

**GENEALOGIES OF DESIRE:
“URANIANISM,” MYSTICISM AND SCIENCE IN
BRITAIN, 1889-1940**

by

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ABSTRACT

This article examines early twentieth-century British “Uranian” same-sex sexualities as a distinct entity from other labels for homosexuality. British sexologists, feminists, and other radical socialist/anarchist reformers invoked scientized versions of mysticism and Asian religions to conceptualize different, though intersecting, meanings for the Uranian. Historians of sexuality, however, tend to conflate the term “Uranian” with the other various and conflicting medico-scientific concepts circulating at the time, such as “homosexual,” “sexual invert,” and “intermediate sex.” Overstating the slippage between terms, however, obscures the significance of Uranianism in the history of same-sex eroticism, and reinforces a dichotomy between spirituality and modernity. The Uranian discourses examined here epitomize a “progressive” historical moment that elaborated the scientific origins for the spirit, soul, and a divine will in the constitution of modern sexual/spiritual subjects. In many ways, Uranianism challenged the late nineteenth-century medical-sexological discourses that demarcated the homosexual as a pathological “type” by creating a more fluid understanding of sexuality through the interplay of Edwardian critiques of scientific materialism with New Age ideas about the mind, psyche, and spirituality. That is not to suggest that Uranianism offered an “alternative” (homo)sexuality that was disentangled from pathological discourses; on the contrary, the Uranian discourses implicitly consolidated the “homosexual type.” Tracing the genealogy of Uranian sexuality through three case studies illuminates a modern moment when reformers attempted to create fluid sexualities. We find that Uranianism complicates our understandings about the supposedly dominant role of medical-scientific discourses in the construction of early twentieth-century British (homo)sexuality.

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1 INTRODUCTION

*Not Kisses Only or embraces,
Nor the sweet pain and passion of the flesh alone;
But more, far more,
To feel (ah joy!) the creature deep within
Touch on its mate, unite, and lie entranced
There, ages down, and ages long, in light,
Suffused, divine – where all these other pleasures
Fade but to symbols of that perfect union.¹*

Edward Carpenter

During the *fin-de-siècle*, British homosexual activist Edward Carpenter developed a vision of exceptional same-sex desire that he called Uranian love, a concept that combined his socialist mystical vision for the New Age with a biological understanding of homosexuals' extraordinary capacities. Although Carpenter made the most provocative claims for elevating the status of Uranian homosexuals during that time, the term was used – sometimes to rather different ends – by a range of early twentieth-century social and sex reformers. British sexologists, feminists, and other radical socialist/anarchist reformers invoked scientized versions of mysticism and Asian religions to construct a range of different, though intersecting, meanings for the Uranian.² Nevertheless, historians of sexuality have elided the “quasi-scientific” term “Uranian,” focusing instead on scientific categories as the source of sexual knowledge that produced the modern homosexual. Historians tend to conflate the term “Uranian” with the other various and conflicting medical-scientific concepts circulating at the time, such as homosexual, sexual invert, and intermediate sex. Overstating the slippage between terms, however, obscures the significance

¹ Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, 331.

² Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams: Being Autobiographical Notes*, 216–220. As Edward Carpenter demonstrates in his autobiography, socialism and anarchism were not separate ideas at this time. Carpenter's socialism, for example, blended socialist William Morris's ideas with those of anarchist Peter Kropotkin.

of Uranianism in the history of same-sex eroticism, and reinforces what Michael Saler calls a “binary discourse” between spirituality and modernity.³

As we shall see, Uranianism epitomizes a “progressive” historical moment when radical social and sexual reformers envisioned a scientific basis for the unknown realms of human experience.⁴ The Uranian discourses critiqued scientific materialism and advocated a utopian social ideology that linked esoteric religious philosophies with understandings of biological and chemical processes – what I call mystico-science. Advocates of Uranianism claimed that sexually undifferentiated human cells have both a regenerative “vital force” and a divine substance that manifests through (same-sex) sexual desire. To make that claim, the Uranian discourses linked two concepts: a belief that human unicellular organisms are androgynous and spiritually potent became associated with the modern Uranian who was seen to have perfectly blended feminine and masculine qualities. Furthermore, the Uranian represented an evolved spiritual consciousness that was reached through that harmonious blend of masculine and feminine temperaments – a notion that, for some, was exemplified by same-sex love and eroticism. Uranian discourses, then, integrated ideas about a “natural” spiritual and divine substance into their conception of exceptional modern sexual/spiritual subjects. Modifying a wide range of evolutionary theories, proponents of Uranianism

³ Michael Saler, “Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review,” 3. Michael Saler claims that spirituality and mysticism are often defined as “the residual, subordinate ‘other’ to modernity’s rational, secular, and progressive tenets.”

⁴ See e.g., Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*; Lucy Delap, “The Superwoman.” The socialist revival in the 1880s spawned a radical/socialist intelligentsia or “progressive” elite. They advocated radical “progressive” ideas for social and sexual reform in the early twentieth-century that contested so-called “philistine” conventional bourgeois notions of Victorian materialism and moral codes. Socialist/anarchist social and sexual reformers sought political, cultural, and social changes as a means to address the demands of modernity, such as increasing urbanization, increasing industrialization, and the oppression of women, the working classes, and homosexuals. They also critiqued the Victorian emphasis on scientific mechanistic explanations of existence. Typical of the late Victorian and Edwardian “avant-garde,” the Uranian discourses examined here made particularly modern psychological investigations into “consciousness” and the self.”

claimed that a divinely inspired (same-sex) sexual desire would be the creative impetus for (r)evolutionary change that would elevate all of humanity.

The combination of Edwardian critiques of scientific materialism and New Age ideas about the mind, psyche, and spirituality allowed for more variable sexualities than the prevailing medical and scientific categories of sexual “types.” Uranianism challenged the late nineteenth-century medical-sexological discourses that defined the homosexual as a pathological “type” by creating a more fluid understanding of sexuality. That is not to suggest that Uranianism offered an “alternative” (homo)sexuality that was disentangled from pathological discourses; on the contrary, the two discourses were mutually constitutive. In fact, the Uranian discourses implicitly consolidated the “homosexual type.” Tracing the genealogy of Uranian sexuality through three case studies illuminates a modern moment when reformers attempted to create fluid sexualities in much the same way that today’s queer theorists critique identity categories. We find that the development of Uranianism complicates our understandings about the supposedly dominant role of medical-scientific discourses in the construction of early twentieth-century British (homo)sexuality.

Michel Foucault famously argued that European medical and scientific inquiries into homosexuality in the late nineteenth-century transformed the homosexual into a “type.” Earlier in the century, legal proscriptions against forbidden sex acts categorized the acts themselves rather than the person who committed the crime.⁵ Foucault marks 1870 as the definitive historical moment when German physician Karl Westphal created the homosexual

⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 43. According to Foucault, homosexuals were no longer identified by a sexual practice – sodomy – but rather were reconceived as identifiable types of people: “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.”

as a “personage.”⁶ From that point onward, argued Foucault, the homosexual became an “object” of study and a medical-scientific category. In Britain, the homosexual was publicly transformed into a social “type” at the end of nineteenth century. For example, the 1885 Labouchère amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act – an Act that prohibited “any act of gross indecency” between men – in combination with its sensational public debut during the Oscar Wilde trials of 1895 constituted the homosexual as an identifiable social deviant.⁷

Some scientific authorities, such as German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing and British sexologist Havelock Ellis, opposed the late nineteenth-century social and legal condemnation of homosexuals. Drawing upon nineteenth-century evolutionary science, especially biology and degeneracy theories, they theorized the etiology for the “disease” of male and female homosexuality to prove that homosexuality was congenital and, therefore, ought not to be legally punished. Their explanations for “inborn” homosexuality were based on the late nineteenth-century understandings of metabolic disorders and pathology combined with cultural understandings of gendered behaviour.⁸ For example, their identifying terms for congenital homosexuality – the “third sex,” “sexual invert,” and “intermediate sex” – were conceived within a heterosexual and gendered paradigm of opposite sexes whereby the male invert has a “contrary” sexual nature (feminine and passive)

⁶ Hubert Kennedy, “Karl Heinrich Ulrichs,” 30. Historians now contest Foucault’s claim. Hubert Kennedy, for example, argues that Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’s theory of the “Urning” homosexual marks the invention of the homosexual as an individual.

⁷ See, e.g., Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*, 1–2.

⁸ See e.g., Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession*. Terry provides a good overview of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis’s theories. In Britain, German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s term “homosexual” and the concept of sexual inversion, popularized in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1892), was reworked in British sexologist Havelock Ellis and John Addington’s book *Sexual Inversion* (first published in 1897). *Sexual Inversion* was well-known among British sexual reformers in the early twentieth century.

that “naturally” compels him to make a “contrary” object choice (a man).⁹ It would be a mistake to characterize Krafft-Ebing and Ellis’s theories as straightforward arguments about homosexual degeneracy but they nevertheless reinforced the dichotomy between normal and abnormal sexualities that persists today.¹⁰

Many scholars have analyzed the medical and scientific obsession with homosexuality in shaping such issues as political policies, cultural attitudes towards sexuality, gender, and “race,” as well as personal experiences of sexual desire and identity.¹¹ Following from Foucault, historians of sexuality have traced the constitution of the homosexual as a medical-scientific category in order to understand the legacies of this understanding of homosexual pathology. At the same time, historians now complicate Foucault’s claim that individuals’ sexualities and bodies were constructed by the deployment of medical, legal, and scientific technologies; rather, we are now aware of the ways that the homosexual “objects” of scientific study negotiated the terms of their medically defined identities.¹² Additionally, feminist and queer theorists argue against the notion that there is (or was) one homogenous category of the “homosexual” and a static gay political identity.¹³ Those scholarly innovations turn our attention to the variable sexualities that were eventually superseded by scientific categories.

⁹ See, e.g., Jennifer Terry *An American Obsession*; Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds., *Sexology in Culture*; Vernon A. Rosario, ed., *Science and Homosexualities*. Ellis, in his efforts to uphold the prevailing gendered dualism – men are naturally active and masculine whereas women are naturally passive and feminine – argued that the male invert has a feminine temperament, and the female invert has a masculine temperament.

¹⁰ Harry Oosterhuis, “Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s ‘Step-Children of Nature.’” Also see, Joy Dixon, “Sexology and the Occult,” 412–413. The sexologists’ theories were more multifaceted than previously thought and difficult to label as absolutely pathologizing.

¹¹ See, e.g., Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession*; Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds., *Sexology in Culture*; Vernon A. Rosario, ed., *Science and Homosexualities*.

¹² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 155.

¹³ See, e.g., Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Butler, *Undoing Gender*; Lisa Duggan, “Making it Perfectly Queer.”

One result of the new approach which has tried to complicate the genealogies of the “homosexual” is to draw our attention to the earlier scientific categories which were displaced by the triumph of that term. While historians have explored the meanings of terms like “inversion” or “intermediacy,” less attention has been paid to concepts that evade scientific definition. The idea of the “Uranian,” formed as it was in a complex fusion of scientific and mystical ideas, has received almost no serious scholarly consideration. Scholars regard Edwardian uses of the term “Uranian” as a revival of German homosexual activist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’s theory of psychical hermaphroditism popularized in the 1860s.¹⁴ Indeed, Edward Carpenter, who introduced the term into English, was indebted to Ulrichs’s “Urning” – a hermaphroditic third sex based on Plato’s *Symposium* and associated with *Uranos* or heaven.¹⁵ Adapting scientific examples of hermaphroditism, Ulrichs argued that the male *Urning* was inhabited by a female psyche/soul, and, vice versa, the female *Uranian* was inhabited by a male psyche/soul.¹⁶ Ulrichs’s ideas were consistent with Victorian beliefs that people’s psychological and spiritual experiences are gendered – an idea that prevailed during the *fin-de-siècle* among many radical social and sexual reformers such as Carpenter (discussed below). Furthermore, as we shall see Carpenter’s biological theory is reminiscent of Ulrichs’s claim that the natural origins of the Uranian can be traced to the evolution of the embryo.¹⁷ Ulrichs, however, had no scientific training on which to base his

¹⁴ For example, Jennifer Terry in *An American Obsession* (70) claims that Carpenter followed in Ulrichs’s footsteps, which drastically oversimplifies Carpenter’s concept of the Uranian.

¹⁵ Carpenter makes that claim in *The Intermediate Sex*, 20. Like Ulrichs, Carpenter argued against the idea that homosexuality was an illness. As William A. Pannapacker argues in “‘The bricklayer shall lay me’” (282), “Carpenter uses Ulrichs’s model to reverse the negative discourse of perversion and inversion, making the Uranian’s transgending a source of physical, moral, intellectual, and social virtue.”

¹⁶ See Hubert Kennedy, “Karl Heinrich Ulrichs” for an in depth study of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs.

¹⁷ Joseph Bristow, “Symonds’s History, Ellis’s Heredity,”90.

argument; Carpenter, among others, criticized his work as unscientific.¹⁸ Despite the similarities between Ulrichs's theory and the later Uranian discourses, the mystico-scientific theories of Uranianism significantly expanded Ulrichs's concept. Overstating the association of Uranian spiritual/sexualities with Ulrichs's ideas misses a unique modern moment in the history of sexuality.

The mystico-scientific conceptions of Uranianism disrupt a teleological progressive view of homosexual emancipation. Historiography tends to reinforce a progressive and secular (enlightened and rational) narrative of homosexual emancipation that marginalizes spiritual conceptions in the historical record. The late nineteenth-century medico-scientific production of the supposedly pathological and degenerate homosexual marks the beginning of that narrative. That image was widely disseminated in the 1930s and 1940s under the authority of sexology and psychoanalysis.¹⁹ It was not until the 1970s that we saw the rise of coherent lesbian and gay sexual identities and political resistance to these pathologizing characterizations. Finally, the 1990s and beyond celebrate a queer climax of "new elasticity in the meanings of 'lesbian' and 'gay.'"²⁰ The boundaries between gay, lesbian, transsexual, transgender, and bisexuality, for example, are becoming increasingly blurred. As Lisa Duggan argues, we are less likely to maintain the "notion of a fixed sexual identity

¹⁸ According to Hubert Kennedy in "Karl Heinrich Ulrichs" (33), Ulrichs's theory was viewed as oversimplified and unscientific by medical sex theorists at the time. Also see, Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age*, 118. Carpenter claimed that Ulrich's theory of a "crosswise connexion between 'soul' and 'body'" was "somewhat vague and indefinite," implying that it lacked scientific credibility.

