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**Gender Identity and Social Consciousness
in the Works of Corra White Harris**

By

Catherine Badura

VOLUME I

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ABSTRACT

GENDER IDENTITY AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE WORKS OF CORRA WHITE HARRIS

By

Catherine Badura

This study examines two middle-class white women's perceptions of social justice in the U.S. Progressive Era and how those perceptions were shaped and informed by perceptions of self on the one hand, and notions of public and private on the other. Using as evidence the works of Georgia novelist and writer, Corra White Harris (1869-1935) and those of social theorist, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), I ask why some women developed a social consciousness and others did not; why some women learned to think of themselves as social beings and others did not; and more specifically, how gender and regional identity related to and informed those perceptions. The study is situated theoretically, in part, in an issue known to some in women's history as the "difference debate," or simply the debate that explores the political and social implications of considering women equal to or different from men. Incumbent within the debate are notions of authority, hierarchy, duality and the privileged status of reason embedded in western thinking. The social and psychological alienation that results from these concepts and the peculiar ways women experience alienation provide another part of the theoretical framework.

The dissertation considers Harris and Gilman as two social and political archetypes rather than as representatives of any particular group or type of women. It is

an asymmetrical study, however, focusing more on Corra Harris as the lesser known of the two writers. Gilman's more familiar theories provide a backdrop against which to analyze Harris's lesser known, lesser studied, and less understood perspectives. I examine the influence of regional identity on both, concentrating more on the role of Harris's southern identity in shaping her gender identity and the role of both region and gender identity in shaping her notions of public and private. The analysis demonstrates, through the use of home as a metaphor, how certain notions of public and private can and often do thwart the development of a social consciousness. The study concludes with an indictment against the model of reason as humankind's pinnacle of development. It concludes as well with inferences drawn about what beyond a social consciousness--namely the developed traits of empathy, compassion, and relatedness--might eventuate in the kind of human connectedness posited as essential for the realization of social justice and the transcendence of cultural arrogance.

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that I have received the best of my life and nearly every gift that prospered in me from my association with” him.

The dissertation is dedicated, however, to four women, two women already and two yet in the making. I dedicate this in part to my two precocious young namesakes, Chelsea Catherine Ricks-Wait and Olivia Catherine Olsen, knowing that they will both, with their lives, make the world a better place. To the third woman, my daughter, Hope, who has been a woman of substance since the age of five, I dedicate it as a labor of love. She sacrificed more than most daughters who see their mothers through school. If she is to everyone whose path she crosses a fraction of the inspiration she has been all her life and continues to be to me, the world will inevitably be a better place. Last of all, I dedicate this to the one woman who has never failed of encouragement throughout this seemingly endless academic journey. In an effort to understand why it takes so long to get a “doctor's” degree, and to know how to recognize when the end is in sight, she sometime ago concluded that it would finally be over when I finished writing my “book.” Well, finally, it is finished! And, Mama, this “book” is especially for you.

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INTRODUCTION

What makes people perceive themselves more as social than self-interested beings? The question underlies much of social history. A central purpose of this dissertation has been to ask how gender identity relates to, informs, or shapes an individual's social philosophy, and the individual's understanding of self as a social being. For answers I turned to sources from a time and place when issues of gender identity and social consciousness were beginning to be analyzed, discussed, and debated openly. Namely, the study consults principally the works of Georgia novelist, Corra White Harris (1869-1935) and secondarily, the works of social theorist, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), two turn-of-the-century American women writers representing two fundamentally opposing social, political, and regional perspectives.

The study initially posed several ambitious questions and a premise. The most immediate questions concerned the nature of human nature, how it is perceived differently from the nature of woman's nature, and what social conditions inform both perceptions. The most basic of questions asked regarding human nature was, if people are inherently social beings, as social historians (among others) want to believe, why does self-interest characterize so much of what they think and do? A more specific question grew from an earlier study of women antisuffragists, and relates to antifeminism; namely,

what essentially informs antifeminism, specifically that of women. Or, to ask similarly: Why, historically, have some women resisted the advancement of their own political and social emancipation? And, why, as many anti-feminists posit, do women seem naturally to hate other women? What explains the strident antagonism of women antifeminists? Some combination of these two basic questions on woman's nature and on human nature led to a third: What influence does gender identity have on the ability to think of self in social terms, or more succinctly, in what ways does gender identity prevent or promote a social consciousness?¹ This introduction briefly identifies the historiographical issues relevant to the study and the theoretical position upon which the study is based, and concludes with an explanation of the organizational structure and methodology.

The original conception for this study came from a premise I wanted to explore further after analyzing the works of several women fiction writers in addition to Harris

¹It is important to acknowledge here some of the limitations of this study. It is constrained inevitably by my own perspective, one that has been shaped by my identity as a heterosexual southern white woman who was born and grew up in lower-middle-class circumstances in Georgia in the fifties and sixties, who lived a relatively traditional domestic existence in the seventies and early eighties, and whose college and graduate education span the mid eighties and nineties. That perspective informs the questions posed, the sources chosen, the interpretation of the sources, and the conclusions reached. Nonetheless, I am aware that women of color especially have noted and challenged the limitations and inherent biases in white women's views. They have over the past two decades or more pointed out the exclusionary nature of professional and middle-class white feminists' analyses of women's position in society. Race, women of color argue, is an issue too consequential in determining the roots of oppression to be added as an afterthought behind class and gender. They suggest the futility of claiming a feminist politics. Since "there are . . . by necessity many feminisms . . . any attempt to find the 'true' form of feminist politics should be abandoned," Chantal Mouffe writes in, "Feminism, Citizenship and Radical Politics," in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge University Press, 1992) p. 382. Three additional edited collections that deal with this issue are: Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, et al., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); and Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, eds., *Women of Color in U.S. Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

and Gilman. Through short stories, novels, and essays by Rebecca Harding Davis, Sarah Orne Jewett, Ellen Glasgow, and Willa Cather, to name the most noted, I gleaned and hoped to demonstrate a range of gender and related political identities discovered from asking the above questions. Initially I proposed to do so by examining the works of Harris, Gilman, Glasgow, and Jewett. Very soon, however, the prohibitive nature of such a proposal became obvious, and for reasons explained below, I decided upon Harris and Gilman.

Just as this study was originally conceived as a demonstration of gender identity across a political spectrum, my original premise was informed by a categorical understanding of the “difference” debate in gender studies and women’s history, the debate, that is, as it related originally to differences between the sexes not as it came to relate to differences among women.² By dividing feminist positions on the issue into

²See note number one above for reference to some of the works committed to the debate as it relates specifically to differences among women of different race, class, age, regional, and other backgrounds. The works published on the subject of difference in its variety of meanings would list for pages. Here follows a sampling of works devoted in part or exclusively to a discussion of the issue of difference between the sexes in gender studies and women’s history: Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (Spring, 1988), Vol. 13, no. 3; Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, (New York: Routledge, 1992); Judith M. Bennett, “Feminism and History,” *Gender and History*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Autumn 1989):251-272; Gisela Bock, “Challenging Dichotomies: Perspectives on Women’s History,” in Karen Offen, et. al., *Writing Women’s History: International Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Kathy Davis, “Toward a Feminist Rhetoric: The Gilligan Debate Revisited,” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1992):219-231; Jane Flax, “Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory,” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture and Society* (hereafter, *Signs*), Vol. 12, No. 4 (Summer, 1987):621-643; Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Nancy Fraser and Sandra Lee Bartky, eds., *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency, and Culture*, (Hypatia, 1992); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Linda

various categories--liberal, socialist, radical, cultural, relational, etc.--I could position myself among those who resisted emphasis on the difference between the sexes, those who argued that concession to difference inevitably leads to hierarchical stratification and marginalization of woman as the "Other" against man as the standard measure of humanity.³ The understanding I gained about female alienation from an earlier study led to my understanding at the outset that any focus on gender difference contributed both to sexual discrimination and to female alienation. Furthermore, it was a position that avoided direct engagement in the debate over the universality of the Enlightenment paradigm. As the study advanced, however, and as the sources took shape around the questions posed, the premise changed somewhat. The significance of gender I found to be too complex to categorize as readily as I had been willing to in the beginning;

Gordon, "On Difference," *Genders*, No. 10 (Spring, 1991):91-111, and "What's New in Women's History," in Teresa de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/ Critical Studies* (Indiana University Press, 1986); Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), and *Moral Voices, Moral Selves: Carol Gilligan and Feminist Moral Theory* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); Linda Nicholson, ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), and "Interpreting Gender," *Signs*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Autumn 1994):79-106; Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Autumn 1989):198-209; Sonya O. Rose, "Introduction to Dialogue: Gender History/Women's History: Is Feminist Scholarship Losing its Critical Edge?" *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1993):89-128 (comments following Rose by Anna Clark, Mariana Valverde, and Marcia R. Sawyer); Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: or The Uses of Poststructuralist Theory of Feminism," *Feminist Studies*, 14, #1(1988); Rosmarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989); Lise Vogel, "Telling Tales: Hand historians of Our Own Lives," *Journal of Women's History* (Winter, 1991):89-101; Iris Marion Young, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective," *Signs*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring, 1994):713-138.

³Simone de Beauvoir introduced the concept of woman as "Other" in her classic *The Second Sex* published in the 1950s. Since that time it has been employed by women throughout the disciplines for its means of graphically capturing the position of women and other marginal groups in society.

moreover, I discovered through my sources that there could be no closure by avoiding engagement with the western model of man as the norm for humanity. The evidence, as I interpret it through the sources, leads, not surprisingly, toward the conclusion that gender analysis holds a key to understanding human development--moral, social, and psychological.⁴ But they are key insights that demand positioning within a cosmic paradigm. They require at least questioning, if not replacing, the existing paradigm, most specifically, its interpretation of moral development that privileges justice over care, autonomy over solidarity, reason and rationality over emotion and intuition; the paradigm's promotion of the "disembedded" and "disembodied" self--the "prediscursive self who sits outside of society"⁵-- vs. the circumstantially or socially-situated self; its promotion of the "generalized" vs. the "concrete" other; its privileging of culture over nature; its historicization of the public, and dehistoricization of the private, realm; its ahistoricization of human experience through the "state of nature" metaphor; and the paradigm's association of women with the polar opposite of what it privileges in each case, and thereby its unavoidable relegation of women to a state of inherent inferiority.⁶

⁴Among the most noted proponents of gender as a viable analytical category are: Joan Kelly, in *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), Linda J. Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), and Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), especially chapter two: "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis."

⁵Leora Auslander, "Feminist Theory and Social History: Explorations in the Politics of Identity," *Radical History Review* 54(Fall, 1992):158-176; p. 164.

⁶For a treatment of all the categories mentioned, consult the works of Benhabib and Hekman cited above; also see Butler and Scott, eds., and Nicholson cited above. For an analysis specifically of the historical situatedness of the nature and culture paradigm, woman's affinity for nature and man's affinity of culture, see Carol P. MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern, *Nature, Culture and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), Carolyn Merchant,

To summarize very briefly, the complex debate over how to regard gender difference was spawned in part well over a decade ago with the publication of Carol Gilligan's psychological study of women's moral development, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Woman's Development* (1982). In the book Gilligan argues *vis-a-vis* her mentor, Lawrence Kohlberg, that women's moral development is not stunted, as he contends, but rather that it is simply different. Mature men might speak in moral terms of rights and justice, while mature women speak in terms of responsibility and care, but the difference should not be considered a qualitative one as Kohlberg's study suggests. According to Gilligan it was not women's moral development that needed to be questioned, but rather Kohlberg's stages of development, the highest of which (stages five and six) valued impersonal abstraction of justice for the disembodied other, which morally mature men voiced, over personal care and concern for the known as well as the unknown Other (stage three), which morally mature women voiced.⁷ The debate has since turned on whether or not there actually is a qualitative difference in moral development between the sexes, with the sides separating along a number of

Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), and Susan R. Suleiman, ed. *The Female Body in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). My thinking on the Enlightenment as a universal paradigm was influenced by the works of Benhabib, Fraser, Gordon, Hekman, and others. It was more fully persuaded, however, after living with and interpreting the works of Harris and Gilman.

⁷Since the initial debates, Kohlberg has acknowledged that women's more highly developed ability to relate personally to the "concrete" other (as opposed to men's ability to relate abstractly to the "generalized" other) "usefully enlarges the moral domain" (Quoted in Benhabib, p. 150). Nonetheless, he maintains the superiority of justice reasoning as the highest stage in moral development, the one reached outside and beyond the personal, private realm of the family.

different philosophical divides.⁸ Among other relevant questions, researchers ask: If women do indeed hear and speak morally “in a different voice,” how does it relate to the other voice of moral development? And is it strictly a gender divide between the voices?⁹

Interestingly, the debate over the significance of gender difference begets some unlikely alliances between groups of feminists who are otherwise culturally and politically at odds. A brief mention of some of those alliances is worthwhile for underscoring the complex nature of the debate. First are those who, in various ways and for as many different political reasons, choose to make an issue out of gender differences. “Cultural feminists,” for instance, who want to protect and preserve much of a traditional female culture (including traditional family culture), find it expedient to emphasize the biological differences between men and women. They unwittingly become allies, however, at least on this issue, with radical feminists who, for very different reasons—one being glorification of the feminine—find it expedient to focus on differences between the sexes. A primary criticism of the positions emphasizing gender difference is that they are unavoidably essentialist in their assumptions, that they privilege the female, and hence, merely replace an androcentric with a gynocentric culture. Another, more complex criticism, is that an acknowledgment of difference necessarily concedes hierarchical ordering of the sexes, and that no matter what the rhetoric purporting female superiority,

⁸Typically Neo-Kantians support a qualitative difference. Some Neo-Aristotelians and Neo-Hegelians find a means to harmonize the differences. Benhabib, Fraser, and Hekman, among others, discuss the philosophical bases of these positions.

⁹Before the issues were theorized and became a popular subject of debate, Gilligan had answered no to the latter question. “The different voice I describe,” she writes, “is characterized not by gender but by theme.” p. 2.

women inevitably become marginalized, become the Other, and the masculine remains the universal standard.

Jane Flax explains how merely assuming a position of opposition to the existing conventional paradigm is not only not enough, but is naive with regard to the implications. In order for the insights of gender analysis to be effective there has to be “a transvaluation of values--a rethinking of our ideas about what is humanly excellent, worthy of praise, or moral,” Flax writes; but then cautions, “In such a transvaluation, we need to be careful not to assert merely the superiority of the opposite.” To do so simply shifts power from one potentially irresponsible source to another. “For example,” she writes:

sometimes feminist theorists tend to oppose autonomy to being-in-relations that can be claustrophobic without autonomy--an autonomy that, without being-in-relations, can easily degenerate into mastery. Our upbringing as women in this culture often encourages us to deny the many subtle forms of aggression that intimate relations with others can evoke and entail. For example, much of the discussion of mothering and the distinctively female tends to avoid discussing women’s anger and aggression--how we internalize them and express them, for example, in relation to children or our own internal selves. Perhaps women are not any less aggressive than men; we may just express our aggression in different, culturally sanctioned (and partially disguised or denied) ways.¹⁰

For Flax, a “transvaluation of values” demands that both the autonomous and the relational selves be part of the model for moral development.

At the opposite end of this debate on the role of gender difference are those feminists who would prefer to ignore the differences, believing them to be not merely

¹⁰Flax, p. 641. Claudia Koonz’s *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, The Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987) reveals the legitimacy of Flax’s concern expressed here.

irrelevant, but detrimental to the goal of equality of the sexes. They choose instead to concentrate on gaining for women the same rights and opportunities as men, which is to say, equal opportunities in the public sphere. Oddly enough, this in some (though by no stretch, all) ways allies liberal and socialist feminists, two feminisms informed by antithetical political positions: classical liberalism and socialism. The criticisms of this position as well are numerous and complex. Opponents argue that simply to act as though gender differences do not exist, or even to contend that they are merely biological, does not and cannot change the obvious, that gender roles necessarily follow biological functions. In a more complex vein, opponents argue that to ignore, or not to acknowledge gender differences, forces women to accept the existing universal voice, which is not neuter, but masculine. To argue for women's equality without challenging the existing universal paradigm is to impose the masculine over the feminine, for there is no accepted neuter paradigm.

Seyla Benhabib and Susan Hekman are two theorists among those who challenge the conventional Enlightenment theory of moral development, although they do so from different perspectives. Benhabib operates within the existing, though altered, modernist framework; Hekman posits fully "displacing the tradition." Through means of what Benhabib labels "discourse ethics," or "communicative ethics," she finds a way to retain fundamental, "crucial insights of the universalist tradition in practical philosophy . . . without committing oneself to the metaphysical illusions of the Enlightenment."¹¹ She "situates the self" within the paradigm essentially by redefining it to include the elements

¹¹Benhabib, p. 4.

of “care and solidarity” in addition to those of “justice and autonomy.” “A coherent sense of self is attained with the successful integration of autonomy and solidarity, or with the right mix of justice and care. Justice and autonomy alone cannot sustain and nourish the web of narratives in which human beings’ sense of selfhood unfolds; but solidarity and care alone can raise the self to the level not only of being the subject but also the author of a coherent life story.”¹²

Hekman, on the other hand, through means of “discursive morality,” wants to do far more than “reform the dominant moral tradition of Western thought”; she wants rather to “radically transform it.”¹³ It is impossible, Hekman maintains to “supplement” the tradition with the moral theory Gilligan posits; the two inhabit “incompatible theoretical space.”¹⁴ What Hekman most opposes and finds impossible to reconcile are the polarities, the dualities, and inherent dichotomies within Western thought--reason vs. emotion; culture vs. nature; public vs. private, etc.--which are unavoidably hierarchical and oppositional. Hekman “eschews the individualistic construction of moral principles, assuming, instead, that morality is a pattern of behavior that is socially acquired.”¹⁵ Although Hekman believes Gilligan is naive to assume that her moral theory can coexist within the Enlightenment paradigm, she finds in Gilligan’s work the seeds of the kind of radical transformation she believes necessary. Gilligan, Hekman believes, “moves beyond dichotomies and the hierarchies they entail. Her discussion of the relationship

¹²Benhabib, p. 198.

¹³Hekman, *Moral Voices, Moral Selves* p. 25.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 154.

between justice and care as a ‘double fugue’ and her assertion that both moral voices have a relational basis suggest that she is displacing oppositional thought rather than continuing that tradition.”¹⁶ The works of Benhabib and Hekman were instrumental in helping me shape my own thinking on the academic debate, and therefore in helping me analyze the works of Harris and Gilman, the two principal subjects of this study. But the complexities, paradoxes, and even convolution into which one can be drawn remain a challenge.

Historian Linda Gordon explains it as a dilemma for those writing history. She writes about the perplexities surrounding the debate, about the risks and consequences of choosing either way. Gordon sees “gender dualism as a constriction of possibility,” and the emphasis on differences between the sexes potentially as a “depoliticizing, even a conservatizing” of work done by women and feminist historians over the past three decades. For, to Gordon, whether one merely concedes difference or glories in difference, the practical result is the same. Issues of chief concern to women are considered private, and hence nonpolitical. On the other hand, however, denial of difference has equally destructive consequences, including psychological alienation and identity confusion. Either choice carries personal or political consequences for women. Women who choose to focus on gender differences risk losing political ground; those who choose to deny the relevance of gender, risk a certain personal fragmentation. “Denial of [gender] difference,” Gordon explains, “can in some circumstances mean inauthenticity, while assertion of difference can lead to retreat from supporting women’s

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 24.

transcendent aspirations.” “Put another way: love of difference can mean a retreat from anger at the limitation of possibility, while hatred of difference can mean self-hatred for women.”¹⁷

The works of Corra White Harris, a relatively unknown Georgia novelist, outspoken antifeminist, and for a time, nationally published social critic, are the primary subject of this dissertation. Her conservative social philosophy in general and her particular brand of antifeminism more specifically, prove fertile ground for the questions posed at the beginning.¹⁸ By way partially of comparative analysis, and also as a

¹⁷Linda Gordon, “On ‘Difference,’” pp. 98-99.

¹⁸A note on my dilemma with the choice of Corra Harris as a subject. Choosing Corra as the primary focus at first seemed problematic, if not peculiar. I was haunted especially in the early stages of research and writing by a nagging sense that I needed continually to justify my interest in her. At some point midway through writing, I returned for reference to an article on antisuffragists and rediscovered at least one plausible explanation for why I had felt so unsettled. It is worth repeating here. In “‘Better Citizens Without the Ballot’: American AntiSuffrage Women and Their Rationale During the Progressive Era,” Manuela Thurner writes (quoting antisuffrage historian Brian Harrison), “For historians, writing about those who ‘back the wrong horse in politics’ is neither an extremely popular nor a very easy undertaking. . . .” Among other reasons I have found on my own and hope to make clear by study’s end, Thurner points out that understanding an oppositional viewpoint helps understand the “tactics, rhetoric, and self-definition” of the proponents; it also gives a “fuller picture of the period’s cultural and political climate.” Her points, and others I have discovered, seem obvious, but they apparently are not to all students of history. My own original misgivings attest to how true it is that our impressions of valid historical subjects are shaped by the profession’s proclivity to focus on political heroes and heroines. The kinds of questions and reactions I have received from some historians asking about my topic attest further to how deeply rooted are those suspicions. One particular special issue of the journal *Gender & History* (Vol. 3, No. 3, Autumn 1991) devoted to a look at “Gender and the Right” demonstrates, nevertheless, in a number of articles the value of studying the oppositional perspective. In that issue Jane Sherron De Hart’s “Gender on the Right: Meanings Behind the Existential Scream,” (pp. 246-268) is particularly relevant in illuminating the possibilities offered from studying the unpopular side. Erin Steuter’s “Women against feminism: an examination of feminist social movements and anti-feminist countermovements,” in the *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 29:3 (August 1992):289-305 is also insightful toward this end. So are the studies of a number of British social psychologists in Suzanne Skevington and Deborah Baker’s, *The Social Identity of Women* (London: Sage Publications, 1989). Especially beneficial are: Patricia Gurin and Hazel Markus, “Cognitive Consequences of Gender Identity” (pp. 152-172), and Christine Griffin, “‘I’m not a Women’s Libber . . .’: Feminism, Consciousness and Identity” (pp. 173-193). See also Kathleen M. Blee’s

theoretical model, the works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the well-known social theorist and reformer, are a secondary subject of the study. I do not, however, in this study deal equally with Gilman and Harris's works. The preponderance of studies on Gilman precludes the need to treat her life or her publications in the same detail, and the scope of this project precludes an examination of her unpublished works. The rationale for choosing these two particular writers is significant (if not readily apparent), and needs explaining. Certainly neither one of them personally represents any particular group of women, yet each in her social philosophy clearly represents opposing political archetypes. Each wrote directly and prolifically on issues of concern to this study; little is left in their works to inference, so that analysis and interpretation are less problematic than they might be with less obvious subject matter. Determining their political position on any given subject is rarely a mystery.

For several reasons the works of Corra Harris proved ideal for the study I was proposing. Her relative historical anonymity (discussed below) as well as the substantial volume of her published and unpublished works both made her an attractive subject. She wrote often and specifically about gender roles in her fiction and non-fiction. Her extensive body of works, including her personal correspondence, is useful for this study, not because she was an especially sophisticated writer, a well-trained, knowledgeable social or political theorist, but precisely because she was not. She was a thinker and a writer limited by a background that provided little more than the basic elements of education. Her training and her outlook were parochial. What makes her work of value

Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

to this study is that it reflects the way an untrained but curious mind might process and attempt to reconcile popular ideas in conflict. Fortunately for someone looking to analyze her thinking, she went to considerable lengths to justify her position, one that, in spite of her unwavering political conservatism, betrays nonetheless, evidence of several conflicting schools of thought. On the surface, and usually in print, she is an unapologetic southern conservative, promoting primarily Old South agrarian and gender ideals. Underneath, in much of her private correspondence, she struggles with many of those beliefs, especially traditional gender role ideology, partly because her own life contradicted tradition so blatantly. It is not primarily the contradictions in her thinking that make her works interesting, though, but more the way she justified the contradictions to herself and to anyone else she felt obliged to explain herself to. Corra Harris's works would be a valuable resource for anyone hoping to understand interplay between gender and political identity. To the extent that much of her reasoning echoes today in conservative political circles, and especially among strident antifeminists, her works warrant note.¹⁹

Significantly, I discovered Corra Harris via Charlotte Perkins Gilman, one whose writings I was already familiar with. When reading works on home and family for a study on antisuffragists preliminary to this one, I found a debate between Harris and Gilman entitled "The Future of the Home" published in 1906 in *The Independent*.²⁰ In

¹⁹See note no. 18 above.

²⁰The editor's identification of the two women in prefacing remarks is interesting, and reflects something of their regard for the two women's political positions. "Mrs. Gilman is a destructive and constructive critic of social affairs. Mrs. Harris is a Southerner." The feature article is titled, "The Future of the Home," *The Independent* (Oct. 4, 1906):788-798; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Home-Worship," pp. 788-792; Corra White Harris (Mrs. L.H. Harris), "The

addition to Gilman's being a contemporary of Harris, the comprehensive nature of Gilman's work makes it an ideal source for the theoretical framework of the study, a framework begun in an earlier paper that led to this dissertation, one in which I examined the rhetoric of antisuffragists, looking for the reasoning behind their arguments. As a means of explaining those ideas, I found the concept of female alienation helpful.

Feminist theorists from several disciplines as well as different philosophical perspectives essentially reexamined the Marxist concept of alienation factoring in gender as an informing component.²¹ They maintain, at bottom, that the ideologies of femininity and domesticity create a uniquely female experience of alienation. The language of female alienation helped explain, in part, the phenomenon of women's opposition to their own

Monstrous Altruism," pp. 792-798; response by Gilman, "Why 'Monstrous?'" p. 798.

²¹Three book titles suffice as examples of the gendered construction of the concept of alienation: *The Alienation of Modern Man* (1959), *Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society* (1962), and *Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and His Industry* (1964). For works devoted specifically to alienation as a female experience, see Sandra Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), and "Narcissism, Femininity and Alienation," *Social Theory and Practice*. vol. 8, no 2 (Summer 1982): 127-143; Sharon Bishop and Marjorie Weinzig, editors, *Philosophy and Women*, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1979); Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault," in Jaggar and Bordo, *Gender/Body/Knowledge* (below); Rose Laub Coser, *In Defense of Modernity: Role Complexity and Individual Autonomy*, (Stanford, 1991); Ann Foreman, *Femininity as Alienation: Women and the Family in Marxism and Psychoanalysis*, (London, 1977); Cindy L. Griffin, "Rhetoricizing Alienation: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Rhetorical Construction of Women's Oppression," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80(1994):293-312; Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1983); Alison Jaggar and Susan Bordo, editors, *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Jean Baker Miller, "The Development of Women's Sense of Self," *Essential Papers on the Psychology of Women*, Claudia Zanardi, editor, (New York University Press, 1990): 437-454; Madonna Kolbenschlag, *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye*, (New York, 1979), and *Lost in the Land of Oz: The Search for Identity and Community in American Life*, (San Francisco, 1988); Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, (San Francisco, 1989); and Iris Marion Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist and Social Theory*, (Indiana University Press, 1990).

political emancipation.²² In light of that theory, antisuffrage rhetoric and reasoning made more sense. Some of the scholars and theorists whose works are noted in chapter four of this dissertation used the language and techniques of social science and social history to explain the relationship between gender and systems of social oppression. They explain that the perpetuation of sexual discrimination results, partially at least, from compliance on the part of women who become alienated socially and psychologically as a means of coping with sexual discrimination and rigid gender role definition.

