodoxy and gender ideology of the time through the imaginative interplay of space and time. This includes Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), Edwin Abbott's *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884), and H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), all of which, like Hinton's *Stella and an Unfinished Communication*, find inspiration from new ideas in mathematics and physics and implications for the perception of bodies in space and time. The imponderables of physics and abstract mathematics intersected with, and were often used to explain, other areas of occult activity. Indeed, the Theosophist Charles Leadbeater's belief that the astral plane existed in the fourth dimension, and William Stead's theory of 'throughth', a fourth dimension of clairvoyance and telepathy, suggest a Spiritualist dimension to Hinton's hyperspace.⁴³ Nineteenth-century accounts of Spiritualism alluded to the annihilation of space and time as the borders between living and dead became ever more permeable. In fictional accounts, Spiritualist phenomena were often disdained and feared, for example, in Henry James's *The Bostonians* (1886) and Hamlin Garland's *The Tyranny of the Dark* (1905). On the other hand, in Rudyard Kipling's 'Wireless' (1902), spirit communication promised to be a more powerful tool of communication than the latest technological inventions. But where much of the fiction dealing with Spiritualism favoured the so-called rational, scientific mind, writers like Phelps, Marryat and Corelli saw the potential of invisible forces to create other-worldly spaces in which they could re-configure female subjectivity. This was one version of the utopian dream that proved very popular

⁴³ C. W. Leadbeater, *Astral Plane: Its Scenery, Inhabitants and Phenomena* (Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1895); William Stead, 'Throughth'; or, On the Eve of the Fourth Dimension', *Review of Reviews*, April 1893, pp. 426-432.

towards the end of the century, exemplified by the proliferation of utopian novels, amongst the most famous being *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888) by the American, Edward Bellamy, and *News from Nowhere* (1891) by the Englishman, William Morris. But it was the feminist utopian novels of writers like Corbett, Lane and Gilman, which were to assume a more radical position in their challenge to patriarchal societal structures. Like the fiction of Corelli, Phelps, Marryat and Hinton, they imagine a space unbounded by the usual spatio-temporal gendering of Victorian life to emphasise the role of women in the evolution of humankind. In the same way that science and technology were to interweave with the imaginary, so different literary forms intersected.

Literary Critical Responses

The intersection of science and literature has been a fertile area for literary critics. As Andrea Henderson points out, 'Not only did many works of late-nineteenth-century art aspire to the condition of science, but, in important ways, late-nineteenth-century science aspired to the condition of art'.⁴⁴ Several critics, including Daniel Brown and Sally Shuttleworth, explore the interconnections of poetics and science.⁴⁵ Others are concerned with the ways in which new forms of communication technology elided with the occult.⁴⁶ Roger Luckhurst, for example, shows how easy it was for science, especially physics, to become embroiled with pseudoscience when reason was overtaken by imagination.⁴⁷ There has also been an interest in the way that literature intersects with other cultural forces. One of the literary critics whose work has influenced this thesis is Sarah Willburn, who focuses on how the Spiritualist conjuring of extra spheres offers a route to individuality quite different from that of liberal individualism.⁴⁸ I am also indebted to the work of Christine Ferguson, who analyses the role of eugenics in Spiritualism's promise of regeneration in this world and in the afterlife; and

⁴⁴ Andrea Henderson, 'Math for Math's Sake: Non-Euclidean Geometry, Aestheticism, and Flatland', *PMLA*, 124.2 (2009), 455-471 (pp. 469-470).

⁴⁵ Daniel Brown, *The Poetry of Victorian Scientists: Style, Science and Nonsense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), and *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Barri J. Gold, *Thermopoetics: Energy in Victorian Literature and Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010); Sarah C. Alexander, *Victorian Literature and the Physics of the Imponderable* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015); and Devin Griffiths, *Science and Literature between the Darwins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

⁴⁶ Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 2011); Sam Halliday, *Science and Technology in the Age of Hawthorne, Melville, Twain and James: Thinking and Writing Electricity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Roger Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould and others (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), pp. 403-412.

⁴⁸ Sarah A. Willburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

Elana Gomel, who examines the intersection of Spiritualism and radical utopianism.⁴⁹ Several literary scholars discuss how the ideas of radical utopianism developed in feminist utopian fiction were heavily influenced by contemporary science, technology and eugenics.⁵⁰ My particular focus is on the ways in which literature intersects with developments in thinking about space and time, and what happens when women are situated in imaginary conceptual spaces with their own space-time. From this perspective of a different space-time, I explore how thinking about female subjectivity intersects with discourses on Darwinism, eugenics, religion, gender and women's rights.

Recent critical work on the representation of space in literature suggests the heterogeneity of ways in which space is conceptualised. Isobel Armstrong considers how Kantian space was represented in the nineteenth-century novel with particular reference to the fiction of George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen and William Makepeace Thackeray.⁵¹ She points to the heuristic uses of different theories of space, from the application of Kant's fundamental premise that 'space is the condition of perception', and Hegel's counter suggestion that space is not a representation but a 'material reality', to later twentieth-century theories.⁵² Armstrong suggests the possibility of a more nuanced reading of literary space through the consideration of a range of approaches from *The Poetics of Space* (1958), in which Bachelard uses the concept of 'topoanalysis' to emphasise the significance of the house or home to a sense of interiority; Henri Lefebvre's socially-constructed spaces in *The Production of Space* (1991); Michel Foucault's reading of 'Heterotopia' in 'Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias' (1984), in which he considers marginalised spaces such as the asylum; and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of 'striated' space in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), that suggests space as fragmented and discontinuous.⁵³ Mark Blacklock, on the other hand, is interested in how literature represents four-dimensional space in Hinton's short story, 'A Plane World' (1895) and H. G. Wells's 'The Plattner Story' (1896), and in the idea of free

⁴⁹ Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); Elana Gomel, "'Spirits in the Material World': Spiritualism and Identity in the Fin de Siècle", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35.1 (2007), 189-213.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Nina Bowman Albinski, "'The Laws of Justice, of Nature, and of Right': Victorian Feminist Utopias", in *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*, ed. by Libby Falk Jones and Sarah Webster Goodwin (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), pp. 50-68; Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004); Penelope Deutscher, 'The Descent of Man and the Evolution of Woman', *Hypatia*, 19.2 (2004), 35-55; Lois N. Magner, 'Darwinism and the Woman Question: The Evolving Ideas of Charlotte Perkins Gilman', in *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. by Joanne B. Karpinski (New York: Hall, 1992), pp. 115-128;

⁵¹ Isobel Armstrong, 'Theories of Space and the Nineteenth-Century Novel', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 17 (2013), <http://19.bbk.ac.uk> [accessed 28 March 2017].

⁵² Armstrong, pp. 3, 6.

⁵³ Armstrong, pp. 15, 19, 21.

indirect discourse as a literary form that enables a looking through to the interiority of the subject, as if in the fourth dimension.⁵⁴ These essays are helpful not only in contributing to an understanding of space as heterogeneous, but also in indicating that reading nineteenth-century texts through the lens of different spatial theories offers diverse perspectives on the heterogeneity of subjectivity. Thus my approach of thinking about selfhood from the perspective of a space-time that is variable, dynamic and interactive enables a more open-ended and multi-dimensional view of female subjectivity.

Chapter Summary

To recap, my particular focus is on literary representations of conceptual or imaginary spaces, and how these allow for the examination of female subjectivity through its complex intersection with space and time. In Chapter 1, I outline the ways in which conceptions of space and time were changing towards the end of the nineteenth century, and link emerging thinking about space-time with my theoretical framework. This is based on a space-time that rejects space and time as separate and gendered modalities. I engage primarily with the work of feminist philosophers, Luce Irigaray and Elizabeth Grosz, and the way that space and time are implicated in their thinking about female subjectivity. Unique to my approach is the bringing together of feminist thinking to challenge traditional discourses on women and femininity that have relied on Hegelian conceptions and a post-Darwinian sexual science that has precluded female subjectivity as open-ended. Combining Grosz's interpretation of Darwin and Irigaray's concept of the feminine divine and the irreducibility of sexual difference with emerging nineteenth-century feminist thinking results in an eclectic framework for representing female subjectivity and femininity.

In Chapter 2, the liminal spaces of the spirit world and the séance room are explored in the spiritualist novels of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Gates Ajar*, *Beyond the Gates* and *The Gates Between*, and in Florence Marryat's novel, *The Dead Man's Message* and her account of her own spiritualist activities in *There Is No Death*. The unbounded space between life and death, where temporalities of past and present merge, is a space that prioritises feminine knowledge and spirituality over masculine rationality. In the pursuit of self-expression, Phelps's feminised reading of the gospels enables her to imagine a domestic heavenly paradise in which gender roles are re-balanced and corporeal desires are reconciled with

⁵⁴ Mark Blacklock, 'The Higher Spaces of the Late Nineteenth-Century Novel', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 17 (2013), <http://19.bbk.ac.uk> [accessed 28 March 2017] (p. 17). Blacklock extends his discussion of literature and *n*-dimensional spaces in his recent monograph, *The Emergence of the Fourth Dimension: Higher Spatial Thinking in the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

spirituality. Like Irigaray, who argues for a concept of God that women can identify with, she deconstructs theological texts with this in mind. Marryat's engagement with Spiritualism suggests a more radical and individualistic pursuit of self-expression, with its lively tension between mind and body pointing to the multiplicity of subjectivity. Both novelists engage with evolutionary theory, I argue, to demonstrate that the space-time of the spirit world enables a complex interaction between female agency and spirit guidance to highlight women's role in human evolution. I argue also that different forms of feminism emerge through Phelps's and Marryat's engagement with Spiritualism, reflecting the heterogeneity of expressions of subjectivity and feminist thought in the late-nineteenth century.

In Chapter 3, through an idiosyncratic mix of science, heterodox religion and Spiritualism in *A Romance of Two Worlds*, Marie Corelli imagines a dream space, again with its own space-time situated beyond the spatial and temporal framework of Victorian gender ideology. Spiritual regeneration is effected through a journey through the celestial spheres and the witnessing of ever-evolving levels of reincarnation. Reading against New Woman and Theosophist texts of the late-nineteenth century, I explore the way that Corelli intersects traditional ideas of femininity with her own interpretation of evolutionary theory and eugenics to place women at the centre of moral and spiritual progress. Reprising the ancient tradition of the goddess in the form of a feminine divine, which I argue mirrors the connection Irigaray makes between divinity and women's creativity, Corelli creates a heroine who combines the feminine divine with genius.

In Chapter 4, I consider two novellas by Charles Howard Hinton, *Stella and An Unfinished Communication*. In his employment of the conceptual space of the fourth dimension or hyperspace, Hinton suggests a complex conjunction between female subjectivity, altruism and transcendence. In positioning women in hyperspace, Hinton challenges not only the readers' limited understanding of the world and of mathematics, but also the ways in which Victorian gender ideology tends to restrict the perception of women's multiplicity. Hinton's hyperspatial female represents an interrogation of a biological determinism that excludes women from the story of evolution, and a disavowal of the notion that it is man who represents the pinnacle of nature. The experience of women in a hyperspace that dissolves both spatio-temporal and gender boundaries suggests an interesting and potentially conflicting confluence of female self-sacrifice and transcendence. But if Hinton's representation of women in hyperspace is considered from the point of view of Irigaray's

‘sensible transcendental’, it is possible to reconcile the apparent dichotomies of matter and spirit, immanence and transcendence.⁵⁵

Chapter 5 focuses on feminist utopian space and the prevailing defensive strategy that is employed against the re-instatement of a regime that would return women to subjugation. The utopias of Mary Bradley Lane’s *Mizora*, Elizabeth Corbett’s *New Amazonia* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* are imaginary creations outside the spatio-temporal framework of turn-of-the-century life. As is the nature of the utopia, they are positioned in future time but always with a backward glance to the present and past and how they intersect with future possibilities. These novels engage with familiar themes that are addressed in earlier chapters – gender politics, evolutionary theory, eugenics and the deification of motherhood. I explore the ways in which these feminist societies have been created as a response to discourses of imperialism, colonisation and science. I argue that the efforts these matriarchal societies make in order to pursue the dream of evolutionary perfection and to protect their new-found rights and freedoms against invasion suggest the risk of replacing one oppressive regime with another. The emergence of female subjectivity is problematised in the discussion about individualism and collectivism, and in the difficulty in distancing the utopia from patriarchal structures. I argue that this undermines the notion of the feminist utopia as a space women can call their own.

The concluding chapter re-visits the concept of ‘positive negative’ space as an alternative way to understand women’s struggle for a space of their own. The idea of positive negative space as fluid and active means that there is a continual tension between figure and ground, mirroring the struggle for women in positioning themselves in the foreground and becoming subjects in their own right. Using the Futurist sculptor Alexander Archipenko’s *Woman Walking* (1912), a female image of the void as a metaphor for a space full of meaning, I discuss the significance of space to emerging female subjectivity, and reflect on the varying success women have in finding somewhere in which to give free expression to their creativity and multiplicity.

⁵⁵ Irigaray, p. 129. For a discussion of Irigaray’s ‘sensible transcendental’, the fixing of mind and body as one at the same time as maintaining them as separate concepts, see Carolyn M. Tilghman, ‘The Flesh Made Word: Luce Irigaray’s Rendering of the Sensible Transcendental’, *Janus Head*, 11.1 (2009), 39-54.

CHAPTER 1

SPACE AND TIME

One of the organising principles of this thesis is the conception of space-time, a pre-Einsteinian configuration of the fluidity and intersection of space and time. It opposes the view of space and time as separate modalities and, thus, brings into question all the binaries that were associated with the gendering of these modalities. In this chapter, I trace very briefly the development of ideas about space, time and gender in the nineteenth century before setting out the theoretical framework for what follows. For centuries space and time were considered as absolute. From Aristotle onwards, space was understood as real, infinite and empty – for this was the only way it could contain bodies. Time was associated with motion, especially the revolution of celestial bodies; it too was seen as real and infinite, flowing continuously and uniformly without regard to external matter.¹ In the eighteenth and through to the nineteenth century, the accepted explanation for the movement of bodies through space was the medium of the aether, a substance that was believed to fill all space and through which all objects moved.² But theories of time and space, and of the aether, were based on constructs that had no empirical basis.³ In *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), philosopher Immanuel Kant challenged the notion of the objective reality of space and time, arguing that they could only be experienced as subjective forms of understanding, whilst at the same time claiming that they were both universal and separate categories. As Grosz puts it:

For Kant, time and space are the pure forms of perception imposed on appearances in order to make them accessible to experience. Space and time are necessary structures, ideal rather than real, that are the conditions of possibility for the experience of objects. Euclidean geometry can be counterposed with Newtonian physics, and Kant's understanding correlates and counterparts their conceptions of knowledge.⁴

Kantian time and space were still conceptualised as absolute and separate modalities, but this began to change in the nineteenth century with new developments in science and technology, and with new philosophical thinking.

¹ Isaac Newton, *Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica*, trans. by Andrew Motte and Florian Cajori, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), I, p. 6, quoted in Russell West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 36.

² Sean F. Johnston, *History of Science: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), p. 114.

³ Sarah C. Alexander, *Victorian Literature and the Physics of the Imponderable* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 25.

⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversions* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 94.

The certainty derived from the Bible about the age of the world and our sense of time was severely shaken with the publication of Scottish geologist, Charles Lyell's, *Principles of Geology* (1830-31). Within three decades, a belief in God the Creator was further destabilised when the English naturalist, Charles Darwin's, *On the Origin of Species* (1859) outlined his theory of evolution by natural selection, and the common ancestry of animals and humans, giving rise to further questions about our understanding of time and the history of mankind. Scottish scientist, James Clerk Maxwell, was primarily concerned with energy and the laws of thermodynamics in *Theory of Heat* (1872), but his work also had implications for the understanding of time. The first law of thermodynamics states that the total quantity of energy in the universe is constant; the second that as energy is transferred or transformed, increasingly more of it is wasted. Because the process is irreversible, the implication for the duration of time is that time always flows in the direction of increasing entropy – a worrying idea when coupled with the possibility that Darwinian evolutionary progress might be halted and reversed along a course of devolution or retrogression. The notion of a 'natural order of time' espoused by the Victorians, with rational man at the centre of progress towards perfection, underpinned by Christianity and the promise of eternity, was under threat.⁵ Time was a matter of interest to metaphysicians also. The American psychologist, William James, first articulated the notion of a stream of consciousness in an essay in 1884, suggesting that we experience time as duration or a whole, rather than a series of discrete units.⁶ And Henri Bergson's concept of 'duration' (*durée*) in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1903) led to the distinction between quantitative, measurable time (the ticking of a clock, for example) and qualitative, subjective time. But as Kern points out, Bergson found it incredibly difficult to articulate his theory, underlying 'the difficulty of expressing in words the true nature of our existence in time'.⁷ The development of the railways, the electric telegraph, early cinema and photography, and their impact on individual experience of time, gave rise to further questions about its universality suggesting, instead, time as a unique subjective experience.

Space was also under interrogation in the nineteenth century.⁸ Early in the century, the Russian mathematician, Nikolai Lobatchewsky, and German mathematician, Bernhard Riemann, devised non-Euclidean geometries of, respectively, hyperbolic space and elliptical

⁵ Patricia Murphy, *Time is of The Essence: Temporality, Gender, and the New Woman* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 15.

⁶ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols (New York: Holt, 1890), I, pp. 609-610.

⁷ Kern, p. 25.

⁸ Blacklock (2018) charts the emergence of the four-dimensional thinking in his recent monograph.

space.⁹ In *Science and Hypothesis* (1901) the French mathematician, Henri Poincaré, posited moving away from focusing on geometrical space to thinking about space as experienced through the bodily senses. But it was the German theoretical physicist, Albert Einstein, who finally established the relativity of space and time in his Special Theory of Relativity in 1905. He theorised that when time in one reference point moves at a constant speed, if viewed from a different reference point it appears to have slowed down. He developed this idea further in his General Theory of Relativity (1916): ‘Since every bit of matter in the universe generates a gravitational force, and since gravity is equivalent to acceleration, he concluded that “every reference body has its own particular time”’.¹⁰ He replaces what he termed ‘the vague word “space”’ with the idea of “motion relative to a practically rigid body of reference”.¹¹ Gravity is explained as the effect of the curvature of space-time. This concept of space-time challenged the absolutism of Euclidean geometry and Newtonian physics, and especially the idea of space and time as separate modalities. Although Einstein’s theories did not come to public attention until the early-twentieth century, the intellectual history of the nineteenth century points to the evolution of thinking about space and time as relative, and to the ways that this was interconnected with other forms of knowledge. In his history of the ideological construction of knowledge, Herbert demonstrates ‘the inseparable continuity of scientific discovery with a multiplicity of fields of discourse’.¹² He argues that the relativity principle in different scientific disciplines became connected to ideas about emancipation and wider ethical issues, suggesting that, ‘Relativity was in this sense not so much discovered as a scientific property of nature as it was implanted there by a deeply moralised scientific imagination’.¹³ The relativity of space-time as a fictional concept moves beyond the mathematical and physical to reflect a culture that was becoming more open to interrogating issues relating to wider social concerns, including issues of gender and women’s rights.

Space, Time and Gender

From Plato onwards, time and space had been gendered – the temporal framework of cause and effect and historical progress being delineated masculine, and the cycle of generativity

⁹ Kern, p. 133. Hyperbolic space and elliptical space are curved space, as opposed to Euclidean space that has no curvature.

¹⁰ Kern, p. 19, quoting Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and The General Theory* (1916; rpt. New York, 1952), p. 26.

¹¹ Kern, p.136, quoting Einstein, *Relativity*, p. 9.

¹² Herbert, p. xiii.

¹³ Herbert, p. xiv.

and the womb (Plato's *chora*) delineating space as feminine.¹⁴ Luce Irigaray traces this gendering back to the Bible and God's creation of time and space:

God would be time itself, lavishing or exteriorising itself in its action in space, in places [...] Time becomes the *interiority* of the subject itself, and space its *exteriority* [...] This subject, the master of time, becomes the axis of the world's ordering, with its something beyond the moment and eternity: God. He effects the passage between time and space.¹⁵

Thus time as masculine is dynamic and future-seeking, whereas feminine space is enveloping and static. In this way, woman is represented as a space for man – *his* space as mother and wife. This conceptualisation of time and space as separate modalities suggests that the two are in hierarchical opposition to each other. As Doreen Massey argues, 'time is the one which matters and of which History (capital H) is made. Time Marches On but space is a kind of stasis, where nothing really happens'.¹⁶ This has far-reaching implications for the position of women for, as Massey points out, the separation of time and space serves to compound a series of oppositions that pervade most aspects of lived experience – mind and body, reason and emotion, positivity and negativity.¹⁷ The duality of German philosopher, G. W. F. Hegel's, concepts of immanence and transcendence is one example of this gendered split.¹⁸ Woman is pivotal to Hegel's idea of family life, providing a stable affective centre from which man can emerge into the public domain.¹⁹ For Hegel, women represent immanence, closely aligned with Nature and cyclical, bounded time. Both he and Kant identify women with nature and men with reason. Although neither of them deny women the possibility of transcendence, they believe that women's minds are too immature to reach the stage of consciousness that allows for transcendence. Embedded in Hegel's 'nether world', women's role within the privacy of family life necessarily excludes them from the political domain. Their position is to support men and enable them to flourish in the marketplace, in other words, to transcend mere living to take their place in the political outer world – to influence progress and history. This socio-political conception of time as progress and male, with space

¹⁴ Russell West-Pavlov, *Temporalities* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 101.

¹⁵ Luce Irigaray (1993), p. 7, original emphases.

¹⁶ Massey, p. 253.

¹⁷ Massey, p. 255.

¹⁸ Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 80.

¹⁹ See G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977),

http://faculty.umb.edu/gary_zabel/Courses/Marxist_Philosophy/Hegel_and_Feuerbach_files/Hegel-Phenomenology-of-Spirit.pdf [accessed 2 April 2018] (pp. 267-278).

as stasis and female, is central to a separate spheres gender ideology.²⁰ Woman represents man's envelope: a home that provides nurture, sympathy and interiority. Women constitute the ethical centre of family life, where there is a clear delineation of emotion and nurture, the bodily and sensual, as separate from the exercise of intellect and reason. It is this very duality embedded in nineteenth-century philosophy, compounding the binaries of private and public, inside and outside, which genders notions of space and time. When women are expected to know their place, this has both a literal and metaphorical meaning.²¹

Although space was conceptualised as feminine, it belonged as much to men as did time. According to Kathleen Kirby, from the seventeenth century onwards, men were mapping the world's inhabitants in order to exercise control over them. The reliance on 'measurement and standardisation' was a way for Enlightenment men to transform previously uncharted, mobile and chaotic territories that they encountered on their travels into some sort of rational and stable order: 'The externalisation and control of space [...] goes hand in hand with their attempt to formulate a safely encapsulated subject'.²² Men sought to replicate in spatial terms the autonomous, rational man that was, in turn, formed by the space he occupied. In this way, they were able to marginalise anything that suggested 'idiosyncrasy and emotionality, physicality and specificity'.²³ This has implications both for women's position in space and for the colonised 'other', particularly those resistant to the influence of the Western civilising project. Western men were able to locate (and define) themselves in a world that was man-made. Once the boundaries begin to disintegrate – and this is implied by a conception of an interactive space-time that disavows the dualism of space and time – their self-confidence as autonomous subjects begins to crumble. Kirby cites Fredric Jameson's essay on postmodernism, in which he rails against a postmodern architecture that 'has succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself [...] to map its position in a mappable external world'.²⁴ Generally speaking, men (including Jameson) tend to have a secure sense of themselves in space, never having to think about their location or what it might signify, so when they sense that their position has been disturbed

²⁰ The boundary between public and private spheres was far more permeable in life than it was in ideology, but it is the ideology that underpins the power of the discourse on spheres. Caroline Levine, 'Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies', *Victorian Studies*, 48.4 (2006), 625-658 (p. 627).

²¹ Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 56.

²² Kathleen Kirby, 'Re-Mapping Subjectivity: Cartographic Vision and the Limits of Politics', in *BodySpace: Destabilising Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. by Nany Duncan (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 45-55 (p. 47).

²³ Kirby, p. 47.

²⁴ Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review*, 146 (1984), 53-92 (pp. 82-83), quoted in Kirby, p. 50.

they experience dislocation and alienation – the same sense of the uncanny or *unheimlich* that is experienced when the male protagonists in Marryat's and Phelps's novels first find themselves in the afterlife. It was uncanny for men used to being able to locate themselves in a space and a time that belonged to them. Women's experience, on the other hand, was to be accustomed to living in men's time and being mapped onto space by them.

Being mapped onto space was the particular experience of women in the home, traditionally seen as their terrain but actually a place which guaranteed men's authority and autonomy. For Gaston Bachelard, 'our house is our corner of the world. It is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word'.²⁵ Before men are 'cast into the world', they are cradled in the intimacy of the house: 'Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house'.²⁶ This is a very powerful gendered imagery of home/house as a womb-like shield protecting men from the outside world until the time comes for them to leave. Home takes on a metaphysical as well as a material significance. The process of individuation depends on being able to leave home, but men's sense of security relies on knowing that the empty space they have left behind endures in their absence. As Irigaray points out, man 'envelops [woman] in walls whereas he envelops himself in her flesh, and envelops his things with it'.²⁷ The experience of home as a safe container or womb is, according to Irigaray, experienced very differently by men and women:

The nature of these envelopes is not the same: on the one hand, invisibly alive, but with barely perceivable limits; on the other, visibly limiting or sheltering, but at the risk of being prison-like or murderous if the threshold is not left open.²⁸

For men, home is an idealised place that serves to shore up their idea of themselves, it is both protecting and liberating. For women, it can feel like a prison, containing and threatening their existence.

In the context of nineteenth-century theories about women and femininity, home was a space of protection against the vagaries of public life. The belief in the evolutionary difference between men and women was given legitimacy by post-Darwinian sexual science. Women were deemed the weaker sex, requiring protection from the brutality of the physical and intellectual demands of modernity. As opportunities for education and work became more available to women, so the dire warnings against pursuing these opportunities became louder. As English physician, Dr William Withers Moore, stated in his presidential address to the

²⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 4.

²⁶ Bachelard, p. 7.

²⁷ Irigaray, p. 11.

²⁸ Irigaray, p. 11.

British Medical Association in 1886, the price of women becoming educated was to become 'more or less sexless'.²⁹ Others, including Scottish biologist, Patrick Geddes, and naturalist, J. Arthur Thomson, in *The Evolution of Sex* (1889) warned of the threat to women's lives of the over-development of their brains. Intellectual stimulation of the female mind was proscribed by their theory of sexual differentiation at the cellular level. The active cells were the male katabolic ones, the female anabolic cells the energy-conserving, passive and life-supporting cells.³⁰ It was believed to be woman's nature to be man's helpmate, and to go against nature was to risk mental breakdown.³¹ The fear of breakdown made it all the more important that women should see their place as in the home. The fear of 'sexless' women, fuelled by the vitriol in the press against the New Woman, who, if not part of a 'shrieking sisterhood', was either unsexed or made degenerate by her activities, was compounded by a crisis in masculinity.³² As Showalter argues, the opportunities for men to succeed at home or in the Empire were not infinite. Moreover, it was believed that the pace of modern living and the decadence that prevailed in the period of the *fin de siècle* increasingly led to physical and mental weakness, described most vividly in Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892).³³ The belief that women were at risk of being unsexed and made degenerate by attempting to enter the public domain, and that men risked neurasthenia as a result of the pressures of modernity, actually appeared to give weight to English sexologist, Havelock Ellis's, theory that the border between masculinity and femininity was permeable and might be crossed by either side.³⁴ There was all the more reason, therefore, to embrace a Darwinian sexual science that deemed home the safest place for women. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that separate spheres were more an ideological than lived reality. Women had demonstrated through the ages their capacity to hold roles both within and outside the home. What Western industrialisation and capitalism did was to create a middle class, in which the middle-class woman became more clearly delineated as marginal to the economic world and denied the full citizenship granted to her husband or father.

²⁹ Showalter, p. 40.

³⁰ Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex* (London: Scott, 1889), pp. 26-27.

³¹ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 123.

³² Eliza Lynn Linton coined the phrase 'shrieking sisterhood' to describe outspoken feminists in *The Girl of the Period*, 2 vols (London: Bentley, 1883), II, pp. 64-72.

³³ Showalter (1990), p. 8. Max Nordau (1849-1923) was a physician and writer. In *Degeneration*, Nordau blames the decadence of the *fin de siècle* on the world-weariness he finds in men and women and on the loss of moral boundaries. He blames contemporary art and literature for the increase in degeneration and hysteria.

³⁴ Showalter (1990), p. 9.

Re-Configuring Space and Time

Interested in eradicating the gendered associations of space and time, the social scientist and geographer, Doreen Massey, uses the concept of space-time to posit a model of four-dimensional reality to replace a reality in which time and space are seen as separate modalities.³⁵ She envisages space and time interacting to allow for a simultaneity and multiplicity of spaces:

Seeing space as a moment in the intersection of configured social relations (rather than as an absolute dimension) means that it cannot be seen as static. There is no choice between flow (time) and a flat surface of instantaneous relations (space).³⁶

Dispensing with Newtonian constructions of separate space and time makes it possible to re-imagine women other than being framed by an ideology based on binaries that deny them a place in history and a role in the political sphere. The intersection of space and time means that space is no longer construed as a negative or lack, neither can it be positioned as the opposite of time. Instead of seeing space as a 'slice through time', it is envisaged as 'a moment in the intersection of configured social relations' – this is its dynamic nature according to Massey.³⁷ Although Newtonian physics is still relevant to many disciplines, it does not provide a useful framework for understanding the personal and the social:

[T]he social issues which we currently need to understand, whether they be the high-tech postmodern world or questions of cultural identity, require something that would look more like the 'modern physics' view of space. It would, moreover, precisely by introducing into the concept of space that element of dislocation/freedom/possibility, enable the politicisation of space/space-time.³⁸

For Massey, Newtonian conceptions of time and space, separating active man from passive woman, have prevented women from taking their place in political life; modern physics' conception of space-time promises to remove this obstacle. It then becomes possible to imagine space and bodies-in-space (both male and female) interacting in ways that are dynamic, fluid and powerful. Women cease to be just the static, holding space for men of which Irigaray complains: they too can be engaged in politics and have a place in history.

In her essay, 'Women's Time', Julia Kristeva looks at the way that time has been associated with gendered distinctions. She distinguishes between male time – 'time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding, time as departure, progression, and arrival' – in

³⁵ Massey, p. 3.

³⁶ Massey, p. 265.

³⁷ Massey, p. 265.

³⁸ Massey, p. 263.

other words, time as history, and female time.³⁹ Female subjectivity is entwined with time as repetition and eternity:

On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance*. On the other hand, and perhaps as a consequence, there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word ‘temporality’ hardly fits.⁴⁰

This dichotomy between male and female time was current in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, helping to frame conceptions of male and female subjectivity. In the way that Kristeva describes female time, and its connection with reproduction, mysticism and eternal recurrence, it becomes associated with spatialised stasis and the disavowal of female progress. The way forward for women, according to Kristeva, is not to reject gender and its associations, but to change ‘the speaking subject’, and the way to do this is through literature: ‘a place – a space – where new borders between what can and cannot be said can find the *time to form*’.⁴¹ She hopes for a place, and a time, from which women can finally speak. What I examine in this thesis is whether the different representations of conceptual spaces that women inhabit serve a similar function – to provide a space for the development and re-framing of female subjectivity. And whether these ‘elsewhere’ spaces become sites for a more nuanced and open-ended understanding of female cycles of reproduction and for the transcendent possibilities of eternal recurrence.

The ‘elsewhere’ space also enables a re-interpretation of some of the ideas that helped shape space and time, including Darwinism. At the heart of Darwin’s theory of natural selection was progress towards the most highly evolved forms of organism. This chimed with the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century view of man’s progress towards perfection as the ideal form of civilisation. In spite of the critical role women had in sexual selection, as a less-developed form of life they played a subsidiary role: evolutionary progress was the work of men. Acknowledging Darwin’s role as ‘one of the most influential and profound theoretical figures of the modern era’, Grosz is interested in what he might have to offer modern

³⁹ Julia Kristeva, Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, ‘Women’s Time’, *Signs*, 7.1 (1981), 13-35 (p. 17).

⁴⁰ Kristeva, p. 16. Roughly translated into English, *jouissance* means pleasure, but for Kristeva it also carries the connotation of a pleasure that is both shocking and disruptive.

⁴¹ Alice Jardine, ‘Introduction to Julia Kristeva’s “Women’s Time”’, *Signs*, 7.1 (1981), 5-12 (pp. 11, 12), original emphasis.

feminism.⁴² She suggests that it is possible, and necessary to a future for women, to read him differently. Similar to Irigaray in wanting to reconceptualise women's space and temporality, Grosz explores what she calls an 'ontology of becoming':

whose central concern is the re-elaboration of a conception of time in which temporality is conceived, not in terms of the (perceptual and practical) privilege of the present, but rather in terms of the pre-eminence of an undeterminable future.⁴³

The future as a virtual form of open-ended becoming is a useful concept for feminist thinking. Grosz reads Darwin's evolutionary time as moving forward with increasing complexity and variation, suggesting an indeterminacy that stands in opposition to a Newtonian universe and impels the individual to self-transformation.⁴⁴ This is a helpful perspective, because it situates women in the struggle not simply for survival, but also for a continuing process of improvement and progress.

Grosz also reads the philosophies of Nietzsche and Bergson as philosophies of becoming. She considers Nietzsche's will to power and self-overcoming to be related to a Darwinian understanding of evolution; and points to Bergson's duration as implying a continuous process of becoming. Where Bergson's measurable time is linked to differences of degrees and categories, for example male and female, and suppresses or relegates difference, duration is associated with differences that are in the process of being made, suggesting a sexual politics similar to Irigaray who understands sexual difference as evolving as part of the process of becoming.⁴⁵ She reminds us that her contemporary, Gilles Deleuze, is also influenced by Darwin and Bergson in his conceptualisation of time as a multiplicity of durations within which past and present co-exist, the future is considered virtual and pre-figured by the past, and 'is that openness of becoming that enables divergence from what exists'.⁴⁶ Grosz seeks to identify philosophies that build on the idea of becoming and that can be read from a feminist viewpoint, implicating women in time – in history and futurity. By giving weight in this thesis to early feminist contributions to discourses on Darwin, sexual science and religion, I draw attention to the way in which they were also engaged in formulating their own theories of female embodiment in space and time. What will become

⁴² Elizabeth Grosz, 'Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigations for a Possible Alliance', in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Ackman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp. 23-51 (p. 24).

⁴³ Elizabeth Grosz, 'Feminist Futures?', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 21.1 (2002), 13-20 (p. 15). Her ideas are expanded in a later publication, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁴⁴ Grosz (2004), p. 9.

⁴⁵ Grosz (2004), pp. 160-161.

⁴⁶ Grosz (2002), p. 18.

clear in later chapters is the way in which nineteenth-century feminists were already choosing to interpret evolutionary theory differently, and to imagine women in a space-time that disavowed the gendered separation of time and space so that they could determine their own place in history. In my discussion of the Spiritualist novels of Phelps and Marryat, the spirit world becomes a space of regeneration in which time can be re-visited and re-enacted differently. In Hinton's novellas, the concept of eternal recurrence is used to resist the linearity of time, and the 'unlearning' of *An Unfinished Communication* suggests a demand not only for a different understanding of the way that history and memory shape us, and of Darwin's concept of time, but also for a different understanding of gender and ideology.

Irigaray, Space, Time and Sexual Difference

Grosz acknowledges the debt she owes to Irigaray in reconceptualising sexual difference and female subjectivity in relation to space and time:

Without her work, it would not have been possible to understand conceptions of space, time, and becoming as political, social, cultural, and above all feminist, as well as philosophical, and particularly ontological, questions; without her work, it would not have been possible to see that sexual difference is conditioned by and expressed through relations of space, time, and becoming as much as it is through subjectivity, identity, consciousness, and the unconscious.⁴⁷

At the heart of Irigaray's feminism is the concept of sexual difference, the irreducible difference between male and female.⁴⁸ She employs the use of the 'negative' (I am not you, and you are not me) to represent the space between a man and a woman that helps emphasise their sexual difference: 'The negative is used to maintain the duality of subjectivities, and a space between them, which belongs neither to the one nor to the other, and which allows them to meet together'.⁴⁹ It is only when both sexes can emerge from their own space that they can meet as equals. Reconceptualising the interconnections between space and time is central to Irigaray's theory of sexual difference, and to her call for women to find a space they can call their own: 'The transition to a new age requires a change in perception and conception of *space-time*, the *inhabiting of places*, and of *containers*, or *envelopes of identity*'.⁵⁰ As Grosz argues, for Irigaray space and time are no longer neutral or transparent media, they become active ingredients of subjectivity.⁵¹ Irigaray is keen to ensure that women have a closer

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, 'Irigaray, The Untimely, and The Constitution of An Onto-Ethics', *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 43.1 (2017), 15-24 (p. 15).

⁴⁸ It is important to bear in mind, as Grosz points out, that Darwin argued for the irreducibility of sexual difference.

⁴⁹ Luce Irigaray, *Key Writings* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 3.

⁵⁰ Irigaray (1993), p. 7, original emphases.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Crows Nest, NWS: Allen & Unwin, 2005), p. 174.

alignment with temporality so that they are not simply associated with space, containment and curtailment. Thus space and time are interwoven:

The two intertwine, in each one and between one another, so as to build a possible dwelling for humans. Time itself becomes space, doubles spatially without for all that surrounding it. Time and space remain open while continuously constituting a dwelling place in which to stay.⁵²

The implication of this new configuration of the knowledge and understanding of space and time is a new and expanded capacity for women to understand and experience selfhood as autonomous beings rather than as other to man. Central to this experience is an awareness of corporeality – the body in its spatial and temporal framework.

One of Irigaray's concerns is that male Western philosophy has tended to ignore corporeality.⁵³ She focuses on women's morphology (the lived body as a social body) rather than anatomy, returning to pre-Socratic philosophy and its emphasis on the four elements – earth, fire, water and air, which compose all matter. The frequent references in her writing to women's 'two lips', and to mucous and fluids, is a way of representing female sexuality as both active and passive, and to reveal women's multiplicity – their flowing and becoming.⁵⁴ As Grosz points out, the pre-Socratics rejected the binary ordering of life and, 'while not representing a pre-patriarchal or pre-phallogentric conceptual order, remain much closer to an acknowledgement of sexual difference, and the place of Goddesses in the pantheon that constitutes both the universe and its regulative principles'.⁵⁵ Irigaray wants to restore a direct connection between the sexes and between bodies and ideas, dissolving the gendered duality that emerged with the patriarchal order. Western philosophy's tendency to sideline the body, and the patriarchal order's tendency to project onto the female body all that was problematic to man's idealism, was to make it difficult for women to acknowledge, let alone celebrate, their corporeality. Thus we see, in Chapters 2 and 3, examples of the struggle between the corporeal and the spiritual only resolved once women have found a space-time of their own in which these opposing dualisms no longer apply. In the space that enables sexual difference, in which women are no longer merely containers or envelopes for men, it is possible to re-negotiate the relationships they have as wives, mothers and daughters. The maternal function and mother-daughter relationship is important to Irigaray, but not at the expense of her being

⁵² Irigaray (2004), p. 28.

⁵³ Claire Colebrook, 'Feminist Philosophy and the Philosophy of Feminism: Irigaray and the History of Western Metaphysics', *Hypatia*, 12.1 (1997), 79-98 (p. 88).

⁵⁴ See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

⁵⁵ Grosz (2017), p. 19.

a woman in her own right.⁵⁶ The tension between the vital role motherhood plays and the desire for individual expression outside this role can only be resolved, according to Irigaray, once women have their own space. This tension between maternal role and individual desire is something I address in Chapter 5, where I question the extent to which the feminist utopia can be considered a fulfilling space for women.

Another concept central to Irigaray's project of sexual difference, and women's right to their own subjectivity, is that of a feminine divine. This is not a call for a different God but is, instead, the creation of an ideal self-image for women: 'If she is to become woman, if she is to accomplish her female subjectivity, woman needs a god who is a figure for the perfection of *her* subjectivity'.⁵⁷ Without this, women remain identified with the Judeo-Christian formulation of man (God) as time and woman as space. The creation of a divine for women becomes 'a space for what is new, what remains unthought, the space for the projection of possible futures'.⁵⁸ Irigaray returns to Greek mythology, tracing a female genealogy back to Demeter, the goddess of the earth, and her daughter, Persephone, queen of the underworld, who also represents the relationship between the celestial and terrestrial. Irigaray's feminine divine is both transcendent and immanent – the 'sensible transcendental' – which dissolves the division between (male) transcendence and (female) immanence and combines spirit and flesh.⁵⁹ Returning to the elements that compose matter, Irigaray focuses on one element – air, or women's breath – which she suggests unites 'the subtlest real of the cosmos with the deepest spiritual real of the soul', assuring a bridge between human and cosmic worlds.⁶⁰ Without dismissing the male Godhead, Irigaray engages in a process of deconstructing philosophical and theological texts in order to re-think sexually-specific gods. So when Nietzsche mentions the death of God, this is not to signify the disappearance of gods but is, as Kristeva points out, 'about the approach or the annunciation of another parousia [arrival, or second coming] of the divine'.⁶¹ The increase in female religious leadership in the nineteenth century signalled women's desire for a religion that spoke to them and their needs. This is reflected in a later chapter in which I argue that Corelli's representation of a woman whose genius is divinely inspired is her way of imagining her own feminine divine. And in the next

⁵⁶ Irigaray (1993), p. 105.

⁵⁷ Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. by Ann Gary and Marilyn Pearsall (New York & London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 471-484 (p. 476), original emphasis.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St. Leonard's, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p. 162.

⁵⁹ Irigaray (1993), pp. 147-150.

⁶⁰ Irigaray (2004), p. 166.

⁶¹ Kristeva (1993), p. 140.

chapter, I show how Phelps undertakes a feminist deconstruction and re-interpretation of religious texts, and Marryat fashions Spiritualist encounters, in order to invoke female agency and to open up the discourse on female subjectivity.

CHAPTER 2

SPIRITUALISM AND WOMEN'S SPACE:

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Florence Marryat

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Florence Marryat were both prolific writers of the nineteenth century, with Phelps's work demonstrating her interest and activism in women's rights, and Marryat's her interest in sensationalism and the stage. They both wrote Spiritualist novels which articulate their feminism, with these emerging within a transatlantic culture which saw Spiritualism playing an increasingly significant role in many people's lives. With an active interchange of ideas across the Atlantic between women involved in Spiritualism and women's rights, the texts of Phelps and Marryat exemplify the way in which Spiritualism became a route to re-negotiating relations of power, gender and sexuality. In this chapter, I explore the spirit world and séance room as imaginary 'elsewhere' spaces in which the boundaries between space and time, the living and the dead, spirit and matter dissolve to allow each writer to represent their own form of feminism. My discussion focuses on a series of three novels by Phelps, *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *Beyond the Gates* (1883) and *The Gates Between* (1887); and on Marryat's novel, *The Dead Man's Message* (1894) and her non-fiction account of her own experiences of the séance, *There Is No Death* (1891). Phelps's and Marryat's writing reflects a dissatisfaction with the realities of life for nineteenth-century women and a desire for change. Their Spiritualist texts open up a space in which to explore the transformation of women's lives and alternative forms of subjectivity. The spirit world and the séance room, with their own space-time, become spaces women can call their own. Here they re-negotiate the meaning of femininity, engaging in discourses on religion, gender and evolution within a space that promises renewal and regeneration.

I argue that they each employ Spiritualism to evoke their own particular brand of feminism. Phelps's primary concern, through her form of Christian Spiritualism, is to feel part of a spiritual community and to offer comfort and hope to those who have suffered the ravages of war and loss. Subsumed within this is a personal desire to assuage the effects of a strict Calvinist upbringing and of her own experience of loss, but it is the coming together of a common spiritual community that is uppermost. In imagining a better world for women, Phelps seeks to feminise the relationship between religion and its followers through an approach that is sensitive and empathetic towards women's needs. Transformation takes place within familiar and, therefore, to some extent reassuring, patriarchal structures. With this in mind, Phelps's feminism can be understood as reformist in contrast to Marryat's, which

represents a more radical exploration of gender and sexual relations.¹ Marryat's Spiritualist fiction and memoir reflect an interest in individual transformation through communion with the spirit world. Like so many Spiritualists, she sought restitution and resolution of personal grief; through communion with the spirits she also finds the potential for multiple subjectivity. Being possessed by spirits, or being in close communion with them, authorises both individual self-expression and group participation. This is what Willburn refers to as '*possessed individualism*'.² Marryat explores the multiplicity of subjectivity in ways that transgress acceptable boundaries of gendered and sexual behaviour. The respective feminisms of Phelps and Marryat, expressed through their Spiritualism, reflect the heterogeneity of feminist thought in Britain and America in the second half of the nineteenth century.³

The positioning of these two forms of feminism in relation to one another is important. Through their different perspectives, Phelps and Marryat demonstrate how Spiritualism became a stage on which to negotiate feminist thinking, and how it worked to mediate, in different ways, individual and collective desires. Whether in the guise of a form of Christian religious practice or of the theatre of the séance room, Spiritualism gave women a route to self-expression. Erika Bourguignon argues that the trance state taps into the unconscious mind and, in the case of women who are often powerless, offers a unique form of expression: 'Acting out the identity of spirits in ritual possession trance offers women an acceptable, and consciously deniable, way to express unconscious, forbidden thoughts and feelings, particularly in situations of social subordination'.⁴ Willburn suggests that the possession trance takes women to another sphere beyond the public and private spheres of everyday existence.⁵ Whether or not the source of their revelations was external, due to the power of unseen agents, or internal, reflecting their own unconscious desires, what they believed to be contact with the spirit world liberated women and allowed them to give voice to thoughts and feelings that they might otherwise have not been able to express. In the space-time of the spirit world, the spatial and temporal markers that normally distinguish self from other no

¹ When I call Phelps's feminism reformist, I am referring to the way that bell hooks defines reformist feminism as being about 'women gaining equality with men in the existing system' (*Feminism is For Everyone: Passionate Politics* [London: Pluto Press, 2000], p. 3). Marryat's feminism is radical in its concern with dismantling the existing patriarchal system.

² Willburn, p. 8, original emphasis.

³ This is well-documented in Sheila Rowbotham, *Rebel Crossings: New Women, Free Lovers, and Radicals in Britain and America* (London and New York: Verso, 2016). In the socialist, liberal and anarchist circles that many feminists inhabited, debates about individualism and collectivism were ongoing, as were discussions about individualism versus individuality expressed through the social relations of love and support.

⁴ Erika Bourguignon, 'Suffering and Healing, Subordination and Power: Women and Possession Trance', *Ethos*, 32.4 (2004), 557-574 (p. 558).

⁵ Sarah Willburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 2.

longer apply. If spirit communication causes a sensation of the uncanny, this is because of the removal of markers that delineate boundaries between one body and another, between spirit and matter, reason and emotion, space and time. It is the disappearance of a world structured by Cartesian duality that is unnerving and threatens a sense of disintegration of the self. As Grosz argues, 'For the subject to take up a position of a subject, he [sic] must be able to situate himself as a being located in the space occupied by his body'.⁶ The uncanny experience underlines a central theme to this thesis: that the intersection of the subject with space and time is critical to subjectivity. The task for those women engaged in Spiritualism was to hold onto a sense of self whilst, at the same time, using the space-time of the spirit world or the séance to explore different expressions of subjectivity. As can be seen from the development of Spiritualism on both sides of the Atlantic, self-expression took multiple forms.

Spiritualism in America and Britain

It was the rapping noises heard in 1848 by Kate and Margaret Fox, sisters living in Hydesville, New York State that started a widespread interest in Spiritualism in America. Spiritualism crossed the Atlantic four years later with the help of two American female mediums, Mrs. Hayden and Mrs. Roberts, and proved just as popular.⁷ The interest in Spiritualism responded to a number of anxieties fuelled by civil war in America and social unrest in Britain, scientific advancements including evolutionary theory, and a widespread disenchantment with organised religion. The so-called manifestation of spirits of the dead on both sides of the Atlantic was timely, offering reassurance that there was both a God and life after death. The assumption of women's natural sensitivity, their spirituality and suggestibility meant that they were seen as well-suited to the role of Spiritualist medium. Ann Braude points out that the role of medium allowed women to 'perform', in the sense that Judith Butler uses the concept of 'performativity' to denote a process of gender construction.⁸ The séance room opened a door to women's self-expression, women's involvement in Spiritualism suggesting 'religion's substantial role in the construction, contestation, renegotiation and performance of gender'.⁹ Those women who spoke in trance to public audiences were the first group of women in America to be allowed a public platform. They not only spoke on religion, and through this, assumed religious leadership, but they also used Spiritualism as a 'vehicle for

⁶ Grosz (1995), p. 89.

⁷ Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 19.

⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 33.

⁹ Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, 2nd edn (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. xix.

the spread of women's rights ideas'.¹⁰ Although, as Braude suggests, not all women with feminist ideas were Spiritualists, 'all Spiritualists advocated women's rights'.¹¹ Many were involved in the temperance movement, the fight for female suffrage, anti-vivisectionism and abolitionism. In many ways quite radical, in that they took to public speaking on social and political affairs, they rarely questioned the fundamental nature of femininity, instead using it to their advantage. As Braude states, 'The very qualities that rendered women incompetent when judged against the norms for masculine behaviour rendered them capable of mediumship. Mediumship allowed women to discard limitations on women's role without questioning accepted ideas about woman's nature'.¹² It was into this tradition that Phelps stepped, seizing the opportunity that Spiritualism offered for self-expression and for challenging traditional ideas about gender roles, without disrupting the *status quo*.

Spiritualism in nineteenth-century Britain reflected a general conservatism: by foregrounding female spirituality, women's role as the spiritual centre of the family was emphasised, serving in turn to reinforce a separate spheres ideology.¹³ According to Alex Owen, British Spiritualism tended towards a form of moral puritanism, with its support of women's moral role and the desire of many Spiritualists to distance themselves from American Spiritualism's association with free love.¹⁴ It was the Swedish scientist and theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg's theory of spiritual affinity, that is, the affinity between souls that finds expression in conjugal love, which became confused with free love and resulted in much controversy.¹⁵ It was British spiritualists like Emma Hardinge Britten, suggests Owen, who bridged the gap between the British conservative form of Spiritualism and the American more radical version. Britten campaigned for roles for women outside the home, basing her argument on the very characteristic that had restricted them to the private sphere – the strength of women's spirituality.¹⁶ On neither side of the Atlantic, however, were women Spiritualists able to free themselves completely from a perceived association with transgressive and immoral sexual behaviour – even the idea of assuming a public platform or being employed as a medium was seen in some circles as unacceptable behaviour for a woman. To be a Spiritualist, therefore, was to have to negotiate a number of difficult issues,

¹⁰ Braude, p. xx.

¹¹ Braude, p. 3.

¹² Braude, p. 83.

¹³ Owen, p. 31.

¹⁴ Owen, p. 30.

¹⁵ Swedenborg believed that he was appointed by Christ to reveal the teachings of the Second Coming, and that his theology represented the true Christian religion. He believed that the Bible described the transformation of the human from material to spiritual being – a form of rebirth.

¹⁶ Owen, p. 32.

as Owen argues: ‘Women’s involvement with Spiritualism was at one level all about gender expectations, sexual politics, and the subversion of existing power relations between men and women’.¹⁷ In Britain, like America, Spiritualism became associated with social reform, women’s rights and the pursuit of individual desire. The British National Association of Spiritualists, founded in 1874, campaigned not only for moral and social reform but also for individual progress and fulfilment for both men and women. The Spiritualist texts of Phelps and Marryat exemplify the transatlantic cross-fertilisation of feminist ideas amongst many nineteenth-century Spiritualists concerned with issues of gender, sexuality and self-expression. Indeed, as Marryat travelled to America more than once, so did the spirit of her daughter, Florence, who continued to manifest herself at séances there.

Christian Spiritualists rejected the central tenets of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (the Anglican doctrine of 1563) – the everlasting punishment of the wicked and the doctrine of election by grace – and used Spiritualism as empirical evidence to support their claims. Their view of the afterlife was based on the ‘possibility of regeneration and moral perfectibility’ for all.¹⁸ In the face of the determinism of hereditarian and eugenic theories, this version of the afterlife enabled Spiritualists to re-envision their eternal destiny. It is this that gave Phelps and Marryat the optimism and impetus to work towards transforming the world they lived in, and accounts for the more widespread association between Spiritualism and political, social and gender reform. As Merie points out:

The litmus test for the validity of the concepts of heavenly progress, continuity, and preservation was the ‘embodiment of the spirit’ in the afterlife – i.e. the existence of a spiritual body or ‘astral body’, an ‘airy envelope’ of the spirit assumed immediately upon death.¹⁹

This alternative eschatology was based on the active embodied spirit in the afterlife. It is an example of the way that women employed a different space-time to insert themselves into discourses about evolution and population control, to challenge received wisdom about the linearity of time and the processes of evolution. Here, it is through the reconfigured space of the spirit world that women are able to challenge the bastions of male knowledge. In later chapters, as will become clear, different conceptual spaces are used to similar effect.

For many the attraction of Spiritualism was not only in the pursuit of reform but also to satisfy personal need, often associated with loss. Spiritualism was a form of unique and

¹⁷ Owen, ‘Introduction’, n.p.

¹⁸ Mioara Merie, ‘The “Airy Envelope of the Spirit”: Empirical Eschatology, Astral Bodies and the Spiritualism of the Howitt Circle’, *Intellectual History Review*, 18.2 (2008), 189-206 (p. 193).

¹⁹ Merie, p. 193.

individual communication between subject and spirit world. Christian Spiritualists believed that all persons are equal in the eyes of God, and that He intends that each one, regardless of gender, race, or class, should have self-sovereignty. This would have been particularly attractive to women in a political economy which favoured the liberal individualism of men, and where women's opportunities for expressions of individuality were limited.²⁰ Spirit possession promised a route to an alternative form of individuality.²¹ The admixture of self-sovereignty and democracy appealed to those women interested in equal rights and respect for the individual, helping to explain the close association in the nineteenth century between Spiritualism and the abolition movement in America and women's rights on both sides of the Atlantic. These reforms were part of what Braude describes as 'a broad reform platform designed to overthrow conventions imposed by Church or state between the individual and his or her God-given nature'.²² That God might give his full unmediated attention to a woman was highly valued in a world where women's needs and efforts at self-expression were mediated by a patriarchal society. Spiritualism offered a way to express their rejection of unjust laws and economic restrictions, and especially those supported by institutionalised religion. Through Spiritualism, women were brought together as a community. At the same time, however, Spiritualism enabled women to express individual desire and need: the spirit communicated not to the group but directly to the individual, revealing truths 'without recourse to external authority'.²³ Truths were unmediated by the Church or by other patriarchal institutions that served to exclude women from various sources of knowledge. But were they mediated by the spirits or, instead, by desire? The reported exchanges between spirit and recipient were unique and personal, helping to make sense of the different ways in which Spiritualism contributed to the respective feminisms of Phelps and Marryat. Reading their texts through the lens of an imaginary space-time that dissolves duality, this chapter explores the blurring of the boundaries between those external and internal forces.