¹⁹ In *The History of Sexuality* (56–57), Foucault argued against the notion of a moment of enlightened and rational truth about sex and sexual liberation marked by Freud. He argues instead that Freud's modern insights were part of the continued deployment of the scientific mechanisms of power that drew upon a long history of religion and superstition in the production of sex and the homosexual. According to Foucault, "What needs to be situated, therefore, is not the threshold of a new rationality whose discovery was marked by Freud." Instead, he situates Freud as part of the "progressive formation . . . of that 'interplay of truth and sex' which was bequeathed to us by the nineteenth century."

²⁰ Duggan, "Making it Perfectly Queer," 166.

determined by a firmly gendered desire.”²¹ Edwardian Uranian mystico-scientific sexuality fits uneasily within that progressive narrative of the modern homosexual, and suggests an early “queer” moment when the dualism between what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman was challenged.

The Uranian discourses elaborated a mystico-scientific “essence” for the Uranian that worked against establishing a coherent and stable gendered identity category. While taken up in different ways, ideas about “vital forces,” divine substances, and the unicellular evidence of same-sex desire destabilized the sex/gender understandings of sexuality. The term “Uranian” represented a mystico-scientifically conceived androgynous ideal of spiritual, psychic, and even physiological perfection, all of which is difficult to reconcile with our understandings of a modern homosexual identity. A number of historians, however, have all demonstrated that spirituality was a vital element in the constitution of modern sexual subjects.²² The early twentieth-century was a unique period of experimentation among a loosely affiliated group of social theorists, literary figures, artists, and activists who were advocating “progressive” and utopian programs of social and sexual reform.²³ They blended seemingly incongruent concepts taken from medicine, science, and esoteric religions to challenge scientific materialism. Representative of that moment, Uranian (homo)sexuality and love challenged the scientific evolutionary evidence of increasing sex dimorphism, and posited a “higher type” of human with a divinely inspired free will.²⁴

The genealogy sketched here illuminates three linked but distinctly different historical moments that help to capture the diverse and contested terrain of modern Uranian

²¹ Duggan, “Making it Perfectly Queer,” 166.

²² See, e.g., Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*; Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine* and “Sexology and the Occult”; Lucy Delap, “The Superwoman.”

²³ Jo-Ann Wallace, “Edith Ellis, Sapphic Idealism, and *The Lover’s Calendar* (1912),” 184.

²⁴ Delap, “The Superwoman,” 104–105, note 12.

mystico-scientific androgyny and exceptional same-sex love: Edward Carpenter's "divine-germ" theory developed from 1889 to 1914, a debate in the feminist periodical *The Freewoman* in 1912, and a later feminist journal called *Urania*, which ran from 1916 to 1940.²⁵ The possibilities and limitations of Uranian sexuality become evident when we analyze these mystico-scientific conceptions of androgynous Uranian same-sex love and desire.

These diverse philosophies of Uranian (same-sex) love and eroticism demonstrate a new understanding of sexuality – Uranianism – based on an androgynous spiritual and biological "essence." According to that view, the Uranian was innately transgressive and transcendent – a view that challenged the cultural notions of gender and sex fixity, as well as the label of homosexual degeneracy. This is not to suggest that it produced an unproblematic expression of same-sex love and desire. The individualist expression of a psychological/spiritual experience combined with the de-emphasis on physical sexual experience limited the possibilities for Uranianism to offer a clearly defined sub-cultural or political identity. Ironically, the arguments against the sexological category of "homosexual" actually helped to solidify the notion of "homosexual" deviance. At the same time, Uranian sexuality represents a historical moment when, as *Freewoman* contributor Harry Birnstingl suggested, certain middle-class homosexuals "refuse[d] to be pigeon-holed."²⁶ These sexual and social reformers created a Uranian type of love, as described in Carpenter's poem (above), which was by its very nature, spiritually elevated and liberated from sexological

²⁵ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 81. Basing his theory of genealogy on Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals*, Foucault problematized the master historical narrative that seeks out the origins of an essential truth, or identity. In Jennifer Terry's article "Theorizing Deviant Historiography" (285), Terry expanded Foucault's claims. Terry provides an "interventionist strategy" for exposing the hidden possibilities in discourses. A genealogical method, then, allows us to deconstruct what Jennifer Terry characterized as the "process and operations" that produced historical moments on the margins of dominant discourse; in this case, the intersecting and, oftentimes, enigmatic discourses that created the Uranian.

²⁶ Birnstingl, "Uranians," *The Freewoman: A Weekly Feminist Review* 7, vol. 1 (1912) 39.

constraints: “divine – where all these other pleasures/ Fade but to symbols of that perfect union.”²⁷ As we shall see, the mystico-scientific aspects of Uranian androgynous sexualities destabilized sexology’s fixed sexed/gendered and pathological identity categories. They allowed for fluid and variable sexual subjectivities that transcended the medical scientific categories prior to the sexological and psychoanalytical theories gaining authority in the 1930s and 1940s.

²⁷ Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, 331.

2 EDWARD CARPENTER: THE URANIAN'S "DIVINE-GERM"

It was a "fascinating and enthusiastic period," wrote Edward Carpenter in his autobiography: "The Socialist and Anarchist propaganda, the Feminist and Suffragist upheaval, the huge Trade-union growth, the Theosophic movement, the new currents in the . . . Artistic world, the torrent even of change in the Religious world . . . all constituted so many streams and headwaters converging, as it were, to a great river."²⁸ Carpenter's sense of tumultuous change characterizes the flood of controversial ideas about sex and gender in the late nineteenth century. Newspaper coverage of Oscar Wilde's 1895 trials consolidated the image of homosexual effeminate decadence, and created the "manly" New Woman through caricatures of militant suffragists whose spectacular campaigns challenged sexual and gender norms. Feminists and their male supporters were advocating social reform through new notions of "sacred and consensual" (hetero)sexual relations.²⁹ The Edwardian feminist Edith Lees Ellis described the new age of sexual reform as a "sexual renaissance": "a blending of healthy temperate animalism with that rare mating when soul lies by soul."³⁰ Edith Lees Ellis was a prolific writer and lecturer who developed theories on marriage and sexuality that encompassed her views on unconventional relationships. She was involved in "lesbian" relationships while in a platonic marriage with the sexologist Havelock Ellis. A close friend of Carpenter, Edith Lees Ellis characterized Carpenter's spiritual sexology as part of the modern "sexual renaissance" that combined "physiological sexuality and spirituality in a

²⁸ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 245.

²⁹ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 272.

³⁰ Mrs. Havelock Ellis [Edith Lees Ellis] "The Love of To-Morrow," *New Horizon*, 3.

harmonious perspective.”³¹ Carpenter’s mystico-scientific theory of androgyny and exceptional same-sex love – epitomized by the term Uranian – created a more flexible conception of same-sex eroticism than the more mainstream concepts like sexual inversion. In fact, Carpenter’s Uranianism posed an important challenge to the intertwined theories of gender and degeneracy pervasive among most sexual theorists.

Born into an upper middle-class English family in 1844, Carpenter attended Trinity Hall at Cambridge where he studied and lectured on the physical sciences, and was ordained as an Anglican Deacon in 1869. In the 1870s he experienced a spiritual and intellectual crisis; he became increasingly disenchanted with Anglican religious doctrine, and with a Victorian social order that oppressed the working classes, women, and homosexuals. In 1873 he relinquished his clerical orders.³² He became well-known in “progressive” circles, and associated with other notable figures involved in social and sexual reform.³³ Inspired by classical imagery, literature, and the Indian religious text called the *Bhagavad Gita*, Carpenter envisioned the “seed of new conceptions of life” that included a socialist/anarchist and mystical vision of sexual and social reform.³⁴

³¹ Mrs. Havelock Ellis [Edith Lees Ellis] “Eugenics and the Mystical Outlook,” *New Horizon*, 41. Edith Lees Ellis’s friendship with Carpenter is documented in his autobiography – *My Days and Dreams* – and in their correspondence found in the Fabian Economic and Social Thought, Series One: The Papers of Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929 (hereafter cited as Carpenter Collection).

³² See, e.g., Sheila Rowbotham, “Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life,” 27 & 31; Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 72.

³³ See, Judy Greenway, “It’s What You Do With It That Counts: Interpretations of Otto Weininger,” 36; Edward Carpenter, “Self-Analysis for Havelock Ellis,” 289; Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*, 46–47; Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 245–246. Carpenter was also a close associate of Eleanor Marx, Kate Salt, Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Annie Besant, Laurence Housman, and Edward Westermarck. Feminist novelist Olive Schreiner was in regular correspondence with Carpenter, as were well-known feminists Isabella Ford, Constance Lytton, and Edith Lees Ellis. Carpenter also associated with the medical sexologist Havelock Ellis. In fact, Carpenter provided Ellis with a case history (reprinted as Case VI) for Ellis’ *Sexual Inversion*, which was written in collaboration with homosexual John Addington Symonds.

³⁴ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 67. See, Joy Dixon’s “Edward Carpenter’s Millennial Visions” and “Sexology and the Occult” for an analysis of Carpenter’s spiritual/sexual politics.

Carpenter's ideas were consistent with those of other Edwardian radical social and sexual reformers. During the late Victorian and Edwardian eras, scientists, artists, philosophers, and social/sexual reformers challenged the materialist limits to human experience, and sought explanations about the realm of the unknown: the psyche, the unconscious, and the soul. The elite reformers featured here challenged the nineteenth-century scientific materialists' views that humans are natural objects composed only of substance – of matter. Whereas scientific materialists rejected the idea that god, the soul, or the mind were actual entities that existed apart from the physical body, the British reformers emphasized the scientific origins of the soul, the psyche, and the divine. Those ideas were influenced by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer's ideas about the transcendent potential of what he called "the will," developed and publicized by Eduard von Hartmann's *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* published in 1869.³⁵ According to Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, each person carries a mysterious world in their psyche or soul that has the potential to link them to the transcendent cosmos. Edwardian intellectuals and proponents of radical social reform, including Carpenter, incorporated ideas about the individualist pursuit of the divine "will" into their socialist, anarchist, and aristocratic programs for social reform in the New Age.

During the *fin-de-siècle*, "progressive" reformers appropriated a wide range of evolutionary theories in order to articulate the (r)evolutionary spiritual potential of some human beings to transcend the limitations of what it means to be a woman and a man. The "progressive" elite critiqued the social inequities justified by Victorian scientific determinism. In the nineteenth-century, "Social Darwinists' used evolutionary theory to

³⁵ Corinna Treital, *A Science for the Soul*, 30–36. According to Corinne Treital, scholars now regard Schopenhauer as the father of the study of the unconscious.

claim that social hierarchies of race, class, and sex merely reflected a natural order.”³⁶ Social and sexual reformers challenged the social inequality between men and women, and the assumption that sex (maleness and femaleness) and gender (masculinity and femininity) are immutable. Reformers used an evolutionary paradigm to explain the developmental hermaphroditic impulse in human cells that would inspire a spiritual revolution toward “higher” ideals and “higher beings” who would be the leaders in the New Age. For some, homosexuals’ hermaphroditic “natures” challenged the dualistic sex/gender system.

Basing their theories on ideas like that of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, social and sex reformers developed the idea of “super” men and women who were able to transcend the limitations of the sexed body through a heightened consciousness.³⁷ For example, “Bernard Shaw argued in *Man and Superman* that life force, as the basis of all evolution, would ‘build up that raw force into higher and higher individuals, the ideal individual being omnipotent, infallible, and withal completely, unilludedly self-conscious: in short, a god.’”³⁸ Edwardian vitalism, popularized by Henri Bergson, also complicated nineteenth-century evolutionary theories; unicellular organisms, according to Bergson, have a source of energy unexplained by mechanical and chemical forces that provide humans with the ingenuity to evolve to “superhumanity” and divinity.³⁹ Neoplatonism provided another source for conceptualizing not only the unity of matter and spirit, but also that “all of creation is interrelated and . . . [the] expression of a universal soul or cosmic mind.”⁴⁰ “Progressive” thinkers, such as Edward Carpenter and the *Freewoman* contributors, envisioned the metamorphosis of the psyche and soul – the sloughing off of the husks of material limitations – toward heightened

³⁶ Terry, *An American Obsession*, 37.

³⁷ See, Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 133; Delap, “The Superwoman,” 113.

³⁸ Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*, 114, quoted in Delap, “Superwoman” 112.

³⁹ Delap, “The Superwoman,” 105, note 12.

⁴⁰ Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 21.

levels of consciousness and the divine. To that end, they found scientific evidence of psychic and divine potential in unicellular, sexually undifferentiated organisms – what Carpenter called the “divine germ.” Carpenter formulated a mystico-biological theory of divine androgyny and “transmutable passion” that envisioned the Uranian’s potential to achieve a “higher order of consciousness.”

Carpenter’s widely-circulated books articulated a democratic vision of social progress and emphasized the universal connection between all humanity; in his view, the harmonious blend of the material physical world and the inner spirit would result in a “third form of consciousness” or “cosmic consciousness” and the universal connection between all beings.⁴¹ As we shall see, Carpenter elaborated a complex mystico-scientific formulation in order to argue that the Uranian had a spiritual and biological androgynous essence – a “divine germ” – that would bring the corporal and spiritual into harmony.⁴² Three interrelated ideas underpinned Carpenter’s mystico-scientific concept of Uranianism: his mystico-biological concept of a protozoic “divine germ” and the related ideas about consciousness; his notion of (r)evolution that combines theories of biology and evolutionary science; and the idea of reincarnation.

Inspired equally by Lamarck’s evolutionary theory and the *Bhagavad Gita*, Carpenter posited that the “germ-plasm” at the protozoic level of human origins carried the memory of all its reincarnations and the potential to reach a divine stage of consciousness. He often referred to that “germ-plasm” as a “divine germ.” The “divine germ” harboured in the

⁴¹ Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 51. Carpenter argued in *The Art of Creation* (47) that a sexually undifferentiated consciousness was poised to contribute to cosmic connection: “Their knowledge is, as it were, embedded in the great living intelligent whole (of the world), and therefore each special act of knowledge or perception carries with it a kind of *aura* or diffused consciousness extending far, far around it.” We also find references to Carpenter’s belief in cosmic connection in his friend Edith Lees Ellis’s book *Three Modern Seers*. See, Edith Lees Ellis [Mrs. Havelock Ellis] *Three Modern Seers: James Hinton, Nietzsche, Edward Carpenter*, 201.