No one theorist, however, offers a fuller or more comprehensive critique of the social causes and consequences of femininity, domesticity, and the role they play in woman's alienation than Charlotte Gilman. Gilman's works alone encompass a wide range of the same topics addressed by many women who have written in the past three decades. She, like they, theorized the source, meaning, and consequences of female gender identity for the individual and for society.²³ For that among other reasons her works proved a valuable counterpoint for this study. But the juxtaposition of Gilman and Harris's ideas, arguments, and social philosophies also provide a means for exploring an

²²For an alternative view of why women opposed suffrage, see Jane Jerome Camhi, *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920*, (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc. 1994) in Gerda Lerner, ed., *Scholarship in Women's History: Rediscovered and New*. Camhi concludes, among other things, that antisuffragists might, after all, have been less alienated than suffragists were. Believing they had a more viable alternative to social progress than political equality with men, "the Antis had less invested in the status anxieties or social roles of men and were more immune to the feelings of alienation or displacement that may have threatened the suffragists" p. 228.

²³For an alternative and distinctly oppositional view of Gilman see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Bederman believes Gilman's social philosophy, including her feminist insights, is fundamentally undermined and flawed by an inherent and inextricable racism. A more detailed response to her treatment of Gilman is covered in footnote five, chapter four.

issue central to social history in general and women's history in particular: namely how to treat gender difference.

This study draws no definitive conclusions on the issue of gender differences. It offers a look, however, at the potential consequences of being forced to choose one way or the other, and a suggestion of one means of broadening and strengthening the narrow, fragile, line between "loving" and "hating" gender difference. Corra Harris confirms Linda Gordon's assumption that both alienation ("inauthenticity") and withdrawal ("retreat") are likely to follow the dual identity white women develop in their quest for meaning and fulfillment in a world where gender continues to be among the fundamental means of oppression. Harris was a woman who had both a "love of difference" in her public, or her published, life where she promoted traditional roles for women, and a "hatred of difference" in her private life where she was perpetually caught up with denying and disparaging her feminine side, and she suffered from the inability to reconcile these conflicting claims on her identity. Gilman admittedly did not have the same kind of problems with dual identity that Harris had, but her thinking on the subject is not as straightforward as it seems on the surface. A simple interpretation of Gilman's solution to gender inequality (and over all social injustice) would seem to situate her (if on this issue only, otherwise she would be at odds politically) with those who would choose merely a gynocentric over an androcentric culture, one that privileges the feminine over the masculine, one that makes the feminine the universal paradigm. But Gilman was not as simple-minded as this interpretation would suggest. Her many efforts to define what it means to be human, to privilege the human over the "sexed" or the gendered being, could be read with more than one meaning, one of which supports a basis for a

viable alternative moral theory. It is part of the larger purpose of this study to unravel the ideas behind two very dissimilar thinkers to determine how their notions of gender inform their notions of social justice.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. Part One is partially conventional and partially intellectual biography. It deals with the details, events, and relationships that shaped the character and influenced the thinking of Corra Harris. Chapter one is a brief biographical treatment of her life, her family relationships, and her writing career. The second chapter reveals Corra Harris's social philosophy as a whole, largely through her own words, with a focus on the influence region exercised on her thinking. Chapter two includes as well the role other factors, such as poverty, played in shaping her thinking, especially how it and other factors shaped her ideas about human nature. In chapter three I examine her relationship with editor and literary critic, Paul Elmer More, an individual who exercised a considerable influence on Corra's intellectual and moral development as an adult. More was especially significant in, if not shaping, at least affirming, the social and political conservatism she learned at home. Equally as significant, he affirmed, and gave voice, to her evolving ideas about the nature of human nature, and, if not directly, at least through inference, her ideas about the nature of woman's nature. In none of the chapters is there more than passing treatment of the sources chronologically. That is not to say that Corra experienced no intellectual growth or development over time, but the basic social philosophy she made public through her works did not change, and in fact only grew more rigid with time. Where the passing of time influenced or altered her thinking (in the second part) the chronological importance is noted. For the purposes of spelling out her philosophy, however, (especially in chapter two) the issue of historical

time is insignificant.

Part Two is chiefly the delineation of ideas about gender identity and gender roles, those both of Corra White Harris and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.²⁴ Chapter four includes a treatment of the social philosophy of Gilman including her critique of domesticity as a social ideal. It also focuses on the relationship in Gilman's thinking between gender identity and social ideals. Chapter five examines the thinking of Harris and Gilman on the nature of woman, with an emphasis on the repressive elements of thinking on woman's nature in Harris's works and her strident anti-feminism. Chapter six examines Harris's self-perceptions and the personal traits she valued as well as the contradictions between her public and private personae. Chapter seven deals specifically with the value both Harris and Gilman placed on a developed social consciousness. The concluding chapter eight analyzes the implications of the study's findings through the use of "home"

²⁴A note of explanation for the names chosen in referring to Corra Harris and Charlotte Gilman: When analyzing their works together, I refer to them as Harris and Gilman, except when referring to them in their childhood, at which time I most often use their first names. When analyzing Charlotte Gilman's works separately, I refer to her as Gilman. Most often when dealing with Corra Harris's works separately, I refer to her as Corra. I do so because it is what seems most natural. Objectively, I knew when I made the choice to treat the references to each of them differently, that I should, in fact, have treated them equally, and that both should have been referred to by their last names. I attempted that as a method when drafting the first chapters, but, in the case of Corra, it felt awkward to the point that it undermined the drafting process. Once I abandoned the objective rule and referred to them in ways that seemed most comfortable and most natural to me, I was able to proceed apace. This explanation may not be acceptable to all readers, but it reflects the tension from a number of different, sometimes conflicting, schools of historical interpretation that have shaped my own thinking about the writing of history. Of all those different schools of thought--some of them traditional, some Marxist, some feminist, some post-modern--the one from which I claim legitimacy for this decision is the one that revealed and continues to promote the maxim that "the personal is political." My reason for referring to one by her first name and the other by her last name is personal. Although I clearly and unequivocally have more respect and appreciation for Gilman's social philosophy, and conversely, an acute disregard for nearly all of that of Corra Harris, I feel an affinity, a familiarity, even an intimacy with her that I do not feel with Charlotte Gilman. Whether that speaks to the strength of regional identity in us both I am not sure. It is nonetheless the case that I found it an unnecessary constraint to use any rule in this regard other than the one I chose.

as a metaphor. The final chapter relies on the works of several contemporary scholars, historians, poets and others who met at a conference in 1991 to ponder and write about home as a place and an idea to be considered in a time of growing homelessness. Their works help to understand and theorize how certain notions of home shape individuals' perceptions of public and private, and how those latter, in turn, help develop or prevent the development of a social consciousness.

Chapter 1

LIFE AND CAREER OF CORRA MAE WHITE HARRIS

What follows is a cameo of the personal life and writing career of Corra Harris for the general reader unfamiliar with her works or reputation.¹ She was born Corra Mae White March 17, 1869 on Farmhill Plantation in Elbert County, Georgia to Tinsley Rucker White and Mary Elizabeth Mathews White. Farmhill was a two thousand acre plantation “mortgaged to the last cotton bloom,” Corra noted, and she was “the fourth generation . . . to be born under this mortgage.”² Not until she was grown, however, did

¹A more complete account of her life can be found in John E. Talmadge’s conventional biography, *Corra Harris: Lady of Purpose* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1968) and in two autobiographies, *My Book and Heart* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924) and *As a Woman Thinks* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925). In addition to Talmadge’s biography of Corra Harris, several lesser biographical works are cited below. Two that are not cited are Charles Dobbins, “Life of Corra Harris,” *Atlanta Journal Magazine*, Oct. 18, 25, Nov. 1, 8, 15, 1935; and Ruby Reeves, “Corra Harris, Her Life and Works,” Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Georgia, 1940. Karen Bartley Coffing most recently studied Harris and her works: “Southern Womanhood Preached to a National Audience: The Writings of Corra Harris, Author and Novelist,” Masters Thesis, Kent State University, 1993, and “Corra Harris and the *Saturday Evening Post*: Southern Domesticity Conveyed to a National Audience, 1900-1930,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, #2, Summer 1995.

²Harris, “My Book and Heart,” *Saturday Evening Post* (Hereafter referred to as *SEP*) (1 Sept. 1923) p. 3. The biographical information here on Corra Harris comes primarily from several sources: her two autobiographies, *As a Woman Thinks* (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1925) serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post*, August, September and October, 1925, and *My Book and Heart* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post*, September and October 1923; “Memories of an Early Girlhood,” *The Independent*, (May 7, 1903):1071-1075; and the biography by John E. Talmadge. For citation purposes, excerpts from the serialized accounts will be cited in quotes and those from the published works in italics.

Corra discover just “how anguishingly poor” her family had been.³ Both sides of Corra’s family were from Virginia, though she seemed to value her paternal more than maternal kin. Her paternal grandparents descended from cavaliers and migrated to Georgia in the early nineteenth century. The Whites made their livelihood banking and serving in state politics; the Ruckers farmed large Georgia plantations, but they were better known locally for their wit and oratory, traits her father inherited in abundance. Corra’s maternal grandparents also migrated from Virginia. Her mother’s father was a physician, but family traits seem to stem from a “long line of Baptist ancestors”⁴ and strong Puritan roots on both sides of her mother’s family. Corra claims a moderately carefree existence for herself and younger sister Hope, each growing up remarkably free of “self-consciousness.”⁵ There was a much younger brother, Albert, but he figures little in the memories she shares in autobiographical accounts of her life.

Corra recalls both her parents with respect and a sort of disinterested affection. She never expressed publicly anything but respect for them, but her words reveal implicitly if they do not acknowledge explicitly an emotional distance that she felt between herself and them. Her mother she praises for her steadfast religious faith, her resulting “power to endure,” and especially the longsuffering patience she practiced in watching out for Corra’s father’s salvation. Corra believed her mother was one of those

³Corra Harris, “As a Woman Thinks,” *SEP*, (August 22, 1925) p. 112.

⁴Corra Harris, “A Candelit Column,” *The Atlanta Journal*, 10 Nov. 1933. This was a tri-weekly column in which Corra published from Nov. 15, 1931 to April 28, 1935.

⁵Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 45.

women who was genuinely “good,” one who represented a “generation where grace and virtue were the ordinary attributes of women, nothing to make a fuss about.”⁶ Mary White was “literally a religious woman,” with a “stern . . . rigidly orthodox” character. But hers was an unemotional religion. “She would perform her spiritual duties on a cold collar and keep the Commandments without praying or fasting. I have always thought,” Corra writes, “she might have been a trifle short on the Beatitudes, because she practiced them with less emotion than any other person I have ever known.”⁷

Mary “ruled” her household with a kind of “order and righteousness” that affected everyone who entered. “Nothing could be changed in it,” Corra remembered, “least of all [her] mother . . .” Corra’s sense in coming home, wherever she had been, was always as that of the “prodigal son.” Mary “kept a good little house . . . Everything in it was clean, white where it should be white, glistening where it should shine. If [however] by chance an unworthy person crossed her threshold, he brought his former virtues with him and practiced them. She demanded at least noble deceit of goodness.”⁸ But that sort of godly intensity came with a price. This mother was a proud woman. “She had resignation and endurance to a remarkable degree, but she was sublimely deficient in humility.”⁹ (Humility is a dominant female trait glorified in Corra’s fiction.) Corra remembered her having had a “brilliant temper,” the sort of woman Corra would never have thought of

⁶Corra Harris, “My Book and Heart,” p. 5.

⁷Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 31.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 31, 38.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 31.

disobeying. Worse than the temper, though, Mary could also be aloof, keeping an emotional distance between herself and those around her, even her children. When she became preoccupied with her husband's sins, "when she would be wrestling in prayer with that particular angel whose business it was to look after father," it was then especially that she "would pass into silence," become "inaccessible," and "would retire far beyond our reach into some dim land of sorrows where even we were unknown."¹⁰ Corra writes that neither she nor her sister ever "attempted to penetrate into the mystic regions of her gentle spirit"; a "gentle spirit" that they nonetheless had to admire from afar.¹¹ This kind of detachment led Corra to write that she never formed any "apron string attachment," to her mother, nor could she ever "remember crying for" her as a child.¹²

Neither did she recall crying for her father, but she did recall having with him a "certain silent intimacy." "Nothing," Corra writes, "could cure [her] of a dangerous likeness" to her father with whom she was "closer kin" in "mind and spirit" than her mother. She and her father "both were highly sensitized emotionally, but not morally."¹³ Mary's stern character was tempered and even overshadowed at times, by the colorful and quick-witted Tinsley, who loved strong drink a lot more than planting cotton and who

¹⁰Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 32; "Memories of an Early Girlhood," *The Independent*, May 7, 1903, p. 1073.

¹¹Corra Harris, "Memories of an Early Girlhood," p. 1073.

¹²Corra Harris, "My Book and Heart," *SEP*, Sept. 1, 1923, p. 4; "Memories of an Early Girlhood," *Ind.*, May 7, 1903, p. 1073; *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 14.

¹³Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 31, 38.

took Shakespeare as seriously as the Bible. Tinsley “was spiritually minded, but only intermittently religious, during which periods he far outstripped mother in the bloom and beauty of his virtues,” Corra recalled. “But he frequently fell back into original sin, where he seemed to belong.” “Give him a full glass, a roistering companion, and he could race with the devil himself.” Just as quickly, however, “Give him the noblest words of penitence and he could produce the accompanying remorseful emotions.” He was a man as readily “moved to left [as to] the right in the moral world.”¹⁴

Tinsley was never more animated than when under the influence of liquid spirits and pontificating on the War--of which he was a faithful Confederate veteran--or when repenting at Mary’s knee for his sins of indulgence. Corra most often writes of her father with humor, especially his capacity for strong drink followed by “operatic” acts of repentance before the open family Bible. These episodes were always dramatic, “grand,” and “invariably the same”; there was a “methodical routine” about each of them. They followed the classic pattern of sin, fall, repentance, redemption, restoration. The sin and fall always took place elsewhere; the repentance, redemption, and restoration always at home where Corra was “quarantined by the tightening ligaments of my mother’s virtues and obliged to practice my rectitudes more scrupulously than usual. No escape to the terrace outside. And the house felt like a church--terribly hallowed.” Every member of the family had a role to play. “When the hero of the house fell from grace,” she writes, describing her father’s role in one of these scenes, “he disappeared. He was not.” It never failed, though, that Tinsley would “emerge from the dark pit of his transgression”

¹⁴Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 32, 36.

with a “moral grandeur” that made Corra “behold him with awe and speechless admiration.”¹⁵ Tinsley would begin each occasion of repentance in abject contrition, “staring with pale composure at the open Bible,” and end with a “histrionic” prayer so eloquent that it must have been an “honor [for God] to forgive him.”¹⁶ Never mind that in his heart he “dreaded the blasphemy demanded of him”; that was something Mary never knew, and Corra only figured out much later in life.¹⁷

Mary bore Tinsley’s transgressions like any good woman would. She loved him, even “more than she could have loved a better man. Corra believed it was the quality of truly good women, like her mother, to be able to love especially men who were moral rogues, like her father. No matter what he did, how often he fell from grace, Mary “could not be made to forsake him.” Actually she needed him as much as he needed her. Her goodness depended upon his sinfulness, and therefore made the pain and suffering of remaining righteous worthwhile. His falls from grace were her redemption. She looked at them each time “as if she gazed upon her cross and knew she could bear it.” “She loved him with a shrewd tenderness,” for sure, Corra explained, “but let him break his traveling gait toward Heaven and she was the most adroit persecutor of the damned and fallen I have ever known.”¹⁸ Having taken her mission in life seriously, however, Mary could do no other. From beginning to end of each of these incidents, Mary would move

¹⁵Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 33, 32.

¹⁶Corra Harris, “Memories of an Early Girlhood,” p. 1073.

¹⁷Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 35.

¹⁸Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 33, 38.

from some inner state of anguished distress to one with “an expression of crucified joy upon her countenance.”¹⁹

Until the process from her father’s fall to his restoration took its course, it was Corra’s responsibility to sit quietly, but to observe with reverence. It was not easy, but Corra sensed it was necessary. Even when “bursting with emotion” over the “wind of sorrow blowing from the eloquent lips of my father,” she was restrained by the “inscrutable face” of her mother. Sometimes, however, she simply could not take it. Once, especially, “her lid came off in this mysteriously electric atmosphere.” She had listened with solemn restraint as he prayed passionately the words of the psalmist, “Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplication.” And she had managed to “repress” her anguished empathy when he prayed “woefully,” “Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit faileth.” But her resolve broke after “casting a watery glance through my fingers, I saw father wiping his face on the blue curtains. This was too much. I keened my nose and let out a wail that steadied the great mourner and ended his petition.”²⁰ Similar episodes happened at least as often as there was cotton to take to market. Tinsley would leave with fifty bales of cotton and return with “fifty cents in his pocket and never be able to tell what he had done with the cotton.”²¹

But the episodes finally ended when Tinsley became the hero of a temperance drive to vote Elbert County dry. At his wife’s request he rounded up the local freedmen

¹⁹Corra Harris, “Memories of an Early Girlhood,” p. 1073.

²⁰Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 35-37.

²¹Corra Harris, “My Book and Heart,” *SEP*, Sept. 1, 1923. p. 4.

whose vote would determine the outcome. While Mary intended to persuade the recently enfranchised “negroes” with the best food feast she and their wives and mothers could provide, Tinsley had a surer plan in mind. With his connections he was able to provide more liquid incentive than the liquor proponents on the other side of the county. At the end of a week of debauchery, but also a successful campaign to make Elbert County dry, Tinsley was carried home “recumbent.” Nevertheless he had grown so impressed with his role as the hero of a righteous cause that he foreswore strong drink--a promise he managed to keep at least for the rest of Mary’s life.²²

Corra recalls her father’s drinking, as painful as it obviously was to her mother, with amusement ostensibly because when he was drinking the change he underwent, to her and her sister’s minds, was for the better. When sober he was “the most taciturn and unapproachable of men”; when drinking he became a loving and frolicsome playmate riding them on his back and tossing them to the ceiling. He went from being “our paternal sovereign,” a man to behold in awe from a distance, briefly, to being an accessible parent. Neither Corra nor her sister would understand for years the financial price they were all paying for her father’s indiscretions. Nor would they be able until then to appreciate their mother’s long-suffering in dealing with their father.²³ Corra grew to appreciate her

²²Corra Harris, “My Book and Heart,” *SEP*, Sept. 1, 1923, p. 61-2. Reflecting on episodes like this, Corra doubts if her mother would have been much of a Suffragist since she could obviously get whatever she wanted if she wanted it badly enough just by asking her husband.

²³Significantly, the relationship she witnessed between her parents also influenced her view of human nature. Although she maintained throughout her life a negative view of human nature, that view was tempered by the sacrifices her parents made for each other--her father’s giving up strong drink and her mother’s long-suffering patience with him in the interim. Had it not been for this, she writes, “Maybe I should never have learned to see through the perversities

mother's role as wife of a profligate once she married a man of equally destructive excesses.

Corra knew she was a "human hybrid" composed of the "natures" of both her parents, but it was her mother's stern moral training and not her father's emotional nature that had the most dominant effect. As much as she felt an affinity with her father in "mind and spirit," she "inherited some invincible stamina from [her] mother, a capacity for standards and principles," that remained with her all her life. It was her mother's "stamina" and her penchant for "standards and principles," Corra became convinced, that had shaped her character. But more than that, it determined her cosmology, how she would relate to the world, and all outside herself. Mary, a woman meticulously fashioned by place and time, taught her daughter obedience to a God who was righteous and sovereign, but otherwise humorless and dispassionate, and she interpreted the divine scriptures through the same lens. Mary's God and the scriptures as she read them were stronger forces with a more tenacious hold on Corra's thinking than was her father's less troubled spirit and capacity for emotional indulgence. And, given Corra's life, they were surer means of survival in an insecure and unpredictable world. But they exacted a price, she discovered later in life. "The burden of being obedient to mother's God, and later on to the God of a still more drastic saint [her husband], has wearied me," she wrote. The scriptures as interpreted by her mother and then her husband required "too much

of human nature how good men and women really are." Goodness of human nature was measured by sacrifices made in private life, however, never in public life. "My Book and Heart," p. 62.

submission, too much bondage to sacrifice.”²⁴ She was sure she would have been a different person if she had spent her formative years under less legalistic auspices. “I have no idea,” she reflects in *As a Woman Thinks*, “what kind of mind and life I might have had if I had enjoyed the same religious freedom in my youth that I had in choosing the texts I studied.”²⁵

She submitted with her mind, however, not with her heart. And it was her mind, she believed, that had misled her.²⁶ Thinking had betrayed her. “The mind is something else, not us. It is an instrument set up in us, controlled by spiritual forces which reach it through the medium of our emotions.”²⁷ She longed for the ability she remembered having as a child, who “divines peace and happiness without thinking.” Corra knew she had been shaped by what she thought and believed, which she had not revealed in her first autobiography. She had written *My Book and Heart* to tell the story of her life and loves; and it had had popular appeal. Readers had found in it “a record . . . intimate and personal to them”; they had found in it experiences that were “common to us as human beings.” Her second autobiography would have no such effect. She wrote *As a Woman Thinks* to reveal “the drama I have lived in thinking and believing; how the mind I have, determined my conduct, courage, cowardice, and literally created the life I have lived in

²⁴Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 38-9.

²⁵Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 59.

²⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 9, 40.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 129

spite of everything.”²⁸ The book was an admonition, an essay on what not to think and believe. The consequences would be one’s life’s story. “[I]f I show what a dim thing it was in the beginning,” she writes, “how a child divines peace and happiness without thinking, what a terror thinking became afterwards, how bravely and adventurously my mind guided me, how cunningly it misguided me, what burdensome rewards it earned for me, and what dividends in peace I have lost by following the best Scriptures according to my mind--some of you who read this record may get a hint to watch the thing and control it more wisely than I have controlled mine.”²⁹ Considering those who peopled Corra’s life, her failure to manage more “control” over her thinking is easily enough fathomed. Her mother’s austere brand of morality, she tells her readers, would have a greater influence on her throughout her life than her father’s more carefree nature. That it did so was practically insured by the man she chose to marry.³⁰

Corra wed Lundy Howard Harris (1858-1910) February 8, 1887. Lundy grew up a minister’s son in north central Georgia during the Civil War and Reconstruction. As a young man he possessed enviable personal traits. He was strikingly handsome, he had an aristocratic manner, a sharp intellect, and was known by everyone to be a deep thinker. Corra was only one among those who believed he “was not only a learned man; he had an

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 4-7.

²⁹Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 9.

³⁰In addition to her parents and her husband, Corra’s relationship with Paul Elmer More and his writings also had a great impact on her thinking. Chapter three deals with More’s influence on Corra’s moral and intellectual development.

original mind, [was] brilliant and charming.”³¹ He entered Emory College at Oxford, Georgia when he was fourteen and graduated from there just four years later with the B.A. and the M.A. degrees in 1876, trained either to preach, or to teach Greek to others who would preach the Gospel according to evangelical Methodism. At different points in his life he taught, preached, wrote, and published his own vision of that Gospel, even if at times it was at odds with that of his training and of his former mentors. He had the ability to move people with the spoken word, both in public speech as well as in private conversation. But he was a man whose “spiritual vision ruled him,” and some would say, eventually destroyed him. Through it he “saw things which were beyond [the] ken” of his colleagues. Because of it he lived, worked, and prayed for “a world where justice and love reigned.” But his vision of a world ruled by justice and love was not the same as that of his colleagues in the Methodist Church, nor was he ever able to reconcile the opposing views. Many people, especially his students, recalled him fondly, but always with an awareness that he was a man governed by a temperament of foreboding. “He was a great professor, and he made his classes fond of Greek, but even in the classroom the vision of a world to be won for Christ, and so little being done, would come over him and he would drop into fits of deepest gloom.”³² Corra believed his confusion came from having “mixed the fatalism of the Greeks with his Christian faith.”³³ She could not help

³¹Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 199.

³²“Underpaid American Parson is an Accusing Figure,” *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Sept. 25, 1910.

³³Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 114.

wondering after his death if in fact “he might have fared better in the spirit if he had been free as a monk to seek his sacrifices and renunciations.”³⁴ Unfortunately, however, Lundy Harris was a thinking man who came of age at a time when orthodoxy reigned, and in a place where thinking people were anything but free.

Without question, though, he came by his ecclesiastical leanings honestly. He descended from a long line of itinerant Methodist ministers the earliest of whom was ordained by John Wesley.³⁵ Shortly before he was to marry Corra, Lundy announced he would join the ministry as an itinerant, a life to which neither he nor Corra was temperamentally suited. It provided experience for her autobiographical novel, *A Circuit Rider's Wife* (1910), the book that established Corra's career as a writer. Fortunately Lundy did not feel compelled to remain an itinerant. Much to his bride's relief, sometime in 1888 after a short tenure on the circuit in the rural mountains of north Georgia, they moved to Oxford, Georgia where he taught Greek at Emory College, his alma mater, until 1898. From 1898 until 1902 Lundy held several teaching and preaching positions before being appointed as assistant secretary of the Methodist Board of Education in Nashville, Tennessee, where he remained until shortly before his death in the fall of 1910.

Lundy was a complex individual, tortured in his efforts to reconcile a faith steeped in orthodox theology with a curious intellect fascinated with modern liberal theology, or the seductive “higher criticism.” In addition to, or perhaps because of, this impossible conundrum, he was temperamentally moody, melancholic, passionate, and oddly--

³⁴Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p.183.

³⁵Talmadge, p. 7.

considering his background in orthodox theology and evangelical Methodism--a compassionate humanitarian. He had the intellect of a scholar, the temperament of an artist, and the soul and spirit of an early Christian martyr. Doubt in the faith of his fathers and the guilt he suffered from that doubt haunted him until eventually despair drove him to suicide September 17, 1910.

In spite of his intensely spiritual nature (or some might have argued, because of it), Lundy was prone periodically to "backslide." When he did, his indiscretions were often in the form of strong drink and loose women--loose women of color, that is. He claimed that he had never dishonored a white woman.³⁶ And while his two brothers and his Methodist friends forgave his folly, believing that the race of the women "lessened the gravity of his sins," Lundy wrote his good friend Warren Candler that he believed his "conduct was as criminal before God as if a white woman had been" involved.³⁷ From this and other accounts John Talmadge, concluded that Lundy, totally unlike his wife, had a "complete indifference to social distinctions." His different racial and class views along with his extreme religious convictions that bordered on "mania" made Lundy a man much "beyond the comprehension of his devoted friends." For years they tried to explain away his "outrageous conduct" by attributing it to "overwork" and the "tendency to brood." He was simply, they decided, a person who thought "too much and too deeply." Finally, however, after a trek across the Texas desert in search of God in 1898, and the "debauch"

³⁶Talmadge recounts Lundy's numerous "debauches" in his chapter "Pilgrims in a Barren Land," pp. 17-26.