In the Spiritualist novels of Phelps and Marryat, and in the latter's depiction of the séance space, the spirit world represents one of the 'elsewhere' spaces that this thesis examines. It is both a site of literary imagination and one grounded in religious belief and, for many, scientific evidence. Kantian conceptions of space and matter are redundant here, as is

²⁰ Nineteenth-century 'individualism' was exclusively male as is evident in the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, Benjamin Franklin, Friedrich Hegel and Ralph Waldo Emerson. See Linda K. Kerber, 'Women and Individualism in American History', *The Massachusetts Review*, 30.4 (1989), 580-609.

²¹ Willburn, p. 2.

²² Braude, p. 56.

²³ Braude, p. 57.

Kant's belief that the existence of immaterial beings could not be demonstrated by reason.²⁴ As far as the German physicist, Johann Zöllner, was concerned, their very existence was proved by the medium, Henry Slade, in Leipzig in 1877. With the two ends of a knotted cord carefully secured, through his mediumship Slade demonstrated the unknotting of the cord in four-dimensional space. For Zollner this was evidence enough of supernatural phenomena. To those doubters, he offered the cord as a demonstration of 'an *objective* and lasting effect produced in the material world, which no human intelligence, with the conceptions of space so far current, is able to explain'.²⁵ Spiritualism and physics were complicit partners in undermining conceptions of space and time, and the borders between the living and the dead. As an 'elsewhere' space, Spiritualism functions as a liminal space where real and imaginary, seen and unseen, intersect. With its own space-time, it annihilates the distance between the living and the dead and the temporal gaps between past, present and future. It is a utopian space of free self-expression or, as William James was later to describe the trance-state or reverie, an example of 'dispersed attention', in which 'the whole body is felt, as it were, at once, and the foreground of consciousness is filled, if by anything, by a sort of solemn sense of surrender to the empty passing of time'.²⁶ The sense of being out of everyday time and space means that the usual boundaries between them no longer signify. This experience of temporal and spatial mobility serves further to blur the boundaries between flesh and spirit, as the corporeal and spiritual bodies intermingle, and the borders between conscious and unconscious self merge.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's Spiritualist Novels

In her three Spiritualist novels, *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *Beyond the Gates* (1883) and *The Gates Between* (1887), Phelps envisages a coherent spiritual selfhood dwelling in an idealised version of paradise, where self-fulfilment takes the form of access to truth, finding a true soulmate and living in eternal harmony with her fellow-spirits. The first of the 'Gates' novels was written just after the American Civil War and, like the second of the series, demonstrates Phelps's desire to provide comfort to those men and women who lost loved ones in the Civil

²⁴ Kant refuted the claims of those purporting to communicate with spirits by locating the body in the world of experience. His understanding of the body in space meant that it was impossible for an immaterial substance to affect matter, and *vice versa*. "The body, the alterations of which are *my* alterations – this body is *my* body; and the place of that body is at the same time *my* place." By locating the body in space, as a place, Kant challenged the idea that a spirit could have a shape or fill any space'. Shane McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self: Thinking about Ghosts and Ghost-Seeing in England, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 68, quoting Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*, trans. by David Walford and Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 312 (original emphases).

²⁵ Johann Carl Friedrich Zöllner, *Transcendental Physics: An Account of Experimental Investigations from the Scientific Treatises*, trans. by Charles Carleton Massey (London: Harrison, 1880), p. 20, original emphasis.

²⁶ William James, *Psychology: Briefer Course* [1892] (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 228.

War, and to offer them a vision of a heavenly paradise that feels like home. Writing these novels after a particularly turbulent time in American history, Phelps sought to avoid further upheaval by any radical re-envisioning of gender relations: instead she re-balances them, ensuring women's equality with men within an existing Christian framework. Like New Woman writers who used Christian mythology and iconography to strengthen their cause, Phelps legitimates her feminism by calling on a Christian tradition of women's preaching which goes back to the eighteenth century and challenges an ideology that arose not only from a 'male' reading of scriptural texts but also the dominance of the male preacher. As Christine Krueger puts it:

From the women preachers of the eighteenth century to the novelists who were their heirs, women's writings testify to their ability to recognise the ideological conflicts in scripture that were suppressed in the patriarchal feminine ideal, and to interpret scriptures as offering divinely sanctioned challenges to masculine authority.²⁷

Like others, Phelps recognised the potency of Christian mythology, and the opportunities available to the writer sufficiently well-versed in the scriptures to re-interpret them.²⁸ Her third novel, *The Gates Between*, in which she emphasises the superiority of female spirituality over male scientific rationalism, ends with a happy family reunion. Phelps's reformist feminism is motivated by her politics of seeking a transformation in the lives of women tempered by her strong belief in the Christian institutions of marriage and family. Individual self-realisation is, in a way, a by-product of working for the greater good of the spiritual community. Any challenge to nineteenth-century gender ideology leaves undisturbed the overall structure of gender relations, class and women's roles. According to Nina Baym, the women in these novels are educated, middle-class women for whom, like Phelps's female readership, 'bourgeois domesticity [...] is a trap'.²⁹ Although her depiction of heaven suggests a world in which women are no longer deprived, Phelps's desire to impart theological and spiritual insights does not cross over into challenging the institutions that leave many women in want and for whom bourgeois domesticity might have appealed. These are middle-class novels for a middle-class readership.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps was born in 1844, the daughter of a Calvinist minister and Professor of Rhetoric and Homiletics, and a mother who was a writer. Both she and her

²⁷ Christine Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 7.

²⁸ Kabi Hartman discusses the frequency of conversion narratives in suffragette literature: "'What Made Me a Suffragette': The New Woman and the New (?) Conversion Narrative", *Women's History Review*, 12.1 (2003), 35-50. The New Woman writer, Olive Schreiner, also draws on Christian mythology in 'Three Dreams in a Desert' (1890).

²⁹ Nina Baym, 'Introduction', in *Three Spiritualist Novels*, vii-xxiii (p. x).

mother urged women to develop their potential through a form of work that would be rewarding both to themselves and to society.³⁰ Single until well into her forties, Phelps earned her living by writing. She was prolific, her works including books for children, ghost stories, novels, essays, biography, autobiography and spiritual fiction. Elizabeth Duquette highlights the importance of her essays on theology, philosophy and social and contemporary political issues, suggesting that it would be a mistake to dismiss Phelps as a writer of sentimental novels.³¹ Her Spiritualist novels seek to offer women help in dealing with loss, as both Nancy Schnog and Lisa Long point out.³² But she was also ‘adept at crafting abstract arguments’ and capable of ‘immense erudition’, as Duquette argues.³³ Phelps was committed to women’s rights and social reform, including dress reform, temperance, anti-vivisection – movements that were also ‘instrumental in creating the conditions of possibility for the New Woman’.³⁴ Her fiction reflects this commitment. Amongst her many novels are *The Story of Avis* (1877), in which a woman fights to preserve her independence as an artist whilst in an unhappy marriage; *Dr. Zay* (1882), about a pioneering woman doctor; and *Trixy* (1904), which addresses anti-vivisection, a movement espoused by many feminists. Throughout her Spiritualist fiction, too, there appears a ‘relentless connection between Spiritualism, Christianity and reform’ according to Roxanne Harde.³⁵ Her emphasis on feminising the Bible leads Elizabeth Stuart to identify her as ‘a prototypical feminist theologian’.³⁶ In her introduction to Phelps’s spiritualist novels, Baym highlights her interest and active involvement in the cause of women’s rights.³⁷ Although she equivocates over the issue of spirit communication, her faith in Spiritualism is used in an attempt to empower women as they struggle to find their place in a post-bellum world. Her work also reflects a vision of an idealised domestic space and, according to Baym, ‘an intense belief in romantic, heterosexual

³⁰ Carol Farley Kessler, ‘A Literary Legacy: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Mother and Daughter’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 5.3 (1980), 28-33 (p. 32).

³¹ Sophia Forster argues that, although *The Gates Ajar* can be read as antebellum sentimental fiction, in *Men, Women and Ghosts* (1869), Phelps attempts a high literary genre; and other novels reflect her social realism. ‘Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and the Emergence of American Literary Realism’, *Studies in the Novel*, 48.1 (2016), 43-64 (p. 46).

³² Nancy Schnog, ‘“The Comfort of My Fancying”: Loss and Recuperation in *The Gates Ajar*’, *Arizona Quarterly*, 49.1 (1993), 21-47; Lisa A. Long, ‘“The Corporeity of Heaven”: Rehabilitating the Civil War Body in *The Gates Ajar*, *American Literature*, 69.4 (1969), 781-811.

³³ Elizabeth Duquette, ‘Introduction’, in *Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: Selected Tales, Essays, and Poems*, ed. by Elizabeth Duquette and Cheryl Tevlin (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), pp. ix-xxxviii (p. xiii).

³⁴ Duquette, p. xxx.

³⁵ Roxanne Harde, ‘“God, or something like that”: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s Christian Spiritualism’, *Women’s Writing*, 15.3 (2008), 348-370 (p. 364).

³⁶ Elizabeth Stuart, ‘Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: A Good Feminist doing Bad Theology?’, *Feminist Theology*, 9.26 (2001), 70-82 (p. 79).

³⁷ Baym, p. x.

love as essential to any woman's full development'.³⁸ Christine Stansell believes that one of the limitations to Phelps's feminism is in its apparent suggestion that every woman needs a man.³⁹ This need not, however, necessarily detract from her commitment to improving women's lives.

Phelps's vision of heaven is a mixture of the Swedenborgian notion of heaven as the representation of the real world, combined with an American version along the lines of the Spiritualist colonies that were to develop in the West, one of which was called Summerland.⁴⁰ This was an example of a domesticated rural idyll that influenced the garden cemeteries across America before the Civil War, and was to offer solace to the bereaved after the War. Summerland burial grounds were designed not as a reminder of the inevitability of death, but as places for contemplation of happy memories and in which to look forward to the eventual reunion with loved ones in the afterlife.⁴¹ Underpinning this ideal vision, however, was, according to Stansell, Phelps's 'devastating analysis of the nature of heterosexuality and its implications for the liberation of women'.⁴² As a child, Phelps witnessed the difficulties her mother had in trying to combine motherhood and marriage to a Calvinist minister with her strong desire to write. It was Phelps's view that this struggle contributed to her mother's early death, and it was in recognition of this that she adopted her mother's name. In many of her novels, she addresses the difficulties for women trying to combine an independent life of their own with marriage and family. Central to Phelps's feminism is a critique of what might be called masculine virtue, the rational, scientific mind, and the privileging of female spirituality. In her Spiritualist novels is an attempt to transform gender and power relations without disturbing the Christian institutions of marriage and family, hence her feminism is reformist. That her reforms take place in the heavenly sphere emphasises, I suggest, the tension between the idyllic and romantic nature of Phelps's re-imagined world and the real world, in which social institutions served mostly to constrain women.

Phelps's *The Gates Ajar* and *Beyond the Gates*⁴³

In Phelps's version of an idealised Christian domesticity, space and time flow into one another, and there are permeable borders between the spirit world and the living world. There

³⁸ Baym, p. xi.

³⁹ Christine Stansell, 'Elizabeth Stuart Phelps: A Study in Female Rebellion', *The Massachusetts Review*, 13.1/2 (1972), 239-256 (p. 255).

⁴⁰ Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), p. 61.

⁴¹ Braude, p. 53.

⁴² Stansell, p. 239.

⁴³ Further references are given after quotations in the text.

is reassurance for those on earth knowing that one day they will be reunited with their loved ones who, in turn, will be cleansed of any imperfection or damage inflicted by war. Her theology is one that rejects the central Calvinist tenet of predestination for a version of a God that is benign, loving and forgiving. The influence of one of the most important American Spiritualist writers of the nineteenth century, Andrew Jackson Davis, is evident in Phelps's theology in the way that both writers articulate 'a comprehensive worldview incorporating spirit manifestations, reform principles, and an anti-Calvinist theology into a single system'.⁴⁴ Phelps sets out her belief system in her first two Spiritualist novels, *The Gates Ajar* (1868), and *Beyond the Gates* (1883). *The Gates Ajar* takes the form of the diary entries of a young woman, Mary Cabot, whose brother has been killed in the American Civil War. Some biographers have suggested that this reflects Phelps's own experience of losing her fiancé in the war.⁴⁵ In this novel, Mary's Aunt Winifred comforts and reassures her of eventual reunion with her brother through a rejection of Calvinist eschatology and the privileging of women's knowledge. Like her creator, Aunt Winifred aspires to the status of feminist theologian, someone who is not only well-versed in the Bible and able to argue authoritatively with the local minister, but also replaces the latter as the one from whom the townsfolk seek comfort.⁴⁶

The association of women with spirituality has a long religious tradition from goddesses of ancient times, to female mystics in the early modern period, to a belief popular with millenarian sects in the advent of a female Messiah. Millenarianism was often seen as a response to political, economic and social upheaval which, of course, was the backdrop to Phelps's novels.⁴⁷ And, as J. F. C. Harrison points out, there was a close connection between millenarian-style belief and elements of popular culture, including the supernatural.⁴⁸ Aunt Winifred is part of this tradition. She is a learned woman, having studied the Bible and its commentators very carefully, and is able to cite many of them in her discussions with Mary:

[As] Dr Chalmers says, 'It were well for us all, could we carefully draw the line between the secret things which belong to God and the things which are revealed and belong to us and our children'. Some one else, – Whately, I think, [...] that precisely because we know so little of them, it is the more important that we 'should endeavour so to dwell on them as to make the most of what little knowledge we have' (p. 54).

Underpinning this portrayal of a woman steeped in religious studies is Phelps's belief that spiritual transformation, and thus women's advancement, go hand in hand with education.

⁴⁴ Braude, p. 35.

⁴⁵ Baym, p. x.

⁴⁶ Stuart, p. 78.

⁴⁷ J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780-1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 219.

⁴⁸ Harrison, p. 39.

Aunt Winifred's careful studies have enabled her to deconstruct the patriarchal God of strict Calvinism to re-imagine a God with whom women might find greater sympathy. If man (*sic*) is made in the image of God, then an educated reconstruction of a feminised God allows for woman's image to be transformed. Mary Daly refers to the deconstruction of a patriarchal God as 'the unfolding of God', a process that 'involves the creation of new space, in which women are free to become who we are, in which there are real and significant alternatives to the prefabricated identities provided within the enclosed spaces of patriarchal institutions'.⁴⁹ In *The Gates Ajar*, Aunt Winifred not only seeks to feminise the Bible, she also wants it to create a space that women might recognise, hence her talk of Heaven containing houses and pianos.⁵⁰ (The meaning of physical space and place and its intersection with female desire and subjectivity is explored further in my discussion of utopian space in Chapter 5.) Material artefacts may not be exactly the same in Heaven and on earth, but '*something that will be to us then what these are now*' (p. 81, original emphasis). This sense of intimacy and homeliness in Heaven suggests also a continuity of memory and consciousness from life into death, across time and space.

The second novel, *Beyond the Gates*, is narrated by another Mary who, on her sickbed, resides in the liminal space between life and death. In an altered state of consciousness she is reunited with her deceased father and transported to the afterlife. Time appears stopped between life and death, and paradise appears as a space that in many ways resembles the fictional utopian spaces that I discuss later. Indeed, *Beyond the Gates* is included in Kessler's anthology of women's utopian stories, for which the title is taken from a line of Phelps's poetry: 'Ideal of ourselves! We dream and dare'.⁵¹ Kessler argues that Phelps's 'Gates' novels 'depict as heaven a eutopian world in which women no longer exist in want'.⁵² The heavenly city Mary finds herself in 'had the confusion of sudden pleasure', with clean streets, beautiful buildings, libraries, museums and gardens (p. 195). The people she encounters give off an air of purposefulness: '[T]hese were men and women, busy without hurry, efficacious without waste; they had ambition without unscrupulousness, power without tyranny, success without

⁴⁹ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: Women's Press, 1986), p. 40.

⁵⁰ On Phelps's popularising of the gospels see Gail K. Smith, 'From the Seminary to the Parlour: The Popularisation of Hermeneutics in *The Gates Ajar*', *Arizona Quarterly*, 54.2 (1998), 99-133; and Lucy Frank, "'Bought with a Price": Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and the Commodification of Heaven in Postbellum America', *ESQ*, 55.2 (2009), 165-192. Frank sees Phelps's focus on materiality and commodities as a way to channel emotional and psychic content.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, 'Victorae Salutamus', *Songs of the Silent World and Other Poems* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885), p. 99, quoted in *Daring to Dream: Utopian Stories by United States Women: 1836-1919*, ed. by Carol Farley Kessler (Boston: Pandora Press, 1984), p. 6.

⁵² Kessler (1984), p. 105. Here 'eutopian' is used to indicate a good place.

vanity, care without anxiety, effort without exhaustion' (p. 195). There is no suggestion of time passing as no one ages, and there is neither sickness nor impairment. Here, bodily impairment, which the Spiritualist Davies believes is a reflection of spiritual discord, undergoes spiritual rehabilitation: 'death causes so much *alteration* in the condition of the individual as the *bursting* of a rose-bud causes in the condition and situation of a flower'.⁵³ The emphasis placed on the idea of spiritual incarnation reinforces the centrality of embodiment to subjectivity, whether of a heavenly or earthly variety. Physical rehabilitation, which also entails spiritual transformation, must have been of great comfort to Phelps's readers, many of whom would have witnessed the death or maiming of loved ones. Cindy Weinstein dismisses Phelps's utopian space in *The Gates Ajar* as a 'kind of Prozac nation', suggestive of the sense of stasis recognisable in some literary utopias.⁵⁴ But here, I argue, one sees the opposite: an active utopian space in which things are put right, and where '[e]very day new expedients of delight unfurled before us' (p. 224). It is as important to rehabilitate the mind as it is the body, as Mary discovers when endless opportunities for learning open up before her. With time no longer proceeding in linear order, the past can be re-visited and corrected. Mary can 'read history backwards by contact with its actors': 'Was I not in a world where Loyola, and Jeanne d'Arc, or Luther, or Arthur, could be asked questions?' (pp. 224-225). The importance that Phelps places on education in the afterlife reflects her interest in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill, particularly his belief in perfect equality and the capacity for every human, regardless of gender, to progress.⁵⁵ They share the view that one of the things that hold women back is no access to a proper education.⁵⁶ With the lack of barriers to progress in the afterlife, Mary senses the possibility of multiple identities: 'In how many worlds should I experience myself? How many lives should I live? [...] Might one try the domestic or the public career in different existences? Try the bliss of love in one age, the culture of solitude in another? Be oneself yet be all selves?' (p. 226). With all these opportunities open to her, however, Mary chooses the traditional feminine role of domesticity.

Although Phelps spent most of her adult single life following a career as a writer, marrying late only to be deeply disappointed, she revered marriage and family life. She has

⁵³ Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Great Harmonia*, 4th edn, 4 vols (Boston: Mussey, 1850), I, p. 157, quoted in Braude, p. 51, original emphases. See also Lisa A. Long, "'The Corporeity of Heaven': Rehabilitating the Civil War Body in *The Gates Ajar*", *American Literature*, 69.4 (1969), 781-811 (p.793).

⁵⁴ Cindy Weinstein, 'Heaven's Tense: Narration in *The Gates Ajar*', *Novel: A Forum On Fiction*, 45.1 (2012), 56-70 (p. 58).

⁵⁵ Duquette suggests that Phelps's ideas about women's rights were influenced as much by Mill as by her religion, citing Phelps's expressions of admiration for Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) in private correspondence, and her references to his book in her essays. Duquette, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

⁵⁶ J. S. Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. by John M. Robson (University of Toronto Press, 1963-1991), XXI, p. 295.

Mary adopt familiar domestic roles, however, only once these roles have assumed a different and higher meaning, reflecting her commitment to the recognition of women's work and worth. As someone who read Mill, she may well have taken note of what he has to say about women and family life, and the high value he gives to work in the home:

When the support of the family depends, not on property, but on earnings, the common arrangement, by which the man earns the income and the wife superintends the domestic expenditure, seems to me in general the most suitable division of labour.⁵⁷

Mill goes on to say that, as long as marriage is an equal contract, it is likely that 'a woman makes choice of the management of a household, and the bringing up of a family, as the first call upon her exertions'.⁵⁸ The tasks that Mary undertakes lie, moreover, within the context not of a hierarchy that places domestic and caring roles as subordinate, but of a form of feminist spiritual theocracy in which 'Position [...] depended upon spiritual claims. Distinction was the result of character. The nature nearest to the Divine Nature ruled the social forces. Spiritual culture was the ultimate text of individual importance' (p. 203). Education, duty and spirituality interconnect, with education, in particular, providing the foundation to a moral way of life that extends to:

the grandeur of helping the weak, and revering the strong; to the privilege of guarding the erring or the tried, whether of earth or heaven, and of sharing all attainable wisdom with the less wise, and of even instructing those too ignorant to know that they were not wise, and of ministering to the dying, and of assisting in bringing together the separated' (p. 224).

As in *The Gates Ajar*, where Aunt Winifred's study of religious texts results in a feminist re-working of Christian teaching and offers a sense of spiritual transcendence to those around her, here Phelps elevates feminine duty to a form of spiritual leadership in which moral authority lies with women.

Phelps is careful to give a spiritual framework to any expressions of sensuality and eroticism. The idea of the embodied spirit was not confined to Christian Spiritualism, but where orthodox Christians believed in the assumption of a spiritual body at the Last Judgement, Christian Spiritualists believed that there was a kind of 'substantial encasement of the spirit (an 'astral body')' at the point of death.⁵⁹ Because spirits remained substantial they retained personality, were able to receive God's love and thereby attain eternal life. This

⁵⁷ J. S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1870), pp. 87-88.

⁵⁸ Mill, p. 89.

⁵⁹ Merie, p. 194.

reflects the ‘incarnationist’ trend in nineteenth-century Christianity in England that interpreted the Atonement through Christ’s crucifixion not literally but, as Merie points out, as a metaphor, ‘an exemplary paradigm for an always-possible individual redemption and regeneration’.⁶⁰ Central to man’s redemption was not the crucifixion but the outpouring of Spirit through the incarnated Christ. The idea that moral improvement was still a possibility after death reflects the conjunction Christian Spiritualists made between the substantiality of the spirit and its evolution in the afterlife, grounded in an incarnationist tradition. For Aunt Winifred, therefore, death does not imply disembodiment: ‘Death is simply the slipping off of the outer body, as a husk slips off from its kernel’, she tells Mary in *The Gates Ajar* (p. 65). It signifies losing a layer of selfhood that shields the true self: ‘If I say that I felt as if I had got into the *soul of a body*, shall I be understood?’ (*Beyond the Gates*, p. 165, original emphasis). The outer earthly layer can equally be seen to signify a patriarchal construction of femininity of either the undesiring female body, or of the female body that is at the mercy of uncontrolled desires and must therefore be tamed. Either way, it is a construction that denies women true expression. In the spirit world, women are embodied with the same desires as on earth, but the afterlife space allows for a transcendent expression of female sensuality that effectively separates it from any sense of degradation. Baym points out that women avoided being defined by their anatomy by expressing sensuality in spiritual terms.⁶¹ It is not, however, Phelps’s intention to obviate sensuality. In fact, Mary’s senses are heightened, sensing something ‘more energetic than the bodily sensations I had known’ (p. 157), perhaps the sublimation of sexual desire into a mystical experience.

When Mary is reunited with the man she loved on earth, she can only give herself to him once God sanctions their love, ‘and by His blessing lifts our human love into so divine a thing that this seems the only life in which it could have breathed’ (pp. 230-231). Love in the afterlife is sanctioned through a combination of spirituality and Swedenborgian conjugality.⁶² Baym suggests that Phelps avoids the tricky issue of defining the nature of conjugal love in the afterlife by returning Mary to the living world.⁶³ But actually she overcomes this difficulty through God’s intervention. Love is encompassed within a spiritual framework, eroticism sanctioned by being transformed into its divine expression. Any suggestion of what might be deemed transgressive sensuality is easily tempered by an idealisation of romantic

⁶⁰ Merie, p. 194.

⁶¹ Nina Baym, *Women’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America, 1820-1870*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 18.

⁶² Swedenborg preached that, once they had assumed corporeal forms after death, male and female spirits were able to engage in conjugal love.

⁶³ Baym (2000), p. xxii.

love, encompassing the erotic within a framework of spirituality and traditional marriage roles.

Phelps's *The Gates Between*

The Gates Ajar and *Beyond the Gates* are representative of the homiletic fiction of the second half of the nineteenth century. The term homiletic refers to a literary form of preaching. It was one avenue available to women who were otherwise denied a place in the pulpit. In the hands of the feminist, homiletic fiction could be used to dissolve and evade traditional social, sexual and religious boundaries.⁶⁴ Through a feminist re-interpretation of the gospels in *The Gates Ajar* and the depiction of a domestic heavenly paradise in *Beyond the Gates*, the scene is set for the foregrounding of feminine ways of knowing in the third of Phelps's Spiritualist novels, *The Gates Between* (1887). This is narrated by the spirit of Dr Esmerald Thorne, a doctor who has been killed in a carriage accident shortly after an ill-tempered farewell to his wife, a woman he idolises and yet neglects. She is the perfect Victorian wife with all the womanly virtues that enable her to be both adored and ignored. In this story, Thorne arrives in the afterlife space between death and the Last Judgement. Here he is allowed the opportunity for redemption through a process of spiritual enlightenment. Transformation and redemption are framed by an idealised vision of family life, *The Gates Between* ending with the happy reunion of husband, wife and child in the afterlife. This ensures, according to Baym, that in this novel Spiritualism 'becomes Christianity's highest expression' in the way that it confirms the traditional institutions of marriage and family within a Christian framework.⁶⁵ I would argue, however, that the novel also represents an important re-working of gendered power relations. Without disavowing the essentialist perspective on women's spirituality, Phelps nevertheless manages to privilege a woman's world in which their spiritual insights and knowledge are superior to the science and rationality that apparently shape men's knowledge. In the spirit world, Thorne's worldly wisdom is ineffective, leaving him feeling both displaced and inadequate.

Thorne is a rational physician who values his paternal family history of scientists. He is a man of the nineteenth century who embraces his inheritance of a 'world of physical facts' and distances himself from his maternal heritage, a man 'who thinks the thought of his father, who does the deed of his father's father, who contests the heredity of his mother' (p. 236). His preferred interpretation of Darwinian evolution is a version of the survival of the fittest

⁶⁴ Ann-Janine Morey, *Religion and Sexuality in American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 236.

⁶⁵ Baym, p. xxii.

masculine virtues, and in the nineteenth century this meant foregrounding reason and logic over weaker feminine traits of irrationality and emotionality.⁶⁶ So when he falls in love in middle life, he finds it difficult to rationalise his status as ‘President of the State Medical Society, and Foreign Correspondent of the National Evolutionary Association, forty-six years old, and a Darwinian’ with loving a woman like any ‘common, ardent, unscientific fellow’ (p. 249). This slippage does not extend to the realm of spirituality. Unlike real life scientists like William Crookes and Oliver Lodge, two physicists who transgressed the rational boundaries of science to explore the world of Spiritualism and risked their reputations along the way, Thorne remains committed to a form of scientism which, following his death, results in him being unable to negotiate an afterlife that prioritises spirituality. So used to his own world in which space and time operate according to familiar principles, he now finds himself unable to move either forwards or backwards, or to communicate his needs. He is imprisoned in ‘an indefinite period of great misery’, ‘a form of moral dislocation’, frozen in time and in a space in which he feels ‘unmanned’(p. 303) – a reference both to the emotional impact of this experience and to the sense of impotence it brings. It takes a female spirit, the suitably named Mrs. Faith, a casualty of his carriage accident, to reveal that his sense of loss and helplessness can only be overcome once he reconciles his scientism with a sense of spirituality.

Thorne realises eventually that ‘there are possibilities and privileges in the state immediately succeeding death, which had been utterly denied to me, and were still unknown to me’ (p. 297). Neither his masculinity nor his scientific training can help him. The normal hierarchies of power and authority have been usurped by a spirit community in which intimacy between self and the spirit world depends on belief. Thorne is now the one at a disadvantage: ‘It seemed now to have been an extraordinary narrowness of intellect in me that I had not at least attached more weight to the universal human hypothesis’, that is, that there is life after death (p. 301). Thorne is the kind of man who might have joined the X Club, a British dining club founded by the biologist Thomas Huxley (1825-1895). This was a club for like-minded men interested in furthering the cause of science. Huxley was an important figure in the nineteenth century, known as Darwin’s ‘bulldog’ for his keen advocacy of evolutionary theory. He proposed a method of working based on the principle of agnosticism: follow the path of reason and only come to conclusions that are based on demonstrable facts. Huxley viewed the world in materialist terms. ‘Materialist terminology is to be preferred’, he says:

⁶⁶ In Chapter 4 I discuss how the psychologist, William James, and the journalist, William Stead, gender the conscious (rational) and unconscious (irrational) mind.

for it connects thought with other phenomena of the universe, and suggests inquiry into the nature of those physical conditions, or concomitants of thought, which are more or less accessible to us, and a knowledge of which may, in future, help us to exercise the same kind of control over the world of thought as we already possess in respect of the material world; whereas, the alternative, spiritualistic, terminology is utterly barren, and leads to nothing but obscurity and confusion of ideas.⁶⁷

This scientific paradigm is one that Thorne would have espoused, believing it to provide a useful framework for the evolution of man's knowledge. But he is beginning to realise that it has failed to give him the spiritual tools necessary for moving forwards. That he is forced to seek help from a woman further emphasises the privileging of female spirituality over male scientism.

The nineteenth century saw a growth in female leadership of new religious movements including Christian Science, the Shakers and Spiritualism.⁶⁸ Emanuel Swedenborg exerted a strong influence on religious heterodoxy in the nineteenth century and, as I have already mentioned, was important in shaping Phelps's idealised version of love in the spirit world.⁶⁹ Swedenborg's essentialising of the masculine and feminine components of the Divine nature probably contributed to Phelps's reluctance to challenge gender roles in any radical sense. Swedenborgians believed that:

The Divine Love is the feminine, the Divine Wisdom the masculine principle in the Divine nature. They are inseparable, co-existent, co-animating, co-operating. They are the positive and negative poles of the infinite magnet.⁷⁰

This heterodox view not surprisingly served to reinforce the binaries of masculinity and femininity, and in turn became embedded in some spiritualist thinking: One spirit communicated in the 1880s that 'the masculine principle was associated with inspiration, the intellect, wisdom, and the word; the feminine with influence, love, and the breath'.⁷¹ Divine nature is depicted as the coming together of male and female: this suggests that although Phelps privileges female spirituality, true fulfilment is lacking without the wisdom of a male counterpart. At the same time, the wise male is lost without his spiritual partner.

Until Thorne finds his spiritual other, he feels alienated: 'I care nothing for this place [...] It is the most unhomelike place I ever saw' (p. 306). This unhomelike, or *unheimlich*,

⁶⁷ T. H. Huxley, *On The Physical Basis of Life* (Yale College, CT: College Courant, 1869), p. 23.

⁶⁸ I discuss this further in the following chapter.

⁶⁹ Owen, p. 14.

⁷⁰ William H. Holcombe, *The Sexes Here and Hereafter* (London: Spiers, 1869), p. 4, cited in Owen, p. 14.

⁷¹ Owen, p. 14, citing a spirit communication to the medium, Florence Theobald.

place is a form of the Freudian uncanny.⁷² It raises a sense of anxiety in Thorne that harks back to the emotional impulse of mother-love that he has long since repressed, the ‘heredity of his mother’ that he ‘lock[ed] down with the iron experience of his calling’ (p. 236). As a scientist, however, Thorne understands the weight of inheritance. He cannot fully dismiss the heredity of his mother – the feminine traits he may have inherited – and to try and do so can only result in conflict and anxiety for it means that he must, at the same time, reject her and what she signifies as home. Thus, he experiences both the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*: he recognises the familiarity of the feminine impulse from his mother, and perhaps his longing for a return to mother-love, but to give way to it means risking the disruption of his carapace of rationality and lack of sentiment. In the feminised space of the afterlife, where the boundaries between masculinity and femininity are blurred, repressed desire and the sense of loss are magnified – his loss of mother and manhood, and his isolation from a spirit world that promises redemption. In Swedenborgian tradition, redemption occurs only through the union of the masculine and feminine. Phelps rejects the view of some Swedenborgians that woman remains, because of ‘her maternal functions and forces [...] an appendage to man’.⁷³ Instead, she figures the afterlife as a feminised intermediary space between life and the Last Judgement, in which gender relations are reconfigured. Women may need their male counterpart for true fulfilment, but she privileges the feminine, spiritual principle to emphasise that men are completely lost unless they accept the significance of the feminine to their survival.

Thorne is re-united with his son who died as an infant. It is through his son’s eyes, and with the helpful ministrations of his spirit guide and Mrs Faith, that Thorne recognises his ignorance of the ‘unseen Being’: ‘The service of this invisible Monarch vied only with the universal affection for Him. So far as I could understand the spiritual life at all, it seemed to be the highest possible development and expression of love’ (p. 325). It is after this realisation that Thorne is re-united with his wife. As he begs her forgiveness, she is depicted as creeping towards him weeping, not as a woman wronged but because of her sweet nature. In 1901, Phelps published a dramatised version of *The Gates Between* called *Within the Gates*. Here

⁷² Sigmund Freud, ‘The ‘Uncanny’’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols (1917-1919), vol XVII, *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-1974), pp. 217-256. Freud writes, ‘If psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny’ (p. 241, original emphasis).

⁷³ F. J. Theobald, *Homes and Work in the Future Life*, part 3 (London: The Psychological Press Association and Allen, 1887), p. 132, cited in Owen, p. 14.

the story ends not with Thorne's wife creeping towards him, but with her in the ascendant position standing over him and lifting him from his knees as he begs forgiveness.⁷⁴ Phelps cleverly inverts the image of Christ lifting the repentant Mary Magdalen from the ground in the spirit of forgiveness. Here, Thorne's wife becomes the divine figure, marking a radical departure from the accepted patriarchal Christian framework. This is a compelling image of women's potential for power and agency. Maria Carrión suggests that Phelps may have had a political motive in turning her novel into a play. For nineteenth-century women, to be a playwright was considered a riskier occupation than to be a novelist. The theatre was considered a male, public space, whereas the personal, private space of the novel was deemed more suited to women. Carrión suggests that Phelps was politicising the unfair position of Victorian women writers, and that this episode further emphasises the significant role of her writing in making the personal political.⁷⁵ I would say that the act of writing itself was a political statement for Phelps, and it may have been that, with the passing of years, she felt more confident in making a more radical statement about women's position. She always refused to allow her gender to determine what she could and could not do. Taking her mother's name, she wanted to correct the imbalance of gender roles that made it so difficult for Phelps Senior to prioritise her writing. It would be wrong to let her depiction of an idealised domestic paradise overshadow her feminist intentions, for it is important to contextualise these novels in a postbellum society that had witnessed the tragedy of war. As Baym points out, Phelps's feminism was a 'pragmatic feminism [...] constrained by certain other types of beliefs that are less operative today'.⁷⁶ She recognised the importance of preserving the religious and social institutions that promised postbellum comfort, stability and permanence. Her reformist feminism arose from ways that, without dismantling these institutions, she had the audacity to undertake a feminist re-appraisal of the gospels and to re-balance gender relations. By using the afterlife with its own space-time to formulate her feminism, Phelps is able to break down the boundaries between what was considered male and female domains. She not only re-positions women in space by foregrounding the power of feminine knowledge and spirituality, but she also ensures their place in time through their actions on past, present and future.

⁷⁴ María Dolores Narbona Carrión, 'Nineteenth-Century Women Going Beyond the Gates of the Personal: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *Within the Gates*', in *Women's Contribution to Nineteenth-Century American Theatre*, ed. by Miriam López Rodríguez and María Dolores Narbona Carrión (València: Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord'americans: Universitat de València, 2004), pp. 111-123 (p. 111).

⁷⁵ Carrión, p. 113.

⁷⁶ Baym (1993), p. 18.

Florence Marryat's Spiritualist Texts

Unlike Phelps, for whom belief in an active spirit world was sufficient in itself, Marryat's desire to explore the extent of female subjectivity, as well as the desire for reassurance of life after death, involved seeking empirical evidence of spirit communication: she was an active Spiritualist both as medium and participant in the *séance*. *The Dead Man's Message* (1894) has a remarkably similar story line to Phelps's *The Gates Between* but with no happy ending. Read in conjunction with the account of her own experiences of the Spiritualist *séance*, *There Is No Death* (1891), it is clear that, for Marryat, Spiritualism opened the doors to experiences that transgressed boundaries, taking her beyond the domestic utopian paradise of Phelps's. Through intimate corporeal interactions with spirits and their mediums, she challenges the version of femininity delineated by nineteenth-century gender ideology and sexual politics to suggest, instead, the multiplicity of female subjectivity. Where Phelps's reformist feminism is framed within traditional, safe gender boundaries and situated in the heavenly spheres, Marryat's more radical feminism engages in a more expansive exploration of what it means to be a woman. In the borderland between life and death, a Spiritualist space in which the clear and familiar demarcations of space and time are dissolved, the fluidity and permeability of selfhood is experienced as fragile and uncanny – which is to feel something as being both familiar and unfamiliar, producing a sense of anxiety – at the same time as being potentially liberating.

Florence Marryat was born in 1833, the daughter of the author, Captain Frederick Marryat. She was a woman of many guises – twice married and divorced, she had eight children, was an author, journalist and editor, actress and Spiritualist. She had the ability to re-invent herself as circumstances demanded, suggesting an ease with role-playing and performance, and an affinity with the idea of subjectivity as multiple.⁷⁷ A prolific writer of sensation novels, including *The Nobler Sex* (1892), a story of an abusive and unhappy marriage which is regarded as her most autobiographical, she was also interested in social issues and women's rights. She argues against vivisection in *An Angel of Pity* (1897), and addresses transgressive gender and sexual roles in *Her Father's Name* (1876) and *The Blood*

⁷⁷ See Beth Palmer, 'Florence Marryat, Theatricality and Performativity', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 8 (2009), <http://19.bbk.ac.uk> [accessed 28 September 2015]. Palmer applies Judith Butler's theory of 'performativity' to Marryat. See also Tatiana Kontou, 'The Case of Florence Marryat: Custodian of the Spirit World / Popular Novelist', in *Ashgate Companion to Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. by Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn (Farnham: Ashgate, 2102), pp. 221-229 (p. 226). Kontou suggests that Marryat moves between different literary genres, and that her accounts of Spiritualism are a hybrid between performance and reality.

of a Vampire (1897).⁷⁸ Her Spiritualist fiction includes *Open! Sesame!* (1875), *The Strange Transfiguration of Hannah Stubbs* (1896) and *The Dead Man's Message* (1894).⁷⁹ Other Spiritualist texts include *There is No Death* (1891), in which she explores the multiplicity of subjectivity, and *The Spirit World* (1894): in both these books she writes of her own experiences as a medium and participant in séances. It is important to Marryat that there is no conflict between her Spiritualism and Catholicism: 'For if Spiritualism is wrong, God is wrong, and the Christ is wrong, and the Bible is wrong, and you have nothing left to cling to, for time or eternity!'⁸⁰ She believes that the Catholic Church chooses to hide the power of the spirits from their congregation, preferring to invest authority in its priests: 'The Roman Catholic Church is a mass of Spiritualism – she teems with so-called miracles', but should the masses become aware of this, they might turn away from the priest towards their own consciences and find that they were 'free'.⁸¹ Spiritualism promises, then, not only consolation but also personal freedom. The spirit world offers an imaginary space in which gender and power relations can be reconfigured, as it does for Phelps, but Marryat is also interested in using it to explore the freedom to extend experience beyond what was traditionally ascribed to women. For her, communing with spirits engages more than the soul and a belief system, it engages the body and the senses – '[I] have seen them, conversed with them, handled them', she says of the spirits.⁸² It is the experience of corporeal intimacy with embodied spirits that enhances and multiplies her sense of self.

Spiritualism played an important role in liberating women in body and mind. At a time when women were pushing against the barriers that prevented them from engaging fully as social, political and cultural participants, a world in which it was possible to experience the dissolution of the borders between space and time gave them a space in which to reconfigure their place in the world and in history. The imaginary space-time of the spirit world contributed to the breakdown of binaries associated with gender – matter and spirit, emotion and reason, sentiment and science. The female body's experience of possession by or communication with spirits spoke to a desire for a more liberated and expansive sense of selfhood. The body became a cultural site, and written on it were the tensions women sought to resolve. As Grosz points out:

⁷⁸ Catherine Pope, "'More like a woman stuck into boy's clothes'": Sexual Deviance in Florence Marryat's *Her Father's Name*', <http://www.academia.edu/14382793> [accessed 11 August 2015].

⁷⁹ Greta Depledge, 'Introduction', *The Dead Man's Message*, v-xxiii (p. v).

⁸⁰ Florence Marryat, *The Spirit World* (New York: Reed, 1894), p. 38.

⁸¹ *The Spirit World*, p. 12, original emphasis.

⁸² *The Spirit World*, p. 35.

The body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product.⁸³

The Spiritualist female body came to represent a site of resistance to patriarchal authority and the expression of a desire for freedom. It spoke not only of individual desire, but also of the collective desires and demands of women on both sides of the Atlantic for greater rights and social reform. The anti-vivisectionism and attempt to re-balance (male) scientism with (female) spirituality in *The Dead Man's Message* suggests to Greta Depledge Marryat's engagement with social and cultural issues of the day.⁸⁴ For Marryat, corporeal engagement with Spiritualism both enabled a fuller expression of individual subjectivity and involvement with contemporary discourses.⁸⁵ In both *The Dead Man's Message* and *There Is No Death*, individual self-realisation occurs through the experience of a corporeal and mystical communion with the spirit world. Marryat's desire for self-realisation coincided with the needs of many nineteenth-century women: a common need for individual expression coming together with a collective desire for change.

Marryat's *The Dead Man's Message*

In *Message*, Marryat redresses gender inequality in a storyline remarkably similar to the one in Phelps's *The Gates Between*, but Marryat is particularly interested in the effects of heredity and the intersection between the determinism of eugenics and the transformative powers of Spiritualism.⁸⁶ Professor Aldwyn, another man of science like Thorne, dies in his armchair and is transported to the first level of the spirit world, a kind of purgatorial space in which he must expiate his sins. It is not a coincidence that both Thorne and Aldwyn are scientists: Phelps and Marryat were keen to point out that science fails on its own as a route to self-knowledge. Just as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) points to the dangers of a male, hubristic science, Phelps and Marryat highlight the shortcomings of the male scientific mind and its failure to get to the truth of human experience. They can be

⁸³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 23, original emphasis.

⁸⁴ Depledge, pp. xiv, xx-xxi.

⁸⁵ See Mohammed Hamdan's account of the displaced eroticism in the table-rapping of the séance in "Give me the table – all the rest, all the other effects, come afterwards": Sound and Sexual Communication in the Spiritualist Fiction of Marryat and Phelps', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 37.4 (2015), 341-353. Marryat's involvement in discourses on eugenics and determinism, and hybridity are discussed respectively in Christine Ferguson, *Determined Spirits: Eugenics, Heredity and Racial Regeneration in Anglo-American Spiritualist Writing, 1848-1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012); and Brenda Mann Hammack, 'Florence Marryat's Female Vampire and the Scientising of Hybridity', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 48.4 (2008), 885-896.

⁸⁶ From hereon *The Dead Man's Message* will be referred to as *Message*, with references following quotations in the text.

situated at the early stages of a feminist movement to critique male scientific methodology that, even in the late twentieth century, according to Evelyn Fox Keller, still needed to challenge ‘the deeply rooted popular mythology that casts objectivity, reason, and mind as male, and subjectivity, feeling, and nature as female’.⁸⁷ A feminist scientific methodology is rooted in the interplay between objectivity and subjectivity. Removing the subjective factor denies science its human context, and the fact that it occurs within a specific space and time.⁸⁸ As Aldwyn finds out, acknowledging context is critical to understanding. With his guardian spirit, also a scientist, by his side, he is forced to face the wrongs he has committed against women, children and animals – Aldwyn was a keen vivisectionist, and is accompanied through this first stage of rehabilitation by ‘the spirits of the dumb brutes whom you tortured in the name of science’ (p. 94). Biblical references abound as testament to the journey he must make.⁸⁹ Unlike Phelps, however, who re-interprets Biblical passages to provide comfort to the living, Marryat draws on her Catholic belief that it is only through suffering for one’s sins that access to Heaven will be granted. Added to which, in this liminal space between life and death, where there are no clear markers to space and time, the unrehabilitated Aldwyn experiences the same alienation that Thorne feels in *The Gates Between*. For Aldwyn, whose time on earth was clearly demarcated by what were deemed to be masculine pursuits, his studies and conferences with scientific colleagues, time represents progress and the opportunity for posterity, made possible for him in the space created by his self-sacrificing wife and children. In the afterlife, he encounters his father who denies him comfort and dismisses his scientific achievements: ‘What value are they, do you suppose, to us in the blessed freedom of spirituality? Less than the dirt beneath your feet’ (p. 48). In the afterlife, where there are no distinctions between the material and the spiritual, there is no clear prosperous future for him. Like Thorne, he too is stuck, unable to move one way or the other, denied the power of communication with either the living or the dead.

Marryat’s concern with the process of spiritual rehabilitation involves a complicated negotiation between the rhetoric of Spiritualism, eugenics and evolutionary theory. Many Spiritualists, like eugenicists, believed that the progress of humanity could not simply be left to natural selection. Christine Ferguson refers to Spiritualist texts by Andrew Jackson Davis (*The Magic Stuff* [1857] and *Beyond the Valley* [1885]), and Paschal Beverly Randolph (*The*

⁸⁷ Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, 10th anniversary ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 6-7.

⁸⁸ Ruth Hubbard, ‘Science, Facts, and Feminism’, *Hypatia*, 3.1 (1988), 5-17 (pp. 11-12).

⁸⁹ For example, from Matthew 25: 40, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me’; and from Matthew 5: 26, ‘Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, til thou has paid the uttermost farthing’. *Message*, pp. 48, 68.

Davenport Brothers: The World Renowned Spirit Mediums [1869]) as examples of texts that are full of eugenic rhetoric.⁹⁰ She argues that it is wrong to associate Spiritualism with ideas of freedom, egalitarianism and individualism: these texts suggest the existence of ‘hard hereditarian and biodeterminist beliefs’.⁹¹ In her reading of personal accounts of Spiritualism, some of which were spirit texts channelled through mediums, Ferguson identifies a complex relationship between ‘the combined forces of heredity and spiritual determinism’.⁹² Anxiety about heredity and the role of eugenics was widespread in the late-nineteenth century, and not confined to Spiritualists. It is a theme that figures in the other texts discussed in this thesis, and was certainly a central topic in a lot of New Woman fiction. In *The Beth Book* (1897), Sarah Grand’s emphasis on the survival of the fittest and the moral responsibility of those deemed unfit not to reproduce, has its precursor in the words of the deceased physician, John Elliotson, channelled through the medium, Daniel Dunglas Home, who says, ‘It’s very wrong to allow persons to marry who are not properly fitted to perpetuate their race’. He goes on to say that, unless stopped, their progeny will include ‘the outcast, the criminal, and the murderer’.⁹³ Ferguson identifies the same determinist principles within eugenic texts and Spiritualist accounts. But Marryat tries to make the space between the determinism of eugenics and the more positive, transformative spirit world an interactive space. Aldwyn’s father points to a crippled and scarred women, newly arrived in the afterlife, being transformed before their eyes into beauty and radiance: ‘It is love that has changed her – the love of God [...] Do you think that spirits carry their diseases and deformities into the spiritual world? That would be impossible’ (p. 49). Marryat seeks a balance between determinism and free will by figuring the intervention of spirits as benign and guiding influences rather than as pre-determining ones, with the power to transform and to help the ones with spiritual strength, often women, to shape the future of the race.

In *Message*, Aldwyn’s second wife, Ethel, expresses relief that ‘I did not bring a child into the world. Fancy having a son or daughter with that man’s disposition’ (p. 60). She is quite convinced that both Gilbert and Madeline have inherited their father’s undesirable characteristics, and Madeline bemoans the fact that ‘poor Gilbert and I have the misfortune to have his blood in our veins’ (p. 74). It seems that the ‘bad blood’ of the male line supersedes any influence from the female line. In Spiritualist circles it was commonly held that spirits were able to exercise a form of spiritual eugenics through influencing the minds of the living,

⁹⁰ Ferguson, p. 14.

⁹¹ Ferguson, p. 201.

⁹² Ferguson, pp. 9, 39.

⁹³ Viscount Adare, *Experiences in Spiritualism* (published privately, 1870), p. 89, quoted in Ferguson, p. 9.

guiding them, for example, in the choice of an appropriate spouse.⁹⁴ When Ethel and Madeline consult with a medium, the spirit control approves Ethel's match with her old lover and offers guidance to Madeline: only when she has found a man she can love and honour should she 'trust [her] future fearlessly to his care' (p. 88). Marryat adopts a form of spiritual eugenics along the lines of the American free-thinker, radical and spiritualist, Lois Waisbrooker. Influenced by Darwin, the eugenicist, Francis Galton, and Swedenborg, Waisbrooker believed that true spiritual enlightenment came from a form of sexual union that she called Dianism, through which spiritual fluid is exchanged: 'For her, sex is the way to heaven and is also the vehicle through which spirits rule the world, making women a natural, sexually active, sexually evolved part of divine order'.⁹⁵ Although more interested in spiritual than physical evolution, Waisbrooker was not alone in re-interpreting Darwinian theory in order to emphasise women's role in sexual selection. In a similar vein, Marryat ensures that, through the mediation and guidance of the spirit world, Ethel and Madeline will make choices based on eugenic principles. Ferguson argues Marryat's emphasis on male bad blood suggests the 'annihilation of maternal agency' and that 'the only ameliorative work that women might perform on degenerate stock is to refuse to host it' (p. 107). Her emphasis on inheritance through the father can also be understood, however, as Marryat accentuating the nature of patriarchal authority – men determining when and with whom they will procreate, with women's choices curtailed by economic necessity or the pressure of social mores. Madeline's decision to remain single, following experiences that have taught her to fear and distrust men, can be interpreted as an active and radical choice rather than a passive refusal. The English novelist and essayist, Mona Caird, in her notorious article, 'Marriage' (1888), supports women's right to refuse marriage in its traditional form. She advises women to opt, instead, only for a form of union that is based on freedom and equality.⁹⁶ It is, after all, through women's self-determination, states Waisbrooker, that 'woman's freedom is the world's redemption'.⁹⁷ There may be few choices available to women in this life but, through a spirit-channelled eugenic guidance, Marryat hopes women will make informed choices.

If women fail to make good choices on earth, a Swedenborgian form of union with a spiritual affinity is promised in the afterlife, as experienced by Aldwyn's first wife Susan after her death (p. 52). But this is all determined by God who decides also that Susan will act as

⁹⁴ Ferguson, p. 94.

⁹⁵ Willburn, p. 72. See Lois Waisbrooker, *The Fountain of Life, or the Threefold Power of Sex* (Topeka, KS: Independent Publishing, 1893) and *My Century Plant* (Topeka, KS: Independent Publishing, 1896).

⁹⁶ Mona Caird, 'Marriage', *Westminster Review*, 130.1 (1888), pp. 186-201.

⁹⁷ Lois Waisbrooker, *The Sexual Question and the Money Power* (Battle Creek, MI, 1873), p. 21, quoted in Braude, p. 57.

another spirit guide to Aldwyn. This suggests to Ferguson that, in restoring Susan's earthly bond and duty to her husband, Marryat makes the afterlife 'deeply patriarchal'.⁹⁸ This is a different kind of relationship, however, for Susan is no longer in thrall to Aldwyn's patriarchal authority. Instead, she is now the one who knows, the subject with agency, and he is her inferior. She has the authority that really counts – spiritual knowledge. Her liberation from a patriarchal marriage, and all that it represented on earth, is contrasted with the lengthy penance he must endure in order to find his own spiritual enlightenment. The significance of heredity through the male line means that reversing the trend towards degeneracy will take many generations. Aldwyn realises that he must atone for the sins of future generations as he glimpses the lives of his children blighted by their paternal inheritance. Not only is Madeline left distrusting all men, Gilbert, having run away to sea and suffered many privations and trials, ends up half blind and an invalid, unable to take his proper place in the world. Even the spiritual influence of their deceased mother cannot easily break down the barriers to spiritual fulfilment created by their father, suggesting that overcoming the forces of scientism and rationality is not an easy process. Aldwyn's own future will be difficult, his path to redemption involving years of restitution for his sins – 'without your purgatory, no reward', says his guide (p. 127). In this novel, there is a strong emphasis on the sins of the father and the inversion in the afterlife of the nature of knowledge and authority. The forces of the spirit world collide with the power of inheritance, pitting the Christian Spiritualist tradition of equality, self-sovereignty and rehabilitation against determinism. It is not inevitable that the lives of Madeline and Gilbert should already be mapped out. Having found the route to salvation, Aldwyn can now be a force for good in the living world. He is urged, 'Go forth then as a fisher of men. Use your undoubted talent in influencing them for good – in protecting them from evil – in whispering a warning into their ears when they are in danger of going wrong' (p. 127). In Marryat's imaginary spirit world Christian benevolence transcends determinism – even the sinful Aldwyn is promised eventual redemption.

Marryat's *There Is No Death*

As Marryat discovered for herself in the séance room, the liminal space between the worlds of the living and the dead, where the forces of the seen and unseen meet, promises a blurring of the borders between body and spirit, undermining the notion of a self-consciously autonomous, integrated self. In two of her Spiritualist novels, *Open! Sesame!* (1876) and *The Strange Transfiguration of Hannah Stubbs* (1896), she addresses some of the more controversial aspects of Spiritualism – the ease with which some people, particularly those

⁹⁸ Ferguson, p. 110.

who had lost loved ones, could be fooled by the most flagrantly deceptive of mediums, and the dangers inherent in dabbling with the forces of the occult and the esoteric world of the spirits.⁹⁹ In *Hannah Stubbs*, an initially sceptical Italian professor discovers that his landlady's servant, Hannah, channels the spirits of the dead. Through her, he makes contact with his deceased wife, deciding to marry Hannah, in spite of the differences in social standing, in order to maintain contact with his wife. Like so many nineteenth-century mediums, Hannah discovers that her fame as a medium gives her access to forms of power and status that she would otherwise have been denied. After a series of tragic events, it is revealed that Hannah has all along been possessed by the spirit of the professor's vengeful first wife. A knock on the head returns her to her former self, but she has been so drained by the possessing spirit that she dies. The failure of two scientists to save Hannah iterates a common theme in Marryat's Spiritualist texts: the inability of science and scientific scepticism to withstand the power of Spiritualist belief. In *Open! Sesame!*, first serialised in the periodical that Marryat edited, *London Society*, she inverts the usual combination of female medium and male sceptic. The protagonist is figured as a weak and effeminate man, sceptical of Spiritualism but easily convinced by the spirit messages mediated by his conniving sister-in-law that he is to die shortly. It takes the sceptical and level-headed woman, his fiancée, to save him. The serialisation of *Open! Sesame!* in *London Society* ran between March 1874 and June 1875, following a series of articles debating Spiritualism from opposing sides. It coincided with the investigations of William Crookes, the eminent scientist who became embroiled in highly controversial experiments on mediumship.¹⁰⁰ Marryat's enthusiasm for engaging in the discourse on Spiritualism and for ensuring that different sides of the argument were represented in her periodical demonstrates, as Georgina O'Brien points out, that she herself welcomed the debate. Providing a platform for opposing arguments indicated that one could not simply dismiss her as a gullible believer.¹⁰¹ Through her canny editorial choices in *London Society* and in the scope of her Spiritualist fiction, Marryat's purpose was to show not only that her belief in Spiritualism was founded on empirical evidence but also that she was fully aware of its potential abuses and the associated risks.