⁴² Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, 246.

primitive state of protozoa would later manifest in a modern and exceptional Uranian with “that third order of perception which has been called the cosmic consciousness, and which may also be termed divination.”⁴³ These concepts emerge and build on each other in a number of major works: *Love’s Coming of Age* (1896), *Civilisation: It’s Cause and Cure* (1889), *The Art of Creation* (1900), *The Drama of Love and Death* (1912), and *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk* (1914). In Carpenter’s works, the Uranian represents the most modern realization of homosexuality; Uranianism carried the “divine germ” of potential for transcending sex difference toward a heightened level of cosmic consciousness and sacred love.⁴⁴

In many respects, Carpenter’s gendered definition of the congenital sexual intermediate was similar to Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis’s more mainstream theories about sexual inversion. Carpenter’s concepts reinforced the Victorian scientific ideas that linked biological sex difference to contemporary gender roles, and defined as “degenerate” and “homosexual” those men and women whose biological sex and gender identity were not aligned.⁴⁵ As Jennifer Terry argues, “gender and sexuality were collapsed in the earliest writing on homosexuality, firmly rooted as it was in the key assumptions of the prevailing two-sex system.”⁴⁶ His colleague the British sexologist Havelock Ellis, for example, demarcated rigid sex and gender categories. Ellis defined what he termed “sexual inversion” within a masculine/feminine binary; privileging the prevailing gender ideology that upheld binary oppositions between masculine (active) and feminine (passive), he

⁴³ Carpenter, *The Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk*, 63.

⁴⁴ Today, Carpenter is best known for the term “sexual intermediate” defined in *Love’s Coming of Age* and *The Intermediate Sex*. The term Uranian, however, better epitomizes Carpenter’s mystico-scientific theory of divine androgyny and exceptional same-sex love.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., William A. Pannapacker, “The Bricklayer shall lay me,” 283; Rowbotham, “Edward Carpenter: Prophet of the New Life,” 110.

⁴⁶ Terry, *An American Obsession*, 36.

constructed the congenital female and male inverts as distinct categories that inverted gender norms.⁴⁷ Carpenter also characterized homosexuals according to the gendered opposition between masculine and feminine behaviours. Describing the modern homosexual temperament of the “intermediate type” in gendered terms, Carpenter wrote: “We all know women with a strong dash of the masculine temperament, and we all know men whose almost feminine sensibility and intuition seem to belie their bodily form.”⁴⁸ Carpenter, in fact, differentiated between the “extreme and exaggerated types” and “the more normal and perfect types.” The imperfect male intermediates are excessively effeminate and female intermediates are overtly masculine and aggressive, according to Carpenter.⁴⁹ In Carpenter’s calculation of intermediacy, the “perfect male specimen” will have an “unsensational exterior” that conforms to the social expectations for gendered behaviour to match biological sex.⁵⁰ Whereas the intermediate’s “internal” feminine “soul-stuff” was admirable, effeminacy betrayed feminine weakness, according to Carpenter. Effeminacy indicated the impact of corrupted modern commercial civilization – an argument that must be understood in the context of his socialist/anarchist argument against commercialization and the excesses of the upper classes. An “exterior structure” that was indistinguishable from biological sex held the greatest appeal for Carpenter’s philosophical and erotic ideal.⁵¹

Carpenter and Ellis also upheld the prevailing essentialist beliefs that biological sex difference was correlated with socially prescribed gender norms, and that sex/gender

⁴⁷ Ellis and Symonds, *Sexual Inversion*, 87 & 88. According to Terry in *An American Obsession* (35), Ellis, among others investigating the “problem” of homosexuality, sought to make sense of people who behaved contrary to nature – people who were attracted to members of their own sex, and therefore failed to fulfill the “natural” social activities of heterosexual marriage and reproduction. In that case, sex theorists argued that homosexuals were “inverted,” with characters, personalities, and bodies of the “opposite” sex.

⁴⁸ Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 17.

⁴⁹ Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 29.

⁵⁰ Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 31.

⁵¹ Carpenter, *Love’s Coming of Age*, 129.

distinction was a marker of “civilized” evolutionary advancement. Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson’s *The Evolution of Sex*, published in 1889, was viewed favourably by both Ellis and Carpenter.⁵² Highly influential during the Victorian era, Geddes and Thomson’s biological theory was based on nineteenth-century understandings of metabolism and social theories of gendered “separate spheres.” Their book posited that there were fundamental biological differences between the sexes: female energies, typified by the ovum, were “anabolic,” conservative and passive, whereas male energies, typified by the sperm cell, were “katabolic,” active, and disruptive.⁵³ In that formulation, sex and gender difference was inscribed at the cellular level of sexually undifferentiated primeval protozoa.

For many theorists, that meant that the gender and sexual ambiguity of “lower life forms” became associated with so-called “lower races.” Ellis, for example, claimed that hermaphroditism – signified by transgressions of gendered norms and a lack of sex/gender differentiation – was deemed to be primitive; in that case, certain homosexuals represented “anomalous ‘throwbacks’ within a scheme of cultural and anatomical progress.”⁵⁴ In *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk*, Carpenter also demarcated a racialized distance between androgynous “primitives” and hyper-masculine “civilized” warriors. For example, Carpenter separated homosexuals into “sub” (inferior) and “super” (superior) categories according to their proficiency at civic virtue, honorable love attachments, the degree of their gender ambiguity, and their developmental stage of (spiritual/psychic) consciousness. According to Carpenter, a more advanced “soul-stuff” bred nobility and heightened

⁵² Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, *The Facts of Life: the creation of sexual knowledge in Britain, 1650–1950*, 157. According to Roy Porter and Lesley Hall, “Edward Carpenter, much further to the left of the reform spectrum, read the work with interest and pronounced it ‘first-rate.’”

⁵³ Roy Porter and Lesley A. Hall, *The Facts of Life*, 155–166.

⁵⁴ Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*, 29. In my estimation, Ellis made more favourable assessments of middle-class and “respectable” homosexuals like his friend Carpenter.

masculinity for men (super-virility) and femininity for women (ultra-femininity).⁵⁵ Upon closer analysis, however, we find that Carpenter’s mystico-biological formulation elevated “primitive” life forms; that is, the prophetic and hermaphroditic tendencies of the “primitive” organisms were directly linked to the modern androgynous Uranian’s divine gifts.

Carpenter combined scientific information and Hindu religious traditions to construct a theory of the inherent Uranian potential – the “seed” of a heightened stage of consciousness – that is inscribed in the hermaphroditic and unconscious desires of protozoa. According to Carpenter, protozoa were the “seeds” of consciousness, desire, and divine forces – loosely referred to as forces of creativity. I will explore two major intersecting elements, or forces of creativity, in protozoa that provided the template for Carpenter’s extraordinary claims about Uranianism: hermaphroditic desire and divinity. As we shall see, Carpenter argued that protozoa represent the germinal stage of sexually undifferentiated desire and divine consciousness that will manifest again in a higher stage of development or, in his words, “exfoliate” the higher stage of divine, cosmic consciousness.⁵⁶

Envisioning three levels of consciousness, Carpenter argued that the first level begins with sexually undifferentiated and spiritually potent protozoa.⁵⁷ In his paradigm, protozoa exhibit the simple “primitive” stage of consciousness where mind and matter are unified but

⁵⁵ Carpenter, *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk*, 163 & 172–174. Also see, e.g., Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*; Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*; Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession*; Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; Julian Carter, “Normality, Whiteness, Authorship”; Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion*. *Primitive Folk* raises a number of questions for future study regarding British imperialism and the mutually constituted categories of race, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and science. These scholars have addressed aspects of these questions, linking nineteenth-century sexology, evolutionary theories, and European and Anglo-American anxieties about race with the “atavistic” homosexual.

⁵⁶ See Carpenter’s theory of exfoliation described here on page 20.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Schloegel and Schmidgen, 618 & 619; Piet de Rooy, “Of Monkeys, Blacks, and Proles: Ernst Haeckel’s Theory of Recapitulation,” 30; Niles R. Holt, “Ernst Haeckel’s Monistic Religion,” 274 & 267. In the late nineteenth century, studies of protozoa provoked scientific questions about the primitive origins of life, which included questions about the relationship between the physiological and the psychological, and the origins of human will and consciousness. For example, German naturalist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel (cited by Carpenter) promoted a vitalist and monist philosophy later in life and claimed that protozoa possessed a psyche and a divine essence.

unconscious. This first stage of primitive consciousness kindles a “quasi-divine knowledge” that is “largely lost in the second stage of consciousness, but restored again in the third.”⁵⁸ In that case, protozoa are inscribed with the “divine germ” for the advanced stage of consciousness. The hermaphroditic and spiritual potential of human unicellular organisms will evolve into exceptional Uranianism, according to Carpenter’s mystico-scientific formulation.

In Carpenter’s vision, human beings are generally stuck in the second stage of consciousness. The organism passes through an ordinary second stage of (self) consciousness when sex dimorphism and distinctions between mind and matter become paramount. In keeping with his democratic socialist and mystical perspective, he viewed the “possessing classes” as representatives of the second stage of consciousness because they were obsessed with materialist principles and with mechanistic explanations of creation.⁵⁹ Furthermore, he argued that their “dual compulsion” (sex/gender differentiation) is a “barrier to [their] own further progress.”⁶⁰ According to Carpenter, men at this stage of consciousness have been molded by commercial civilization to ignore their “feminine” qualities – “affection and tenderness of feeling.” Carpenter identified those men among the Upper and Middle-classes, referring to them as “the great representative[s] of modern civilisation, and the triumphant outcome of so many centuries of human progress” who then bully and oppress women, the working classes, and homosexuals.⁶¹ An emphasis on differences between men and women,

⁵⁸ Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 48.

⁵⁹ In Carpenter’s socialist argument in *Love’s Coming of Age* (30–31), the “possessing classes” were responsible for the excesses of commercialization, industrialization, and imperialism, all of which oppressed women, homosexuals, the working classes, and the “barbarian races.”

⁶⁰ Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 7.

⁶¹ Carpenter, *Love’s Coming of Age*, 31.

according to Carpenter, reinforced the non-democratic divisions and inequalities between men and women.

The third stage of consciousness is free of distinctions between men and women, the working and the “possessing” classes, spirit and matter, and God and humans. According to Carpenter, sex differentiation “is not known in the earlier stage of simple consciousness, and it passes away again in the higher and more perfect stage of the cosmic consciousness.”⁶² In Carpenter’s theory Uranians already exemplified blended masculine and feminine psyches and, therefore, they were well situated to advance to “cosmic consciousness.” Furthermore, this spiritual potential was already present in “protoplasms and primordial cells.” “Primitive” origins, therefore, have a specialized role in social and sexual progress in Carpenter’s schema.

For Carpenter, hermaphroditic unicellular organisms also contain the “race memory” of previous lives, as well as harbouring the capacity for same-sex desire.⁶³ To make those claims, Carpenter integrated the Hindu religious teachings on reincarnation into philosopher Henri Bergson’s notion of “*élan vital*,” as described in his book *L’Evolution Creatrice*. Drawing on Bergson, Carpenter endowed these unicellular organisms with a divine life force: “We only perceive that it, the soul, must have been there, in an unseen world of some kind, pushing forward towards its manifestation in the visible.”⁶⁴ Carpenter also integrated the teachings on reincarnation drawn from his reading of the *Upanishads* into his concept of same-sex love, arguing that the soul exists before birth and is propelled forward into consciousness through the “interchange of vital and ethereal elements” experienced in a

⁶² Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 5.

⁶³ Carpenter, *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*, 27–28; Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, 239–251. For Carpenter, human beings have a “race memory” of their “primitive” beginnings of hermaphroditic desire and a “harmonious and perfect state of being” in paradise.

⁶⁴ Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, 126

psychic and sexual love union (described below).⁶⁵ Carpenter concluded that human cells have a germinal consciousness and are inscribed with the “thousand love dramas” of “primitive” hermaphroditic desire that have played out through reincarnation.⁶⁶ “It may be that every great onward push of the growing soul,” wrote Carpenter, “something in the nature of a metamorphosis does really take place; and the new order, the new revelation, the new form of life, is seen for a moment as a Vision in glorious state of a divine being within.”⁶⁷ This metamorphosis occurs, according to Carpenter, through that third stage of cosmic consciousness when there is an “opening out of a new plane of perception” in one’s mind.⁶⁸

Carpenter also elaborated complex mystico-scientific ideas about metamorphosis, which he called “exfoliation,” to explain the process of psychic and spiritual evolution towards cosmic consciousness. Carpenter’s conception of exfoliation adapted Darwinian evolutionary theory to Lamarck’s notion of increasingly complex acquired traits.⁶⁹ To Carpenter, exfoliation explained how the forces of creativity would manifest in more advanced life forms. “The Theory of Exfoliation,” claimed Carpenter, “differs from that very specialized form of Evolution which has been adopted by modern science . . . [it] recalls to us the fact that often in any succession of phenomena, that which is first in order of precedence and importance is the last to be externalized.”⁷⁰ According to Carpenter, the first life forms are the exfoliating agents; they are the agents of transformation because they carry the

⁶⁵ Carpenter, *Love’s Coming of Age*, 23.

⁶⁶ Carpenter, *Civilisation: It’s Cause and Cure*, 27–28.

⁶⁷ Carpenter, *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk*, 65.

⁶⁸ Carpenter, *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk*, 64.

⁶⁹ Carpenter, *Civilisation: It’s Cause and Cure*, 133–141. Adam Kuper, *Reinvention of the Primitive*, 18. Carpenter critiqued Darwinian evolution on the basis that it was based on “rivalry and competition,” and failed to account for consciousness. Lamarck’s theory proved more useful for Carpenter’s purposes. According to Adam Kuper, Lamarck argued that species “had an innate will to progress, and as they progressed they became increasingly complex and efficient.” Edwardians adapted Lamarckian theory to posit the progression of increasingly complex acquired traits that would culminate in (r)evolutionary progress for individuals and society.

⁷⁰ Carpenter, *Civilisation : Its Cause and Cure*, 199.

evolutionary impulse for live renewal. Furthermore, he suggested that first life forms are imprinted with the more perfect state that will be revealed after exfoliation. Carpenter described the growth of a plant to explain his theory. Not only does the seed or germ have an innate desire to progress, according to Carpenter, but it provides the impetus to that progression; the “will” of the seed inspires the continual movement, the unfolding or exfoliation of leaves and petals in a plant, for example, and ultimately culminates in the most advanced stage of that seed’s “desire.” Rather than a linear depiction of progress that improves on the preceding stages of development, Carpenter’s notion of exfoliation was an evolutionary process that was propelled by the “desire” of the earliest stages of consciousness or “seeds” and would manifest the potential of that germinal stage in the final stage of development.