³⁷Talmadge, p. 22.

in Austin that followed, Al Harris concluded with relief that his brother must be mentally insane. “I feel more and more the lifting of a load as my conviction deepens that he is insane.” Of all who knew him, though, Corra “alone,” Talmadge believed, “seemed to grasp the driving force of religion upon his life,” and to understand the relationship between his spiritual life and his mental health.³⁸ When he kept “company as usual with the apostles and certain Old Testament saints like Isaiah,” Corra wrote, he was fine. “He belonged to the Scriptures as truly as ever David did”; it was “when he got out of them he was not sane.”³⁹ And he was not insane when he headed for Texas, she declared. He was merely “seeking God with the same idea of repentance that drove the old monks into the desert.”⁴⁰

Lundy was always contrite after his sinful excesses, like the “Austin debauch,” but his contrition brought Corra more pain than his indulgence. He always felt compelled to confess his sins publicly to gain public exoneration, a display far more humiliating to Corra than knowledge of the infidelity ever could have been. In a letter to their daughter, Faith, many years after Lundy’s death, Corra told her that in spite of Faith’s husband’s shortcomings--which, to Corra, were numerous enough--Faith could be grateful that he was unlike her father at least in some ways. “There are two sorrows that you will escape which have been the hardest for me to bear,” Corra wrote. “Your husband is a clean and loyal man, with no appetite that keeps you in imminent danger of the most poignant

³⁸Quoted in Talmadge, pp. 22-25.

³⁹Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 173.

⁴⁰Talmadge, pp. 22-25.

humiliation and public disgrace.” Unfortunately for Corra, Lundy sought purging and forgiveness at a public altar, after which any other trial she faced because of him paled in comparison. “I endured that and lived through it, until years before your father died nothing he could do really hurt or humiliated me, and I could not feel disgrace.”⁴¹ Nor did the trying episodes finally erode her respect or affection for him. Living with Lundy had brought her the “terrible wisdom of love.” “I cannot doubt,” she wrote reflecting on their marriage, “that I have received the best of my life and nearly every gift that prospered in me from my association with Lundy.”⁴²

Everytime Lundy fell from grace he was haunted by the fearful dread and anxiety of the guilty believer, but Talmadge argues somewhat convincingly that Lundy’s carnal indulgences followed rather than preceded his angst, or that his sinful excesses resulted from his angst rather than caused it. The “immoralities” were merely desperate displays of a man with medieval zeal and outlook disillusioned by his failure to keep religious faith in a modern, secular world. Lundy struggled perpetually to hold on to a faith nurtured in orthodoxy but battered by liberal theology that was changing the face of religion everywhere. He was too much the scholar to dismiss the new knowledge and new perspective as heretical, which was the custom for most ministers of the evangelical faiths in the New South. One journalist eulogized, “Scholar though he was--a great linguist, and a thorough scientist--his faith was as simple as a little child’s, and the advocates of the ‘new theology’ drove him to despair. [His] vision was being destroyed

⁴¹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 6 Mar. 1918.

⁴²Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 183.

by iconoclasts and he knew not how to replace the picture.”⁴³ No one was surprised when Lundy took his life in September of 1910. A friend of Lundy’s told a reporter that “Lundy Harris killed himself because he began his ministry with a vision, and in a moment of black despair he doubted if the vision would ever be realized.”⁴⁴ “He entered the Methodist ministry with a great vision of making the world better, and of drawing it closer to God. He fought strenuously to realize that vision, but all at once the black idea seized him that he had failed and that in spite of his years of endeavor, and hardships the world was no nearer God than when he began his ministry.”⁴⁵ The “black idea” seized Lundy more than once in his life, but circumstances had always redeemed him, at least until that last year when they seemed instead to conspire against him.

Corra blamed the powers-that-be at the Methodist Board of Education for Lundy’s death. They had worked him mercilessly, and though he proved himself over and over a valuable member of the Board, they never made allowances for his dissenting opinions. Some people wondered immediately after his suicide if the publication of *A Circuit Rider’s Wife*, had prompted it. One newspaper reported, “Those who knew, say that Dr. Harris fell into profound melancholy after the publication of ‘A Circuit Rider’s Wife.’ He seemed to think that it was a story of a vision unrealized, and that his life had been a failure.”⁴⁶ Perhaps no one knew whether or not the novel played a role in Lundy’s final

⁴³*Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Sept. 25, 1910.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶*Ibid.* Others afterward attempted to downplay the role of the novel in Lundy’s last bout with melancholia and his final surrender through suicide. The same year Talmadge’s biography

surrender. There was no evidence of it in the note he left. But two passages from Corra's pen suggest that the timing of the novel's publication and Lundy's death were not entirely coincidental. In the first passage from the novel, Corra wrote as Mary Thompson reflecting on the death of her minister husband William, who had "turned over on his spiritual ashheap and died."⁴⁷ She experienced an extraordinary sense of freedom after his death, a lifting of "domination," a sense of personal liberty she had not before known in her life. Reflecting on her own experience Mary realized for the first time that,

a person may be absolutely dominated for years by certain influences and not only feel no antagonism to them, but actually yield with devotion and inconceivable sacrifices, yet, when the influence is removed and there is no longer the love-cause for faithfulness the illusion not only passes, but the person finds himself of his original mind and spirit, emancipated, gone back to himself, what he really was in the beginning before the domination began. Such at least is as near what happened in my own case as I can tell it.⁴⁸

Finally, she "belonged to [her]self"; she was for the first time, a "free moral agent."

"Widows are the only women who are," she added.⁴⁹ Whatever grief or loss she experienced after William's death, nothing was stronger than Mary's newfound sense of

was published, the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, reported in an article published to recall the Georgia novelist, that Lundy Harris's suicide was "not because of anything in the book." Bill Winn, "'Aunt Corra' Harris: Almost Forgotten, She Was Once Famed as a Writer," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 4 Feb. 1968.

⁴⁷Corra Harris, *The Circuit Rider's Wife* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Co., 1910), p. 301.

⁴⁸Corra Harris, *The Circuit Rider's Wife*, p. 305.

⁴⁹*Ibid*, p. 309.

freedom at once again having her “original mind and spirit emancipated.”⁵⁰ One can only speculate what would have been the effect of this on a man dealing with self-doubts the magnitude of Lundy’s.

In another passage from her second autobiography Corra was writing on the subject of happiness, and how it had eluded her throughout her life. The closest she ever came to it was “[s]hortly after ‘A Circuit Rider’s Wife’ was published.” “[I]t seemed to me I saw it [happiness],” she wrote,

as you look a long way down the road and see a wider brighter place where you turn in through a gate and enter your own house. I remember saying something to Lundy about this. We would get away presently from all the cares we had ever had, take a little house in the country and begin to live happy ever after. I remember his silence, the look he gave me. If in the last day when we are called there is one who hears, but cannot rise from his dust, he will have just that look of terrible comprehension.⁵¹

The publication and success of her first book brought Corra as close to happiness as she would come in her life, according to her autobiography. What it brought Lundy is impossible to know; only that “that look of terrible comprehension” that followed shortly after the publication, preceded just by weeks his final decision to take his own life.

If Corra could not rescue her husband from his fated beliefs, she would rescue

⁵⁰Whether or not the novel had anything to do with her husband’s death, the sentiments the passage conveys no doubt explain Corra’s choice to remain a widow for the remainder of her life in spite of her public regard for marriage as the normal woman’s preferred status. See Chapter six below for more on her thinking about widowhood.

⁵¹Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, 182.

their daughter, Faith, from a similar fate.⁵² Corra vowed early in her married life that Faith, first child born to Corra and Lundy December 24, 1887, and the only one to survive to adulthood, would not grow up worshipping the same God as her father.⁵³ Corra “was determined that Faith should have no such God as this.” Convinced that “Lundy’s God” was responsible for his “periods of melancholia,” and that she could neither “change Lundy’s God” nor change him, she swore to keep Faith from ever meeting her father’s God. “If it was the last thing I ever did,” Corra wrote, she was determined that Faith “should inherit the normal distant sky-line God of my family. I did my best to make her a spunky little human first.” She apparently was successful; at least as long as Faith was a child, she and Corra “enjoyed many cheerful blessings in a normal way without discussing divine sources.”

Unfortunately, Corra would discover later, not all of Lundy’s melancholia came from his God. It was apparently a part of his biological makeup, a part he lamentably passed along to his daughter. Corra spent much of Faith’s adult life counseling her daughter on how to handle her brooding moods, hoping she could learn to do so more successfully than did her father. Although Faith did not take her own life like her father had--she was too busy nursing a husband absorbed in his own despair--she spent much of it battling against the same kind of “melancholia” and anguish that characterized her father’s life. She graduated from Woman’s College in Baltimore in June 1909, married

⁵²Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 114.

⁵³Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 114. The Harris’s had two sons after Faith, one died as an infant and the other at age two.

Harry Leech from Nashville (against her mother's better judgment) in December 1910 just a few months after her father's death, and was at the beginning of what looked like a promising literary career following in her mother's footsteps when she died unexpectedly of an undisclosed illness in 1919.

Corra's relationships with her daughter and son-in-law provide insight into her identity analyzed in more detail below. Except for a brief period when Faith's mutual devotion to her husband and her mother was challenged, Corra and Faith were not only mother and daughter but they were best friends. Their relationship was typically volatile when Faith married against her mother's wishes, and especially when Faith and Harry moved into Corra's home, which became known popularly as "the Valley," for a couple of years to help get the Valley farm started, but mother and daughter became closer than they had been at any time previously not long after Faith and Harry moved to Atlanta to live on their own. Unlike Corra's official explanation that the Leech's could not make a go of farming, they moved because Harry simply could not abide his mother-in-law as a supervisor, not even when much of the time they lived together Corra spent away working on stories for one or more magazine editors. The antagonism Corra and Harry felt mutually even before the marriage, only grew afterwards. Harry resented the fact that Corra was financially self-sufficient and interpreted every gesture on her part as a deliberate air of superiority because of her independence. Corra resented Harry for many reasons, not the least of which was her awareness that he would never be able to provide the kind of lifestyle she wanted for Faith, but neither would he allow Faith to accept financial help from her mother. Much of Faith's time the last few years of her life was

spent trying to balance her loyalty between her husband and her mother, a task made especially difficult by Harry's refusal after they moved ever to speak to or to visit Corra again, a vow he kept until a few months before Faith died. His repeated career failures and their resulting financial struggle kept Harry in states of ill health both mentally and physically most of the time. And much of Corra's life from 1916 to 1919 was spent getting underground support, both moral and financial, to her daughter without Harry's knowledge.⁵⁴ The value of that support in fostering an exceptionally close mother-daughter bond is evident in the letters between Corra and Faith in the three years before Faith died. Her life was cut short from a sudden complication in a medical condition she and her mother both sought carefully to keep concealed.⁵⁵ With Faith's death Corra lost not only a close daughter, but the only truly close friend she ever had, and buried with her the last of genuine intimacy she would share with another person.⁵⁶

⁵⁴A perennial problem for Corra was not only keeping the Leechs housed, clothed, and fed according to standards she set for her daughter's well-being, but to be able to trick them both in the process. Getting support to them "on the sly," or behind Harry's back, was difficult enough, getting Faith to accept the support without the attendant guilt took a mastery of psychological persuasion that was probably Corra's chief strong-suit. She did so by convincing Faith that the quality of life for all three of them ultimately depended on Faith's success in the literary world. To be successful in a writing career, one had to have more than the mere essentials of life, one had to be relieved from "household drudgery." At the very minimum Faith had to have help with meals. Addie, a long-time servant of Corra's and a favorite of Faith's, helped when Corra could spare her. When Addie's services were needed back in the Valley, though, Corra had to make other arrangements, as she did one spring when there was a turn over there in the domestic staff. "In exchange [for "lending" Addie back to her] I will pay for Harry's meals down town, on the sly of course!" (Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, March 31, 1919)

⁵⁵The exact cause of Faith Harris Leech's death is not revealed possibly because the source of the illness was gynecological. For Faith, there was a certain stigma or embarrassment attached to female medical problems. See chapter five below for further explanation.

⁵⁶Corra had never been very good at making friends. As a girl in school she had been considered "a little 'queer' because she made no close friends," nor did she change with maturity. A half-sister recalled after her death, "it was not easy to get close to Corra."

Between Faith's death in 1919 and her own in 1935 Corra's greatest pleasure in life was entertaining family and associates in the Valley. Her personal life evolved around three nephews (Hope's sons), and to a greater extent, Bettie and Trannie Rains. The nephews and their families visited Corra as often as they could, and wrote more than they might have liked.⁵⁷ Bettie and Trannie were two young neighborhood girls who came to live with Corra in the early 1920s to work off a twenty dollar debt their mother owed her. In short time Corra found the two girls to be amiable companions and all but legally adopted them both, though she was fond of claiming they adopted her. There are numerous letters among the three, most of them between Corra and Bettie, and many of them written in 1925 when Corra was in California working on her last autobiographical work, *The Happy Pilgrimage* (1927). Bettie especially became a substitute for Faith. When she wanted to compliment Bettie, whose diction, grammar, and style were

(Talmadge, p. 6) She was aware of her lack of sociability and expressed concern about it on occasion. "I am not temperamentally fit to go among strangers," she wrote Adelaide Nealle (15 Feb. 1914). And to Faith she confided after having successfully entertained a crowd of guests one evening: "Pinkie, my dear, I shall never, never be able to live with people again, not those of the world. They seem so *trivial, so gullable!* I want to talk about this when I see you. I am anxious, seriously anxious about myself. Is the trouble with me? Have *I* become cynical, hard, suspicious? Or, is . . . [everybody else] a fool?" (Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 7 Oct. 1918) Intimacy was something she simply kept closely reserved. Faith, may have, in fact been the only genuine friend Corra had in life. Talmadge notes that "Faith's death brought a deeper grief than the one she had endured after Lundy's suicide. He had wanted to die, had taken his life, and if he had refrained, his future would have been dark and uncertain. Mrs. Harris's reaction to the loss of her husband had been anger and resentment that it had to be. Faith's death, on the contrary, seemed to drain her of all emotions. She had lost more than a daughter: she had lost her only companion, the one person to whom she could give her confidence." (Talmadge, p. 101)

⁵⁷If they were to stay in their aunt's good graces, they and their spouses must write. The more grateful and adoring the letters the better; otherwise Corra would threaten to cut them out of her will. Among others, see, John Harris to Corra Harris, Nov. 23, 1925; Fred Harris to Corra Harris, June 28, 1926 and Sept. 26, 1926.

untrained at best, and whose spelling made Corra's notoriously bad spelling look masterful, Corra would tell her in a return letter how much it read just like something Faith would have written.⁵⁸ The Rains sisters and Corra's nephews and their families were Corra's companions the last years of her life. More than anything, however, she enjoyed and lived for the serenity, solitude, and isolation of the Valley. After Faith's death she wrote editor and friend George Horace Lorimer that from then on she lived and wrote to make enough "money to spend on this land which is the only dear and living interest I have."⁵⁹

The isolation of the Valley symbolized much of Corra's life. Her familiarity with loneliness and her frustrated attempts to find happiness provide some of the material for this study. She wrestled with loneliness in those years between Faith's death and her own--a theme that pervades her autobiography, *As a Woman Thinks*. But she seemed reconciled to the idea that loneliness was life's primal reality, and happiness its ultimate illusion. "Live and die under your own roof," she advised the aging. "I have a suspicion that it is a lonely passage, even if everybody is present."⁶⁰ Such had become the sum of Corra's philosophy. It seemed at one point she had had a fleeting chance at happiness, when she first began to write, and then she realized happiness was something one needed to know how to handle, not something for the novice. "I had no practice [at happiness],

⁵⁸Corra Harris to Bettie Rains, April 18, 1925. "What you said in the last sentence of your letter about the flowers not caring to be where they cannot be seen in the house sounded almost like little Faith," Corra wrote Bettie about a letter she had especially enjoyed.

⁵⁹Quoted in Talmadge, p. 102.

⁶⁰Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 191.

not a day when I was free from care and one great anxiety--and one must be free to be happy. I know that much about it by having missed it.”⁶¹ William Tate remembered a visit with her in her later years, when she “was an old and tired woman, disappointed perhaps in the sale and reputation of her books, kindly jealous of more popular writers--wondering how the years would deal with her books”⁶² Sadly for Corra, time has not dealt so kindly with her books.

The market, however, at least during her life, dealt relatively generously with them and much of her other work. Well known locally and regionally for most of her adult life (and to a lesser extent since her death), her fame was nationwide at one time. For at least a decade and a half from the publication of her first novel in 1910 through the late twenties she was widely known and published. Her career was lucrative enough to support herself and Lundy during the last years of his life, herself after his death, her daughter and son-in-law much of their lives together, two “adopted” daughters later in her life, as well as that of other close relatives on occasion. Among the numerous honors she received in her lifetime she became one of the first women war correspondents in 1914 when *The Saturday Evening Post* sent her to Europe to survey and write about the effects of the war on European women. She gained a reputation as a novelist, short story writer, book reviewer, essayist, and social critic, and became an exceptionally accomplished woman who achieved against odds that would have felled many a determined, ambitious,

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁶²William Tate, “Recollections of Corra Harris,” *The Georgia Review* Vol. V (Spring 1951):1-12; p. 2.

and self-motivated person.

Her writing career actually started by accident when she was forced to find a way to supplement her family's income. She makes clear in her autobiographies that her writing career began not with the desire to write but with the need to survive.⁶³ After Lundy had been exiled from the ministry for his unorthodox views (among other reasons) to teach high school at a "little village far up in the mountains" of North Georgia, his salary was supposed to be \$300 annually, but months would pass when they would see no pay at all. After selling everything they owned but her husband's books, Corra concluded they were in "a desperate emergency," or dire financial straits.⁶⁴ She knew she would have to do something, though exactly what was unclear. The only paying job she had ever had in the past was teaching school, but she had found that to be an onerous chore, not something she ever wanted to do again. Fortunately for her, Providence intervened and spared her the indignity of having to return to the class room to teach "a lot of empty headed, impudent girls."⁶⁵

Instead of teaching to help earn her family's living, it soon became clear Corra

⁶³Among other places, Corra makes this clear in *My Book and Heart*, p. 251 and *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 142-44.

⁶⁴Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 142.

⁶⁵Corra Harris to Faith Harris, March 22, 1909. In this letter Corra pleads with her daughter not to go into teaching; it was the worst job a woman could possibly do, for several reasons. "If you teach you give up liberty, you give up all literary propsects, for you will not have the vitality to do anything *but* teach. . . . You can only make a pittance teaching" Not only did teaching deplete energy for literary prospects, it kept women from preparing themselves for their primary responsibility in life. "Nothing is more pathetic than a woman going into a home of her own with no knowledge of its problems, no practical experience in solving them. This is what happens to women who teach till they marry."

would write. She responded to a scathing, indignant editorial in the *Independent* by superintending editor William Hayes Ward on the lynching in Georgia, April 23, 1899 of Sam Horse, a black man accused of killing a white farmer and raping his wife. She replied to the editorial with a letter to Dr. Ward, “giving the Southern woman’s explanation of lynchings, which was by no means a defense of this regrettable practice among Southern white men, but placing the responsibility where it belonged so clearly that it amounted to an indictment.” Dr. Ward published Corra’s letter and was so impressed with the reader reaction to it, he invited Corra “to submit something else.”⁶⁶ Thus with an impassioned letter indicting foreigners in the North for provoking the rabble in the South to “the regrettable practice” of lynching, Corra’s writing career began.⁶⁷

Afterward, she published book reviews, articles, and short fiction in the *Independent* regularly until 1910 and then intermittently until 1920. In addition to her

⁶⁶Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 179.

⁶⁷As did her long and friendly association with the editorial staff at the *Independent*, in spite of the seemingly stark differences in their political and social opinions. Neither Dr. Ward’s background nor his views could have been more opposed to Corra’s. David Lee Hitchens writes, “A phenominal [sic] linguist of gigantic intellect, Ward at six years of age read the Bible in Hebrew, at nine in Latin, and at twelve in Greek. In his spare time he studied Ancient Assyria, leading the expedition of the American Institute of Archaeology to Babylonia in 1884 and 1885. He once refused the Harvard chair of Assyriology to stay with the weekly [*The Independent*], where he worked with the energy of ‘a human dynamo.’ Outspoken in his liberalism, Ward violently opposed all bigotry, and wrote on race lynchings with acrid candor.” (David Lee Hitchens, “Peace, World Organization, and the Editorial Philosophy of the Independent Magazine, 1899-1921,” an unpublished dissertation, University of Georgia Repository, LX16.1968).

Nonetheless, when Ward realized Corra’s invectives could “ruffle” more “tempers” than could his “acrid candor” he would agree to let the staff of *The Independent* indulge her with space in the journal as often as she could contribute, and pay her, as long as she was willing to write. Talmadge describes Corra’s relationship with Dr. Ward as that of “an unpredictable daughter and an indulgent, amused father.” (pp. 29, 33)

association with the *Independent*, Corra published well over 200 articles, reviews, and works of short fiction in magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Harper's*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Pictorial Review*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and others. She published fourteen novels, including two which became films. In 1920 her novel *Making Her His Wife* became the movie "Husbands and Wives." Then in 1951 Twentieth-Century Fox made her first and most popular novel, *A Circuit Rider's Wife*, into the feature length motion picture *I'd Climb the Highest Mountain*.⁶⁸ In addition to the two autobiographies noted above, she published an autobiographical account of a trip to California titled *Happy Pilgrimage* (1927), which, along with *My Book and Heart* and *As a Woman Thinks*, was serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post*. She collaborated on two separate works: *The Jessica Letters* (1904) with Paul Elmer More, the man who became her principle mentor, and *From Sunup to Sundown* (1919) with her daughter, Faith Harris Leech. A complete bibliography of her works can be found in Talmadge's biography. Posthumous critics of Corra's writing have not been generous. The most fatal criticism was one any aspiring writer of literature would die to avoid: she wrote foremost to sell. Critic Walter Blackstock believed that readers of Corra's fiction "instinctively feel that [she] chose and handled her subject with the consciousness of its saleability." Further, he concludes, "The most deserving of it suggests the possibility of a growth which proved abortive."⁶⁹

⁶⁸The screen play was written and the film produced by Lamar Trotti, and starred Susan Hayward, William Lundigan and Rory Calhoun. The film was just released on video Spring 1995.

⁶⁹Walter Blackstock, "Corra Harris: An Analytical Study of Her Novels," *Florida State University Studies in English and American Literature*, 19(1955): 39-92, pp. 91-2.

The circumstances surrounding her entry into the literary world explain at least why she began with a strong “consciousness of its saleability.” Why her “growth . . . proved abortive” is a more complex issue, but probably it relates to the length of time she, for survival, remained conscious of the “saleability” of her work. Corra had no illusions about what it took to be a great writer; that raw talent was not enough; that time, energy and proper training were essential. In spite of her success, moreover, she often expressed secret doubts about the legitimacy of her fame as a writer. Corra no doubt would have been displeased with Blackstock’s assessment of her as a writer whose growth proved “abortive,” but it is unlikely she would have been surprised.

A letter to her daughter indicates that at a critical time in Corra’s development, she was forced to take the talent she had and channel it for expedience into the market rather than train and discipline it for possibly a more lasting cause. A few months before she was scheduled to graduate from college, Faith wrote her parents that for financial reasons she was considering a career in teaching. Corra wrote back pleading with her daughter not just to forget teaching, but to come home and let them support her, detailing several very important reasons why it was in everyone’s best interest for her to do so. First, and arguably foremost, Corra wanted relief from some of the perennial burdens of housework so she could channel more of both her time and energy into writing. “*I am tired,*” she wrote. “I am so tired that I *must* have a chance to relax. I *cannot* go on working so hard. But that is not all,” she continued. “I want a chance to do something besides literary drudgery. I want the liberty to work at other things. . . . I want to feel free if the chance opens to travel and write. Above all I want the chance to write a novel. I

have never had it. I have always had to do the thing that would pay the quickest.”⁷⁰

Corra knew she had been producing mostly “hack” work, but felt she was capable, with the right breaks, of much better work.⁷¹ “If you will come home,” she begged her daughter, “and give me the chance I think I could do something.” Otherwise, Corra feared, she might not get another chance. She had a suspicion that by developing the talent to write for popular consumption she might be stifling the talent to write for posterity, but without relief she believed only Faith could give her, she had no choice but to continue writing for expedience. She had more than just her own literary future in mind, though. She had plans for Faith. “I have served a long apprenticeship, largely for your sake, to hold the work for you.” Corra wanted a break for herself because she sensed that her days to try for something better were numbered. The same was not so for her daughter, however, who was at the beginning of what could be a very successful writing career; but if she did not take care to make the right decisions in her youth, she would find herself with her mother’s same dilemma. “Take warning yourself,” Corra wrote, “and come home to your *own rest and rest before it is too late!*”⁷² As much as she hoped otherwise, the long and tiring years Corra had to write to survive explain at least in part why her growth was one “that proved abortive.”

A dilemma for all of Corra’s literary critics seemed to be how properly to classify her writing tradition. Describing her style, Blackstock explains, “The author’s self-

⁷⁰Corra Harris to Faith Harris, March 22, 1909.

⁷¹Reference to hers as “hack work” from letter to Paul Elmer More, Feb. 24, 1909.

⁷²Corra Harris to Faith Harris, March 22, 1909. The emphasis is hers.

consciousness might seem to be conceit, but a long view of her work suggests that her fault was simply mechanical inability to write in the third person.” That and similar other problems made her fiction difficult to categorize. Blackstock believed it “approached a realistic tradition,” though it could not properly be considered realism. “Whenever one refers to modern fiction as realism, critical realism, naturalism, or stream-of-consciousness,” Blackstock wrote, “Corra Harris must be mentioned apart from these descriptions. Besides, her writing cannot be considered to represent a definite tradition even of its own.” Nevertheless Blackstock believed that “[r]egardless of her faults, it is significant that the novels of Corra Harris separate her clearly from the tradition of sentimental fiction.” For this if no other reason she deserves “some memorial in the history of American literature.”⁷³ Grant Overton, another critic, believed that Corra’s fame rested in her arch-individualism, a trait which marked her uniquely as a “national.” Her distinction was “not so much ‘literary’ as national. [Her] work could be nothing but American.”⁷⁴

William Tate also found that her “individuality” is what set her work apart, and that her “strong personality” characterized her writing as well as herself as an individual. “I felt she held center stage” he wrote after visiting her. And “it was so in her writings, where she was ever resolutely herself--not the voice of any generation, not the leader of

⁷³Blackstock, pp. 91-2.

⁷⁴Grant Overton, *The Women Who Make Our Novels* (New York: Moffat, Yard & Company, 1922), p. 154.

any literary movement, nor the echo of any other writer.”⁷⁵ L. Moody Simms, Jr. portrayed Corra as a “perceptive southern critic” if not an accomplished writer of fiction.⁷⁶ Even though she was an ardent southern loyalist, she was not timid about criticizing southern writers. “We are fairly intelligent, we have splendid dramatic material, and we are brave enough to fight, right or wrong,” Simms quoted Corra writing in the *Independent* in 1908, “but *nothing* will induce us to tell the truth about ourselves that is not complimentary, no matter how thrilling it should prove to be.”⁷⁷ This perception on Corra’s part, the fact that she “was certainly not typical as far as turn-of-the-century southerners were concerned,” Simms believed makes at least her work as literary critic of lasting interest.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Tate, p. 3.