⁹⁹ Florence Marryat, *Open! Sesame!* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1876), and *The Strange Transfiguration of Hannah Stubbs* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1896).

¹⁰⁰ William Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (London: Burns, 1874). Crookes's most famous experiments were with the mediums Florence Cook and Rosina Showers, both of whom Marryat consulted. Crookes makes a further appearance in Hinton's 'Stella' in Chapter Four.

¹⁰¹ Georgina O'Brien, "'Above the Breath of Suspicion': Florence Marryat and the Shadow of the Fraudulent Trance Medium", *Women's Writing*, 15.3 (2008), 333-347 (p. 333).

Marryat was vehemently opposed to any association between Spiritualism and the supernatural. Indeed, for her there is no real boundary between this world and the world of spirits:

There is no such thing as super-nature! Their life in the spheres is but a continuation of their life on this earth. Our spirits are like birds confined in cages. Their cage doors have been set open – ours are still shut. But we can hold communion through the bars.¹⁰²

Marryat's use of a cage metaphor is interesting, as it functions in a number of ways. It is a metaphor for the lives of those Victorian women who found themselves constrained by the ideological 'cages' of Victorian life. The medium is caged, as she sits in the dark, enclosed space of the séance room, encased in a small cabinet and often restrained by being bound to her chair. There is the sexual metaphor of penetration, as cabinet and medium are penetrated by spirits and, occasionally, by the unruly element in the audience, emphasising the anxiety about sexual transgression in Spiritualist practices.¹⁰³ The cage also represents the border between living and spirit worlds: as flesh and spirit 'hold communion between the bars', space and time blur and the boundaries between material and spiritual dissolve. For Marlene Tromp, it is at the site of 'fluid boundaries and metamorphosing identities' that change becomes possible, that 'social worlds [...] begin to shift'.¹⁰⁴ For Owen, this is the site of both the 'unconscious resistance to an order which sought to define women and contain them', and the site at which, through the enactment of repressed desire, they realised a different world.¹⁰⁵ Willburn describes it as an 'extra sphere': a 'theologically-inflected, mystical imaginary community' in which spirits and living bodies meet.¹⁰⁶ As a space-time in which the temporal boundaries between past and present, and the spatial boundaries between spirit and living body, are dissolved, the body becomes the 'point of mediation' between inner and outer, spirit and matter, self and other.¹⁰⁷ It is the point at which past, present and future merge within consciousness, and where earthly desires extend beyond the body into the spiritual realm, allowing for new and different forms of self-expression. The past becomes a time and space

¹⁰² *Spirit World*, p. 39, original emphasis.

¹⁰³ Marlene Tromp, 'Spirited Sexuality: Sex, Marriage, and Victorian Spiritualism', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31.1 (2003), 67-81 (p. 75). There were also rumours of affairs between mediums and psychical researchers, the most notorious being that allegedly between Florence Cook and William Crookes.

¹⁰⁴ Tromp, p. 69.

¹⁰⁵ Owen, p. 234.

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Willburn, 'Women Victorian Theologians of the Mystical Fringe: Translation and Domesticity', in *Women's Theology in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Transfiguring the Faith of Their Fathers*, ed. by Julie Melnyk (New York and London: Garland, 1998), pp 189-206 (p. 202).

¹⁰⁷ Grosz (1994), p. 20.

not lost or to be mourned but to be recuperated, as Marryat discovers in her séance encounters.

There Is No Death (1891) is a record of Marryat's experiences both as a medium and as a participant observer in séances.¹⁰⁸ Her account suggests a sense of loss and longing associated with a desire for both the recuperation of personal relations and the possibility of a more expansive self-expression. It is here that repressed desire converges with the forces of the spirit world, blurring the boundaries between the two in such a way that the reader can never be quite sure of the source of the impulse. For Marryat, however, the evidence of the senses demonstrates the empirical truths of Spiritualism. She gives accounts of meeting with a long-lost and dearly-loved friend; being united with a daughter who died in early childhood and with stillborn children; and intimate exchanges with mediums that make her feel as though her body is merging with the other. In these encounters, she is able to give expression to feelings and emotions that in other situations would be seen as transgressive. Indeed, the behaviour of many female Spiritualists was variously condemned as outrageous, salacious and hysterical, when what they were actually doing in the séance room was challenging normative and essentialised notions of femininity.¹⁰⁹ For Marryat, Spiritualism served not only to confirm her belief in an afterlife, but also enabled her to question the nature of femininity and the forms of self-expression allowed women. The apparently transgressive and unusual behaviour in the séance room was open to multiple interpretations. Where on the one hand it was attributed to higher spiritual forces, on the other hand it could just as easily be attributed to the disinhibiting effect of the séance, and/or the expression of repressed desire. The English physiologist, William Carpenter, certainly believed that the latter force was at work, attributing the effects of the séance to 'unconscious cerebration': 'Spiritual communications come from *within*, not from *without*, the individuals who suppose themselves to be the recipients of them'.¹¹⁰ Others identified the complex interaction of forces both internal and external to the body and mind.

Frederic Myers, co-founder of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), thought the séance trance activated the subliminal consciousness. He believed that there were several layers of consciousness, from the subliminal to the supraliminal, with the former having a capacity for activity well beyond our conscious experience: 'Subliminal consciousness and

¹⁰⁸ *There Is No Death* is hereon referred to as *No Death*. Further references follow citations in the text.

¹⁰⁹ See Owen, pp. 139-167, on the association made by the nineteenth-century medical profession between female mediumship and hysteria and insanity.

¹¹⁰ William Carpenter, 'Spiritualism and Its Recent Converts', *Quarterly Journal*, 131 (1871), 301-353 (p. 307), original emphases.

subliminal memory may embrace a far wider range both of physiological and psychical activity than is open to our supraliminal consciousness, to our supraliminal memory'.¹¹¹ The subliminal self, he believed, extended along a spectrum from rudimentary human functioning to clairvoyance, automatism and telepathic functioning. Discussing the different permutations of personality, Myers identifies a group of people at the higher end of psychic functioning:

High among such improved plans of psychical structure I reckon the condition of those sensitives who, without injury to normal health or capacities, can exercise an easier commerce than is open to most of us with their own subliminal selves.¹¹²

These are the people most likely to experience a condition known on both sides of the Atlantic as 'cosmic consciousness'. This term was first coined in 1894 by the Canadian psychiatrist, Richard Bucke, to denote the experience of consciousness of the cosmos, intellectual enlightenment on a higher plane, moral exaltation and a sense of immortality.¹¹³ It was adopted by the American psychologist and one-time President of the SPR, William James, to explain the transcendent self:

[The self] becomes conscious that this higher part is coterminous and continuous with a MORE of the same quality, which is operative in the universe outside of him, and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board with and save himself when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck.¹¹⁴

For James this is an extension of individual consciousness outwards into a higher sphere: 'whatever it may be on its *farthest* side, the "more" with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its *hither* side, the subconscious continuation of our conscious life'.¹¹⁵ This is another way of describing the extended psychical activity that Marryat describes. In *No Death* she gives accounts of passing through space and time as her body is seen in two places at once, giving rise to 'strange feelings of distrust of [herself]' (p. 38), being able to predict events, having episodes of telepathy and being inhabited by the bodies of others: 'We wear our earthly garb so loosely, that the spirits of people still living in this world can leave the body and manifest themselves either visibly or orally to others in their normal condition [...] It is a fact that spirits have so visited myself' (p. 34). Myers explains that 'sensitives' are the people most susceptible to possession by spirits. When an automatist falls

¹¹¹ Frederic W. H. Myers, 'The Subliminal Consciousness', *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 7 (1891-1982), 298-355 (p. 306).

¹¹² Myers, 'The Subliminal Consciousness', *PSPR*, 9 (1893-1894), 3-128 (p. 7).

¹¹³ Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (Philadelphia: Innes, 1905), p. 2.

¹¹⁴ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Modern Library, 1902), p. 498-499.

¹¹⁵ James, p. 502, original emphases.

into a trance, his spirit will partially ‘quit his body’, entering into a state ‘in which the spiritual world is more or less open to its perception’, allowing room for ‘an invading spirit to use it in somewhat the same fashion as its owner is accustomed to use it’.¹¹⁶ As the possessed person’s spirit does not completely exit the body, there is a complex interplay between two competing spirits:

It seems probable that when a spirit can control a sensitive’s organism, the sensitive’s own subliminal self may be able to do the same. The transparency which renders the one possession possible facilitates the other. This may be one reason for the admixture seen in most trance utterances, - of elements which come from the sensitive’s own mind with elements inspired from without.¹¹⁷

No Death appears to comprise the convergence of these different forces – the powerful subliminal, which is also an expression of repressed desire, with the forces of the spirit world. This account of the séance is as much an expression of the need to assuage her own feelings of loss, grief and desire as an explication of the strange working of the spirits.

Marryat’s desire for contact with her deceased loved ones focuses on two important figures in her life, her close friend John Powles, and her daughter Florence who died in infancy. Florence was born with a facial deformity and Marryat was convinced that the ‘uncontrolled grief’ she suffered in pregnancy after Powles died contributed to this disfigurement (p. 80). Linked to the belief in the power of inheritance, many Spiritualists believed in the theory of maternal impressions – that traumatic events or strong emotions during pregnancy can cause disfigurement or hybridity in the foetus.¹¹⁸ This hybridity, often associated with miscegenation, expresses itself in deformations or degeneracy. In Marryat’s novel, *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), the heroine Harriet is cast as a hybrid figure by virtue of a heredity that includes insanity and mixed race. She is the progeny of a father who is a mad scientist and a mother who is a mulatta, a Creole voodoo priestess whose own mother was bitten by a vampire bat. Harriet shows a predisposition for sadism: she sucks the life force out of those with whom she comes in close contact. As Brenda Mann Hammack points out, the representation of the vampiric Harriet and of Marryat’s own daughter’s deformity reflects her ‘ready assent to the theories of hybridity that were inherent in the pseudo-scientific conception of imaginationism, otherwise known as maternal

¹¹⁶ Frederic W. H. Myers, *Human Personality: And Its Survival of Bodily Death*, 2 vols (New York, London and Bombay: Longmans, Green, 1904) II, p. 190.

¹¹⁷ Myers (1904), p. 249.

¹¹⁸ Ferguson cites articles in the socialist Spiritualist journal, *The Two Worlds*, and the anonymously authored American Spiritualist novel, *Foreordained: A Story of Heredity and of Special Parental Influences* (1986), pp. 37-38.

impressions'.¹¹⁹ Where Spiritualists were concerned, however, there was at least the promise of rehabilitation both spiritually and physically in the afterlife. There are examples of this in Phelps's *The Gates Ajar* and in both Marryat's *Message* and *No Death*. In the latter, Florence's disfigurement has gone now that she is in the afterlife; and she eventually appears to her mother as one who has 'reached the climax of womanly perfection in the spirit world' (p. 86). This is enormously reassuring for Marryat who has harboured a sense of guilt and responsibility for this affliction. This emphasises one of the differences between her investment in Spiritualism and her feminism, and that of Phelps. Messages of reassurance about lost loved ones are important to Phelps, as they were to all of those she sought to comfort through her depiction of an egalitarian heavenly paradise. Where for Phelps the wider social need attends also to the personal, for Marryat the personal is political. When Florence appears before her as a grown woman, she tells her mother that she 'must not give way to sad thoughts', and must let the past 'be buried in the blessings that remain to you' (p. 86). The greatest of these blessings for Marryat is her 'belief in the existence of [her] spirit-child' (p. 86). Evidence of the restitution of the body assuages feelings of personal guilt and remorse at the same time as challenging the determinism of hereditary principles. The spiritual strength gained from Spiritualism enables Marryat to resist the social and cultural constraints that have determined her and other women's lives, offering instead a route to personal and collective transformation.

The body is central to Marryat's politics here. In the space-time of the séance, the development and progress of the body is no longer ruled by linear time. Instead, it is possible to re-visit the past and effect corporeal transformation. Marryat is not only challenging the determinism of heredity, but she is also interjecting a particular feminist agency into evolutionary thinking. And this is what we see in the other texts discussed in this thesis – conceptual spaces with their own space-time, allowing for a more flowing intersection of space and time which resists a deterministic and linear approach to progress, enabling women to enter the discourse on evolution. But for Marryat, the political is personal too. The body is the central mediating point in communication between the living and the dead. And, as in many Spiritualist accounts, the séance room becomes a space in which the rituals often violate cultural norms as the boundaries between corporeal and spiritual bodies dissolve.¹²⁰

Marryat describes her intimate encounters with the spirit of her close friend, John Powles. When he was alive, they would have discussions about the Unseen, with Powles

¹¹⁹ Hammack, p. 888.

¹²⁰ Owen, p. 203.

promising that, should he die first, he would return to visit her. His death caused Marryat considerable grief and it was then that she gave birth to Florence. A while later, she ‘commenced to *know* and to *feel* that John Powles was with me again’ (p. 65, original emphases). With a mixture of sensual passion and fear, she feels his presence: ‘I used to lie awake trembling under the consciousness that he was sitting at my bedside, and I had no means of penetrating the silence between us’ (p. 65). In séances with the medium Rosina Shower, she gives Powles her hand: ‘as he kissed it, his moustaches *burned* me’ (p. 67, original emphasis). During a night when Rosina and Marryat share a bed, Powles materialises and climbs on the bed between the two women. Marryat feels his hand caressing her hair. They talk through the night as two intimates. Although she does not say so, perhaps this is an encounter with her spiritual affinity. Marryat records, ‘you will understand why I cannot write down the conversation that took place between us that night here’ (p. 70). The manifestation of the embodied spirit was believed to take place through the secretion of ectoplasm from the body of the medium, materialisation confirming the spirit’s embodied subjectivity. Being able to touch Powers reawakens an eroticism that, as a married woman, Marryat would have been debarred from expressing. The ability to touch each other suggests to Marryat that this is real, that she is ‘in touch with reality’.¹²¹ The heterogeneity of ‘haptic’ experience – the sense of bodily position, touch, movement and balance – is, according to Abbie Garrington, ‘intimately connected to the constitution of the self, and it is so by virtue of its very intimacy, its operation on the carnal border between self and world’.¹²² This ‘haptic’ border of the body between living and spirit worlds realises within Marryat expressions of subjectivity previously obscured. Apart from the eroticism of her encounters on the bed with Powles, Marryat also experiences a homoeroticism in her intimacy with Katie King, the spirit manifestation of the famous medium, Florence Cook:

She called me after her into the back room, and, dropping her white garment, stood perfectly naked before me. ‘Now’, she said, ‘you can see that I am a woman’. Which indeed she was, and a most beautifully-made woman too; and I examined her well, whilst Miss Cook lay beside us on the floor (p. 142).¹²³

¹²¹ Roger Smith argues that it is through touch that we come to understand embodiment in the world; touch endows the self with a sense of reality. ‘Kinaesthesia and Touching Reality’, *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 19 (2014), p. 2. <http://19.bbk.ac.uk> [accessed 24 September 2015]

¹²² Abbie Garrington, *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 17.

¹²³ Marryat was not the only one to be invited by Cook to touch Katie King and to find this an erotic experience. At one of her séances, Cook invited William Crookes behind the curtain where he proceeded to ask King if he could clasp her in his arms: ‘Permission was graciously given, and I accordingly did – well, as any gentleman would do under the circumstances’. William Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (London: Burns, 1874) p. 106.

The feelings that this encounter gives rise to may, or may not, be attributable to sexual feelings for, as Sharon Marcus points out, there were many different forms of feminine intimacy in the nineteenth century, and it was not until the 1890s that there was any interest in distinguishing between homosexuality and heterosexuality in women.¹²⁴ The use, however, of more florid language in an earlier account – ‘I felt her heart beating rapidly beneath my hand’ – suggests the hyperaesthetic effect these intimate encounters had on Marryat.¹²⁵ Occurring in the liminal space between life and death, where the boundaries that would normally serve to define and delimit expressions of femininity are dissolved, selfhood takes on new dimensions as the spirit world intersects with the subliminal and supraliminal mind.

The effect of her own mediumistic powers, and those of the mediums with whom she consorts, have a significant effect on Marryat’s sense of self. When she is with Rosina Showers, it is often unclear whether the spiritual energy flowing between them emanates from her, Rosina, or from both: ‘We could not sit next each other at an ordinary tea or supper table, when we had no thought of, or desire to hold a *séance*, without manifestations occurring in the full light’ (p. 109). There are occasions when it feels to Marryat as if there are numerous hands touching her simultaneously. Being part of an intimate group of spirits, where it is difficult sometimes to tell one body from another, is both an opening to an experience of multiplicity and expansiveness as well as risking the disintegration of selfhood. By becoming a ‘site of spiritual exchange’, the medium’s body can be penetrated by any number of spirits.¹²⁶ The result of this, as Willburn suggests, is to make the woman’s body ‘uncanny: unfamiliar at the place where it once seemed at home’.¹²⁷ If home, however, is a space normally delineated by men, then for the body to begin to feel unfamiliar may be the beginning of realising a new home or space. It is as though the body now inhabits what Irigaray terms a ‘negative’ space, in which selfhood no longer relies on one’s relation to another, but allows for self-definition to emerge in a new space: ‘I love to you’, with ‘to’ indicating a space between you and I without sacrificing one to the other.¹²⁸ Marryat’s focus on the body and on touch is to highlight the fluidity and permeability of the body, similar to the way that Irigaray emphasises female morphology, fluids and mucous, as a sign of

¹²⁴ Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 13.

¹²⁵ *The Spiritualist*, 29 May 1874, p. 259, cited in Owen, pp. 227-228. The more explicit language used in this earlier account may be attributable to the fact that it would have been read by a community of like-minded people who may themselves have had similar erotic experiences in the *séance* room.

¹²⁶ Willburn (2006), p. 86.

¹²⁷ Willburn (2006), p. 88.

¹²⁸ Irigaray (2004), p. 3.

women's multiplicity.¹²⁹ Like Irigaray, Marryat's focus on female corporeality and the sense of her body merging with the spirit body, almost losing herself, is her way of connecting the body with ideas about space, time and subjectivity. It affirms, as Grosz points out, that 'the body is a pliable entity whose determinate form is provided [...] through the interaction of modes of psychical and physical inscription'.¹³⁰ As Marryat seeks to break down the borders between living and spirit worlds in order to experience multiplicity, the boundaries that determine the self slowly dissolve.

In this liminal state of permeability in the process of a new becoming, the self may also be at risk of being diminished or lost. Rosina's spirit manifestation, Florence, tells Marryat, 'I can detach certain particles from her organism for my own use, and when I dematerialise, I restore those particles to her, and she becomes once more her normal size' (p. 113). As Owen argues, 'the final coinage of exchange' in mediumship was 'the apparent abdication of self for possession by another'.¹³¹ Marryat witnessed this in séances with Arthur Colman, whose body could be possessed by as many as five spirits at the same time. Marryat comments that, 'To be a good physical medium means literally to part, little by little, with one's own life' (p. 130). This abdication makes Tromp ask, 'Which experiences are those of the flesh and which are those of the spirit? In which body does the medium's identity lie? Who is responsible for the reaching arms, the shared kiss, the embrace?'¹³² That the borders between life and death and between one subject and another can be breached so easily reflects the ghostly, numinous nature of the séance space. There is an unsettling lack of spatial or temporal markers to indicate solidity or to separate one subject from another. This might suggest an opportunity to formulate a different kind of subjectivity, but was just as likely to be seen as an indication of the susceptibility of Spiritualists, particularly women, to the penetration of forces beyond their control.

The effect on those who participated in Spiritualist séances was certainly to undermine the concept of a singular, unified self. Marryat's account indicates that subjectivity is neither fixed nor stable, but permeable, fragile and always in a process of becoming. The medium's vulnerability to possession risks the disintegration of self. On one occasion, the appearance of Rosina terrifies Marryat: 'She now appeared to be shrunk to half her usual size, and the dress hung loosely on her figure' (p. 110). At the same time, the permeability of body and mind to spiritual forces suggests multiplicity. On another occasion, there appear to be as many as four spirits inhabiting Rosina, with four voices 'perfectly distinct from one another' (p. 115). In

¹²⁹ Irigaray (1985), p. 28.

¹³⁰ Grosz (1994), p. 187.

¹³¹ Owen, p. 233.

¹³² Tromp, p. 69.

the mid-nineteenth century, mediumship was often coded as disease: the American physician Frederic Marvin referred to it as ‘mediomania’.¹³³ The focus then was on the vulnerable female body as the site of pathology, with the behaviour of mediums making them virtually indistinguishable from hysterics. We now understand the hysterical body as articulating the unsayable, and thus it was with the body possessed by spirits. As Molly McGarry points out, ‘Mediums and hysterics, women ventriloquised by spirits or by disease, expressed bodily what could not be vocalised by the rational, speaking, and implicitly male self’.¹³⁴ By the late-nineteenth century, when theories of the unconscious were more prevalent, the conscious self was understood as being always susceptible to subliminal or unconscious urges and, therefore, as being potentially fragile and unstable. Owen emphasises the active intervention of the unconscious self in mediumship, where the spirit comes to represent ‘the tantalising Other of the unconscious’.¹³⁵ If identity, however, is considered as socially constructed, with the emphasis on subjectivity emerging through what one does rather than what one is, Marryat’s propensity for performing different identities as life demanded – novelist, editor, playwright, actress, singer, Spiritualist – would suggest an unfixed and ever-changing sense of subjectivity. Beth Palmer considers Marryat’s life and multiple identities from the perspective of Judith Butler’s theory of ‘performativity’ which, to summarise, argues that the gendered self only exists through its acts, that is, it is constituted through its performance. Palmer suggests that, ‘It is this absence of a pre-existing or essential self in Butler’s work [...] which leaves room for the possibility that identities might be reconstructed or proliferated in subversive ways’.¹³⁶ For Butler, bodies are inherently active and gender norms are always changing.¹³⁷ She aims to subvert the duality of gender which she sees Irigaray as promulgating. Stone suggests, however, that it is possible to reconcile Irigaray’s philosophy of sexual difference with Butler’s theory of socially-constructed gender by thinking of the self’s multiple discordant drives which challenge and break down cultural norms to suggest multiple expressions of subjectivity.¹³⁸ This idea of multiplicity corresponds with my thesis of the multiple opportunities for self-expression offered by a different space-time.

The uncanny sensation experienced by the body, a sensation that is perturbing, familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, is the point at which spatial and temporal markers

¹³³ Frederic Marvin, *The Philosophy of Spiritualism and the Pathology and Treatment of Mediomania; Two Lectures Read Before the New York Liberal Club* (New York: Butts, 1874), cited in McGarry, p. 125.

¹³⁴ McGarry, p. 126.

¹³⁵ Owen, p. 222.

¹³⁶ Palmer, p. 2.

¹³⁷ See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 3-27.

¹³⁸ Stone, p. 81.

have begun to disappear. In *Message*, Aldwyn experiences the uncanny in a space that lacks the usual signs that point to his rational masculinity. For Thorne, in Phelps's *The Gates Between*, the afterlife feels both familiar and unfamiliar as he begins to become acclimatised to his spirit self occupying a different kind of space. Marryat's uncanny experience in the séance originates from an initial feeling of displacement – where are the usual temporal and spatial markers that 'place' her as a woman? No longer is subjectivity delineated by the separation of spirit and matter, mind and body, reason and emotion, time and space. The disappearance of a world structured by Cartesian duality is, at first, extremely unsettling because it signifies the loss of the familiar. Subjectivity emerges from the interrelationship between body and space. By situating the female body in an imaginary space-time that is configured differently inevitably leads to the reconfiguration of subjectivity.¹³⁹ For women like Marryat, rather than pointing to the disintegration of selfhood, the space-time of the spirit world suggests an opportunity for a more enlightened and multiple representation of female subjectivity.

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The belief in an active afterlife that is central to Phelps's and Marryat's Spiritualism was grounded in Christian belief. Both women were raised within strong Christian traditions, Phelps had a Calvinist background and Marryat was a convert to Catholicism. In their texts they combine religious doctrine with Spiritualist beliefs, Phelps rejecting the unforgiving nature of Calvinism and Marryat enshrining Spiritualism within her Catholicism. Their belief in the mediation of spirits between this world and the next served to dissipate the rigid structures and unforgiving nature of the religious doctrines they had been taught, allowing for their replacement with principles that were kinder to women. That they saw a continuity between the living and spirit worlds suggests also that the process of transformation and evolution of the body and soul endured beyond death. Merie defines the Christian Spiritualist version of the afterlife as a form of 'softened eschatology', a benign version that refuted the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.¹⁴⁰ Merie argues that Spiritualism, rather than signifying a break with orthodox religion, demonstrates the continuity, adaptability and symbolic power of religious beliefs and practices.¹⁴¹ Spiritualism came to be woven into different interpretations of Christian doctrine. It reflected the desire not for a replacement for religion but a form of religious belief that accorded with nineteenth-century ideas of self-improvement and change. There was 'a homology between the Victorian social and cultural landscape and the

¹³⁹ Grosz (1995), p. 89.

¹⁴⁰ Merie, p. 190.

¹⁴¹ Merie, p. 192.

Spiritualists' conviction that a more optimistic picture of the afterlife could be framed and defended'.¹⁴² Christian Spiritualists had a much more positive conception of the afterlife than the Lutherans, for example, for whom the soul awaiting the Last Judgement was in a passive, unconscious state; or the Calvinists, who believed that at the Last Judgement the soul was destined for either eternal damnation or eternal happiness.

In their Spiritualist texts, Phelps and Marryat use the liminal space of the afterlife to explore different forms of subjectivity. Following the Christian Spiritualist belief in the substantiality of the spirit and its evolution in the afterlife, in *Between the Gates* and *The Dead Man's Message* they offer a space to their male protagonists for redemption. In Marryat's *There is No Death*, spirit manifestation is evidence of the spirits' substantiality, and the potential for regeneration is seen in the transformation of physical disfigurement into beauty. In appropriating the space of the spirit world as a conceptual space, Phelps and Marryat exploit its capacity as a 'realm of continual spiritual regeneration and free moral choice of the spirit' for their own ends.¹⁴³ They use it both to reverse power dynamics and for restitution and redemption. The idea of the embodiment of the spirit allows for different interpretations – a spiritual sensuality that incorporates and transforms the unexpressed earthly desires of Phelps, and a corporeality for Marryat that traverses the material and spirit world to allow for an intimate exchange between self and spirits and that reveals the multiplicity of selfhood.

The Spiritualist texts discussed in this chapter are examples of women's writing that imagine the 'extra space' that Willburn writes about – a space conjured up through Spiritualist practices to enable women to create and explore imaginary worlds – or the 'elsewhere' that Rita Felski refers to in those novels by authors including Marie Corelli, the subject of the next chapter, where 'redemption [is] always located *elsewhere*'.¹⁴⁴ But do they belong to the realm of romantic fiction of the imagination, or do they cross genre boundaries? Considered together, the texts of Phelps and Marryat suggest the blurring of genre boundaries in a way that destabilises any presumption about their purpose, function or perceived value. The afterlife or spirit world had its literary origins in the gospels and in the religious and mystical imagination, constructed in various ways to express faith, hope and desire. In its literary form, like the supernatural space of the ghost story, the afterlife space offers 'an alternative political tool to realism' where women could write in coded terms about their 'ghostly role in

¹⁴² Merie, p. 191.

¹⁴³ Merie, p. 195.

¹⁴⁴ Willburn (1998), p. 189; Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 131 (original emphasis).

society'.¹⁴⁵ Vanessa Dickerson suggests that supernatural, sensation and New Woman fiction are common bedfellows:

After the 1850s, the supernatural story would share the scene with the sensation novel, which in its focus on such subjects as bigamy, adultery, and female eroticism would anticipate the second bedfellow of the supernatural tale, the writing of the New Woman, with its emphasis on sexual and social liberation and its critique of marriage.¹⁴⁶

It is, of course, important to distinguish between the 'Spiritualist', embedded in religious belief, and the 'supernatural', but there is a commonality between Spiritualist fiction and other literary forms that women used to express alternative identities liberated from Victorian gender ideology. These texts represent new fictional spaces within which to explore female subjectivity, whether it is the sitting room or bedroom in which women make their mark; the public sphere in which they fight for social and economic equality; the ghostly spaces of the supernatural; or the space of the spirit world. In each of these, women rise above the strictures of Victorian life that have sought to define them and shape their behaviour. It is here they find expression of both conscious and unconscious desires.

The texts of Phelps and Marryat engage with a spirit dimension – a hyperspace – suggestive also of scientific romance or utopia in their view of what women might become. *No Death* is a text that covers a range of literary genres, from romance, the Gothic, sensation to autobiography or memoir.¹⁴⁷ Phelps's Spiritualist novels are examples both of homiletic fiction and sentimental romance. For Helen Sword, who believes that it is not until the modernist aesthetic of the early twentieth-century that Spiritualist literature manifests its intellectual intent, nineteenth-century Spiritualist texts 'pursued a primarily religious and domestic agenda, organising the realm of the dead according to the family-centred principles they hoped to promote on earth'.¹⁴⁸ Applied to the novels of Phelps and Marryat, this is a neat but simplistic reduction. These texts should not be dismissed as either lacking intellectual intent or simply residing in the realms of an overactive Spiritualist imagination. Ferguson makes the point that 'imaginative literature had long held an important position in the British [and, I add, American] Spiritualist movement, serving both as a vehicle for proselytisation

¹⁴⁵ Hilary Grimes, *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, The Uncanny, and Scenes of Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 138, 91.

¹⁴⁶ Vanessa Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1996), p. 133.

¹⁴⁷ Kontou, p. 226.

¹⁴⁸ Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 13.

and as a common product of trance mediumship'.¹⁴⁹ She refers to the afterlife novel dictated by the spirits as 'a fascinating generic hybrid', a mix of living and spirit authorship.¹⁵⁰ Reality is never not mediated however – the author can never be absolutely sure of the origin of her text. The reality for Phelps and Marryat resides in the certainty of their beliefs and, for Marryat, in her personal experiences. It is also important to consider the historical and religious context in which they wrote. Their texts coincided with the many personal accounts published in Spiritualist journals on both sides of the Atlantic, and with the publication of psychical research in the British *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. These accounts suggest a form of literary realism, as Ferguson points out: 'Through an ontologically realist framing, readers would learn to recognise spectral manifestations, not as extraordinary events accompanied by wonder and terror, but rather as confirmations of a numinous reality'.¹⁵¹ From this perspective, and considered alongside some of the accounts published in the *PSPR*, it is possible to argue that Phelps's and Marryat's texts might also be considered as a form of literary realism. The afterlife was certainly a real world to them.

The cultural and intellectual work that Phelps's and Marryat's texts undertake can be summarised in their contribution to wider nineteenth-century discourses on individual psychology, gender ideology and women's role in society. Spirit influences competing with subliminal urges, the dissolving of boundaries between body and spirit, mind and matter contribute to contemporary anxieties about the autonomy of individual selfhood and about the stability of subjectivity. This highlights the risk of relying only on scientific materialism to reveal truths about human functioning. Spirit possession of the body emphasises the role corporeality plays in the revelation of subjectivity as multiple, at the same time as demonstrating that there may be other forces at work too. Women's self-expression through Spiritualism suggests an undertow of repressed desire. Having a medium through which to articulate their needs serves not only to accentuate their spirituality but also, and more importantly, to reveal a potential to engage actively in transforming the world through political and social action. The embodied female spirit reveals that she can move between the worlds of the living and the dead, feeling at home in both so long as she has the freedom to make these spaces her own.

The 'elsewhere' space of the spirit world represents a challenge to normative ideas of time and space as separate and gendered, envisioning instead an interactive space-time that allows women free expression of a subjectivity that is both more expansive and changing. The

¹⁴⁹ Christine Ferguson, 'Zola in Ghostland: Spiritualist Literary Criticism and Natural Supernaturalism', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 50.4 (2010), 877-894 (p. 880).

¹⁵⁰ Ferguson (2012), p. 92.

¹⁵¹ Ferguson (2012), p. 191.

different feminist perspectives that emerge from Phelps's and Marryat's engagement with Spiritualism reflect the heterogeneity of first-wave feminism on both sides of the Atlantic, and the different routes taken to express subjectivity. Phelps's feminism is reformist and collectivist. Her agenda to re-balance gender and power relations without upsetting the traditional Christian values of marriage and family must be read in the context of a post-bellum American world. Her developing subjectivity, emerging through her dream of a world in which men and women are equal and live together in harmony, reflects her Christian Spiritualism and a strong sense of community. Marryat's individual engagement in séance practices leads to the development of a more radical and transformative sense of self. Her Spiritualism also has a strong Christian foundation and reflects her politics of seeking a better world for women. In direct engagement with the spirit world through the séance, however, her search for individual transformation increasingly takes a form that is both transgressive and subversive of gender and sexual norms. Spiritualism enabled women to break free from a nineteenth-century definition of femininity that was essentialist and framed by patriarchal ideology. Instead, it gave expression to women's desire for a form of female subjectivity that was both fluid and multiple. Gomel describes those engaged in Spiritualism as 'utopian subjects'.¹⁵² She charts a continuity between radical utopian-socialist movements and Spiritualism, and likens the utopian mentality that seeks to shatter the prevailing order with the Spiritualist subject. Central to the disruption of the order of things is the breaking down of the dualisms that determine gender and subjectivity. Women's engagement with the spirit world and the séance room, in common with their interaction with the other conceptual spaces considered in this thesis, seeks to do just that by re-envisioning space and time, and reconfiguring women's relationships in a new imaginary space-time. In the next chapter, I argue that Corelli's attempt to fashion a heroine who combines genius with the feminine divine represents both a refusal to accept the traditional framing of genius as male and a re-configuration of women's relationship with the divine.

¹⁵² Gomel, p. 191.

CHAPTER 3

MARIE CORELLI'S CELESTIAL SPHERES

Marie Corelli, born in 1855, was one of the most popular and best-selling English novelists of the late-nineteenth century, at times outselling writers like Rudyard Kipling and H. G. Wells, and with a readership that extended from the lower middle classes to Queen Victoria and Gladstone. This did not prevent the critics from questioning the public's taste for her novels, or from describing her variously as 'the idol of suburbia' and of having 'a mind like any milliner's apprentice'.¹ Throughout her writing career, which extended from the 1880s through to her death in 1924, she was to negotiate an antagonistic press and tense relations with her publishers, with an authorial output that attempted to balance the desires of her readership for romance, excitement and escapism with her own wish to portray a world of spiritual transcendence. Forgotten for most of the twentieth century, it is only in recent decades that Corelli has been recognised as someone whose writing makes an important and nuanced contribution to the late-nineteenth century discourse on femininity and feminism, reinforcing the multi-dimensionality of femininity and the plurality of feminisms. Scholars have continued to criticise her for a literary style that is overly melodramatic; for her avowed moral certainties and extreme oppositions of good and evil; for her inconsistencies in the way she re-interprets Christianity, Eastern religions and the occult; for her misinterpretation of Darwinian theory; and, as Janet Galligani Casey points out, for giving 'an illusion of a feminist spirit couched in a fundamentally conventional Victorian ideology'.² Her depiction of femininity in both her fiction and her essays suggests a contradictory mix of the Victorian pure and docile feminine archetype, and what would generally be recognised as a distinctly feminist stance in her praise for the woman who is independent economically, in thought and in action. In many of her essays in *Free Opinions* (1905), to which I refer in this chapter, Corelli uses overlapping images of woman to suggest a creation that reflects as much a

¹ Solveig C. Robinson, 'Expanding a "Limited Orbit": Margaret Oliphant, "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine", and the Development of a Critical Voice', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 38.2 (2005), 199-220 (p. 215); A. St. John Adcock, 'Marie Corelli: A Record and an Appreciation', *The Bookman*, May 1909, 59-61 (p. 60), quoted in Kirsten Macleod, Introduction to Marie Corelli, *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2004), pp. 9-55 (p. 9); Rebecca West, *The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews* ([1926] London: Virago, 1987), p. 321.

² Elaine M. Hartnell, 'Morals and Metaphysics: Marie Corelli, Religion and the Gothic', *Women's Writing*, 13.2 (2006), 284-303; Martin Hipsky, 'The Corellian Romance *contra* Modernity: *The Treasure of Heaven* and *Innocent*', *Women's Writing*, 13.2 (2006), 206-224; Robyn Hallim, 'Marie Corelli's Best-Selling Electric Creed', *Women's Writing*, 13.2 (2006), 267-283; Janet Galligani Casey, 'Marie Corelli and *Fin de Siècle* Feminism', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 35.2 (1992), 163-178 (p. 166).

resurrection of female mythology (for example, in her reference to ‘white-robed Amazons’) as a modern feminist agenda.³

It would be a mistake to confuse Corelli’s apparently opposing representations with a lack of clarity on her part about what it means to be a woman. In her first novel, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886), she provides an account of femininity that is complex and provocative, managing to combine those qualities of Victorian womanhood that she values – innocence, demureness, beauty – with a divinely-inspired form of genius that is distinctly feminine, spiritual, and that privileges the female apostolic role.⁴ In so doing, Corelli engages with nineteenth-century debates on genius in order to refute the theory that genius is confined to the masculine, and with gendered notions of spiritual and religious leadership. Her heroine is both the pure, romantic heroine of the popular novel *and* a version of the new woman of the turn of the century. In this chapter, I argue that it is through the allegory of celestial space that she manages to combine these apparently contradictory elements and to offer a different interpretation of femininity. The celestial spheres, another form of hyperspace with its own space-time, challenge the oppositions between masculine and feminine, matter and spirit, human and divine. This is another kind of extra space that Sarah Willburn refers to as the ‘communal, godly, outer space[s] of extra spheres’.⁵ Here, Corelli imagines a female subjectivity in the form of a feminine genius divinely inspired. This is a form of religious radicalism which had its roots in eighteenth-century millenarianism with female visionaries like Joanna Southcott, whose prediction of salvation at the hands of a female descendant of Eve, strengthened the idea of women as omnipotent beings. In this fictional ‘elsewhere’ space, Corelli imagines woman not at the mercy of a gender ideology where she must strive for equality with man but remains always his other, but in a space where, if she is other, it is to an ideal in the shape of a feminine divine.⁶ Her depiction of the feminine genius can be read as an evocation of a politics of sexual difference, *pace* Luce Irigaray’s, which, as Elizabeth Grosz points out, requires a woman ‘to reject existing definitions and categories, redefining oneself and the world according to women’s own perspectives’.⁷ This sense of

³ Marie Corelli, *Free Opinions Freely Expressed on Certain Phases of Modern Social Life and Conduct* (London: Constable, 1905), p. 170.

⁴ Marie Corelli, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (London: Methuen, 1903), referred to in the text as *Romance*. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

⁵ Willburn, (2006), p. 141.

⁶ The notion of woman’s ideal self-image residing in a feminine divine is taken from Luce Irigaray’s theory of the feminine divine, which I discuss further on page 92.

⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Conclusion: A Note on Essentialism and Difference’, in *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construction*, ed. by Sneja Gunew (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 332-344 (p. 340). See also Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (London: Athlone Press, 1993).

difference ‘is not seen as difference *from* a pre-given norm, but as *pure difference*, difference in itself, difference with no identity’.⁸ In the imaginary space of her first novel, distanced from a world of materialism, degeneracy and cynicism, a world that has lost touch with its spiritual origins, Corelli sets up an account of ideal femininity that is reiterated throughout her writing. In *Romance*, female subjectivity is shaped through merging with the divine.

Early on in *Romance*, the unnamed heroine, also the narrator, encounters an Italian artist by the name of Cellini, who immediately recognises some special quality in her: ‘Everywhere I seek for intelligence, for thought, for inward refinement – in short, mademoiselle, you have the face of one whom the inner soul consumes’ (p. 12). He recognises her musical artistry and the toll that having ‘the emotional genius of music’ can take (p. 71). He gives her a glass of Eastern wine to which he has added an electric potion acquired from Heliobas, a mysterious Chaldean adept.⁹ That night she has a strange dream in which she encounters Heliobas, from whom she later seeks help in order to regain her musical inspiration and vitality. When finally they meet face-to-face, he recognises in her an example of what woman was originally intended to be: ‘pure-hearted, self-denying, gentle and truthful – filled with tenderness and inspiration’, a description of Victorian womanhood that Corelli happily embraced (p. 84). Heliobas identifies the heroine as a woman untainted by the materialism and degeneracy of the age in which they live, and, exceptionally, as one of the few people able to benefit from the esoteric knowledge he holds. The strange electric potion that he goes on to administer sends her into a deep sleep, a dreamspace in which she experiences a journey through the celestial spheres. In entitling the story a ‘romance’, Corelli engages with the idea of romance as a way of ‘making apparent the hidden dreams of [the known] world’.¹⁰ The narrator is first and foremost a popular romantic figure, one who appeals through the promise of an imaginary world that transcends the quotidian. Corelli’s celestial space offers this escape from the mundane world, at the same time as re-confirming, during a period when astronomy was revealing how little was known about the wider cosmos, that there is a heaven. As Gillian Daw points out, the increasing interest in astronomy in the nineteenth century stimulated an interest in the possibility of celestial travel.¹¹ Reflecting on the possibility of life on other planets was, she maintains, a way of reconciling what appeared

⁸ Grosz, p. 339, original emphases. Pure difference is similar to *différance* as defined by Jacques Derrida, used to indicate how language is unstable and open to different meanings. Here, it refers to women as different not in their binary relation to men but in their distinct separation from this binary.

⁹ A Chaldean adept is someone privileged with the most ancient wisdom traditions of early Babylon. Corelli merges the Chaldean adept with the Theosophical adept, one of the elite with access to higher selfhood.

¹⁰ Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 12.

¹¹ Gillian Daw, “‘Hospitable Infinity’: Imagining New Prospects and Other Worlds in Victorian Cosmic Voyage Literature”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 44.3 (2016), 535-555 (p. 536).

to be a vast, uninhabitable space with the idea of a celestial heaven populated by angels. The growth of stories about interplanetary travel suggests that ‘the theme of the cosmic voyage was used in popular print to negotiate Victorian anxieties about astronomical distance and the possibility of extraterrestrial life’.¹² In Corelli’s case, it serves to dispel anxieties about this vast world, and to substantiate the possibility of both knowing and experiencing the wonder of the heavens as an ‘elsewhere’ space of female possibility. Her journey through the celestial spheres owes more to Theosophy than astronomy.

Corelli’s Feminine Genius

Corelli’s celestial space is constructed from a heterodox mix of Christianity, Theosophy, ancient religion and electricity. She incorporates into her religious ethos the idea of God’s electric force and the ‘electric Germ of the Soul’, with the strength of its electric spark determining its attachment to God (p. 241). Although Corelli tried to distance herself from Theosophy and its leader, Madame Blavatsky, in this novel she appropriates from its doctrine of evolution and reincarnation, and from one of the defining features of the esoteric wing of the Theosophical Society, access to the secrets of the universe. Theosophy was based on a tradition of ancient wisdom in which science and religion are one. It borrowed from both Hinduism and Buddhism, especially the concept of reincarnation and spiritual progress with an emphasis on individual evolution and perfection. Theosophy offered its members initiation into the esoteric traditions that had been guarded for centuries by its adepts, those at the height of spiritual reincarnation.¹³ Blavatsky’s inspiration came from the ‘Mahatmas’ who taught an immanentist and evolutionary vision of spirituality: ‘the universe, seen and unseen, was One Life, which evolved to consciousness (in a series of immensely complicated cycles) through a diversity of forms, governed by the mechanisms of karma and reincarnation’.¹⁴ Although Blavatsky denied any association between Theosophical space and the fourth dimension, another Theosophist, Charles Leadbeater, owed a debt to Charles Howard Hinton’s fourth

¹² Daw, p. 537. Examples of popular fiction that reflected an interest in astronomy include the well-known *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) and *All Around the Moon* (1870) by Jules Verne, and *The War of the Worlds* (1898) and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) by H. G. Wells. Less well-known stories include Lord John Russell’s *Adventures in the Moon, and Other Worlds* (1836), Agnes Giberne’s *Among the Stars* (1885), and William Leitch’s ‘A Journey Through Space’, in *Good Words* (1861) [Daw, pp. 537-538].

¹³ See Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), Chapter One; H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy, Being A Clear Exposition, the Form of Question and Answer, of the Ethics, Science, and Philosophy for the Study of Which the Theosophical Society Has Been Founded* (London: Theosophical Society, 1889).

¹⁴ Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 4.

dimension, in his depiction of astral space in *The Astral Plane* (1895).¹⁵ The astral plane is the first, after the physical plane, of a series of levels, the journey through which leads one to full realisation of the higher self. This series of spiritual levels represents a spatialised form of evolution, but of the human soul. Through a process of selection, only the spiritually fittest achieve the highest level. The concept of the higher self was one espoused by both the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a society devoted to spiritual and magical development. The higher self was variously described as ‘Superhuman’, the ‘Permanent Self’ and ‘Genius’, and upon these persons depended the evolution of the human race.¹⁶

Heliobas is represented as one of these ‘higher’ beings, a direct descendant of the ‘wise men of the East’ (p. 66). Just as Theosophists believed that it was possible for women as well as men to achieve this higher status, so Heliobas identifies the heroine as such a woman. In her, he recognises a connection – ‘a connection does exist between *your* inner self and *my* inner self’ (p. 87, original emphasis). By administering his electric potion, he opens the door to a dream world in which, in travelling to the most ascendant Electric Circle wherein God abides, the heroine experiences the promise of union with the divine: ‘Mortal from the Star I saved from ruin, because though hast desired Me, I come! ... through Me shalt thou attain immortal life!’ (p. 196). In the celestial spheres, her sense of spiritual empowerment extends to experiencing the power of creation. Bid to ‘CREATE!’, through ‘the mere desire of [her]being’, a paradise peopled with men, women and children opens before her (p. 183). But this image is as easily reversed when she turns away: ‘And when I thus turned away my eyes, all manner of evil came upon the once fair scene (p. 184). Corelli realises, from what she understands of Darwinian evolutionary theory, that humanity is capable of progressing towards perfection, but is also at risk of regressing into degeneracy. In *Romance*, devolution is figured as ‘Eternal Retrogression’, when the soul becomes subject to the forces of an opposing Will (p. 241). But, as Robyn Hallim points out, by believing that God is in overall control of the process of evolution, Corelli can set aside the amorality and randomness that is at the heart of natural selection, preferring instead to rely on the strength of the electric spark that she believes exists between the human soul and God to empower those individuals chosen to shape progress.¹⁷ To a nineteenth-century audience unsettled by the

¹⁵ See Mark Blacklock, *The Emergence of the Fourth Dimension: Higher Spatial Thinking in the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 142-146. Blacklock discusses the intersection of hyperspace and Theosophy and argues that Leadbeater colonised the imaginary spaces of the fourth dimension.

¹⁶ Lucy Delap, ‘The Superwoman: Theories of Gender and Genius in Edwardian Britain’, *Historical Journal*, 47.1 (2004), 101-126 (p. 113).

¹⁷ Hallim, p. 278.

potential demotion of God by evolutionary theory, one of the attractions of Corelli's genius was the certainty with which her belief in God ensured that He remained at the centre of the universe and progress.

Genius in female form features regularly in Corelli's writing, often represented in the guise of the woman artist divinely inspired.¹⁸ The heroine in *Romance* is reminded that her talent does not belong to her, but is 'planned by a higher intelligence', with the artist just 'the hired labourer chosen to carry out the conception' (p. 135). For Corelli, genius is 'God-given'.¹⁹ Through the power of imagination (otherwise called 'Inspiration') or 'the Divine Fire', is given 'that wonderful spiritual faculty which is the source of all great creative work in Art and Literature'.²⁰ Corelli's feminine genius is a combination of spirituality, imagination, intellect, beauty and delicacy. In this depiction, she works towards not only disavowing the idea that genius can only exist in masculine form, but also dissolving gender boundaries, and those between spirit and flesh, the divine and the human. She is both a nineteenth-century physical beauty and an angel. In *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), often described as Corelli's most autobiographical novel, the heroine Mavis Clare, a much-admired novelist, is 'an "old-fashioned" young woman'; 'a quiet, graceful creature, so slight and dainty, so perfectly unaffected and simple in manner'.²¹ As Lucio, the figure of Satan, realises, Mavis Clare is a 'woman – genius – angel'.²² She combines what are usually delineated as respectively feminine and masculine attributes in a divinely inspired union that produces the androgynous form of an angel, without loss of qualities essential to the embodied form. This androgynous divine, the spiritual union of masculine and feminine, is a Theosophical concept that also features in New Woman writer Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), used to describe true genius.²³

Corelli was acutely aware of how difficult it was for a woman of intellect not to be associated with the 'unsexed' modern woman. Like Grand, who deployed femininity in support of her feminism, Corelli had to negotiate carefully the representation of her authorial

¹⁸ Apart from being featured in *Romance* and the other texts discussed in this paragraph, female genius is either central to or touched upon in *The Soul of Lilith* (1892), *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self* (1889), *Thelma: A Norwegian Princess* (1887), *The Master Christian* (1900), *Temporal Power* (1902), *God's Good Man* (1904), *Innocent* (1914) and *The Secret Power* (1921). Corelli was not the only woman writing about female genius at the turn of the century: see Penny Boumelha, 'The Woman of Genius and the Woman of Grub Street: Figures of the Female Writer in British Fin-de-Siècle Fiction', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 40.2 (1997), 164-180.

¹⁹ *Free Opinions*, p. 252.

²⁰ *Free Opinions*, p. 273.

²¹ Marie Corelli, *The Sorrows of Satan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 178, 182.

²² *The Sorrows of Satan*, p. 280.

²³ Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 94.

heroine (and herself as author) in a way that emphasised both intellect *and* feminine beauty, to serve as an antidote to the image of the New Woman writer often depicted as unsexed. In the introductory note to *The Murder of Delicia* (1896), she says:

The woman who paints a great picture is ‘unsexed’; the woman who writes a great book is ‘unsexed’; in fact, whatever a woman does that is higher and more ambitious than the mere act of flinging herself down at the feet of man and allowing him to walk over her, makes her in man’s opinion unworthy of his consideration as a woman; and he fits the appellation ‘unsexed’ to her with an easy callousness, which is as unmanly as it is despicable.²⁴

Delicia is another successful novelist, combining beauty, genius and spirituality, a figure designed to counteract the common judgement by men that the great woman writer must be ‘without tenderness, without permanence in her work, and certainly without personal beauty’.²⁵ As the narrator in *Wormwood* (1890) says of Heloise St. Cyr, ‘a woman’s genius if great and true, equals and often surpasses that of the most gifted man’.²⁶ Corelli’s feminine genius is also a rejection of the common belief that genius was associated with physical and mental weakness: her heroines are deliberately depicted as healthy and strong – or if not strong, made so through divine intervention, as in *Romance* - and decidedly and incontrovertibly feminine.²⁷

Corelli rebuts the mid-nineteenth-century association of genius with sensuality and lassitude, personified by the poets Keats, Coleridge and Byron, and the later connection made between genius and aestheticism and decadence, the most prominent example being Oscar Wilde.²⁸ The work of both the Italian physician, Cesare Lombroso, and the English psychologist, James Sully, stressed the hereditary nature of genius and its association with insanity.²⁹ Sully was keen to point out the toll that genius takes on the few women who possess it, citing Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot all having ‘a physical frame pitiably unequal to support the cerebral superstructure’.³⁰ (George Eliot was, presumably, particularly vulnerable as her weak frame supported what was deemed to be a

²⁴ Marie Corelli, *The Murder of Delicia* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1896), pp. 7-8.

²⁵ *The Murder of Delicia*, p. 12.

²⁶ Marie Corelli, *Wormwood: A Drama of Paris* (New York: National Book Company, 1890), p. 23.

²⁷ A. Laura Stef-Praun, ‘Harriet Martineau’s ‘intellectual nobility’: Gender, Genius and Disability’, in *Harriet Martineau: Authorship, Society and Empire*, ed. by Ella Dzelzainis and Cora Kaplan (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 38-51 (p. 39).

²⁸ Rebecca N. Mitchell, ‘Francis Galton’s *Hereditary Genius, 1869 & 1892*’, in *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. by Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. http://branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=rebecca-n-mitchell-francis-galtons-hereditary-genius-1869-1892 [accessed 17 August 2016], pp. 1-12 (p. 3).

²⁹ Cesare Lombroso, *The Man of Genius* (London: Scott, 1891); James Sully, ‘Genius and Insanity’, *Nineteenth Century* (June 1885), 948-969.

³⁰ Sully, p. 966.

man's brain.) Without great care being taken, weakness affects both the male and female genius and Sully comes to the conclusion that, 'the possession of genius carries with it special liabilities to the action of the disintegrating forces which environ us all. It involves a state of delicate equipoise, of unstable equilibrium, in the psycho-physical organisation'.³¹ Ironically, this description of delicacy and instability, one that so strongly mimics a nineteenth-century depiction of woman's bodily organisation, describes male genius at the same time as excluding women from genius by virtue of their weak constitutions. In an attempt to escape her genius being associated with disability, the woman of letters, Harriet Martineau, herself disabled by hearing loss and chronic invalidity, was forced to negotiate a relationship between her disability and genius: she preferred to understand genius not in terms of *being* a genius but in relation to having a genius *for* something.³² She also made a constructive connection between psychological and physical pain and genius, suggesting a mutual and beneficial relationship between them.³³ This is not a construction that Corelli would have recognised. Instead she emphasises an embodiment of genius in her heroines (and herself) that is in direct opposition to the theories of Lombroso and Sully. *Romance*'s heroine may come to Heliobas feeling like 'a wretched invalid' (p. 8) and looking 'pale and haggard' (p. 32). But her out-of-body celestial journey so rejuvenates her that, on her return, she looks in the mirror to see her re-embodied self transformed, with 'a rose-tinted complexion, a pair of laughing, lustrous eyes' (p. 33). Corelli was obsessed throughout her life with her own image and its public presentation, keen to present an image of 'a woman who managed to combine the best of 'male' intellectual capacity with the most desirable 'female' attributes'.³⁴ Written on the body is the manifestation of an inner, psychical transcendence – a direct rejection of the physiognomic and nervous elements traditionally associated with genius.