We can apply this theory of exfoliation to Carpenter’s concept of protozoic hermaphroditic desire. Influenced by the theory of intelligence developed by French psychologist Alfred Binet, Carpenter also argued that hermaphroditic protozoa exhibit (same-sex) desire: a “kind of ‘choice’ or elective affinity.”⁷¹ For Carpenter, protozoic hermaphroditic desire provided the evidence that the Uranian’s same-sex desire was “natural.” Recall that the hermaphroditic stage, or the stage “before all differentiation, emanation, or expression,” constituted the stage of simple consciousness in Carpenter’s conception.⁷² That hermaphroditic “primitive” stage, however, would manifest again in the modern Uranian. “How often the late and high developments have been indicated in the germ in primitive stages,” wrote Carpenter.⁷³ Protozoa, then, foreshadowed the evolved type of Uranian love that comes from the third stage of consciousness. In that case, the simple stage

⁷¹ Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 1.

⁷² Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 4.

⁷³ Carpenter, *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk*, 64.

of consciousness witnessed in the movements of protozoa – the “germs of ‘desire’” – carry the potential for the “transcendent factor” later realized in the third stage of cosmic consciousness.⁷⁴

Carpenter’s theory of exfoliation implicitly contested contemporary theories of homosexual degeneracy. Benedict-Augustin Morel’s nineteenth-century theory of degeneracy was fundamental in constructing the link between homosexuality and degeneracy. Morel claimed that hereditary deviations “worsened progressively over generations until the last member of the tainted line was killed off by the sheer weight of accumulated pathology.”⁷⁴ Later in the century, Morel’s theories were directly applied to homosexuals and artists. For example, Max Nordau, best known for his controversial book *Degeneration*, popularized the association between artistic genius and disease in the *Weekly Sun*: ““All these new tendencies, realism, or naturalism, ‘decadentism,’ ‘neo-mysticism,’ and their sub-varieties, are manifestations of degeneration and hysteria.”⁷⁵ He added, ““They do not direct us to the future, but point backwards towards the past.”” According to Nordau, Wilde’s so-called artistic and sexual decadence was atavistic. Carpenter contested those beliefs in his own evolutionary theories that integrated ideas about free will and the latent divine forces in human life. Carpenter argued that transformation took place as a “step *forward* in the line of evolution, rather than as mere backslidings and signals of failure.”⁷⁵ Critiquing degeneracy theory that marked both the “primitive” and the homosexual as atavistic, Carpenter theorized that primitive beings – people and protozoa – encapsulated the “seed” of potential for human advancement that would be realized by Uranians.

⁷⁴ Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 2 & 7.

⁷⁵ Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 239.

Carpenter's theory of metamorphosis was inextricably linked to Uranian androgyny and same-sex love. Androgynous cells, in his estimation, nourish each other with a regenerative vitality.⁷⁶ For Carpenter, same-sex passion is "transmutable"; "transmutable passion" refers to an impulse toward change that exists in the unicellular sexually undifferentiated "germ-plasm" of same-sex lovers. Love, then, was viewed as a dynamic and transformative agent that generated cell division in such a way that it maintained the androgynous integrity of the cells. As Uranians exemplified blended masculine and feminine souls, they were well situated to advance society through their sexual/psychic "transmutable passion" and "etheric union[s]."⁷⁷ Uranians, in fact, could transcend sex difference as they moved toward an elevated and divine stage of consciousness. At the cosmic level, he envisioned a "cosmic world of souls" whereby the kindred spirits embodied a *trans*-soul familiarity imagined through reincarnation: "a world of souls whose relations are eternal and clearly-defined . . . Our terrestrial relations are merely the working-out and expression of far antecedent and unmodifiable facts."⁷⁸ Putting it another way, he claimed that through the "memory of a thousand love dramas" – reincarnation – human beings would evolve to a higher stage of consciousness whereby they would in turn understand their true selves and their connection to all peoples and the universe.⁷⁹ Future evolutionary advancement, argued Carpenter, would bring the corporal and the spiritual into harmony, a process that would result in less distinction between the sexes and was exemplified by Uranian love.

Carpenter's mystical-scientific sexology – epitomized by the term Uranian – created a fluid and flexible understanding of same-sex eroticism that had particular meanings for

⁷⁶ Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, 7.

⁷⁷ Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death*, 31–32.

⁷⁸ Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age* 144–145.

⁷⁹ Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 135.

Carpenter's contemporaries. The concept of Uranianism allowed women and men to understand their sexuality "beyond" the constraints of conventional sexology that pathologized same-sex eroticism and erased or degraded physical sexual behavior. In 1913, Amy Tasker disclosed what she called "the conditions of my life" in a letter to Carpenter: "I hardly know how to explain my sense of Love . . . it is a soul-love, the highest and best in me, an inspiration, a wholeness which sanctifies me."⁸⁰ Kathlyn Oliver's letter to Carpenter in 1915 recounted a similar a process of self-identification.⁸¹ For Oliver, sexual attraction was both physical and spiritual: "When I think of her I have physical desire and should love above all things to be able to live with her and be as intimate as possible . . . and I don't feel that this desire is at all immoral or degrading, [but] it is not merely or chiefly physical desire."⁸² Oliver's ideal relationship included a "union of spirit – of soul."⁸³ On a more personal note of gratitude to Carpenter, trainee solicitor Albert Löwy wrote: "In the marvel of your touch I learned the magic secrets of love . . . I know now . . . a life-course . . . a hope-force."⁸⁴ Carpenter's correspondents recounted stories of same-sex eroticism that represented the elusive and spiritual/sexual concept of Uranianism.

Carpenter articulated a complex spiritual, psychological, and scientific theory of innate same-sex sexuality that destabilized the rigid parameters of congenital homosexuality identified by terms like sexual inversion. During Carpenter's time, the interconnected theories of androgynous hermaphroditic protozoa, evolution, the psychic and divine potential in unicellular organisms, as well as esoteric religious ideas provided the raw material for

⁸⁰ Amy Tasker, Letter to Carpenter, July 21, 1913, Carpenter Collection.

⁸¹ Kathlyn Oliver, Letter to Carpenter, October 25, 1915, Carpenter Collection.

⁸² Kathlyn Oliver, Letter to Carpenter, October 25, 1915, Carpenter Collection.

⁸³ Kathlyn Oliver, Letter to Carpenter, October 25, 1915, Carpenter Collection.

⁸⁴ Albert Löwy to Carpenter, 9 October 1911, Carpenter Collection, quoted in Greenway, "It's What You Do With It That Counts," 38.

arguing against notions of gender and sex fixity, and the associated ideas of homosexual degeneracy. That mystical scientific theory dislodged the Uranian from the sexology classification system that linked degeneracy and the atavistic homosexual.

3 THE FREEWOMAN: THE CONTESTED TERRAIN OF “URANIAN”

An androgynous ideal that dismantled the rigid gender divisions of man and woman and conventional notions of (hetero)sexual relations was advocated by most progressive thinkers in Carpenter’s circle. Many also promoted what they described as “spiritual passion” – a term that, for some, meant a practice of celibacy in protest against the tyranny of male sexual oppression, and for others represented a new language for elevating the discussion of sex to a “higher plane.”⁸⁵ Dora Marsden, the editor of *The Freewoman*, was a feminist-anarchist who advocated an individualist notion of sexual freedom for women that challenged heterosexual and feminine ideals. She called, in contrast, for an androgynous ideal and the liberation of free will.⁸⁶ She voiced her views in her controversial periodicals: *The Freewoman* and *The New Freewoman* (1911-1913).⁸⁷ The papers challenged notions of sexual purity in favour of radical sexual reform that promoted free love and spiritual passion.⁸⁸ Marsden’s goal was to dismantle categories – such as the intertwined sex/gender categories – that restricted women’s individual spiritual freedom. Her writings advocated an androgynous ideal: “If men and women would try to turn their attention away from the

⁸⁵ Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 276. According to Bland: “They tended to use the concept and its ambiguity of meaning to talk about ideal feelings and experiences that were ‘above’ the purely physical . . . Feminists used the concept of passion to explore the potential for other states of being – states of *pleasure* – which were not inevitably rooted in *physical* sensation.”

⁸⁶ Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism: Gender, Individualism, Science*, 8–18.

⁸⁷ Dora Marsden and Mary Gawthorpe, eds., *The Freewoman: A Weekly Feminist Review* (November 1911 – October 1912) and *The New Freewoman: A Weekly Humanist Review* (November 1912 – December 1913). Although Gawthorpe was a co-editor, she rarely made editorial contributions; Marsden’s views predominate in editorials and commentaries.

⁸⁸ See, e.g., Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 52 & 249; Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 128; Lesley Hall, “Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity and Sexual Science in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain,” 36–56. Sexual purity campaigns arose from the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the late nineteenth century and resulted in feminists and other sex reformers calling for the elimination of the “double-standard” of morality that expected women to be chaste and tacitly expected male promiscuity. The extensive campaign included efforts to change laws regarding rape and incest, and close brothels. Sex reformers, while also seeking to change attitudes regarding women’s supposed passionlessness, argued for freedom in women’s sexual expression.

infinitesimally small differences which distinguish them . . . we should soon have heard the last of Man and Woman spelt with capitals, and the day of the individual would be at hand.”⁸⁹ Women’s freedom, according to Marsden, involved a process of spiritual self-actualization: “Freedom is born in the individual soul, and . . . no outer force can either give it or take it away; only Freewomen can be free, or lead the way to freedom.”⁹⁰ The *Freewoman* debate about Uranianism was characteristic of the periodical’s philosophy: an individualist pursuit of psychic illumination that would result in spiritual and actual emancipation.

In 1911, former British suffragists Dora Marsden and Mary Gawthorpe launched *The Freewoman: A Weekly Feminist Review*. Insufficient funding caused *The Freewoman* to fold in 1912. It was re-issued in 1913 as *The New Freewoman: A Weekly Humanist Review*, and went through yet another shift toward an increasingly individualist paper when it was renamed *The Egoist* in December 1915. The journal’s readership was small. Nevertheless, as Lucy Delap argues, “the journal briefly gained a very high national profile, and was notorious for its frank discussions of sexuality and emancipation beyond the vote.”⁹¹ This feminist-anarchist periodical denounced suffragist politics in favour of a feminist Nietzschean idea of individual spiritual transformation toward a “superwoman” or “freewoman.”⁹² Submissions by physicians, literary figures, anarchists, suffragists, theosophists, and other radical thinkers provoked dialogue on many controversial subjects. Cresting the wave of emancipatory movements, *The Freewoman* provided a forum for Edwardian intellectuals to discuss dissident views on religion, science, philosophy, suffrage,

⁸⁹ Dora Marsden, “Views and Comments” *The New Freewoman* (1 July 1913) 24.

⁹⁰ Marsden, “Bondwomen,” *The Freewoman* (23 November 1911) 2.

⁹¹ Delap, “The Superwoman,” 102.

⁹² Delap, “The Superwoman,” 102.

socialist/anarchist politics, art, gender, and sexuality.⁹³ Homosexuality, however, was rarely explicitly discussed. The debate between Birnstingl and Whitby debate which is discussed below was the conspicuous exception, and reveals the potential of the term “Uranian” to incite a virulent contest about spiritual/sexual conceptions of (homo)sexuality.

The “Uranian,” created within a discourse of shifting and contradictory possibilities, emerges as an unstable subjectivity in *The Freewoman*. Historian Judy Greenway rightly argues that *The Freewoman* contributors used the various terms for “homosexual” interchangeably, leaving room for “fruitful ambiguities.”⁹⁴ The term Uranian, however, was assigned much more significance than noted by Greenway or other scholars; the term Uranian was singled out in the debate precisely because of the way that the Uranian was linked to heroic and spiritual significance. In the end, and despite their differences, Birnstingl and Whitby elaborated spiritual and scientific views of Uranian genius that ultimately unsettled the authoritative terrain of scientific discourse; somewhat paradoxically, the Edwardian esoteric spiritual conceptions of the “super-human” ultimately dissolved the rigid (homo)sexual identity and type, allowing for an androgynous Uranian with special attributes and a new political legitimacy to emerge.

In 1912, “Scython” wrote: “I have been reading THE FREEWOMAN from the start, and . . . my principal reason for doing so was the sympathetic way in which the Uranian question was treated.”⁹⁵ “Scython” was referring to architect Harry J. Birnstingl and medical

⁹³ “Notes of the Week,” *The Freewoman*, (23 November 1911) 3. The *Freewoman* editors wrote: “We claim to be an ‘open’ paper. We do not mean ‘open’ in the sense that we have no editorial point of view, but ‘open’ in the sense that we are prepared not only to accept, but to welcome opposing points of view.”

⁹⁴ Greenway, “It’s What You Do With It That Counts,” 39.

⁹⁵ Scython, “Uranians,” *The Freewoman* (22 February 1912) 274.

practitioner Dr. Charles J. Whitby's dispute about the term "Uranian" published in 1912.⁹⁶ Both Birnstingl and Whitby wrote frequently for *The Freewoman*. They both argued on behalf of women's equality, and demonstrated a spiritual individualist philosophy that was characteristic of the paper. Their opinions diverged, however, over the issue of Uranianism and its link to homosexuality and genius. Birnstingl endorsed Edward Carpenter's *The Intermediate Sex* when it was published in 1908, and endorsed its elaboration of a "higher type" of sexual Uranian with the intellectual, ethical, and spiritual potential to become the vanguard of the New Age. "Genius has often come from the ranks of Uranians," insisted Birnstingl.⁹⁷ Outraged at Birnstingl's (and Carpenter's) claims that homosexuals might be "world pioneers," Whitby invoked a Neoplatonist idea about spiritual unity and the evolution of genius to argue that degenerate homosexuals were incapable of spiritual excellence. "Uranian," according to Whitby, carried only an astrological and theosophical meaning of spiritual androgyny that had nothing in common with homosexuality.