⁷⁶L. Moody Simms, Jr., “Corra Harris on the Decline of Southern Writing,” *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South*, Vol. XVIII #2 (Summer 1979):247-250; p. 247. See also “Corra Harris, William Peterfield Trent, and Southern Writing,” *Mississippi Quarterly*, Vol. 32 #4 (Fall, 1979):641-650; and “Corra Harris on ‘Literalism’ in Fiction,” *Resources for American Literary Study*, Vol IX #2 (Autumn, 1979):213-217.

⁷⁷Quoted in Simms, “Corra Harris on the Decline of Southern Writing,” p. 249.

⁷⁸The reason that Corra, otherwise a staunch southern partisan, could transcend her regional loyalties when it came to literature is best explained by the strong influence of Paul Elmer More, the literary critic from whom she learned the tricks of the trade. The extent of More’s influence is found in a letter to him in which she told More that after she read his criticisms of a book she had admired, she “could no longer stay in the same room with it.” Ardent regionalist that she was though, after being tutored by More, Corra developed relatively high standards, considering her limited educational background, for evaluating a work of fiction. Afterward her regional loyalty was tempered by standards More taught her of the artistic value of a work. If she felt that a book by a southern author was not up to par, she was not above saying so, and with biting criticism. She despised Thomas Dixon, for instance, who was noted for his work *The Clansman* (1905) upon which D.W. Griffith’s silent film *Birth of a Nation* (1914) was based. Dixon was “a vulgar creature,” an “ossified stick of vanity and selfishness,” whom she “snub[bed] every chance [she] got.” Even though they held “mutual southern prejudices,” and his work was devoted to the same principles as hers, she and he both knew that she held greater “influence” over opinion at the *Independent* “against his books.” She felt a lot more loyalty to

Writing before Simms, John Talmadge, who knew her work (and her life) better perhaps than any other, also believed her at times to be a perceptive reviewer. Admittedly a “conservative, moralistic viewpoint colored her literary criticism,” he noted explaining that Corra’s “inheritance and upbringing had made too much impression for her to accept alien ideas.” Nonetheless, “when she came to grips with a book, she could always find something intelligent or at least interesting to say.” He found three book reviews particularly “interesting.” “In reviewing *The God of His Fathers*,” Talmadge writes, “she declared that Jack London “gathers up every situation in his fists, squeezes the blood out of it on the snow, scatters the bones of his heroes, and goes on to the next tragedy.” She was perceptive enough to recognize in *Bismarck’s Love Letters* that the Iron Chancellor prized highly his wife’s “innocent nature.” Even when Mrs. Harris indulged in rhetorical flourishes she could still make a point, as when she decided that “William Dean Howells . . . can no more interpret the mob mind of America than he can get drunk and paint the town red.”⁷⁹

Whatever were Corra’s strengths or claims to fame in her lifetime, though, or by the few critics or admirers since then, except locally, she has largely been forgotten. She was not mentioned, for instance, in the recently compiled *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1989) which includes a fairly comprehensive section on southern

the principles she learned from More on literary criticism than she felt for blind allegiance to the ideals she shared in principle with “bad” southern writers.

Corra did, however, tell More that no matter what he said, she was “determined not to be turned against [George Washington Cable’s] ‘The Cavalier!’” (Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 13 Dec. 1901; 2 Dec. 1903; and letter “Sunday” following envelope dated 11 Jan. 1904).

⁷⁹Talmadge, pp. 30-31.

literature.

Many of her contemporaries, however, likely would not have believed Corra would ever be forgotten. Some of the most gratifying praise for her, no doubt, was that in which critics compared or at least mentioned her favorably with celebrated authors. Southern writer Edward Mims ranked her with Ellen Glasgow.⁸⁰ A reader from Chicago told her that she wrote “nearer to old mother earth than did George Eliot.”⁸¹ Another reader believed he saw “flashes of genius as good as any writing I have seen outside of Shakespere [sic]” in her books *The Circuit Rider’s Wife* and *In Search of a Husband*.⁸² A writer from *The Times* wrote, “You are much more adept than Sherlock Holmes when it comes to analysis . . .”⁸³ And Hamilton Holt, editor of the *Independent*, likened the day of the journal’s discovery of Corra Harris to those of their discovery of Robert Frost and Sydney Lanier. “As I look back now I recall but one red-letter day like it in *The Independent* office--the day when Robert Frost--a stripling of eighteen--sent in his first poem.” Or perhaps “that day when Sydney Lanier’s first poem came in . . . when the whole staff gathered round [Dr. Ward’s] desk . . . to listen while he read it aloud.” Moreover, in Holt’s opinion Corra’s first autobiography put her in the company of four of the western world’s most renowned autobiographers. “I know of only two living Americans who seem . . . to have the courage, candor and literary ability--the three

⁸⁰Bernice McCullar, “Writer Corra Harris Kept Haunting Sorrow a Secret,” *The Atlanta Journal*, January 19, 1966.

⁸¹Frederick O. Stewart to Corra Harris, January 29, 1911.

⁸²H.J. Martin to Corra Harris, December 13, 1913.

⁸³Henry Warnack to Corra Harris, March 23, 1912.

essentials for supreme autobiography writing--to emulate these four immortals [Benvenuto Cellini, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Herbert Spencer and Benjamin Franklin]. One is E.W. Howe . . . The other is Corra Harris." In her autobiography and in everything she wrote, she had an "unerring sense of the value of words," Holt believed, and a style "no editor could improve" upon.⁸⁴

But Holt's opinion of Corra had formed years before the publication of her first autobiography.⁸⁵ Her letter to Dr. William Hayes Ward's editorial on lynching in the *Independent* Holt believed, "evidenced both in form and substance that something which for want of a preciser definition we call genius." But her genius was not limited to her writing ability. It was more penetrating than that. "Corra Harris knows the human heart as does, in my judgment, no contemporary writer in America," he wrote, careful to add, "certainly [as] no woman writer [does]." There was something about Corra's earthiness that charmed Holt; perhaps it was the fact that "she [was] hardly educated at all," or that up to the time he brought her to New York she had "never been away from the red earth and brown streams of her beloved Georgia." In any case, he claimed, "I have never met a soul in my life who could tell you so many true things about yourself that you never even

⁸⁴Hamilton Holt, "A Circuit Rider's Wife in Literature," *The Literary Digest International Book Review* (November 1924):871-73; p. 871.

⁸⁵Holt's admiration and amiable feelings for Corra appear to have been genuine, lasting throughout her life. At his request she accepted a temporary position as "Professor of Evil" at Rollins College in Florida when he took over there as president. And although she had little tolerance typically for liberal political opinions, she had enough respect for Holt, like co-editor William Hayes Ward, that she was willing "to live with his unquenchable liberalism." (Talmadge, p. 33) Interestingly, though her association with both Ward and Holt lasted much longer than it did with More, the latter had the most lasting impact on her thinking. See chapter three.

suspected before, and yet you instantly recognized as so.” And Corra was able to use this gift of insight into the human heart in a remarkably rare way--she could use it to evaluate herself. Such explained the caliber of her autobiography. Most surprising of all about the whole phenomenon, Holt wrote, “But Mrs. Harris is a woman. As no other woman I know, she can if she will explain the mystery of womanhood.” But alas, she would not. It was the book’s one shortcoming. With a bit of disappointment Holt confides to the reader that *My Book and Heart* did not reveal those mysteries of womanhood that he might have wanted, but in retrospect it was probably best that womanhood was left a “mystery.” Then (still in clueless condescension) he declared Corra’s autobiography to be without doubt certainly if “not a masculine, it [was] a feminine masterpiece.”⁸⁶

Holt was not alone in his thinking that Corra had unique insight into human nature, or in his surprise at the fact that such insight could be found in a woman. Although most of the professionals who wrote praising Corra were men, one medical doctor from Eureka, California proved an exception. Mabel A. Geddes, M.D. wrote, “I believe your greatness lies in your ability to penetrate deeply into the vast pool of human frailties and emotions and to bring up in your fingers the glowing rubies of human affections of the bones and feathers of our less worthy passions.”⁸⁷ In a tone similar to Holt’s, a reviewer from *The Inter Ocean* wrote to Altemus Publishing Company about

⁸⁶Georgia journalist O. B. Keeler went even further than Holt in his praise of *My Book and Heart*. Keeler believed it was “the greatest autobiography ever given the world.” O.B. Keeler, “Corra Harris Takes First Rest in 27 Years: Author expresses her view on reform, food, education, salvation,” *The Atlanta Journal*, February 22, 1925.

⁸⁷Mabel A. Geddes, M.D. to Corra Harris, Sept. 9, 1925.

The Circuit Rider's Wife expressing his surprise over Corra's gender. About her first novel this particular reviewer wrote, "There is abundance of good humor of the sort, half-cordial and half-whimiscal, that women do not generally see and understand in this 'A Circuit Rider's Wife,' wherefore it seems rather astonishing to one that it is a woman . . . who is the author of the book." He continued, "Her pathos is as cordial, truly human, as her humor. It is not made mushy." He hoped Altemus would pass along his gratitude to Corra for this timeless piece. Even a woman deserved credit for such insight and for lending some kind of sane wisdom to a literary world run amuck with misguided sentiment. "We thank her so because our thanks are due to anyone who shows us just that kind of sturdy human nature in an age where there's too much neurotic driveling."⁸⁸

Corra had a diverse lot of admirers inside the world of professional literary criticism, but she had far more lay-admirers. They were both distant and close to home, male as well as female, highly to barely literate, socially prominent to socially outcast, and much in between. The most surprising letters of praise, however, given the domestic nature of her subject matter, came from men in the business and professional classes.⁸⁹

⁸⁸C. L. Searcy to Altemus Publishing Company, Aug. 29, 1910 in the *Corra Harris Collection*. *The Inter Ocean* was a Chicago newspaper which "devotes more space to literary matters than any other Chicago morning paper and therefore has the most select literary following."

⁸⁹The following are offered to demonstrate the wide-ranging appeal of Corra's works. Lawyers made up a considerable number of the professionals. Attorney W.W. Ballew from Corsicana, Texas wrote, "I enjoy your writings more than anything I read in way of Popular Literature." The Chief Attorney of the Law Department of United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company of Baltimore wrote for an autographed copy of *My Book and Heart*, and asked, "Do you contemplate at any time having an uniform edition of your books published? It ought to be done, and if so, you may put me down as a subscriber." An attorney in Sumter, South Carolina wrote after reading her serialized work "A Circuit Rider's Widow" asking how he might get it and others in book form. Another South Carolina attorney from Greenville wrote, "I agree

Bankers, in fact, made up some of Corra's most earnest admirers.⁹⁰

Harris received widespread support for her position in a debate with Charlotte

thoroughly with everything contained in the book [*A Circuit Rider's Wife*]." Attorney Stovall Johnson from Memphis especially appreciated *Eve's Second Husband*, where he found "so many things are put in so true to life and put in so artistically that the art is concealed." A dentist from Newport, Tennessee reviewed one of Corra's books for the local newspaper and was so taken with it that he hung a picture of her on his office wall. A professor from the History and Political Science Department at the University of Arkansas "sat up till midnight last night to finish 'Circuit Rider's Widow.'" A doctor from Los Angeles was effusive: "If anything has appeared in literature since David Copperfield and Vanity Fair that equals 'The Recording Angel' . . . it has escaped the notice of the writer. Corra Harris, whether man or woman I know not, has a seat in the Hall of Fame." An accountant from New York "loved its [*The Recording Angel*] teachings." The General Manager of the Gainesboro, Tennessee Telephone Company told Corra "You have come closer to nature and have a better insight into the character of to day than any writer I have had the pleasure of following." The manager of Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada wrote, "If there has ever anything been done in literature in the way of character-sketching that surpasses these stories, I have failed to see it, and I have read more widely than the average man--they are classics." The secretary of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Connellsville, Pennsylvania was not the type generally to praise effusively, but he made an exception in Corra's case. "It is not often that I am so moved by a tale of fiction that I do other than admire it silently," the secretary wrote, "but I was so deeply impressed with 'The Son of Old Blood' that I take the liberty of expressing to you my deep appreciation of this short story masterpiece." W. W. Ballew to Corra Harris, July 8, 1924; Joseph A. McCullough to Corra Harris, July 23, 1924; R. O. Purdy to Corra Harris, Oct. 20, 1916; J. F. Woodward to Corra Harris, July 3, 1924; J. M. McCullough to Corra Harris, Aug. 9, 1910; Stovall Johnson to Corra Harris, Jan. 1, 1911; Dr. J. F. Woodward to Corra Harris, July 3, 1924; Professor David Thomas to Corra Harris, Oct. 22, 1916; Dr. George W. Carey to Corra Harris, March 12, 1912; John Byron Dame to Corra Harris, Sept. 19, 1913; James N. Cox to Corra Harris, April 18, 1912; David Thomas to Corra Harris, Oct. 22, 1916; C.E. Kregloe to Corra Harris, Oct. 27, 1916.

⁹⁰The president of the United States Savings Bank in Washington, D. C. wrote that he had "had the great pleasure of reading your various articles in the magazines from time to time." But he was especially amused by *The Circuit Rider's Widow*. "Your description of the Presiding Elder visiting the Quarterly Conference," he wrote Corra, "is so accurate and real that I laughed until the tears came to my eyes." More seriously moved by her philosophy than amused by her humor, the president of the Federal Land Bank of Houston, Texas wrote, "In the warp and woof of the fabric of modern life your quaint philosophy, religious and social, so happily expressed runs like a thread of gold for all those whose privilege it is to follow your pen. It would please me greatly if it could be my privilege to frame your autographed photo with copy of this letter." Wade H. Cooper to Corra Harris, 1919; M. H. Gossett to Corra Harris, Jan. 30, 1924.

Perkins Gilman on the role and nature of home in 1906 in *The Independent*.⁹¹ Although the editors prefaced the articles with the patronizing disclaimer, “We do not say which gets the better of the argument,” Hamilton Holt, the managing editor, wrote Corra, “Every mail brings letters about it, slightly more of them approving of your position than hers.” Having sat next to Gilman the night before at a “socialistic political banquet,” Holt had first hand news of her reaction. “She told Professor Giddings that you could write better than she, but she had the truth on her side. It is remarkable,” Holt concluded, “how that debate has been reverberating.”⁹²

The debate “reverberated” because it struck a nerve in the readers. Few issues were more sacred than that of home. It offers a prime opportunity for examining the kind of fundamental assumptions for which this study is designed. A more thorough analysis follows below. Here is merely a sample of the kind of support Corra received for her opinion. Adherents of both sides claimed, not surprisingly, that their view reflected the truth, as did Gilman to the professor at the banquet she and Holt attended. Writing in support of Corra, a Lutheran minister from Cincinnati expressed a view shared by many in

⁹¹*The Independent* titled the debate “The Future of the Home,” Gilman titled her contribution “Home-Worship” and Harris titled hers “The Monstrous Altruism,” with a rebuttal by Gilman titled “Why Monstrous?”.

⁹²Hamilton Holt to Corra Harris, Oct. 19, 1906. Considering that Corra’s position, was far more representative of mainstream thinking, and that Charlotte Gilman’s was quite some distance to the left, Holt may have been understating the degree of response favoring Harris. If so, his reason could be partially that his political if not his personal sympathies were closer to Gilman than to Harris. Although Paul Elmer More, whose political opinions are also examined later in the text, could not be considered an impartial observer of political persuasion, he once wrote Corra about Holt: “Take it all in all, our friend Holt is the mildest-mannered cut throat that ever herded with Socialists and anarchists” (Paul Elmer More to Corra Harris, Dec. 17, 1906).

his profession. "These abominable ultraisms must be suppressed by [?] means and such a positive and overwhelming rebuke as your article in 'The Independent' is a public blessing," Rev. Johnson wrote. "The effectiveness of it is well evidenced by the puerile and snarling reply of Mrs. Gilman."⁹³ The president of the Indiana County Railway Company wrote to "congratulate [Corra] on having 'routed the enemy.'"⁹⁴ The secretary of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce at the University of Pennsylvania wrote, "Dear Madam--I cannot refrain from expressing my sentiments relative to your admirable article in defense of the home. It deserves the unreserved commendation of every student of sociology as champions of chivalry, purity, religion, and the preservation of the home, sacred to every rational man and to every noble woman. We are with you though unknown."⁹⁵ An attorney from Elberton, Georgia expressed a view popular no doubt throughout Corra's home state. He saw Corra's "victory" as a blow not just to Charlotte Gilman but to socialism as a threat to the American way of life. "[T]here will be few outside of her own cult," this attorney wrote, "who will not agree that you have ignominiously defeated Mrs. Gilman; but you have done more than this, you have written, and written forcefully, and beautifully, in defense of the most sacred place on earth, and at the same time dealt a sledge hammer blow to that pernicious doctrine of socialism which is getting such a hold upon the world."⁹⁶

⁹³Rev. Johnson to Corra Harris, Oct. 6, 1906.

⁹⁴George R. Stewart to Corra Harris, Oct. 8, 1906.

⁹⁵John C. Spangler to Corra Harris, Oct. 7, 1906.

⁹⁶Name of this correspondent is lost. It was a letter to Corra Harris dated Oct. 18, 1906.

And Joel Chandler Harris, one of the few southern writers Corra ever admired, wrote, “I have also read your comments on the plan of Charlotte Gilman to place the home in an outhouse. It was beautifully done, because what you say is beautifully true. I was afraid that, in this age and time, I was almost the only person who objects to the modern scheme of crawling backwards on our all-fours, and calling it progress.”⁹⁷

These tributes to Corra for her traditional ideas defending home, as well as the others praising the homespun philosophy of life found in her fiction and nonfiction, probably say as much about the tenor of the time as they reveal about Corra’s reputation,⁹⁸ but they are offered here to acquaint the reader with the latter. Her literary career slowed down in the early 30s when she had all but quit publishing nationally. She was writing regularly for *The Atlanta Journal*’s “Candlelit Column” when she died in 1935.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Joel Chandler Harris to Corra Harris, Oct. 9, 1906.

⁹⁸One of Karen Coffing’s central premises.

⁹⁹William Tate believed “these columns might well be among her best writings, for the vignettes or short essays--pervaded to a marked degree by pungent remarks and cryptic characterizations or dialogue--show her at her stylistic best.” (p.10)

Chapter 2

SOUTHERN IDENTITY AND SOCIAL VALUES IN THE WORKS OF CORRA HARRIS

“It’s what we do best [in the South], kill our women. Or maim them. Or make monsters of them, which may be the worst of all,” claims the narrator and protagonist of the novel *Peachtree Road*.¹ Corra Harris would have denied such a claim, vigorously denied that the South gave to either its men or its women anything but the best life had to offer. Corra loved the South and valued her southern identity, perhaps publicly above all else. She believed the South was possibly the last place on earth where order could be found, possibly the last bastion of sanity in a world moving too fast in the other direction. She understood the economic and social imperatives that divided the South in time between Old and New; nonetheless, she believed the best of southern culture transcended time. In her mind the South was a place where people knew their place and rarely challenged it, and that was good. It was a place where peace and order generally prevailed. This chapter examines Corra Harris’s social and political philosophy, with an emphasis, but not an exclusive focus, on regional influence. It covers first gender role construction, or what her writings reveal as the ideal man and woman as archetypes

¹Anne Rivers Siddons, *Peachtree Road* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988) p. 3.

modeled after the southern gentleman and lady. It then examines her general understanding of what constitutes a well-ordered society, most of which is informed by southern culture. It ends with a brief look at two other factors that influenced her social philosophy, factors not directly related but not unrelated to her regional identity: namely, her experience living in poverty throughout her married life, and her unyielding conviction in the evil nature of human nature.²

Certainty about gender roles in Corra's thinking was no small factor in what made the South ideal and unique, in keeping it ordered with everyone in her and his right place. Gender roles there had been less altered by time and modernity than they had been elsewhere. They were less often questioned there because there was no confusion over what it meant to be a man or a woman. Each sex knew his or her role, fulfilled that role without questioning it, and gloried in their natural, God-given differences. Southern men might be many things, but essentially they were independent, chivalrous, and noble; southern women, as their counterparts, were domestic, pleasant, and everywhere and at all times submissive to the powers that be, chiefly their husbands.³ In Corra's philosophy, if

²There is little original or unique in Corra Harris's stated social philosophy. The woman she describes as ideal for her own day is hardly distinguishable from the antebellum Georgia belle that Eleanor Miot Boatwright describes bound and muted by law and custom in her study, *Status of Women in Georgia, 1783-1860*, *Scholarship in Women's History: Rediscovered and New* (New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), ed. by Gerda Lerner, originally written as an M.A. thesis at Duke University, 1940.

³Most of Corra's portrayal of the ideal southern woman reads a lot like the prescription of antebellum spokesmen of southern patriarchy, like George Fitzhugh, who numbered among the most outspoken. A brief excerpt from Fitzhugh is worth recalling: "So long as she is nervous, fickle, capricious, delicate, diffident and dependent, man will worship and adore her. Her weakness is her strength, and her true art is to cultivate and improve that weakness. Woman naturally shrinks from public gaze, and from the struggle and competition of life. . . . in truth, woman, like children, has but one right and that is the right to protection. The right to protection

the sexes elsewhere in the country could be as certain about their own gender roles as both were in the South, many of the social problems people complained about, especially in the Northeast, would eventually solve themselves. Women everywhere, since women were most responsible for moral order, could especially learn from southern gender norms.

The southern lady always epitomized the pride of the South. The reason why has never been a mystery. She defined what it meant to be a lady. But more importantly, Corra would explain, this woman did not resent her pedestal. She was at home and content, if not happy, there. If Corra's description of the southern woman as ideal seems on the surface nothing more than hollow and banal Victoriana, her reasoning helps explain something of how the ideal survived so long, and perhaps how strains of it remain trapped in thinking about gender roles.⁴

The southern woman was one whose character and substance were shaped largely by the passive quality of her nature. It guarded her thinking in private and governed her conduct in public. Corra explained, "the most marked characteristic of the Southern

involves the obligation to obey. A husband, a lord and master, whom she should love, honor and obey, nature designed for every woman. . . . If she be obedient she stands little danger of maltreatment." George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South* (Richmond: Morris, 1854), pp. 214-15.

⁴Significantly, although she defended and idealized this woman as the sex's finest representative, Corra would readily admit, as she did to her confidante, Paul More, "I am not a representative Southern woman. I see too keenly. But, I declare to you that they are the most natural, the least informed about themselves of any other women on this earth." (Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 13 July 1901.) The contradictions between her stated beliefs and her practical experience are analyzed in greater detail in chapter six below.

woman is her conservatism, particularly in her social relations.”⁵ She belonged at home and she knew it. Furthermore, she had no inclination for involvement in anything outside her own home; it was a “circle” over which she presided as “patron saint.” The “keynote of this woman’s character” was that she was not a “force in the life about her, she [was] only an influence.”⁶ She was content with being an influence, though, because of her passive nature; she was naturally happier “being” rather than “doing.” She might not be able to “do so much, but she can *be* all that is necessary in a woman.”⁷ The central nature of passivity in this ideal creature is captured in the following description: “In all cases she is stationary, like one who has already evolved and feels the fact. She has attributes, not powers. She can be wise without knowledge, and pious without engaging in a warfare against other people’s iniquities.” Regardless of what attributes and wisdom she gained, though, she never had legitimate reason to feel confident, especially about herself. The southern woman was self-conscious, not self-confident. Self-doubt in a woman, she was

⁵Unless otherwise indicated, material on southern women comes from two articles in *The Independent*: “A Southern Woman’s View of Southern Women,” (Apr. 17, 1902): 922-24, and “The Southern White Woman,” (Feb. 15, 1900): 430-32.

⁶The traits Corra describes as ideal in southern women are well-known as representative of the extremes of gender identity associated with the notion of separate spheres emerging out of industrialization. The particular notion of woman as influence is traced and analyzed in the last chapter in *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford University Press, 1990) by Jeanne Boydston. The chapter also analyzes the ideology that underlies the “pastoralization of housework,” and how and why that ideology promoted stark gender distinctions. Boydston maintains, “The language of the ideology of spheres was the language of gender, but its essential dualism was less precisely the opposition of ‘female’ and ‘male’ than it was the opposition of ‘home’ and ‘work,’ an opposition founded on the gendering of the concept of labor.” (p. 159) That was no doubt true throughout the country, but likely less so in the South, at least from practical experience, where the majority of households were still agrarian with agrarian values at the time Corra was writing.

⁷Corra Harris, “Be Sweet, Clever Maid,” *The Independent* (May 11, 1911): 1008; italics hers.

taught to believe, was a virtue; it was not a weakness but a strength. Self-consciousness and self-doubt actually added to her charm, made her more appealing, more attractive. As such, it became a strength. But it was a strength for which she could not take credit. That along with her other attributes were qualities she inherited from her culture, or which “evolved” in and through her over time. “Southern women have whole hemispheres of light in their eyes sometimes,” she wrote, but these were “lights for which they are not responsible. They are just made that way.”⁸ The southern woman in all her glory was not, after all, the product of her own making, could not actually take credit for her character; she was “just made that way,” perhaps by some mysterious design, or just her good fortune for having been born at a certain time in a certain place. She arrived at adulthood “evolved,” one who was fully formed, and she lived out her life satisfied to have “attributes, not powers”; satisfied to be “wise without knowledge.” Two of those attributes were integral: adaptability and resignation; and the wise woman was the one who, through the force of a pleasant personality, made those attributes look effortless.

The southern woman’s passive nature was aptly revealed in her personality, which Corra described tritely as “sweet.” The wise woman learned, “at all hazards,” to yield herself to her naturally “sweet” personality. But what did it mean to be “sweet”? First of all, it meant success. The sweet personality was the successful one. Whoever “knew or heard of a sweet woman being a failure.” But how did sweetness manifest itself in the individual woman? The sweet woman was the one who learned instinctively how to adjust herself to whatever the circumstances demanded. “[T]o be sweet is to be

⁸Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 13 July 1901.

engagingly, adorably adjustable.”⁹ To be “adorably adjustable” was the southern woman’s crowning attribute. Sometimes adjustment meant resignation, especially if a woman found herself married to someone who was not exactly a southern gentleman, or not exactly a financially stable southern gentleman. Whatever was her lot in life, though, the southern woman knew what was expected of her; the same that was expected of her mother and her mother’s mother, and all model women before them. “The Southern woman inherits resignation as other women inherit the pearl necklaces of their grandmothers. . . . She resents and resists her lot in life less than women do who are born beneath harsher skies.” This adaptability and resignation were the means by which she was able to accept her rank in life, and they were, without question, the traits that made her the pride of the South. How and why the southern woman managed so well was simple: She lived for love, first and foremost romantic love.¹⁰ And these traits, however skeptically they might be regarded elsewhere, she believed confidently, were a woman’s surest means of gaining and keeping that love.¹¹ The southern woman accepted her station in life with “placid repose” because she, above all women, “is the most beloved.”