Havelock Ellis's statistical survey of genius, which he presented as a scientific and objective study of the subject, reveals a ratio of 18 male to one female genius in Britain.³⁵ He concludes that '[a] slightly lower standard of ability, it would appear, prevails among the women than among the men', confirming Lombroso's view that 'women of genius are rare exceptions in the world'.³⁶ Only in acting do women 'seem to be little, if at all, inferior to the men in ability'.³⁷ There were examples of female genius in the field of literature – he cites Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen and George Eliot – but fiction did not, in Ellis's

³¹ Sully, p. 968.

³² Stef-Praun, p. 40.

³³ Stef-Praun, p. 47.

³⁴ Casey, p. 166.

³⁵ Havelock Ellis, *A Study of British Genius* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1904).

³⁶ Ellis, p. 10; Lombroso, p. 137.

³⁷ Ellis, p. 11.

eyes, have the same status as poetry which was men's field of artistic creativity.³⁸ There was a general acceptance that genius was not part of women's nature. Earlier in the century, at the same time as the publication of *The Subjection of Women* (1869), in which John Stuart Mill presented the ideas that he had developed with his wife, Harriet Taylor, and argued that it was a lack of education that held women back, Francis Galton was insisting in *Hereditary Genius* (1869) that no circumstances would repress the true potential of any human being.³⁹ In other words, if women were capable of genius they would be able to overcome any obstacle. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), in which he refers to the work of his cousin Galton, Charles Darwin states that it is possible to infer that 'the average of mental power in man must be above that of women'.⁴⁰ Both English sociologist, Herbert Spencer, and Thomas Huxley were of the opinion that there was no natural equality between the sexes, Spencer going so far as to emphasise 'the heavy handicap nature had imposed upon women, leaving them in a virtually permanent state of arrested development'.⁴¹ Corelli, however, represents the physical, intellectual and spiritual dimensions of femininity as transcending the merely biological, refusing to concede to this deterministic view of womanhood.

There were some who saw in women's nature a necessary complement to men's genius. The English historian, Henry Thomas Buckle, for example, believed that women's nature favoured deductive reasoning based on subjective experience, their emotional insight and intuition being an enormous influence on men's thinking: 'Because, being more emotional and enthusiastic, they live in a more ideal world, so therefore prefer a method of inquiry which proceeds from ideas to facts; leaving men the opposite method of proceeding from facts to ideas'.⁴² Without the influence of remarkable mothers, male geniuses tend towards a 'frigidity of tone', lacking a 'burning fire' and spontaneity.⁴³ Geddes and Thompson's theory of sexual difference, based on the difference in cell metabolism between the male and female, showed how women's genius worked through the male: the anabolic nature of women, emphasising balance and preservation, complementing the katabolic – the creative and destructive – metabolism of men.⁴⁴ For Ellis it was the male sexual drive that

³⁸ Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Characters*, 4th edn (London: The Walter Scott Publishing Co., 1904), p. 371, cited in Flavia Alaya, 'Victorian Science and the "Genius" of Woman', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 38.2 (1997), p. 274.

³⁹ Alaya, p. 267.

⁴⁰ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 629.

⁴¹ Alaya, p. 264.

⁴² Henry Thomas Buckle, 'Women's Influence on the Progress of Knowledge', in *Miscellaneous and Posthumous Works of Henry Thomas Buckle*, ed. by Grant Allen, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1885), I pp. 55-75 (p. 63).

⁴³ Buckle, p. 73.

⁴⁴ Geddes and Thompson, pp. 270-271.

nourished the creative impulse, whereas woman's role was to channel it to the positive pole of creation.⁴⁵ This theory of complementary genius, according to Jill Conway, 'easily accommodated to the romantic idea of male rationality and female intuition'.⁴⁶ The effect of this was to further emphasise the distance between men and women, and women's supportive, and therefore subsidiary, role to men.

The British feminist and writer, Frances Swiney, was one of a number of women, like Corelli, who resisted the essentialising of woman's nature in a way that would necessarily exclude her from genius in her own right. In a similar vein to Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor Mill, Swiney stressed the importance of education in developing women's potential.⁴⁷ Swiney argues that women have not had sufficient time to develop transcendent genius, for they have only benefited from education in the past few decades: 'No one, therefore, can forecast what triumphs may yet be in store for the sex in the future, when the influence of environment and transmitted qualities have begun to tell on the race'.⁴⁸ Later on, her fellow-countrywoman, Helena Swanwick, was to emphasise this further in *The Future of the Women's Movement* (1913):

Now, as regards genius, we may know how much genius women have in some hundreds of years, when they have been free to develop according to their natures. The kind of emotional tyranny which women have been subjected is the most crushing of all, and men have never had to undergo this particular sort of tyranny, so that it is not in the least true to say that if women had had any genius it would have overcome tyranny, as men's genius has done. No man has ever known what it is to be born of the more sensitive, sympathetic, conscientious and affectionate sex, and to be reared in an atmosphere where insult and hate followed on any expression of genius, where cold discouragement was the best that a woman could expect from her own people, and where the wooing from her own work has taken that most insidious of all forms for duty-loving woman – the claims of others to her care and service.⁴⁹

In a tone not dissimilar to Corelli's, Swanwick rails against the discrimination that women face in their position of apparent weakness in relation to men. She does not, however, go so far as to reject the essential nature of women. Instead, she suggests that it is not women's nature that holds them back, but the social and political culture. If left to develop according to

⁴⁵ Alaya, p. 275.

⁴⁶ Jill Conway, 'Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Evolution', in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. by Martha Vicinus (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp. 140-154 (p. 144).

⁴⁷ Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858), British writer and women's rights activist, called for more than just access to education in order for women to fulfil their potential. In 'The Enfranchisement of Women' (1851), she also demanded active participation for women in political and economic life through suffrage and full access to employment.

⁴⁸ Frances Swiney, *The Awakening of Women or Woman's Part in Evolution* (London: Reeves, 1908), p. 78.

⁴⁹ H. M. Swanwick, *The Future of the Women's Movement* (London: Bell, 1913), pp. 144-145.

their natures, women will determine their own paths, and will direct their ‘natural’ sympathy and conscientiousness to more fruitful endeavours than caring for a family. She suggests that if a woman wants to take up a career as a mathematician, for example, she should find someone else to look after the children, and she dismisses the priority given to motherhood, pointing out that it is only rarely that women of genius breed sons of genius.⁵⁰ In her essay, ‘The Advance of Women’, Corelli notes that men ‘have begun to fall back and look askance’ as women make progress in Art and Literature. She predicts that women ‘will be something greater than the mere vessels of man’s desire – whether maids, wives, or mothers, they will prove themselves worthy to be all these three, and more than these, to the very utmost extent of their moral and intellectual being!’⁵¹ There is nothing that a woman cannot do, according to Corelli, but she exhorts her to bear in mind that in ‘securing intellectual equality with Man’, she must do this at the same time as ‘maintaining and preserving as great an Unlikeness to him as possible in her life and surroundings’.⁵² Corelli appears to be espousing both an egalitarian feminism that seeks to measure women as equal to a male standard, and a feminism whose power lies in women’s difference from men. But in her promotion of an ‘Unlikeness’, Corelli celebrates a difference based on a rejection of gender binaries which hold women back, so that women are enabled to stand alone as different and unique in their own right.

In rejecting gender binaries, pure difference, in the sense that Grosz uses it, demands ‘a major transformation of the social and symbolic order’ which has been founded on the notion of the singular male identity.⁵³ Sexual difference here can be celebrated only when women are no longer other to men, but stand alone and can define their own brand of femininity. This might help explain the apparent contradictions in her version(s) of femininity. One of her writer heroines, Delicia, says that women will win ‘by cultivating and cherishing to the utmost every sweet and sacred sentiment of womanhood – every grace, every refinement, every beauty; by taking her share of the world’s intellectual work with force, as well as with modesty, and by showing a faultless example of gentle reserve and delicate chastity’.⁵⁴ Where someone like Taylor Mill wanted women to be seen as equal to men and not set apart by their higher moral and spiritual virtues, Corelli has Delicia giving an account of femininity that encapsulates all the virtues that she holds dear. This includes beauty and spirituality as well as the ability to make a good living from her writing, and

⁵⁰ Swanwick, p. 146.

⁵¹ *Free Opinions*, p. 170.

⁵² *Free Opinions*, p. 182.

⁵³ Grosz, (1990), p. 340.

⁵⁴ *The Murder of Delicia*, p. 15.

inverting the usual economic marital arrangement in that her husband is financially dependent on her. Corelli dismisses the criticism that 'gentle reserve' serves only to maintain women in a position of passivity and silence.⁵⁵ Her concept of femininity encapsulates gentility and reserve at the same time as asserting the rights of women to be independent and to choose their own path, including the right to reject marriage and motherhood should they wish. She disavows the traditional differences between Man and Woman, arguing instead for a femininity that is open, multiple and all-encompassing.

Corelli manages to bring together the exceptionality of genius with the traditional attributes of femininity to create a successful woman of genius. This is in contrast to some of the heroines in New Woman fiction who struggle to negotiate the opposing forces of genius and the ideal of the 'real' woman.⁵⁶ Corelli effects a reconciliation of the tensions that other women geniuses often fail to overcome. Her women are strong, healthy and self-confident. They are like 'the white-robed Amazons' marching into the 'Battle of Life', 'prepared to fight for intellectual freedom, and die rather than yield'.⁵⁷ By disavowing definitions of femininity that rely on crude ideological oppositions, Corelli delineates her own politics of difference – a freedom to define female subjectivity in her own version of the ideal self. She takes the concept of genius and shapes it to emphasise the genius of women and, in so doing, makes a radical departure from the traditional view of genius being the domain of the male. In accentuating women's strength through divine inspiration, genius becomes identified with an ideal self-image in the form of the feminine divine. In *Romance*, the celestial spheres are the 'elsewhere' space in which to give shape to this representation of the feminine divine, and to experience female subjectivity through the union of human and divine.

Feminine genius divinely inspired

In *The Sorrows of Satan*, Geoffrey Tempest describes Mavis Clare, the successful novelist as having been created by God in the form of 'a woman of genius with a thinker's brain and an angel's soul', one who 'is bound to be a destiny to all mortals less divinely endowed'.⁵⁸ Although Corelli denied that Mavis Clare was a thinly disguised version of herself, there are too many coincidences to ignore, including both being novelists and sharing the same

⁵⁵ See Florence Farr, 'Marie Corelli and the Modern Girl', *The New Age*, August 1 1907, pp. 214-215. Farr was vehemently opposed to Corelli's position, pointing out the dangers of confusing chastity as a virtue with chastity as a commodity in the marriage market.

⁵⁶ Penny Boumelha, 'The Woman of Genius and the Woman of Grub Street: Figures of the Female Writer in British Fin de Siècle Fiction', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 40.2 (1997), 164-180 (p. 175). Boumelha cites numerous New Woman heroines who come to grief in their efforts to transcend the strictures of nature and heredity as well as the demands of everyday life in order to express their genius.

⁵⁷ *Free Opinions*, pp. 161, 170.

⁵⁸ *The Sorrows of Satan*, pp. 344-345.

initials.⁵⁹ Mavis Clare's divinely inspired genius is Corelli's too. Her genius in *Romance* is to take a gift given by God and to re-vision it in the form of the feminine divine. In this section I explain how, at the moment in the heroine's celestial journey when she is invested with the power of creation, Corelli offers an alternative to the traditional creation story. If the writer of literature is an artist in the act of creation, Corelli can be seen as 'a species of religious genius and [her] work of art as a quasi-divine creation'.⁶⁰ *Romance*'s heroine becomes a prototype for the divinely inspired artistic heroines that feature in her later fiction. She uses the 'elsewhere' space of the celestial spheres, a space beyond the real world in which the fluidity and non-linearity of time recalls ancient religious beliefs and allows for the traversing of numerous reincarnations, all of which contributes to a sense of self that is free and unbounded. In the Preface to *Romance* Corelli states that, 'It is a terrible responsibility to possess that "vital spark of Heavenly flame" as Pope so exquisitely expresses it, the direct gift of the Creator, and yet do nothing with it' (pp. xi-xii). In the Introduction, she goes on to say that 'if ever there was a time for a new apostle of Christ to arise and preach this grandly simple message again, that time is now' (p. xxiii). This is a grand claim to make, emphasising Corelli's belief in herself and her creations as spiritual guides. The heroine is charged with not only discovering for herself the truths of the spiritual world but also with imparting to Heliobas, and others who are prepared to listen, spiritual guidance. As Heliobas says to her, 'You were marked out to me as a small point of light by which possibly I might steer my course clear of the darkness which threatened me' (p. 313). Set apart from other women, she is one of '*the rare few with whom the Soul is everything*' (p. 53, original emphasis). She has the 'distinguishing mark of the true Spiritualist', that is, 'self-rejection', a form of Nietzschean overcoming of self: 'Self stands on one side, as it were, and is no longer allowed to obscure the Soul's view of the splendid universe to which it belongs' (p. xxvi). Sent to Heliobas by some 'mystical authority and influence', he says to her, 'I was made aware that you were the *only woman* living to whose companionship I could trust my sister [Zara] at a time when the society of one of her own sex became absolutely necessary to her' (p. 313, emphasis added). These qualities of rarity, apostolicism and self-sacrifice transmute the heroine into a divine figure. She is given 'full and clear instructions how to cultivate and educate the electric force within [her]' (pp. 201-202). Endowed with the power to communicate with the spirits in the heavenly spheres, and to use her newly acquired

⁵⁹ Brian Masters, *Now Barrabas was a Rotter: The Extraordinary Life of Marie Corelli* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), p. 143.

⁶⁰ C. P. Christ, 'Feminist Studies in Religion and Literature: a Methodological Reflection', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 44.2 (1976), 317-325 (p. 319).

clairvoyant powers and heightened sensitivity to beauty and goodness to influence others, she becomes a rare spiritual figure.

The genius of Corelli's divine intervention is complicated by an alternative theory of genius, devised by Frederic Myers, and associated with the unconscious. Rather than conflicting with Corelli's theory of divine intervention in *Romance*, it adds another layer to the idea of genius. In *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self* (1889), the genius that arises from the unconscious or subliminal memory suggests an immediacy between distant, buried memories and the divine.⁶¹ Myers describes the expression of genius as an 'uprush' of subliminal consciousness: 'I hold that Genius may be best defined as a capacity of utilising powers which lie too deep for the ordinary man's control; so that an inspiration of genius is in truth a subliminal uprush of *helpful faculty*'.⁶² Myers's theory of subliminal consciousness, as discussed in Chapter 2, posits that there are layers of consciousness, the only one of which we are fully conscious being the supraliminal consciousness. At the heart of his theory is the belief in the subliminal consciousness as the soul that outlasts the body and is the repository of memory, thus making possible 'flashes of inspiration' from subliminal strata.⁶³ The subliminal uprush in *Ardath*'s poet Theos mediates, through memory, the poetry of an earlier incarnation, Sah-luma. Corelli believes that the imaginative faculties of the poet or romanticist is 'a kind of second sight, which conveys the owner of it to places he has never seen, and surrounds him with strange circumstances of which he is merely the spiritual eye-witness'.⁶⁴ In the prologue to the last of her 'electric creed' novels, *The Life Everlasting*, she indicates that *Romance* was born out of a 'strange psychical experience [...] the direct result of an initiation into some few of the truths behind the veil of the Seeming Real'.⁶⁵ But perhaps these truths lie dormant in another layer of consciousness as yet inaccessible to memory. This psychical phenomenon is replicated in the heroine's transactions with Heliobas, as he helps awaken a long-lost memory of a figure that is both familiar and unfamiliar.

⁶¹ See Alisha Siebers, 'The Genius in *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self*', *Women's Writing*, 13.2 (2006), 246-266 (p. 252). Siebers suggests that the depiction of the genius of *Ardath* originating in memories of an earlier incarnation predates Myers's theory of genius. See also Elsa Richardson, 'Extraordinary Powers of Perception: Second Sight in Victorian Culture, 1830-1910 (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen Mary, University of London, 2013), p. 223.

⁶² Frederic W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1904), I, p. xxix, original emphasis.

⁶³ Frederic W. H. Myers, 'The Subliminal Consciousness', *PSPR*, 7 (1891-1892), 298-355 (pp. 305, 306).

⁶⁴ *Free Opinions*, p. 301.

⁶⁵ Marie Corelli, *The Life Everlasting: A Reality of Romance*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1911), p. 12. Corelli wrote seven 'electric creed' novels, the first of which is *Romance*. Her 'electric creed' combines Old Testament stories with allusions to ancient civilisations, stressing the Orient as the cradle of the philosophy and mysticism of the occult, and her own unique interpretation of the power of electricity and radium.

In the same way that Myers believed that a trance state facilitated access to subliminal consciousness, Heliobas's brief mesmerising of the heroine reveals to her '*the image of another face* looking at me *through or behind* the actual form and face of Heliobas' (p. 88, original emphases). It both was and was not his face: it was the face of one 'that I was certain I had known long, long, ago, and moreover one that I must have loved in some distant time, for my whole soul seemed to yearn towards that indistinct haze where smiled the fully recognised yet unfamiliar countenance' (p. 88). In a clever turn, designed both to distance this psychic event from the pseudo-science of mesmerism and to connect it to a higher, divine form of intervention working through memory, Heliobas explains to the heroine that their two souls are connected by being on 'the same circle of electricity', that is, they exist on the same plane of spiritual proximity to God (p. 88). As Myers's supraliminal consciousness mediates the messages of the subliminal, Heliobas identifies the heroine as a chosen mediator of God's message, through access to a deep memory of connection with the divine. This marks her out as different from the passive recipient of magnetic fluid or the medium of messages from the spirit world. As Jill Galvan points out, Corelli's writing rejects this representation to, instead, 'subtly revise the image of inspired femininity, framing women's communications channeling as a vocation marked by active intellectual and social involvement'.⁶⁶ Her spiritual quest for contact with the divine promises a sense of awakening and wholeness, a transformation into a 'higher self' that marks her out for a higher purpose both spiritually and socially. The aim of her celestial journey is to revitalise her creative energies, to return with insights for Heliobas and others who care to listen. The experience of this transcendent journey, in which she accesses forgotten memories and desires, and discovers her spiritual powers, brings her closer to the feminine divine and Corelli's ideal form of female subjectivity.

The conception of the feminine divine emerges through Corelli's heterodox religion which incorporates Christianity, Theosophy and ancient Eastern traditions. She never abandons her adherence to the traditions of Christianity: it acts as a kind of palimpsest upon which, in a feminist act of re-visioning, she inscribes her own version, overscoring the tradition without discarding it.⁶⁷ It enables her to 'create a reassuring Biblical framework for her ideas' at the same time as infusing it with the esoteric Theosophical concept of the higher self and evolution through reincarnation.⁶⁸ The 'higher self' of Theosophy is described by Russian Helena Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society, as 'the universally

⁶⁶ Jill Galvan, 'Christians, Infidels and Women's Channeling in the Writings of Marie Corelli', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 31 (2003), 83-97 (p. 84).

⁶⁷ Heather Walton, 'Feminist Revisioning', in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. by Andrew Hass, David Jasper and Elizabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 543-557 (p. 548).

⁶⁸ Hallim, p. 270.

diffused ‘*divine principle*’ inseparable from the one and absolute *Meta-spirit*’.⁶⁹ According to the English Theosophist, A. P. Sinnett, evolution is accomplished through ‘a *spiral progress* through the worlds’, a journey through the planets over several lifetimes, but replicated here by the heroine in the contracted temporality of her dream.⁷⁰ On her journey, as she travels from planet to planet, she ascends closer and closer to perfection. On Saturn she encounters ‘creatures of lofty stature and dazzling beauty, human in shape, yet angelic in countenance’; on Venus ‘the dreams of sculptors and painters, in the graceful forms and exquisite faces of the women and the splendid strength and godlike beauty of the men’ (pp. 178, 179). Like other writers keen to engage in the discourse on evolution, Corelli has her own interpretation. Her conception of evolutionary perfection is proclaimed through the embodiment of a Victorian aesthetic of human beauty in harmony with sublime Nature and spirituality. Physical and spiritual transformation are interdependent, with an increasing prioritising of the spiritual as the disembodied narrator travels beyond Jupiter towards the final circle which encloses God. Corelli’s version of evolutionary progress through different stages of reincarnation works to harmonise the disjuncture between science and religion. She is keen to place God at the centre of evolution, just as Darwin, at the end of *Origin of the Species* (1859), reassures his readers that the Creator is the overarching architect of evolution: ‘There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one’.⁷¹ In the space-time of her dream, in which time collapses into space, the heroine experiences every stage of reincarnation up to the final one when she approaches God’s circle. Through a conjunction of religious heterodoxy, evolutionary theory and nineteenth-century psychology, Corelli inserts woman at the centre of the evolutionary process, transforming her into an image of the spiritual transcendence.

The original title of *Romance* was to have been *Lifted Up*, a title Corelli changed before publication.⁷² It is an appropriate word image for the heroine’s journey through the celestial spheres, where she is truly elevated from a material world in which she was ‘afflicted by a series of nervous ailments’ into a space in which all temporal and spatial boundaries are dissolved (p. 5). As she narrates her journey, she describes being ‘lifted up’ into some ‘illimitable’ space full of light where, she says, ‘I seemed to be at home in some familiar element’ (pp. 174, 175). She ascends ‘higher and higher’ into the celestial spheres to meet

⁶⁹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy being a clear exposition, in the form of question and answer of the Ethics, Science and Philosophy for the Study of which the Theosophical Society has been Founded* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1889), p. 135, original emphases.

⁷⁰ A. P. Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1887), pp. 84-85, original emphasis.

⁷¹ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of the Species* (London: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 360.

⁷² N. N. Feltes, *Literary Capital and the Late Victorian Novel* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Madison Press, 1993), p. 119.

those inhabitants of the 'Great Circle' to whom is given 'the power of communicating higher thought or inspiration' (p. 190). Not only does the novel's representation of celestial travel offer reassurance of what lies ahead, but it also provides an experience of sublime spiritual transcendence, a form of spatio-temporal freedom that, as Rita Felski points out, represents 'a radical alternative to the narrow fictional spaces within which female characters had often been confined'.⁷³ The heroine experiences the hyperaesthesia and hypermnesia that are common 'when the glare of the supraliminal spectrum is deadened by sleep or trance'.⁷⁴ She describes the radiant beauty of the landscape and the creatures she encounters, including 'a circular spacious garden in which all the lovely landscapes of a superior world appeared to form themselves by swift degrees' (p. 183). Witnessing different levels of reincarnation as she moves easily from one planet to another suggests both the openness and limitlessness of space and the fluidity of temporal markers. When she reaches the highest sphere, a voice tells her that she will receive a vision: '*Thou shalt create; thou shalt design and plan; thou shalt be worshipped, and thou shalt destroy!*' (p. 181, original emphases). Having been ordered to 'CREATE!', the heroine finds that she has been given the supernormal strength to create a world of beauty in which she is surrounded by people made in her own image who give thanks to her: 'Because something of my essence still was in them, they always instinctively sought to worship a superior creature to themselves' (p. 183). Self-consciousness of her spiritual strength and superiority extends to a form of Christ-like power that enables her to resist the order to destroy by offering up her own life for those around her. As Kuehn notes, 'While she is pleading to spare her creation, the heavenly voice opens her eyes to the fact that she has just now re-enacted the history of Christianity'.⁷⁵ As far-fetched as this seems, in portraying this image Corelli crosses the ultimate gender boundary – not only does she represent a form of feminine transcendence, she also suggests the possibility of a female Christ-figure. As her heroine journeys on towards the fiery waves of light that denote the perimeter of God's circle, she encounters a figure, 'majestic, unutterably grand and beautiful' with the 'faint semblance of a Crown of Thorns', and feels 'a touch upon [her] like a scorching flame' (p. 196). She is chosen to be 'a channel of spiritual knowledge between two worlds'.⁷⁶ Her role as apostle and her encounter with divinity imbue her with the possibility of her own subjective divinity.

⁷³ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 134.

⁷⁴ Myers (1892), p. 334.

⁷⁵ Julia Kuehn, *Glorious Vulgarly: Marie Corelli's Feminine Sublime in a Popular Context* (Berlin: Logos, 2004), p. 200.

⁷⁶ Galvan, p. 86.

As the chosen title, *A Romance of Two Worlds*, suggests, the story moves between two worlds, the material world of wakefulness and the dream world of the unconscious, encapsulating Myers's theory that:

[W]e are living a life in two worlds. The waking personality is adapted to the needs of earthly life; the personality of sleep maintains the fundamental connection between the organism and the spiritual world by supplying it with the spiritual energy during sleep, and itself develops by the exercise of its own spiritual faculties.⁷⁷

The real and the imaginary, and the material and the spiritual, intersect in the enactment of Corelli's desire for a female subjectivity aligned with a feminine divine. Reality and dream become confused in the heroine's account of her out-of-body experience as a 'sort of shifting dream that was a reality, yet so wonderfully unreal – a vision that impressed itself on every portion of my intelligence' (pp. 181-182). As Kuehn points out, Freud believed that although the psychical, in terms of dream material, and the real are different, both can be experienced as equally authentic.⁷⁸ I see the conjunction of the heroine's use of 'dream' and 'vision' to suggest her experience of a prophetic and divine intervention is also representative of a desire for a different way to frame divinity and female subjectivity. In terms of Myers's psychology, Corelli can be seen as channelling memories of female goddesses and mystics to create her own version of a feminine divine. Allowing the heroine to experience herself as having the divine power to create represents a radical departure from a Christian and bourgeois ideology that denoted (masculine) creativity endowed by a male godhead. Finding alternative rhetorical devices for imagining the divine involves critiquing a masculine ideology. Gail Turley Houston, in her study of nineteenth-century women writers who recuperate a feminine divine, makes the point that '[t]he rhetorical concept of a female god is important to a number of major, mid-century Victorian women writers who revise Christian and classical mythology to create alternative mythoi that subversively critique nineteenth-century gender politics'.⁷⁹ Corelli employs this device both to challenge the patriarchal orthodoxy of the Christian church and to re-vision it in order to create a feminine divine. Houston suggests that it is 'imagining symbolic female divinities that allowed [women] to acquire the authorial legitimacy patriarchal culture denied them'.⁸⁰ By 'expanding the divine metaphor to include women as omnipotent beings', she argues, women writers identified what she describes as a gap at the centre of Western patriarchy – 'mother-god-want' – that is, the desire for a

⁷⁷ Myers (1904), p. xxxiii.

⁷⁸ Kuehn, p. 200.

⁷⁹ Gail Turley Houston, *Victorian Women Writers, Radical Grandmothers, and the Gendering of God* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), p. 3.

⁸⁰ Houston, p. 2.

mythology and divinity that embraces the female.⁸¹ Engagement by nineteenth-century women in forms of radical spirituality that foregrounded a female mythology and the idea of a feminine divine occurred alongside an increase in women's political and social power, and the recognition of professional women writers.⁸² The blurring of the boundary between radicalism and millenarianism helped legitimate their call for women's rights. It is not surprising, therefore, that early feminists were attracted to millenarian movements, and to movements like Theosophy that allowed for female leadership: in foregrounding women as religious leaders they offered alternative ways for women to imagine themselves in a dynamic relation to God and to the world they inhabited.

There was a brief period in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, according to Christine Krueger, when male-dominated evangelical rhetoric declined, opening a gap that allowed women preachers like Southcott in Britain and Ann Lee, the leader of the Shaking Quaker sect in America, to make their own claims to the 'authoritative language of scripture'.⁸³ There were strong feminist threads linking Southcott and Lee. Southcott's doctrine of the Woman, her 'theological feminism', aimed to redeem women from the guilt associated with a traditional reading of the Fall.⁸⁴ Ann Lee, who announced a later millennium, promoted a simple, ascetic feminism built around community. The Shakers' interpretation of Genesis was that, in creating man and woman in His image, God created them as equals. Mother Ann was believed to be the manifestation of a female Christ. The popularity of millenarianism was partly, as Harrison points out, a reflection of late-eighteenth-century political, economic and social upheaval on both sides of the Atlantic, when the struggling working classes were desperate for reassuring messages that the established Church failed to supply.⁸⁵ But it was also a reflection of the need of different groups of women for an alternative rhetoric.

The political and social uncertainties persisted through the years of Corelli's authorship. The emphasis on mysticism and a rejection of traditional roles for women, elements that were central to millenarian movements, were also evident in Theosophy, Christian Science and, to a certain extent, Spiritualism. Their rhetoric provided a version of the 'visionary republic' that 'located spiritual and political authority not in the masculine rule

⁸¹ Houston, p. 14. In this group of women writers she includes Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Florence Nightingale and George Eliot.

⁸² Houston, p. 11.

⁸³ Christine L. Krueger, *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth-Century Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 5, quoted in Houston, p. 14.

⁸⁴ Harrison, p. 108.

⁸⁵ Harrison, p. 219.

of reason but in the feminine realm of mystical power'.⁸⁶ Susan Juster makes the contentious suggestion that the power of this female rhetoric, particularly 'the retrieval of the archaic language of prophecy', may actually have been a more powerful and effective challenge to contemporary politics than the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft and the English philanthropist and religious writer, Hannah More.⁸⁷ For example, Juster cites Southcott's unique reading of random biblical texts, her metaphorical forms of argument, her scorning of the 'learned' and 'civilised' society as a sharp contrast to the prevailing political radicalism and appeals to reason of Wollstonecraft. Through resurrecting archaic forms, according to Juster, Southcott portrayed herself as a defender particularly of the poor woman in a way that neither Wollstonecraft nor Mill did.

Certainly women writers, both religious and literary, found a language that spoke to those in need of spiritual regeneration *and* social and political change. As discussed in Chapter 2, Phelps imagined re-writing Biblical passages in a comforting, feminine form that foregrounded female knowledge and authority. Corelli creates an imaginary world, in which the genius of women is encapsulated in a concept of the feminine divine. It was a feminised religious rhetoric that allowed for a more expansive conceptualisation of women's spiritual and intellectual capacities. For example, the British Theosophist, feminist and occultist, Florence Farr, associated feminine mysticism with a form of superhumanity. She was a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an organisation devoted to the study of arcana and magic. In a later review of A. R. Orage's *Consciousness: Animal, Human and Superman* (1907), she writes, 'the state of consciousness, now identified by leading modern thinkers [for example, Nietzsche and Bergson] as the state called superman, is mystically feminine. It is Isis who will bring forth Horus the Saviour'.⁸⁸ Reprising the image of the Egyptian goddess, Isis, and the knowledge vested in her, Farr writes that superman is only woman in 'her symbolic sense of wisdom as the field of the new birth we all await'. Engaging with eugenic principles, one of the objects of the Golden Dawn was the perfection of Man and the regeneration of the race on the same lines as the Nietzschean call for an elite new race.⁸⁹ Theosophists, too, believed, as Owen points out, that 'they were promoting an ancient wisdom tradition that would be crucial to the establishment of a spiritually enlightened new age'.⁹⁰ Like the Golden Dawn, Theosophy was seen as both sympathetic and receptive to

⁸⁶ Susan Juster, 'Demagogues or Mystagogues? Gender and the Language of Prophecy in the Age of Democratic Revolutions', *American Historical Review*, 104.5 (1999), 1560-1581 (pp. 1574-1575).

⁸⁷ Juster, p. 1580.

⁸⁸ Florence Farr, 'Superman Consciousness', *The New Age*, 6 June 1907, p. 92.

⁸⁹ Owen, p. 134.

⁹⁰ Owen, p.22.

female membership and leadership and for feminists like Farr it offered a spiritual dimension to social and political change – a way to re-shape gender politics.⁹¹ Corelli's intention is not to reprise a form of goddess worship, but rather to re-construct the concept of goddess to support the idea of feminine divinity. Like Farr, Corelli manages to combine feminine wisdom, genius and divine inspiration to suggest a form of spiritual evolutionary progress that prioritises the feminine, opening up possibilities for the expression of female subjectivity.

The significance of the rhetoric of a feminine divine is not just as a historical moment for women. It is also critical from a philosophical point of view to the claim for an autonomous female subjectivity. In a world in which man's sense of self derives from his identification with his male ideal in God, and where there lacks a feminine equivalent, it is impossible, argues Irigaray, for women to formulate their own autonomous subjectivity: 'No human subjectivity, no human society has ever been established without the help of the divine'.⁹² Man sees himself in relation to an ideal God – one that remains always unattainable – and in relation to woman as his other. Unless a woman has her own divine, she remains always identified as man's other: 'If she is to become woman, if she is to accomplish her female subjectivity, woman needs a god who is a figure for the perfection of *her* subjectivity'.⁹³ As I noted in my earlier discussion of Irigaray's philosophy, it is only when woman can define herself according to her own perspective, that is, with a feminine divine in mind, that she can stand on her own as independent of and different to man. The task for a woman, according to Irigaray, is to 'maintain an *irreducible difference* between the other and herself, while preserving her natural origin or roots', that is, her first relationship with the mother.⁹⁴ In order to achieve this difference, she must maintain a transcendental dimension between self and other, especially when the other is man, so that the 'insuperable difference between the two – the 'you' and the 'I' is maintained. Irigaray's 'concern with the notion of the divine or God' is less to do with suggesting an alternative to God, according to Grosz, and more to do with being 'part of a project of creating an ideal self-image for women'.⁹⁵ The image of God functions for Irigaray as a 'metaphor of being situated in space and time as a subject of a particular kind and of the capacity for an autonomous identity'.⁹⁶ Women's

⁹¹ Owen, p. 24.

⁹² Luce Irigaray, 'Divine Women', in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. by Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 471-484 (p. 475).

⁹³ Irigaray, p. 476, original emphasis.

⁹⁴ Luce Irigaray, *In the Beginning, She Was* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 158 (emphasis added).

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, 'Irigaray and the Divine', in *Transfigurations: Theology and the French Feminists*, ed. by C. W. Maggie Kim, Susan M. St. Ville and Susan M. Simonaitis (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), pp. 199-214 (p. 202).

⁹⁶ Grosz (1993), p. 208.

identification with their own divine will enable women, according to Irigaray, to escape the binaries associated with masculine/feminine opposition and establish themselves in their own space and time. The imaginary feminine divine conjured by Corelli serves as a secure framework for both her religious beliefs and female possibility.

In 'Divine Women', Irigaray argues that 'Divinity is what we need to become free, autonomous, sovereign'.⁹⁷ The idea of woman as an autonomous subject can be a problematic concept for feminists, as becomes clear in relation to the depiction of individualism in the feminist utopian novel. The association of the autonomous subject with the individual Enlightenment male suggests that women's search for subjectivity remains bound to a phallogentric construct. Irigaray's writing is deliberately opaque and open to different interpretations. It is never clear, according to Pamela Sue Anderson, what she means by the terms, 'free', 'autonomous' and 'sovereign'.⁹⁸ Anderson asks whether Irigaray's need for a feminine divine is simply to mirror man's ideal in God. I suggest that Irigaray intends neither to replicate this nor to create another god, merely an appropriate ideal image for women. Nor does she see women's identification with a feminine divine as incompatible with a sense of freedom. Quite the reverse: having their own divine image frees women from being other to man. Anderson also questions Irigaray's use of the concept of sovereignty, asking how this can be achieved in what must be an unequal relationship between human and divine.⁹⁹ She asks whether women need a god at all to support them as females. Anderson prefers to assume that '*free* implies being metaphysically undetermined and personally unencumbered; that *autonomous* means thinking for oneself, following an univocal yet universal law of one's own nature as created human, not divine'.¹⁰⁰ She finds Irigaray's use of the term 'sovereign' difficult to define as it seems to suggest, not as Irigaray intends, each human approaching the other as independent and equal, but as one having sovereignty over the other.

I think it is more helpful to consider Irigaray's concept of the feminine divine as integral to her concept of sexual difference and the 'three-way reconceptualization of man/divine relations, feminine/divine relations, and [...] the role of the divine in relation to the masculine and feminine'.¹⁰¹ Penelope Deutscher examines the interchangeability of Irigaray's use of the term 'divinity', variously standing for wonder between the sexes,

⁹⁷ Irigaray (1996), p. 475.

⁹⁸ Pamela Sue Anderson, 'Life, Death, and (Inter)Subjectivity: Realism and Recognition in Continental Feminism', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 60.1/3 (2006), 41-59 (p. 51).

⁹⁹ Anderson, p. 46.

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, p. 46, original emphases.

¹⁰¹ Penelope Deutscher, "'The Only Diabolic Thing about Women ...': Luce Irigaray on Divinity', *Hypatia*, 9.4 (1994), 88-111 (p. 97).

transcendence between men and women, an ideal form of love, and as sexual difference. Deutscher concludes that the feminine divine and feminine identity are indistinguishable, emphasising Irigaray's aim of making the divine continuous with the human, thus guaranteeing woman's subjectivity.¹⁰² This is different from the relationship man has with the divine, an ideal that is always separate and unattainable. The realisation of female subjectivity through the divine is not as a fixed entity. The divine is ever-changing: 'a projection of the past into a future that gives the present new meaning and direction', according to Grosz.¹⁰³ That it is possible for women to merge with their ideal feminine divine suggests that they are always in a process of becoming, allowing for 'a field of infinite, open-ended feminine identit[ies]'.¹⁰⁴ An Irigarayan moment of human merging with the divine is contrived by Corelli in her heroine's journey through the celestial spheres: 'By the mere desire of my being, expressed in waves of electric warmth that floated downwards from me to the earth I possessed, my garden was suddenly filled with men, women and children, each of whom had a small portion of myself in them' (pp. 183-184). The brief moment in time and space, during which she experiences the merging of self with divinity in her power to create and destroy, and the multiple investment of her spirit in others, is a moment of feminine transformation. In the dream space with neither spatial nor temporal boundaries, she finds other margins are dissolved too – those between spirit and flesh, transcendence and immanence, the divine and the human – in a desire to become an autonomous woman. The identification with the divine signals a break with phallogentric conceptions of autonomy, freedom and sovereignty – these terms are ascribed a new meaning in connection with the emerging subjectivity experienced by Corelli's heroine.

Genre, form and expressions of femininity

Romance is an example of the novel as an 'elsewhere' space that exists in the margins of discourse and knowledge. The novel itself occupies a space on the edge of different generic forms and, in so doing, subverts ideas of what might constitute 'masculine' or 'feminine' writing. As Anne Cranny-Francis points out, the depiction of women in many fictional genres often reflects a conservative gender ideology which figures women in stereotypical roles with men as their saviours, a typical example being the quest narrative in romantic fiction.¹⁰⁵ She claims that feminist writers employ mimesis in different ways to deconstruct generic

¹⁰² Deutscher, pp. 99, 100.

¹⁰³ Grosz (1993), p. 210.

¹⁰⁴ Deutscher, p. 101.

¹⁰⁵ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 18-19.

frameworks, and that mimesis is a useful way for women writers to use genre to expose what is hidden. Tania Modleski suggests that this not only uncovers the hidden ideological intent, but also reveals the fact that, 'if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply reabsorbed in this function. *They also remain elsewhere*'.¹⁰⁶ The narrative in Corelli's novel serves as a spiritual quest that takes the heroine to an 'elsewhere' space in which to explore her subjectivity. Corelli also uses the novel as a space in which to complicate received ideas about women writers of the late-nineteenth century. Although often dismissed for writing fiction that was considered lowbrow and insignificant in comparison with the realist, literary and highbrow fiction mostly written by men, her mix of genres shows how much her writing blurs the boundaries of classification. For example, in her employment of electricity to explain the ineffable and supernatural experiences of her heroine, it is possible to conceive of *Romance* as an example of scientific romance; or as utopian in the way that Corelli creates an imaginary world in which woman is transformed. It might also be read as an example of spiritualist fiction, the feminine sublime or romance.

Corelli has been criticised for a style that is perceived as either too simple, or too ornate and overblown in its use of melodrama and hyperbole. Felski argues that Corelli's fiction is an example of the 'popular sublime', a term she uses to highlight the way some popular fiction seeks a form of 'transcendent, exalted and ineffable' expression.¹⁰⁷ It stands apart from the sublime which has traditionally been seen as a masculine literary form. Instead, the popular sublime is associated with 'a more general emotionalism, rapture, and loss of self that have historically been gendered feminine rather than masculine'.¹⁰⁸ Corelli's use of form, therefore, enhances her intention of emphasising women's transcendent capacities. She uses it to transport her readers to a new space, similar to the one that Ferguson calls 'a purified, Edenic spiritual space where meaning and "truth" had not yet been sacrificed to the vagaries of modern linguistic representation'.¹⁰⁹ As Ferguson suggests, 'Corelli idealises, not a *kind* of language, but rather a flight from the traps of all language that can paradoxically only be accomplished through certain kinds of written narrative'.¹¹⁰ Her writing exists in an 'elsewhere' space that gives her the freedom to explore, to their fullest extent, her imaginative powers. Corelli's use of form and genre in *Romance* calls attention to her representation of

¹⁰⁶ Tania Modleski, 'Feminism and the Power of Interpretation: Some Critical Readings', in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 121-138 (p. 129), original emphasis, quoted in Cranny-Francis, p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Felski, p. 119.

¹⁰⁸ Felski, p. 120.

¹⁰⁹ Christine Ferguson, *Language, Science and Popular Fiction in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle: The Brutal Tongue* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 48.

¹¹⁰ Ferguson, p. 49, original emphasis.

femininity as complex and multi-dimensional, and emphasises the important contribution that her versions of femininity and feminism make to nineteenth-century discourses on gender and women's rights.

In defying a specific generic classification, Corelli is able to take a position from 'elsewhere'. In its refusal to be classified, *Romance* shifts between different positions and, in doing so, not only deconstructs expectations of the nineteenth-century woman's novel but also introduces an element of estrangement, that is, the sense of alienation readers feel when their expectations are unsettled. It cannot be described as Spiritualist in the same sense that Phelps's and Marryat's work is, nor as occult fiction even though it employs the same unseen spaces as Theosophy. It is utopian in its anticipation of a better world, but resists the form and structure of the utopian novel. Not only is it positioned 'elsewhere' as a fictional text, *Romance* also uses an imaginary 'elsewhere' in the form of a celestial space that is also a space of deconstruction. In defying generic, temporal and spatial boundaries that generally serve to delineate and categorise writing and human subjectivity, Corelli is also freed to re-imagine female subjectivity. One of her fears was that, with the high regard given to realist fiction, the power and delight of imagination were in danger of disappearing, exacerbated by the modern educational preference for coaching and cramming that resulted in 'the gates of fairyland and romance [being] shut with a bang'.¹¹¹ She might have favoured, instead, to associate her novels with Andrew Lang's description of romance in his 1887 essay, 'Realism and Romance', where he says that romance must stimulate the passions to excite: 'Not for nothing did Nature leave us all savages under our white skins; she has wrought thus that we might have many delights, among others "the joy of adventurous living", and of reading about adventurous living'.¹¹² The delights of adventure and the heights of sensual and spiritual awakening stimulate the senses of the reader as *Romance*'s heroine journeys through the spheres, 'perfectly awake to my sensations', feeling 'waves of electric warmth' and, when touched by the mysterious heavenly figure, sensing 'a touch upon me like a scorching flame' (pp. 174, 175, 197). The rhetoric employed here emphasises the excitement of the romance. The heroine exemplifies both the traditional romantic figure, in the form of a beautiful young woman rescued by a powerful and mysterious older man in the shape of Heliobas, and a woman re-imagined through Corelli's alignment of her with the feminine divine. This lifts the work to a level of creativity that was not usually associated with what would have been considered 'lowbrow' women's writing in the nineteenth century.

¹¹¹ *Free Opinions*, p. 300.

¹¹² Andrew Lang, 'Realism and Romance', *Contemporary Review*, 52 (November 1887), 683-693 (p. 689).

As Brenda Weber points out, women's imaginative powers were not generally assumed to extend beyond the visible world: 'To imagine is to call forth ideas and images that have never before existed. [This] invokes tensions between the gendered components of creation and procreation, grounded in governing cultural investments in sex-dictated behaviour'.¹¹³ To imagine beyond the known world, let alone to extend the imagination into a re-visioning of theology, is clearly a violation of gender boundaries. In order, therefore, to satisfy her readers' desire for romance and to pursue her own spiritual quest, Corelli must fashion her heroine as close as possible to the Victorian ideal of femininity, whilst at the same time re-imagining her in union with the feminine divine. She can then be admired as a role model and guide to those trying to negotiate a path through the materialism and godlessness of the modern world, and as a promise of a more transcendent female subjectivity.

The impression of otherworldliness that is maintained in *Romance* locates the novel alongside other popular fiction that exists, as Kuehn points out, 'in a dreamspace where a utopian gesturing towards an exalted and ineffable otherness helps the reader momentarily transcend the constraints of everyday life'.¹¹⁴ The dreamspace of the celestial spheres, in which emerges the sublimity of spiritual transcendence, allows the heroine to experience a form of freedom that, according to Felski, represents 'a radical alternative to the narrow fictional spaces within which female characters had often been confined'.¹¹⁵ My point is that this dreamspace has its own space-time, in which women's access to movement is no longer constrained by gendered conceptions of space and time, making it possible to break free from the narrow spaces to which Felski refers. The heroine ascends 'higher and higher' into the celestial spheres to meet those inhabitants of the 'Great Circle' to whom is given 'the power of communicating high thought or inspiration'.¹¹⁶ In contesting the spatial borders of the familiar world, the celestial spheres seem almost to merge with her inner self, inducing this sense of transcendence. Corelli's imaginary creation of a utopian space, in which this becomes possible, challenges normative ideas of female subjectivity as well as suggesting infinite possibilities of self-expression.

The terms 'popular sublime' and 'feminine sublime' have both been used to describe Corelli's style. Her ability to represent the transcendent in a way that would appeal to the

¹¹³ Brenda R. Weber, *Women and Literary Celebrity in the Nineteenth Century: The Transatlantic Production of Fame and Gender* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 117.

¹¹⁴ Julia Kuehn, 'The Strategies of the Popular Novel: Marie Corelli's Feminine Sublime and the Aesthetic of the Dream', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 41.6 (2008), 975-993 (p. 990).

¹¹⁵ Felski, p. 134.

¹¹⁶ *Romance*, p. 190.

masses is, for Felski, an example of the ‘popular sublime’.¹¹⁷ Kuehn prefers the ‘feminine sublime’ to portray a narrative strategy that allows Corelli to express the interiority of transcendence.¹¹⁸ She argues that Corelli’s feminine sublime is best understood in the way that Patricia Yaeger employs the term – as a subversive category that resists the usual definition of the sublime as masculine transcendence and domination of the sublime object. Instead, the feminine sublime represents a desire to merge with the sublime object.¹¹⁹ Kuehn suggests that the rhetorical strategies that Corelli uses in her narrative, for example, the turning away from the rational to express herself in a mixture of images from reality and fantasy, are an acknowledgement of the difficulty of representing the feminine sublime in language.¹²⁰ Rhetorical strategies are also required, I argue, because of the difficulty of finding a language to express the sublime experience of inhabiting a different space-time. One example is the strange convergence of the reality of modern electricity which powers the heroine’s journey through time and space, intersecting with the fantastical and transcendent celestial spheres. And Kuehn gives the example of the heroine’s refusal to destroy a world that appears before her towards the culmination of her journey; instead, she reconciles the opposing forces of creation and destruction. The ‘popular’ and ‘feminine’ are two interesting uses of the sublime, particularly the latter in its suggestion of a desire to merge with the sublime object. Another way of considering this, and one that I think is most relevant here, is as a form of merging with the divine which, as Irigaray suggests, is a way of uniting the human with the divine in the realisation of female subjectivity. It is another way for Corelli to assert woman’s choice of fulfilment through a spiritual union rather than through marriage. Her use of the sublime highlights her use of divine imagery to emphasise female spirituality, and her own authorial role as a spiritual light to lead people out of darkness. Heliobas says to the heroine after her journey, ‘Believe in anything or everything miraculous and glorious – the utmost reach of your faith can with difficulty grasp the majestic reality and perfection of everything you can see, desire, or imagine’ (p. 315). This rhetorical strategy of Christian creation strengthens the connection between the human and the divine, suggesting that, for the woman who achieves this union, there is no end to what she might desire or what she might become.

¹¹⁷ Felski, p. 119.

¹¹⁸ Kuehn (2008), p. 981.

¹¹⁹ Patricia Yaeger, ‘Toward a Female Sublime’, in *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Linda Kauffman (New York: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 191-212 (p. 205). From a psychoanalytic perspective, Yaeger sees this merging as a re-writing of the oedipal desire for closeness that the male sublime represses.

¹²⁰ Kuehn (2008), p. 983.

Corelli's employment of the sublime to express the inner experience of transcendence is reinforced by her use of melodramatic language to express the ineffable: 'All my senses seemed to be sharpened and invigorated and braced up to the keenest delight' (p. 121). This is not simply an excessive use of hyperbole, for it is this combination of melodrama and transcendence of the mundane that, as Felski points out, invokes 'a sense of rapture, transport, or self-transcendence that is linked to a perception of the ineffable and other-worldly'.¹²¹ In Peter Brooks's view, melodrama brings a sense of excess to the narrative, and it is through the use of hyperbole and the grandiose, such as the idea of travelling through the celestial spheres, that it is possible to break through the surface of reality to the 'realm of emotional and spiritual reality'.¹²² Writing about the aftermath of the French Revolution, Brooks sees melodrama as a way of re-connecting to the sacred:

It comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern.¹²³

The impact of the French Revolution was felt in Britain too. Faced with political uncertainty, a general disillusionment with organised religion and anxiety about *fin-de-siècle* decadence, Corelli turns to writing in an attempt to re-instil in her readers a revitalised version of authentic Christianity, but one that emphasises the power of the feminine voice. She despairs of clergymen who despoil the 'noble passages' of the Bible by droning forth each Sunday, as she also despairs of congregations 'who profess eagerness to know something of the higher forms of spiritual progress' but look for them elsewhere, for example in 'table-turning, magnetic slate-writing, and other illusive phenomena' (p. xix). Hence Corelli believes that it is now time for 'a new apostle of Christ' (p. xxiii). Her use of melodrama is one way of asserting herself, through her fiction, as that apostle or, to put it differently, of pursuing her spiritual quest. Melodrama is a mode of high emotionalism that dissipates only when virtue has triumphed over villainy. In its optimistic mode, according to Brooks, it ensures that 'the moral imagination can open up the angelic spheres'.¹²⁴ Thus, for Corelli, as Richard Kowalczyk points out, 'One escapes through art and returns to reality with a keener perception of its higher truths'.¹²⁵ As the heroine learns on her journey through the 'angelic spheres', anything is possible including the fulfilment of the desire to be close to God: 'The

¹²¹ Felski, p. 120.

¹²² Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, 2nd edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 4.

¹²³ Brooks, p. 15.

¹²⁴ Brooks, p. 20.

¹²⁵ Richard L. Kowalczyk, 'In Vanished Summertime: Marie Corelli and Popular Culture', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 7.4 (1974), 850-863 (p. 855).

mere fact of *the existence of a desire* clearly indicates an *equally existing capacity* for the *gratification* of that desire' (p. 324, original emphases). Desire is a driving force for Corelli, figured in the rhetoric of spiritual or religious passion, where the language used to describe the experience might also suggest a sensual passion that is beyond words.¹²⁶ Her emphasis on spiritual transcendence subsumes the sensual, avoiding its direct expression, instead merging it with the spiritual.

Corelli's hyperbole and exaggerated, overdramatic form can be read as a way of masking a passion that goes beyond the religious. But it can also be understood as her attempt to distance herself from traditional male-female relationships that imply the dominance of the male. Annette Federico and Kuehn have respectively referred to Corelli's writing as an example of 'the infinite richness of women's writing', and as 'a woman's space and an *écriture féminine*'.¹²⁷ This idea of a feminine language, or feminine writing, is used by Irigaray (and also by Hélène Cixous) to escape the logocentrism of a language that is meant to denote a truth or reason that, from a Christian standpoint, is derived from the word of God and that, thus, reinforces the gender binaries with which we are familiar. Irigaray is interested in the voice that emerges from the female body – a pre-oedipal, pre-symbolic voice. Irigaray's essay, 'When Our Lips Speak Together', is an attempt to find 'an ideological space in which to "speak female" (*parler femme*)'.¹²⁸ In this essay, there are examples of ignoring the logical rules of syntax, and of re-shaping the language of different disciplines from anthropology to commerce to geography, in order to speak female.¹²⁹ Corelli's language – her melodramatic style and use of hyperbole – can be understood as a direct attempt to find her own ideological space in which to represent woman's transcendent experiences. The dramatic, exaggerated and superlative are used to great effect to signify rising above a logocentric language, and the lifting up of the heroine from a world that seeks to define and contain her into a space in which she is free to express herself. Corelli seeks to occupy a different psychic space, represented here by the celestial spheres, in which women and their expressions of subjectivity are defined not in relation to the space occupied by men, with its formal and rational forms of expression, but in a space they can call their own.¹³⁰ Corelli's use of the

¹²⁶ See Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London and New York: Tauris Park Paperbacks, 2002), p. 275, where she discusses the language of passion that is used interchangeably to account for both religious ecstasy and passion and sexual passion.

¹²⁷ Annette Federico, *The Idol of Suburbia: Marie Corelli and Late Victorian Literary Culture* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. x; Kuehn (2004), p. 48.

¹²⁸ Carolyn Burke, 'Introduction to Luce Irigaray's "When Our Lips Speak Together"', *Signs: A Journal of Women's Culture and Society*, 6.1 (1980), 66-79 (p. 67).

¹²⁹ Burke, p. 68.

¹³⁰ Carolyn Burke, 'Irigaray Through the Looking Glass', *Feminist Studies*, 7.2 (1981), 288-306 (p. 296).

language of the sublime, engaging in melodrama and exaggeration, can be read as an attempt to allow for a multitude of effects, through moving to a space in which expression may have diverse meanings. Her transition from the material world to a dreamspace, and to a form of expression that is redolent of transcendence and sublimity, signifies a shift from a pre-defined subjectivity to one that is open and expansive. Corelli creates a space where form and content coalesce – an ‘elsewhere’ space where both author and heroine dream of new possibilities for the expression of female subjectivity.

But *Romance* is not merely a flight of imagination, an escape into another conceptual space. It is a spiritual quest to find unity with a feminine divine, and the sense of wholeness that this provides gives woman a right to her own being. As Carol Christ argues, the spiritual quest undergirds a social quest for freedom and equality in relationships and in society.¹³¹ Corelli engages with contemporary discourses about women, particularly with social issues that affect their freedom and independence. The heroine is a woman who, in seeking help, is also seeking a route to an independent life. That this is a life ultimately directed by God does not detract from the ability to exercise free will: ‘Our WILL is positively unfettered; it is a rudder put freely into our hands, and with it we can steer *wherever we choose*’ (p. 324, original emphasis). She exerts the right to an independent existence, in which the desire for happiness is not invested in marriage but in the ultimate union between flesh and spirit when she finally encounters her twin spirit. Women, Corelli argues, will be more than ‘the vessels of man’s desire’.¹³² Her focus on spiritual union as the ultimate goal is, to all intents and purposes, a rejection of marriage as women’s true fulfilment. This sentiment is echoed in New Woman writing which views marriage as an obstacle to fulfilment through other means.¹³³ Corelli’s belief in women’s role in the moral and spiritual evolution of humankind resonates in the writing of other women, from Swiney who asserts that the influence of ‘feminine virtues’ will become ‘the leaven of true civilisation’, to those New Woman novelists who believed that they, in their sexual and maternal roles, held the key to the evolutionary future of the human race.¹³⁴

There is nothing straightforward, however, in suggesting an alignment between Corelli and New Woman writers. Corelli tends to adopt the negative position enjoyed by much of the press, referring to New Women in *The Sorrows of Satan* as those ‘unnatural hybrids of no-

¹³¹ Carol P. Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (Boston: Beacon, 1980), p. 11.