Advocating a socialist/anarchist democratic and spiritual ideal, Birnstingl argued against differentiation between rich and poor, men and women, spirit and body. Like many of his contemporaries, Birnstingl looked forward to a New Age when the husks of old ideas would be replaced by a new "rhythmic harmony" between bodies and souls: "Now the ideal person, the perfect person, is he whose body and soul are in absolute harmony, is he who is a perfect entity, pulsating in rhythmic harmony."⁹⁸ In a similar vein to Carpenter, he criticized the emphasis on sex differentiation during the Victorian era, and predicted evolutionary progress toward the harmonious unity of matter, spirit, and a hermaphroditic consciousness –

⁹⁶ Harry J. Birnstingl, "Uranians," *The Freewoman* (4 January 1912); Charles J. Whitby, M.D., "Tertium Quid," *The Freewoman* (18 January 1912).

⁹⁷ Birnstingl, "Uranians. II." *The Freewoman* (25 January 1912) 189.

⁹⁸ Birnstingl, "Interpretations of Life," *The Freewoman* (6 June 1912) 51.

a position that allowed for a specialized role for Uranians who blended masculine and feminine characteristics in a harmonious balance. Additionally, Birnstingl, an architect and art critic, drew a connection between Futurist art and the elements of modern (self)consciousness. Agreeing with Oscar Wilde's edict that "Life imitates Art," Birnstingl argued that Futurist art dissolves the artificial duality between "inspiration and treatment, matter and form, the subjective and the objective" and, therefore, reflects the evolved psyche.⁹⁹ Birnstingl's two articles about Uranians argued against legislation that criminalized same-sex love; he claimed that the Uranian's same-sex desires were "natural."¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, taking together the two streams of thought in Birnstingl's writings – one from his earlier article about "Uranians" and one from his lecture on the "Interpretations of Life" – the "Uranian" emerges with the spiritual potential to advance society in the New Age.

Birnstingl's assessments of the Uranian, in part, echoed contemporary degeneracy theories that pathologized the homosexual. His initial explanation of Uranianism reiterated the prevailing Darwinian evolutionary discourse that emphasized natural sex difference for the purposes of reproduction, and thus assigned the homosexual to a "lower," degenerate stage of development. "The lower we go in the scale of living organisms the greater the tendency towards hermaphroditism and a protoplasmic condition of self-impregnation," theorized Birnstingl, such that "these types must be recessives."¹⁰¹ Birnstingl reinforced a late Victorian evolutionary paradigm that marked the single cell protozoa as the "primitive"

⁹⁹ Birnstingl, "Futurism," *The Freewoman* (18 April 1912) 428–429.

¹⁰⁰ Birnstingl, "Uranians," *The Freewoman* (4 January 1912) 127–128. According to Greenway in "It's What You Do With It That Counts" (37), his favourable position towards Uranians was inspired by his aunt Ethel Birnstingl's relationship with her long-time companion Alice Pollard, as well as Edward Carpenter's widely circulated *The Intermediate Sex*.

¹⁰¹ Birnstingl, "Uranians," *The Freewoman* (4 January 1912) 127.

atavistic beginning of life. In that case, Birnstingl implicitly endorsed sexologists' degeneracy theories that associated Uranians with hermaphroditic "lower" organisms at the "primitive" stage of evolution. At the same time, Birnstingl (following Carpenter) invoked "primitive protozoa" to elaborate a theory of evolution that opened a conceptual space for imagining the exceptional Uranian. Birnstingl disputed Victorian scientific mechanistic dualism or sex differentiation, and articulated an evolutionary process for the development of the psyche toward the unity of the mind, body, and soul.

Several months after his articles about "Uranians" in January 1912, Birnstingl gave a lecture to the *Freewoman* discussion circle called "Interpretations of Life" – later published in the periodical – during which he employed a combination of Darwinian evolution theory and a spiritual psychological process to explain his ideas. Birnstingl began his lecture, "My intention is to elucidate a theory of dualism and unity . . . My whole object in this paper is to show you how this duality originally sprang from Unity, and how it must eventually return to Unity."¹⁰² Like Carpenter, he described the regenerative potential in sexually undifferentiated "primitive protozoa."¹⁰³ Roughly tracing a progressive evolutionary process beginning with protoplasmic forms, Birnstingl used the hermaphroditic protozoa as a point of reference for future spiritual/corporal unity and actual equality in socialist and democratic societies: "And this seems to me to be typical of evolution generally: it is to re-unite; for throughout life there has been this divorce, be it male and female, rich and poor, God and man, the spiritual and the corporal."¹⁰⁴ Emerging from that unity, argued Birnstingl, are the "great *evolvers* of the

¹⁰² Birnstingl, "The Interpretations of Life," *The Freewoman* (6 June 1912) 50.

¹⁰³ Birnstingl, "The Interpretations of Life," *The Freewoman* (6 June 1912) 51.

¹⁰⁴ Birnstingl, "Interpretations of Life," *The Freewoman* (13 June 1912) 71.

world, the artist and the philosopher” – ideas that are very similar to Carpenter’s characterization of the exceptional Uranian.¹⁰⁵

Although he did not refer explicitly to the Uranian in his “Interpretations of Life” lecture, the Uranian was an obvious model for that “perfect entity” that unifies male and female, body and soul. Birnstingl argued that “the sexes, having developed from one primordial cell, have become more diverse, but now all modern movements are tending to lessen the sex differentiation.”¹⁰⁶ For Birnstingl, modern movements such as socialism and Futurism, like new ideas about psychology and sexuality, advocated “progressive” ideas about the spiritual/psychological unity of the body and the soul. One perfect type of unity, according to Birnstingl, was the complementary union that occurs from the perfect blend of masculine and feminine traits. He cited two examples that suggested he was referring to same-sex unions as a model for complementary unions. One was the German physician and homosexual theorist Otto Weininger’s view that all humans have innate masculine and feminine traits.¹⁰⁷ He also recounted Aristophanes’s speech in the *Symposium*:

He [Aristophanes] tells us . . . how the male and the female were originally one being; how, for revolting against the gods, they were cut in twain by Zeus; how, afterwards, each part strived to find its complement; and how, when they found each other, whether they were likes or unlikes, that is two males, or a male and a female, they remained henceforward inseparable.¹⁰⁸

Birnstingl’s example from classical literature provides cultural evidence for the universality of an androgynous ideal and same-sex attraction. Homosexuality is implicit in that

¹⁰⁵ Birnstingl, “Interpretation of Life,” *The Freewoman* (13 June 1912) 71.

¹⁰⁶ Birnstingl, “The Interpretations of Life,” *The Freewoman*, (6 June 1912) 51.

¹⁰⁷ Birnstingl, “Interpretations of Life,” *The Freewoman* (13 June 1912) 71. See, Chandak Sengoopta, *Otto Weininger* for an in depth study of Otto Weininger. See, Judy Greenway, “It’s What You Do With It That Counts” for the ways in which Weininger was discussed in *The Freewoman*,

¹⁰⁸ Birnstingl, “Interpretations of Life,” *The Freewoman* (13 June 1912) 71.

suggestion. Furthermore, Birnstingl's reference to the hermaphroditic god implicitly drew a connection to Carpenter's conception of Uranians who have blended sex temperaments and a divine consciousness.¹⁰⁹ Uranians, according to Birnstingl, combine the "dual natures" of the sexes and, therefore, "are especially suited to produce pioneers and men and women of unusual intellect."¹¹⁰

Harry Birnstingl's ideas were contradictory. In many respects he upheld the conventional gendered thinking about Uranians. At the same time, his mystico-scientific ideas about the evolution of both society and human consciousness toward unified bodies and souls and an androgynous ideal unsettled the sexological classification system. As he said, "For the classifier, the maker of laws, and other similar guardians of the public morals, these persons form a serious obstruction, seeing that they refuse to be 'pigeon-holed' . . . the best remedies would be to abolish the pigeon-holes altogether."¹¹¹ Humans would only advance, claimed Birnstingl, if human physical development was brought into harmony with spiritual development – a process that would result in androgynous souls and perspectives.

Prior to publishing her friend Birnstingl's "Uranians" article, the editor Dora Marsden approached Dr. Charles Whitby for advice.¹¹² Whitby suggested the article be published, if for no other reason than *The Freewoman* "exists precisely to bring the light of day into these dark and dusty corners."¹¹³ He advised, however, that his medically informed response should immediately follow. Unlike Birnstingl, Dr. Charles Whitby advocated an "aristocratic" socialism: in his view, a few exceptional people would lead the "mediocre"

¹⁰⁹ Carpenter, *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk*, 15 & 66-83. Carpenter amassed ethnographic accounts of hermaphroditic gods in order to support his claim that Uranians have "prophetic gifts and divination."

¹¹⁰ Birnstingl, "Uranians. II." *The Freewoman* (25 January 1912) 189.

¹¹¹ Birnstingl, "Uranians," *The Freewoman* (4 January 1912) 127.

¹¹² Greenway, "It's What You Do With It That Counts," 37.

¹¹³ Whitby, "Tertium Quid," *The Freewoman* (18 January 1912) 167.

masses into the new millennium.¹¹⁴ Neoplatonist spiritual individualism underpinned Whitby's arguments in the *Freewoman* and elsewhere. These were ideas that Whitby had been developing for some time. His book *The Logic of Human Character*, published in 1905, outlined a self-disciplined and individualistic process for intellectual and spiritual self-actualization. Along similar lines, he argued in *The Wisdom of Plotinus* that rational "man" might evolve toward a psychically androgynous state of divinity. That progression toward genius, however, was foreclosed to those with "arrested development" and perversion, such as homosexuals.¹¹⁵

Whitby actually sanctioned sexologists' conflation of homosexuality, effeminacy, and degeneracy. Whitby, a self-defined "medical man," privileged terms such as "invert," "pervert," and "homosexual" in order to demarcate same-sex eroticism as pathological in nature.¹¹⁶ He combined evolutionary and environmental causes in his assessment that homosexuals were the offspring of incestuous degenerate unions. Like "imbeciles, dwarfs, and monstrosities," argued Whitby, effeminate homosexuals who mimic women's use of cosmetics, corsets, high-heeled shoes, and a "mincing gait" were the pathological result of industrial civilization.¹¹⁷ There Whitby was repeating sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Havelock Ellis's claims that so-called mimicking practices signify the "pseudo-invert" represented by the "lower" class cross-dressing prostitute "type."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Whitby, "A New Formula," *The Freewoman* (18 April 1912) 425-6; Also see, Delap, "The Superwoman," 119.

¹¹⁵ Whitby, *The Logic of Character*, 16.

¹¹⁶ Bruce Clarke, *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism*, 84. According to Bruce Clarke, Whitby relied on German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's technical vocabulary for the homosexual.

¹¹⁷ Whitby, "Tertium Quid," *The Freewoman* (18 January 1912)168; Whitby, "A Matter of Taste," *The Freewoman* (1 February 1912) 216.

¹¹⁸ For a more thorough analysis, see, Jeffrey Weeks, "Inverts, Perverts, and Mary-Annes." Terry, in *An American Obsession* (49) claims that those arguments were left over from nineteenth-century arguments that upheld a "Spencerian notion of overspecialization resulting from modern progress and civilization." Proponents

Applying a eugenic argument, Whitby warned intellectuals to “stop short of disregarding those deep-seated instincts which warn us from the sloping edge of the abyss of vital dissipation and racial ruin.”¹¹⁹ Whitby’s medical-scientific claims, then, provided the basis for his initial attack against the so-called degenerate effeminate homosexual.

Whitby therefore responded to Birnstingl’s “Uranians” article with a scathing commentary entitled “Tertium Quid.” Whitby’s use of the term “Tertium Quid” – a “third thing” or “third substance” – is never explicitly explained, nor is the term defined. Adapted from the Latin meaning – “some third thing” – Whitby might simply have used the term to refer to sexological definitions of the homosexual as a degenerate third sex.¹²⁰ At least one early twentieth-century science critic, however, referred to the latent spiritual force that unites body and soul as a “tertium quid” – an idea that agrees with Whitby’s Neoplatonist paradigm.¹²¹ In that case, the “third thing” means a spiritual entity that emerges outside of the constraints imposed by biological sex and gender identity. Whitby used the term, therefore, as a strategic attempt to shift the notion of Uranianism away from an association with homosexuality.

Like Birnstingl, Whitby contested Victorian mechanistic interpretations of human life, and adopted a vitalist philosophy that was based on a Neoplatonist theory of rational self-determined development toward divine genius. His notion of “self-realization, harmony, [and] unity of life” was based on Plotinus’s “doctrine of unity” that prophesied the soul’s re-

of that theory associated a perceived preponderance of childless manly women and effeminate men – many of whom were artists and intellectuals of the upper classes – with excessive “cultural refinement.”

¹¹⁹ Whitby, “A Matter of Taste,” *The Freewoman* (1 February 1912) 214.

¹²⁰ The Oxford English Dictionary (2008) traces a history of varied meanings for the term “tertium quid.” The most applicable definition is: “Something (indefinite or left undefined) related in some way to two (definite or known) things, but distinct from both.” http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50249638?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=Tertium+Quid&first=1&max_to_show=10 (accessed April 19, 2008).

¹²¹ Walter S. Nichols, “The Test of Vitalism.”

unification with divinity.¹²² Whitby also critiqued “Kantian dualistic logic,” which he defined as the supposition that “life-impulse [is restrained] within the cast-iron trammels of categorical imperatives” of sex distinction.¹²³ Protesting Birnstingl’s exalted definition of the Uranian homosexual as the psychologically hermaphroditic embodiment of the “world’s pioneers,” Whitby argued “Genius is androgynous, but it is never homosexual. A man of genius may be feminine, but he must *not* be effeminate.”¹²⁴ Whitby’s conception of the “androgynous” superman consciousness was “mystically feminine” but not homosexual; that is, he believed in a spiritual androgyny while maintaining conservative views on sexual inversion.¹²⁵ Many *Freewoman* contributors argued that the superman transcended sex distinctions, or gained special intuitive faculties from his psychically feminine aspect.¹²⁶ Whitby also argued that “femininity is a matter of endowment: every man is more or less feminine.”¹²⁷ Influenced by Nietzsche and Neoplatonism, Whitby argued that people develop good character by “true volition.” As a result, he drew a hard line between psychic femininity and effeminate homosexuals. For Whitby, effeminacy was a *behaviour* that signified prostitution among the degenerate lower class sexual inverts; it was an imitative behaviour found among those lacking in character development and volition. He suggested that homosexuality was evidence of character weakness and intentional social deviance rather than a congenital condition, thus reinforcing the stereotype of the effeminate homosexual pervert incapable of spiritual love unions.