⁹Corra Harris, “Be Sweet, Clever Maid,” *The Independent* (May 11, 1911): 1008.

¹⁰In *The Southern Lady From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), Ann Firor Scott explains the code and the consequences for violating the code: “Be a lady, and you will be loved and respected and supported. If you defy the pattern and behave in ways considered unladylike you will be unsexed, rejected, unloved and you will probably starve (pp. 20-1).”

¹¹When resignation and repression made women ill or neurotic as it inevitably did, they had ready consolation from their men. If neurosis was hard to live with, there was something intolerably worse, and expert George Fitzhugh was quick to remind southern men: “We men of the South infinitely prefer to nurse a sickly woman to being led around by a blue stocking (*Sociology for the South*, p. 217).”

Clearly she was “most beloved” because she aspired to nothing more than love: “[T]here is no intellectual barrier between her and love, no mental reservation of ambitions or secret rebellions against the sad fates of womanhood. For all these love of one sort or another is her compensation. . . . Surrounded by a bodyguard of customs which deny her the freedom enjoyed by her Northern sisters, she is not stunted in social intercourse by timidity or shyness, as might be expected.” Because she was “more gifted in personality than in the mere matter of brains” she was neither stunted, timid, nor shy in “social intercourse.” The southern woman’s personality was innocent, naive, refined by her senses, never her intellect. Corra was particularly impressed with a novelist who was able to capture the “absolute lifelike and accurate developement [sic] of the Southern woman.” He portrayed southern woman in “her stupidity, her little mysterious airs of modesty about unimportant trifles. They are all so familiar to me. . . . It was this sweet idiocy” that made them special and the goddess of southern chivalry.¹² What the southern woman sacrificed by avoiding intellectual development, she more than gained through exercise of personality. It was the one facet of herself she was encouraged to cultivate. It was the southern woman’s only claim to the individuality for which her male counterpart was better known.

Moreover, personality and the love she gained through it, more than compensated

¹²Quote from letter, Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 13 July 1901. Although Corra might not be, a “representative Southern woman,” because she had more self-knowledge than the norm (as she once told More, cited above), she did know what it was like to sacrifice intellectual development for love. In *As a Woman Thinks*, she writes, “Love does something to the mind. But it is something that you cannot use so long as it lasts as a vital part of your experience. During the first ten years of my married life it seemed to close the intellectual pores of my mind. . . . I did not think in terms of ideas, but only in the terms of love. I was guided entirely by my husband’s mind” (p. 79)

for ignorance. Unlike her politically aware sisters to the north, the southern lady “knows nothing and cares less” “of that academic modesty which is so essentially obtrusive in the better equipped woman intellectually. She converses by inspiration and never is silent in proportion to her ignorance of the subject under discussion. For she has the tiptoeing mind and knows how to pick her way over the top of a smart man’s argument, using it indeed as a bridge to reach her own conclusion.” Nor was there any danger that her conclusion would ever lead her to independent thinking. Her pedestal meant too much.¹³

“[N]o male dragon of higher education will ever bring us out of these airy fortresses where we keep our sacred images and our ancestral diplomas.” Try as hard as they might to turn the region around, one thing Yankee bureaucrats could never do is change the South’s women. Assuredly, Corra wrote, “[t]he last thing to be reconstructed in the South will be the hearts of her women.”

Interestingly, even though women’s hearts would be the last thing reconstructed in the South, the South’s women would be the first to gain the vote, Corra was sure it would be so mainly because, unlike women elsewhere in the country as well as the world,

¹³The myth of the southern woman on a pedestal has long been a favorite. Boatwright, writing about it as a relic of antebellum Georgia explains, “On a whole, nevertheless, moronic simplicity, piety, innocence, and smelling salts were the indispensable equipment of a Georgia belle. The ‘lady’ stood on a pedestal. Southern gentlemen seldom shook it, and rarely offered to help her down. Her quarters were uncomfortable and precarious,” though. The art and skill of remaining atop the fabled dwelling place could be tedious. Boatwright quotes the writer of textbooks for boarding school girls who “discovered” something of the futility of pedestal-sitting. Almira L. Phelps, school teacher from Baltimore wrote about such a woman: “If beautiful she will be condemned as vain; if graceful, as affected in manners; if frank and ingenuous, she will likely be called imprudent; and if cautious artful. If, to be agreeable to many, she talk on common-place topics, she may pass for one who has shallow intellect; if she introduce into fashionable circles, literary or religious subjects, she will probably be shunned as pedantic or bigoted. If she should have admirers, she will be called a flirt; if she should have none, she will be pitied for her supposed disappointment and mortification” (p. 30).

southern women knew how to ask for their political rights. They would not use anything like the tactics of their northern sisters, who had been misguided by the brash and tactless British suffragettes. Instead, southern women would politely ask their husbands and trust the consequences to God. Unlike her contemporaries elsewhere, the southern woman could be “neither a reformer nor an agitator. She is too frail, and the Southern climate too enervating for the entertainment of violently energetic ideals. Besides she has a sweet-tempered faith . . . that God is willing to bring His will to pass concerning her without her active interference in the plans of the divine order.” Southern women “probably understand better than any others the gentle art of winning their franchise rights,” hence, from them “there is no ‘agitation,’ and there never will be.” The reason was clear and evident. There was no agitation among women for the vote or any other cause, because there was “less opposition between the sexes” in the South; there “men and women are still very much in love with one another.” Therefore, women “will simply begin to vote when they all make up their minds to it. And the men will count the women’s ballots in with their own, without any misgivings about their women becoming less attractive or faithful because they have taken a notion to vote for themselves. This may seem absurdly optimistic to those who do not know that it is first and second nature of every Southern man to humor his womenkind in every possible way. And I stick to my prediction that he will be the first man in this country to concede to her the rights of citizenship.”¹⁴ His

¹⁴Corra Harris, “Price of Suffrage,” p. 56. Corra’s prediction, of course, did not come true. The South remained as tradition-bound about sex as it did about race. All southern states except Arkansas, Tennessee and Texas held out on woman suffrage until forced by federal constitutional amendment in 1920 to grant the ballot to women.

concession would prove that the only real means of bringing about reform was through private persuasion rather than political involvement. This conviction led southern women to devote themselves exclusively to their husbands and to his home. The same energy women in the north put into suffrage and other social reforms, southern women directed toward individual men, most often their husbands.¹⁵ The “foundations of society rest in no small measure upon the success of this vocation wherein women are called,” that is the “supreme ability” of one woman’s love and virtue to reform one man.¹⁶

If there was anything about a particular southern gentleman that needed to be reformed, it would take nothing short of the miracle workings of a true southern lady to bring it about. The ideal southern man, though--in practically every way the opposite of the southern woman--was nothing if not cussedly independent. Independence was his signature. He believed in his heart above all else, no matter what his material circumstance, that “he is the author of his own fate”; “[h]e is a free agent of his own salvation.”¹⁷ The southern man believed he was the “author of his own fate” because he was his own individual, whatever it cost him. He was “self-possessed,” never “open to foreign convictions, because [he had] an awful personal integrity in such matters.”¹⁸ Taking seriously what he faintly knew of Shakespeare, he was true to himself, “whether

¹⁵Chapter seven below deals specifically with social reform.

¹⁶Corra Harris, “The Serpent and the Woman in Fiction,” *The Independent* (Dec. 7, 1905): 1332.

¹⁷Except where once noted, quotes to here come from three articles in *The Independent*: “The White Man in the South,” 28 Dec. 1899, pp. 3475-7; “The Confederate Veteran,” 23 Oct. 1901, pp. 2357-8, and “The South’s Way,” 26 Nov. 1908.

¹⁸Corra Harris, “The Cheerful Life in the South,” *The Independent* (July 20, 1905): 137.

[he] ever advanced an octave in the scale of things or not.” This might not be “an enlightened virtue, but it is a virtue.”¹⁹ The southern man was his own individual because he was as self-sufficient as nature. He could take care of himself by himself; just like the “trees . . . all standing upon the hills,” were able to survive literal storms and remain standing on their own, so could he weather his own personal storms and remain unmoved.²⁰ The southerner was neither “progressive, nor imitative, but . . . [always] original.”²¹ It was important to be original--too important to ruin with education. He would avoid too much education because mere education tended “to increase the critical faculty, and to destroy intellectual individuality, that mental presumption upon which original thinking depends.”²² But thinking, even original thinking, was never his favorite pastime. The southern man “never thinks as a means of enjoyment”; rather, he “always . . . prefer[s] living to thinking.”²³ This trait made the South a place where it was “not so necessary to be always thinking . . .”²⁴ Southern men preferred living through their instincts and consulting no one outside themselves for affirmation. It explains why there, “every man lays more stress upon his own individuality than upon the needs of the

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Corra Harris, “From the Peace Zone in the Valley,” *The Independent* (May 3, 1915): 191.

²¹Corra Harris, “The White Man in the South,” p. 3475.

²²Corra Harris, “Advice to Literary Aspirants,” *The Independent* (Jan. 10, 1907): 80.

²³Corra Harris, “North and South: The Difference,” *The Independent* (June 1905): 1349.

²⁴Corra Harris, “New York as Seen From a Georgia Valley,” p. 98.

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community”²⁵--why in the South, they “do not know how to pool [their] means, organize and work together. There is too little room for personal dignity in organization.”²⁶ In the mind of the southern gentleman, “the needs of the community” and the notion of “working together” were inherently at odds with expression of his own individuality.

There was also too little room for individual personality in organized efforts to suit him, and personality was arguably as important to the southerner as personal dignity. As “partisan” as the southerner was about his regional identification, it never conflicted with his image of himself as a unique individual, set apart from the rest of humanity, even his southern brothers, by his own unique traits. This could and did actually prove a handicap in some ways, Corra admitted. The South, for instance, had never produced “writers of any note upon philosophic subjects,” because southerners were not capable of drawing “the artist’s line between personality and composite humanity.” This limitation stemmed from the fact that southerners “think too much in terms of mere personality” Southern distinction came from the “mystery back of them which has to do with temperament and personality.” The southerner “could not abnegate his own monumental sense of personality . . . enough to see clearly and to tell truthfully anything apart from his own experience.”²⁷ Such an intense focus on personality had thwarted southern literary

²⁵Corra Harris, “The South’s Way,” *The Independent* (Nov. 26, 1908):1275-76.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Corra Harris, “Southern Writers,” included in L. Moody Simms, Jr. “Corra Harris, William Peterfield Trent, and Southern Writing,” *Mississippi Quarterly*, Fall 1979, p. 647. Although in this article Corra is in part discussing ante-bellum southern writers, and as Simms notes, objectively criticizing their literary merit, her remarks about the role personality plays in the southerners’ self-identity are consistent with what she writes elsewhere on the value of personality well into her own time.

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talent to that point in time, but the alternative might not necessarily have been better.

It seemed to Corra it was better to have an exaggerated sense of personality than to have no sense at all of its value, a condition she noted after observing different people on her visits north. The absence of personality was a phenomenon she found in New York in the lower strata of society at one end as well as among New England intellectuals at the other. The people on the Bowery “showed more monotony of features than any other. The only thing like it is a big negro quarter on a Southern plantation where the same lack of variety exists in the cast and expression of the black faces. And there were fifteen hundred Germans in the Atlantic Garden one afternoon who looked like twins; . . .”²⁸ Likewise, she was “impressed with the lack of diversity in the facial expression of the more intellectual classes. . . . It is a sort of birthmark in expression.” Never in the South (except in the servants’ quarters) would one find such human monotony. “[W]e have accordingly a great diversity of features--some critics complain, ‘a veritable frivolity in chins’. . . .” But it was not just physical differences that set southerners apart from themselves as well as others. “We often fail to resemble our own fathers; indeed, not because we fall morally short of kinship to them, but the Southern man’s mind is not congenital. It is the undeveloped potentiality which his children inherit, while they are left astonishingly free to develop their own features and frowns.”²⁹ The southerner was convinced and proud of his own personal, individual distinction, and so would guard

²⁸Corra Harris, “How New York Appears to a Southern Woman,” *The Independent* (June 13, 1907): 1401.

²⁹Corra Harris, “North and South: The Difference,” *The Independent* (June 15, 1905): 1349.

diligently against becoming, in his mind, just an ordinary person. Indeed, in his mind, individuality had nothing to do with social position. It was the legacy of every southerner, whether rich or poor in the scheme of things, which helps explain, at least in part, his political and social philosophy that endorsed hierarchical ordering as natural and right.

“Politically, he [the southern man] still retains his monarchical instincts, and is determined to govern according to the power he has rather than with the didactic precision of a theory. He comes of a race whose passion was to rule; and it is still a passion so strong in him as to outweigh any sentimental notions held by other people concerning justice and liberty.” “Socially,” she writes in another place, “the Southern man believes in castes, because he is not revolutionary. He will not interfere with the natural distinctions in human society and calls the man who does an anarchist. He is conservative; in his subconsciousness he would even prefer a monarchical form of government, provided the king was derived from Virginian ancestry.” He was “complete” socially because he “has only to live up to the past.” Even though “[s]ince the War, he has been somewhat embarrassed by the lack of something to govern,” nonetheless his political and social beliefs remained firm. They were ideals for which all southerners had “an affinity.”

The southerner never questioned his beliefs nor himself because “he believes more stedfastly [sic] than any other doctrine, human or divine--this, that he was born a gentleman, is a gentleman, and always will be one.” This gentleman had unquestioned honor, which was not to be confused with morality. Even if he was “somewhat limited

and predestined morally,” he remained sure of his honorable intentions; he retained “positive qualities of personal force and self respect.”

The ideal southern gentleman’s beliefs included his principles and his prejudices, both of which he valued, but he clearly cherished the latter more. “He has been known to forsake a principle, but a prejudice, never.” “He is as true to [his prejudices] as a leopard is to his spots.” He was true knowing that “the prejudices of a noble man are also noble.” “His idea of virtue is sometimes oblique, but he will not steal nor bear false witness. His judgment is often erratic, but he is never false to his ideal of justice.” He might have “fewer scruples than most men,” but he was more confident than most. He was confident mainly because he “never despises himself; nor in the midst of any dishonor, does he lose that sublime confidence in his possible integrity.” He never held a grudge against himself, because he had the ability to “forgive himself oftener” than “other men.” If “his ethical quality rarely improves,” it makes little difference; “his eternal hopes multiply day by day,” sustaining his confidence in himself and in his ideals. “The hope of a noble ideal springs eternally in his breast” for many reasons. For one, “he believes emphatically in his own ultimate good intentions.” To be well-intentioned covered a multitude of sins. But he also feared nothing because he knew there was “nothing in this world to fear but dishonor,” and he would sooner sell his soul than violate this inherited code of honor.³⁰ It was this code after all that made him the gentleman he was, that protected and enforced at all times the code that defined his counterpart, the southern lady. Moreover, it was just this sort of definition of proper social and gender roles that resulted in an ordered society,

³⁰Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 7 Feb. 1917.

the kind one found in the South.

Peace and order, Corra believed, were the essential components in any society. Whenever order was disturbed it had to be restored and then maintained at whatever the cost, “according to the teachings of Jesus Christ--and sometimes according to Mussolini,” Corra said, “according to the necessities of the situation.”³¹ Order in society was one issue over which the ends justified whatever means necessary. Order was often kept in the South through swift and firm execution of justice, which happened most readily when race was an issue in a given case. Corra wrote Faith in 1917 about such an incident that occurred in Cartersville one June day in the middle of the week. In practically an aside after detailing news from the farm and homefront, Corra remembered, “This is all the news except that another negro was killed in Cartersville Wednesday--for ‘sassing’ the wife of the brakeman on the Shortdog, about some ice he went to deliver. A justice of the peace tried and acquitted the brakeman the same afternoon, and all goes merrily as the devil could ask.”

The whole thing troubled Corra. The brakeman’s behavior was an outrage. It was just such incidents as this that practically justified the images outsiders had of the South. Regardless of her convictions affirming racial hierarchy, she believed such blatant acts of violence and lawlessness against the inferior race would come back to haunt the white

³¹“Discussion on Evil,” Spring 1930, Box 98.4. Corra participated in a dialogue at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida with several contemporary authors, dramatists, clergymen, etc. including author Irving Bachellor; former editor of *The Independent* then president of Rollins College Hamilton Holt; poet and dramatist Percy MacKaye; financial director of the League of Nations Sir Herbert B. Ames. When he took over presidency of Rollins, Holt appointed Corra “professor of evil” after which she guest lectured on the subject occasionally.

man. She wrote pensively, “Negroes, I am convinced are of a lower order of man. I do not believe they can ever attain caucasian standards of morals or civilization, or develop [sic] the same sense of responsibility. But they are the only people on this earth who can stand patiently before the frowning face of the white man and submit patiently to his will. It is horrible therefore to abuse and kill them like beasts. It places a fearful shame upon a superior race.”³² Indeed it was morally reprehensible for the law to sanction such an action, but the justice of the peace was the law, and the purpose of the law was to maintain peace and order.

When the law failed to work, however, lynching was another way order was kept in the South during Corra’s lifetime. Lynchings were “primitive” means of justice to Corra; they were “affairs” she regarded with “horror.”³³ Moreover, they could be particularly embarrassing if she happened to be in the north when one took place, as she was in New Hampshire when Leo Frank was lynched in 1915. Faith had written to Corra about the Frank case imploring her mother to use discretion when talking about it. “Don’t give them the slightest hint that you in anyway approve of the hanging,” Faith warned. “Be sure to say that you regret the lawlessness that has characterized the whole case. You must say that for decency’s sake and for prudence.” Faith knew how arduously reasoned was her mother’s defense of lynching, and how widely known she was for that reasoning, but she was also acutely aware of how distant was that thinking from the people surrounding her mother in New Hampshire. “[N]o matter what

³²Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 22 June 1917.

³³Corra Harris, “Note on Lynchings,” box 79:9, no date.

humiliation of spirit we suffer,” Faith wrote advising her mother, “we must suffer in silence for the standards by which we might defend the act.”³⁴

Corra had already decided to keep her distance, as well as to hold her tongue, but she could not help feeling humiliated when a woman at the hotel where she was staying actually “called [her] a lyncher.” She lectured her accusers on the impropriety of talking about such things in polite society and noted that she knew of no Georgian who would be so crass. These people proved to Corra just how “extremely vulgar” northern people actually were with their “sectional prejudice.”³⁵ It was not the fault of the southern “night riders” anyway who resorted to the extreme measure of lynching.³⁶ They were merely pawns of the more invidious criminal; they were the classic example of the southerner, “pushed too far.” When that happened, the less well-bred kind “sheds civilization, arms himself with fire and sword and steps back into the middle centuries, where he feels more at home, anyhow. He goes mad quickly . . . becomes a brute . . . ,” none of which would have happened, if he had been left alone.³⁷[I4c] The Frank case was provoked, as were all lynchings, by “these damned yankees who are meddling with our laws as if we were savages.”³⁸ Years later she was still convinced where the fault lay: “Everyone knows that the malicious Pharisaism of the north corrupted the minds of southern negroes after the

³⁴Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 25 Aug. 1915.

³⁵Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 28 Aug. 1915.

³⁶Corra Harris, “The South’s Way,” 1276.

³⁷Corra Harris, “The South’s Way,” p. 1277.

³⁸Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 22 Aug. 1915.

Civil War and is responsible for every lynching that has taken place here.”³⁹

But embarrassment, humiliation, propriety, and sectional differences aside, at least lynchings were effective. In fact they were not at base wrong, she believed, they were merely executed in the wrong way. If they were barbaric, then the nature of the execution itself was what needed changing. That could be done if people would “create” a “public sentiment” to “improve the manners, methods and dignity governing these regrettable executions of justice.” “[A]fter all is said and done in the name of the law and religion, does not public opinion remain the strongest moral force we have for controlling the conduct of men?”⁴⁰ One way to do this would be to distinguish between the “good people” who through lynching were merely avenging “the laxness and delays of justice” and “those who depraved the occasion by abominable conduct.”⁴¹ The latter should, in fact, receive “equally severe punishments” as the criminal being lynched. If there were a “movement to improve the spirit and manners of lynching” lynching in itself would not be a bad system of justice. “The pioneers of the far west afford a good example,” Corra wrote, of a more honorable system. They maintained the “honor and dignity of their

³⁹Corra Harris, Candlelit Column, *The Atlanta Journal*, Feb. 12, 1932.

⁴⁰Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 257-8. Public opinion was the best recourse not only for public but for private, even domestic, injustices. She recalled a success story about a woman whose husband “could not have been more exacting” or controlling over her and the rest of the household than if he had been a “warden of a penitentiary.” This woman was clever though. “In the course of two years she let in the light of so much public opinion on this man and his methods as an overbearing husband that now he practically runs to open the door for her every wish. He is tremendously concerned that his neighbors shall know his wife may do as she almighty pleases. And she does.” This man was fated from the beginning. When he tried to “reprimand [his wife] for exposing his private authority she remained artless and too simple to be managed.” p. 103.

⁴¹“Notes on Lynching.”

rights” by swiftly executing offenders. Especially important, it was all done in “decent silence”⁴²--so unlike the spectacle of the Frank case.⁴³ “I am sorry that it was necessary to lynch Frank,” Corra wrote to Faith, “but I’ll warrant the next Governor who is asked to commute a rapist sentence will have more sense than to do it in Georgia.” Besides, obviously “the man was guilty.”⁴⁴ Lynching might be extreme but it guaranteed justice.

A less extreme way of keeping order in society was to control what people knew.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³Corra’s attitude toward lynching (hopefully) shocks our sensibilities today. As philistine as it is, however, her thinking on the method of execution is not entirely inconsistent with that of Albert Camus. In an article discussing the death penalty Peter Linebaugh analyzes the reasoning of Sister Helen Prejean, chairperson of the National Coalition Against the Death Penalty, and confidante to death row inmates at Angola, a Louisiana prison known for its number of executions. Linebaugh finds Albert Camus to be the most dominant of all the influences on Sister Prejean’s thinking. She gains a great deal of insight from Camus’s “Reflections on the Guillotine” of 1957. Linebaugh finds, however, a significant difference between the thinking of Prejean and that of Camus on the subject of capital punishment. “[U]nlike Sister Prejean, [Camus’s] opposition [to the death penalty] is equivocal.” What Camus found most ‘revolting’ was the ‘butchery, an outrage inflicted on the person and body of man.’ Linebaugh believes it highly significant that Camus refers repeatedly to the physical degradation, that he is most offended by beheading as a spectacle. Quoting Camus, Linebaugh writes, ‘That truncation, that living and yet uprooted head, those spurts of blood date from a barbarous period that aimed to impress the masses with degrading sights.’ What is telling about this statement, Linebaugh believes, is that, “What is truncated is the head rather than a life.” Further quoting Camus, ‘An anaesthetic that would allow the condemned man to slip from sleep to death (which would be left within his reach for at least a day so that he could use it freely and would be administered to him in another form if he were unwilling or weak of will) would assure his elimination, if you insist, but would put a little decency into what is at present but a sordid and obscene exhibition.’ “This compromise at the very end of a supposed philosophical denunciation of the death penalty gives the game away. . . . The deeper opposition in Camus’s argument is thus not between life and death, but between decency and obscenity. He wishes to remove something that is offensive to the senses rather than to do justice. It is an aesthetic critique rather than a moral one.” Unlike Camus, however, Sister Prejean opposed the death penalty on moral grounds, regardless of the way the penalty was “administered.” Peter Linebaugh, “Gruesome Gertie at the Buckle of the Bible Belt,” *New Left Review* 209(Jan./Feb. 1995):15-33. pp. 21-22.

Not unlike Camus, Corra believed just a “little decency” was in fact the key to proper execution of justice in lynchings.

⁴⁴Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 22 Aug. 1915.

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Corra believed that history taught and modernity was proving that knowledge could be a dangerous thing--the wrong kind of knowledge, that is. There were two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of life, and knowledge of the world. People gained the former through religious faith and experience, the latter they gained through education, thinking, and other outside sources. The latter kind could be dangerous knowledge, and could compromise social order; at worst, it could and often did destroy order. So dangerous was worldly knowledge, in fact, it was always preferable to stay on the safe side, which was "sweetly" ignorant. For Corra the best way to demonstrate the point was through regional comparison. For instance, compare the modernized north with the yet rural south, and the evidence spoke for itself.⁴⁵

The people of New York City "have a great deal of information, but not much wisdom. . . . They have absolutely no protection against any kind of knowledge, however dangerous."⁴⁶ For New Yorkers, much of this dangerous knowledge came from socialist novelists, "the literary offspring of the labor unions and the slums," the "standard bearers of a great illusion," who through their sentimental novels go around "exciting admiration rather than compassion for the" poor. If not stopped these people would surely succeed in establishing "a lasting hatred between the masses and the classes," and in bringing about the social revolution that would do "violence" first to "well-fed respectability" and eventually to civilization itself.⁴⁷ But American socialists were not the original source of

⁴⁵Arguably for Corra "the North" and New York City were synonymous.

⁴⁶Corra Harris, "How New Appears to a Southern Woman," *Independent*, 13 June 1907, p. 1400.

⁴⁷Corra Harris, "The Walking Delegate Novelist," *Independent*, 24 May 1906, p. 1213.

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their own doctrines. They were themselves victims of the “virus of foreign populations among” them.⁴⁸ “Foreign ideas derived from immigrant intellectuals [who were providing] most of the inspiration for this bloodless revolution the radicals and other elements of our own *intelligenzia* [sic] are waging so successfully these days.”⁴⁹ The kind of knowledge spread by these intellectuals made the average man on the streets of New York “diabolically intelligent.”⁵⁰ Corra had run into a few of these herself, and realized in the briefest of conversations just how threatening this kind of knowledge could be. “I did not meet a single person who could not get the best of me in the discussion, no matter how wrong he was.”⁵¹

The people in the Valley were protected from this kind of knowledge. They might even be considered ignorant, but it was a safe and wholesome ignorance. “Their ignorance is of the world, not of life, nor of the way they must go in life.”⁵² Knowledge of life and knowledge of the world were two different kinds of knowledge. Her Valley neighbors represented the best of the “beautifully ignorant” to Corra.⁵³ One of her favorite neighbors was among these people. Mrs. Angie Raines could “neither read nor write,” but she managed “so much wisdom and courage” it passed Corra’s

⁴⁸Corra Harris, “Obsolete Womanhood,” *SEP*, 24 Aug. 1929, p. 7.

⁴⁹Corra Harris, “Obsolete Womanhood,” *SEP*, 24 Aug. 1929, p. 7.

⁵⁰Corra Harris, “How New Appears to a Southern Woman,” *Independent*, 13 June 1907, p. 1400.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²Corra Harris, “The Valley--After New York,” *Independent*, 13 July 1914, p. 63.