¹³² *Free Opinions*, p. 171.

¹³³ For an example, see Caird’s essay on marriage.

¹³⁴ Swiney, p. 72;

sex'.¹³⁵ But there are some commonalities: for example, a belief in the power of authorship to transform the moral climate and to redeem the individual.¹³⁶ According to Nickianne Moody, Sibyl in *Sorrows* is Corelli's 'most identifiable New Woman character'.¹³⁷ She is portrayed as a self-centred, sensuous woman of lax morals, a conflicted woman who falls victim to the power of the more decadent examples of female writing. Having read one lascivious and daring novel written by a woman, 'the insidious abomination of it filtered into my mind and stayed there'.¹³⁸ As she moves towards death there is a gathering recognition that she has been manipulated by 'the literary teachers of [her] time' who have taught her that there is no harm in free love or marital infidelity.¹³⁹ Moody maintains that 'Sibyl is ambiguously positioned at the centre of conflicting interpretations of femininity'.¹⁴⁰ On the one hand, Mavis Clare's sympathy for Sibyl suggests that women may be pardoned for having been seduced by the power of fiction and by a world in which women have become mere commodities; on the other hand, punishment inevitably awaits those who fail to resist these modern forms of seduction. The power of the pen for Corelli, and other women writers, lay not only in pre-empting women's corruption, but also in demonstrating that there were alternative and more fulfilling ways for women to live their lives. Corelli was vehemently opposed to female suffrage, and nor would she have endorsed the principle of free love proposed by some New Woman writers. But what they do have in common is a belief in the utopian dream of a world in which women's lives are transformed. Both Corelli and the New Woman writers address the socio-political issues of the day, but where New Woman fiction often confronts these issues more directly through demands for social, economic and political change, Corelli's *Romance* seeks a form of individual female transformation that is primarily spiritual, re-visioning female subjectivity in a more transcendent form.

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In *Romance*, the celestial spheres, with their own spatio-temporal configuration, serve to challenge the borders between masculine and feminine, human and divine, matter and spirit. *Romance* and the journey through the spheres represent a 'spiritual quest': 'a woman's awakening to the depths of her soul and her position in the universe'.¹⁴¹ Once women start to

¹³⁵ *The Sorrows of Satan*, p. 178.

¹³⁶ See Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), in which Tompkins argues that women's fiction can be read as 'a monumental effort to reorganise culture from a woman's point of view' (p. 124).

¹³⁷ Nickianne Moody, 'Moral Uncertainty and the Afterlife: Explaining the Popularity of Marie Corelli's Early Novels', *Women's Writing*, 13.2 (2006), 188-205 (p. 198).

¹³⁸ *Sorrows*, p. 324, original emphasis.

¹³⁹ *Sorrows*, p. 334.

¹⁴⁰ Moody, p. 200.

¹⁴¹ Christ, p. 11.

name their own experiences, according to Christ, they begin to realise that these are framed by a male divinity. Women's spiritual quest is for a sense of their own being: it is a quest for 'a wholeness in which the oppositions between body and soul, nature and spirit or freedom, rationality and emotion are overcome'.¹⁴² In her quest for a sense of wholeness, Corelli deconstructs the idea of male creativity and genius, re-visions the divine in feminine form, and presents female subjectivity as potentially transcendent. The musician-heroine in *Romance* personifies the female artist as embodying a divinely inspired spiritual genius. Her artistic inspiration is attributed to 'the subtle influence and incontestable, though mysterious, authority exercised upon our lives by higher intelligences than [our] own – intelligences unseen, unknown, but felt' (p. 3). Corelli resists the myth of womanhood that defined woman by her biology and that fed into the binary depictions of woman as virgin or whore, docile wife or angry feminist. Dissolving these binaries, she creates her own version of femininity – a woman of beauty, purity and intelligence whose genius stems from her identification with an ideal in the form of the feminine divine. In deconstructing notions of femininity, genius and divinity, Corelli makes an important contribution to contemporary discourses on gender, religion and spirituality. *Romance* is the beginning of her attempt to 'answer the ontological question "What is a woman?"', a question that absorbed the attention of many other women writers who were prepared to challenge and subvert Victorian gender ideology.¹⁴³ Corelli's particular contribution is to present a unique and radical re-imagining of femininity and female subjectivity that is both complex and multiple.

The conjuring of the celestial spheres, in which past, present and future merge into an Edenic world that both recaptures the mythology of the feminine divine and incorporates a spirit of reincarnation in its promise of a transformed future for women, represents an example of what Kowalczyk suggests was Corelli's overriding belief: 'that the artist's powers shaped and sustained the existence of ideals which could not endure in modern life'.¹⁴⁴ *Romance* is the first of Corelli's 'electric creed' novels that express a common concern for the loss of soul and instinct in the face of rationalism and scientific materialism. In *Modernities* (1913), a collection of essays on contemporary figures by the English lawyer and writer, Horace Samuel, Corelli figures alongside notable European thinkers of the nineteenth century, including Nietzsche, Stendhal, Heine and Wedekind. What they all have in common, according to Samuel, is 'a spirit of energy, of fearlessness in analysis, whose sole *raison*

¹⁴² Christ, p. 26.

¹⁴³ Federico, p. 135.

¹⁴⁴ Kowalczyk, p. 851.

d'être and whose sole ideal is actual life itself".¹⁴⁵ Samuel calls Corelli 'an authoress keenly alive to the social problems of the day', and comments on the voices of angels whispering to her 'to leave the world a little better than she found it'.¹⁴⁶ He continues:

Her *Weltanschauung*, broad, plain, simple, touched at once with a high consciousness of her ethical mission and a ruthless observation for all the sins and follies of the age, is the authentic and spontaneous outcome of her own unique psychology.¹⁴⁷

In spite of the derision and adverse criticism that she endured during her lifetime, Corelli remained true to her cause of exposing the sins and follies of the modern world and offering an ethical alternative. This involved projecting a particular image of womanhood, one that combined femininity with genius and divinity, as a form of moral and spiritual guide into the future. In the invention of this example of womanhood in *Romance*, Corelli creates someone with the potential of creativity and multiplicity.

It is the space-time of the celestial spheres, divested of gendered associations with space and time, which enables this re-visioning of a feminine divine and female genius. No longer are women associated only with the empty void of space disconnected from history and progress. Space and time take on different meanings as Corelli's heroine travels through a celestial space-time that ascends to evermore transcendent levels of consciousness and perfection. As Darwinian theory pointed to man as the highest animal form in the evolutionary chain, so Corelli charts the evolution of the soul through time and space to the highest astral plane. In her journey through the spheres, *Romance's* heroine awakens to a vision of her creativity and divinity. In this imaginary space inspired by a mixture of heterodox religious beliefs, evolutionary theory and the physics of electricity, Corelli explores a new configuration of womanhood in all her multiplicity. In re-defining what it means to be a woman, she combines the traditional with the unorthodox and radical to reveal her creation. In delineating the nature of genius, she rejects its association with the male and with debility, instead imagining a feminine genius that is bracketed with strength, beauty and divinity. Her deconstruction of the nineteenth-century idea of genius to offer a transcendent version serves as a glimpse of what might be possible for women. The heroine's genius in her union with the divine is to mediate God's message and to pursue her spiritual quest. Corelli's genius as an author is to transcend the male world of publishing and criticism, in which popular fiction was often disparaged, to appeal directly to a readership that wanted hope and comfort in the face of disillusionment and despair and, in so doing, pursue her own spiritual quest. *A Romance of*

¹⁴⁵ Horace B. Samuel, *Modernities* (New York: Dutton, 1913), p. vii.

¹⁴⁶ Samuel, p. 117.

¹⁴⁷ Samuel, p. 133.

Two Worlds both reprises female mythology and presents a forward-looking feminist agenda. It offers a vision of two worlds – the mundane world where women’s lives are pre-determined, and an imaginary dreamspace in which the evolutionary possibilities for women take the form of ever-ascending levels of reincarnation. In the next chapter, in which I discuss Hinton’s hyperspatial philosophy and its implications for female subjectivity, this vision of another world is replicated in four-dimensional form but to the same effect, the experience of a fourth dimension offering a more expansive worldview than that of the mundane three-dimensional world.

CHAPTER 4

HINTON'S HYPERSPATIAL FEMININE¹

This chapter explores another imaginary literary space – the fourth dimension as depicted by the English mathematician, Charles Howard Hinton, in two novellas published together as *Stella and an Unfinished Communication* (1895).² These novellas form part of a larger project, published in two volumes of *Scientific Romances* in 1886 and 1896, in which Hinton develops his hyperspace philosophy.³ In this chapter I use the terms ‘fourth dimension’ and ‘hyperspace’ interchangeably. ‘Hyperspace’ is a useful concept because, as I suggest in the Introduction, the ‘elsewhere’ space, the central organising theme of this thesis, is a kind of generic hyperspace that I apply to literary texts. For Phelps and Marryat, it is the additional dimension or liminal space that links the world of the living with that of the dead. For Corelli, it takes the form of celestial spheres; and, in the next chapter, utopian space assumes a hyperspatial form in its ‘no’ place world of hopes and dreams. In this chapter, I argue that Hinton’s depiction of hyperspace, another ‘elsewhere’ space, challenges not only contemporary scientific epistemology and the understanding of space and time, but also a Victorian gender ideology that delimited women’s self-expression and access to transcendence. I also consider how, in re-envisioning the space occupied by woman, Hinton places himself alongside other nineteenth-century women novelists engaged in re-thinking female identity and subjectivity.

The idea of hyperspace connected many diverse aspects of cultural life from Spiritualism to science and religion. The 1883 publication in the *Cheltenham Ladies’ College Magazine* of Hinton’s first essay on space, ‘What is The Fourth Dimension?’, was seductively subtitled, ‘Ghosts Explained’, making an explicit connection between hyperspace and the spectral. As discussed earlier, both Spiritualism and Theosophy appropriated the fourth dimension in support of their beliefs. It was championed by the Theosophist, Charles Leadbeater, to explain the astral plane: in Blacklock’s opinion, ‘[Leadbeater] was Hinton’s most prolific propagandist at the fin de siècle’.⁴ In *The Unseen Universe* (1875), the Scottish physicists, Balfour Stewart and Peter Guthrie Tait, used hyperspace physics to explain the

¹ Parts of this chapter have appeared in a different form in my essay, ‘Female Transcendence: Charles Howard Hinton and Hyperspace Fiction’, *Victorian Network*, 7.1 (Summer 2016), 83-106.

² Charles Howard Hinton, *Stella and an Unfinished Communication: Studies of the Unseen* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1895).

³ Charles Howard Hinton, *Scientific Romances*, First and Second Series (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1886, 1896).

⁴ Blacklock (2018), p. 164.

concept of immortality, whilst the German physicist, Johann Zöllner, used it to make sense of the strange happenings in the séances of Henry Slade.⁵ The English journalist, Spiritualist and activist, William Stead, used the term ‘throughth’ to describe the marvels of a four-dimensional world: ‘In the new world which opens up before us life becomes infinitely more divine and miraculous than it has ever been conceived by the wildest flights of imagination of the poet’.⁶ As Rosemary Jann suggests, ‘Like so many rival empires, Christians, spiritualists, and scientists each wished to colonise higher space for their own exclusive use’.⁷ Steven Connor suggests that the ‘truths’ of geometry were both empirical and transcendental: ‘Geometry was the meeting point of mind and world, spirit and matter, sense and intellect, fact and truth, the practical and theoretical, the unextended and the extended, the local and the universal’.⁸ Christians could appropriate its spiritual implications to evidence the afterlife; scientists could use it to speculate on new forms of scientific and mathematical knowledge; and the Spiritualist medium seized on the fourth dimension to explain the strange phenomena of the séance room. In *Stella and an Unfinished Communication*, Hinton uses his hyperspace philosophy to give us a glimpse of a universe expanded in its dimensionality and in the subjective experiences of its inhabitants.

In the preface to *Stella and an Unfinished Communication*, Hinton tells the reader that these stories dwell on the ‘wider bearing’ of speculations on the ‘Higher World’, that is, the world of hyperspace. In order to study the Higher World, the reader needs ‘the instrument of observation, the intuition of higher space, the perception of higher matter’.⁹ As he states in *A New Era of Thought* (1888), once this is acquired, ‘a path is opened by using that very truth which, when first stated by Kant, seemed to close the mind within such fast limits’.¹⁰ Our experience of space is subject to being in space, but it is ‘not limited as we at first think’ (p. 7). ‘Stella’ explores the interiority of a hyperspatial higher consciousness to reveal more expansive possibilities for subjectivity. ‘Stella’ tells the story of a young woman made

⁵ Justin St. Clair, ‘Borrowed Time: Thomas Pynchon’s *Against the Day* and the Victorian Fourth Dimension’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 38.1 (2011), 46-66 (p. 56); C. W. Leadbeater, *The Fourth Dimension* (Chicago: Theosophical Press, 1918); Balfour Stewart and P. G. Tait, *The Unseen Universe, or, Physical Speculations on a Future State* (London: 1875); J. C. Friedrich Zöllner, ‘On Space of Four Dimensions’, *The Quarterly Journal of Science*, 58 (April, 1878), 227-237.

⁶ William Stead, ‘Throughth: or On The Eve of the Fourth Dimension’, *Review of Reviews*, (April 1893), pp. 426-432 (p. 427).

⁷ Rosemary Jann, ‘Christianity, Spiritualism, and the Fourth Dimension’, *Victorian Newsletter*, 70 (1986), 24-28 (p. 27).

⁸ Steven Connor, ‘Afterword’, in *The Victorian Supernatural*, ed. by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 258-277 (p. 262).

⁹ Hinton (1895), n. p. Further references to *Stella and an Unfinished Communication* are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁰ Charles Howard Hinton, *A New Era of Thought* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1888), p. 7. Further references follow quotations in the text.

invisible by the reduction of her coefficient of refraction to one by her uncle, Michael Graham, whose intention is to reveal the true nature of subjectivity in the higher world.¹¹ Although the fourth dimension is never mentioned, Stella's invisibility is a metaphor for her hyperspatial existence. When her uncle dies, mid-experiment, the executor of his will, a young man called Hugh Churton, meets Stella, falls in love with her and persuades her to marry him. The story is narrated by a friend to whom Churton recounts the story from memory and notes. Described as a man with 'even more than the average English incapacity for ideas' (p. 107), and steeped in Victorian science and gender conventions, Churton fails to appreciate the insights gained by Stella in hyperspace, and finally persuades her to return to her visible form. This represents a happy outcome for him but not for Stella, who says at the end, 'I cannot be quite happy often' (p. 106). 'An Unfinished Communication' provides further insight into the experience of hyperspatial subjectivity. In this story, the male narrator comes across a notice on a door that says, 'Mr. Smith, Unlearner' (p. 110). Fascinated by the idea that Mr. Smith might be able to help him unlearn, or forget, his past, the narrator goes in search of the Unlearner only to find, on meeting him, that it is not forgetting that the Unlearner promises, but the unlearning of linear time in order to 'form a higher intuition by means of which you can observe more' (p. 132). The narrator's near-death experience by drowning is an allegory for entering hyperspace, where past and present collide, where he glimpses eternity and experiences being part of a wider consciousness. In both stories, the male protagonists struggle initially with the idea of a fourth dimension of space, and find it difficult to make sense of the insights offered by this higher world. In contrast, the female protagonists' hyperspatial experiences enable the transcendence of a world in which their position in time and space has only served to constrain them. The space-time they experience dissolves the division between gendered space and time, thus destabilising other gendered dualities such as spirit/body and transcendence/immanence.

In the end papers of both *Scientific Romances* and *A New Era of Thought* some of the more favourable reviews of Hinton's work are reproduced. 'What is the Fourth Dimension?' is described by the *Pall Mall Gazette*, a paper that was at that time devoted to investigative journalism, as a clear treatise that brings readers 'panting, but delighted' to an at least momentary faith in the fourth dimension.¹² It has 'a boldness of speculation and a power of conceiving and expressing even the inconceivable, which rouses one's faculties like a

¹¹ When light enters a substance, it is deflected at an angle. By reducing Stella's coefficient of refraction to one, Graham has ensured that when light enters Stella's body it does not bend, thus making her invisible.

¹² 'Ghosts Explained', *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 25, 1885, p. 5.

tonic'.¹³ *Scientific Romances* grew in popularity in the 1880s, with favourable reviews in both *Nature*, an important scientific journal, and *Mind*, a journal devoted to exploring whether psychology could be deemed a natural science. A review of *A New Era of Thought* by the *Literary World*, a paper for the world of publishing and readers, discusses Hinton's visualisation of the fourth dimension through the tesseract (a four-dimensional analogue of a cube). The *Literary World* calls it 'a powerful mental gymnastic' in which Hinton promises 'a complete system of four-dimensional thought – Mechanical, Scientific, and Aesthetic'.¹⁴ Of the revised third edition of *A New Era*, the *Westminster Review*, a liberal paper supporting free thought, says, 'The book is not one for triflers; but it is not one to be despised. The author was not mad, he was an inspired speculative mathematician'.¹⁵ A review of 'What is the Fourth Dimension?' by *Mind* describes it as 'a very suggestive and well-written speculation', which urges the supplementing of mechanical science with 'a just consideration of the constitution of the knowing faculty and the conditions of knowledge'.¹⁶ But a later review in *Mind* by Bertrand Russell is less than complimentary about the 1906 publication of *The Fourth Dimension*. Here, Russell accuses Hinton of speculation that completely emancipates the reader from the real world.¹⁷ Overall, however, reviews suggest a positive reception of Hinton's *Scientific Romances*, and also indicate that his speculations on hyperspace were considered neither novel nor eccentric. Compare reviews of Hinton's texts with the reception of Corelli's *Romance*. The *Quarterly Review* in 1898 comments on the amazing fact 'that any reader should have taken *A Romance of Two Worlds* seriously'; with the *Westminster Review* in 1906 describing Corelli as writing for the unthinking classes, 'a symbol of our superficial generation', and 'a social menace'.¹⁸ Both authors were writing highly speculative and imaginative texts, and yet it is the male Hinton who is described as bold and inspired, whereas Corelli is dismissed as superficial and not worth reading. Such was the highly gendered and discriminatory context of the publishing world at the end of the nineteenth century.

Hinton was only one amongst many nineteenth-century thinkers who were interested in the potential of a fourth dimension, although Linda Dalrymple Henderson calls him 'the

¹³ It is worth bearing in mind that the *Pall Mall Gazette* was edited by William Stead, the man who wrote about 'Throughth', or the spiritualist manifestation of the fourth dimension.

¹⁴ Rudolf Rucker, 'Introduction', *Speculations on the Fourth Dimension: Selected Writings of Charles Howard Hinton* (New York: Dover, 1980), p. xii, quoting from the end papers of *Scientific Romances*, 2 vols (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1884, 1885; and *An New Era of Thought* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1888).

¹⁵ Anon, 'Theology and Philosophy', *Westminster Review*, 175.1 (1911), 104-111 (p. 111).

¹⁶ 'Review of *Scientific Romances*, I, "What is the Fourth Dimension?" (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1884)', *Mind*, 10.39 (1885), p. 467.

¹⁷ Bertrand Russell, 'Review of *The Fourth Dimension*', *Mind*, 13.52 (1904), pp. 573-574.

¹⁸ 'A Romance of Two Worlds', *Quarterly Review*, 188.376 (1898), p. 310; Peril, 'A Note upon Marie Corelli', *Westminster Review*, 166.6 (1906), 680-692 (pp. 682, 692).

first true hyperspace philosopher'.¹⁹ The Russian mathematician, Nikolai Lobachevskii, was speculating on non-Euclidean geometry in the 1820s. Georg Riemann and James Sylvester, German and English mathematicians, lectured on n -dimensional space to audiences in Europe in the mid-century. At much the same time, German physicist, Hermann von Helmholtz, and Scottish scientist, James Clerk Maxwell, were working on the implications of extra spatial dimensions for physics. Duncan Sommerville cites 1800 papers on n -dimensional geometry in his 1911 *Bibliography of Non-Euclidean Geometry*, with about three-quarters of them having been written in the nineteenth century.²⁰ Interest in Hinton's work on the fourth dimension spread to Europe and Russia; and Hinton engaged in a lengthy correspondence about his philosophy with William James. His work was also of interest to the American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois.²¹ For Spiritualists and occultists, the fourth dimension became 'the favoured plaything', and for novelists it fuelled the literary imagination.²² Amongst many literary examples are Edwin Abbott's *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884), H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), 'The Plattner Story' (1896) and *The Invisible Man* (1897), George MacDonald's *Lilith* (1895), Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's 'The Hall Bedroom' (1905), and Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer's *The Inheritors* (1905). Wells's *The Invisible Man* may have been suggested by Hinton's 'Stella'.

Contemporary literary criticism on Hinton is fairly limited. Deanna Kreisel considers the impact of four-dimensional spatiality in her analysis of the rhetoric of privacy and domesticity in Hinton's 'A Plane World' (1886).²³ Mark Blacklock comments on Hinton's place amongst several nineteenth-century writers interested in the fourth dimension,

¹⁹ Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), p. 127.

²⁰ D. M'L. Y. Sommerville, *Bibliography of Non-Euclidean Geometry including the Theory of Parallels, the Foundations of Geometry and Space of n Dimensions* (London: Harrison, 1911), cited in Alfred M. Bork, 'The Fourth Dimension in Nineteenth-Century Physics', *Isis*, 55.3 (1964), 326-338 (p. 326).

²¹ Elizabeth Throesch, *Before Einstein: The Fourth Dimension in the Fin-de-Siècle in Literature and Culture* (London: Anthem Press, 2017), p. 4. See pp. 107-131 for Hinton's correspondence with William James; and pp. 133-167 for the influence of Hinton on H. G. Wells. Both James and Du Bois can be considered as on the margins of contemporary philosophical thought and as challenging conventional ideas. James was a respected psychologist and philosopher, but his involvement in psychical research and belief in consciousness that extended beyond the living world was considered unconventional, if not misguided, by some. Du Bois, the first African-American to become a Professor of History, Sociology and Economics, was known for his civil rights activism and his theory of double consciousness. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), he describes the two types of consciousness of African-Americans, the one perceived through the lens of racial prejudice, and the other that is their own. Du Bois believed that because of this double consciousness, African-Americans have their own privileged epistemological perspective from both the outside and inside of a white world. James's epistemology was shaped by a similar belief in dual consciousness, an individual consciousness that is one small part and shaped by a larger cosmic consciousness. In a similar vein, Hinton's hyperspace philosophy suggests that subjectivity is shaped by the consciousness of self as either three- or four-dimensional.

²² Mark Blacklock, 'The Higher Spaces of the Late Nineteenth-Century Novel', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 17 (2013), p. 3 <http://19.bbk.ac.uk> [accessed 5 June 2014].

²³ Deanna K. Kreisel, 'The Discreet Charm of Abstraction: Hyperspace Worlds and Victorian Geometry', *Victorian Studies*, 56.3 (2014), 398-410.

describing his texts as occupying ‘a hybrid terrain between self-help thought experiments, scientific romances, and mathematical and physical treatises’.²⁴ In his monograph on the emergence of the fourth dimension, to which Hinton is central, Blacklock acknowledges him as ‘arguably the least well-known yet most influential theorist of higher space in the late-nineteenth century’.²⁵ Bruce Clark considers the intersection of thermodynamics with the fourth dimension in Hinton’s allegorical tale, ‘The Persian King’, published in the first volume of *Scientific Romances*, suggesting that Hinton was ‘too enmeshed in his scientific and philosophical agendas to cut his texts loose as pure fictions’.²⁶ His stories serve to illustrate his philosophy: Rudolf Rucker identifies ‘Stella’ as an early example of science fiction, one which has the didactic purpose of spreading his philosophy of openness and altruism, and ‘An Unfinished Communication’ as a vehicle for his ideas about two-dimensional time.²⁷ Elizabeth Throesch is the scholar who has written most extensively on the literary value of Hinton’s hyperspace philosophy. I am indebted to her work, particularly her insightful criticism of the eponymous heroine in ‘Stella’ as subject to a phallogocentric framing by the men in her life; and her identification of the strong influence on Hinton of the philosophies of Gustav Fechner, Friedrich Nietzsche and William James in both novellas. In this chapter, however, my interest is specifically in how the representation of women in Hinton’s two novellas is shaped by his conceptualisation of four-dimensional space, and how the interconnection between space-time and the female body serves to confirm Grosz’s notion that subjectivity is inextricably interwoven with the experience of the body in space. In ‘Stella’, for example, space and time are experienced differently by Hugh and Stella. Hugh experiences a traditional separation of space (female) from time (male) that situates woman as a refuge or home for him to retreat to after making his mark on the world. Hinton’s fluid and interconnected space-time allows Stella a different perspective on human subjectivity and agency. The dissolution of the borders between space and time acts simultaneously to dissolve the gender boundaries that have restricted women to stasis and passivity, and men to independence, autonomy and progress. I am also interested in how Hinton’s representation of space-time raises the possibility of a feminine space in a way suggestive of Irigaray’s desire for a space women can call their own. In ‘Stella’, his hyperspatial allegory in which the

²⁴ Blacklock (2013), p. 7.

²⁵ Blacklock (2018), p. 10.

²⁶ Bruce Clark, ‘A Scientific Romance: Thermodynamics and the Fourth Dimension in Charles Howard Hinton’s “The Persian King”’, *Weber Studies*, 14 (1997) <http://www.altx.com/ebr/w%28ebr%29/essays/clarke.html> [accessed 24 February 2013], penultimate para.

²⁷ Rucker, p. viii.

eponymous heroine finds herself in a space of her own, Hinton re-considers Victorian ideas of women's visibility and their alignment with nature.

Hinton's Hyperspace Philosophy

Charles Howard Hinton was born in 1853, the son of surgeon, James Hinton, better known for his advocacy of free love and philosophy of altruism. The theme of altruism permeates the younger Hinton's notion of casting off the self, the altruistic and selfless approach necessary for experiencing hyperspace. Throesch emphasises the influence of the themes of 'lawbreaking' and 'service' in James Hinton's philosophy – 'lawbreaking' referring to the need to remove artificial barriers, such as an adherence to laws of physics or geometry, that restrict human activity; and 'service' as an altruistic form.²⁸ Again, these themes are threaded through his son's philosophy: his hyperspace philosophy breaks the laws of scientific epistemology, with the setting aside of self-interest an intrinsic part of it. James Hinton's altruism was linked to his belief that the experience of both pleasure and pain were essential to human life and spirituality. In a rather bizarre move, made in order to reconcile his ideas about pleasure and pain with his belief in self-control as an essential quality in civilised man, he promoted a system of polygamy as a means to control sexual desire. Whether or not this was a part of his philosophy that the younger Hinton espoused is debatable, but there was a notorious and life-changing event in the latter's life when he was sentenced to three days for bigamy. According to his second, bigamous wife, Hinton undertook this marriage in order to legitimise their children, which could possibly be interpreted as an altruistic, although somewhat wrong-minded, act.

Hinton's writings reflect the cultural times in which he lived. Educated at Oxford University, he attended lectures on Kant by the philosopher, Thomas Hill Green, and on aesthetics by art critic, John Ruskin, who was also a friend of his father's. Throesch suggests that Hinton may have been particularly influenced by Ruskin's views on the relationship between the sciences and the arts and his writings on imagination.²⁹ Hinton's *Scientific Romances* certainly reflect the power of romancing, or imagination, in building bridges between science and fiction. He knew Havelock Ellis, who was particularly drawn to James Hinton's philosophy, as was Ellis's wife, Edith, whose book, *The Modern Seers* (1910) eulogised him.³⁰ Howard Hinton also had connections with the Men and Women's Club, a society for radicals formed by English mathematician, Karl Pearson; the Fellowship of the

²⁸ Throesch, p. 32.

²⁹ Throesch, p. 37.

³⁰ Heilmann (2000), p. 109.

New Life (later the Fabian Society); and the Metaphysical Society which boasted many famous members, including Huxley, Ruskin and the British physicist, John Tyndall.³¹

The young Hinton trained as a mathematician and taught in a number of schools whilst developing his hyperspace philosophy.³² His first publication on the fourth dimension appeared as an essay, 'What is the Fourth Dimension?', in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1880. A further nine texts, including 'Stella' and 'An Unfinished Communication', were published between 1884 and 1886 and comprise the two series of *Scientific Romances* published in 1886 and 1896.³³ *A New Era of Thought* appeared in 1888, the first part written by Hinton himself, with the second part, explicating the details of his hyperspace exercises, completed after his death by his friends, Alicia Boole and H. John Falk. Following the discovery of his bigamy, Hinton and his family fled to Japan. After a spell there, he went to America, where he taught at Princeton, and where he also invented a mechanical pitcher in the form of a baseball gun. From teaching, he took up a position at Washington's Naval Observatory, and from there became an examiner of chemical patents. He died in 1907 following a cerebral haemorrhage at a dinner at Washington's Society of Philanthropic Inquiry, just after the assembled company had raised a glass to 'female philosophers' – an apt ending, perhaps, for a man whose vision of a higher world suggested one in which women's potential might be realised.³⁴ His final book, *An Episode in Flatland: or how a Plane Folk Discovered the Third Dimension* (1907) was in press when he died.

Hinton's work needs to be contextualised within a culture in which relativism was beginning to dominate thinking. The idea that all areas of knowledge were somehow interconnected and therefore relative to each other was to disrupt notions of absolute truth and objectivity. The view that all things were relative impacted on physics, destabilising established theories of space and time and intersecting with many other fields of discourse, including those of politics and social justice. As Herbert points out, 'Relativity was in this sense not so much discovered as a scientific property of nature as it was implanted there by a deeply moralised scientific imagination'.³⁵ At the centre of this notion of relativity was the questioning of the absolute truths that had framed an understanding of the universe and time and space; and the recognition that all knowledge was connected through a network that

³¹ Blacklock (2018), pp. 108-109.

³² Rucker (1980) provides a helpful overview of Hinton's life and his philosophy as it developed through his writings.

³³ Hinton's publisher was Swan Sonnenschein, known for their intellectual eclecticism. They published a range of philosophy and science as well as works by radical thinkers like Karl Marx and George Bernard Shaw.

³⁴ Rucker p. xvi.

³⁵ Herbert, p. xiv.

spread from evolutionary science and political economy to Spiritualism, permeating all aspects of life. Herbert reprises the principle of the first-ever expounder of relativity, Protagoras the Sophist – ‘nothing is one thing by itself’, like Katherine Hayles’s concept of a ‘cosmic web’ in which all things are interconnected.³⁶ And it is in this way that we can make sense of Hinton’s speculations about the fourth dimension being not just about abstract geometry, but also intersecting with a phenomenology of hyperspace and the nature of consciousness and subjectivity, and with a philosophy based on principles of altruism and morality.

Hinton recognised the difficulties facing him in trying to make real an abstract mathematical concept. His work suggests, however, that he was interested less in the geometric possibilities of the fourth dimension than in its association with higher forms of consciousness and an ethical way of life. To be able to intuit hyperspace was to experience higher consciousness. In common with other scientists, including Sylvester who believed that it was conceivable ‘to imagine beings capable of realising space of four or a greater number of dimensions’, and Helmholtz, Hinton was keen to push the boundaries of knowledge by challenging three-dimensional geometry.³⁷ His essays and lessons on the fourth dimension are quite dense and difficult for the non-mathematical mind to comprehend. In using different forms of exposition, including diagrams and his instrumental cubes, he clearly wanted to help the reader make sense of hyperspace by asking them to set aside any preconceived ideas about space. In his early essay, ‘What is the Fourth Dimension?’, Hinton writes, ‘It is the object of these pages to show that, by supposing away certain limitations of the fundamental conditions of existence as we know it, a state of being can be conceived with powers far transcending our own’.³⁸ In arguing for the existence of a fourth dimension, he suggests that just as a two-dimensional being would find it difficult to perceive a three-dimensional object, so is it difficult for us to imagine a four-dimensional being. It is not impossible but depends on us ridding ourselves of pre-conceived limitations: ‘Why, then, should not the four-dimensional beings be ourselves, and our successive states the passing of them through the three-dimensional space to which our consciousness is confined?’ (p. 18). In other words, let us assume that we live in a four-dimensional world. In *A New Era of Thought* (1888), he proposes ‘a complete system of four-dimensional thought – mechanics, science, and art’, the necessary condition of which is ‘that the mind acquire the power of using four-dimensional

³⁶ Herbert, p. 4; Hayles, pp. 9-10.

³⁷ Blacklock, p. 1.

³⁸ Charles Howard Hinton, ‘What is the Fourth Dimension?’, in *Scientific Romances First Series* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1886), pp. 3-32 (p. 4).

space as it now does three-dimensional' (p. 86). Accompanying his later publication in 1904, *The Fourth Dimension*, Hinton's publishers offered for sale a set of multi-coloured cubes to assist the reader in understanding and experiencing the fourth dimension (figure 1).³⁹

The moral and ethical basis of Hinton's philosophy lies in the requirement to set aside self-regard and replace it with a 'thorough-going altruism':

Pure altruism means so to bury the mind in the thing known that all particular relations of one's self pass away. The altruistic knowledge of the heavens would be, to feel that the stars were vast bodies, and that I am moving rapidly (p. 92).

Dispensing with established ideas that have shaped the way we live and setting aside self-regard is what Hinton means by 'casting out the self'.⁴⁰ It is because of our affinity to a particular way of understanding the world that our true vision is hampered: 'One's own

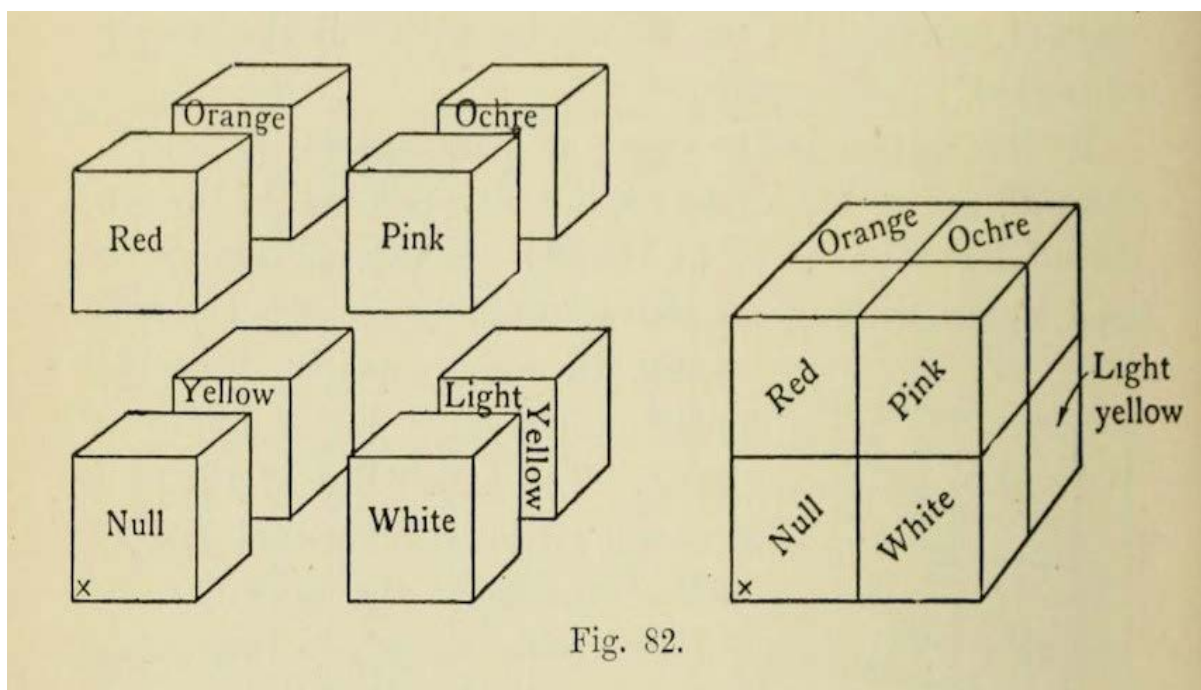


Figure 1. Charles Howard Hinton, *The Fourth Dimension* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1906), p. 140.

³⁹ Hinton was not the first mathematician to offer his readers a set of instruments by which to learn geometrical propositions. At the end of William Ritchie's 1833 textbook, *Principles of Geometry Familiarly Illustrated, and Applied to a Variety of Useful Purposes, Designed for the Instruction of Young Persons* (London: Taylor, 1883), is an advert for geometric instruments to aid the learner. See Alice Jenkins, *Space and the 'March of Mind': Literature and the Physical Sciences in Britain, 1815-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 174-175.

⁴⁰ Charles Howard Hinton, 'Casting Out the Self', in *Scientific Romances*, pp. 205-222 (p. 211). Further references follow quotations in the text.

particular relation to any object, or group of objects, presents itself to us as qualities affecting those objects – influencing our feeling with regard to them, and making us perceive something in them which is not really there’ (p. 210). He instructs his readers to divest themselves of spatial relations that inform a particular viewpoint and sense of identity associated with self-interest, exhorting them to move into a space of selflessness and altruism. The term ‘altruism’ was coined by French philosopher, Auguste Comte in *System of Positive Polity* (1851) to describe a quality exclusive to the human race, a sign of being ‘of a nobler and more beautiful kind’.⁴¹ James Hinton applied Comte’s understanding of altruism as an innate characteristic to his ideas about social justice.⁴² He believed that altruism could be learned from the study of nature, which is much more than what we apprehend from it. Nature teaches us that all things are interconnected, and Hinton believed that nature was the manifest expression of the spiritual world. His philosophy influenced his son’s depiction of femininity in different ways. The intersection of a particular form of female knowing associated with nature and instinct in Howard Hinton’s work is similar to his father’s concept of feminised genius; he believed women to be the intuitive, natural gender: ‘Genius has a woman’s way of seeing (intuition) on a wider subject [...] men of genius are the women of the race’.⁴³ James Hinton’s theme of self-sacrifice permeates Graham’s philosophy in ‘Stella’; and his theory of the unity of spirit and nature is personified in the strange manifestation of a female figure during the near-death experience of the narrator in ‘An Unfinished Communication’. These two novellas engage with contemporary discourses on philosophy and science; and they employ the literary imagination to explore the gaps that appear when women are excluded from these discourses.

‘Stella’

As Hinton points out in the Preface to *Stella and an Unfinished Communication*, in this volume, ‘One line, one feature, of the landscape of the land to which these thoughts lead, and only one, has been touched upon’ (n. p.). These novellas, together with each of his other texts, form two-dimensional slices of the four-dimensional world he aims to explicate. In ‘Stella’, the story of the eponymous heroine is framed by a series of male viewpoints. The narrator puts down in his own words, ‘as nearly as I can recollect it’ (p. 1), the story told to him, seven years after the events, by Churton, who has to reinforce his own memory at one point ‘by reference to a sheet or two of closely written paper’ (p. 11). This structure to the story, in

⁴¹ Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, 4 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1875), I, p. 496.

⁴² Clark, p. 42.

⁴³ James Hinton, *Selections from Manuscripts*, 4 vols (London: Theo Johnson, 1856), I, p. 56.

which the narrator, who may or may not be reliable, enters a social transaction with the reader, raises issues about the power and authority of narration.⁴⁴ The reader must make up her own mind as to the kind of person the narrator is. She knows little about him, apart from the fact that he met Churton and his friend Frank Cornish, a nephew of Graham's, at a crammer school in London.⁴⁵ She knows that the three men were less interested in studying than in London life – 'and a very worthless and corrupt side of London life' – and the novels of Zola, suggesting something disreputable about the threesome (pp. 1-2). By mentioning their interest in Zola, Hinton points to the literary Naturalism of the late-nineteenth century which was epitomised in the novels of Emile Zola, the French writer whose intention was to provide a faithful copy of life. Fundamental to Naturalism, according to Lilian Furst and Peter Skrine, was the attempt to apply a scientific method to the arts, 'to present with the maximum objectivity of the scientist the new view of man as a creature determined by heredity, milieu and the pressures of the moment'.⁴⁶ This can be seen as a masculine literary mode, as Lisa Long argues, designed to counteract the effete and decadent mode associated with writers like Oscar Wilde.⁴⁷ The narrator and his friends set themselves up as rational, scientific beings. By the end of the novella, however, the narrator appears to doubt whether a scientific and deterministic approach to understanding human beings can tell the whole story. Hinton points up the flaws in this perspective by referencing Zola and then proceeding to undermine the scientific method in his depiction of women and their spirituality.

Hinton deliberately positions himself in opposition to Naturalism and closer to his father's philosophy of the human being combining spirit and nature. Stella is the female personification of this unity of spirit and nature, in the same way that the genius of Corelli's narrator suggests the unity of nature (the body) and culture (the mind). Although Hinton eschewed the Theosophical principles that so influenced Corelli, his depiction of Stella's higher self suggests the Theosophical idea of woman's oneness with nature and the eternal.⁴⁸ But for Hinton, this union of spirit and nature, which is the basis for Stella's extended subjectivity, emerges as a four-dimensional phenomenon. Not being privy to a hyperspatial worldview, Churton, however, is unable to move beyond a very narrow and deterministic

⁴⁴ Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) are examples of some of the most well-known nineteenth-century texts with a gothic structure, in which the stories are narrated through the mediation of letters, journals and diaries, or third-hand accounts.

⁴⁵ Crammer schools prepared young men in the shortest time possible for the selection exams for University, the Civil Service and for Army Officers

⁴⁶ Lilian R. Furst and Peter N. Skrine, *Naturalism* (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 42.

⁴⁷ Lisa A. Long, 'Genre Matters: Embodying American Literary Naturalism', *American Literary History*, 19.1 (2007), 160-173 (p. 161).

⁴⁸ Throesch, p. 30.

view of women. For him, and so many Victorians, women conform either to the brutal realism of being defined by biology and/or uncontrolled desires, or to the idealised version of the pure, unsullied maiden. For Stella to be the perfect wife, Churton must construct an image of her close to his ideal and as far away as possible from the image of women in the novels of Zola. The narrator, on the other hand, may be open to changing his mind. He thinks Stella's story is worth telling, but whether as an account of her uncle's experiment or as a revelation of female subjectivity is left to the reader to decide.

At the end of 'Stella', the narrator believes that he has been able to interpret Churton's account and make sense of Graham's notes: 'I mastered their contents, and that is how this present narrative comes to be written' (p. 107). But the reader can never be certain, because, of course, this is yet another layer of interpretation of Graham's work. Stella says to the narrator, 'You must not judge by Hugh or me [...] we could not explain it to you' (p. 107). Having Graham's original notes to refer to suggests that the narrator has access to his intentions and, in writing this book, he wishes Graham's philosophy to be preserved. But the structure of the story hints at unreliability, the fallibility of memory and intellect, and the transgressive nature of storytelling. Churton's account is framed by a strongly patriarchal viewpoint in contrast to that of the narrator, which appears to be more open-minded and sympathetic to Graham's project. From either perspective, however, the story is told from a male viewpoint, with the female voice rarely heard except in Stella's attempts to explain Graham's philosophy to Churton. The reader must, therefore, negotiate the many layers to get to the truth of events. This is not so different, then, from the efforts demanded to intuit the fourth dimension, and to imagine Stella's higher consciousness: both demand the mediation of established scientific epistemology and gender ideology in order to clear the mind of presuppositions about space and female subjectivity.

Stella had come to live with her uncle, Michael Graham, after she was orphaned at the age of five. She was made transparent by Graham when she was 14 years old, and she meets Churton when she is 17. Stella was an ideal experimental subject for Graham: she was both young and female. As Graham's notes state:

It would be impossible to adapt an adult to a new moral code; the very structure of his brain is formed in correlation to his old one. With a child, on the other hand, it would be possible, as its brain is in a state which admits the potentiality of either (p. 23).

Children are less habituated to the three-dimensional world; their minds are more open and, therefore, divesting themselves of pre-conceived notions is less likely to be difficult. To render a boy invisible would be to remove from him his very being, for all he cares about is

‘eating and drinking and getting things’. According to Churton’s reading of Graham, ‘You could not deprive him of these self-centred activities of his, without making him one with the All’ (p. 48). A girl’s self-love, on the other hand, is gratified ‘in producing an effect on others’ (p. 49). As Graham states in his notes, ‘The body and the moral sense are intimately connected [...] Think of a little girl, almost from the time when she can first see, creeping up to a glass and looking at herself, decking herself with a ribbon or a string of beads’ (p. 15). Thus vanity becomes incorporated into selfhood. Both Graham and Churton adhere to a gender ideology that marks the differences between boys and girls from an early age, and that places man in the public sphere, associating masculinity with the manifestation of material consumption and activity in the marketplace. Femininity, on the other hand, is delineated by display and self-gratification. Stella’s assumption of invisibility marks her out in Churton’s eyes as self-sacrificing and in the service of others, a reflection both of nineteenth-century idealised femininity and of James Hinton’s philosophical emphasis on service. From Stella’s point of view, however, her agreement to be made invisible may initially have represented a form of self-sacrifice. Now there is a sense of gratification, for a woman can feel at home in her own body when no longer defined by the male gaze. This suggests the gendered construction of self-sacrifice. Stella is comfortable in her invisible form. She is shocked by the way Churton responds to pictures of women in *décolleté* gowns, further confirming invisibility as her preferred state. In trying to explain Graham’s theory that women’s visibility and vanity originated in Eve’s behaviour in the Garden of Eden, Stella again highlights the gendered interpretation of women’s behaviour.

Graham’s version of the Fall is that visibility is the penalty Eve paid for eating the fruit, not of the tree of knowledge which belonged to Adam, but of ‘the tree of being seen and known’, the desire to be seen being part of woman’s fallen nature (p. 32). Before she was tempted by Satan to eat the fruit, Eve was ‘like the air – like a spirit’ (p. 32). It was Adam who was shamed by Eve’s visibility into covering himself; it was her penalty to be continually tempted by the desire to be seen. There have been various re-interpretations of the Fall, several of which represent examples of a feminist project to free women from the burden of sin. For example, ‘a tempering or denial of the doctrine of the Fall’, the aim of which was to remove from women the taint of depravity or abjectness, was a common feature of some of the new religious movements that emerged in the nineteenth century in America.⁴⁹ The millenarian, Joanna Southcott, for example, believed that she was the second Eve and that she

⁴⁹ Mary Farrell Bednarowski, ‘Outside the Mainstream: Women’s Religion and Women Religious Leaders in Nineteenth-Century America’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 48.2 (1980), 207-231 (p. 209).

had been called upon to redeem both men and women.⁵⁰ As I have discussed earlier, a reinterpretation of religious texts and doctrine went hand-in-hand with a growing women's rights movement, the call for suffrage, and the freedom for women to define themselves in relation to a feminine divine. Re-writing the myth of Eve was central to this project, and supported by a feminist re-reading of Darwin.⁵¹ The work goes on, with feminists continuing to re-interpret the myth of Eve, transforming her from the hapless victim of her senses to a woman with power and agency – one interpretation being that, in taking the apple, Eve becomes an active subject determining her own destiny.⁵² The difficulty for Churton, and the reader, is in working out whether or not Stella is liberated from the legacy of Eve by Graham's project to make her invisible. The vanity that Stella describes as woman's 'fallen nature' is, according to Graham, a vanity arising from the desire to be gazed upon: '[All women] put on heaps of clothes to attract attention; not one of them is content to be as she was intended to be' (p. 32). They become objects of the male gaze. For Irigaray, being situated as the 'other' is tantamount to reducing women to the status of things. The wearing of jewellery, make-up and clothes is a form of secondary narcissism or masquerade that, according to Irigaray, is one way in which women reduced to being things can 'attempt to give themselves a place, an envelope, a covering instead of their own self-defined space'.⁵³ This more nuanced interpretation would suggest that women's so-called vanity can be read as parodic and ironic imitation of a patriarchal world in which women are the objects of male desire, highlighting femininity as a male construct that denies women subjectivity, at the same time as emphasising the need to find a route to self-expression. Adornment may be women's only possible response to living in a male world. Although Graham might not view the visible woman in these terms, he does recognise that, as a result of Eve's taking the apple, Stella 'was no longer as she was meant to be' (p. 32), suggesting that he understood that adornment falsifies the self. His intention is to free Stella in order for her to find her true self.

Women's Invisibility

Within the framework of Victorian patriarchy, the invisibility or visibility of women are problematic concepts in terms of both women's position in society and their bodies as a source of knowledge. The Victorian woman was expected to be both visible and invisible –

⁵⁰ Harrison, p. 109.

⁵¹ I return to this in Chapter 5.

⁵² For feminist interpretations of the Fall by Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, see Deborah F. Sawyer, 'Hidden Subjects: Rereading Eve and Mary', *Theology and Sexuality*, 14.3 (2008), 305-320. For Cixous, the apple signifies more to Eve than just a taste or vision, it is invested with power. For Irigaray, in taking the apple Eve becomes a woman by and of herself and can no longer, therefore, be subsumed by (an)other.

⁵³ Irigaray (1993), p. 11.

visible, in terms of aspiring to present the embodied form of ideal femininity; and invisible, in that she was also expected to be silent, docile, self-sacrificing, existing in the shadow of her menfolk. In both forms she lacked true subjectivity. From the late-eighteenth century, ‘Western science ha[d] placed the act of “looking” at the heart of scientific enquiry’, with medicine beginning to challenge religion as the ‘arbiter of knowledges: in particular, those of femininity, sexuality and, on occasion, morality’.⁵⁴ One of the aims of science was to learn more about nature and how to control it, and, as women had always been associated with nature, how to gain knowledge and control of women’s bodies and minds. It is helpful to consider Stella’s (in)visibility in these terms. For Graham, knowledge and control of Stella lies in his scientific experiment of making her invisible, casting off the trappings of vanity in order to reveal her true nature. Given his religious interpretation of woman’s vanity, he uses science in the service of both nature and religion. Bound by an image of idealised femininity, Churton, on the other hand, can only ‘know’ Stella as a woman, and control her, in her visible form. For him, woman is his other: ‘The man is a poor creature who cannot give his wife a warm and thorough approval’ (p. 80). In a way emblematic of Victorian masculinity, what use is a wife to a man if she cannot be seen on his arm and shown off? What authority does a husband have if he does not have his wife within his vision? The only way Churton can cover his shame in having an invisible wife is to clothe her. At their wedding, Stella wears ‘a copious veil’ (p. 76). Churton finds a dressmaker to make her ‘a few well-fitting gowns’ so that he can gaze upon the contours of her figure (p. 84). As Ludmilla Jordanova points out, the veiled figure has more allure and mystery and is, therefore, more erotic than the naked (or, in this case, invisible) body.⁵⁵ Stella’s veiling achieves two ends for Churton – it reduces his shame and presents his wife as the alluring and mysterious Victorian woman. But it highlights gendered and conflicting responses to (in)visibility, for it induces in Stella a sense of shame that she presents a false self. In her essay, ‘Veiled Lips’, Irigaray returns to Greek mythology and the female figures of Athena, Persephone and Ariadne as women who exemplify the wearing of masks as a way for men to contain femininity in their own image of woman:

Dissimulation of woman in the thought of the father. Where she is created fully-clothed and armed. Veiled, her beauty concealed. Nothing visible except her face. Therefore, not woman [...] And the voice clearly speaks the will of the father.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London and New York: Tauris Parke, 2001), pp. 52, 53.

⁵⁵ Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 90.

⁵⁶ Luce Irigaray and Sara Speidel, ‘Veiled Lips’, *Mississippi Review*, 11.3 (1983), 93-131 (p. 99).

Veiled by men, these women represent order and the subordination of the feminine to the masculine, where the male creation of femininity is to cover the true nature of woman. In this way, man neutralises femininity, removes it from woman's control, hence Stella's frustration and shame.

When Stella is asked to wear make-up, another form of veiling, in order to make her face visible, she is horrified. For her, this is equivalent to 'exposing more of her person than society permits' (p. 86). The request to expose herself is an interesting inversion of the Victorian repudiation of women who exposed body parts, serving to emphasise the highly-constructed nature of feminine presentation. Jordanova's use of unveiling as a metaphor for making women known is worth considering here. Gazing at a nineteenth-century statue of a partially veiled woman with the inscription, 'Nature Unveiling Herself Before Science', she considers the way that veiling both reveals and conceals:

Thus, even in this case the veil is doing two different jobs, in that its removal will give rise to knowledge at the same time as its presence is preserving decency. There is a powerful moral ambivalence at work here, stemming from the absence of any stable value attached to the female body and hence to its visibility or concealment.⁵⁷

Ambivalence about the female body is reflected in the different perspectives of Graham and Churton on Stella's (in)visibility. For Graham, to know Stella is to divest her of the trappings of Victorian culture and return her to a state closer to nature. As a respectable, professional man, Churton requires Stella to be clothed, not to indulge her vanity, but to know her and to be able to control her. Visible and within his gaze, he can manage how, and in what ways, she is known. Grosz points out that Nietzsche also reprises the figure of Athena. In *The Gay Science* (1882), Athena represents scientific and philosophical knowledge, functioning as 'an emblem of women's general position as men's image, mirror or fantasy'. She is a particular 'kind' of woman who 'collaborates' with masculine values.⁵⁸ Veiling operates as a form of distancing woman from nature and its association with forces beyond the control of man. These forces refer mainly to female sexuality and male anxiety about how to keep women's bodies under control. Veiling of the female body serves not only as a source of mystery and allure; it also provides a carapace to conceal and discipline dimensions of femininity that are either unfathomable or alarming. In a way, Churton's anxiety resembles the troubled mind of Latimer in George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil* (1859). Latimer possesses 'superadded consciousness', a form of hyperspatial vision that allows him to see and know everything.

⁵⁷ Jordanova, pp. 88-89. The sculpture is *La Nature se dévoilant à la Science* by Louis-Ernest Barrias (1800).

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St. Leonard's, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p. 165.

This causes him ‘intense pain and grief’, made worse when he finally accesses his wife’s consciousness, only to find a ‘blank, prosaic wall’.⁵⁹ Because Churton fails to understand the meaning behind Graham’s unveiling of Stella, and lacks the imagination to see through her invisibility, when he imagines the wind blowing the veil aside from her face, he reflects sadly that, ‘if it did I should only see the inside of a hat’ (p. 71). He, too, can only see into an abyss. Unless Stella comes within his limited gaze, she does not exist properly for him. It is his inability to conceive of a feminine multi-dimensionality that prevents him from seeing who she really is. At the same time, Graham’s desire to return Stella to her ‘natural’ state comes dangerously close to indulging in another essentialised version of femininity – one that aligns woman with nature, which she is denied the opportunity to transcend. Hinton avoids this by representing Stella as a woman whose close affinity to nature is aligned with an insight into a higher world.