¹²² Whitby, *The Logic of Human Character*, 48; Whitby, *The Wisdom of Plotinus*, 125–131.

¹²³ Whitby, “A Sex Heresy,” *The Freewoman* (16 May 1912) 507.

¹²⁴ Whitby, “Tertium Quid,” *The Freewoman* (18 January 1912) 168.

¹²⁵ Florence Farr, *The New Age* (June 1, 1907) 92, quoted in Delap, “The Superwoman,” 113.

¹²⁶ Delap, “The Superwoman,” 113.

¹²⁷ Whitby, “A Matter of Taste,” *The Freewoman* (1 February 1912) 216.

In contrast, Whitby argued that psychic femininity was a spiritual ideal that all men should aspire toward. “What else is love but the hunger and thirst of the spirit for the qualities which in itself are merely potential,” queried Whitby.¹²⁸ Recounting the Christian myth, Whitby argued, “The explicit object of Eve’s creation was to endow Adam with a companion.” Following a line of reasoning that suggests the influence of early twentieth-century theosophy, Whitby claimed that companionate fulfillment involved man’s reunification with what Joy Dixon identifies as a widespread belief in the “divine feminine.”¹²⁹ Whitby argued that Eve “received her higher faculties and endowments directly from the Divinity,” and that men’s goal in love was to re-unite with that feminine and divine aspect in order to advance to a “higher plane of existence.”¹³⁰ In contrast to Carpenter’s notion of Uranian love, Whitby suggested that the blending of souls through love unions was a strictly heterosexual blending of souls. Whitby argued on behalf of a heterosexual ideal and viewed homosexuality as a “sterile passion.”¹³¹ As a result, heterosexuality penetrated the spiritual and physical realms. Homosexuality was pathologized as a deviant and intentional rebellion against the (heterosexual) spiritual and physical ideal.

Whitby re-aligned the term Uranian with its theosophical astrological meaning connoting magnetic and spiritual forces in order to erase the (same-sex) sexual connotation from the term Uranian. He wrote: “I have purposely avoided the term ‘Uranian,’ because I deprecate a purely sexual application of the word.”¹³² Referring to an article in another

¹²⁸ Whitby, “A Sex Heresy,” *The Freewoman* (16 May 1912) 506.

¹²⁹ Dixon in *Divine Feminine* explores the unstable and contradictory feminist influences in Theosophy, and examines the intersection of ideas such as reincarnation, a feminized notion of esoteric religions, and divinity.

¹³⁰ Whitby, “A Sex Heresy,” *The Freewoman* (16 May 1912) 506.

¹³¹ Whitby, “Tertium Quid,” *The Freewoman* (18 January 1912) 168.

¹³² Whitby, “Tertium Quid,” *The Freewoman* (18 January 1912) 169.

progressive paper *The New Age*, Whitby contended that Uranians are those “persons under the influence of Uranus, the planet which awakens the spirit from lethargy and brings it into strange conditions and hazardous enterprises.”¹³³ Whitby’s reference to astrology is consistent with theosophical understandings of the term Uranian. In theosophical and esoteric spiritual circles, as Dixon has argued, “the Uranian simultaneously represented a spiritualized and celibate (homo)sexuality and the harbinger of the New Age.”¹³⁴ Whitby’s use of the term “Uranian,” then, contested Birnstingl’s favourable view of homosexual genius.

The Freewoman debate appears to apologize for Uranian sexuality, and purify the middle- and upper educated class Uranian behind a publicly restrained masculine exterior. Whitby insisted on a celibate Uranian spiritual consciousness that had nothing in common with Carpenter and Birnstingl’s conception of an androgynous spiritual sexuality. Others who wrote in support of Uranian homosexuality established equally narrow parameters for acceptable same-sex eroticism; for example, M.S., Scython, and Albert E. Löwy, all argued that the “higher types” of Uranian must avoid the repulsive “outward and visible sign[s]” of effeminacy witnessed among the “prostituted” types.¹³⁵ Furthermore, they emphasized spiritually feminine temperaments that override physical sexual desire. Along those lines, Birnstingl compared Uranian attachments to Walter Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean* that advocated Plato’s notion of “spiritual procreancy” to construct an apology for male love.¹³⁶ The evolved Uranian, according to Birnstingl, represented the “god of the nobler kind of love” as opposed to the “god of lust” (this was, presumably, a reference to sodomy).¹³⁷

¹³³ Whitby, “Tertium Quid,” *The Freewoman* (18 January 1912) 169.

¹³⁴ Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 114.

¹³⁵ M.S., “Uranians,” *The Freewoman* (8 February 1912) 232; Scython, “Uranians,” *The Freewoman* (22 February 1912) 274; Albert E. Löwy, “The Intellectual Limitations of the ‘Normal’,” *The Freewoman* (February 1, 1912) 212.

¹³⁶ Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, xv.

¹³⁷ Birnstingl, “Uranians,” *The Freewoman*, (4 January 1912) 128.

Birnstingl's argument recalls Plato's *Symposium*, which prophesied an ideal of higher "procreancy" focused on the spirit rather than the flesh.¹³⁸ In that case, *The Freewoman* seems to advocate Uranian platonic love.

The Uranian debate in *The Freewoman* also set up a dichotomy between the ambiguous and elusive figure of the private/interior Uranian, and the public/exterior effeminate pervert crystallized in the image of an Oscar Wilde "type." As depicted in *The Freewoman*, the Uranian was defined in contrast to its degenerate counterparts: effeminate men and male homosexual sex workers. Perhaps the concept of Uranian allowed homosexuals to consider their legitimacy outside the images of decadence and degeneracy. The Uranian might have provided a meaningful concept for a legitimate, "respectable," middle- and upper class same-sex eroticism. Despite Whitby's condemnation of homosexuals, both he and Birnstingl allowed Uranians a "heavenly" love divorced from the animalistic lust that plagued Edwardian sex reformers.

Uranian sexuality, then, should be assessed within *The Freewoman* program for sexual and social reform. It would be a mistake to assume that depictions of a non-sexual Uranian were apologies for homosexuality. The individualist political projects engaged in by *The Freewoman* intellectual circle promoted an introspective eroticism that shifted focus from genital sex to a spiritual/sexual elevated consciousness. In that sense, the Uranian emerges as an (a)sexual alternative; furthermore, the Uranian, divested of his immorality, achieves a measure of cultural and political legitimacy. *Freewoman* contributors divested sex of Victorian morality, writing extensively about increasing the meaning in heterosexual relationships through the spiritual evolution of a "super" union – the "interknitting of two

¹³⁸ Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, 29.

human souls” – that transcended the limitations of consciousness.¹³⁹ Sex reformers advocated “modern civilized lovemaking” that evolved from the unity of an androgynous spirit, mind, and body.¹⁴⁰ The invert and homosexual were compared to “savage men and wild animals”; paradoxically, the Uranian stood in for the most perfected example of civilized love, and the evolved androgynous spirit and consciousness.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Dora Marsden, “Interpretation of Sex,” *The Freewoman* (May 9, 1912) 482. Also, Dixon in *Divine Feminine* (196–200) provides a comprehensive analysis of Marsden’s philosophy of individualist spirituality and sexuality.

¹⁴⁰ Julian Carter, “Normality, Whiteness, Authorship,” 159.

¹⁴¹ E.S.P. Haynes, “Sex and Civilisation,” *The Freewoman* (15 February 1912). Haynes, for example, discusses the dichotomy between “savage” and “animalistic” sex and “civilized love.”

4 URANIA'S TRANSCENDENT SEXUALITY

In 1912, E. M. White, published in both *The Freewoman* and in the *International Journal of Ethics*, asked a quintessentially Edwardian question that underpins the three Uranian discourses examined here: “Is there a Woman-Soul, distinct from a Man-Soul, which shall continue distinct, and form a different side of the great Soul of Humanity?”¹⁴² White’s answer invoked a related set of concerns about the relationship between the sexed/gendered body, the soul, and God that animated the Edwardian “progressive” sex theorists: “Controversies as to whether the physical produces the spiritual or whether the spiritual moulds the physical, are foreign to this point, for in either case the physical must have some effect on the spiritual, for it conditions the spiritual and is its vehicle.”¹⁴³ The feminist sexual theories examined here all contested White’s view. Despite their differences, Edward Carpenter and the *Freewoman* debate combined notions of the spirit with scientific understandings of biological sex and gender to argue that Uranians embody an androgynous soul. The feminist periodical *Urania* also used mystico-scientific evidence to promote an ideal of androgynous spiritual/sexual transcendence that destabilized sexology and biological sex difference. “It is impossible to express the sense of emancipated exhilaration which floods the soul when it has discarded the idea of sex,” insisted the principle editor Thomas Baty, also known in his transgender persona as Irene Clyde.¹⁴⁴ Upholding a

¹⁴² E. M. White, “The Woman-Soul,” *International Journal of Ethics* 3, 22 (April, 1912) 323. White raised similar points in *The Freewoman*. E. M. White, “Militancy in Women,” *The Freewoman* (January 11, 1912) 158–159. To date, I have not found any additional publications either by or about E.M. White.

¹⁴³ E. M. White, “The Woman-Soul,” *International Journal of Ethics* 3, 22 (April, 1912) 324.

¹⁴⁴ Editor, “Enfranchisement,” *Urania* Nos. 109 & 110 (January – April, 1935) 1. According to Daphne Patai and Angela Ingram, Thomas Baty was the principle editor and the author of the frontispiece editorials. Patai and Ingram, “Fantasy and identity.” In *Urania*, “sex” refers to biological sex and sex difference, and occasionally to sexual intercourse.

spiritual/androgynous ideal, Baty argued that being forced into artificial gender categories resulted in “soul-murder.”¹⁴⁵

Urania, privately published and circulated between 1916 and 1940, represents a significant moment in this genealogy of the Uranian – perhaps the last historical moment in Britain when mystico-scientific conceptions of the Uranian allowed for a fluid understanding of sexuality. The title of the periodical, while never explained in the surviving copies, resonates with the nineteenth-century homosexual Urning and Uranian elaborated by people such as Ulrichs, the Uranian poets, and Edward Carpenter, and can be read as a celebration of same-sex love. Ulrichs’s notion of a “third sex” might have provided a reference point, but the transgendering of souls implicit in his vision – a male soul inhabiting a female body and, vice versa, a female soul inhabiting a male body – was contrary to *Urania*’s vision of a disembodied soul.

Adapting scientific materialism to esoteric religious ideas taken from both European and Asian traditions, the journal developed a feminist theory of sexual/spiritual emancipation from the sexed/gendered body. In *Urania*’s view, the androgynous soul would inspire a metamorphosis beyond sex distinction that would, in turn, create social change during the “Dark Ages” of the world wars: “There is a vista before us of a spiritual progress which far transcends all political matters. It is the abolition of the ‘manly’ and the ‘womanly.’”¹⁴⁶ The paper advocated the abolition of sex and gender distinctions or the “dual organization in humanity,” and vociferously refuted the point of view that the soul is bound by the “physical

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Baty, “The Aëthnic Union,” *The Freewoman* (22 February 1912) 278-79. Thomas Baty, founder of the Aëthnic Union in 1912 and editor of *Urania*, also emphasized the soul and spirit in an androgynous ideal. The Aëthnic Union believed that gender distinctions prevented the development of the free self. In *The Freewoman* (278) Baty wrote, “The dress they wear, in the games they play, in the occupations they follow, in their very food and drink, it is constantly borne in upon that they must assimilate themselves to one or the other imperfect type.”

¹⁴⁶ “Editorial Note,” *Urania* Nos. 29 & 30 (September – December, 1921) 14.

envelope,” or body.¹⁴⁷ Poet and Theosophist Eva Gore-Booth’s claim that “sex is an accident” was *Urania*’s founding principle.¹⁴⁸ In fact, the journal argued that an androgynous soul or asexual spiritual consciousness enabled individuals to transcend socially prescriptive notions about sex (maleness and femaleness) and gender (masculinity and femininity). Indeed, same-sex love was a transformative agent toward an androgynous spiritual consciousness.

The journal features a cross-cultural mosaic of fascinating articles re-printed from newspapers from around the world, combined with editorial commentaries, references to Classical legends, and poetry, all of which provided readers with an alternative scientific and cultural basis for androgynous spiritual perfection and same-sex love. The paper was produced by a group of feminist idealists who met through their mutual interests in suffragism, esoteric religions, anti-materialism, pacifism, and New Age sexual spiritual politics: Thomas Baty/Irene Clyde, Eva Gore-Booth, Esther Roper, Dorothy Cornish, and Jessey Wade.¹⁴⁹ The periodical refashioned the feminist ideals for social reform seen in earlier publications such as *Shafts*, *The New Age*, and *The Freewoman*.¹⁵⁰ Feminist and pacifist Baty/Clyde (herein referred to as Clyde) was the principal editor and a prominent voice throughout the paper (as a result, her ideas are privileged in this study).¹⁵¹ Clyde

¹⁴⁷ Editor, “To Our Friends,” *Urania* No. 13 (January – February, 1919) 1; Editor, “Psychology,” *Urania* No. 22 (July – August, 1920) 8.

¹⁴⁸ Eva Gore-Booth was also one of the founding members of *Urania*. She is credited with that claim in an editorial called ““Sex is an accident,”” *Urania* Nos. 113 & 114 (September – December, 1935) 2.

¹⁴⁹ Eva Gore-Booth and her same-sex partner Esther Roper were very prominent in spirit. Excerpts from Gore-Booth’s poems were also featured, and the two women were recognized in a large obituary. The Montessori advocate Dorothy Cornish contributed ideas about child education that matched Baty’s views on the social construction of gender during childhood. Jessey Wade, a member of the Humanitarian League, was also listed among the editors.

¹⁵⁰ Alison Oram, “Sex is an Accident”; Oram, “Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women in *Urania*, 1916-1940.” Oram provides the most comprehensive studies of the periodical’s production, and how to understand the journal’s feminist position on sexuality and same-sex love.

¹⁵¹ Daphne Patai and Angela Ingram, “Fantasy and Identity,” 274. Patai and Ingram thoroughly examine Thomas Baty/Irene Clyde’s double life, variable identities, and his/her sexual and political views. Baty was an

rejected the pursuit of equality through legislative measures, and subscribed to a Neoplatonist and aristocratic vision of equality that would be attained when spiritual sexual consciousness transcended the biological determinism of the body.