⁵³Corra Harris, “These Husbands,” *Ladies Home Journal*, June 1925, p. 27.

understanding.⁵⁴ Many people in the Valley could read and write, however. Yet they managed purposely to remain relatively ignorant of worldly knowledge by staying away from one of the chief sources: newspapers. “We do not take papers in The Valley,” Corra claimed.⁵⁵ The rest of the world might be “clouded with too much bad information,” but not residents in The Valley. They had no use for any outside knowledge that might foster reflection beyond the spiritual. One especially would never catch neighbors in the Valley, or anywhere else in the South for that matter, “skipping the rope intellectually.”⁵⁶ They were not “inquisitive” that way. It did not matter; their “credulity compensate[d] for [their] lack of curiosity.”⁵⁷ They all recognized intellectual exercises as “folly.” It was this awareness that “explains why the Southern people are more truthful than the Northern people,” not to mention why they were safer from the kind of degradation taking place in the rest of the country.⁵⁸

Corra actually relied more heavily on her own “personal impressions,” her own “sort of telepathy,” than on knowledge for her opinions and most decision-making.⁵⁹ She wrote articles “on anything from literature and religion to politics which were copied all

⁵⁴Corra Harris, “The Unknown Great American Woman: Not a Singer, Nor a Writer, Nor a Musician, But a Simple Back-Country Mother,” *Ladies Home Journal*, January 1923.

⁵⁵Corra Harris, “From the Peace Zone in the Valley,” *Independent*, 3 May 1915, p. 191.

⁵⁶Corra Harris, “The South’s Way,” *Independent*, 16 Nov. 1908, p. 1275.

⁵⁷Corra Harris, “The White Man in the South,” p. 3476.

⁵⁸Corra Harris, “The South’s Way,” *Independent*, 16 Nov. 1908, p. 1275.

⁵⁹Corra Harris, “Robin Hood Roosevelt,” speech, date and place not given, Box 81:6; Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 28 May 1902.

over this country,” and she did not “know anything as knowledge goes” on those subjects. The key to publishing was not being informed, anyway; it depended upon one’s “capacity to produce in acceptable form what [one did] know.”⁶⁰ Corra recalled that Lundy had advised their daughter once, when she had seemed a bit puffed up with knowledge after “getting the best” of him in a debate, to “[s]tudy books less and study your mother more. She has brains. They are as fruitful as the earth. But she doesn’t know anything. She does not need to know anything.”⁶¹

If she was not one to rely upon knowledge, however, she did believe in the credibility of her instincts. “[T]here is more veracity in feeling than in half the thinking and philosophic conclusions” reached by anyone.⁶² She was fully convinced that individuals were much “more easily misled by [the] mind than by . . . instinct.”⁶³ The mind and one’s instincts were distinct faculties, working, if not at odds, at least separately. To think about the mind, about the intellect, about how it works processing information, could bring about “a hysteria of self-consciousness” as it had for her once, and for sometime thereafter “made thinking impossible.”⁶⁴ “The mind is something else, not us,” she decided after talking to a professor of metaphysics.⁶⁵ One’s instincts, on the

⁶⁰Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 187.

⁶¹Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 272.

⁶²Corra Harris, “The North and South: The Difference,” p. 1348.

⁶³Corra Harris, “The Great Kinship,” *Independent*, 23 April 1908, p. 900; *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 132.

⁶⁴Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 126-27.

⁶⁵Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 127-29.

other hand, were in touch with a “higher” instinct, that “hidden truth out of which romance and poetry . . . are made”; the “mind has no such fortification.”⁶⁶ She told Faith that even though she might be a “blunderer” more often than not, nonetheless, “I never for a moment doubt the good impulses of my own heart.”⁶⁷

Her impressions led her once in the decision not to publish in the Hearst newspapers in spite of the attractive fee they offered her. “Doubtless if I were better informed I should not feel this way, but since I do, I am going to act squarely up to my convictions and not dally any more with this temptation to earn twelve hundred dollars.”⁶⁸ Her impressions also decided her unquestioning opinion in the Leo Frank case. “I am one of the few women here,” she wrote to her daughter, “who has never read the evidence in the Frank case,”⁶⁹ yet she knew unequivocally that he was “guilty.”⁷⁰ Because Corra had discerned at least in her maturity good from bad knowledge, and had kept herself some distance from the latter, she felt confident offering advice in a crisis like the Depression. “My contention is that it is not presumptuous for an old person who has long enjoyed the profoundest ignorance of many things not profitable to know, but has acquired a working knowledge of the major simplicities, to offer a few brief words of encouragement upon the present crisis in all men’s affairs.” That advice was simple: “Things are not so bad,”

⁶⁶Corra Harris, “The Great Kinship,” *The Independent* (April 23, 1908): 900; *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 132.

⁶⁷Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 18 Feb. 1919.

⁶⁸Corra Harris to [family correspondence], 23 Sept. 1918.

⁶⁹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 28 Aug. 1915.

⁷⁰Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 22 Aug. 1915.

she suggested. As soon as people learn again to become “more self-reliant,” to “practice thrift” and other related “virtues,” the country would return to normalcy.⁷¹ To Corra, this was wisdom, not knowledge, and it was instinctively that she came to know these things, not after having studied the science and theories of economics.

Wise people like her, moreover, knew more than the rules of living simply. They knew their “place” and their “limitations,” and never attempted to overstep either. There was no need in the ordered society that Corra envisioned for one to move outside one’s place. Not if one believed in, as she did, the inherent goodness of authority. Quality of life for individuals and society as a whole depended upon right relationship to authority. Much of Corra’s work laments the shrinking regard society had for the concept of authority. But Corra kept the faith throughout her life. “I know my place and my limitations,” she wrote in her later years in response to some “friends [who] urged [her] to become a candidate for the legislature.” She would continue to be merely a “dutiful woman and a Methodist as usual,” praying for those in authority, but never challenging them (at least not openly). She had in fact not just respect for authority. She was “superstitiously reverent toward those in authority.”⁷² They were “set” there for a reason, something in which Corra took heart. “One thing is essential with me,” she wrote Paul More about his literary guidance, “and that is to believe in the judgment and literary convictions of the person who is set over me. Once I am certain of their infallibility I do

⁷¹Corra Harris, “A Change for the Better,” *SEP*, 12 Sept. 1931, p.25.

⁷²Corra Harris, “A Woman Takes a Look at Politics,” *SEP*, 13 June 1931, p. 128.

my savage best to be like them in substance at least.”⁷³ Whether it was a literary, personal, political, or spiritual authority was not the issue. The principle was the same. Authority was practically divine and to be favored accordingly.

The days were long gone, she knew, but in the past reverence for and obedience to authority were traits that were instilled in childhood, as they should be. “The idea was to enforce the law of obedience and good conduct without reasoning with the victim.”⁷⁴ Even if this did involve “considerable tyranny and injustice to the child . . . [she] survived these methods, grew up neatly good and did honor her father and mother.”⁷⁵ In Corra’s childhood, questioning of authority was never tolerated, not “even in boys, much less girls, who by their very natures were supposed to be predestined to a life of obedience and submission to the ancient fate of women.”⁷⁶ Rare were the provisions for legitimate grievance, not even mistreatment. Respect for parental authority never depended upon the integrity of the parent. “Authority was vested in the office of [father] even if he was of doubtful dimensions morally.”⁷⁷ It mattered not, Corra believed, “whether he was a good man or a bad one.”⁷⁸ “A man was not elected to it by the people: he came to it

⁷³Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 3 March 1902.

⁷⁴Corra Harris, “The Synthetic Girl,” *Ladies Home Journal*, April, 1928, p. 37.

⁷⁵*Ibid.* I use the masculine pronoun elsewhere as Corra does; here I use the feminine pronoun here because Corra is writing about girls in this article.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷Corra Harris, “Obsolete Womanhood,” *SEP*, 24 August 1929, p. 98.

⁷⁸Corra Harris, “Parents and Children, Yesterday and Today,” *SEP*, 28 May 1932, p. 24.

ordained by Nature, the ruling sovereign of his own dynasty.”⁷⁹ If this seemed unmerciful, an examination of what happened when authority was subverted proved that it was the only viable way. The new child-training techniques that replaced the imposition of authority with sound moral reasoning were proof enough to Corra that the old way was best. When authority was undermined in principle, not only was the despotism of bad fathers subverted, the best of fathers were dismissed smugly by their upstart sons. Even the father who was the “very pattern of integrity . . . [was now] frequently no more than the ‘old man’ to his sons, to be used, but neither honored nor obeyed.”⁸⁰ Obedience to authority, Corra believed, was, in varying degrees, not just everyone’s responsibility--we all answer to someone--it was more pointedly a compass for humankind to keep on track those who would otherwise lose moral direction. It was not the nature of humans to know good from bad. That was for a privileged few. Americans had, no doubt, taken their forefathers too seriously when they replaced notions of authority with notions of personal liberty. “Men were not made for liberty--Thomas Jefferson to the contrary, notwithstanding--but they were made to be obedient.”⁸¹

Obedience, she believed, was not merely something one did, an action, it was a state of mind; and nothing better advanced obedience as a state of mind than poverty as a state of being. Corra glorified poverty as the “natural, honorable, [and] proper state of

⁷⁹Corra Harris, “Parents and Children, Yesterday and Today,” *SEP*, 28 May 1932, p. 24.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹Corra Harris, “New York as Seen from a Georgia Valley,” *Independent*, 19 January 1914, p. 98.

man.”⁸² “Properly practiced” poverty “is the finest of all arts of living.”⁸³ It is the “very life of virtue, dignity and modesty.”⁸⁴ It keeps human nature in check by keeping human desires simple. It keeps people simple by protecting them from “ideals of worldly prominence, success and wealth,” and from the “vulgar ambition” and competition that accompanied those ideals.⁸⁵ As a nation we would do well to “restore the dignity and reputation of poverty,”⁸⁶ to allow people to “standardize their poverty,” “to remain relatively poor, but self-respecting and contented.”⁸⁷ She knew from personal experience; she had lived in poverty much of her life. Most of her neighbors in the Georgia mountains were still in poverty, but they were the “peacefully poor.”⁸⁸ “They had been poor for so long that they had risen above mere finances.”⁸⁹ But that sort of innocent life-style would never be sanctioned in American society. “Public sentiment [was] against such wisdom.” Society had so ingrained those false ideals, of “worldly prominence, success and wealth,” it was no longer possible to “take the vow of poverty

⁸²Corra Harris, “Woman Writer Leaves New York for Georgia Home,” *Evening Post*, 14 March 1914.

⁸³Corra Harris, “To Restore Poverty’s Good Name,” Candlelit Column, *Atlanta Journal*, 12 December 1934.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵Corra Harris, “A Good and Glorious Poverty,” Candlelit Column, *Atlanta Journal*, 22 May 1932.

⁸⁶Corra Harris, “To Restore Poverty’s Good Name.”

⁸⁷Corra Harris, “A Good and Glorious Poverty,” Candlelit Column, *Atlanta Journal*, 22 May 1932.

⁸⁸Corra Harris, “A Woman Takes a Look at Politics,” *SEP*, 13 June 1931, p. 129.

⁸⁹Corra Harris, “From the Peace Zone in the Valley,” *Independent*, 3 May 1915, p. 191.

and live frugally” even if that was what an individual wanted.⁹⁰

Corra believed from her own observations that honorable poverty, or the ability to endure poverty honorably, was regional, a legacy of the generation that survived the Civil War, both those newly impoverished by the effects of the war and those who had never known anything but poverty. The former were wellborn people who had been relatively well-off materially, but had lost what they had in the war. They learned from their experience to live by “the noble creed of well-bred poverty.”⁹¹ Although there was nothing to prepare this generation of veterans and their families “for the change from the epic of battlefields to the prose of poverty and economy,” nonetheless, they set about the “hard task of reconstructing [their] ideals . . . with admirable fortitude.”⁹² They set a standard that formed an impression in Corra’s childhood and lasted throughout her lifetime. In one of her Candlelit Columns, she wrote, “During the whole of my youth I do not recall a single complaint about the sacrifices and hardships they endured. Poverty was the top rail men took gaily in those days.” Faith in God was their source of strength, and poverty the means by which they “escaped the vulgarity of rationalism.”⁹³ Poverty kept the genteel class of newly impoverished from “vulgar rationalism,” and as such clothed them with an invincible integrity they might not otherwise have known had they

⁹⁰Corra Harris, “A Good and Glorious Poverty,” Candlelit Column, *Atlanta Journal*, 22 May 1932.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²Corra Harris, “The Confederate Veteran,” *Independent*, 23 Oct. 1901, p. 2357.

⁹³Corra Harris, “Selling the Depression,” Candlelit Column, *Atlanta Journal*, 11 Dec. 1931.

embraced rather than rejected modernity's creed. Equally important, they taught by example Corra's generation who would follow in the footsteps of cultured poverty. They taught them how to live in their minds, how to keep a "gayer possession of [their] poverty."⁹⁴ It was both a blessing and an honor bequeathed to them from their forebears. "Poverty was our endowment. So we sat beside the candle of our own minds and believed great things. . . . We had noble visions; a circumstance exalting to the consciousness of the very young."⁹⁵

The "noble visions" of "endowed" poverty that "exalted" the consciousness of Corra's generation fed as well the next generation. Corra's daughter Faith shared her mother's appreciation for the character developed by poverty, even if she did not care much for the experience itself. Faith and her husband lived in constant financial struggle and might have at several points "gone under completely" if not for Corra's help, but Faith tried never to despair. If there were particularly trying times when she would say to herself "this now is what I've heard about--this is life, troublesome-and difficult to deal with," she knew just as well, even if her husband did not, that life was "not really unconquerable if one can just keep one's head up and fighting."⁹⁶ Faith could look around and see what separated her and her own from those around her who were going under. She wrote her mother of the tragic fall of a Mr. Thornton, an acquaintance who had been at one time a bank president, but who had lost "the glamour of 'wealth' and

⁹⁴Corra Harris, "Sowing Seeds of Kindness," Candlelit Column, *Atlanta Journal*, 12 February 1932.

⁹⁵Corra Harris, "Obsolete Womanhood," SEP, 24 August 1929, 7.

⁹⁶Faith Harris Leach to Corra Harris, 15 March 1917.

‘society’” and was then managing the Soldier’s Home. “It is terrifying to see what time and life can do to a person,” Faith wrote. When they had known the Thornton’s when both families lived in College Park, “. . . we were as poor as one could be with nothing to back up against and everything to fear. Now they have gone under completely and we have come up. Still,” she continued, with sober confidence, “I doubt whether they would have gone under so if they had had the same caliber in them that we have. Sometimes I fear the future, fear the changes that might come and then it comes over me that I believe that whatever came I’d continue to hold fast somehow or other. I would not sink. I’d find a way to come up again. I’d never stop till I did.”⁹⁷

Even in some of her darkest moments Faith knew that with “a little time and nerve” she could work her way out of any of life’s adversities.⁹⁸ The same was true of everyone, if they practiced a few of life’s proven principles like thrift, industry, and saving. This applied even to her mother’s black servants, one of whom needed surgery her family could not afford.⁹⁹ The doctor told Corra that Sophie’s “uterus [sic] is misplaced and that the lacerations are dreadful and that she will never be any account.”¹⁰⁰ “I am so awfully sorry about Sophy,” Faith wrote. “Its [sic] a pity they can’t save their money and have her operated on. They could do it if they really wanted to.”¹⁰¹ At least

⁹⁷Faith Harris Leach to Corra Harris, 4 June 1918.

⁹⁸Faith Harris Leach to Corra Harris, 15 March 1917.

⁹⁹Lena, Charles and daughter, Sophie all worked for Corra and lived in servants quarters in the Valley.

¹⁰⁰Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 20 June 1917.

¹⁰¹Faith Harris Leach to Corra Harris, 22 June 1917.

some of Corra's philosophy had taken firm root in her off-spring.

The other southern poor, the "country poor," those who for generations had never known anything but poverty before as well as after the War, emerged from its devastation in their own element. Though the physical devastation of the land might have been something new, poverty certainly was not; they had had plenty of experience with it, so this was their moment to shine. And they did so with their dignity intact and with sharp wits about them. Corra admired traits in them that made them resist the efforts of "educated" outsiders to elevate their quality of life. They remained impervious to outside influence because they knew intuitively that they were being patronized. Outsiders always failed because they were forever "trying to patronize primitive autocrats, which cannot be done."¹⁰² These "primitive autocrats" had spunk, and they were best left alone. To attempt to help them would destroy that inherent goodness that their way of life fostered.

These were the people Corra missed most when she went to New York. "Another thing one misses upon the streets is the cheerfulness of the poor. With us they are still the happiest class as a whole."¹⁰³ These people made Corra wonder "why we strive so for money when the finest happiness is easily within reach of the poor."¹⁰⁴ Observations of these people over the years made her confident that she could and "should like to write a

¹⁰²Corra Harris, "Are Country People Comical," Candlelit Column, *Atlanta Journal*, 16 December 1931.

¹⁰³Corra Harris, "How New York Appears to a Southern Woman," p. 1400.

¹⁰⁴Corra Harris, "Speculations in the Stock Exchange of Human Nature," Candlelit Column, *The Atlanta Journal*, April 6, 1932.

textbook on how to be poor and happy.”¹⁰⁵ Two stories personalize Corra’s convictions about the goodness and the “cheerfulness” of the poor: the story of Mrs. Angie Raines, a widowed neighbor; and the story of local “poor people shopping for Christmas.”

Mrs. Angie Raines was a widow, “a mother, a patriot, a saint.” Though there was “not a rocking-chair or a rug” in her house (which looked “like a dirt dauber’s nest girdled by a rainbow”), nevertheless “she was the richest woman [Corra] ever saw.” Mrs. Raines had many virtues if “no elegance to speak of.” She was genuinely charitable in her poverty. She “will give anything, however small, with a grace that leaves no sting of obligation.” Mrs. Raines was “a forty-two year old widow . . . [with] seven children. When her husband died seven years ago, he owed sixteen hundred dollars on his farm, and she weighed ninety pounds.” The next year after crops failed “due to a drought and the ravages of the bollweevil,” Mrs. Raines weighed only “eighty-five pounds.” But basically, she was “too busy to worry.” “She knows perfectly that she will get through the winter warm and fed.” She lived by faith.

The three Raines daughters were “beautiful, happy maidens who work hard in the fields.” Fortunately for them, “they [had] never seen a town.” And they never gave their mother a minute’s trouble even though they were “at the age of love and romance.” Her four sons, “on the other hand, require[d] discipline,” which she wisely administered. They were loyal sons. “[T]hey worship[ped] her” with “reckless devotion”; she was “their Altar and their Hague.” There were times when Mrs. Raines might not have what

¹⁰⁵Corra Harris, “To Restore Poverty’s Good Name,” Candlelit Column, *The Atlanta Journal*, December 12, 1934.

“dietitians” would consider “proper food” for her children, but what she fed them somehow kept them nourished. Corra believed it was not the food that kept them healthy; “more likely it is the love with which it is savored.” When the time came, Mrs. Raines proudly sent three of her sons away to the Great War. Shortly after they returned and “took their places in civil life,” Mrs. Raines realized that, at the ancient age of fifty, “her work was finished and well done, her days emptied and her heart failed her. She passed away, not of any sickness, but because the strain was over. There were no more labors of love to keep up the tension.” Mrs. Raines died “without ever having received the least recognition for her services or having expected any reward.” It was her handling of her life of poverty that represented an ideal to Corra. She was among the thousands like her who by their sacrifices kept alive “the peace and love of mankind.”¹⁰⁶

Corra tells another story with similar nostalgia. It is a story of “the most beautiful manifestation of the Christmas spirit.” That is, the spectacle of poor people who sacrifice for those they love at Christmas. Unlike the “impersonal charity” of the philanthropist who contributed “liberally to the ‘Empty Stocking Fund’” and felt “no sacrifice,” the poor man must make the dollar he has “saved by the hardest for this purpose” buy all the “little gifts needed to make the mother and each child in [his] house happy on Christmas morning.” Corra witnessed a particularly proud couple shopping in Cartersville one Saturday before Christmas Eve when “all the country people had come to town wearing

¹⁰⁶Corra Harris, “The Unknown Great American Woman: Not a Singer, Nor a Writer, Nor a Musician, But a Simple Back-Country Mother,” *Ladies Home Journal*, January 1923. I will cover Corra’s evaluation of Mrs. Angie Raines as a woman elsewhere. Here, it’s her role as a poor woman that is pertinent.

the secret look of conspirators” as they tried to conceal small packages they hid from each other. The man of this couple, “accustomed to a heavy load,” was “bent” from his labors, but that was secondary. He was proud, and walked “with the cumbering stride of strength.” The woman, though wearing “black clothes [turned] green with age,” “held her head high, face lifted, [showing] that she felt the distinction of her moth-eaten and cankered finery.” Corra could well relate to these people. The couple passed a local “five and ten Cents store . . . precisely as [she had] gone by Tiffany’s in New York many a time without ever presuming to enter a place so notoriously expensive.” Finally they found a more affordable place, one of those “little squatter shops that spring up in dingy side streets.”

This mother and father enacted scenes common among the people shopping on these side streets. They might barter with a merchant over a large “store bought doll” of twenty five cents, and failing success, settle for one for fifteen. Corra saw “an old man dicker with a girl clerk for a pair of silk stockings for his fat old wife [who had] never had any,” a wife who would receive these with more “agreeable surprise” than many other, wealthier women she knew would “receive the gift of a piano.” For Corra these “humble” scenes represented what Christmas was all about. “This drama of sweetened poverty” would move “from one act to another of pure loveliness,” capturing along the way the true spirit of the season.¹⁰⁷ These poor people shopping for their families at Christmas represented not just the best of Christmas, but their way of life made them the

¹⁰⁷Corra Harris, handwritten note titled, “Poor People Shopping for Christmas,” no date, Box No. 93:11.

best specimens of humankind.

But not all poor people were the same. There were the worthy poor and there were the “unworthy” poor, and there was a world of difference between the two. Moreover, Corra could always tell the difference. Without a doubt New York produced the latter kind. There was something about cities, and particularly that one, that produced “problems.” “This place is the factory of problems in human life, working overtime, night and day.”¹⁰⁸ New York was the place where there was “too much poverty reduced to pauperism and to equally unscrupulous crime.”¹⁰⁹ Poverty was one thing; pauperism something else. Paupers were mendicants for whom poverty was “a mental illness.”¹¹⁰ They were a “type of miserable, bat-winged humanity,” often passed off in fiction by misguided socialist writers like Jack London or Upton Sinclair, as “men and brethren who have as many rights and wrongs as other people.”¹¹¹ Clearly, they did not have the same

¹⁰⁸Corra Harris, “If You Must Come to New York,” *The Independent* (April 6, 1914): 31.

¹⁰⁹Corra Harris, “The Literary Spectrum of New York,” *The Independent*, p. 441.

¹¹⁰Corra Harris, “Sob Sister Citizens,” *Ladies Home Journal*, February, 1925, p. 105.

¹¹¹Corra Harris, “The Walking Delegate Novelist,” *The Independent* (May 24, 1906): 1213. It was a good year for Corra for doing battle with socialists. In addition to her debate with Charlotte Perkins Gilman on the home, and other attacks in *The Independent* on Jack London and many more that she deemed socialists, she managed to engage London in a private dispute through correspondence. His response is comical. Corra sent London an “apology form” to sign and return to her for an “obscene” insult she felt he had directed toward her in an article on the “House Beautiful.” London refused to sign and return the form which he found humorous and “deliciously ridiculous.” In a mildly mocking retort, he wrote, “While we’re on this subject of obscenity, in the very letter accompanying the apology form, you yourself confess to a consciousness of the obscenity of your reference to what I said in the last paragraph on the House Beautiful. You yourself say: ‘I have ached, but with shame and regret, every time I thought of it since.’ Why shame? . . . Imagine my surprise and consternation when in this letter of yours I now have before me I learn that you have misconstrued my meaning and given me to understand that it is not becoming on my part to intimate ‘that sort of thing to a woman of your age. [sic] Heavens on earth! I never thought of such a thing until I read it here in your letter.’” London

rights. They had to earn the right and that right came by learning self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency came, among other ways, by learning thrift, a discipline that would “go a long ways toward relieving existing social and economic conditions,” Corra told a reporter in 1919.¹¹² The lack of thrift, which was extravagance, Corra warned, was an evil. “One of the greatest agencies against the very foundations of our institutions is the habit of extravagance--the lack of thrift. We are bound to admit that the example for these evils originally was set for our people by the capitalist class, but this class has gone far toward redeeming itself and digesting its sins by its loyalty and sacrifices for this country during the great war.”¹¹³

Honest poverty was good for people as long as it did not force them to beg for the means to survive. Widows of all people were to avoid this kind of poverty. Corra warned widows whose husbands had died and left them “without a competency” never to become what the apostle Paul called a “widow indeed,” or one “whose piety and poverty entitle her to charity.”¹¹⁴ Even if the kind of work it took to survive “brings you down in

suggested that she not takes things so seriously: “You say you have to keep on respectable terms with me. Why sweat about respectability? It is so bourgeois.” In any case, “as regards disrespect,” he pointed out to her, “in this very letter you’ve called me a fool twenty times.” One wonders if Corra caught the veiled patronization in London’s closing comments, or if she actually believed herself flattered. “And now, a final paragraph,” London writes. “Do you know the whole cause of conflict between you and me? I’ll tell you in two words. It is the inevitable conflict that arises between the simple mind and the complex mind. You are all complexity, I am all simplicity.” (Jack London to Corra Harris, Sept. 17, 1906.)

¹¹²Corra Harris, “Thrift Investment Blow to American Bolsheviks Corra Harris Declares,” *The LaGrange Reporter*, Dec. 1, 1919.

¹¹³*Ibid.*

¹¹⁴Corra Harris, “Concerning Widows, or How to Be a Widow,” *Ladies Home Journal*, September, 1920, p. 64.

the mere world,” being self-sufficient was the important thing, not ever having to take a handout. Where she lived, no one had to depend upon anybody or anything outside themselves and their own domicile. “If every factory and store in this county closed, these people would scarcely be inconvenienced.”¹¹⁵ If the poor people surrounding her, and even widows with no skills and experience outside the home could do this, so could able-bodied men wasting themselves in the New York slums. Willingness to work hard and refusal to accept a handout is what separated the worthy from the unworthy poor.

There was a deeper, more fundamental flaw, however. The reason the poor could not remedy their own situation, was because they would not accept a right relationship to authority. “The efforts of the poor to resist the pressure from above deprived them in a large measure of self respect, of dignity and of many virtues to which the poor alone are entitled.”¹¹⁶ The moral fiber crucial to this kind of relationship was missing from the working poor. “They lack the right moral discipline necessary to form honorable judgments; the sense of responsibility has been destroyed in them and has been replaced by the most monstrous greed.”¹¹⁷ This is what separated the worthy poor, or those Corra found almost exclusively in her own region of the country, and those she found on the streets and in the slums in New York. Self-respect, dignity, and the other named virtues were essential to being able to take care of self. But these all depended upon one’s

¹¹⁵Corra Harris, “New York as Seen From a Georgia Valley,” *The Independent* (Jan. 19, 1914): 97.

¹¹⁶Corra Harris, “If You Must Come to New York,” p. 29.

¹¹⁷Corra Harris, “Thrift Investment Blow to American Bolsheviks Corra Harris Declares.”

ability, which depended upon one's willingness, to adjust oneself to authority; this meant whatever one's authority was, whether it was God, boss, husband, parent, whatever.