Higher Consciousness

In his experiment with Stella, Graham had hoped that by situating her in hyperspace he would be able to reveal the nature of higher consciousness, ‘a consciousness in us deeper than thought, which is directly reached, which is reminded of the higher existence by the clear depth of waters, and by the limitless profundity of the night-time sky’ (p. 51). He may have chosen a woman for this experiment not only for the reasons already mentioned, but also from a sense that a feminine consciousness might be more open to the higher world. Hinton was surprised by the facility with which his 18-year-old sister-in-law, Alicia Boole, was able to grasp the intricacies of four-dimensional geometry by manipulating his coloured cubes. Boole contributed to his book, *An New Era of Thought*, and went on to become a well-respected mathematician in her own right.⁶⁰ Preternatural ability in women was traditionally associated with the mystical and, of course, there is a mystical or transcendent quality to Hinton’s depiction of hyperspace. William James makes reference to the higher powers of the ‘feminine-mystical mind’:

The scientific-academic mind and the feminine-mystical mind shy from each other’s facts, just as they fly from each other’s temper and spirit. Facts are there only for those who have a mental affinity with them. When once they are indisputably ascertained and admitted, the academic and critical minds are by far the best fitted ones to

⁵⁹ George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil* (London: Virago, 1985), pp. 19, 48.

⁶⁰ Irene Polo-Blanco, ‘Alicia Boole Stott, A Geometer in Higher Dimension’, *Historia Mathematica*, 35 (2008), 123-139.

interpret and discuss them, - for surely to pass from mystical to scientific speculation is like passing from lunacy to sanity.⁶¹

James comments on the tendency of scientists to ignore what does not fit with their thinking, yet suggests their ability to accept ‘facts’ that may well have their source in the mystical.

William Stead makes a similar differentiation of male and female mind in his analogy of the Conscious Personality as husband and Unconscious Personality as wife. In contrast to the husband, who is ‘vigorous, alert, active’, the wife keeps house, storing up impressions, remaining passive until her husband sleeps, when she is free to act:

Deprived, like the wife in countries where the subjection of woman is the universal lay, of all right to an independent existence, or to the use of the senses or the limbs, the Unconscious Personality has discovered ways and means of communicating other than through the recognised organs of sense.⁶²

Stead’s depiction of marital dynamics initially reinforces the notion of traditional Victorian gender relations, only then to subvert it by suggesting that women sit quietly until the time is right for them to act and reveal their superior intuition and insight.

In *Scientific Romances*, Hinton attempts to build a bridge between the mystical or, in this case, the imaginative, and the scientific, always aware that situating himself on the margins of established epistemology can be dangerous. It is not for nothing that his reviewer in the *Westminster Review* of 1911 reassures the reader that Hinton is not mad, but ‘an inspired speculative mathematician’.⁶³ Being situated on the margins can have its advantages, however, directing the gaze towards more expansive and uncharted territory. From this vantage point, it is possible to challenge the thinking that permeates from the centre. Hinton challenges both scientific epistemology and gender ideology in his texts, signalling the possibilities for science and for humankind from a more open-ended perspective. In Hinton’s ‘A Plane World’, a story about two-dimensional life, the occupation of two-dimensional space serves to emphasise the polarity between the sexes. He makes the following observations:

In dwellers in our world this polarity, which shows itself amongst other ways in the distinction of the sexes, is tempered and modified.

In every man there is something of a woman, and in every woman there are some of the best qualities of a man.

⁶¹ William James, ‘What Psychical Research Has Accomplished’, in *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1921), pp. 299-327 (p. 301). These essays were first published in original form in *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1890, *Forum* in 1892, and *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* in 1896.

⁶² William Stead, *Real Ghost Stories* (New York: Doran, 1921), p. 23.

⁶³ Anon, p. 111 (emphasis added).

But in the world of which we speak there is no physical possibility for such interfusion.⁶⁴

The implication is that in moving from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional world the polarities between genders are modified. What then for the subject who occupies four-dimensional space? In the latter world, the fourth dimension is easier to understand if thought of as time: 'All attempts to visualise a fourth dimension are futile. It must be connected with a time experience in three space'.⁶⁵ A fourth dimension transforms our thinking about space and time, as it intersects with the other three dimensions in a space-time which collapses the two modalities as separate. In this conceptual space, not only are the boundaries between science and imagination blurred, but also, because of the gendered nature of space and time, those boundaries between masculine and feminine, rational and mystical.

It is in this different spatio-temporal context that it becomes possible to re-think the body's relationship with space and time and the relationship of corporeality and subjectivity. As Elizabeth Grosz suggests, 'If bodies are to be reconceived, not only must their *matter and form* be rethought, but so too must their environment and *spatio-temporal location*'.⁶⁶ It is impossible to think about subjectivity without considering the subject's body in space-time. In 'Casting Out the Self', Hinton aims to teach his readers how to experience the fourth dimension through the manipulation of his cubes. This is, in effect, to inhabit bodily the fourth dimension. He states that our understanding of 'left and right' and 'up and down' constitutes 'a self-element': an espoused belief that enables us to negotiate our position in three-dimensional space, but means that we are 'under a certain limitation' in being able to intuit a fourth, in which it would be possible to invert and pull through a cube.⁶⁷ Hinton is calling on us to dispense with a self-awareness that restricts the body in three-dimensional space:

Thus, taking the simplest and most obvious facts – the arrangement of a few cubes – we found that there was a known part and an unknown part; the known part corresponding to our act of putting, the unknown part the cube which, of some size or another, must be taken as given in the external world. Then there was obviously a self-element present in the Up and Down felt as in the cubes. This being removed, Right and Left had also to go. So, to get the knowledge of this simple set of objects clear of self-elements, two universe transforming thoughts have to be used; and when these thoughts are thus incorporated the cubes become different (pp. 227-228).

⁶⁴ Charles Howard Hinton, 'A Plane World', in *Scientific Romances*, First Series, pp. 135-159 (p. 140).

⁶⁵ Charles Howard Hinton, *The Fourth Dimension* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1906), p. 207.

⁶⁶ Grosz, (1995), p. 84, original emphasis.

⁶⁷ Charles Howard Hinton, 'Casting Out the Self', in *Scientific Romances*, First Series, pp. 205-229 (p. 227).

Casting out the self here involves dispensing with our three-dimensional corporeal subjectivity in order to assume a new and higher subjectivity in the fourth dimension. Although Stella may conform to the Victorian ideal of the self-sacrificing woman in agreeing to be Graham's experimental subject – 'being is being for others' she says (p. 34) – it is important to understand her invisibility in terms, not of her diminishment, but rather her extended subjectivity in another dimension. That she cannot be fully seen and known is because of Churton's and others' three-dimensional perspective of her and the world she occupies. They can only ever have a partial view of her.

Throesch makes an important point when she suggests that, 'If we read "casting out the self" as extending the body – to encompass other, external perspectives, the title of this text ['Casting Out the Self'] takes on an entirely different meaning from that of self-surrender'.⁶⁸ It assumes, instead, the meaning of casting the self out of this contained world into a more expansive universe. Graham's notes suggest that casting out serves both self-interest in the form of self-transformation, and altruism in a world in which self-interest is balanced with societal change:

Self-interest was an inversion of the true motive of life [...] [A]ll the economic relations of life which bring good for society out of the self-directed efforts of men show equally that an activity directed towards the good of others would imply the best development of the individual (p. 47).

Although clearly influenced by his father's philosophy, Hinton may also have been inspired by Herbert Spencer. Spencer blurs the boundaries between egoism and altruism to argue that altruism is not possible without self-interest as it always has pleasurable benefits for the individual: 'The adequately egoistic individual retains those powers which make altruistic activities possible'.⁶⁹ In his notes, Graham suggests that a harmony can be achieved between self-interest and the interests of others. Stella is a good example of this: her invisibility – altruistic, self-sacrificing *and* self-gratifying – serves both her own interests and those of her uncle. As the notes detailing Graham's experiment go missing, it is difficult for Churton to make sense of this. Indeed, he has to create his own experimental model which is, needless to say, limited both by his understanding of space and time and his ideas of female self-sacrifice. When the notes are recovered, Churton finds in a passage about religion Graham's speculation about the impression Stella might make on a stranger:

She would seem unreal to him, having no share in the greater part of his life. But gradually manifestation after manifestation of reality would come, till at last he found

⁶⁸ Throesch, p. 74.

⁶⁹ Herbert Spencer, *Data of Ethics* (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879), p. 194.

a helpmate as real as anything in his life before, but infinitely more important to him (p. 102).

That this passage appears in a section on religion suggests that being cast into hyperspace is to discover gradually both the expansion of substance in the fourth dimension and a form of spiritual awakening that comes with higher consciousness. It also assumes that those who are able to experience the higher world will have important truths to offer others. To cast out the self is, therefore, both self-serving and in the service of others.

That the concept of beings with higher consciousness is beyond the imagination of most people is due partly, according to Graham, to ‘the influence of that school which looks on material existence as evil, and therefore connects spiritual existence with the absence of matter’ (p. 51). This makes it difficult to represent higher consciousness in other than metaphorical terms. Graham writes about ‘a consciousness in us deeper than thought’, and of being ‘reminded of the higher existence by the clear depth of waters, by the limitless profundity of the night-time sky’ (p. 51). The influence of both the German philosopher, Gustav Fechner, and William James is evident in Hinton’s use of metaphor. In James’s translation of Fechner’s *Elemente der Psychophysik* (1860), for example, each wave on the surface of the sea represents an integrated consciousness, with the waves beneath interconnected in what James refers to as a ‘world soul’, or, in Throesch’s words, ‘the unified source of consciousness from which other human brains also channel their individualised consciousness’.⁷⁰ The depths of the sea used by Fechner and James become the higher spaces of the fourth dimension for Hinton. When Stella talks to Churton about eternity and says to him, ‘To find your eternal self is not to find yourself apart and separate, but more closely bound to others than you think you are now’ (p. 29), she is referring to her own experience of a higher, cosmic consciousness. James suggests that, ‘the drift of all the evidence we have seems to me to sweep us very strongly towards the belief in some form of superhuman life with which we may, unknown to ourselves, be co-conscious’.⁷¹ Graham points out that it has been necessary to use all sorts of images and emblems to depict a higher state: ‘The spiritual higher world is imaged under forms of matter so attenuated as hardly to resemble matter at all’ (p. 51). Ectoplasmic and ethereal manifestations are types of attenuated matter that appear in the séance room. James was interested in Spiritualism and the supernatural for what they might reveal about different levels of consciousness, hence his allegiance to the Society for

⁷⁰ Throesch, p. 128. See also William James, *Writings 1878-1899* (New York: Library of America, 1992), p. 1117.

⁷¹ William James, *A Pluralistic Universe: Hibbert Lectures at Manchester College on the Present Situation in Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1909), p. 309.

Psychical Research. As already mentioned, the fourth dimension was used by some Spiritualists to explain the strange happenings in the séance room. When Stella disappears, Churton knows how easy it is to confuse her invisibility with the spectral (he, too, believed at first that she was a spirit), which leads him to think that she must have been stolen by Spiritualists. Her aunt contacts the Society for Psychical Research; they constitute ‘a committee’, only to agree that Churton must be insane to believe in Stella’s corporeality.⁷² Churton enlists his friend Frank Cornish to help him in his search for Stella. Churton goes abroad whilst Cornish decides to search Clubland – ‘everything curious is heard, sooner or later, there’ (p. 56).⁷³ It is not long before they discover that Stella has gone off with a Spiritualist, Professor Biglow, to aid him in his séances. There is no indication that she has done this against her will, which suggests that there may have been some attraction for her in Spiritualism and its access to the unseen world.

It is through the intervention of ‘the celebrated chemist C’ that Churton manages to track down Stella and Professor Biglow. C is a man with an ‘air of openness’ about him, ‘the least untrammelled of mortals by preconceptions of any kind’, and ‘that ardour for experiment which becomes a second nature with scientific men’ (p. 61). Hinton most likely based C on the renowned chemist and physicist, William Crookes, a man prepared to risk his reputation as a scientist and member of the Royal Society in the pursuit of Spiritualist inquiry. His most notorious investigations involved the medium, Florence Cook, and her manifestation, Katie King, which he reported on in the 1870s in his journal, the *Quarterly Journal of Science*. Intent on proper scientific investigation, Crookes writes, ‘Romantic and superstitious ideas should be entirely banished, and the steps of [the scientist’s] investigation should be guided by intellect as cold and passionless as the instruments he uses’.⁷⁴ Unlike his scientific contemporaries (and the fictional Churton and friends), Crookes combined the cold, rationality of the experimenter with an openness of mind that suggests a willingness to admit new, previously unsubstantiated evidence, in other words, to admit the ‘irrational’. Once convinced of Cook’s ability to summon the spirits of the dead, Crookes’s intention, like Hinton’s, was to demonstrate the evidence of the unseen spiritual dimension in material form.

⁷² The SPR’s investigations of paranormal activity were conducted by committees formed from its membership.

⁷³ The term ‘clubland’ was used in the late-nineteenth century to describe the many men’s clubs that became sites for elite ruling-class males to shore up their masculinity against the social, economic and political changes going on outside, and as sites in which to display dandyism, decadence and queerness. Anything might be said or done here and, given the outlandish nature of Graham’s experiment and Stella’s invisibility, Cornish thinks here is a good place to start his search. See Barbara J. Black, ‘The Pleasure of Your Company in Late-Victorian Clubland’, *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 32.4 (2010), 281-304.

⁷⁴ William Crookes, *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (London: Burns, 1874), p. 17. Crookes’s articles from the *Quarterly Journal of Science* are collected in this volume.

In one séance with Florence Cook, he uses a lamp ‘to illuminate Katie’s whole figure and satisfy [himself] thoroughly that [he] was really looking at the veritable Katie whom [he] had clasped in [his] arms a few minutes before, and not at a phantasm of a disordered brain’.⁷⁵ (This encounter is very similar to Florence Marryat’s encounter with Katie King which I described in Chapter 2, erotic and intimate in its endeavour to ‘know’ the manifestation in her corporeality.) What Crookes and Hinton held in common was a commitment to ideas outside established forms of scientific knowledge, together with a belief that life existed beyond the material substance visible to the three-dimensional world. For Crookes, it manifested itself in the spirits of the dead. For James, it was an overarching dimension of consciousness that might manifest itself in supernatural or mystical proportions; and for Hinton, it was the corporeality and consciousness of fourth-dimensional life.

Hinton’s fictionalising of Crookes in this episode is important for three reasons. Firstly, he reminds his readers that a fourth dimension is not only an abstract mathematical concept: it is another way of explicating an unseen world that already exists as a reality for some, particularly Spiritualists. Secondly, Hinton aligns himself with a well-respected scientist prepared to be marginalised for his beliefs.⁷⁶ And thirdly, both Hinton and Crookes reveal a hyperspatial world that has significant moral and social implications for women. As discussed earlier, Spiritualism offered a fresh path for the expression of female desire and subjectivity, an opportunity for women to reveal aspects of themselves through communication with the spirit world that they were unable to express in the living world. In Hinton’s hyperspatial world, his revelation is of a multi-dimensional female subjectivity capable of higher consciousness. Both Spiritualist space and Hinton’s fourth dimension reconfigure a space-time in which women are no longer bound by the polarities that have determined their gendered subjectivity – here is a space that promises self-exploration and self-determination.

‘An Unfinished Communication’

In ‘An Unfinished Communication’, Hinton explores further the interiority of fourth-dimensional consciousness and its intersection with space and time. He is influenced by both James and Nietzsche in his depiction of higher consciousness and eternity, both aspects of his philosophy that appear in ‘Stella’⁷⁷. The focus of the story is the unnamed narrator and his

⁷⁵ Crookes, p. 107.

⁷⁶ It is important to remember that most of Hinton’s writings on the fourth dimension appeared before he lost his reputation as a result of his bigamy.

⁷⁷ Throesch describes ‘An Unfinished Communication’ as ‘one of the earliest English language engagements with Nietzsche’s ideas’ (p. 10). The similarities between Hinton’s and Nietzsche’s ideas are overwhelming.

quest for unlearning which develops into a near-death experience of Nietzschean eternal recurrence. In asking the Unlearner to help him forget his past, the narrator mistakes forgetting for unlearning. Instead, the Unlearner informs him that what he really needs is redemption through a Nietzschean form of *verlernen*. As Robin Small points out, *verlernen* is a process of unlearning, one element of which is the need to overcome moral prejudices and to give up thinking in terms of responsibility, guilt or blame. Another element is to rid oneself of dualisms, such as health/sickness and pleasure/pain, which dominate life. In relation to this story, *verlernen* also enables the narrator to reconsider the gendered dualism of immanence/transcendence, and to question the traditional association of women with nature and her exclusion from transcendence. Here, as in Nietzsche's philosophy, unlearning is not the same as forgetting; it is, instead, related to relearning or *umlernen*.⁷⁸ It is whilst he is close to drowning under the waves that the narrator begins to understand the true meaning of unlearning. His underwater experience acts as a metaphor for entering the fourth dimension. Again, Hinton uses the sea and its waves to symbolise different levels of consciousness. In order to help him distinguish between forgetting and unlearning, the Unlearner asks the narrator, 'Is it not the greater tides you should strive to learn, forgetting the momentary disturbances?' (p. 119). In other words, is it not a higher form of consciousness that you really seek? The narrator encounters this underwater, where time and space collapse into a revelation of eternity. It is this that Stella has tried to explain to Churton in the first story: 'If you felt it you would know that you are always living in your whole life, that it is always changing, though with your eyes you can only see the part you are in now' (p. 30). In 'An Unfinished Communication', as the story unfolds it becomes clear that the women the narrator encounters have the same four-dimensional vision that Stella has. It is through their experience of the enfolding of time and space into each other in hyperspace that they gain an insight into eternity. This depiction of a female higher consciousness serves also as a way for Hinton to re-think women's relationship with nature and spirit.

It was Hinton's view that it was easier to have a working intuition of the fourth dimension if it was represented as time. (H. G. Wells also represented time as the fourth dimension: 'There is no difference between Time and any of the three dimensions of our Space except that our consciousness moves along it'.⁷⁹) Time as a separate fourth dimension, however, is really an illusion: it represents another dimension of the consciousness of a space-

⁷⁸ Robin Small, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Reconciling Knowledge and Life* (Yarra, Victoria: SpringerNature, 2016), p. 75.

⁷⁹ H. G. Wells, *The Definitive Time Machine: A Critical Edition of H. G. Wells's Scientific Romance*, ed. by H. M. Geduld (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 32, quoted in Throesch, p. 134.

time in which time and space continually intersect. The narrator realises this whilst under the waves he experiences his life passing before him: ‘Just as truly as I am lying here, rising and sinking with the heave of the waters, so I am in each of the scenes and places I have ever been in, living and acting in them’ (p. 173). He moves through childhood to adulthood, as though Nietzsche’s demon has visited him, re-playing ‘every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in [his] life’.⁸⁰ The choice is to despair or, in Nietzsche’s words, to experience ‘a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine”’.⁸¹ This is the opportunity not just to re-live one’s time but to change events. In *A New Era of Thought* (1888), Hinton likens this process of Nietzschean eternal recurrence to matter moving along the ‘grooves of the aether’ (p. 61), as though it is some kind of ‘phonographic record of the aether’.⁸² Every time the Earth returns to its starting point, history repeats itself, but with slight differences as it is possible to alter the direction of the grooves. (There are similarities here with the experiences of the women in Phelps’s and Marryat’s texts who find that, in the spirit world, regeneration is possible.) From the narrator’s position in hyperspace, able to see everything and everyone, he watches closely and notices that ‘each of us is not doing exactly the same – and see, our lives are altering’ (p. 174). He recognises a new consciousness coming over him, one that makes him realise that these continuous alterations in his life are no different from the ongoing changes in the natural world. He sees his life transformed: ‘It is the body of a higher will, changing, moving, altering in a new direction wherein death does not lie. ’Tis life, indeed, for what may not my life become?’ (p. 174). His response to this rhetorical question is not to fear the demon of eternal recurrence but to choose to return to the living world in order to put right the wrongs he has done. The narrator’s consciousness of the space-time of the hyperspatial world awakens in him the power of human will. He realises that the spiritual lesson he has learned in the higher world about the cyclical nature of life and its continual alteration has always been there, although obscured, in the world of three dimensions.

Nature and Spirit

The emphasis which Hinton gives to nature in ‘An Unfinished Communication’ suggests the influence of his father’s belief in nature as the physical manifestation of the spiritual. In *Life*

⁸⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Leipzig: Fritzsche, 1887), p. 273. Nietzsche begins this passage with, ‘What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness, and say to you: “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more”’.

⁸¹ Nietzsche, pp. 174-175.

⁸² Rucker, p. xi.

in *Nature* (1862), James Hinton argues that we cannot truly appreciate life until we are able to carry our thoughts beyond the physical:

Nature is not truly what it is to our apprehensions, but is something more; we are forced to feel that the phenomena of organic life put us in the presence of a spiritual fact. And since in that life there is nothing more than is throughout nature, nature itself must be the phenomenon – or appearance – of the spiritual world.⁸³

This belief in the conjunction of nature with spirituality helps make sense of the sudden appearance in ‘An Unfinished Communication’ of a female figure during the narrator’s underwater experience. In his vision of the ‘spacious courts of heaven’ (p. 161) appear St. Paul and St. Simeon Stylites. Before them comes a woman, Nature, covered with a robe and carrying a great bundle, and she says to them, ‘Judge me, I have stolen these’ (p. 163). She then unpacks all the beauties of the flora and fauna and, without any substance to it, the grace and beauty of the human being. She explains that, ‘It was mine [...] at the creation to keep the busy atoms dancing, to turn and twist them on their moving course, playing the shuttle of vibration in all the system’ (p. 164). But then men bedecked her with clothing, light and colour, which she put on, ‘making pretence to be as they would care to see me’ (p. 164). Here, Hinton re-engages with the problem of the (in)visibility of women, and the tendency of men to construct their own image of femininity. The desire of women to rid themselves of being defined from a male position is the attraction, according to Irigaray, of the mystic consciousness in which the self is annihilated. As I have already argued, to return to a naked state, or nothingness, is to remove the clothes of the masquerade of femininity which Irigaray describes as the ‘needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely men’, in order to extinguish that version of selfhood and for a new one to emerge.⁸⁴

It is interesting that Hinton brings St. Paul into this part of the story, as biblical scholarship acknowledges the contradictions in some of the writings attributed to him. On the one hand, he exhorts women to be silent and to cover their heads.⁸⁵ On the other hand, in his Epistle to the Romans he celebrates the ministry of a number of different women, for example:

I commend unto you Phoebe [...] That he receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.⁸⁶

⁸³ James Hinton, *Life in Nature* (London: Smith, Elder, 1862), p. 164.

⁸⁴ Irigaray (1985), p. 134. See also Ann-Marie Priest, ‘Woman as God, God as Woman: Mysticism, Negative Theology, and Luce Irigaray’, *Journal of Religion*, 83.1 (2003), 1-23.

⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35 and 11: 4-16.

⁸⁶ Romans 16: 1-16.

It is to Romans that Hinton presumably refers when he depicts St. Paul recognising the higher spiritual calling of this woman. He tells her that she has the wherewithal to be all that man longs for, but she must leave the garments and the voice he gave her in order to, ‘go thy way, be to him as thy awakening heart tells thee’ (p. 165).⁸⁷ In other words, she must decide for herself who and what she will be, the implication being that she can be more than simply man’s helpmeet. As James Hinton argues, ‘We cannot think worthily of life, until we see that it is not in these physical things at all, which possess but the shadows and appearances of it; till we carry our thoughts beyond’. Only then can our minds ‘rise up and walk’.⁸⁸ This episode in ‘An Unfinished Communication’ marks the dawning of a new day for women: ‘The light of dawn, the sunset of even, no longer were what man put on her; but were of Nature’s own’ (p. 165). Hinton rejects both a naturalistic and deterministic perspective of woman and a phallogentric framing of femininity to depict, instead, a form of female subjectivity that combines the natural and the spiritual. He avoids the charge of essentialism by stressing the balance between body and spirit.

The conjunction of nature and spirit is evident in two other women characters in ‘An Unfinished Communication’. When the narrator first knocks on the door marked, ‘Mr. Smith, Unlearner’, he encounters the landlady with two small children, one in her arms and the other hanging off her skirt. She appears shabby and unkempt, ‘but her form, strong and substantial, had a touch of antique grace’ (p. 113). She tells the narrator that the Unlearner ‘did say as I was a better one in his line than he was himself’ (p. 113). The narrator misinterprets this to mean that women provide a way of forgetting for men, but of course this is not what is meant, as he discovers later. What is alluded to instead is that she, too, has an insight into a higher world through her apprehension of eternity. In his depiction of women in this story, Hinton disavows Hegel’s account of women and the polarity between (female) nature and (male) reason and spirit. Hegel believed that man was at the pinnacle of nature but, in order to place himself above the mere animal, he must subordinate his passions to reason.⁸⁹ This involves a splitting off of blood ties and reproduction from the rational, discursive community or state. Man becomes associated with human law, whereas woman assumes the role of director of the home and preserver of divine law. For Hegel, woman has an ethical duty as wife and mother

⁸⁷ In Olive Schreiner’s ‘Three Dreams in a Desert’ (1890), there is similar scene in which a woman crossing a river is told to take off her outer garments that signify ‘Ancient-received-opinions’, leaving only the garment that signifies truth. Only then can she cross to the Land of Freedom. Olive Schreiner, ‘Three Dreams in a Desert’, in *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 308-316 (p. 313).

⁸⁸ Hinton, p. 160.

⁸⁹ Kathy E. Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 47.

that denies her entry into a spiritual realm.⁹⁰ As Genevieve Lloyd puts it, ‘Woman’s task is to preserve the intermingling of mind and body, to which the Man of Reason will repair for solace, warmth and relaxation’.⁹¹ This gender polarity ensures women’s immanence and denies them access to transcendence, a higher consciousness that both Hegel and Nietzsche believed was beyond the development of female consciousness. In a similar vein to Hegel, Nietzsche says that, ‘Woman is more closely related to Nature than man and in all her essentials she remains ever herself. Culture is with her always something external, a something which does not touch the kernel that is eternally faithful to Nature’.⁹² The isolation of women’s association with nature occurs ‘alongside the replacement of a cosmological view of nature as fertile, life-giving earth with an instrumentalist view of nature as brute matter to be conquered and transcended by the human subject and shaped in accordance with the human will’.⁹³ It is this polarity of male mind and female body with which Irigaray takes issue as she argues that nature is two, both male and female, a conceptualisation that lies at the heart of her theory of sexual difference.⁹⁴ In her use of the term, the ‘sensible transcendental’, Irigaray fuses mind and body whilst leaving a space in between, in which to create a new symbolic order. This *parler femme* is based on female morphology and allows women to achieve transcendence in their embodied state.⁹⁵ Irigaray refuses the opposites that a patriarchal symbolic order generates – those of spirit and matter, reason and emotion, time and space. In his depiction of the landlady, Hinton also challenges this polarity, dissolving the boundaries between nature and spirituality, and presenting a woman whose closeness to nature indicates, also, her transcendence.

The second woman the narrator meets is a young woman called Nattie who saves him from his first encounter with the treacherous waves. Nattie is a mysterious figure, standing out from the simple fisher folk with whom she lives. It transpires that, following a storm at sea in which her parents died, she emerged from the waves ‘miraculously preserved’ (p. 146). The mythology of the Virgin Mary comes to mind: this incident is not dissimilar to the story of the Virgin Mary saving from shipwreck a woman about to give birth, which Marina Warner

⁹⁰ See G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), § 181.

⁹¹ Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ in Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 59.

⁹² Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘The Greek Woman’ trans. by M. A. Mügge, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 18 vols., ed. by O. Levy (London: Foulis, 1909-1913), II, p. 23, quoted in Lloyd, p. 1.

⁹³ Pheng Cheah and Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Of Being-Two: Introduction’, *Diacritics*, 28.1 (1998), 2-18 (p. 7).

⁹⁴ Luce Irigaray, *I Love To You: Sketch of a Possible Felicity in History*, trans. by Alison Martin (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 35.

⁹⁵ Carolyn M. Tighlman, ‘The Flesh Made Word: Luce Irigaray’s Rendering of the Sensible Transcendental’, *Janus Head*, 11.1 (2009), 39-54 (p. 40).

suggests makes ‘the metaphysical analogy between the watery mass from which form emerges into life and the actual birth of a child, between the ocean and the maternal womb’.⁹⁶ The story of Nattie’s emergence from the sea is like a re-birth. In her singularity, her independence and her oneness with nature, Nattie has emerged as different from the fisher folk, causing the narrator to ask himself, ‘Who was she? – singular, wild girl, living on the sands by the sea’ (p. 148). He recognises the powerful affinity she has with the sea and the land, a landscape that has both saved and cherished her:

[F]or who else had taught her that ineffable grace? Who else had breathed into her soul those premonitions of life’s deep passion? Who else had taught her to catch the thoughts of those high souls, whose words, faintly echoed, leave all unmoved the slumbering world? The courage of the storm, the grace of each pale flower of the strand that gives all its tender beauty to its arid spot of sand – all was hers; and she moved breathing life and meaning into all around her (p. 150).

The narrator decides to call Nattie by her full name, Natalia, with its resonance of birth and renewal. The reader is meant to understand her shipwreck as a journey into the deeper waves of consciousness, from which she emerges as a woman both closely entwined with the natural world and transcending it in her spirituality and higher consciousness. It is not until the narrator has his own experience of re-birth under the waves that he can begin to understand the mystery of Natalia. At the end of the story, he foresees a time when he and Natalia will be reunited as equals. This can only happen once he too has experienced higher consciousness through unlearning, ‘for it is only in the world-regard in the care for all life that souls can walk together perfectly, and only so now will Natalia and I walk together’ (p. 176). For a man and a woman to truly recognise each other as individuals and come together in an equal relationship, this process of self-knowledge and individuation is vital. Irigaray states that, ‘If any meeting is to be possible between man and woman, each must be a place, as appropriate to and for the other, and toward which he or she may move’.⁹⁷ The transcendence of a limited world-view, one that defines man as subject and woman as his other, is possible in Hinton’s hyperspatial world where both man and woman can locate their own space-time and discover a new subjectivity.

From Mathematics to a Feminist Dimension

Hinton’s stories are situated at the intersection between science and imagination, with the gap between opening up as an ‘elsewhere’ space in which to speculate on female consciousness.

⁹⁶ Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 272.

⁹⁷ Irigaray (1993), p. 40.

He encroaches on discourses on gender and femininity that were the preoccupation of other late-nineteenth-century writers, including the New Woman, who were concerned with women's rights and employed science and pseudo-science in their arguments for a vision of a new world for women. Like Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, Hinton was a scientific romancer who, as I have mentioned earlier, was 'as yet too enmeshed in scientific and philosophical agendas to cut his texts loose as pure fictions'.⁹⁸ In the blurring of the boundaries between science, philosophy and art, Hinton was not unique. Paul Fayter points out the 'two-way traffic' between Victorian science and science fiction exemplified by stories in the many cheap new magazines that appeared on both sides of the Atlantic between the 1870s and 1890s.⁹⁹ He says, 'we are dealing with a shared context in which distinctions among "scientific", "fictional", "moral", and "social" discourses are blurred'.¹⁰⁰ Before the growth of professionalism and specialisation of scientific disciplines towards the end of the century, much scientific writing was aimed at a more general audience, using the language of imagination and metaphor to explain what might otherwise appear to be dense scientific concepts. And, of course, in the realms of abstract mathematics, imagination was critical to the development of ideas: Simon Newcomb says, 'geometry itself has its fairyland – a land in which the imagination, while adhering to the forms of the strictest demonstration, roams farther than it ever did in the dreams of Grimm or Anderson'.¹⁰¹ Hinton's *Scientific Romances*, with their mix of didacticism, mathematical computation and fiction, are examples of a mathematician experimenting with genre in order to make his theories comprehensible. As Andrea Henderson explains, 'Victorian mathematicians were as earnestly concerned with the transparency of symbols as Victorian poets, and in their development of "imaginary" and "impossible" geometries they experimented with style and genre in the manner of Victorian novelists'.¹⁰² In one interview, H. G. Wells explained that fiction is the mouthpiece for science, philosophy and art: 'The dream of the philosopher has all the richness and variety of imagination necessary to a fascinating novel'.¹⁰³ In the way that Hinton pursues through

⁹⁸ Clark, penultimate para.

⁹⁹ Paul Fayter, 'Strange New Worlds of Space and Time: Late Victorian Science and Science Fiction', in *Victorian Science in Context*, ed. by Bernard Lightman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 256-280 (p. 256).

¹⁰⁰ Fayter, p. 262.

¹⁰¹ Simon Newcomb, 'The Fairyland of Geometry', *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, January 1902, pp. 249-252 (p. 249).

¹⁰² Andrea Henderson, p. 469.

¹⁰³ H. G. Wells, 'A Chat with the Author of *The Time Machine*', *Weekly Sun Literary Supplement*, 1895, p. 6, quoted in Steven McLean, *The Early Fiction of H. G. Wells: Fantasies of Science Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 2.

speculation the construction of an alternative hyperspatial world, the separate sections of *Scientific Romances* might all be described as fictions.

It is generally accepted that it was Hinton who coined the term, 'scientific romance'.¹⁰⁴ His starting point was a knowledge of mathematics and abstract geometry, and with his powers of imagination and romance he wove his fictions, employing a form like the romance described by Henry James as, 'experience liberated, so to speak; experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it'.¹⁰⁵ Hinton's stories resist the constraints of rationalism, stretch the boundaries of scientific epistemology and engage with the romantic imagination. In conceptualising a hyperspatial world, Hinton conjoins his knowledge as a mathematician and scientist with, as James puts it, 'the beautiful circuit and subterfuge of our thought and our desire', a desire to make real through fiction an expansive world of infinite possibilities.¹⁰⁶ His writing has been described by Clarke as science fiction 'in utero'.¹⁰⁷ Darko Suvin defines science fiction as 'a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment'.¹⁰⁸ Whether or not one chooses to classify Hinton's texts as romance or science fiction, or a synthesis of the two in the scientific romance, what is relevant here is Suvin's emphasis on estrangement and alternative frameworks. Hinton's intention was to jolt his readers out of their complacent acceptance of a mathematical epistemology based on Euclidean 'truths' that had endured for centuries and which underpinned our knowledge and understanding of the world. He wanted to take them on a journey into another world in which not only were the boundaries between science and imagination dissolved, but also those between space and time and the associated gendered polarities. Using a fictional framework, in *Stella and an Unfinished Communication* Hinton combines science, mathematics, philosophy, ethics and imagination with a serious intent to change the minds of his readers. In representing the known three-dimensional world as an estranged (although, to him, very plausible) four-dimensional form, Hinton engages in a venture which is both romantic and utopian in its desire for a new way of being.

¹⁰⁴ Darko Suvin, *Victorian Science Fiction in the UK: The Discourses of Knowledge and Power* (Boston: Hall, 1983), p. 177. The term 'scientific romance' was also adopted by Wells to describe his early stories (see McLean, p. 193).

¹⁰⁵ Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (London: Scribner, 1895), p. 33.

¹⁰⁶ James, p. 32.

¹⁰⁷ Clarke, para. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (Bern: Lang, 2016), p. 20.

As an ‘elsewhere space’ outside the three-dimensional world, hyperspace is not only strange and unorthodox but, in challenging scientific epistemology and an ideology dependent on gendered polarities, it threatens to disrupt the status quo. It can be described as a form of heterotopia which Foucault defines as ‘a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’.¹⁰⁹ One of the principles of heterotopia is, according to Foucault, ‘to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space [...] as still more illusory’.¹¹⁰ As a heterotopia, Hinton’s hyperspace reveals as illusory our conception of a three-dimensional world, contesting and disrupting it as a so-called ‘real’ space. In the words of Sarah Alexander, the fourth dimension, or hyperspace, ‘contest[s] other spatial imaginaries by refusing a “common locus”’.¹¹¹ It cannot be pinned down and, therefore, cannot have attached to it the discourses of power and knowledge that have served to define and constrain the human subject and, for the purposes here, women. If it is illusory in its four-dimensionality, then it points to the illusory nature of any conception of space. What Hinton is trying to suggest is that we have constructed our world and ourselves within it according to knowledge that has been passed down to us, but this world is built on false premises and is flawed in its vanity and self-interest. Hinton has created a form of heterotopia based on an alternative understanding of space and time that positions itself in contrast to the world we know in order deliberately to unsettle and disrupt.

Situating women in the ‘elsewhere’ of hyperspace enables Hinton to reject a Victorian phallogocentric framing that is premised on a Cartesian division of flesh and spirit. Instead, and in the spirit of his father’s philosophy, embodiment is central to his vision of spiritual subjectivity, only here we are drawn to the flesh and spirit of women. Stella is still embodied in her invisible form, and it is her invisible corporeality that enables her both to save the passengers and crew on their Chinese steamship threatened from hijack and to experience eternity. The spatio-temporal framing of hyperspace is such that the embodied woman is in communion with matter and spirit, as Hinton emphasises in his depiction of the landlady and Natalia in ‘An Unfinished Communication’. Hyperspace disavows the gendered binaries of flesh and spirit, of immanence and transcendence that underpin the construction of women in the philosophies of both Hegel and Nietzsche. Hinton rejects an understanding of femininity that relies on reading the female body as a surface upon which is inscribed contemporary culture and its underlying philosophies. He prefers to think about the body in terms of lived

¹⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, trans. by Jay Miskowiec *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986), 22- 27 (p. 24).

¹¹⁰ Foucault, p. 27.

¹¹¹ Alexander, p. 134.

experience, where inscription is of a psychic or internal form.¹¹² Hence his emphasis on Stella's apprehension of eternity and Natalie's affinity with nature and the ineffable.

Just as a four-dimensional cube can be inverted to make the interior visible, Hinton understands hyperspace to reveal the unseen, psychic dimensions of female consciousness. Of course this can be seen as just another (male) construction of femininity, and Hinton is very aware that knowledge is neither neutral nor objective. There is, however, a moral intent to his deconstruction of both the scientific epistemology of three-dimensional space and the framework that Victorians used to delineate female subjectivity, one that aims to free the mind from pre-conceived ideas. Should readers reject his philosophy of hyperspace, Hinton has at least opened their minds to the possibility of a different understanding of the world and, in terms of reappraising subjectivity, to a framework that synthesises the external and internal, the corporeal and the psychic. As Throesch comments at the end of her essay on 'Stella', Hinton's aim, although limited by his own time and culture, 'is surprisingly similar to the feminist project of rethinking the ways in which sexuality, subjectivity, and the concept of emancipation are framed by discourse'.¹¹³ Hinton demonstrates the extent to which any world-view depends on the discourses of knowledge that circulate. In rejecting established scientific thinking, Hinton is also disavowing a knowledge base created by and for men. I suggest that he goes further. Not only does he highlight the ways that notions of femininity and female nature are constructed by contemporary discourse, but he also reveals women's capacity to engage with space and time in different ways. Framing women in a more open-ended, multi-dimensional and fluid space-time makes it possible to re-envision women in a process of becoming, the extent of which has yet to be explored. Employing the 'elsewhere' space of the fourth dimension with its own space-time is Hinton's way of offering an alternative world in which it is possible to rethink spatio-temporal existence and subjectivity.

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In the series of essays and stories that make up *Scientific Romances*, Hinton acknowledges the difficulties involved in casting off or unlearning well-established modes of thinking. He was not alone in trying to persuade others to open themselves to different ways of understanding the world and those within it. Other writers, mainly women and including the New Woman, struggled to find a new space for themselves. Where Hinton differed from the feminist writer

¹¹² See Elizabeth Grosz, 'Bodies and Knowledges: Feminism and the Crisis of Reason', in *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 25-43, for a discussion of different ways in which the body is theorised.

¹¹³ Elizabeth Throesch, "'The difference between science and imagination?'" (Un)framing the Woman in Charles Howard Hinton's *Stella*, *Phoebé*, 18.1 (2006), 75-98 (p. 98).

whose starting point was the social, political and economic disadvantages of the nineteenth-century woman, was that his primary aim was to access a higher form of consciousness as the route to inner transformation. But transformation in any guise was not easy to achieve. It was the fate of many heroines of New Woman stories either to die prematurely or to end their lives in loneliness and poverty, a testament to their struggle to effect change in the face of (mostly) male opposition. That Graham's experiment with Stella failed to reach a satisfactory conclusion speaks to similar difficulties that Hinton knew he would experience in trying to convince the scientific community and the general public to relinquish a knowledge of space and time based on ancient axioms of three-dimensional geometry. In positing a pre-Einsteinian space-time, Hinton not only questioned Newtonian and Euclidean 'truths' but, in suggesting the dissolution of boundaries between space and time, he also called into question all those other binaries associated with gendered space and time. In *Stella and an Unfinished Communication*, he challenges the idea of linear time, disavowing the Hegelian and Nietzschean conjunctions of man with reason and progress, and woman with space and stasis. He opens up the possibility of women transcending their mundane existence, of having an active role in time and space. This is not in order to emulate a form of male transcendence, which distances the male spirit from corporeality. Instead, in a way suggestive of his father's philosophy, Hinton emphasises the unity of nature and spirit in women, thus celebrating their corporeality and their access to a higher consciousness – their transcendence. There are similarities between Hinton's representation of a hyperspatial female consciousness and Irigaray's attempt to find an alternative to Hegel's account of women. In a kind of hyperspatial manipulation of femininity, she proposes, 'an *inversion* of the femininity imposed upon me in order to try and define the female corresponding to my gender'.¹¹⁴ This calls for a form of asceticism involving the re-direction of the desire for natural immediacy, that is, the satisfaction of woman's so-called uncontrollable passions, in order to access a new spirituality – in Hinton's version this is casting off the self.¹¹⁵ He imagines a route to female transcendence that involves women returning to a state of nature, removing the outer trappings of (male) constructed femininity, so that they can emerge into a subjectivity of their own. This representation of women by Hinton marks a radical departure in the nineteenth century from an understanding of women as incapable of transcendence and always other to men.

¹¹⁴ Irigaray (1996), p. 64, emphasis added.

¹¹⁵ Joy Morny, *Divine Love: Luce Irigaray, Women, Gender and Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 90.

The world of hyperspace was not a utopian dream for Hinton, as he believed that we already exist in four-dimensional space. What is utopian is the way that the world he wants his readers to experience, particularly the world that women might occupy, shines a critical light on the world in which they currently live. In his discussion of the literary fourth dimension, Robert Philmus comments, 'As a world wherein the consequences of the accepted ideal can be envisioned, the fourth dimension provides a critical and comprehensive point of view from which to evaluate the present'.¹¹⁶ At the beginning of this thesis, I suggest that the term 'hyperspatial' can be ascribed to the other conceptual spaces that I examine. In proposing extra-dimensional worlds in which women might express their subjectivity more freely, there has to be a dialogue between the imaginary world and the one we live in, an ongoing negotiation between dream and reality as attempts are made to overcome the difficulties faced in trying to change the world. The next chapter, which addresses the imaginary spaces of utopia, exemplifies again the difficulties that exist for anyone trying to dismantle systems of knowledge, whether related to scientific epistemology or socio-political structures. In the feminist utopian novel, there is a constant tension between trying to realise a utopian dream and resisting the forces of patriarchal society.

¹¹⁶ Robert M. Philmus, 'The Time Machine; Or, The Fourth Dimension as Prophecy', *PMLA*, 84.3 (1969), 530-535 (p. 534).

CHAPTER 5

FEMINIST UTOPIAN FICTION AND FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY

As I have suggested, the conceptual spaces of all the literary texts considered here could be referred to as hyperspatial in that they represent ‘elsewhere’ spaces of another dimension. They are also utopian in the way that these imaginary spaces stand in opposition to the *status quo* and ‘transcend the dominant consciousness of their times’, dissolving the boundaries that have determined selfhood and freeing women to explore their subjectivity beyond the constraints of the Victorian world.¹ In the texts examined in earlier chapters, female subjectivity emerges through a process of individuation of the embodied self in its immersion in space. The figure of a feminine genius divinely inspired develops as Corelli’s heroine journeys through the celestial spheres, transformed and renewed by the idea of reincarnation, moving forward in realisation of the possibilities for women. In their Spiritualist texts, Phelps and Marryat explore different routes to subjective expression, personal transformation for Phelps being effected through a feminist re-reading of the Bible, and for Marryat through the permeability of the world of the living and the dead. Fourth-dimensional space-time enables the emergence of individual higher consciousness in Hinton’s heroines, disavowing the gendered split between immanence and transcendence. From the many utopian novels written by women in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, I have selected a representative sample of three for this chapter – a group of novels that can be compared for the major themes they have in common. They are the American Mary Bradley Lane’s *Mizora: A Prophecy* (1880-1) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915); and the British Elizabeth Corbett’s *New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future* (1889).² In these examples of utopia, subjectivity is embedded in the identity of the community which is formed in the spaces of the utopian world.

These novels adopt the traditional form and structure of the utopian novel with its focus on a Socratic dialogue between new and old worlds that tends to preclude the development of individual characterisation. Rather than focusing on the emergence of

¹ Jean Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America, 1886-1896: The Politics of Form* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1984), p. 14.

² Mary E. Bradley Lane, *Mizora: A Prophecy* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000); Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, in *The Yellow Wall-Paper, Herland, and Selected Writings*, ed. by Denise D. Knight (London: Penguin Books, 2009); Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett, *New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future* (London: The British Library, print on demand). Further references to each are given following quotations in the text.

individual subjectivity, the emphasis is on identity as part of the community. In this chapter I examine the extent to which the utopian space allows women freedom to explore the multi-dimensionality of female subjectivity. Three key themes, central to the new social order to which the feminist utopia aspires, are addressed – the way that space is configured, the application of evolutionary theory to the *telos* of perfection, and the reification of motherhood which separates reproductive function from desire. As in the novels discussed in earlier chapters, Darwinian evolution is subjected to a feminist reading, which I critique with reference to Grosz’s interpretation of the open-ended nature of evolution. The foregrounding of reproduction is problematised in relation to Irigaray’s spatial configuration of the mother-daughter relationship and the difficulty of avoiding an elision of female identity with motherhood. Together with an appropriation of the science of eugenics in the service of the feminist utopian project, I argue that these themes, and their implications for the expression of female subjectivity, serve to problematise the idea of the feminist utopian space as one that women can call their own.

One of the criticisms of the perfect-state utopia is that it forecloses the possibilities of progress and futurity.³ In arguing for a space women can call their own, Irigaray is alert to the danger of this space becoming ‘a utopia of historical reversal, a dream of reappropriation of power – particularly phallic power – by women if it closes itself in on the circle of its demands and even desires’.⁴ In this chapter I examine the extent to which the feminist utopian novel, in its desire to create a new world, freed from the constraints of the old, patriarchal, world, has constantly to hold in tension the ‘not-yet’ of hope with the closure suggested by the perfect society.⁵ Does the search for perfection delimit the notion of an open-ended subjectivity, serving instead to turn the utopian world into one of stasis rather than transformation? With the emphasis on strong borders and a society built according to rational and scientific laws, the distancing of evolved woman from uncivilised man, and the role of motherhood in the service of the community, I question whether the quest for a utopia by Corbett, Lane and Gilman risks exchanging one oppressive (patriarchal) social order for another repressive matriarchal one. Or whether, if considered as an elsewhere space-time which rejects a view of the world as a series of binary oppositions, it is possible to read their utopias as the not-yet space of hope. In her pursuit of an open-ended feminist utopianism, Lucy Sargisson advocates a rejection of meaning constructed according to a system of binary

³ Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 4.

⁴ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 161.

⁵ For a discussion of the concept of hope in utopian thought see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. by John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

opposites so that new conceptual spaces can be opened up in which to explore emancipation. Rather than focus on a series of oppositions, she suggests an approach ‘through a new conceptual space that is not confined by binarism and dualistic oppositionality – a new ‘no place’ that is [...] utopian’.⁶ She points to Grosz’s use of the concept of pure difference by which she means ‘reject[ing] existing definitions and categories, redefining oneself and the world according to women’s own perspectives’.⁷ This sense of difference ‘is not seen as difference *from* a pre-given norm, but as *pure difference*, difference in itself, difference with no identity’.⁸ Irigaray uses the term ‘alterity’ – a form of otherness outside binary oppositions between self and other, ‘an individual and autonomous other with its own qualities and attributes’.⁹ In this chapter, I also consider the issue of individual difference and whether its incorporation into the collective feminine project suggests dissolution of binary opposition between (male) individualism and (female) collectivism, or whether it instead amounts to sublimation. I ask whether these utopian texts can escape a patriarchal order to create a space for women when, inherent to the structure of the utopia, the utopian world is always being measured against the patriarchal other.

The Cultural and Literary Context

As is well-known, the term ‘utopia’ was first used by Sir Thomas More. Taken from the Greek *ou-topos*, meaning no place or nowhere, it is almost identical to another Greek term, *eu-topos*, meaning good place. The literary utopia reflects a utopian impulse often born of particular social and political conditions which is translated into a vision of a better future. It can best be understood as an imaginary representation of a better world. Because of the dual meaning of the term ‘utopia’ – the no place and the good place, and the tendency for some utopian dreams to be perceived as dystopian nightmares, the literary utopia necessarily asks to be read with a critical eye. For centuries it was deemed to be the domain of male writers, from Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) to Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1888) to William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890). If women make an appearance, it is often to inspire men. Angelika Bammer argues, however, that there are examples of earlier feminist utopian novels. Although not recognised at the time as an example of utopian fiction, one of these is Christine de Pizan’s *The Book of*

⁶ Sargisson, p. 75.

⁷ Grosz (1990), p. 340.

⁸ Grosz, p. 339, original emphases.

⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p. xiv, quoted in Sargisson, p. 197.

the City of Ladies (1405), which depicts a city occupied only by women.¹⁰ An early example of British women's utopias is Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing-World* (1666), in which a female visitor to a kingdom beyond the North Pole becomes empress, scholar, scientist and religious leader. The structure of this book relies not on the usual Socratic dialogue, but on a conversation flowing between two women – according to Lee Cullen Khanna, an interesting example of the intersection of genre and gender.¹¹ In another British utopia, *Millenium Hall* (1762) by Sarah Robinson Scott, two male companions come across a female community in which they are rehabilitated from their former corrupt selves, pre-figuring the rehabilitation of two of the male visitors in Gilman's *Herland*. It was not until the late-nineteenth century that the feminist utopian novel achieved prominence, with most of them appearing in America. As Frances Bartkowski points out:

The periodisation of utopian writing and thought would seem to chart certain moments or ruptures in Western social history – those times when utopian desires/projective longings are driven by both hope and fear, those times particularly marked by anticipation and anxiety.¹²

The impact of the French Revolution was still reverberating in England, as was the aftermath of the Civil War in America. Rapid economic expansion, industrialisation, urbanisation and immigration gave rise not only to social anxiety but also to the aspiration, by both men and women, for a better world.

The novels of Lane, Corbett and Gilman were published at a time when there was a busy transatlantic exchange of socialist, utopian and feminist ideas.¹³ They are representative of an expanding women's rights movement on both sides of the Atlantic, one that saw a creative exchange of ideas and calls to action, particularly in relation to women's suffrage. Their common themes – collectivism and female communities, an economy based on socialist principles, and the application of science and rationalism to motherhood and lifestyle – reflect this robust exchange. On both sides of the Atlantic, the nineteenth century witnessed the growth of utopian, socialist and communitarian movements. Communitarian movements based on socialist principles included Robert Owen's experiment at New Lanark in Scotland in the early part of the century which, in turn, was influential in the establishment of the New

¹⁰ Angelika Bammer, *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopia in the 1970s* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), p. 9.

¹¹ Lee Cullen Khanna, 'The Subject of Utopia: Margaret Cavendish and Her *Blazing World*', in *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*, ed. by Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerton (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994), pp. 15-34 (p. 33).

¹² Frances Bartkowski, *Feminist Utopias* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 7.

¹³ Although there was an active transatlantic exchange of feminist and utopian ideas, the novels considered here were only published in their country of origin – *Mizora* and *Herland* in America, and *New Amazonia* in Britain.

Harmony community in Indiana in 1825. America also saw the development of other communities, one of the most famous being at Brook Farm in Massachusetts, based on the French Charles Fourier's socialist dream.¹⁴ This reformist spirit, together with a growing women's rights movement, was the impetus for social reformist, Jane Addams, to establish the Chicago settlement for women, Hull House, in 1889, a source of inspiration to Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In Britain, the Fellowship of New Life was born out of the Owenite communities, with the intent of securing an ethical socialist approach to life based on simplicity and harmony.¹⁵ Karl Marx's daughter, Eleanor, took up the mantle for women's rights. She spent years travelling through Europe and visited America to disseminate a feminist socialism. In 'The Woman Question' (1886), written with her common-law husband, Edward Aveling, she promoted state ownership of the means of production; equality between the sexes, including women's right to independence, education and other opportunities open to men; and marriage as a private contract based on 'love, respect, intellectual likeness, and command of the necessities of life'.¹⁶ Eleanor extended her father's socialism to include women's issues, arguing that no proper transformation of society could be effected without considering the economic position of women.

It was the hypothetical vision of a twenty-first-century world which captured the imagination on both sides of the Atlantic with the publication in 1888 of the utopian novel, *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* by Edward Bellamy. He imagines a world based on socialist principles, a world that has harnessed science and technology in pursuit of the eradication of poverty and evil and in which everyone lives as equals. The novel generated the establishment of 'Bellamy Clubs' all over America, the main aim of which was the nationalisation of industry. Gender roles in both this novel and William Morris's response to it in, *News from Nowhere*, are depicted in fairly traditional terms. Nonetheless, Gilman was a strong supporter of Bellamy who, together with the reformer, Jane Addams, inspired her work.¹⁷ Gilman was particularly impressed by the spirit of co-operation and collectivism on which these movements were premised, recognising the spirit of collectivism as one born out of a matriarchal order.¹⁸ The feminist literary utopia can be seen to emerge from a tradition of

¹⁴ For more on communitarian experiments in America, see Robert P. Sutton, *Communal Utopias and the American Experience: Secular Communities, 1824-2000* (Westport, CN. and London: Praeger, 2004).

¹⁵ Hinton also had an interest in the Fellowship of the New Life – see Chapter 4.

¹⁶ Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx Aveling, 'The Woman Question: From a Socialist Point of View', *Westminster Review*, 125, January to April 1886, pp. 207-222 (p. 221). Aveling and Marx acknowledge their debt to German socialist, August Bebel's *Women and Socialism* (1879), translated into English in 1885.

¹⁷ See Marguérite Corporaal, 'Towards a Feminist Collectivism: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Nationalist Movement', in *Literary Utopias of Cultural Communities, 1790-1910*, ed. by Marguérite Corporaal and Evert Jan van Leeuwen (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 209-222.