Combining scientific theories, Neoplatonism, Theosophy, and unorthodox esoteric Christianity, *Urania* demonstrated that sex/gender is mutable, and disassociated modern same-sex desire from sexological understandings of homosexual perversion and degeneracy. Scientific and medical evidence of spontaneous sex change, hermaphroditic organisms, and intersexed humans were amassed as evidence that biological sex is changeable. Legends and mythological imagery of angels and fauns supported the paper's esoteric religious androgynous ideal. Same-sex love played a significant role in *Urania's* political spiritual/sexual vision. Numerous stories of same-sex love illuminated the capacity for a non-sexual spiritual ecstasy to inspire transcendent asexual (androgynous) perfection. According to the historian Alison Oram, *Urania* rejected gendered sexological classifications of sexual perversion, such as the designation of "mannish" female inverts, in favour of same-sex romantic love. Expanding on Oram's brief explanation of *Urania's* "spiritualized view of same-sex love," I argue that the mystico-scientific components informed *Urania's* alternative epistemology of sexuality and same-sex desire. In a similar vein to the other Uranian discourses examined here, the mystico-scientific elements constructed an androgynous ideal that destabilized sexological categories of homosexual degeneracy.¹⁵² At the same time, Uranianism as it emerges in *Urania* also denounced a recognizable image of female same-

internationally renowned publicist, author, and legal scholar. He spent the war years as the legal advisor to the Japanese Foreign Office in Tokyo. According to Patai and Ingram, Thomas Baty/Irene Clyde's articles and editorial commentaries were far more prevalent than any of the other editors named there. He used a variety of pseudonyms, such as Irene Clyde and Theta, which may make reference to the Greek letter meaning soul.

¹⁵² Oram, "Feminism, Androgyny and Love between Women in *Urania*, 1916-1940," 66.

sex desire – the “mannish woman” woman. As a result, the periodical reinforced the restrictive thinking they sought to overthrow.

As with the Edwardian “progressive” elite, *Urania* advocated a spiritual philosophy that critiqued scientific determinism and challenged the material limits of human experience. Clyde contested scientific doctrines that fostered “Androcentric Prejudice” – Clyde’s term for scientific claims that naturalized male dominance in governance, war, and imperialism, as well as in the private sphere of (hetero)sexual relations. “Brutish” (masculine) materialism represented by nationalism, imperialism, war, and the theory of “race” hierarchy was interpreted as an “open revolt against the Gospel” – *Urania*’s spiritual gospel of feminine sweetness and love.¹⁵³ By 1939, the editors reported that the “Hitlerian philosophy of Race is . . . the most perfect exemplification of the doctrine of material Violence.”¹⁵⁴ They argued that the Uranian principles of sweetness and love would regenerate the Dark Ages of “Hitlerism, Marinettism, and the cult of Brute Force.”¹⁵⁵ Masculinity and male dominance resulted in violence and spiritual degradation, in Clyde’s view. Furthermore, sexual intercourse perpetrated the same dominance and spiritual degradation against women’s souls and, thereby, degraded love.¹⁵⁶ Clyde advocated an individualistic aristocratic feminine ideal that would transform society, which allowed women a special place in his vision. Additionally, *Urania* created the image of a utopian world where women could live independently from men and reach ecstatic heights of emotional and spiritual fulfillment. In

¹⁵³ Editors, “A Revolt against the Gospel,” *Urania* Nos. 41 & 42 (September – December, 1923) 6. Also see, Irene Clyde, “War,” *Urania* Nos. 37 & 38 (January – April, 1938) 2.

¹⁵⁴ Editors, “Feminism and War,” *Urania* Nos. 137 & 138 (September – December, 1939) 6.

¹⁵⁵ Editors, “One-Hundred-And-One,” *Urania* Nos. 101 & 103 (September – December, 1933) 1.

¹⁵⁶ Editors, “Vaerting’s ‘The Dominant Sex,’” *Urania* Nos. 45 & 46 (May – August, 1924) 2.

many respects, Clyde's vision also reinforced the view that biological sex must match a socially prescribed gender identity.

Like many "progressive" Edwardian philosophies, *Urania* envisioned the god-like and *feminine* perfectibility of humans.¹⁵⁷ The editors drew upon mystico-scientific interpretations of feminine perfectibility that reinforced their viewpoint, such as the theosophist Frances Swiney's *The Cosmic Procession*. On the one hand, Swiney re-inscribed the gendered interpretation that "katabolic" and "anabolic" elemental factors make up the sexes: "It is well known that the male element in nature is katabolic, while the female is the anabolic factor. The one destroys, wastes and expends; the other creates, develops and conserves."¹⁵⁸ Swiney, then, reinforced the gendered interpretation of the sexes. On the other hand, her theosophical vision challenged the prevailing notion that women's creative element is biologically determined and naturally expressed in childbearing: "And the virgin has begun to exercise her rights. She is determined no longer to be the abject instrument of man. She has now learnt that physical generation is a mere passing phase, a transitory condition. In science she has found a useful and able ally; for it appears that the ovum is of itself able to develop into a human being."¹⁵⁹ In that case, argued Swiney, the katabolic male element would no longer pollute women's bodies, and they would be better able to reach a state of ethereal purity that would "respond to high psychic influences."¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, Swiney

¹⁵⁷ Clyde, "The Slimy Enemy," *Urania* Nos. 79 & 80 (January – April, 1930) 3. Clyde's feminine ideal was based on her image of a Victorian woman who combined the best characteristics of both sexes – sweetness and independence. Her views were also reminiscent of the Edwardian reformers as described by Delap in "The Superwoman" (109) who advocated the individualistic cultivation of an aristocratic feminine ideal that would transform society.

¹⁵⁸ Mrs. Frances Swiney, "Sublime Feminism," *Urania* Nos. 99 & 100 (May – August, 1933) 3.

¹⁵⁹ Mrs. Frances Swiney, "Sublime Feminism," *Urania* Nos. 99 & 100 (May – August, 1933) 3.

¹⁶⁰ Mrs. Frances Swiney, "Sublime Feminism," *Urania* Nos. 99 & 100 (May – August, 1933) 4.

argued that women's "complex and highly specialized" physiological and psychological qualities provide the impetus for human evolution.¹⁶¹

Despite the sex/gender determinism in some of *Urania's* arguments, the journal contested the gendered definitions of sexuality and same-sex relationships that were promoted by the science of sexuality.¹⁶² Those arguments were articulated in a review of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) that was likely written by Clyde.¹⁶³ Although Clyde celebrated the depiction of "feminine love" in the novel, the review attacked Hall's use of the sexological framework: "There was no need for the Author to make her heroine a boy in skirts . . . Her heroine, though bold and splendid, is not rough or inconsiderate. But still Radclyffe Hall cannot refrain from depicting her as masculine in shape and tastes."¹⁶⁴ According to Clyde, "There is no attraction for anybody in mannishness or effeminacy. It was a gratuitous concession to popular foolishness on Radclyffe Hall's part, to make her heroine a little mannish."¹⁶⁵ The review implicitly condemned the prevailing sexological definitions of sexual inversion. The periodical's critique of sexual inversion and homosexual perversion is also prominent in a review of Irene Clyde's book *Eve's Sour Apples*. According to Clyde's reviewer J.F., "Miss Clyde makes it quite clear that the 'manly man' and the womanly woman' are just as ugly and imperfect as the effeminate youth and the masculine maiden, for in advocating a policy of asexual [androgynous] perfection Miss Clyde is not singing the praises of homosexual perversion."¹⁶⁶ According to Clyde, gendered "performances" of any sort were abhorrent and antithetical to androgynous perfection.

¹⁶¹ Delap, "The Superwoman," 113.

¹⁶² Oram in "'Sex is an Accident'" provides a more thorough discussion of *Urania's* critique of mainstream sexology, including the works of Otto Weininger, Edward Carpenter, and Havelock Ellis.

¹⁶³ Clyde, *Eve's Sour Apples*. The review articulated the same views and writing style as Clyde's book.

¹⁶⁴ Editor, "The Well of Loneliness," *Urania* Nos. 75 & 76 (May – August, 1929) 1.

¹⁶⁵ Editor, "The Well of Loneliness," *Urania* Nos. 75 & 76 (May – August, 1929) 2.

¹⁶⁶ J.F., "A Feminist Protagonist," *Urania* Nos. 105 & 106 (May – August, 1934) 1.

Yet *Urania* features numerous articles that celebrate cross-dressing, transgender, and spontaneous transsexual experiences. Some of the stories are straightforward examples of mistaken anatomical sex identity.¹⁶⁷ Medical evidence proved that a woman was really a man, or vice versa. Others demonstrate what we would now call transgender yearnings from childhood: “Even from a small boy,” wrote a distraught mother, “he always wanted to be a girl.”¹⁶⁸ The paper also cites numerous examples of “bewildering transformation” and examples of cross-dressing: “the highly successful assumption of the dress and habits of the contrary sex in our own day.”¹⁶⁹ In that case, the transgendered transformations lead to a heterosexual marriage.¹⁷⁰ Whereas Radclyffe Hall’s protagonist – Stephen – elicited explicit condemnation as a “mannish” woman in Clyde’s review, the stories of cross-dressing women and transgendering from female to male are presented in a favourable light.

One explanation is that Hall’s book describes a sexual encounter that *Urania* found objectionable: “Seven words – ‘and that night they were not divided’ – sum up the whole offending.”¹⁷¹ The article also calls Hall’s book “propaganda” for homosexual perversion and “for the social recognition of marriage between individuals of the same sex.”¹⁷² Clyde’s Uranian vision advocates a sexuality that transcends the material conditions of both marriage and sex acts. Homosexuality and same-sex marriage, particularly as characterized by Hall, were objectionable in Clyde’s view. On the other hand, marriages between transgendered individuals and the opposite sex were viewed as revolutionary – a view that seems contrary to Clyde’s critique of sex determinism.

¹⁶⁷ Editor, “And Many More?” *Urania* Nos. 87 & 88 (May – August, 1931) 5–6.

¹⁶⁸ Editor, “And Many More?” *Urania* Nos. 87 & 88 (May – August, 1931) 5

¹⁶⁹ Editor, “And Many More?” *Urania* Nos. 87 & 88 (May – August, 1931) 5.

¹⁷⁰ Editor, “And Many More?” *Urania* Nos. 87 & 88 (May – August, 1931) 6.

¹⁷¹ Editor, “‘The Well of Loneliness’ or ‘Cut by the County,’” *Urania* Nos. 75 & 76 (May – August, 1929) 1.

¹⁷² Editor, “‘The Well of Loneliness’ or ‘Cut by the County,’” *Urania* Nos. 75 & 76 (May – August, 1929) 1.

Despite the contradictions, the cross-dressing and transgendering stories are meant to represent progress toward a time when sex distinction is no longer fixed. The articles about cross-dressing and transgender experiences are intended to highlight the mutability of sex distinction; that is, that “sex is an accident.” Furthermore, many of the articles imply that same-sex love was an impetus for the metamorphosis. Love itself had the power to inspire transformation. Clyde’s main point of contention with Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* was that the same-sex love relationship “ends on a false note.”¹⁷³ “Surely, two loving spirits with books, music, painting, ideas, writing, could sustain each other on a desert island, let alone in Paris,” exclaimed the reviewer.¹⁷⁴ In contrast, many of the transgendering stories celebrate love and suggest its transformative power.

Ultimately, *Urania* challenged the nineteenth-century scientific view that humans are material objects that are unable to transcend the limitations of matter.¹⁷⁵ In an article critiquing scientific determinism entitled “The slimy Enemy,” Clyde made a particularly Neoplatonist argument: “Beauty and Valiancy of heart are things greater and grander than bodily growth and reproduction and decay” and would lead to the “attainment of the soul’s perfection.”¹⁷⁶ For Clyde, one’s heart and soul yearning for human perfection was (r)evolutionary. “The compelling visions of the soul are no less ‘natural’, no less ‘evolutionary’, no less ‘scientific’, no less ‘cosmic’, than the passionate urges of the body,” insisted Clyde.¹⁷⁷ The passionate urges of the soul, suggested Clyde, are transformative. Drawing upon Neoplatonism, Theosophy, and science, *Urania* advocated an aristocratic idea of spiritual evolution that one could cultivate through intelligence, sweetness and

¹⁷³ Editor, “‘The Well of Loneliness’ or ‘Cut by the County,’” *Urania* Nos. 75 & 76 (May – August, 1929) 1.

¹⁷⁴ Editor, “‘The Well of Loneliness’ or ‘Cut by the County,’” *Urania* Nos. 75 & 76 (May – August, 1929) 1.

¹⁷⁵ See, Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 136; Delap, “Superman” 112.

¹⁷⁶ Clyde, “The Slimy Enemy,” *Urania* Nos. 79 & 80 (January – April, 1930) 4.

¹⁷⁷ Clyde, “The Slimy Enemy,” *Urania* Nos. 79 & 80 (January – April, 1930) 3.

independence – an evolution that linked the individual to the heavens. In Clyde’s vision, love, particularly same-sex spiritual desire, had a mystico-scientific basis that allowed humans to transcend sex difference and homosexual degeneracy.

Clyde modified scientific theories in order to argue that the absence of consciousness about sex and gender found in both “lower” life forms and children possessed the potential for transcendence toward a divine same-sex experience. As previously discussed, the nineteenth-century discourses of sexual dimorphism taken up by sexual theorists such as Havelock Ellis were used to establish the boundaries between the civilized and the so-called developmentally delayed “primitive”: a classification that was transferred to homosexuals. Clyde’s Neoplatonist spiritual/biological conception of love implicitly destabilized that viewpoint. According to Clyde, the “lowest” and most basic hermaphroditic organisms demonstrate the germ of same-sex love:

The earlier forms of conscious animal life are uni-sexual; yet they have choice; and choice implies preference; and preference means Love. All animal existence is characterized by conscious liking for one object rather than another. And this liking is the germ of Love. Even the keen intensification of liking antedates sexual intercourse.¹⁷⁸

In other words, love is neither constrained by physiology nor, as we shall see, is it heterosexually determined in Clyde’s calculation.¹⁷⁹

Like Carpenter, *Urania*’s editors claimed that the unicellular and androgynous lower life forms provided evidence of mind and consciousness prior to sexual organization, rather than evidence of sexual degeneracy and atavism. “It is advisable to discard the popular fallacy that hermaphroditism is degenerative,” *Urania* argued; rather, “this state of being is

¹⁷⁸ Clyde, “Love and Eroticism,” *Urania* Nos. 81 & 82 (May – August, 1930) 1.