Corra had, and though her life was not without its pain and suffering, it had, for the most part, worked out quite well.

Another difference between the worthy poor of Corra's acquaintance and the not so worthy that she found in the city, was that the latter worked for wages. Corra had a strong distaste for labor as well as labor unions, but just as the source of the South's social problems originated outside the region, the source of conflict between labor and capital also came from outside. "What we suppose to be labor unrest in this country is no such thing. It is the Calaban features of a degenerate immigrant class, crawling up out of the mud of horrible things, to lay its slimy hands on the Government and make of that great class of American workers American aliens, so that now the two together are no longer to be known as the working class, but as the malignant classes."¹¹⁸ In 1918 Corra wrote to her daughter, "I do not like the looks of the world. And I hope the grimmy [sic] hands of labor will keep off the ideals of American liberty."¹¹⁹ Much to her disappointment as she would write throughout the decade of the twenties, they did not. Corra shared the universal opinion of the South that labor unions were sources of trouble. Always lamenting the dearth of good workers for herself at her home in the Valley, she found one in a man named "Harvey" but would not keep him. "He is an I.W.W. and

¹¹⁸Corra Harris, "Thrift Investment Blow to American Bolshevists Corra Harris Declares."

¹¹⁹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 13 Nov. 1918.

several other dangerous things,” she wrote a friend.¹²⁰ Part of her aversion to labor workers can be traced to her ideas about wage work in general. Where she was from they did “not often risk the extravagance of paying wages at all.”¹²¹ There was something undignified, even demeaning, about working for, as well as paying, wages. Wages eroded the worker’s self-sufficiency which led to the erosion of his self-respect. Without self-respect, the individual had no vested interest in the job for which he was getting paid, the quality of his work suffered, and consequently both worker and employer were injured by the system of wage labor. A classic example of how wage labor turned people into mendicants and members of the “unworthy” poor could be found in the march to Washington by unemployed World War I veterans in the spring of 1932 to secure early release of their promised pensions.

These men were clearly out of line. They and other workers like them with their demands for unreasonable wages and other compensation were largely responsible for the Depression. And they had no legitimate complaint. They paid “only a modicum of taxes or no taxes at all [yet] they had free schools, free clinics, free hospital service and their living wage was raised to a frolicing [sic] wage. Therefore we could not compete in foreign markets with exports so expensive. Therefore one of the chief reasons for unemployment.” The fault was not *all* theirs. To the extent that society gave in to their demands, or that the government offered the pensions in the first place, all were at fault.

¹²⁰Corra Harris to a Mrs. Field, 24 April 1920.

¹²¹Corra Harris, “Men and Women--and the Woman Question,” *The Independent* (February 2, 1914): 164.

“We have degraded American patriotism by making mendicans [sic] of our veterans with excessive pensions.” We made them what they became by catering to them, by attempting to lift them out of the class in which they chose to live, and putting them artificially into a social status they neither worked for nor deserved. “What we called the underprivileged class in this country--that is to say the workers become the over privileged class.” The only way to reverse the trend and to heal the economy would be through “hard work, sacrifice and the slow upward trend from all of our follies,” especially those of indulging the under classes. After enough hard work and sacrifice, “the most serious problem we shall face is the strikes and rioting of the workers, so long subsidized by the very shrewd capitalistic policy of paying excessive wages.”¹²² If there was to be any “reform,” it would have to start at the top, and one sure way to do that would be to return the thinking on charity to one of opprobrium.

Indeed the “unworthy” were responsible for their condition, but they would never own up to that responsibility as long as there were handouts to accept, and as long as there was no stigma attached to those handouts. The auto-workers at the Ford plant were a classic example. They were making a “scandalous” five dollars a day, but “like most poor people, they will not save, they will imitate the extravagance of the rich. Their wives will spend the money on expensive clothes, expensive Victrolas and expensive children.”¹²³ Moreover, when poor of that kind fell on hard times, “they were not thankful for charity.” What they wanted and expected were their “rights--that is, Wall

¹²²Corra Harris, handwritten speech titled “Charity,” undated in box 75:3.

¹²³Corra Harris, “Men and Women--and the ‘Woman Question,’” p. 164.

Street and the fulness thereof.”¹²⁴ And that is what they were getting in the form of charity, thanks to the government, and other private sources.

Charity was a “sentimental evasion of the real issue” (which was cities themselves).¹²⁵ But it was more than that. There was “something radically wrong,” with it in principle.¹²⁶ “It has a defacing effect upon what is safe and brave in other men.” For that reason, Corra was “ashamed [anymore] to be charitable.”¹²⁷ The ill effects of charity were proven in part by the attitude of the beneficiaries; the more charity one gave, the more thankless they became. The Depression, upon which Corra drew for some of her most ardent writing on poverty, offered all the examples one needed. She witnessed over and over “the ingratitude of the poor toward their benefactors, their abuse of those who serve and feed them,” of whom there were more than enough without the government wasting its limited resources to assist.¹²⁸ For Corra, ingratitude and a lack of humility were grievous social sins. They were no doubt what always resulted when “humanitarianism [was] substituted for Christianity,” when the government decided “at

¹²⁴Corra Harris, “How New York Appears to a Southern Woman,” p. 1400.

¹²⁵Corra Harris, “If You Must Come to New York,” p. 29. Corra had a hard time hanging on to her conviction, but she nonetheless maintained that “nothing, no charity, no wisdom, no reform, no energy, can correct what is wrong here, from the bread line of the ragged unemployed, to the limousine line of the other unemployed, but to deport about three million nine hundred thousand of these people to the country.” In several other places, she wrote that cities should be limited in size to no more than 100,000 people.

¹²⁶Corra Harris, “The Problem of the Unemployed,” typed manuscript, Box 93:18.

¹²⁷Corra Harris, “Maneuvering Toward the Kingdom of Heaven,” *Candlelit Column*, *The Atlanta Journal*, November 10, 1933.

¹²⁸Corra Harris, “The Problem of the Unemployed.”

any cost” to “support the improvident,” and to “feed the poor whatever happen[ed] to thrifty, industrious citizens.”¹²⁹ Thrift and industry were traits the government should reward if it was going to meddle in the economy, but certainly it should not reward waste and idleness.

Actually, any social reform efforts were an exercise in futility. “You can do nothing with a thing once it has reached the problem stage,” she wrote condemning the “abomination of cities.”¹³⁰ If anything could be done about it though, clearly reform was not the purpose of government. Government’s “function is to provide security for the lives and property of the people so that every man may pursue his own fortune in peace. . . with no more than the revenue of a burnt offering in taxes to keep him civil and grateful for the protection he enjoys.” One thing a government cannot do is “take the place of parents, preachers, teachers and managers of private concerns.”¹³¹ And social problems, at the root, were just that: private concerns to be dealt with personally with private means. “You cannot uplift your neighbor, no matter how far down he is,” Corra writes. “You can only supply the right condition for him to uplift himself by behaving your own self, . . . A lot of people would die of starvation here if this rule should be followed. But a lot of grass dies also. It is not so great a misfortune to die sometimes as it is to live. Besides whether one is sure of life or not, the next is assured.”¹³² The “thing

¹²⁹Corra Harris, “Selling the Depression,” Candlelit Column, *The Atlanta Journal*, December 11, 1931.

¹³⁰Corra Harris, “The Abomination of Cities,” *The Independent* (Jan. 26, 1914): 129.

¹³¹Corra Harris, “A Woman Takes a Look at Politics,” *SEP*, June 13, 1931, p. 128.

¹³²Corra Harris, “If You Must Come to New York,” p. 31.

which most imprest [sic]" Corra about philanthropic people like those in New York "was the utter futility of them and all their goodness" ¹³³ They could all work themselves "to a frazzle in 'settlements,' in 'diet kitchens,' on 'welfare committees,' in labor unions, and even in church bazaars. But [they] cannot really accomplish any good. It is like trying to sweep the Atlantic ocean back with a broom. . . ." ¹³⁴ Fortunately for Corra, unlike those bleeding philanthropists wasting themselves futilely trying to soften the blows of the Depression, she had perfect "peace of mind . . . in knowing that I cannot do a single thing about it." ¹³⁵

Not even the Church anymore could make the kind of difference it once might have. The Church actually missed its chance for cleaning up the social sphere when Christians forfeited their right to remedy social problems to the socialist, that "predatory man who wants what does not belong to him." "The great reproach of your religious novelist is that he permitted the socialists to discover and exploit what he should have discovered and exploited himself in the name of God and mercy." This "set of fierce-eyed, sincere and dangerous fanatics has taken possession of the miseries, the very real problems of our times," and offered solutions that every Christian, even every American, should consider abhorrent. The Church used to inspire hope in the otherwise hopeless. The great tragedy was that Socialism had taken over that role. "This is the fascination and strength of Socialism," Corra wrote. "[I]t offers consolation, comradeship and great

¹³³Corra Harris, "The Valley--After New York," *The Independent* (July 13, 1914): 65.

¹³⁴Corra Harris, "The Literary Spectrum of New York," p. 441.

¹³⁵Corra Harris, "The Pharisee's Lament," *SEP*, Dec. 19, 1931, p. 83.

expectations to a class of people who have nothing and no hopes of anything.” But the hope was false hope, because Socialism was a delusion, or worse, mere “theory.”

Socialists never realized “that they are offering not a remedy, but a theory, and an untried theory, against an order of things already established.”¹³⁶

The true solution to the growing social problems in the cities Corra realized might sound like “a madman’s dream,” but she knew it would work. Send these people to the country. People who grow up in the country admittedly were a bit “primitive,” but such was a “state of naturalness” that was altogether healthy and wholesome, a state far from that which the hordes of European immigrants who then lived in the cities exhibited.¹³⁷ “Why must we continue to ask Europe for inhabitants--most of whom stop in the city streets to increase the congestion? Why is not some inducement offered to these millions of unemployed citizens we already have to go back to the farms?” “Besides, it is not really so impractical as it sounds, this dissolving of cities and returning to the earth and nature in smaller groups.”¹³⁸ “My theory of life is that when people grow up naturally, they grow up good, wholesome, vigorous, upright; and when they grow unnaturally they become wicked, possibly.”¹³⁹ To send people back to the country where they could “grow up naturally” would put an end to the socialists’ cause and ultimately to the socialists

¹³⁶Corra Harris, “The Walking Delegate Novelist,” *The Independent* (May 24, 1906): 1215.

¹³⁷Corra argued repeatedly for the primitive and the natural as superior to the cultured and refined. She referred to herself approvingly as primitive in many places. See *The Jessica Letters*, pp. 18, 312.

¹³⁸Corra Harris, “The Abomination of Cities,” *The Independent* (Jan. 26, 1914): 130.

¹³⁹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 28 May 1902.

themselves, a far greater threat to the country than poverty no matter what the extent.

The reasons Corra felt the way she did toward the poor and toward charity and public aid for the poor form part of the larger purpose of this study. She believed she had good reason for feeling and thinking the way she did. Personal experience taught her all she needed to know about the “unworthy” poor, about charity, and about the consequences of giving too much. Though she might have been surrounded in the north Georgia mountains by many like Mrs. Angie Raines, and though she might have witnessed moving scenes at Christmas like the ones in Cartersville that invoked her compassion, unfortunately Corra’s personal interaction with the poor people around her was not on the whole so pleasant. She wrote home from California where she was on assignment for one of her editors of her exasperation to her “adopted” daughter, Bessie in 1925, trying to explain why she often had trouble with hired help around the house: “I, who was never regarded as the patrician member of my family seem to be able to get on happily only with that kind of people.” Not that she had not tried to get along with the “plebeian” class. Her efforts to deal with them had taken its toll, in fact. “And like the class to which I belong, I have worn myself out for [the] unworthy ones.” She had learned her lesson though. “All that seems a long time ago, and never to be my way of living again.”¹⁴⁰ Her most direct link to “that kind of people” had been her husband, a man who took quite literally the conditional promise of entering heaven by selling what one has and giving to the poor. In retrospect, his misinterpretation of the gospel message that led to misinformed generosity made him, at least in Corra’s mind, an example of one,

¹⁴⁰Corra Harris to Bessie Rains, 22 April 1925.

maybe to love and admire, but not to emulate.

Lundy Harris had a heart as big as Texas, a “capacity for pity” that led him sometimes to do things no level-headed man would do. He lived, worked and prayed for “a world where justice and love reigned,”¹⁴¹ and he did more than his part as an individual to bring about that vision. As often as he could, he “spent his spare time visiting the sick, the poor, and the totally lost and damned.”¹⁴² He had a reputation wherever he went for fraternizing with the dispossessed, for “attach[ing] himself to the least significant person present.” It was always Corra who had to seek out and make the “strong, effective, influential friends” that would advance his career and their social standing. While Lundy was “temperamentally deficient” in “this kind of wisdom,” namely, finding socially influential friends, she had “always been particularly flush” with it.¹⁴³ A very real problem for Corra was what Lundy’s big heart cost not just him, but his family. She recalled his “touching charities, the rage he used to fall in toward Christmas time when the worthy poor were hawked about for funds to feed them, and how he denied himself [and by inference, his family] to bestow little personal blessings upon the unworthy poor.”¹⁴⁴ Lundy’s misguided notions led them to the poor house, and, in spite of what she wrote about the benefits of poverty, it was something she would prefer to know theoretically rather than to experience practically. “There was something reducing to the

¹⁴¹*Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Sept. 25, 1910.

¹⁴²Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 175.

¹⁴³Talmadge, p. 7; Corra Harris to Faith Harris, 24 February 1909. The reference to Lundy’s sexual appetite will be clarified below.

¹⁴⁴Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 79.

soul in the conditions under which we were living,” she wrote about many of the years of her married life.¹⁴⁵

Some of the frustration Corra felt over the financial situation Lundy left behind are revealed in a letter from her to W.F. Hunt, one of the authorities in Nashville who wrote insisting that she “furnish an inventory of the estate of” her late husband. She wrote Mr. Hunt that Rev. Harris died with “\$52.35 in his purse,” and \$116 in the Union Bank and Trust, but “the major part of his estate was invested in heavenly securities.” She went on to detail the nature of these securities:

He invested every year something over twelve hundred dollars in charity, so secretly, so inoffensively and so honestly that he was never suspected of being a philanthropist and never praised for his generosity. He pensioned an old outcast woman in Bartow County, and an old soldier in Nashville. He sent two little negro boys to school here and supported for three years a family of six persons who were unable to support themselves. He contributed to every charity in Nashville anonymously. Every old maid with a “benevolent” object received his aid. Every child he knew exacted and was paid penny tolls from his tenderness. He supported the heart of every man he knew who confided in him with encouragement and kindness. He literally did forgive his enemies and suffered martyrdom.¹⁴⁶

Not that Corra did not love and revere her husband. He was a “gallant and praiseful husband” to her, nor did she ever doubt the legitimacy of his motivation to give.¹⁴⁷ She

¹⁴⁵*Ibid*, p. 175.

¹⁴⁶Corra Harris to W.F. Hunt, 17 December 1910.

¹⁴⁷Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 240.

knew it was genuine. She was “touched” by his “meekness and patience.”¹⁴⁸ She believed that he had been one of the few real saints in the modern world. But he was a “dear blind saint,”¹⁴⁹ who was always preoccupied with “seeking holy visions and the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁵⁰ This blinded Lundy to reality; it gave him “a nervous, flighty conscience,” and it meant that he was “always getting balled up in some scruple.” Lundy could be “trusted with the most delicate spiritual disorders of other people” but he was the classic “great physician who could not heal himself.”¹⁵¹ His intensely spiritual perspective limited him; it meant that he simply did not have “enough moral elasticity” to live in the temporal world.¹⁵² As much as she loved Lundy, Corra was never haunted by the same convictions that drove him to martyrdom. Of necessity she developed a different sense about her family’s and her own material well-being.

In her family, Corra was, if of necessity, the practical-minded one, aware at least as much of her physical as her spiritual well-being. “[R]eligious philosophy ought to fit [one] for his present environment of earth and flesh,” she believed or else it was useless.¹⁵³ She had a considerably more “elastic” religious consciousness than Lundy. Secretly she really did not like church people and she despised the “agonizing” of tortured

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁵³*The Jessica Letters*, p. 75.

souls at revivals. It was “too exhausting,” and besides, her “faith [did] not require to be so agitated.”¹⁵⁴ Lundy had been a spiritual giant, but his fate had proven to her, among other things, that the world could no longer tolerate spiritual giants. After observing what Lundy’s spiritual scruples had cost him, Corra, without abandonning orthodoxy altogether, made sure that she never got “stitched up in the spiritual straight-jacket” “I literally do believe that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, but I am mindful not to practice some of his Beatitudes in the open, having observed that people who do, frequently come home without their cloak and their coat also--on account of having met somebody in a trade who left his Beatitudes at home.”¹⁵⁵ She knew that an attempt to live life in the exclusively spiritual realm was impossible and damaging to one’s humanity. “All my life I have been familiar with the inhumanity of the merely spiritually minded,” she wrote.¹⁵⁶ Living exclusively in the spirit did nothing to combat the evils of human nature, and was in fact itself “dehumanizing.”¹⁵⁷

Corra was especially practical-minded with money. In her marriage she was the partner who best understood finances. But then, she believed even God was practical-minded where finances were concerned. “Our God is a sensible God,” she wrote.¹⁵⁸ It was always her “impression” for instance, that “the blessing Jacob wrestled for” was most

¹⁵⁴Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 10 Oct. 1901; also letter dated “Sunday” following envelope dated 11 Jan. 1904.

¹⁵⁵Corra Harris, “Obsolete Womanhood,” *SEP*, Aug. 24, 1929, p. 6.

¹⁵⁶*The Jessica Letters*, p. 74.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 184.

likely “a few more sheep or a better pasture,” not primarily for greater spiritual insight, or a closer walk with the Almighty.¹⁵⁹ But Lundy remained confused about the practical needs of life, and he and Corra were worlds apart in their interpretation of their Christian duties. Corra found sound philosophy in Christ’s observation, “you have the poor always with you.”¹⁶⁰ Lundy, on the other hand, temperamentally inclined to “endure all things, and suffer all things,” took more seriously Christ’s words, “sell all that thou hast and give to the poor.”¹⁶¹ Not until after his death did even Lundy’s friends know how literally he had taken those words, that “his philanthropy somewhat outran discretion and caused him to leave nothing for his widow.”¹⁶² The extremes on Lundy’s end likely had something to do with Corra’s commitment to her own ideas on the subject of charity, and with her attitude toward the “unworthy” poor. She had experienced poverty throughout her married life, much of the time because of Lundy’s misguided efforts to remedy the poverty of many less worthy folk.

In addition to her own personal experience, however, Corra’s convictions about human nature also colored her social philosophy. Humans, to be sure, were complex

¹⁵⁹Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 177.

¹⁶⁰In *As a Woman Thinks* Corra writes “Who would be charitable if there was no one in need of charity.” p.70.

¹⁶¹Corra reveals her misgivings about this directive when she uses it to discredit what was going on in “atheist Russia,” where the government “offers its citizens the mere illusion that they share and share alike in the wealth of their country.” Christ gave this advice to “a rich young man” who failed to take it. Corra Harris, “A Woman Takes a Look At Politics,” *SEP*, June 13, 1931. Clearly the advice was for wealthy people, not for poor Methodist ministers who had families to provide for.

¹⁶²Undated loose newspaper clipping, Box 110:19.

creatures, “mortal hyphens,” “halfway between” the “flesh and the spirit.”¹⁶³ In essence, human nature was base and unchangeable. It used to be at one time that human nature was, and probably should have remained, “something respectable people endeavored to live down and cover up.”¹⁶⁴ Humans were simply governed by sinful impulses over which they had little hope of changing. The best they could do was learn self-control, a trait she valued and cultivated.¹⁶⁵ The sinful nature of most humans, however, had to be controlled by external authority. What was impossible, in Corra’s thinking, a pipe-dream in the minds of the misguided, was transformation of human nature. That belief was one that helped explain to her satisfaction why ostensibly social problems were not really social but individual. “[T]here is nothing wrong with the world,” she wrote in the midst of the Depression. “If there is anything wrong, the trouble is with us.”¹⁶⁶ But the real trouble was with people who refused to acknowledge the role of human nature. Neither politicians nor social reformers understood. The latter were inclined to “italicize human nature, not to accept it as the sane prose of life.”¹⁶⁷ Politicians, because they had power, could be even more dangerous. In trying to solve the nation’s problems, “Both Wilson and Roosevelt have overlooked the facts of outrageous human nature”¹⁶⁸ She had an

¹⁶³Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 175.

¹⁶⁴Corra Harris, “The Pharisee’s Lament,” p. 32.

¹⁶⁵See chapter six below.

¹⁶⁶Corra Harris, “A Woman Takes a Look at Politics,” p. 133.

¹⁶⁷Corra Harris, “The Literary Spectrum of New York,” p. 441.

¹⁶⁸Corra Harris, “Robin Hood Roosevelt,” typed manuscript, Box 81:16. Interestingly, in this piece, which may have been a speech, Corra identifies the culprit of the Depression: It was

unforgiving attitude toward human nature in general, and for the most part, a spirited disregard for individuals outside her own immediate family.¹⁶⁹

Her misgivings about humanity come through in an essay she wrote once ostensibly celebrating nature. Writing about the goodness of nature and mankind's lost relation to nature, Corra complains that people "have missed the right frontier. We are lost of the great tribe of nature where the trees were our elder brothers and the flowers were little sisters of the soul." But there is far more disdain for humanity than respect for nature in the discourse. People's "craving for human companionship" was not normal but "morbid." Nature makes a far better companion than even the "friendliest friend." "[N]ot that the tree is immortal, or sentient, but it is *there*, so much alive, so beneficent and so intelligible, which is more than can be said of a human comrade." "Besides, men are sorry, inefficient, unreliable kinsmen at best." Humans simply were not made to coexist as closely together as modernity had brought them. "We have associated with one

"ruthless commercialism" that had "produced" the Depression. However, those who were suffering were not the poor, unemployed roaming the streets. Actually, that image of the "forgotten man" was a figment of the national imagination. Her image was quite different. In her mind the forgotten man was the one laughing all the way to the bank with his relief check. "Meanwhile there has never been such a scarcity of labor. The vast majority of the unemployed have retired on their income. In the rural sections you cannot find one with a fox hound to cut hay or pick cotton. Neither are they trailing the highways and pavements of cities. They go like other customers of banks once a week to the welfare centers to draw their rations and rent checks. Robin Hood's next slogan should be the "Hidden Man" with plans to rout him out and put him to work."

¹⁶⁹Occasionally Corra expressed sentiments to the contrary. She told one admirer who wrote her inquiring about her personal life, "I am afraid of the world, but I like men and women, especially women. If I have a talent, it is not a literary talent, it is a gift for loving." (Corra Harris to a Mrs. Strong, who had written praising her novel *My Son*, 27 April 1922) In another place, she writes that "*goodness* is so inherent in human nature that it is found nowhere else." (Corra Harris, "Fashions in Fiction," *Independent*, 22 June 1905, p. 1407.) She calls it the "sane prose of life," merely misunderstood by do-gooders in New York City. (Corra Harris, "The Literary Spectrum of New York," *Independent*, 30 Mar. 1914, p. 441.)

another so exclusively that the time has come when we are more or less unbearable to each other. We worry our mankind priests, doctors, philanthropists, too much with troubles that would dissolve if we lived more in the fields and less in society.” Humans could not and should not be forced to try, to live so much in society because they were “hampered by troubles of their own, by weariness, temper, selfishness and all manner of circumstances.”¹⁷⁰ It simply would be a waste of time to try to change “all manner of circumstances” or to help individuals “hampered by troubles of their own,” when one could not change individuals’ “weariness, temper,” or “selfishness.” “Weariness,” “temper,” and “selfishness” were the incorrigible substance of human nature.

And fatalism was at the heart of Corra’s beliefs about human nature. “To me,” Corra wrote, “it seems that we are all destined, predetermined by the width and height [sic] of something within us called by different people different names, soul, spirit, capacity,--but we cannot by taking thought add one cubit to the top of it, or take one away.”¹⁷¹ And, for the most part, human nature was, as her Puritan forebears had believed, beset by the original sin.¹⁷² Humans might be “born innocent” nonetheless they

¹⁷⁰Corra Harris, “The Great Kinship,” pp. 899-900.

¹⁷¹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 16 May 1901.

¹⁷²Corra may have had doubts about this conviction at times, or she may have sensed how unpopular bald statements on the nature of human nature were. In her “Note on Lynchings” (no date; Box 79.9) which may have been preparation for a speech or an article, she begins a statement explaining the inevitability of lynching, “But human nature being what it is, and ever shall be in its bestial primitive . . .” She crosses out those words and adds: “But things being as they are, and human nature being what it is in its primitive and even bestial sense of justice and since we cannot illiminate [sic] lynchings under such conditions . . .”

had a “very dangerous” nature.¹⁷³ Humans were “the tragic figure in all creation.”¹⁷⁴ They were tragic because, knowing good from evil, they were generally powerless to choose the former over the latter. And efforts to change were practically futile because human nature was essentially unalterable. “[Y]ou cannot change the real nature of men and women . . . it is the same old everlasting element today it was in the beginning.”¹⁷⁵ “[V]ices” are “the only things that never change in men and women.”¹⁷⁶ And she held her view against all opposition. In a forum discussing the nature of evil in human existence, poet and dramatist, Percy MacKaye, challenged her grim view of human nature: “I am astonished at your belief . . . that there is nothing good in us,” MacKaye said. She answered that in young people who had had all the benefits of modern society, that even though they had “a moral sense,” they were yet “without moral power.” When MacKaye countered, “That takes patient development,” she responded “How long are you going to live? A thousand years?”¹⁷⁷ No amount of patience, Corra believed, could outlast the strength of human nature. It was spiritual dirty laundry. It fostered guilt. “Every man is forever guilty of himself, what he is by nature.”¹⁷⁸ Humankind, after all, was “a criminal

¹⁷³Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 70.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 298.

¹⁷⁵Corra Harris, “New York as Seen From a Georgia Valley,” p. 97.

¹⁷⁶Corra Harris, “The Literary Spectrum of New York,” p. 441.

¹⁷⁷“Discussion on Evil.”

¹⁷⁸Corra Harris, “The Pharisee’s Lament,” p. 32.

either really or potentially.”¹⁷⁹

Corra’s sense of fatalism grew out of her views about human nature, and there is a tone of fatalism pervading her writing from the earliest correspondence to works written just before her death. The essence of her thinking on human nature and on fate is captured in some of her correspondence with Paul More. “[L]ife has been such a *suffering* business for me, and must always be,” she wrote More.¹⁸⁰ She confided in him often her belief in “the general cussedness of fate.”¹⁸¹ More might not be conscious of fate the same way Corra was, but that did not necessarily mean he was not equally as bound by it. “Is there no fate creeping up your hind leg, I wonder. At least with your sublime sense of freedom you will never know it if there is, and that will be cheating indeed.”¹⁸² But Corra never found a way to cheat fate. “I was born on the ‘finger nail of fate’ myself and I have been balancing myself there ever since.”¹⁸³ Fate seemed always to win in what she perceived to be a hostile battle for existence. “To me life is a battle we fight and lose,” she wrote More. But it was not so much disappointment or even disillusionment, because she never thought life would be otherwise. “I never expected any thing else. My courage has consisted in fighting under these conditions. The

¹⁷⁹Corra Harris, “New York as Seen From a Georgia Valley,” p. 97. The end of this sentence reads, “. . . as they are saints the same way.” But her philosophy is shaped far more by belief in the negative rather than the positive potential of humans.