¹⁸ Corporaal, p. 211.

socialist, collective, and women's rights activity that already engaged many women on both sides of the Atlantic.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, it was at the first meeting of the International Council of Women in Washington in 1888 that the Finnish Alli Trygg-Helenius used the Atlantic cable as a metaphor, speaking of the 'golden cable of sympathy' that existed between women of the United States and Europe.¹⁹ McFadden points out that the transformation of travel, the dissemination of magazines and books, and the international postal system all served to strengthen an existing network of relationships between women across the Atlantic.²⁰ Communitarian ideas, utopian projects and social activism were disseminated further with the increase in migration and the emergence of transatlantic literary women such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and George Sand. The idea of female communities was not new to the nineteenth-century utopian novelist. One needs only think of the Amazonians of Greek mythology, surviving and enduring despite endless onslaughts. All-female communities have tended, however, to attract ambivalent responses from both men and women.²¹ Nina Auerbach suggests the following reason: 'As a recurrent literary image, a community of women is a rebuke to the conventional ideal of a solitary woman living for and through men, attaining citizenship in the community of adulthood through masculine approval alone'.²² In the feminist utopian world, women achieve citizenship through group endeavour, often as a result of a long and bloody fight to establish a state of their own. Underlying the feminist utopian dream depicted in *Mizora, New Amazonia* and *Herland* is an imaginary world based on female collectivism – an attempt to re-capture the ideals of the communitarian movement, as well as disavowing a world based on dualisms and the separation of public and private spheres. The notion of the dominant individual male subject, defined by his position in the public sphere and supported in the private sphere by woman acting as his emotional centre, is rejected in favour of a world in which there are no boundaries between the public and the private and in which women form a community, taking on a range of roles. The feminist utopian novel seeks to redress culturally pervasive concepts such as male individualism to re-work gendered power relations, and to re-structure social and political institutions that have worked against women's needs. The ideal of community is directly opposed to liberal

¹⁹ McFadden, p. 1.

²⁰ McFadden, p. 3.

²¹ See Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

²² Auerbach, p. 5.

individualism, but, as I discuss below, there is a risk that a commitment to community also precludes the expression of difference.

The Fictional Utopias of Corbett, Lane and Gilman

Of the three authors I have chosen, little is known about Mary Bradley Lane. Born in 1844, she was brought up in Ohio, worked as a school teacher, then married but remained childless. *Mizora*, first published in serial form in the *Cincinnati Commercial*, is her only known published novel, although she may have written another entitled *Escaneba*.²³ *Mizora* is narrated by Vera Zarovitch, a Russian noblewoman who was banished to Siberia for her outspokenness. She escapes and travels north with a group of Esquimaux. She sets off alone by boat for the North Pole, gets caught up in a strong current, and ends up in Mizora, a strange land situated in a remote part of the Northern hemisphere. There she learns how, three thousand years earlier, Mizora became an all-female society. Impressed with its political and social structure and its employment of the latest scientific and technological developments to ensure its smooth-running, Vera, nonetheless, begins to feel stifled by the lack of excitement and challenge. She decides to return home accompanied by a young Mizoran friend, only to find that her husband and child have died and that her Mizoran companion cannot cope with the exigencies of life in Russia or America.

Elizabeth Corbett was born in 1846, and was a British feminist and journalist with the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*. She wrote several novels that addressed the indignities that nineteenth-century women suffered, and was outspoken on women's rights. The female narrator of *New Amazonia*, is a journalist and feminist who falls asleep and wakes up in the year 2472 in New Amazonia, finding herself with a male companion who has also just arrived. New Amazonia is a socialist state, situated in a colonised Ireland. This is a matriarchal society and, although there are men, they are denied political office. She is escorted through the land, learning about its political, economic and social structure. Although liking what she finds, she decides to return home once she learns that her male companion faces death for his refusal to conform to New Amazonian rules. This novel was written partly as a response to an inflammatory article by Mrs. Humphry Ward, 'Appeal Against Female Suffrage', published in *Nineteenth Century* in June 1889. In this, Mrs. Ward states that women's work and responsibilities should remain separate from men's. If women are limited in their emancipation, this is because of the fundamental differences between the sexes; and the pursuit of mere outward equality is both vain and demoralizing and a misconception of

²³ Jean Pfaelzer, 'Introduction', in *Mizora: A Prophecy* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. xi-xi (p. xiii).

women's true dignity and mission. There was a vigorous riposte to this article in the *Fortnightly Review* together with a petition for female suffrage of which Corbett was a signatory. Her polemical preface to *New Amazonia* refers to this episode. She also wrote regularly on feminist issues to the *Women's Penny Paper*, and the fact that Corbett's narrator is also a journalist is a reflection of her belief in the power of the pen as part of feminist discourse.²⁴

The American Charlotte Perkins Gilman, born in 1860, was a sociologist, activist and lecturer, as well as being a prolific writer of both fiction and non-fiction. Although *Herland* was published many years after both *Mizora* and *New Amazonia*, the seeds of the novel were sewn in two of Gilman's most important non-fiction works, *Women and Economics* (1899) and *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903). Here she lays out her manifesto for women that was later developed in *Herland*. In this novella, three male friends decide to explore uncharted land rumoured to be the site of an all-female society. Told from the perspective of one of the friends, Van, a sociology student, they arrive by plane and are quickly held captive by the women. Their attempt to escape is thwarted, and eventually all three pair off with female companions. During their stay, they are educated about the principles and practices of Herland. One of the men, Terry, is banished for the attempted rape of his companion, Alima, and is accompanied home by Van and his partner, Ellador. Jeff chooses to remain in Herland with his wife, Celis, who is now pregnant – the first pregnancy in centuries by sexual reproduction. Influenced by Edward Bellamy, the writing of *Herland* represents, according to Marguerite Corporaal, a re-interpretation of Bellamy's Nationalism within a maternal culture.²⁵ In the case of both Gilman and Corbett, it is possible to read their utopias from the perspective of their individual activism and involvement with the cause of women's rights. Little is known about Lane, but it is possible that she was caught up in the dream that many women had of a better world, and this inspired her to write a utopian novel. All three novels are didactic in the tradition of utopian fiction, suggesting a commitment to the potential of their cultural work – to make real on the page a dream of the kind of community to which women aspired.²⁶

What sets the feminist utopian novel apart from others in the utopian genre is the focus on dismantling patriarchy. The two main identifying criteria, according to Carol Pearson, are firstly, the premise that patriarchy is an unnatural place and, secondly, the vision

²⁴ See Christina Lake, 'Amazonia, Science and Common Sense: The Rule of Women in Elizabeth Corbett's *New Amazonia*', *Victorian Network*, 5.1 (2013), 65-81.

²⁵ Corporaal, p. 215.

²⁶ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 146-147.

of a better world, a *eutopia* for women.²⁷ Frances Bartkowski recognises three key facets: feminist agency, in that ‘the everyday life of women becomes an exercise of wilful imagination, demanding revolutionary transformations’; a utopian impulse, in that ‘longing and desire, anger and despair, are reshaped by hope’; and a fictional narrative that ‘sets the pattern of these desires and transformations as if a potential future had erupted into the reader’s present’.²⁸ The sense of estrangement is another essential feature according to Darko Suvin. The utopian novel offers:

the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organised according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on *estrangement* arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis.²⁹

The sense of estrangement arises out of the familiar – it is truly uncanny and disrupting. Estrangement is further emphasised by utopian space being conceived at the margins of everyday life. In my Introduction I discuss the advantages of writing from the margins – it allows for both radicalism and subversion. Instead of looking inwards to a life structured according to Victorian ideological principles, the feminist woman writer, already situated at the margins of society by virtue of gender and occupation, is in a position from which she can look forward into a space that she can shape according to her own dreams. The *fin de siècle* writer, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, believed in the power of literature to spread ideas that otherwise might appear heretical.³⁰ She saw her writing as a form of ‘cultural work’ at the boundaries of gender, aimed at challenging and re-defining a pre-existing social order.³¹

The feminist utopian novel works to disturb other boundaries too, those between feminism and science, and feminism and politics. The re-ordering of these boundaries generates a sense of creative subversion and transformation. Thus it is that in the novels I discuss here Darwinian evolution is subjected to a re-interpretation, and science, particularly eugenics, is appropriated in the service of the feminist project. Kessler suggests that the cultural work of utopian fiction by women such as Gilman lies in:

²⁷ Carol Pearson, ‘Women’s Fantasies and Feminist Utopias’, *Frontiers*, 2.3 (1977), 50-61 (p. 50).

²⁸ Bartkowski, p. 10.

²⁹ Darko Suvin, ‘Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia: Some Historical Semantics, Some Genealogy, a Proposal, and a Plea’, in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 37-62 (p. 49), original emphasis.

³⁰ Kessler, p. 126.

³¹ Tompkins, p. xi.

proclaiming the belief that the female half of humanity not be confined to one traditional mode of being – wife/motherhood, but fill as varied social roles as male counterparts, that the female work of society be valued equally with that of the male.³²

What I suggest in my discussion here is that operating on the margins can be liberating whilst, at the same time, serving to emphasise an underlying tension within the feminist utopian project. On the one hand, it suggests freedom of expression and creativity. On the other hand, there is a danger that being situated on the margins simply reinforces the borderline existence of women.³³ Without a space of their own, always other to the patriarchal subject, women must actively resist being positioned as either secondary or irrelevant. The feminist utopian novelist must also resist the potential for the ‘good place’ of their *eutopian* dream to become a ‘no place’ – an irrelevance to the real world – or a space of closure.

The novels follow a common structural pattern – the alternative society or world, the protagonist as visitor to this world, ideological contestations within the text that highlight the contradictions between new and old, and the visitor’s return home.³⁴ The novel traces the emergence of an alternative, ideal society out of the present-day world, the connecting thread between the two worlds inspiring both hope and possibility. As Pfaelzer points out, ‘the seeds of the future are immanent in the present’.³⁵ But this also means that the future can never fully sever itself from the past. These novels are not meant to function as blueprints for a new feminist world but rather, as Cranny-Francis notes, as ‘a deconstruction of the conservative ideological position that the contemporary social formation is natural or obvious or inevitable’.³⁶ An all-female world may be a biologically far-fetched notion (there are very few organisms able to reproduce by parthenogenesis), but it needs to be read as a metaphor for what women might be capable of without men. Although producing a sense of estrangement and the experience of another space-time, Moylan argues that the utopian text must also be ‘cognitively consistent with nature as it is known or with the imagined natural laws in the particular text’.³⁷ The feminist utopia aims to dismantle nature as it is known, refuting the existence of irreducible ‘natural’ laws to create a society built on a new order. One of the challenges is the extent to which the feminist utopia can withstand the old order.

³² Carol Farley Kessler, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress Toward Utopia with Selected Writings* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 7.

³³ Jean Pfaelzer, ‘The Changing of the Avant-Garde: The Feminist Utopia’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 15.3 (1988), 282-294 (p. 284).

³⁴ Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), p. 36.

³⁵ Pfaelzer (1984), p. 17.

³⁶ Cranny-Francis, p. 124.

³⁷ Moylan, p. 33.

The ideological differences between old and new worlds are laid bare in the Socratic dialogue between visitor and guide. The resulting tension is most vividly represented by Terry's (*Herland*) and Vera's (*Mizora*) respective responses to an all-female world: Terry is appalled at the sexlessness of the Herlander women and is determined to show them how real women should behave; and Vera is overwhelmed to the extent of feeling oppressed by the perfection of the Mizoran world. Underlying the tension between new and old worlds is a binary of good and bad, with the utopian society portrayed as organised according to the principles of perfectibility.³⁸ The ideological conflicts inherent in the utopian novel and the responses to them, both within the text and by the reader, emphasise how much one person's utopia may be another's dystopia. As it becomes clear what holds the utopian world together, the more difficult it becomes to sustain the binary of new/good and old/bad. For the utopian world to survive, it is essential that the whole community works together. In striving for perfection, the possibility of difference is denied. The ideal citizen is the Anglo-Saxon woman and, only in the case of New Amazonia, the man who accepts female leadership. Physical or moral weakness is eliminated in the pursuit of a strong, self-sufficient society.

The utopian vision was traditionally created out of masculine discourses of imperialism and colonialism – the idea of the strong, white (male) explorer conquering new territory and colonising it for their own purposes – and of science in the application of rational, scientific methodology to govern the new state. When it is women who conquer and colonise, it is necessary to defend what they have won from the stronger adversary, and to protect themselves from invasion, or from the possibility of retrogression to a world that revisits on them the indignities they have escaped. They can never forget the world from which they came, as the visitors to utopia are a constant reminder of the continuing existence of the old world and the threats it holds. As we shall see, using the traditional (male) form of the utopian novel further embeds the feminist utopia in a patriarchal structure from which it is difficult to extricate itself.

The Re-configuring of Space in the Feminist Utopia

When utopian thinkers portray an ideal community or society, they design a physical setting to establish and strengthen its existence. What utopias do is to experiment with spatial imagination, to reconceptualise the relationship between space and subject and its corporeality.³⁹

³⁸ Moylan, p. 38.

³⁹ Nicole Pohl, *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600-1800* (Aldershot: Aldgate, 2006), p. 2.

The imaginary utopian space, translated into its physical form, is, as Nicole Pohl points out, an ideal space in which to re-envision the relationship between the embodied subject and space. In these novels, space and the way it is occupied is delineated in detail to reveal the paradox 'between ideal and lived space, between ideology and social practice', in a way that emphasises the importance of space to shaping female subjectivity.⁴⁰ The feminist utopian text has its own chronotope with 'an *intrinsic* generic significance'.⁴¹ Referring to Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the chronotope, Catherine Schryer points out, 'Every genre expresses space/time relations that reflect current social beliefs regarding the placement of human individuals in space and time and the kind of action permitted within that time/space'.⁴² The feminist utopian space-time reflects the resistance and challenge to nineteenth-century gender ideology that was at the heart of feminist campaigning. Within this imaginary gendered space, the authors create an ideal space for women designed to meet their needs as a community, and to allow them to express the extent of their capabilities across what would have been delineated as public and private spheres. This is a world in which social and power relations are transformed. Space is foregrounded over time: the embodied subject's experience of space, and the details of how women occupy a space no longer divided between public and private, suggests a new relationship between women and space.

The configuration of space and time not as separate modalities but as relative space-time points to the utopian promise of changing both the future and the past. The projection into the future of a new world follows a critique of the old; the new world offers lessons in transformation which are taken back by the visitor, with the hope that one day the world she lives in might be transformed. Time is thus configured differently, according to Carol Pearson:

Time is linear; *and* it is relative. To the degree that we live only in linear time, we are locked into a world governed by laws of causality, dualism, linearity, and struggle. But we also have available to us a reality based upon relativity. In this dimension, time and space are not separate, but time/space is curved. It then becomes possible to understand that we can change not only the future but the past.⁴³

⁴⁰ Pohl, p. 2.

⁴¹ Bakhtin, p. 85, original emphasis.

⁴² Catherine F. Schryer, 'Genre and Power: A Chronotopic Analysis', in *The Rhetoric and Ideology of Genre: Strategies for Stability and Change*, ed. by Richard M. Coe, Lorelei Lingard and Tatiana Teslenko (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2002), pp. 73-102 (p. 83).

⁴³ Carol Pearson, 'Of Time and Space: Theories of Social Change in Contemporary Feminist Science Fiction', in *Women in Search of Utopia: Mavericks and Mythmakers*, ed. by Ruby Rohrlich and Elaine Hoffman Baruch (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), pp. 260-269 (p. 260).

Non-Euclidean curved time contributes to a sense of estrangement, unsettling any perception or cognition of the world as fixed and stable, and opening up the possibility of imagining an alternative world. It feels strange because it is both different and similar – somewhat uncanny.⁴⁴ Cranny-Francis describes the ‘literature of estrangement’ as a displacement in time and/or space – a displacement in terms of geography and environment, and of temporality.⁴⁵ Taking us out of the world we know into an ‘elsewhere’ space helps de-familiarise the world so that we can consider it more critically.⁴⁶ This is a crucial strategy for the feminist writer wanting both to critique the forces of patriarchy that shape women’s lives and to explore new forms of subjectivity.

The way that space is conceptualised in utopia serves both to strengthen and defend a feminist ideology. Mizora, New Amazonia and Herland are imaginary creations – neither Herland nor Mizora have any real counterpart, and New Amazonia is represented as a colonised Ireland. They have emerged through a process of social unrest, war, colonisation and the gradual displacement of men, either altogether in the case of Mizora and Herland, or from positions of power in New Amazonia. The hard-won victory of women is defended through a variety of mechanisms: imagining a space that is physically impenetrable, transforming it into a new Eden, and strengthening it through the application of a rational, scientific order. Massey argues that, ‘The identity of a place does not derive from some internalised history. It derives, in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with “the outside”’.⁴⁷ Temporal and spatial displacement serve to create distance between the old world, associated with degeneracy and savagery, and the new civilized world. The need to defend and protect suggests, however, that the utopian world is never completely free of the history out of which it was born. New Amazonia is only across the sea from Corbett’s nineteenth-century England although separated from it temporally by nearly 600 years. Colonisation and the evolution of a matriarchal society with a population that consists predominantly of superior women who are seven-foot tall, strong and beautiful, acts as a bulwark against a return to a less civilised time that persists in recent memory. It was not uncommon in the nineteenth century for the Irish to be portrayed as violent and alcoholic, with a physiognomy that was perceived to confirm their inferiority to the Anglo-Saxon race.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Moylan, p. 34.

⁴⁵ Cranny-Francis, p. 26.

⁴⁶ Daphne Patai, ‘Beyond Defensiveness: Feminist Research Strategies’, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 6.2 (1983), 177-189 (p. 179).

⁴⁷ Massey, p. 169.

⁴⁸ Physiognomy, the ability to read character from facial features and expressions, was a branch of phrenology, popular in the nineteenth century. In the 1880s, racial anthropologists described the Irish with their snub noses as descendants of primitive man. The snub nose was linked to bad character, disease and otherness. Sander L.

Visitors are allowed entry to New Amazonia only if able to show ‘good reason for their advent’ and, if unable to do so, are subjected to a period of labour and then expulsion (p. 57). The ever-present threat of regression and degeneracy was not only a function of memory, but also of a more recent appreciation of the ‘civilised’ Western world’s evolutionary proximity to their ‘savage’ counterpart. The women presiding over the utopian worlds imagined by Corbett, Lane and Gilman retain a memory also of having been more closely identified with savages and children than with ‘superior’ man.

In *The Descent of Man* (1871), which focuses on human evolution, Charles Darwin is particularly interested in the nature and origin of the human mind and the development of moral sense and emotions. Where his *On the Origin of Species* (1859) is often read as a work that discovered in nature a world of individualism and bloody competition, in *Descent* Darwin addresses the importance of mutual support, sympathy and love that differentiate humans from other animals. He identifies differences between men and women, describing women as physically ‘intermediate between the child and man’.⁴⁹ With regard to mental powers, ‘Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness; and this holds good with savages’.⁵⁰ Darwin concedes that women’s powers of intuition, their rapid perception, and imitation are more marked than in men, but ‘some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilisation’.⁵¹ The idea that modern woman is not that far-removed from her ‘savage’ ancestry was strongly resisted by a number of women writers, from Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau and Harriet Taylor Mill to those who, in undertaking a feminist reading of Darwin, identified flaws in his theory, particularly in relation to his depiction of the role of the female in evolution.⁵² One way for the utopian society to distance itself from any association with savagery is to create impenetrable borders, and both Herland and Mizora have borders that are heavily defended. Herland becomes inaccessible from the outlying

Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 94-95. Charles Kingsley once wrote to his wife of being ‘haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw [in Ireland]’. Quoted in L. P. Curtis, *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridgeport, CN: Conference on British Studies at University of Bridgeport, 1968), p. 84.

⁴⁹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 622.

⁵⁰ Darwin, p. 629.

⁵¹ Darwin, p. 629.

⁵² In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft argued that women only appear inferior to men because of their lack of access to proper education. This is echoed in the writings of Harriet Taylor Mill who, together with her second husband, John Stuart Mill, wrote of the condition of women and marriage and the way that society prevented women from realising their potential. Harriet Martineau gave the lie to women’s inferiority through becoming renowned from her journalism and travel writing, and particularly for her popularising of political economy in *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832). The Americans, Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Eliza Gamble, and the British Frances Swiney are examples of women on both sides of the Atlantic who directly challenged Darwin’s interpretation of women’s evolutionary position. See below for further discussion of these and others re-reading Darwin.

jungle following a volcanic eruption. Situated on a high-standing spur, '[i]t ran back on either side, apparently, to the far-off white-crowned peaks in the distance, themselves probably inaccessible' (p. 12). Its three visitors are only able to reach it by plane, and are then closely guarded throughout their stay. Mizora is 'a hollow sphere, bounded North and South by impassible oceans' (p. 25). Situated in the Arctic zone on the edge of civilisation, the nearest people are the Eskimaux, an indigenous group with a history of primitivism and shamanism in sharp contrast to the Anglo-Saxon ideal that has evolved in Mizora. The displacement of these worlds, spatially and temporally, acts both to distance their occupants from association with the old world at the same time as reminding them of what still exists beyond the borders and remains within women's collective memory.

The representation of the white Anglo-Saxon utopian woman as a symbol of successful colonisation highlights the problematic relationship between femininity, first-wave feminism and colonialism. The desire to colonise spaces that are at a distance both temporally and spatially from the old world is primarily about protecting the utopian space from degeneracy and regression. But it also reflects the complex and equivocal positioning of gender in the discourse on colonialism and imperialism in the nineteenth century. As Adele Perry points out, 'gender was deeply inscribed in the process of colony building'.⁵³ The white woman was a symbol of purity. Her civilising influence was in ensuring the continuing purity of the Anglo-Saxon race, to act as a bulwark against miscegenation, and to encourage the white male settlers to enter into traditional family life. This further problematises the idea of the colonising utopian woman seeking to distance herself from patriarchal structures, at the same time as having been identified closely with them. Marian Valverde discusses how inextricably linked were discourses on reproduction and racial and imperial politics.⁵⁴ Anxieties associated with colonialism and race were influential in helping form Gilman's views on racial purity and nationalism, and these are translated into her (and others') visions of the feminist utopian space.⁵⁵

The utopian world is imagined as a form of prelapsarian paradise overlaid with the latest scientific and technological inventions, operating according to the most rational principles that turns it into a kind of Garden of Eden that suggests 'a future possibility rather

⁵³ Adele Perry, "'Fair Ones of a Purer Caste": White Women and Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia', *Feminist Studies*, 23.3 (1997), 501-524 (p. 519).

⁵⁴ See Marian Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race is Free": Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism', in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, ed. by Franca Iacoretta and Marian Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 3-26. See also Bland, pp. 230-231.

⁵⁵ Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 80.

than a past moment'.⁵⁶ It reflects Golden Age thinking – a utopian world of peace, harmony and prosperity that inspired the pastoral imagination as well as the millenarian movement of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. The reprising of paradise suggests a widespread desire on the part of women to dispel some of the gender mythology associated with Biblical stories to make this a feminine space. Phelps's fantasy of a Summerland is of a paradise re-imagined through a feminist reading of the Bible; and Corelli creates, through an imaginative conjunction of Christianity, Theosophy and esoteric beliefs, a form of feminine divine. The utopian feminists' representation of a modern paradise is in the same spirit – an attempt to take control of their own mythology, in this case through a re-reading of Darwin. If evolutionary theory challenged the idea that the world was created by God in seven days, then it also allowed for other biblical mythology to be questioned.⁵⁷ Kimberley Hamlin suggests that for many nineteenth-century feminists evolution offered 'an alternative to the Genesis creation story and decentred Eve as the barometer by which all women would be judged'.⁵⁸ Thus both Gilman and Lane represent their utopian worlds as earthly paradises in which women are no longer tainted with the sin of Eve but are, instead, the harbingers of transformation. Place can be read here as a space in which women, rather than being constrained by the legacy of Eve, find themselves, as in Grosz's interpretation of Darwin, facing a future of open-ended becoming.⁵⁹ This suggests time as a dynamic force that, instead of tying women to the past, offers a radical opportunity to engender a new future.⁶⁰ The utopian women have made Herland into a place of 'perfect cultivation', 'a land that looked like an enormous park' (p. 13); and Mizora appears to its visitor as Edenic: 'All nature lay asleep in voluptuous beauty, veiled in a glorious atmosphere [...] Wherever the eye turned it met something charming in cloud, or sky, or water, or vegetation. Everything had felt the magical touch of beauty' (p. 15). This is a world in which women have brought nature into harmony with science and technology to create the perfect space, where they can live untainted by the shame associated with the Fall. Not only is the original creation story denied but women, through the application of science and technology, become the creators of their own world, different and yet, at the same time, reminiscent of an earlier paradise. Feminists

⁵⁶ Felski, p. 158, with reference to Olive Schreiner's representation of Eden in *Woman and Labour* (London: Unwin, 1911).

⁵⁷ This was not new. The Biblical higher criticism of Germany in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century set about analysing biblical texts and searching for historical records, seen by some as undermining the belief that the word of the Bible was divinely inspired. George Eliot translated some of this criticism for an English-speaking audience.

⁵⁸ Kimberley A. Hamlin, *From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women's Rights in Gilded Age America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 55.

⁵⁹ Grosz (2002), p. 15.

⁶⁰ Grosz (2002), p. 18.

were not slow to identify the political and social implications of evolutionary theory for women's lives. As Victorian political activist and suffragist, Helen Hamilton Gardener put it, 'The morals of the nineteenth century have outgrown the Bible [...] What Moses and David and Samuel thought as the word and will of God, we, who are fortunate enough to live in the same age with Charles Darwin, know to be the expression of a low social condition untampered by the light of science'.⁶¹ In the utopian novel, it is 'the light of science' which works to transform the space that women live in. The application of science enables the removal of the barriers between private and public space, giving agency across all aspects of lived experience. There are no social divisions between private and public occupations. In Mizora, 'the word "servant" did not exist in [their] language' (p. 37). Women choose the occupation best suited to themselves and, as in Herland where child care is seen as highly skilled, in New Amazonia, 'Domestic assistants occupy a very honourable position in [the] social economy' (p. 122). The spaces that women occupy and the tasks undertaken are all of equal value.

A rational, scientific approach to space is evident in the feminist utopian novel, based on a realization that space both shapes, and is shaped by, the embodied self. In the nineteenth century, the ideology of public and private spheres helped dictate the spaces that men and women could occupy, with women assigned the home.⁶² Dorothy Hayden points out that it was an overarching aim of those involved in women's rights campaigns 'to overcome the split between domestic life and public life created by industrial capitalism'.⁶³ If women's role was identified with reproduction rather than production, then it was up to them to exert control over this aspect of their lives, to re-organise maternity and motherhood so that they became properly recognised in the overall economy. This was one of the arguments in Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1898), in which she asserts that women's work in the home – child-rearing and housework – should be recognised as having proper economic value.⁶⁴ As part of her call for the recognition of domestic work as a reputable profession, she suggests a radical re-structuring of the family home in the form of serviced apartment houses, designed to meet the needs of the professional woman in particular:

⁶¹ Helen Hamilton Gardener, 'Men, Women, and the Gods', in *Men, Women, and the Gods, and Other Lectures* (New York: Truth Seeker, 1885), p. 24, cited in Hamlin, p. 38.

⁶² It should be noted that the ideology of private and public spheres was not matched in practice. It applied mostly to middle-class married women; impoverished single women and working-class women had no choice but to work in order to survive. The feminist utopian novels considered in this chapter gloss over issues of class.

⁶³ Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighbourhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), p. 4.

⁶⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston: Small Maynard, 1898), p. 13.

The apartments would be without kitchens; but there would be a kitchen belonging to the house from which meals could be served to the families in their rooms or in a common dining-room as preferred. It would be a home where the cleaning was done by efficient workers, not hired separately by the families, but engaged by the manager of the establishment; and a roof-garden, day nursery, and kindergarten, under well-trained professional nurses and teachers, would insure proper care of the children.⁶⁵

Gilman recognised the importance of physical space in the expression of subjectivity and, in particular, how the emphasis on home as the designated place for woman – the ‘angel in the house’ – could be both imprisoning and detrimental to her mental health: ‘We are beginning to see that a house can be a tremendous engine of evil; that [a person] not only makes houses, but is in turn made by them, for good or ill’.⁶⁶ The evil of domestic imprisonment is particularly pronounced in Gilman’s short story, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1892).

Recognising the importance of space in shaping women’s self-expression, she advocated the re-organisation of family space in both her non-fiction and fiction. Gilman argued both to free women from the drudgery of domestic duties by taking domestic work out of the family home and situating it in the public sphere where it would be properly valued and remunerated, and to allow women to pursue professional careers.

Gilman was interested in the work of socialist communitarians, particularly the Welshman, Robert Owen, and the Frenchman, Charles Fourier. When Owen moved to America, it was his intention to create an ideal community, similar to the one Gilman later envisaged. Although his plans failed to get off the ground, he inspired several experiments in community buildings and settlement, as did Fourier, who envisaged what he called ‘phalansteries’ or unitary dwellings – these were settlements with communal facilities.⁶⁷ These ideas appealed to feminists because they were designed to give equal weight to domestic and industrial labour. Gilman’s own version was doomed to failure, as it was aimed at transforming the lives of what was a very small group of professional career women, and did not properly address the issue of who would take on the domestic work. Another influence on Gilman’s vision was Hull House in Chicago, established by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr in 1889. Their programme of reform was somewhat different, in that it was aimed at convincing working-class and immigrant women of ‘the advantages that could be derived from hard work, attention to domestic affairs, and participation in a democracy’.⁶⁸ Instead of

⁶⁵ Gilman, p. 242.

⁶⁶ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ‘The Best for the Poorest’, *Forerunner*, 7 (1916), pp. 260-262 (p. 260), quoted in Jane S. Upin, ‘Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Instrumentalism beyond Dewey’, *Hypatia*, 8.2 (1993), 38-63 (p. 48).

⁶⁷ Hayden, p. 35.

⁶⁸ Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* (New York and London, Guildford Press, 2001), p. 20.

furthering the radical intention of putting the domestic sphere at the centre of public democracy, it ended up supporting the idea that domestic work should be undertaken by women in the home. In spite of the flaws of some of these communitarian ventures, it is important to remember that women were beginning to recognise the central role that space played in the kind of work they undertook and its value. They knew that if women's lives were to be re-shaped then the spaces in which they lived had also to be changed. As Hayden points out, feminists of the late-nineteenth century 'identified the spatial transformation of the domestic sphere under women's control as a key issue linking campaigns for social equality, economic justice, and environmental reform'.⁶⁹ The emphasis that Gilman gives in *Women and Economics* to the spaces women occupy is transposed into the utopian world of *Herland*, with similar versions appearing in the utopian fiction of Corbett and Lane.

The organization and physical layout of Herland, New Amazonia and Mizora suggest the work of early feminist town planners. In New Amazonia and Mizora, homes are constructed around open squares with clean, green spaces offering a pleasurable coming-together of the community – reminiscent of the ideal communities imagined by Owen and Fourier. In all three utopias, there are communal spaces for child care, education and domestic work, the latter facilitated by technology and given equal status with other roles. Herland exudes a sense of homeliness as well as order: 'Everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasantest sense of home all over it' (p. 21). There are private homes in all three utopias, but not as spaces in which women are hidden from the public world. It is this that frustrates Terry in *Herland* when he complains that there is no home: he has to be reminded that in Herland home is everywhere – in the nursery, the parlour, the workshop, the school, the office (p. 99). The rationalisation of physical space reflects an efficiency of town planning that values the spaces in which women work and seek leisure. In *New Amazonia*, Lane mentions that it was only when women became architects that radical changes were made to the environment, as a result of which squalor and discomfort were eradicated, paving the way for 'one of the greatest political events the world has ever seen' – the colonisation of Ireland for this utopian state (p. 38). The utopian spaces imagined by Corbett, Lane and Gilman combine rationalism and scientific management to order life so that women are no longer constrained by either maternity or domesticity. As full participants in society, all spaces are open to them. The creators of these utopias have re-thought the basic notion of space and how it is occupied. Acknowledging the extent to which space shapes the

⁶⁹ Hayden, p. 10.

functioning of bodies within it, they have re-defined space so that the gendered boundaries between public and private are dissolved.

The Feminist Utopia and Evolution

The development of the utopian society in Mizora, New Amazonia and Herland reflects the influence of a form of social Darwinism – an emphasis on the role of environment in the evolution of humankind. The pursuit of the perfect society remains, however, haunted by pervading memories of earlier degeneracy and savagery that must be resisted. Haunted by time, the new utopian space is unable to fully escape the mark of history. The past permeates the present. Attracted to Spencer’s social Darwinism and his concept of the ‘survival of the fittest’, and to French naturalist, Lamarck’s, ideas about intelligent design, many women came to believe that, through education and careful re-organisation of society, it would be possible to transform social conditions. The idea of society as a ‘social organism’ supported the notion of community and the value of interdependence as a sign of evolutionary progress.⁷⁰ Lamarck’s view that characteristics are acquired as a result of environmental influences and passed on through future generations emphasised the significance of intention and will.⁷¹ And the undermining of religious myths that could be read into Darwinian theory, for example the myth of the Fall and the legacy of Eve, showed feminists that they might employ evolutionary theory to add weight to their own project of transforming the way that women were defined by society.

Grosz believes that feminists have often ignored the potential of Darwinian theory for the open-ended and transformative possibilities it offers women, and that they choose instead to focus on Darwin’s Victorian patriarchal views of women.⁷² But it is the randomness of individual variation and natural selection, argues Grosz, that makes evolution a fundamentally open-ended system with neither promise nor indication of a particular future, ‘but every indication of inherent proliferation and transformation’.⁷³ She goes on to state that:

⁷⁰ Lois Magner, ‘Darwinism and the Woman Question: The Evolving Ideas of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’, in *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. by Joanne B. Karpinski (New York: Hall, 1992), pp. 115-128 (p. 121). Other writers commenting on the influence of social Darwinism on feminist utopian thinking include Bernice Hausman, ‘Sex Before Gender: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Evolutionary Paradigm of Utopia’, *Feminist Studies*, 24.3 (1998), 489-510; and Nina Bowman Albinski, ‘“The Laws of Justice, of Nature, and of Right”: Victorian Feminist Utopias’, in *Feminism, Utopia and Narrative*, ed. by Libby Falk Jones and Sarah Webster Goodwin (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), pp. 50-68.

⁷¹ See Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Ark, 1985), pp. 24-26 for a comparison of Darwin’s and Lamarck’s evolutionary theories.

⁷² Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigations for a Possible Alliance’, in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Ackman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp. 23-51 (p. 28).

⁷³ Grosz, p. 38.

What Darwin's work makes clear is that what has occurred to an individual in the operations or a milieu or environment (it matters little here if it is natural or cultural) is the force or impetus that propels that individual to processes, not of remediation (remediation literally involves undoing what cannot be undone) but of self-transformation.⁷⁴

The struggle for existence results in more successful strategies that change the way natural selection functions. Evolution, she argues, is about overcoming the legacy of history and memory. In nature this is a slow process, but where politics and social systems are concerned, they can 'borrow the energy and temporality of natural systems for political modes of resistance and overcoming'.⁷⁵ Because of the struggle to survive, the dominant individual or species is always at risk of resistance from a subordinate group: in terms of gender relations, this places the onus on women to resist and overturn existing power relations. Although these are the thoughts of a twenty-first-century mind seeking an alliance between feminism and Darwinism, there is an interesting parallel to be found between Grosz's perspective and those nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century feminists keen to appropriate Darwin's ideas for their own ends. Darwinian theory could be read differently and applied to social and political life. It could point to, as Grosz argues, the possibilities for women's transformation, once they are able to take control and overcome the legacy of history by intervening in the processes that shape their own history and place in the future. Where advancements normally take generations, in Mizora, 'we have now arrived at a stage when advancement is clearly perceptible between one generation and the next' (p. 67). This application of evolutionary theory works to generate a paradigm shift in thinking about time and history, as we have seen in earlier chapters. Feminists were keen to take from it what they could so that they might forge a role for themselves in the evolution of humankind.

Some nineteenth-century feminists were particularly critical of what Darwin had to say about women and sexual selection. Hamlin points out that where Darwin believed that in all species apart from humans the female selects her mate, feminists saw an opportunity to restore the human female to a condition of choice.⁷⁶ There were women prepared to indicate where Darwin had gone wrong. For example, in *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (1875), the American Protestant minister, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, states that 'the facts of Evolution may have been misinterpreted, by giving undue prominence to such as have been evolved in the male line; and by overlooking equally essential modifications which have arisen in the

⁷⁴ Grosz, p. 40.

⁷⁵ Grosz, p. 41.

⁷⁶ Hamlin, p. 32.

diverging female line'.⁷⁷ Feminist writers also seized on what Darwin had identified as traits of cooperation and sympathy in animal groups – the roots of morality when fully developed in human behaviour.⁷⁸ Thomas Dixon highlights the ways in which the English writer, Arabella Buckley, who wrote for both adults and children, emphasises the moral nature of Darwinian theory. On the life-history of ants in *Life and Her Children*, Buckley writes that, 'the great guiding principle in ant-life appears to be devotion to the community, much more than to each other', the same underlying principle of the feminist utopia.⁷⁹ In *Winners in Life's Race*, she describes how natural selection has led not only to 'wonderfully-formed bodies', but also to 'higher and more sensitive natures', and how 'intelligence and love are often as useful weapons in fighting the battle of life as brute force and ferocity'.⁸⁰ Later on, in *The Sexes in Science and History* (1916), the American writer, Eliza Gamble, was to emphasise the role of altruism and sympathy, which she considered to be superior female qualities promoting feelings of solidarity and community.⁸¹ In Herland, through the support and nurturing of the first women to bear children without men, 'The whole little nation of women surrounded them with loving service', and within a couple of generations they had found 'a new race' (p. 58). Individual desire was set aside for the good of the community and its future well-being.

Like Blackwell, Gamble believed that Darwin chose to play down any signs of superiority in women, for example, the distinctive female characteristics of 'perception and intuition, combined with greater powers of endurance', the first two of which, because of 'the supremacy of the animal instincts, have thus far had little opportunity to manifest themselves'.⁸² Gamble associates the so-called 'civilised' man with selfishness, competitiveness and warmongering tendencies, his 'animal instincts' being responsible for holding women back:

So soon as women are freed from the unnatural restrictions placed upon them through the temporary predominance of the animal instincts in man, their greater powers of endurance, together with a keener insight and an organism comparatively free from

⁷⁷ Antoinette Brown Blackwell, *The Sexes Throughout Nature* (New York: Putnam, 1875), p. 20, cited in Hamlin, p. 104.

⁷⁸ Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism: Making Moral Meanings in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: The British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 136.

⁷⁹ Arabella R. Buckley, *Life and Her Children: Glimpses of Animal Life from the Amoeba to the Insects* (New York: Appleton, 1881), p. 299.

⁸⁰ Arabella R. Buckley, *Winners in Life's Race; Or, The Great Backboned Family* (London: Edward Stanford, 1882), pp. 348-349.

⁸¹ Penelope Deutscher, 'The Descent of Man and the Evolution of Woman', *Hypatia*, 19.2 (2004), 35-55 (p. 43).

⁸² Eliza Gamble, *The Sexes in Science and History: An Inquiry into The Dogma of Her Inferiority to Man* (New York: Putnam, 1916), p. 77.

imperfections, will doubtlessly give them a decided advantage in the struggle for existence.⁸³

In the opinion of Gamble and others, male aggression and traits associated with self-serving desires contribute to a degenerate society in which inequality and poverty persist. If this is the pinnacle of manhood, it simply confirms the other side of evolution – that society might just as easily take the path of dissolution and regression as that of progress. The feminist utopian project was to protect and defend against such a turnaround, hence efforts to invert gender superiority. Competition is downplayed in the feminist model of evolution, one built on co-operation and altruism. Indeed, the superior female characteristics of altruism, sympathy and co-operation suggest that any moral values that were traditionally attributed to the male belonged rightly to the female. A critical reading of Darwinian theory through feminist eyes managed to subvert notions of male superiority and sexual selection, and to place women at the moral centre of evolutionary progress.

The achievement of a peace-loving and co-operative utopian society is not arrived at without a history of aggressive competition. Darwin explained that where variation occurs in small progressive steps, natural selection can be catapulted forward through major, sometimes cataclysmic changes. The results may be unpredictable, but what is important for the utopian project is, as Grosz suggests, that these chance events point to evolution as an ‘open-ended system [...] with every indication of inherent proliferation and transformation’.⁸⁴ Where a combination of variation and the inherent superiority of women might have resulted in the gradual evolution and transformation of women’s position, enabling them to overcome male aggression, the utopian novelist speeds up the process through a series of catastrophic events. In *Herland*, it is a volcanic eruption that serves to cut off the land from the rest of the world and decimate the male population, resulting in women finally seizing control. In *New Amazonia*, war is instrumental in depleting the male population and allowing for female insurgency; and *Mizora* has its own history of war and despotism before women finally establish a new republic of their own. Men, having been excluded from offices of the state for over a century, are selected out through a process of ‘survival of the fittest’. The history of each society, dominated by male aggression and selfishness, has been associated with degeneration, despotism, war and poverty. When women take control of these societies, this represents an attempt at a significant rupture with history. Where Grosz, however, points to the possibility of overcoming the legacy of history and memory, the feminist utopia suggests

⁸³ Gamble, p. 78.

⁸⁴ Grosz (2008), p. 38.

that a complete rupture with the past is impossible because of the way the past continues to haunt the present. Nonetheless, the women attempt a demarcation that signifies both a separation of the peaceful present from the violent past, and a split of the feminine from masculine influence: the displacement of the male in the feminist utopia serving as a rejection of (male) aggression and its association with both animal (sexual) instinct and savagery.

Where there are men in the feminist utopia they play, at most, a limited role. The men in New Amazonia can never assume roles of office: ‘The purity and wisdom of New Amazonian Government is proverbial, and we know better than to admit *the possibility of retrogression* by permitting male governance again’ (p. 80, emphasis added). In a similar vein, men are punished far more severely for adultery than women, inverting the situation that prevailed in Victorian Britain and most of America. For women who commit adultery, their position in society is degraded, but men are banished: ‘It is long since we recognised the necessity of repressing vice by other methods than our forerunners adopted’ (p. 82). The fear of a return to an era of vice and degeneracy is countered by a society based on female principles in which male behaviour is carefully prescribed. It appears that it is only with the complete eradication of men that female society can be managed without the need for constant surveillance. In the all-female Mizora, for example, although laws exist to protect property and regulate moral behaviour, they serve no real purpose – the people ‘would abide by the principles of justice set forth in them just as scrupulously if we should repeal them’ (p. 71). This self-regulated moral behaviour, confined here to the female of the species, is what the British naturalist, Alfred Russel Wallace, saw as the pinnacle of human evolution. He believed that as man’s [*sic*] intellectual and sympathetic emotions were further refined, improvements would be such that the world would once again be inhabited by ‘a single homogenous race’, in which everyone is equal:

Each one will then work out his own happiness in relation to that of his fellows; perfect freedom of action will be maintained, since the well balanced moral faculties will never permit anyone to transgress on the equal freedom of others; restrictive laws will not be wanted, for each man will be guided by the best of laws.⁸⁵

Compulsory government would be unnecessary and man would control his passions in a way conducive to happiness. The world would become ‘as bright a paradise as ever haunted the dreams of seer or poet’.⁸⁶ The moral faculties and self-regulation of Mizoran society are

⁸⁵ Alfred Russel Wallace, ‘The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deducted from the Theory of “Natural Selection”’, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, II (1864), pp. clviii-clxxxvii (pp. clxix, clxx).

⁸⁶ Wallace, p. clxx.

depicted as those of a morally superior and highly evolved world, in contrast to one of degeneracy and vice. Ironically, the utopian society mimics the liberal idealism of the Victorian world, in which self-regulation was valorized as part of a civilised rational order. It has succeeded in becoming the homogenous, equal race of which Wallace dreamt but, as I discuss shortly, at the cost of the freedom of expression.

Another example of the highly evolved state of the utopian society is its ability to harness nature. This is the stage at which, according to Wallace, human will supersede natural selection, resulting in a being so superior to nature that, 'he [*sic*] knew how to control and regulate her action, and could keep himself in harmony with her, not by a change in body, but by an advance of mind'.⁸⁷ It is through the harnessing of science in the service of nature that the women of Herland and Mizora have managed to transform human reproduction from necessitating male and female cells to a system of parthenogenesis. When the male visitors to Herland wonder at how parthenogenesis can result in such variation in women, the latter 'attributed it partly to the careful education, which followed each slight tendency to differ, and partly to the law of mutation' (p. 78). When Terry disputes the transmission of acquired traits, one of the Herlanders suggests that these traits may have been latent in the original mother, although Jeff believes them to be the result of the Herlanders' 'accumulated culture' and 'amazing psychic growth' (p. 79). In Mizora, mental superiority is attributed to following 'the laws that govern the evolution of life' (p. 110). Genius depends on careful nurturing: 'It is not what Nature has done for us, it is what we have done for her, that makes us a race of superior people' (p. 110). The key to this progress is education – as Vera says on her return home from Mizora, 'The future of the world, if it be grand and noble, will be the result of UNIVERSAL EDUCATION, FREE AS THE GOD-GIVEN WATER WE DRINK' (p. 147, original emphasis). Darwin concedes that should woman be 'trained to energy and perseverance, and to have her reason and imagination exercised to the highest point', she might reach the same standard of mental capacity as man.⁸⁸ This is exactly what feminists from Wollstonecraft onwards saw as central to women's progress, and is validated here in its impact on women's ability to shape their utopian future.

The Science and Nature of Motherhood

As the system of reproduction in both *Mizora* and *Herland*, parthenogenesis can be read as a metaphor for the society that can survive without men. First discovered in the eighteenth century in the silk moth and hydra, parthenogenesis later appeared in Lester Ward's

⁸⁷ Wallace, p. clxviii.

⁸⁸ Darwin, p. 631.

‘gynaecocentric theory’.⁸⁹ Ward was an American botanist and sociologist, and a believer in the power of environmental factors to shape evolution. He was a supporter of women’s rights and believed that women were the superior sex. In *Pure Sociology* (1903), he proposes that:

The female sex is primary and the male secondary in the organic scheme, that originally and normally all things centre, as it were, about the female, and that the male, though not necessary in carrying out the scheme, was developed under the operation of the principle of advantage to secure organic process through the crossing of strains.⁹⁰

Through his study of various organisms, Ward discovered that once the male of the species had served his purpose in ensuring variation, he was no longer required; and that this process applied also to the human race. He traces the history of the human race back to a time when women were both dominant and the sexual selectors: ‘It is natural to suppose that [...] woman, almost to the same extent as among the female anthropoids, possessed absolute power of choice and rejection, and in this most vital respect, was the ruling sex’.⁹¹ As far as Ward is concerned, essentially ‘woman is and remains the human race’.⁹² In the period when men were in ascendance, this was only to serve a particular biological function.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the feminist Frances Swiney read Ward with interest. In *The Awakening of Women*, first published in 1899, she selects from a variety of texts on biology, anthropology, embryology, as well as Ward’s sociology, to conceive her own version of evolutionary theory.⁹³ In the *Westminster Review*, she wrote about the evolution of various species in which the male increasingly approximates the female, for example, the male pigeon being able to secrete milk for his offspring. In lower species, such as the *Ostracoda* or *Cirripedia*, the male is sometimes completely subsumed by the female, but this is never found to occur in reverse.⁹⁴ In human evolution, she argues, it is women who endowed men with their superior physical development, intellect and psychic force. Now that men are becoming more like women, with the katabolic (aggressive, forceful) element disappearing, ‘the male shall be reabsorbed into the feminine nature by a gradual and persistent transmutation of the many to the one; an integrating synthetic determination of mankind to one ideal standard of perfectibility’.⁹⁵ She proposes not only that the human race originated with the female, but

⁸⁹ Lester Ward, *Pure Sociology: A Treatise on the Origin and Spontaneous Development of Society*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1907), p. 296.

⁹⁰ Ward, p. 296.

⁹¹ Ward, p. 337.

⁹² Ward, p. 372.

⁹³ See p. 81 for my discussion of Swiney’s views on the influence of environment on the development of female genius.

⁹⁴ Frances Swiney, ‘The Evolution of the Male II’, *Westminster Review*, 163, April 1905, pp. 449-455 (p. 453).

⁹⁵ Swiney, p. 454.

also that as the evolutionary process continues, men would become more and more feminised until finally ‘the man shall become of the substance of the woman; the man shall be re-absorbed into the feminine nature’.⁹⁶ Where the feminising of men was generally associated with decadence and degeneracy, Swiney gave it positive value, as an example of evolution that supported Ward’s theory that woman *is* the human race.⁹⁷

Both Lane and Gilman were indebted to Ward’s gynaecocentric theory. In *Mizora*, Vera is told by one of her guides that the Mizorans have advanced far enough in science to have developed the germ of all life: ‘Know that the MOTHER is the only important part of all life. In the lowest organisms no other sex is apparent’ (p. 103, original emphasis). Gilman once referred to Ward as ‘quite the greatest man I have ever known’, and his influence can be identified in *Herland*.⁹⁸ When, on one occasion, Terry exclaims about the impossibility of a society of women cooperating with each other, the scientist Jeff draws his attention to the *Hymenoptera* – populations of female ants, bees and other insects that depend for their existence on cooperation. In *Women and Economics* (1899), Gilman traces the evolution of the human race and the gradual subversion of the naturally destructive tendencies of the male to the conservative tendencies of the female, such that: ‘Into the male have been bred, by natural selection and unbroken training, the instincts and habits of the female, to his immense improvement’.⁹⁹ She notes that this has been a difficult process for the female, for in order for her to instill into man the qualities of the feminine, she has had to make herself subservient to him so that she can help him develop a range of skills and qualities that might turn him into civilised man:

The intensification of sex-energy as a social force results in such limitless exaggeration of sex-instinct as finds expression sexually in the unnatural vices of advanced civilization, and, socially, in the strained economic relation between producer and consumer which breaks society in two. The sexuo-economic relation serves to bring social development to a certain level. After that level is reached, a higher relation must be adopted, or the lifting process comes to an end.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Swiney, p. 454.

⁹⁷ The idea of the feminised man in the nineteenth century was usually confined to the artistic realm and, towards the end of the century, became particularly associated with decadence and aestheticism. Whereas the artists and writers of the decadent period saw man as becoming more refined, they were criticised for their unmanliness and effeminacy. Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* (1892) portrayed this as a form of cultural degeneracy that was gradually sapping society of its virility and strength. See Felski, pp. 94-95.

⁹⁸ Hayden, p 185, quoting Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1975), p. 187.

⁹⁹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (New York: Source Book, 1970), p. 128.

¹⁰⁰ Gilman, pp. 141-142.

Once woman's job is done, her economic dependence on man draws to a close. Now is the time for a different form of social relations: 'The true and lasting social progress [...] is based on a spirit of inter-human love, not merely the inter-sexual; and it requires an economic machinery organised and functioned for human needs, not sexual ones'.¹⁰¹ In Herland, sex-drive is separated from human relations, thus making men redundant, and a new female social order is instigated. The emasculation of the male visitor to Herland is necessary to this project: if male-female sexual relations are to be re-introduced, they are for the purposes of reproduction only as Van and his friends become painfully aware. Individual sexual drive is sublimated for the collective good in the form of motherhood. Gilman writes about 'the immeasurable power of social motherhood', endorsing Ward's theory that women are the race type.¹⁰²

In spite of Herland and Mizora having established themselves as all-female societies, there remains always the threat of degeneracy. Vera's guide in Mizora tells her that, 'by disregarding nature's laws, or trying to thwart her intentions, in a few generations to come, perhaps even in the next, we could have coarse features and complexions, stoop shoulders and deformity' (p. 105). The resurgence of the matrilineal society that is traced by Lane and Gilman not only constitutes, in the words of Swiney, 'the fundamental recognition of the feminine basis for creation and the Feminine Ideal of ultimate Perfection'.¹⁰³ It was also underpinned by a sense that if the human race was to be saved from both the degeneracy associated with male sexual profligacy and from marriage based on economic rather than love relations, then it was for women to act. Parthenogenesis, then, also acts as a metaphor for women's control of reproduction.¹⁰⁴ In her introduction to *Mizora*, Pfaelzer acknowledges that this marks a significant epistemological shift. Women have ensured that they are no longer aligned with nature merely as producers. Having acquired the knowledge to shape nature, they assume an ascendant position. 'With their biology no longer excluding women from the activities and processes of knowing, men have lost their stance as the knowers, and hence, women have lost their stance as that which is known'.¹⁰⁵ Women's biology is, thus, given a different meaning. 'We have become mistresses of Nature's peculiar processes', a Mizoran tells Vera (p. 90). The knowledge of how to control reproduction, and the celebration

¹⁰¹ Gilman, p. 142.

¹⁰² Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *His Religion and Hers: A Study of the Faith of Our Fathers and the Work of Our Mothers* ([1923] Westport, CN: Hyperion Press, 1976), p. v, cited in Dana Seitler, 'Unnatural Selection: Others, Eugenic Feminism, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Regeneration Narratives', *American Quarterly*, 55.1 (2003), 61-88 (p. 78).

¹⁰³ Frances Swiney, *The Cosmic Procession, or The Feminine Principle in Evolution* (London: Bell, 1906), p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Hausman, p. 506.

¹⁰⁵ Pfaelzer (2000), p. xxx.

of motherhood for its intrinsic power, makes the feminist utopian novel part of a wider turn-of-the-century eugenic project.

The feminist utopia celebrates the female body for its strength, health and beauty, as a radical emancipation from an ideology that elided women's mental and physical capacities with physiological weakness and vulnerability. Instead, women's biology and their reproductive function become the site of evolutionary transformation. Although clearly resisting an ideology that deemed women the weaker sex, Corbett, Lane and Gilman still hold to prevailing thinking about race in this period.¹⁰⁶ In line with the view of the Anglo-Saxon as the superior race, and with a desire to represent the utopian woman as approaching perfection, all the women of New Amazonia, Mizora and Herland are strong and healthy specimens: seven feet tall in New Amazonia, and of Aryan stock in Herland and Mizora. In Mizora, for example, Vera is told that 'the highest excellence of moral and mental character is alone attainable by a fair race', evil belonging to 'the dark race' which has long since been eliminated (p. 92).¹⁰⁷ The depiction of the utopian female body in the guise of the superior Anglo-Saxon is not only to represent her as the epitome of womankind. It is also to distance her in space and time from the savage, in particular, according to Katherine Broad, from the image of the female body which in the nineteenth century became the locus of racial difference – the Hottentot Venus.¹⁰⁸ As Johannes Fabian points out, the Enlightenment made a break with the Judeo-Christian vision of time which was conceived as 'the medium of a sacred history', in which there was a trust in divine providence and a belief in the salvation of all. This meant that the pagan or savage was always already marked out for salvation.¹⁰⁹ With the Enlightenment focus on linear evolutionary time, the primitive or savage came to be positioned a long way, in both temporal and spatial terms, from the possibility of salvation. Savagery was a marker of the past and, if the savage was to be seen in contemporary society, she occupied her own time, not that of the civilised world.¹¹⁰ The utopian female body comes

¹⁰⁶ It is important to bear in mind that in the decades leading up to and following the end of the century, 'race' could have different meanings. It was a term used variously to differentiate between people from different geographical areas, with different physical features or skin colour, and sometimes to distinguish between male and female.