¹⁷⁹ Carpenter in *The Art of Creation* (1–2) argued that protozoic movements demonstrate “attraction and repulsion,” or “a kind of ‘choice’ or elective affinity.” He claimed that the movements of protozoa represent the “germ of ‘desire’” prior to sex differentiation. Clyde’s views were similar.

the ultimate development that can preserve a species threatened with extinction.”¹⁸⁰

According to Clyde, extinction was the natural outcome of sex distinction, which in turn fueled the “brutish” and “masculine” scientific materialism exemplified by nationalism and war.

Urania's feminist and spiritual interpretation of science constructed a regenerative and creative vision of female subjectivity in opposition to the prevailing view that women's social and familial roles were biologically and anatomically determined. First, *Urania* marshaled an eclectic array of scientific evidence and theory demonstrating the creative potential of protoplasm to prove that “sex is an accident,” and to eliminate men's role in the reproductive process. “Lower” organisms such as the oyster were reported to be “addicted to a change of sex.”¹⁸¹ Examples of parthenogenesis proved the inherent powers of hermaphroditic species to produce offspring: “Living organisms caused to grow without the vital chromosomes of father or mother, developing out of what was formerly believed to be an inert protoplasmic jelly.”¹⁸² These articles were taken from major newspapers and the popular press. Quite likely, they were originally meant to titillate the reader and generate newspaper sales. In *Urania*, they constituted legitimate proof that sex differentiation was fluid and could evolve along a number of paths: toward greater sex distinction, toward a spontaneous change of biological sex, or toward hermaphroditism.¹⁸³ Hermaphroditism was the (r)evolutionary outcome.

Clyde's book *Eve's Sour Apples* (1934), parts of which were re-printed in *Urania*, elaborated her feminist idea of parthenogenesis. Clyde re-formulated Victorian gendered

¹⁸⁰ J. F., “A Feminist Protagonist,” *Urania* Nos. 105 & 106 (May – August, 1934) 2.

¹⁸¹ Editorial, “Science confirms intuition,” *Urania* Nos. 29 & 30 (September – December, 1921) 1.

¹⁸² “A Parthenogenic Discovery,” from *Japan Times*, *Urania* Nos. 127 & 128 (January – April, 1938) 10.

¹⁸³ Clyde makes similar claims in *Eve's Sour Apples*, 107–109.

notions of metabolism and elevated women's role in gestation – notions that countered Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson's gendered understandings of metabolism in *The Evolution of Sex* that, in turn, provided the foundation for Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter's theories of sexual inversion and sexual intermediacy, respectively.¹⁸⁴ Citing *La Parthogènèse*, by Delage et Goldsmith, Clyde wrote:

Contrary to the old belief, the feminine share in gestation is not that of a passive and nutritive receptacle: the germ of the future creature is essentially present in the ovum, and microscopic research has shown that it only requires stimulus to become an independent individual. This stimulus the masculine spermatozoon provides – but there is no reason why it should not be otherwise provided.¹⁸⁵

For Clyde, protoplasm, but more particularly women's protoplasm, carried the potential for an evolutionary metamorphosis toward androgyny and same-sex spiritual ecstasy or rapturous love. *Urania* and Clyde challenged the notions that love springs from sexual intercourse.¹⁸⁶ Rather love as spiritual ecstasy was believed to manifest from the essentially feminine creative impulses and have a wider influence beyond the so-called private sphere.

Same-sex yearnings and rapture are inescapable in *Urania*, and represent the most perfect example of same-sex attraction that upholds the editors' feminine and spiritual ideal. In contrast to the editor's depiction of Stephen's "perverted" relationships in *The Well of Loneliness*, Sappho represented their iconic example of the religion of same-sex love:

For Sappho the whole question of love was connected with that divine exaltation which is usually the privilege of saints. When passion comes with such authority, it cannot be regarded as merely a subjective aspect of the poet's self, and Sappho's account of Aphrodite shows that the foundation of her cult of

¹⁸⁴ Porter and Hall, *The Facts of Life*, 155–166.

¹⁸⁵ Clyde, *Eve's Sour Apples*, 107.

¹⁸⁶ Clyde, "Love and Eroticism," *Urania* Nos. 81 & 82 (May – August, 1930) 1.

love lay in her belief that it was a task given to her by the gods.¹⁸⁷

According to *Urania*, Sappho's divine exaltation was inspired not only by same-sex love, but a deep and serious love that was "based on a genuinely religious devotion to a real divinity. She followed not the whims of her flesh but the commands of her visions."¹⁸⁸ "Flesh" suggests both a reference to physical sexual experience and a reference to biological sex difference. *Urania* advocated a spiritual devotion between same-sex "lovers" that inspired transcendence away from notions of "flesh" toward an ecstatic state of being.

Arguably, *Urania* limits the possibilities for same-sex love. According to Clyde's book *Eve's Sour Apples* published in 1934, "We are not condoning for one moment homosexual unions: we only desire to make it clear that 'sexual love' does not necessarily mean connection between man and woman."¹⁸⁹ In Clyde's estimation, a union built on sex difference and attraction between opposites is necessarily a union of character defects, which in turn would lead to domination and surrender.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, Clyde's argument against sexual acts was not altogether prudish, but was consistent with her spiritual/sexual vision: "When the spirit rises to claim all excellence, sex falls to nothing, because its *raison d'être* has gone."¹⁹¹ Clyde's reference to "sex" in this passage means sexual attraction between the opposite sexes. Clyde insisted on differentiating between an ascetic life – one that, presumably, continues to be bound by sex difference and must, therefore, repress and deny sex – and the state of androgynous spiritual consciousness: "The soul which has ceased to think of itself as man or woman, according as its body is male or female, is not ascetic when

¹⁸⁷ "Saint Sappho," *Urania* Nos. 121 & 122 (January – April, 1937) 4–5.

¹⁸⁸ "Saint Sappho," *Urania* Nos. 121 & 122 (January – April, 1937) 5.

¹⁸⁹ Clyde, *Eve's Sour Apples*, 124.

¹⁹⁰ Clyde, *Eve's Sour Apples*, 124.

¹⁹¹ Clyde, *Eve's Sour Apples*, 128.

it declines to think of performing sexual acts – it has no desire to perform them.”¹⁹² The body’s passion, in that case, “is to identify itself heart and soul with what it loves.”¹⁹³

According to Clyde, the greatest impediment to spiritual (a)sexual fulfillment was to follow the social norms associated with biological sex.

“Commonplace love between distorted types,” argued Clyde, “is the pale thing – the muddy flicker in a dark place of the light that shines and flashes in the dazzling affection of those whom no acknowledged and accepted weakness bars from the quest of the Supreme.”¹⁹⁴ Distorted types, in Clyde’s estimation, are people who based their relationships on sex difference, such as in Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*. Furthermore, a focus on sex difference and opposite attraction prevents the transformative type of love advocated by Clyde: the kind of love that releases the “spirit from the bonds of sex limitation.”¹⁹⁵ In “A Railway Idyll,” Clyde described the “Fairies Courtship” or same-sex relationship that exemplifies her vision:

Their evident absorption in each other – the indulgent protective face of the elder – the anxiety of the younger to be entertaining and attractive and pleasing would have been amusing if they had not been transcendently beautiful. As the young girl leant forward over the lilacs, hanging upon her friend’s stray words, following her glance wherever it rested, summoning up a very delicate allurements of voice and smile, exerting every attractive art and all with such transparent sincerity of affection, one seemed to be watching a fairies’ courtship. And yet there was nothing *outré*. It was simply two friends talking in a railway carriage.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Clyde, *Eve’s Sour Apples*, 128

¹⁹³ Clyde, *Eve’s Sour Apples*, 129.

¹⁹⁴ Clyde, “A Railway Idyll,” *Urania* Nos. 31 & 32 (January – April, 1922) 2.

¹⁹⁵ I. Kinloch, “Effete Feminists,” *Urania* Nos. 123 & 124 (May – August, 1937) 1.

¹⁹⁶ Clyde, “A Railway Idyll,” *Urania* Nos. 31 & 32 (January – April, 1922) 2.

Their grace and repose, claimed Clyde, was not due to an evangelical religious type of superiority, but rather was a transparent and transitory moment of dazzling affection and rapture. Their ecstasy was evident in their startlingly sincere same-sex affection. Bemoaning the lack of recognition of women's romantic friendships, Clyde wrote: "Does the world not know it, this love? Or are men too jealous to notice it? Ovid could not be content without metamorphosing Iphis into a conventional shape; . . . Henry James' Olive loses her lover to Basil Ransome. Lady Elaenor Butler and Miss Ponsonby are treated as eccentrics."¹⁹⁷ For Clyde, the Fairies' Courtship is the highest type of love. "For all that, it is a real thing; love of like by like."¹⁹⁸ The desire of the soul is allowed to be completely fulfilled, in Clyde's framework, unrestrained by sex distinction. Clyde's vision, however, discounted physical sexual fulfillment.

Urania, then, created the androgynous Uranian as antithetical to the sexological definition of sexual inversion and, in part, further stigmatized the homosexual as a social type with a recognizable identity. At the same time, the mystico-scientific conception of same-sex rapture reconfigured and destabilized the dominant discourses. The result was to create a fluid and unstable sexual subjectivity, which opened possibilities for women (and possibly men) to imagine same-sex romantic involvements that defied definition and pathological labels.

¹⁹⁷ Clyde, "A Railway Idyll," *Urania* Nos. 31 & 32 (January – April, 1922) 2.

¹⁹⁸ Clyde, "A Railway Idyll," *Urania* Nos. 31 & 32 (January – April, 1922) 3.

5 CONCLUSION

Today, we are deconstructing “gay identity” and positing “queer” alternatives that challenge the medical-scientific definitions of the homosexual and modern sexual subjects. The Uranian mystico-scientific sexualities explored here epitomize another modern moment when sexual subjectivities were diverse and offered alternatives outside sexological classification and the homosexual social “type.” Uranianism was a multilayered concept with diverse meanings; it was neither a definitively emancipatory or pathologizing concept. Uranian sexuality represents a discursive distillation of combined esoteric spiritual and scientific claims that destabilized the immutability of gender, sexual dimorphism, and degeneracy theories. In fact, mystico-scientific claims offered the conceptual fluidity required to destabilize the rigid essentialism constraining notions of sexuality and same-sex eroticism, much as feminist applications of psychoanalytical theory have attempted to do today.¹⁹⁹ Uranianism, with all of its diverse and contradictory meanings, represented a variable sexuality which played an important role in people’s lives prior to the more scientific and technical vocabularies gaining authority.

Scholars tend to view the Uranian’s mystico-scientific inconsistencies and contradictions as evidence of irrational thinking, thus producing a dichotomy between so-called enlightened secular modernity and spiritual ideas about love relationships. Actually, the mystico-scientific Uranian sexualities represent dynamic modern projects. The “progressive” social and sexual reformers engaged mystico-scientific ideas in order to grapple with modern problems related to the increased emphasis on scientific classifications

¹⁹⁹ See, e.g., Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*.

and labels. Going against the grain of a linear narrative, the Uranian emerges in and through the contradictory mystico-scientific conceptions; that is, the inconsistencies and contradictions were productive in and of themselves. Uranianism's shifting meanings resisted static and fixed definitions that would become dominant in the 1930s and 1940s.

There are three main intersecting themes that created the mystico-scientific Uranian concept: the spiritual dimension, the notion of an evolutionary impulse, and a fluid conception of spiritual/sexual subjectivities. To various degrees, all three discourses contested the Victorian notions of scientific materialism. At times developing very complex and carefully worked out arguments, they incorporated ideas about the soul, the psyche, and spiritual progress into scientific ideas about protozoic beginnings and the teleological development of human beings. The Uranian discourses also challenged and adapted scientific ideas about evolution. For some, "primitive" sexually undifferentiated, unicellular organisms harboured the regenerative evolutionary impulse for a socially and spiritually advanced Uranian. Those "primitive" origins, in fact, provided a specialized role in human evolution because they were inscribed with the divine. The evolutionary impulse was also inspired by a feminized spirit that represented, for example, the continual re-birth or reincarnation of women's proximity to the divine. To the "progressive" elite in this study, the evolutionary impulse was inscribed at the unicellular and sexually undifferentiated level of human existence, and provided the impetus for (r)evolutionary transformation, and even transcendence toward divine knowledge.

Finally, Uranian same-sex eroticism was, at times, described as non-sexual. It would be tempting to see these elusively sexual concepts as an apology for same-sex eroticism. Certainly, *The Freewoman* and *Urania* argued against an explicitly (homo)sexual physicality,

and seem to sanitize same-sex relations. Arguably, an apologetic stance for same-sex love and private (closeted) gay identities contradict a political identity. Uranianism, however, offered a new political role for homosexuals and those engaged in same-sex loving relationships. The Uranian's "political" purpose is not comparable to our notions of homosexual political identity. "Progressive" social and sex reformers integrated teleological evolutionary theories, vitalism, new age understandings of the psyche, and esoteric religious ideas in order to create an alternative spiritual sexuality. Countering Victorian notions of animalistic lust and degeneracy, Uranianism integrated elements of mind, body, and spirit as a way to imagine a higher order of consciousness and psychic intimacy. As a result, spiritual sexuality was, by its very "nature," transcendent. Dismantling fixed and static concepts of man and woman, these discourses envisioned an androgynous being that embodied a fluid and changeable notion of gender identity. Furthermore, the Uranian political role was never intended to explicitly advance Uranian rights; rather, the spiritual and androgynous Uranian, as conceived by Carpenter, Birnstingl, Whitby, and *Urania*, was believed to represent the most evolved "super" consciousness for advancing human progress into the New Age.

Ironically, Uranianism ultimately consolidated its nemesis – the "homosexual." Representative of other "avant-garde" arguments, the Uranian discourses distanced "homosexual degenerates" from aristocratic notions of "higher" types of same-sex love and desire. In that case, the Uranian discourses reinforced a hierarchical framework for understanding superior and inferior sexualities. Furthermore, the medico-scientific definitions of "homosexual" underpinned many of the arguments used to dismantle the fixed idea that biological sex must match gender identity. As a result, a dichotomy was established between right and wrong ideas about sexuality and sex/gender identity. Ultimately, the

Uranian discourses strengthened the scientific definitions of the “homosexual” as pathologically “contrary” to the “natural” sex/gender system. In the process, the “homosexual” emerges as a stigmatized “inferior” category rather than an emancipated sexual subject.

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