¹⁰⁷ Swiney was also a believer in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race: 'The Anglo-Saxon woman leads the van'. Swiney (1908), p. 294.

¹⁰⁸ Katherine Broad, 'Race, Reproduction, and the Failures of Feminism in Mary Bradley Lane's *Mizora*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 28.2 (2009), 247-266 (p. 254). Saartjie Baartman, known as the Hottentot Venus, was a South African woman brought to Britain in the early nineteenth-century and exhibited on the London stage. Georges Cuvier, Professor of Anatomy at the Museum of Natural History examined her in his search for what he believed to be the missing link between the animal and the human. Her body became a site of scientific racism. Swiney makes several comparisons between the Anglo-Saxon woman and her Australian and African counterparts in Frances Swiney, *Woman and Natural Law* (London: Daniel, 1912), pp. 26-27.

¹⁰⁹ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 2, 18.

¹¹⁰ Fabian, p. 75.

to epitomise the struggle between the civilised and the savage, incorporating both as it embodies the evolutionary ideal whilst still under the shadow of a historic savagery and a more recent memory of women as weak and vulnerable. In Herland, each woman ‘was in the full bloom of rosy health, erect, serene, standing sure-footed and light as any pugilist’ (p. 22). The depiction of the civilised utopian woman as a white Anglo-Saxon is both a form of resistance and a replication of the culture the utopia opposes. In its implicit acceptance of Enlightenment ideas about civilisation being separated in time and space from savagery, it endorses the very binary oppositions it aims to reject – reason/emotion, time/space, male/female – raising questions about the extent to which the feminist utopia is truly able to provide a new space-time for women. Utopian femininity reflects a contemporaneous discourse on womanhood that ‘legitimis[es] only those women that purify and perpetuate whiteness’, as Broad suggests, but seeking also, through employing the science of eugenics, to add to the ideal of whiteness a physical and mental strength not previously associated with women.

The celebration of this image of woman needs to be read in the context of the social and political climate of the time. In America, the recent abolition of slavery and an increase in immigration had been accompanied by an increasing fear of miscegenation: for many Americans ‘whiteness’ signified status.¹¹¹ As imperialists, the British colonists felt the need to assert their superiority. Britain was also witnessing a period of social unrest that served to heighten the divisions within society and the poverty and sickness of a large portion of the population. The legacy of Darwin’s *Descent* was to assume the superiority of the European race, but a hierarchy of races had already been suggested by the Scottish zoologist, Robert Knox, in *The Races of Man* (1850), in which he argued that race determines both character and behaviour, with the Anglo-Saxon as the *nonpareil*.¹¹² Stephanie Shields and Sunil Bhatia point out that Darwin’s views on race and gender were defined and delimited by the cultural context in which he lived, one that promoted the distinction between ‘primitive’ and ‘advanced’ civilisations, and between the stronger and weaker sexes.¹¹³ For Darwin, one of the reasons for the European race’s superiority was because of its ability to struggle for survival against the harshness of a northern climate. Sexual selection was critical to the continuation of European superiority, and Darwin advocated that those who were ‘in any

¹¹¹ Weinbaum, p. 19.

¹¹² For nineteenth-century racial hierarchies, see Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800-1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982).

¹¹³ Stephanie A. Shields and Sunil Bhatia, ‘Darwin on Race, Gender, and Culture’, *American Psychologist*, 64.2 (2009), 111-119 (p. 111).

marked degree inferior in body or mind' should refrain from marriage.¹¹⁴ His cousin, Francis Galton, had already advocated a system of eugenics in *Hereditary Genius* (1869), which he promoted as the scientific and rational route to addressing these concerns.¹¹⁵ It was also a way of preparing future generations to be strong and vital enough to cope with the rapid progress of modernity.

In the face of imperialist and colonial encounters with parts of the world still deemed to be savage, human fitness became aligned with the evolution of a pure, white, Anglo-Saxon race. The politics of eugenics has a difficult and controversial history. After the Civil War, America experienced significant levels of racial violence, as well as legal disputes over issues of race and citizenship. There was a complex interconnection between discourses on race, reproduction and nationhood, also inevitably involving issues of gender: Perry refers to the way in which white women were considered to be the 'fair ones of a purer caste', a 'potent symbol of civilisation'.¹¹⁶ The focus on the jurisprudence of miscegenation reflected a majority desire for a white nation extending into the future.¹¹⁷ So Mizoran women are 'all blondes: beautiful, graceful, courteous, and with voices softer and sweeter than the strains of an eolian harp' (p. 17). They are the epitome of beauty and the highest form of civilisation, guarding against a concern with moral and sexual profligacy that coincided with a fear of miscegenation and retrogression. In the feminist utopian novel, the evolution of a superior race of women becomes conflated with utopian ideas of racial purity.¹¹⁸ As already discussed, the desire to distance the utopian society from any association with savagery results in the utopian novelist inadvertently endorsing the binaries she seeks to disavow. Unable to discard the traces of memory (time) and the culture of colonialism (space), she finds it impossible to incorporate otherness into a broader framework of humanity. In both *Women and Economics* and the *Forerunner*, Gilman expresses concerns about uncontrolled importation of foreigners and the fear of miscegenation. She worries about the 'rapid admixture of alien blood', and a concern that the 'influx of vast hordes', once deemed the 'oppressed', would become the 'oppressors'.¹¹⁹ At the heart of this is a fear of a return to savagery. At the end of *Descent*, Darwin reminds his readers that regardless of the progress of human evolution, 'Man still

¹¹⁴ Darwin, p. 688.

¹¹⁵ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences*, 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton, 1884), p. v.

¹¹⁶ Perry, p. 502.

¹¹⁷ Weinbaum, p. 18.

¹¹⁸ Broad, p. 249.

¹¹⁹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'Immigration, Importation, and Our Fathers', *Forerunner*, 5.1 (1914), 117-119 (p. 118).

bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin'.¹²⁰ The eugenics of the feminist utopian novel reflects this concern of contamination and retrogression, particularly prevalent in parts of America.

Today, we would be horrified by the racist and discriminatory tenor of Gilman's texts. When Broad suggests, however, that they figure as 'repressive visions of reproductive and social engineering that undermine the radical potential of the text', this is to forget the strength of the social and cultural conditions that shaped nineteenth-century thinking.¹²¹ Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the fears and anxieties expressed by Gilman, and the other two utopian novelists, were the concerns, and privilege, of white middle-class women whose texts actually form part of a much broader and diverse literary field as black women began to find their own voices. In foregrounding the superiority of the white Anglo-Saxon, the utopian novelist perpetuates a dismissal of the 'other', a betrayal of the principles of a wider women's rights movement that had encompassed race and class discrimination, to become dangerously close to later manifestations of racism in the form of the film, *Birth of a Nation* (1915), and the re-emergence of the Ku Klux Klan.¹²² In seeking to protect themselves, the utopian societies that celebrate motherhood and reproduction come close to closing themselves off and repeating the very oppositions they sought to disavow.

In their efforts to protect themselves against retrogression, the utopian women find the best form of defence lies in breeding. The legacy of Darwinian evolutionary theory, according to Hamlin, was to provide women 'with a new vocabulary for understanding themselves as part of the animal and plant kingdoms along with a new appreciation of reproduction as a natural process that followed scientific laws'.¹²³ In the utopian society, these scientific laws are applied to the management of reproduction. Women become efficient economic units, producing just the right number of children to maintain society, the duties of child care being delegated in order to maximize efficiency. Gilman was fascinated by the American engineer, Frederick Taylor's, theory of scientific management. The influence of this, as Katherine Fusco points out, was such that in *Herland* she 'dissolves the distinction between biological and mechanical reproduction through her insistence that the proper way to understand a

¹²⁰ Darwin, p. 689.

¹²¹ Broad, p. 247.

¹²² Kathleen M. Blee, 'Women in the 1920s' Ku Klux Klan Movement', *Feminist Studies*, 17.1 (1991), 57-77. Blee points out that after American women won the vote in 1920, other issues including race and class increasingly eroded the gender unity that had prevailed in the rights movement, with some women associating themselves with the Ku Klux Klan.

¹²³ Hamlin, p. 100.

person is as both product and part of a system'.¹²⁴ There is little space for the expression of sentiment or individuality here. As Dana Seitler suggests, eugenics and feminism become coterminous in the utopian world.¹²⁵ They serve the collective good, with maternity central to an economy that is both efficient and ensures the purity of race. Alys Weinbaum criticizes Gilman for the way that, 'the ethos of purified reproduction is described in nationalist terms and Herlandian maternalism translated directly into racial nationalism'.¹²⁶ There is undoubtedly a flavour of nineteenth-century nationalist superiority in all three novels. It reflects not only the cultural concerns of the age, but also an irresistible opportunity for women to apply the science of eugenics as a way of taking control of their own reproduction, signifying also a disavowal of the dominance of the male in sexual selection. In the heterosexual world, the fact that women could select out those considered 'unfit' for fatherhood suggests to Lucy Bland that the 'great moral question' of eugenics 'was not so much sexual morality but moral ('fit') breeding'.¹²⁷ Eugenics reaches its imaginary apotheosis in utopia in the form of parthenogenesis, eliminating any risk of contamination by sexual disease or social degeneracy and assuring the succession of a healthy white race. In New Amazonia, where men exist and may, therefore, still pose a threat to the purity of the race, marriage cannot take place without a medical certificate of 'soundness'. No less than perfect children are allowed to survive and rigid rules of reproduction are enforced (p. 46). The sex instinct is suppressed through the offer of 'wonderful premiums for chastity', for example the possibility of high office. It may appear that women have a choice, but in fact only those best suited to have children are allowed to do so (p. 81).

This commitment to eugenic principles is one of which Galton would have been proud: 'An enthusiasm to improve the race is so noble in its aim that it might well give rise to the sense of a religious obligation'.¹²⁸ In the all-female utopia, motherhood has the highest, quasi-religious status: in Herland, mother love is the religion; and after death in Mizora, the soul returns to the great mother. Maternal pantheism and the vision of the earth mother goddess are central religious and philosophical myths underpinning the feminist utopia.¹²⁹ As

¹²⁴ Katherine Fusco, 'Systems, Not Men: Producing People in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*', *Studies in the Novel*, 41.4 (2009), 418-434 (p. 427). Frederick Winslow Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) was a pioneering text, applying engineering principles to the shop floor, and was hugely influential through most of the twentieth century.

¹²⁵ Seitler, p. 64.

¹²⁶ Weinbaum, p. 80.

¹²⁷ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London and New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2002), p. 229.

¹²⁸ Sir Francis Galton, *Essays in Eugenics* (Washington, DC: Scott Townsend, 1996), p. 25.

¹²⁹ See Carol Pearson, 'Coming Home: Four Feminist Utopias and Patriarchal Experience', in *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Marleen Barr (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1981), pp. 63-70; and Dorothy Berkson, "'So We All Become Mothers': Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and

discussed earlier, the feminine was central to those nineteenth-century religious movements that sought female leadership, and to many women writers who wanted to re-position women in relation both to the deity and to a more open-ended subjectivity. It is only with a concept of a feminine divine, Irigaray argues, that there is the possibility for the emergence of a female subjectivity that is not always being measured against the male other. The reprising of goddess worship in utopian fiction – the ‘Giver of Life’ in New Amazonia, the goddess Maia in Herland – acts as another way of reclaiming woman’s body as a source of power and creation. In Mizora there is only one religious idea: ‘Nature is God and God is Nature. She is the Great Mother who gathers the centuries in her arms, and rocks their children into eternal sleep upon her bosom’ (p. 120). The central relationship is that of mother-child, or mother-daughter, a relationship figured as protective and interdependent. The deification of motherhood acts to separate the purity of maternity from its association with sexual instinct and desire. It means that a woman’s body belongs to herself, no longer seen only as an object of desire for men. In the utopian vision, however, the female body really belongs to the collective, in the form of the state, rather than to the individual. Mizora, for example, ‘was one immense family of sisters who knew no distinction of birth or position amongst themselves’ (p. 28). Maternity may have assumed a religious significance, but it is also a political act: the mother is the state, and the state is mother – a radical assertion of the dissolution of boundaries between public and private. Instead of a system, as Grosz points out, that elides ‘the specificity of women’s identities and social positions by equating femininity always and only with reproduction and nurturance’, motherhood assumes a socio-political status alongside other public roles.¹³⁰

The centrality of motherhood to the eugenic utopian project means that women’s identity is always interwoven with their reproductive function, even for those who choose not to become mothers. And although the meaning of motherhood may have undergone a significant reconstruction, it still leaves female subjectivity defined primarily in terms of the mother-daughter relationship. It is this kind of relationship, according to Irigaray, which prevents women from developing independent identities. Women must be able to find a way to be both dependent and independent of their mothers, yet this seems impossible in the utopian society.¹³¹ Even the male visitors to utopia must re-position themselves in relation to women. In Herland and New Amazonia, they are infantilised or, should they resist the

the New World of Women’s Culture’, in *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*, ed. by Libby Falk Jones and Sarah Webster Goodwin (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), pp. 100-115.

¹³⁰ Grosz (1989), p. 119.

¹³¹ Irigaray (1993), p. 108.

dominance of women, as is the case with Terry in *Herland*, they are expelled; and Augustus Fitz-Musicus is treated like a child by the New Amazonians. The only way to co-exist with women is to abandon any idea of an androcentric relationship. In *Herland*, Jeff resolves any tension in his relationship with Celis, the woman he eventually marries, by turning her into an idol to be worshipped. Van, however, reluctantly accepts that, if they are to live harmoniously, his relationship with Ellador must be premised on a different kind of love relationship, one that sublimates sexual feelings:

It gave me a queer feeling, way down deep, as of the stirring of some ancient dim prehistoric consciousness, a feeling that they were right somehow – that this was the way to feel. It was like – coming home to mother (p. 139).

This sounds like a reversion to a pre-oedipal mother-child relationship in which he is both infantilised and feminised. It seems that men can only survive satisfactorily in these societies by submitting to the matriarchal social order. They must relinquish the desire for individualism and self-expression that might in any way subvert the feminist project. The male interloper becomes, then, a synecdoche for difference, for the success of the feminist utopian society depends on the suppression of difference in the service of community and the greater good.

In the feminist utopian world, subjectivity is embedded in community. At the beginning of this chapter, I asked to what extent the utopian space allows for women to explore the multi-dimensionality of subjectivity, of difference; whether the space-time of the utopian dream works to dissolve the binaries that have determined women's existence; or whether, in fact, utopia simply promises the exchange of one form of oppression for another. The answer seems to lie both in the way that the female body is represented and in the meaning of community – what resides within its boundaries and what is excluded. The feminist utopia is a community for women, one that acknowledges women's capabilities and celebrates what women might become, but only within very strict parameters that exclude multiple forms of difference in terms of colour, race, class, and individual desire. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the tension inherent in the embodied subject, and consider the conflict between the individual and the collective and different ways of trying to resolve this opposition.

Subjectivity in the Feminist Utopian World

In their depiction of femininity, the utopian writers considered here seek only to retain those traditional female qualities which they believe will serve the interests of society – chastity, moral superiority, a sense of community – and which act as a useful contrast to male

animalistic instincts. Rather than women's biological function being devalued, it is reified. This involves a re-definition of motherhood that assumes, through the harnessing of nature by science, the responsibility for the future of the race, with the intention that it will be subsumed into the utopian identity. Several critics, however, are of the opinion that the feminist utopian novel risks simply reinforcing a separate spheres ideology. Beaumont suggests that for all that woman dreams of a collective utopia, when she opens her eyes she is still on her own and nothing has changed.¹³² Pfaelzer expresses concern that most feminist utopians persist in conceiving of love, sympathy and maternity as the natural instincts of women. The foregrounding of these qualities in the utopian space suggests to her that, 'in the long run, utopians supported the claim that gender roles are natural, having developed before and outside of history'.¹³³ The strong emphasis on the morality of the utopian society, in which female chastity is celebrated, delineates, according to Annegret Wiemer, 'an ultra-Victorian model of female chastity wherein science and technology provide the wherewithal to suppress, or rather re-invent nature'.¹³⁴ Chastity is also emphasised, however, as a way to question assumptions about what is 'natural' and to disavow the perceived association between the female body and physical and mental vulnerability. Female embodiment does, nonetheless, give rise to some fundamental tensions.

In the conceptual spaces of Spiritualism, the occult and the fourth dimension, the development of female subjectivity is less focused on woman's corporeality than on the development of consciousness and spirituality. This is not to suggest a split between matter and spirit, as it is the disavowal of this dualism which is at the heart of a re-conceptualisation of space and time. And, moreover, central to the thesis of a new space-time is the opportunity to re-frame our understanding of the body in space and time. Corporeality assumes a different meaning in the space-time of the spirit world and celestial spheres, where it takes on a more fluid and permeable relation to the ethereal and disembodied. And in the fourth dimension, the body assumes an extra-dimensional, invisible form which opposes the material form of three-dimensional corporeality. The body, re-imagined, lies outside time and space as they have been known. One of the inherent problems for the utopia, as I have argued, is the difficulty in establishing enough distance from the past and its memories. Instead of emerging as a *ou-topos*, the no place that exists completely out of space and time as it is known, the feminist utopia represents an attempt at *eu-topos*, a good place – a wonderful ideal that is only

¹³² Beaumont, p. 89.

¹³³ Pfaelzer (1984), p. 158.

¹³⁴ Annegret J. Wiemer, 'Corpus Ex Machina: Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* (1863) and Mary Bradley Lane's *Mizora* (1880-1)', *Neophilologus*, 79.2 (1995), 187-196 (p. 194).

ever partially successful because the good place is always measured against the bad it has tried to abandon. This tension is especially evident in the representation of embodied woman, who comes closer to incorporating the ideal of Western society – the healthy Anglo-Saxon woman fit for motherhood and eugenic reproduction – than to a utopian version of womanhood re-invented. With this representation central to the utopian project, individual expression also becomes problematic.

The emphasis on and status given to motherhood, and the eugenics of perpetuating a race of perfect Anglo-Saxons, denies the expression of identity other than that of the collective, one that excludes any form of difference, including class and race, which does not fit with the central aim. This is a crucial conflict within the feminist utopian novel that I want to explore. It raises some interesting questions about how female subjectivity is framed. It also highlights the inherent structural problem of the utopian novel: the inability to escape a constant looking backwards which not only serves as a reminder of a patriarchal order but also gestures to a Victorian racial hierarchy. In other words, not only still embedded in linear, historic time, but also within a spatio-temporal framework that emphasises the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon.¹³⁵ The result is to risk replacing a prescriptive patriarchal ideology with an equally prescriptive matriarchal one. In earlier chapters, women's relationship with the respective conceptual spaces works to enable different routes to individual transformation and more open-ended perspectives on female subjectivity. The focus of the feminist utopian space, however, is the transformation of society according to carefully prescribed measures that preclude difference. The utopian space is a socialist dream, in which the goal of individual endeavour is exclusively for the betterment of society, but not necessarily one that precludes comparison with Western society. As Pfaelzer points out, by representing the society based on collectivism as a success, 'utopian fictions also attacked the ideology of competitive individualism', which was very much a Western liberal concept.¹³⁶ Although there is an emphasis on the equal value of all occupations, and women can develop individual talents and skills through education and training, there remains the sense that women are part of a carefully planned system that ensures the maintenance of society as a whole. Transgressors are eliminated, whether through eugenic practices, or through punishment and re-training. The feminist utopian space becomes a site of homogeneity, rather than a space in which a group of individuals might be free to explore the full extent of their subjectivity. This

¹³⁵ Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 7. Bell argues that the concept, 'Greater Britain', not only encapsulates the geographical extent of the British Empire and English-speaking communities, but also emphasises its separation from and superiority over those outside the Empire.

¹³⁶ Pfaelzer (1984), p. 25.

is not to fall into the trap of framing utopia through the lens of liberal individualism but, rather, to highlight utopia's tendency towards exclusion. Just as Irigaray's focus on sexual difference excludes considerations of class and race – 'The problem of race is [...] a secondary problem' – so does utopia, thus making it more difficult to encompass difference in other forms.¹³⁷

When considering opportunities for the expression of difference, it is important to beware, as Kim Johnson-Bogart argues, of trying to impose a modern notion of the independent, autonomous self on readings of feminist utopias.¹³⁸ In the nineteenth century, the concept of the individual self was generally associated with a market economy and the development of separate spheres. This worked to support male individualism, emphasising the opposition between autonomous man, forging his place in history, and woman whose ideal place was in the home providing care and comfort.¹³⁹ Traditionally linked on both sides of the Atlantic with the white liberal democratic state and the rights of man, individualism was further promoted by publications like Scottish writer and campaigner, Samuel Smiles's, *Self Help* (1859), and the work of German thinkers such as liberal political philosopher, Franz Lieber, and Prussian revolutionary and reformer, Carl Schurz.¹⁴⁰ The American suffragist and social activist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, made individualism a feminist issue in her resignation speech to the National American Women's Suffrage Association and to Congress in 1892. She argued that the first right of woman is the individuality of the human soul, and that as a citizen and a woman she is entitled to the same rights as men to individual happiness and development.¹⁴¹ She made the point that, because each man and woman must stand alone, women should not have to depend upon men but should be properly equipped for life, with access to education and equal rights. In her argument for female individualism, she also acknowledged a feminine instinct to work together to provide comfort and protection to others. Her vision of female individualism was not as the solitary self but as a group of individuals who work together for the good of all. These ideas have their precursors in Wollstonecraft and Mill, both of whom rejected the figure of the isolated, competitive

¹³⁷ Irigaray (1996), p. 47.

¹³⁸ Kim Johnson-Bogart, 'The Utopian Imagination of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Reconstruction of Meaning in 'Herland'', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 27. 1/2 (1992), 85-92 (p. 90).

¹³⁹ This is not to say that all women accepted this arrangement. Harriet Taylor Mill, in her essay, 'The Enfranchisement of Women', published in the *Westminster Review* in 1851, argued for women's right to liberty, education and employment in the public sphere.

¹⁴⁰ Franz Lieber (1798-1872) emigrated to America, where he wrote *Manual of Political Ethics* (1838-39) and *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* (1853). Carl Schurz (1829-1906), who also emigrated to America, worked as an editor and gained a reputation for his speeches as a US senator.

¹⁴¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 'The Solitude of the Self', Speech to the House Judiciary Committee, 18 February 1892 <<http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu>> [accessed 10 August 2016]

individual of liberal individualism for a form of liberal feminism in which the reasoning adult emerges from the nurturing and educating space of the family.¹⁴²

The egoist feminism of the early-twentieth century, influenced by the German philosopher Max Stirner's *The Ego and His Own* (1845), and championed by the English suffragette and editor of *The Freewoman*, Dora Marsden, took a more introspective turn.¹⁴³ Having become disillusioned with a women's movement that constrained individual expression, Marsden rejected ideas about women's duty and social service. Her form of moral individualism, according to Lucy Delap, was based on a form of 'Romantic or egoist values of self-development and uniqueness, rather than values of privacy and *laissez-faire*'.¹⁴⁴ The focus was on the growth and development of the individual from within. She argued that without this wider social reform was impossible. These feminist interpretations of individualism coincided with women's call for the rights of the individual to self-realisation, to their own property and freedom within sexual relationships, as well as the collective demands of women to suffrage, equal opportunities for education and employment.¹⁴⁵ Mona Caird was another whose writing was influenced by Mill and who, like him, opposed the eugenics movement for its suppression of individual rights: 'Provided the end is gained, the individual must pay the price'.¹⁴⁶ As Sheila Rowbotham demonstrates, the debate about individualism and collectivism was alive on both sides of the Atlantic during the late-nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, as different socialist, liberal, anarchist and feminist discourses intersected.¹⁴⁷

The structure and form of the utopian novel works against the expression of individuality and, in the case of the feminist texts discussed here, also carefully prescribes the nature of the collective. The Socratic dialogue precludes the development of individual character in space and time. Instead, this form of dialogue highlights the polarity and continuing tension between the old world and its adherence to a form of solipsistic individualism and the new world in which subjectivity emerges through relationships. In *Herland*, for example, it is clear that individual psychology matters little. Psychology is

¹⁴² Susan Wendell, 'A (Qualified) Defence of Liberal Feminism', *Hypatia*, 2.2 (1987), 65-93 (p. 76).

¹⁴³ *The Ego and His Own* was published in translation in New York in 1907 and London in 1912.

¹⁴⁴ Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 131-132.

¹⁴⁵ Delap identifies several other early Edwardian feminists on both sides of the Atlantic whose focus was on self-development as a precursor to social change.

¹⁴⁶ 'Personal Rights: A Personal Address delivered to the Forty-first Annual Meeting of the Personal Rights Association on 6th June 1913 by Mrs Mona Caird' (London: The Personal Rights Association, 1913), quoted in Richardson, p. 192.

¹⁴⁷ See Sheila Rowbotham, *Rebel Crossings: New Women, Free Lovers, and Radicals in Britain and America* (London and New York: Verso, 2016).

concerned with the history of the community: 'It is ours; it is among and between us, and it changes with the succeeding, and improving generations. We are at work, slowly and carefully, developing *our whole people* along these lines' (p. 106, emphasis added). Subjectivity in the matriarchal society evolves through relationships based on intimacy and empathy. Having rid themselves of male dominance, there is no need to struggle for individuation by separating from mother and competing with father. Instead, the emphasis is on subjectivity through the mother-daughter relationship. This is a different paradigm for the development of selfhood from the male one of struggle for autonomy; here the motivating principle is one of 'integrative growth'.¹⁴⁸ In *Mizora*, Vera's guide tells her, 'Our sensitiveness to mental pleasure and pain you would pronounce morbid on account of its intensity. The happiness we enjoy in the society of those who are congenial, or near and dear to us through family ties, is inconceivable to you' (p. 82). In *Herland*, Van is often frustrated by Ellador always referring to the plural 'we' rather than the singular 'I': "'We'" and "'we'" and "'we'" – it was so hard to get her to be personal' (p. 125). The focus on the sentiment of the community means there is little place for the expression of individual desire, and this translates into the ways in which sexual desire is carefully controlled.

In New Amazonia, in an effort to restrict population growth, sexual restraint is rewarded by 'wonderful premiums for chastity', an inversion of the sexuo-economic marriage contract in which women are usually rewarded for sexual favours (p. 81). In *Herland*, sexual desire has been bred out of the population through two thousand years of disuse and, in those rare cases where it did manifest itself 'as atavistic exceptions', motherhood was denied to the miscreants (p. 93). Alima's willingness to consort with Terry is attributed by Van to 'some faint vestige of long-descended feeling which made Terry more possible to her than to others' (p. 94). Alima is described as having 'a far-descended atavistic trace of more marked femaleness' (p. 129). This persisting primitive trait makes her, according to Van, an easy target for Terry's attempted rape. On the other hand, Van's sexual desire for Ellador is tempered by qualities in her that 'de-feminise' her and that suppress the 'sex ideal' (p. 128). Pfaelzer warns that the portrayal of celibacy and lack of female sexual desire in the feminist utopia feeds into the Victorian trope of middle-class woman's passionlessness.¹⁴⁹ But it might also be read as a resistance to uncontrolled and emotional impulses that are contrary to the rational and controlled utopian project. The suppression of desire may reflect a view that sexual passion interferes with more important work. In *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

¹⁴⁸ Johnson-Bogart, p. 89.

¹⁴⁹ Pfaelzer (2000) p. xxviii.

(1792), for example, Wollstonecraft wrote that that it was right that sexual passion should subside early in marriage, and that idle jealousy should not ‘disturb the discharge of the sober duties of life or to engross the thoughts that ought to be otherwise employed’.¹⁵⁰ And, in the context of the social purity movement in *fin-de-siècle* feminism, sexual restraint and celibacy had important social and political implications for wider society.

The foregrounding of women’s intellectual capacities over their sex function, and the sublimation of sexual desire as a form of resistance to male degeneracy and fear of retrogression, were common themes in *fin-de-siècle* women’s writing.¹⁵¹ Woman’s relationship with her body is re-defined to assume political significance. For Irigaray, it is the social signification of the body that matters and informs subjectivity. Male traditions have tended to split subjectivity from the body and the flesh.¹⁵² In the case of the utopian novel, the body becomes a temple to motherhood, emphasising the political role of maternity. The deifying of maternity and mother-daughter relationship acts as a way of displacing romantic sexuality.¹⁵³ But as Foucault argues, sex and sexuality are such intrinsic elements of humanity that they will always find expression and be part of discourse.¹⁵⁴ In the feminist utopian novel, however, sex is framed as animal instinct in need of control. Sexual desire is a barrier to rational behaviour and, because of its association with savagery, must be suppressed, hence the female body in *Herland* and *Mizora* represented as a site of purity and mother goddess worship.¹⁵⁵ A lack of sexual passion, as Pfaelzer points out, also ‘distances the white woman, the mother of the utopian race, from hypersexuality, a proclivity frequently assigned to working class, immigrant, and African-American women’.¹⁵⁶ The suppression of sexual desire serves, then, both as a defence against the ever-present threat of retrogression and to prescribe the identity of white middle-class Anglo-Saxon woman. The inhibition of sexual desire works for the good of the community as a whole, at the same time as working against the expression of individuality.

¹⁵⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. by Charles W. Hagelman, Jr. (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 183, quoted in Margaret Miller, ‘The Ideal Woman in Two Science-Fiction Utopias’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 10.2 (1983), 191-198 (p. 193).

¹⁵¹ Elaine Showalter, *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle* (London: Virago, 1993), pp. xi-xiii.

¹⁵² Irigaray (2004), p. 99.

¹⁵³ Broad, p. 254.

¹⁵⁴ See Michel Foucault, ‘The Repressive Hypothesis’, *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols (London: Penguin, 1998) I, pp. 15-50.

¹⁵⁵ Broad, p. 254.

¹⁵⁶ Pfaelzer (2000), p. xxxi.

Another way to consider the emergence of subjectivity in the utopia is through intersubjectivity, a concept Pfaelzer borrows from Jessica Benjamin.¹⁵⁷ Rejecting the idea of the female self developing as other to the male, Benjamin argues that it is through the connections ‘between individuals, and within the individual-with-others’ that selfhood emerges: ‘The intersubjective mode assumes the possibility of a context with others in which desire is constituted for the self. It thus assumes the paradox that in being with the other, I may experience the most profound sense of self’.¹⁵⁸ Within this paradigm, the female child ceases to struggle for independence from her mother; instead, intimacy, empathy and mutual dependency become the essential features of a selfhood that emerges through the mother-child relationship. With Benjamin’s concept of intersubjectivity in mind, Pfaelzer counters the criticism that the feminist utopian novel makes no allowance for the individual or for independence.¹⁵⁹ She insists that:

Intersubjectivity posits a tension between sameness and difference. Empathy and difference exist simultaneously [...] This concept calls for a social model that resolves the historic split between the father of liberation and the mother of dependence.¹⁶⁰

In the utopia, the individual no longer seeks to be autonomous and separate from the community, but emerges from within it. This makes sense if considered in relation to a concept of utopian space-time in which the binary oppositions that normally apply to life are now redundant: there are no longer the divisions between public and private space that helped determine male and female subjectivity; and time – the making of history – now belongs to women. From this perspective, the feminist utopian novel, in positing a different space-time, disavows the opposition between individualism and the collectivism, and attempts to re-frame female subjectivity as both individual selfhood and identity with the group.

This utopian vision of intersubjectivity is comparable to the new ethical order for which Irigaray yearns. This world of female ethics would consist of relationships on two dimensions, a vertical dimension of daughter-to-mother and mother-to-daughter, and a horizontal one of women among women.¹⁶¹ ‘The vertical dimension’, Irigaray argues, ‘is

¹⁵⁷ Jessica Benjamin, ‘A Desire of One’s Own: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Intersubjective Space’, in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 78-101 (p. 93), cited in Jean Pfaelzer, ‘Subjectivity as Feminist Utopia’, in *Utopia and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*, ed. by Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerton (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), pp. 93-106 (p. 100).

¹⁵⁸ Benjamin, p. 92.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Lynne Evans, “‘You See, Children Were the – the Raison D’etre’”: The Reproductive Futurism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*”, *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 44.2 (2014), 302-319 (p. 311).

¹⁶⁰ Pfaelzer (1994), p. 106.

¹⁶¹ Irigaray (1993), p. 109.

always being taken away from female becoming', because to achieve subjectivity a woman has always been expected to separate from her mother.¹⁶² Women must create a world for themselves, not just for others: 'A world for women. Something that at the same time has never existed and which is already present, although repressed, latent, potential'.¹⁶³ This is the kind of world that Corbett, Lane and Gilman are aiming for in their utopian space – a new social order that will release the full potential of womanhood within their own world. The all-female worlds in *Mizora* and *Herland* can be seen as prototypes for this 'world for women'. Having their own language, they represent a new symbolic order. But, as Van notices, in *Herland*, 'home' is a community of mothers and daughters (p. 139). The state is represented as the protective and nurturing over-mother who educates and trains her children (her citizens) to fulfil the project of creating a new world order. The emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship overshadows the horizontal dimension of subjectivity – the development of women in their own right. There is an assumption of unity of purpose that depends on each woman working towards the same idea of perfection. This excludes the possibility of exploring a personal subjectivity that might not be in accordance with a group identity, thus problematising the idea of an ideal community.

Carol Gould charts the social evolution of society through three distinct phases: the communal society, for example, the agrarian society, in which the individual is subject to the community; capitalism which favours the individual; and the ideal society in which subjects recognise themselves and each other through a common subjectivity.¹⁶⁴ This has some parallels with Pfaelzer's intersubjectivity. This ideal of community concerns Iris Marion Young, however, because it 'privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one's understanding of others from their point of view'.¹⁶⁵ The dream of the ideal society, in which individual subjects recognise themselves and each other as subjects in their own right, is seductive, but also politically problematic: is it possible to truly know ourselves and those around us? (The Mizorans would say that their 'highly refined mentality' enables them to 'feel, intuitively, the happiness or disappointment of those we are with' [p. 82].) And, if the community is the source of subjectivity, can this allow for a personal quest for self-knowledge?¹⁶⁶ Young advocates a politics of difference based on heterogeneity rather than the assumption of unity. But, as Rosi Braidotti points out,

¹⁶² Irigaray, p. 108.

¹⁶³ Irigaray, p. 109, original emphasis.

¹⁶⁴ Carol Gould, *Marx's Social Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), p. 9, cited in Iris Marion Young, 'The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. by Linda J. Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 300-323 (p. 308).

¹⁶⁵ Young, p. 300.

¹⁶⁶ Young, p. 301.

there are several steps that need to be taken in order to achieve this heterogeneity. The first step is to deconstruct the notion of Woman as a generic form. Only then does it become possible to 'widen the attention to difference to cover differences among women and later the differences within each woman that is to say, the split nature of the subject'.¹⁶⁷ Turn-of-the-century writers of feminist utopian novels must extricate Woman from a patriarchal construction of femininity before they can re-imagine women in their own space and time. The feminist utopian vision is to consolidate women as a community before they can feel confident enough to accommodate individual difference. At this early stage of the feminist utopian dream, difference is, therefore, always with a strong homogenous community in mind. In the worlds of New Amazonia, Mizora and Herland, women can pursue individual interests and choices, but only where this is for the good of the community. Community is strengthened by eugenic practices and the exercise of strong borders to exclude difference of any kind. Because there is always the glance backwards to a less civilised time and the fear of regression, the united community based on the idea of perfection becomes the *telos* of utopia: an ideal that offers 'an end to the conflict and violence of human interaction' – this violence taking the form of patriarchal subjugation.¹⁶⁸ Mizora and Herland have perfection in sight; and in New Amazonia, the society 'can today boast of being the most perfect, the most prosperous, and the most moral community in existence' (p. 47). The difficulty with the end-state utopia based on this ideal of perfect peace and harmony is that there is nowhere else to go. This may be because in resisting a male order they have inadvertently come full circle and end up replicating it – an end-state but not the ideal they dreamt of. This utopian vision precludes further differentiation amongst women, thus problematising female subjectivity either as a process of becoming or as an expression of difference.

*

The feminist utopia occupies an 'elsewhere' space of hope and possibility for women, the projection into the future of a radically transformed present, a space-time in which gendered binaries are dissolved and the barriers between public and private space taken down. The feminist utopian novel becomes a site for late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century discourses on feminism and socialism, touching on contemporaneous debates about liberal individualism versus collectivism, Darwinian evolution, eugenics and imperialism. It works to subvert the current social and political order, introducing a sense of estrangement through imagining a new social order developed out of the old, in which women, no longer dependent

¹⁶⁷ Rosi Braidotti, 'Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject', *Hypatia*, 8.1 (1993), 1-13 (p. 9).

¹⁶⁸ Young, p. 308.

on men, seek a future of their own in a space of their own. The dream of utopia always ends, however, with a return to the old world, the generic structure of the novel ensuring that the connection with the patriarchal order is never truly severed. The visitors to utopia choose to return home, but appear ultimately unable to benefit from what they have learnt from their utopian experience. They end up adrift because they cannot separate themselves fully in space and time from their historical roots.

Take *Mizora*'s Vera as an example. Vera's male gaze on the Mizoran world results in a feeling of claustrophobia.¹⁶⁹ The unfamiliar world of peaceful perfection becomes her dystopia:

I felt as a bird might feel who has been brought from the free expanse of its wild forest-home, and placed in a golden cage where it drinks from a jeweled cup and eats daintier food than it could obtain in its own rude haunts. It pines for that precarious life; its very dangers and privations fill its breast with desire (p. 115).

Vera cannot live like this; she yearns for adventure and struggle. But living as a woman back in a man's world is not the answer either. She is punished for her sense of adventure by losing both her child and husband whilst on her travels. Her Mizoran companion, Wauna, discovers that she is 'too finely organised' for American life and dies on her journey back home (p. 145). She is a highly evolved specimen of her own environment, but unable to survive elsewhere – another reason why the utopian state needs its strong defences. Once settled in America, Vera finds herself 'childless, homeless and friendless, in poverty and obscurity'. She concludes that 'life is a tragedy even under the most favourable conditions' (p. 147). In *New Amazonia*, the visitor chooses to leave because of a sense of dis-ease once she realises that the life of her companion Augustus is endangered because of his refusal to conform. When she awakes, she finds herself back home, 'surrounded by nineteenth century magazines and newspapers, and shivering all over, for I had let the fire go out during my long nap' (p. 146). Beaumont views this as symptomatic of the lonely middle-class feminist writer with only her imagination for company.¹⁷⁰ It seems that returning from a world that promises something different and better leaves women with a sense of alienation not dissimilar to that experienced by Hinton's Stella when she returns from hyperspace – she, too, 'cannot be quite happy often'.¹⁷¹ In Herland, it is hoped that the re-introduction of heterosexual marriage will herald a new beginning – dual parentage is described as 'the Great New Hope' (p. 137) – but

¹⁶⁹ Pfaelzer (2000), p. xxxiv. Pfaelzer refers to Vera as 'transgendered' for her independence, sense of adventure and masculine outlook on life.

¹⁷⁰ Beaumont, p. 90.

¹⁷¹ See Chapter 3.

the outcome remains uncertain; and Gilman's *With Her in Ourland*, the sequel to *Herland*, shows that Van's return home with Ellador is unsuccessful.

In a genre dominated by male writers, the utopian world is often represented as a perfect world or, as Krishan Kumar comments on More's *Utopia*, a state of 'impossible perfection'.¹⁷² For Bartkowski, it is the open-ended nature of both feminist fiction and theory that makes them utopian, 'in that they declare that which is not-yet as the basis for a feminist practice, textual, political, or otherwise'.¹⁷³ Kessler maintains that where social and political transformation tend to be seen as an end-state in the male utopia, the feminist utopia employs them only as a means to an end 'of fully developed human capacity in all people'.¹⁷⁴ Sargisson resists the idea of the perfect utopia because of its tendency to closure.¹⁷⁵ It is important that utopian fiction keeps the door open in its pursuit of the not-yet, otherwise it becomes self-defeating, as Erin McKenna points out:

Utopian visions can avoid the problems of static totalitarian visions only when we no longer seek a final, static goal, but realise that it is the process of transformation itself that is our task. What is needed is to keep the possibility of change alive; what is needed is to introduce the notion of evolution and process into utopian visions.¹⁷⁶

The focus on the search for perfection in the feminist utopian spaces of Corbett, Lane and Gilman risks utopia becoming a space of stasis rather than ongoing transformation, thus opposing the notion of open-ended subjectivity or becoming.

At the beginning of this chapter, I asked whether the imaginary utopian space is one that women can call their own. Does the feminist utopian novel succeed in opening a space for the free expression of female subjectivity, or does it simply replicate the old order? At the end, the female visitors to utopia are left isolated and unhappy. This may be, as Beaumont suggests, that the feminist utopia can only exist in the writer's imagination. And the dialogic comparison between utopia and old world means that the old patriarchal order can never fully be discarded. It remains written in memory, both recent and past, with visitors acting as a constant reminder of what still needs defending against. The matriarchal order becomes, then, one that must solidify itself against invasion and retrogression, resulting in an homogenous, tightly unified, society. It is in danger of falling into the trap that Irigaray warns of – re-

¹⁷² Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), p. 3.

¹⁷³ Bartkowski, p. 12.

¹⁷⁴ Carol Farley Kessler, 'Introduction', in *Daring to Dream: Utopian Stories by United States Women: 1836-1919* (Boston: Pandora Press, 1984), pp. 1-25 (p. 7).

¹⁷⁵ Sargisson, p. 4.

¹⁷⁶ Erin McKenna, *The Task of Utopia: A Pragmatic and Feminist Perspective* (New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), pp. 8-9.

appropriating (phallic) power by closing in on its own desires and demands.¹⁷⁷ As a closed near-perfect society, it becomes an end-state utopia in which there is little room for the expression of difference or for the sense of hope associated with the more open-ended utopia. Within its own space-time, the feminist utopia has succeeded in breaking down oppositions between self and community, male and female, public and private, that otherwise constrain women's subjectivity. It is represented as a civilisation in which subjectivity is embedded in community, a more highly evolved form than that of a collection of solipsistic (male) individuals with women having neither space nor time they can call their own. Considered in its historical context, with feminism at an early stage of its own evolution, it is perhaps understandable that the feminist utopia would want to counteract the image of the lonely woman isolated in a male world. To envisage a strong, consolidated and unified community of women is a radical step forward, with one of the casualties being the expression of difference. Utopia is a space for generic Woman, rather than individual woman, to call her own. The feminist utopian novel represents a form of feminist belief that puts the social and political transformation of the community as the primary and necessary pre-requisite for the advancement of women. Societal evolution is placed before free expression of subjectivity. It is not surprising, then, that it takes 2000 years of consolidating an all-female society before the inhabitants of Herland can accommodate the individual desires of a small group of women to marry men. Even then, the outcome is unknown, suggesting that the struggle for female emancipation and freedom of expression was not over.

¹⁷⁷ Irigaray (1985), p. 161.

CONCLUSION

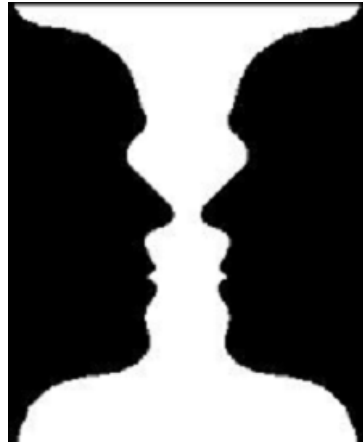


Figure 2. Two Faces.

The primary framing device of this thesis is the conceptual ‘elsewhere’ space – a space used to foreground women’s experiences, bringing together discourses on feminism, philosophy and science to explore female subjectivity. I want to return to another perspective on space, mentioned in the Introduction, which had cultural currency in the late-nineteenth century and which also encapsulates what the authors and their fictional women are trying to do here – reposition women in space as active agents at the forefront of their lives. This is the concept of positive negative space, a term coined by Kern which reflects the revelations by nineteenth-century physicists that the universe is comprised of multiple fields of energy, that space is ‘active and full’.¹ Positive negative space refers to the idea of space as fluid and mobile: figure and ground become interchangeable (figure 2). The interdependence of figure (positive) and ground (negative) means that they have the potential to take on equal value. This concept became a central idea in early-twentieth-century Gestalt psychology with its premise that the whole is greater than its parts.² Positive negative space was to have an enormous impact on the arts. Space became an important constituent element in Futurist and Cubist painting and sculpture; in music which featured intervals of silence; and in the

¹ Kern, p. 152.

² ‘Gestalt’ refers to the way that something has been placed or configured. Gestalt psychology was developed by psychologists, Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka in Germany. Their early work focused on human perception. Gestalt psychology added a humanistic dimension to what had been seen as a fairly sterile scientific approach to the study of the mind.

architecture of the pioneering Frank Lloyd Wright and his focus on the space of the room shaping the building.³ The spaces of silence were used to great effect in the written word, the most notable example being Kurtz's reaction to the empty void of darkness in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) – 'The horror! The horror!', but also in the work of poets such as Emily Dickinson, and fiction writers from Henry James to Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, where space is used to creative effect. The effect of positive negative space was the levelling of what was thought to be primary and secondary in the experience of space. Kern relates this effect to political, social and religious changes that were taking place at the same time: 'The challenge of this generation to the notion that the subject was more important than the background spread in ever widening circles to the notions that some people were more important than others'.⁴ Kern refers specifically to political figures, aristocrats and the sacred space of religion, but I argue that it is just as relevant to women's struggle to find a space of visibility for themselves.



Figure 3. Alexander Archipenko, *Woman Walking*.

The concept of positive negative space is powerfully represented in the female image of the Ukrainian-born Alexander Archipenko's *Woman Walking* (1912), a Futurist sculpture of a woman whose torso is represented by a void (figure 3). Archipenko is quoted by Kern as

³ Kern, p. 157.

⁴ Kern, p. 177.

recalling that this was his first successful creation of ‘space with symbolic meaning’.⁵ He resists the image of the female body tightly-corseted for a body that is shapely by virtue of its core emptiness. This space allows for multiple interpretations of what it means to be a woman, challenging the viewer to see the void, or womb (Plato’s *chora* or Irigaray’s container), not as empty space but as full of meaning. Archipenko makes it possible to see into woman, reminiscent of the recent discovery of X-rays by the German physicist, Wilhelm Röntgen, which caused a sensation for allowing the eye to penetrate the inner workings of the human body. It is a hyperspatial representation of woman, enabling the viewer to see around and through her. It suggests Stead’s ‘throughth’, the mystical fourth dimension which allows one to pass from ‘the narrow and limited condition’ of three dimensions into a divine and miraculous world with its own space-time: ‘The past mingles with the present, and the future unfolds its secrets [...] Spirit is manifested through matter, and we enter into a new heaven and a new earth’.⁶ It is both Hinton’s four-dimensional self and the Higher Self of Theosophy in close affinity with the divine.⁷ Archipenko’s sculpture converts the empty void into a feminine space of multiplicity and promise. He has transformed the space that woman occupies from one of insignificance to a positive negative space in which the manifest self portends so much more than the void that is visible to the naked eye.

In the texts examined in this thesis, women shape the spaces they occupy, enacting an active interdependence of figure and ground, of positive negative space. Instead of being positioned and contained in a space in which others delineate their subjectivity, they seek to determine how they embody space and how they transform themselves. In the unfolding of themselves in the ‘elsewhere’ space, these women move into the foreground to speak of a new social order in which they refuse to be constrained by belief systems that delimit their social, political and existential horizons. As Irigaray stresses, in order for women to occupy space differently, a series of transformations must take place in how female subjectivity and sexuality is formulated; in how women relate to each other and to men; and in their relation to their environment, nature and the divine.⁸ We can see them going about this in different ways that emphasise the fluid and multiple manifestations of femininity and feminism once women find a space of their own. Through an active participation in the spaces between the worlds of the living and the dead, Marryat and Phelps refuse a delineation of femininity that placed women as passive participants in the Christian tradition, and engage instead in a strategy to

⁵ Alexander Archipenko, *Archipenko: Fifty Creative Years 1908-1958* (New York: Tekhne, 1960), pp. 51-60, quoted in Kern, p. 159.

⁶ Stead, p. 427.

⁷ Blavatsky, p. 135.

⁸ Grosz (1995), p. 123.

transform women's relationship with the texts and practices of Christian Spiritualism, revealing their different feminist perspectives. Through their writing, they highlight the way that Spiritualism, and the permeable boundaries between matter and spirit, offered different routes to female self-knowledge and self-expression. Like Corelli, Phelps and Marryat transform their relationship with religion and with the divine. Corelli places centre-stage her heterodox mix of Christianity, Theosophy and the occult as a strategy for re-imagining woman in her genius and divinity. She melds together a traditional Victorian femininity with a modern feminism to create a woman whose whole is greater than her parts. In spite of often viewing the world through a series of binaries, Corelli refuses this configuration in her depiction of femininity composed of intellectual genius, divine inspiration and feminine beauty. Positive negative space allows for movement and multiplicity as Corelli's vision of womanhood shifts from foregrounding one dimension to another. Hinton's Stella is another example of this perceptual shift. She emerges from the background only once it is possible to imagine her in four-dimensional form. Enabling her emergence involves a perceptual acuity that depends on dispensing with traditional forms of seeing or knowing, allowing for new formulations of female subjectivity and the way that women relate to the natural world. In the case of feminist utopian spaces, figure and ground, public and private space, are inverted and re-shaped with women taking centre-ground in a collective strategy for social, political and economic transformation which involves re-thinking their sexuality, subjectivity, relationships and environment.

One of the problems inherent in the figure-ground perceptual configuration is that the human eye will always seek out a point upon which to focus. When, throughout history, this has been a phallogentric focus on man as the central figure, it becomes difficult to shift the perspective. The creation of imaginary 'elsewhere' spaces is an attempt to re-configure the perceptual field as a form of resistance to a patriarchy that has persisted for so long – in other words, to find a space outside the consciousness central to general experience, one that allows for a more fluid movement between figure (male) and ground (female). A major challenge inherent in this new framework is the constant need to resist and refuse the binaries associated with a patriarchal framing, and to find a space in which women can express their difference. As Irigaray argues, this will require 'a revolution in thought and ethics', a reinterpretation of 'the relations between subject and discourse, the subject and the world'.⁹ For the women represented in this thesis, striving to find ways of expressing their subjectivity, this is just the beginning of a long and difficult struggle. Resisting a formulation of subjectivity according to

⁹ Irigaray (1993), p. 6.

long-established epistemological and ideological ‘truths’ is problematic, and is managed in different ways. Fundamental to the resistance is the refusal to be constrained by gendered conceptions of space and time that position women in the background and restrict their agency and, instead, a re-positioning of them in a new space-time. The legacy of history and memory, however, is enduring, and the disavowal of patriarchal structures difficult to achieve. For example, Phelps’s reformist feminism offers comfort through its feminising and re-interpreting of Christian tradition, but remains embedded in the traditional institution of marriage and family. Corelli’s feminism offers an image of female subjectivity that is multiple and radical in its intersection of feminine divine and genius whilst, at the same time, and probably with her readership in mind, retaining all that was valued of traditional Victorian femininity. Marryat willingly embraces the liminal space between life and death in order to experience her multiplicity, but all the while must resist the malign spirit forces beyond her control. Hinton’s four-dimensional space offers women a route to higher consciousness, but when Stella yearns to share this experience with others, she finds it almost impossible to make a connection with those still bound to the third dimension, and is inevitably left feeling unhappy. And the bitter struggle from which the utopian society has emerged continues to cast a shadow over the feminist collective project, as efforts to resist a return to savagery risk replicating a Victorian ideal of female embodiment and replacing one form of oppression with another.

Woman’s embodied position in space matters. ‘Bodies are always understood within a spatial and temporal context’, argues Grosz, ‘and space and time remain conceivable only insofar as corporeality provides the basis for our perception and recognition of them’.¹⁰ If we think of the plight of Gilman’s female narrator in ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1892), we see how being confined to a space marked out by men can result in the slow and tortuous disintegration of a sense of self and a descent into madness. This story exemplifies the intimate interconnections of embodied woman and space, and serves as a bleak reminder of how much women’s survival and well-being depend on them being able to shape their own space. In contrast, the relationship between the body and space-time in the conceptual spaces of the celestial spheres, the spirit world and the fourth dimension reflects a dynamic reciprocity as past, present and future flow into one another, with the body permeable to the fluid forces of time and space, shape-shifting as it negotiates a hyperspatial world. In these ‘elsewhere’ spaces, the focus is primarily on the emergence of female subjectivity through transformed consciousness – the awakening of a freedom of expression and the experience of

¹⁰ Grosz (1995), p. 84

transcendence. The female body in the feminist utopian world, however, is first and foremost a material body. It is the focal point for resistance against a return to savagery; and written on the body are discourses on female sexuality and maternity, race, evolution and eugenics. This is a body carefully fashioned to represent the utopian dream of women's ascendance and independence – their ability to shape a world for themselves beyond the strictures of Victorian patriarchy. But in revering the Anglo-Saxon body and motherhood, and risking the replication of Victorian racial hierarchy and gender ideology, the utopian space, rather than dissolving the binaries associated with gender, draws attention to the female body as a site of continuing tension between the ideal and real world. A feminist re-working of Darwinian theory in the other texts points to a more open-ended and becoming representation of subjectivity through employing ideas of rehabilitation, reincarnation and eternal recurrence. This seems less possible in utopian space-time, where women's space is clearly defined and bordered, and time is associated with the linearity of history, reminiscent of more traditional, gendered representations of space and time. Utopia struggles, in this case, to provide women with a space they can truly call their own.

The tensions embodied in the utopian novel echo the struggles depicted in the utopian dreams of other women's fiction, particularly the New Woman novel which focuses on the material circumstances of women. So often, the fictional New Woman fails in her attempt to find a space of her own because she must constantly negotiate the demands made on her as wife and mother. Or, if she does find a space of her own, it is often a lonely cold room, replicating the isolation felt by the narrator in *New Amazonia* when she returns home. The reality for many women in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century was an ongoing struggle to find any space for themselves. In 1928, Virginia Woolf was still calling for women to have a room of their own.¹¹ For Heilmann, Woolf's room represents a metaphorical womb from which women could embark on 'voyages of self-discovery'.¹² It can also be seen as a space open to multiple possibilities, like the womb-shaped void of Archipenko's sculpture – an active positive negative space. By thinking of the 'elsewhere' space in terms of positive negative space, it becomes clear that the dynamic nature of the figure-ground model, in which figure and ground are in constant tension with each other for primacy, encapsulates not only the way in which changing ideas about space and time in the nineteenth century were to affect women's lives, but also the reality of the ongoing struggle for women to maintain a position, not in the void, but in a space of their own making.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 1945), p. 6.

¹² Heilmann (1995), p. 297.

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