¹⁸⁰Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 29 Oct. 1903.

¹⁸¹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 14 October 1907.

¹⁸²Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 23 May 1901.

¹⁸³Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 14 Sept. 1901.

feebleness of the flesh is horrible to me. If ever I am resurrected, I shall need a doctor for my soul at once, it is scarred all over from this feebleness of the flesh. The world hits through to it, and I have no defense, no escape in your sense of freedom.”¹⁸⁴

In this battle of self against self, fate was even more arbitrary in its designs against woman, the weaker sex. They clearly were at a greater disadvantage. Men could hope to gain some refinement, and could at least behave as though they were infinitely good rather than the opposite. Woman’s nature could never be so disguised. “[T]heir original elements cannot be modified by education and training as in the case of men.”¹⁸⁵ A well-educated woman (especially “the Ph.D.”) to Corra was “the most formidable, the hardest, most unnatural form that intelligence can take in this world.”¹⁸⁶ Corra fortunately was not a Ph.D., but she was smart enough to know many of her own “vices.” They included an inordinate obsession with personal attention from the editors of *The Independent*, especially Paul More. “It is not that I do not know *how*” to change and be like their other contributors who naturally knew better than to beg editors for personal correspondence. “My knowledge of things [propriety in relation to editors] as limited as that is, far exceeds my ability to accomplish. . . . It is the way I am made.”¹⁸⁷ Corra did not even mind “appearing the kind of fool I must appear” when she breached propriety, as she

¹⁸⁴Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 23 May 1901.

¹⁸⁵Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 10 November 1901 [check date].

¹⁸⁶Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 3 Feb. 1904.

¹⁸⁷Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 20 Nov. 1902. Corra did admit, once however, “I never do know exactly what is conventionally scandalous and what is not.” (10 Feb. 1904) When it came to editors, though, the worry over convention never stood in her way.

often knew she did with More and the other editors. "It never has embarrassed me to be accounted a fool or egregious," she wrote, half-apologizing to More for one of her many "wildcat letters." It was another of her actions over which she had no control. Though it might cause her "to sacrafice [sic] a lifetime of love and friendliness," nonetheless she felt she "would have had to [write begging for a response] because I am born that way."¹⁸⁸ Being "born that way," there was no need to try and change what she was by nature.

Whatever were Corra's faults--and she was acutely aware, she was sure, of most of them--she simply could not help it. Her experience confirmed to her the wholesale depravity of human nature, female nature especially, as well as its immutability. "[I]t would make no difference if I was intirely [sic] to blame. There is always a pressure on me that I regret but cannot escape and it comes out in the form of supernatural impudence. It is my misfortune to be that way, my cloven hoof, and whoever I come in contact with has got to put up with it or hurt my feelings."¹⁸⁹ Corra could withstand "hurt feelings" from most anybody but More, and was careful to point out to him in detail ways to keep him from doing so. "I have to do the way I am made to do, talk the way I am made to talk, or be that cheaper fool [?] the hypocrite."¹⁹⁰ As much as Corra admired Paul More, even his advice had little effect on a part of her nature she believed innate. She wrote that she could "only take a hint from you at last by which to guide me on my own particular course. And this is not because I am intractable, or am conceited, but it is

¹⁸⁸Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 14 Oct. 1907.

¹⁸⁹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 29 Oct. 1903.

¹⁹⁰Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 14 Sept. 1901.

because I have been created so that I cannot change the forms in which ideas come to me any more than I can change the contour of my face.”¹⁹¹ Corra’s belief that human nature in general was beyond any individual’s control, and from her own experience, that woman’s nature was even more “defective” than man’s,¹⁹² and that both were ultimately the victims of fate, speak to the roots of her social philosophy.

If there was an ameliorative to human nature it was strict enforcement of a moral code like the Ten Commandments, which worked by enforcing “a moral bias” on people, and whatever moral restrictions went for men, went doubly so for women.¹⁹³ For humans to be redeemable in Corra’s mind, morality was something that had to be forced. No human of his or her own accord had the desire to choose good over evil. They would, in fact, quite naturally choose evil over good if left to the dictates of nature. In desperation over their eternal state, humans would choose God, Corra believed, and through fear of

¹⁹¹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 7 June 1901. In one of her many self-effacing and self-revealing letters to Paul More, Corra explains some of her limitations as a woman, chiefly her inferior intellect, and her inability to change herself, but assures him nevertheless that she will not be crushed under the weight of his criticism. She had many faults but the hypersensitivity common to most writers was not one of hers. On the contrary, she expected, anticipated and was “honestly grateful for all [his] criticism.” I am “one of the humble, and one of the meek of this earth.” I am “just a learner” as Browning calls us. I can no more avoid mischievous [sic] motives sometimes than I can live without my hairpins, but I expect more dignity of spirit in a man. I am incapable of attributing ungenerous or vicious, or cruel motives to a man who found fault with my work. Men have always dealt more faithfully and conscientiously with me than women. The fault between us lies on my side. I have no compunctions about trying the patience of one if I think I will not suffer in consequence. And it will not do to trust my repentance even. But I hope everybody will excuse this defect of my nature. I dont [sic] think I am responsible for it, because if I had made myself, I should have left it out. . . . You can see how sad it is to be this way made. But I am not such a fool as not to understand the fine large difference between such a nature and that which contains the unwieldy element of masculine sincerity. (Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 13 July 1901.)

¹⁹²Chapter five deals directly with her ideas about the nature of woman’s nature.

¹⁹³Corra Harris, “The Pharisee’s Lament,” p. 33.

God, or through fear of consequences individuals attributed to punishment from God, they would obey God's moral code.

Corra's social outlook was shaped by a number of different influences, but arguably, each was, if not directly informed, at least augmented, by her southern identity. Among the most profound of influences, no doubt, was her experience with living near or in poverty throughout most of her married life. As her experience changed, though, and as she moved on her own away from poverty after her husband's death, she retained the same basic ideas about human nature, ideas that brooked no opposition. Human nature was bad. It was up to human ingenuity to find ways to "live it down" or "cover it up." Southerners, in Corra's mind, had found the cleverest ways of doing that. Men developed chivalry; women developed personality. But more importantly, everyone knew his or her place. Gender happened to be one of the chief organizing principles that informed the social structure and simplified life for everyone. But the same resignation, sacrificial attitude, and absence of intellectual curiosity that informed the ideal woman in Corra's works, also informed virtually everyone outside the power structure. The poor, male and female, learned the same sort of resignation to their fate as the model southern "sad-eyed Madonna." And everyone outside that God-sanctioned power structure, male or female, black or white, knew and observed place. Interestingly, in all of her works discussing or portraying the ideal woman, or the ideal poor (who were as helpless in their fate as genteel women), the trait most needed was resignation, not resourcefulness. The sense one gets from reading Corra's essays, stories, and discourses on the proper attitude toward one's place in life, is that not of resourcefulness, but clearly of resignation. The

former suggests some degree of control over one's destiny, while the latter implies a willed submission to one's fate. In an environment where opportunity was so limited, where identity was so rigidly prescribed, and resignation was the only means of coping, where one dare not question that such ordering was the wisdom of God, the mind groped within for answers. But the probing was fruitful of little more than guilt for questioning something sacred. The simplest answer lay not in the social structure, because that was unquestioned, but in something inexplicable: the mystery of human nature. An unchanging and unchangeable human nature, at best controllable, but ultimately corrupt, provided ready answers for almost any serious question of life.

Chapter 3

PAUL ELMER MORE AND THE MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF CORRA HARRIS

Essayist, poet and literary critic, Paul Elmer More was an early mentor of Corra Harris. His influence was arguably greater than any single source besides her southern identity. More was influential, if not in actually shaping Corra's fundamental beliefs and values, at least in providing her with the language to articulate her ideas for the press--ideas, which had been, until then in her own mind at least, much less clearly discernible. Corra believed More was the wisest of modern sages, and felt affirmed by the affinity of essential beliefs they shared about human nature. It was, moreover, his peculiar brand of dispassionate "humanism" that gave substance, form, and finally legitimacy to her early misgivings about human nature, and that same dispassion which confirmed her misanthropic social philosophy.

More was literary editor of *The Independent* from 1901-1903 when Corra first became associated with him; he then moved to the New York *Evening Post* where he was literary editor from 1903-1909; and from there he moved to the *Nation* where he was editor from 1909-1914.¹ Corra had not been publishing in *The Independent* long when

¹More held the post of literary editor for both the *Post* and the *Nation* from 1906-1909. Arthur Hazard Dakin, *Paul Elmer More* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960) p. 98. For other sources on More, see: "Paul Elmer More: Biographical and Bibliographical Note" and

More became the literary editor there. Together they co-authored her first book-length work, *The Jessica Letters: An Editor's Romance* (G.P. Putnam's Sons 1904), a book of epistles between lovers Philip Towers, a New York editor, and Jessica Doane, a Georgia reviewer.² The idea was inspired by the actual correspondence between Harris and More in the early 1900s.³ The letters were to be a dialogue reflecting different regional perspectives on politics and society. What they became was a forum for two shades of the same political conservatism.

"Introduction" in Daniel Aaron, ed., *Paul Elmer More's Shelburne Essays on American Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963); Stephen L. Tanner, *Paul Elmore More: Literary Criticism as the History of Ideas* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1987).

²There was speculation by at least one of More's colleagues that the love affair was not purely fictional. Literary editor Edwin E. Slosson (whom Corra for sometime despised as much for his professional deference to his "Ph.D." wife as for his own character) believed that there might be more to the relationship between Corra Harris and Paul More than a literary partnership. In a review of *The Jessica Letters*, Slosson expressed doubt that "the passions and tenderness in some of the letters are fictitious." But John Talmadge, Corra's biographer, believed Slosson's "insinuation was off the mark." Admittedly, she admired and respected More more than the other editors. While Corra "respected" both William Hayes Ward and Hamilton Holt of *The Independent*, she actually "revered Paul Elmer More," Talmadge wrote. Yet there was nothing, he believed, to justify the accusation Slosson made. Corra's "admiration" for More was "nothing more than another example of the friendly, personal relationship she always sought with editors" (Talmadge, pp. 33-35). After reading the extant letters between Harris and More, though, I am inclined to think Slosson's observation probably reveals more insight than "insinuation," and that here Talmadge is the one "off the mark."

³Dakin, p. 89. About the origin of *The Jessica Letters* Arthur Dakin wrote, "When she had sent More scores of reviews and every few days for a year had deluged him with correspondence whose exhausting length, pronounciatory spelling, and unrestrained temperamentality accompanied an amusing, intelligent, and intense interest in fiction, he proposed they write a novel, the first at which she tried her hand." Dakin called the novel "sweet, flimsy, and ephemeral as a valentine." About the novel Rober Shafer wrote that More "had not the natural aptitude for the undertaking that Mrs. Harris so evidently had. Her creation of Jessica and of Jessica's surroundings is charming; and her language is vivid, often beautiful, nearly always highly individual--indeed inimitable. By comparison, Jessica's editor-lover, Philip Towers is almost tame." (Shafer, p. 103) Corra's biographer, Talmadge, suggests rightly that "Mrs. Harris's letters to More during the writing of the book are more entertaining than those she contributed to [the book itself]" (p. 34).

Although More is hardly remembered today for his literary contributions or literary criticism, he was well-respected in his own day, even by those who disagreed with him. He came very close to being the first American to win the Nobel Prize in 1930 when it went instead to Sinclair Lewis.⁴ More's contemporaries regarded him as a worthy intellectual contender. More biographer, Stephen Tanner, writes, "T.S. Eliot considered him one of the two wisest men he had known. Even H. L. Mencken, who had no sympathy for More's way of thinking, conceded that he was "the 'nearest approach to a genuine scholar' America had."⁵ In his work, whether it was reviewing others or writing his own, he was a man who always dealt "with the fundamental questions of what is the nature of man and how should he believe and act."⁶ Walter Lippmann characterized him as a "man who, in the guise of a critic, is authentically concerned with the first and last things of human experience."⁷ More's conclusions, however, after pondering the "first and last things of human experience," never tempered his belief in "the inherent combativeness of human nature."⁸ "[W]e think we have grown and changed our nature," More wrote relatively late in life, "but in the end we fall back into the pit from which we were dug."⁹ His ponderings taught him early and sustained his faith in a very self-

⁴Tanner, p. 1; Dakin, p. v.

⁵Tanner, p. 1.

⁶Tanner, p. 8.

⁷Quoted in Tanner, p. 4.

⁸Paul Elmer More, *Aristocracy and Justice*, Shelburne Essays, IX (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915) p. 144.

⁹More, *Pages from an Oxford Diary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951, 1937), no. XVII (pages not numbered).

absorbed and self-interested form of humanism.

The nature of More's humanism is captured in an essay he wrote on property and law. In a point, he proclaimed unashamedly, to "the civilized man the rights of property are more important than the right to life" and that "rightly understood the dollar is more than the man." The fact "that law is concerned primarily with the rights of property," and not human rights, and that this was undeniably a means of social injustice was not something to lament, but rather, something to celebrate.¹⁰ More's humanism emphasized above all else the need to constrain the lower impulses in humankind.¹¹ This chapter examines how More's thinking might have influenced the social philosophy of Corra Harris. It does so by looking first at the relationship between Harris and More, and then by analyzing More's philosophy. The former reveals something of Corra Harris's personality and temperament as well as an understanding of how and why More was so influential in her life, while the latter reveals the ways his influence might have shaped her social philosophy.

Corra's relationship with More was based on their professional association, that of an editor with a reviewer. She regarded him with awe, as something of a modern visionary. "I always read whatever of yours I find," she wrote More, "and for the same reason that Lundy prays and fasts, to chasten my spirit, to keep me humble and remind me of what disjointed long necked sentences I write in comparison."¹² "I do not know

¹⁰Paul Elmer More, *Aristocracy and Justice*, pp. 135-141.

¹¹More, *On Being Human*, pp. 7-8. If humans could be taught to "inhibit" their "expansive impulses," he believed, to yield their faculties to be "ordered to a design not of their making," humankind would invariably be lifted and human suffering reduced.

¹²Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 13 Dec. 1901.

how to tell it," she wrote, "but there is something touching to me in your writings that pleases me with a happiness that is exquisite when I read Keats 'Ode on a Grecian Urn.' And I hope you will not mind my talking so to you. I shall probably not do it often. And you must feel how much I mean it."¹³ More became, Talmadge wrote, Corra's "literary oracle."¹⁴

Corra decided early that she would not "aim to be like" her mentor because she did not have "the wherewithal to write that way."¹⁵ But she depended on More to help her, if not reach his literary heights, at least to reach to the limits of her own. "I could never come up to the ideals of a man with your jointed and finished literary imagination," she wrote, but with his help, she could improve, she could at least "be considered respectable as well as 'interesting.'" "That is your usual comment on my style,-- 'certainly is interesting,'--Yes, but anybody who can tell a flamboyant lie can be interesting. What I want is a slick decent, dignified literary manner of writing reviews."¹⁶ If anyone could help her there, More could. She was so influenced by his opinion that a mere comment from him could turn her thinking and her own opinion completely around, which she admitted freely:

Your serene mental contempt for the enthusiasm of another person over a bit of modern literature makes you the most terrifying person to deal with when one has

¹³Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 24 Feb. 1909.

¹⁴Talmadge, p. 34.

¹⁵Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More. The date of this letter is unclear. It is either the 2nd or the 12th of July 1901.

¹⁶Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, precise date is unclear but probably 10 Nov. 1901.

been guilty of a literary hurrahing. The way you talked about "Truth Dexter," for instance, made me feel like I had been guilty of some kind of bad form in church, giggled during prayers or shouted during the sermon!--And all because I admired the thing!--You so turned me against that book that now I would not stay in the same room with it!¹⁷

Corra admired More for his intellect and learned as much as she could from him, but her fondness for him came, in part, from his tolerance of her, something she wondered and worried about early in their association. In response to his suggestion that they begin work on what later became *The Jessica Letters*, she wrote,

. . . how will you put up with my evident dust origin, my ferocious personality? For I am not only a Christian, I am a pagan, a savage and everything else clear on down the trail of my evolution. I live in my mind and imagination. You live in the minds and imaginations of those old masters who have made you what you are. Your originality consists in interpreting them. But all I can do is to interpret myself and everything else by myself. That is a very narrow point of view, how can you have patience with me? You have standards of all sorts of excellencies, and you go by them. They are your gospels. But I do not seem to have any except elemental characteristics. They are not intellectual, but personal.

Because she was limited to "elemental characteristics" she knew she was capable of the worst sort of "literary vandalism." She wondered how he would feel when, in response to one of More's letters as Philip Towers, she as Jessica Doane inevitably interpreted his ideas like a "barbarian." What would he think? "You have sometimes held the line while a fish flashed in and out of the water, darting this way and that," she wrote. "Just so I would run off with one of you[r] ideas. I could not help twisting and turning it till I made

¹⁷Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 13 December 1901. Corra was determined, however, not to let More turn her against George Washington Cable's *The Cavalier*, a novel she was "carried away" with.

it fit into my own mind.”¹⁸ How would More react to her “narrow point of view”?

It was no small relief to discover that not only could he tolerate her and her idiosyncrasies, he seemed one of the few people she knew who accepted her as she was, one of the few around whom she could be herself. His indulgence and patience with her perpetual paper harangues convinced her he had the character of a saint.¹⁹ It won her total devotion. She wrote him, “you have such a lovely toleration for [my] ways I could not help being myself.”²⁰ He would allow her to complain to him about anything in any way that relieved her to do so. He never seemed unsettled or annoyed with her tirades, even when they were directed at him, and he never censured her for them. She became acutely aware of how much their correspondence meant to her when she realized from time to time that their professional relationship was destined to end and that she would have to learn to deal with new editors, none of whom, she was sure, could possibly have the patience and tolerance of More. She asked him once, “Please let me keep you for a card up my sleeve [sic], because I can’t tell when I will have to cheat sorrow in this game of life.”²¹

Corra hoped that the “tone” of her letters “should always be correctly comprehended,” but she knew there was the distinct possibility that they might not be. They were personal, she knew, but were they too personal? “Am I always writing to you

¹⁸Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 28 May 1902.

¹⁹It might also explain why and how her admiration for his reserve, dispassion, and indifference, as well as her emulation of these traits, had an influence on her political conservatism.

²⁰Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 29 Oct. 1903.

²¹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 5 June 1903.

grandiloquently about some personal experience? I am. Do not mind. All children are demonstrative. And I am a child mentally. . . . I constitutionally and mentally lack what Albert Herbert calls 'poise.'" But if her letters were personal, she wanted him to know they were not necessarily emotional. She had read enough of More to know what he thought of human emotion, and it was not flattering. She sought to convince More that her words "do not represent my feelings so much as they do my intellectual conception of this or that emotion or idea." With no more encouragement than a lack of discouragement, she made More her confessor. Besides, he knew how, if he wanted, to put an end to the incessant barrage. He could tell her to stop. The fact that he did not assured Corra that he obviously approved, and that he agreed with her that there were "advantages about keeping a barbarian among the list of your friends."²²

Nonetheless there were times when she could not be content with merely remaining on a "list" of More's friends--she needed more active involvement, which included feedback directly from More. It was the chief source of inspiration for the articles and reviews she wrote for *The Independent*. Long "silences" on More's part distressed Corra. In the first year of their association she warned him that she was completely dependent upon his response to whatever query she had written him. She told him, "you will remember that your opinion alone steadies me. I haven't any sense of my own. I get confused, and I cannot tell for certain whether I am going right or wrong."²³ Nor was a marginal notation or brief impersonal note what Corra considered

²²Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 15 Jan. 1905; 26 June 1901.

²³Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 25 July 1901.

“encouragement.” When he failed to respond with a letter for long periods, she let him know what were the consequences for her. It was like working for no pay. But in fact, on second thought, money was for her, “simply a mercenary [sic] convenience that I cannot do without.” The reward she wanted was not money, but “a word of some sort” from the people at *The Independent*, preferably More, but failing that, one of the others would do. Without that “word,” though, she wrote,

I am like an actor who has lost his cue. I am out of touch. I miss something at the point of my pen. I suffer the most harrowing reflections and repentance lest at last I have overflowed the gentle barrier of your patience and said something altogether unforgivable. . . . Naturally nobody else in the understudy work of literature in America has the affrontery to insist upon a personal correspondence with her editors.

But she was not just anybody else. And she was not in the “literary business” to be just anybody. “[W]here is the diversion for me, if that’s all there is . . . I would not exchange the privileges [sic] I enjoy of writing and receiving letters from you gentlemen in the office for all of poor William D’s greenhouse reputation in literature.”²⁴ “I mention this,” she concludes in this letter to More,

because it is something over two weeks since I have had anything but a bowlegged six line note from Mr. Holt, and nearer three since I have heard from you at all,--not that you ever hurt yourself writing. But you could say something, you know. I have been working so hard to please you for nearly two years now that the top of my wits are getting gray headed and you have never written me but one letter really.²⁵

²⁴The reference is to William Dean Howells.

²⁵Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 20 Nov. 1902.

An encouraging letter from More could carry Corra a long way. One particular “letter gave wings to my fainting spirit,” she wrote him. It gave her the confidence she needed to face some unkind criticism from Dr. Sasnett, a colleague of Lundy’s, who was always accusing her of “impudent, blankety blank ignorance.” Thanks to a letter from More, though, which arrived the same day as one of Sasnett’s unwelcome visits, she spent a “*heavenly day*” “celebrating another lawless literary victory at the expense of his opinion.”²⁶ But such letters from More were, for Corra, so few and far between that she actually gave up on gaining his approval fairly early in the paper relationship. She let him know as much. After having digested a small library of works to gain more background for her literary reviews, she wrote More, “I hope to please you better now,--Not that you will ever tell me so! No! But all the same I will know myself . . .”²⁷ On another occasion she wrote, “I think you ought to be good to me this one time and answer this letter soon. If you dont it seems to me that I am going to sulk!--Not that that matters to you of course, but its very injurious to me.”²⁸ In another place, she maintained, “[S]omebody has just got to write to me! I get lonesome without it.”²⁹

“Lonesome” was a word Corra used to describe depression, which is what she suffered when she had no intellectual stimulation. Beyond needing a “word” of approval from More, Corra’s deepest longing was for ideas. Without them she grew “desperately lonely.” She would not merely “sulk” when she did not hear from More, she would

²⁶Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 10 Nov. 1901.

²⁷Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 18 Nov. 1902.

²⁸Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 15 Jan. 1905.

²⁹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 20 Nov. 1902.

experience “graves of despair [sic].” “The truth, is it makes me lonesome not to have something on my mind for you.”³⁰ Corra longed for the life of the mind and for the company of those who were like-minded. She explained her feelings in a letter threatening to “head just as straight for New York as the crow flies.” She was bored to death with uninteresting “church people” who shared with her nothing but a mutual distrust of each other. She despised their hypocrisy; they believed her an arrogant egotist. The antagonism left her feeling isolated and alone. “I get lonesome, I want to see somebody that I need not be on guard with in the expression of my views etc. Besides I have an affection for you all, and it comes over me in a wave, I want to see you, I want to let go, and just rest a while in the companionships which have proved to be so kind and honest. I know how foolish is the feeling, how impossible to gratify and I get over it until the next time. But sooner or late [sic] it will master me.”³¹ Elsewhere she tried similarly to explain. “[H]ave I been teasing you for letters lately?” she asked.

And do you know the reason why?--Because I had no ideas in my head. I know of nothing so depressing as that sensation. I feel as if I was about to be damned. I want company, consolation, conversation. I pray to all my friends for help. I weep and call out that I am drowning [sic]. That is the mood I am in when I write and ask you for letters.

Since the moods were directly related to having some idea or other to occupy her mind, once so occupied, she could live quite well satisfied alone with her thoughts.

[O]nce I feel a little green spear of thought growing up in my mind, I forget you. I

³⁰Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, letter dated “Sunday” but follows an envelope dated 11 Jan. 1904.

³¹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, letter dated “Sunday” but follows envelope dated 11 Jan. 1904.

don't care whether you write or not. I forget myself, every care, and I have an exaltation nearly as sweet as happiness. Its about the only way God ever blesses me. Thus today, I dont mind whether you write or not because I have that tremulous sense of a companionship within to a new idea. Maybe it is not anything, but maybe it is! Meanwhile I could snap my finger at the whole world, I feel so capable of surviving without it. But you had better write the letter I asked you for, because by tomorrow I may be in one of my graves of despair [sic].³²

Corra suffered some of her greatest periods of “dispair” when she thought that her professional relationship with More was about to end, knowing that once she no longer had any official reason to correspond with him, there would be virtually no more communication between them. Although the relationship did not actually end when he left *The Independent*, the basis for the relationship ended shortly after he moved to the *New York Evening Post* and their collaborative work *The Jessica Letters* was published in 1904. After that the correspondence is sporadic but the sentiments no less heartfelt. Significantly, she continued to keep up with and read his work. In 1909 Corra wrote to thank More for sending her the latest copy of the *Shelburne Essays*, and told him that she had received copies of all but one of the previous issues directly from the publisher. She also lamented the fact that the two of them were no longer closely associated, a circumstance, she was sure, that had retarded her literary development. “I have lost infinitely,” she mourned, “qualities that I might have developed if I had stayed under your influence.”³³ Clearly, however, his chief influence on her was not in literary analysis but in social philosophy. The premises of his philosophy are examined briefly below, and the

³²Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 5 June 1903.

³³Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 12 March 1909.

parallels between the two writers are drawn in following chapters.

“[H]appiness is the final test of morality,” Paul More wrote. One’s relative state of happiness was the best criterion of moral development. Most people, however, were confused about happiness, what it was, and how it could be gained. Contrary perhaps to popular belief, happiness was not “the pleasure of fulfilled desires.”³⁴ Rather, it was integrally bound to the application of two fundamental principles: First, justice, or rather, one’s ability to perceive the meaning of justice, which meant one’s ability to accept the inescapable existence of injustice; and second, happiness could be gained by mastering the self through acts of volition--the “very act itself of choice and of self-control” would bring a certain “happiness of the soul.”³⁵ “*We seek justice for the sake of happiness, and we are just when we are happy;*” More wrote; “or, more briefly still: *Justice is happiness, happiness is justice* (italics his).”³⁶ The “man conscious of doing what he believes is right” and of gaining mastery over the self, was the man capable of happiness.³⁷

And the happy man was the one convinced of the rightness of his cause, after which he need not be deterred by anyone else’s definition of justice.³⁸ When man could

³⁴Paul Elmer More, *Aristocracy and Justice*, p. 215.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 116.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 114.

³⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 114, 216. Corra learned moral certitude from More, how to eliminate “confusion and distress to the moral faculties” when reading and reviewing literature and life. Such a trait came from allowing oneself never to be swayed by an outside opinion. After working closely with More, and after observing carefully his criticisms of hers and others’ writings, Corra wrote, “It seems to me that real genius consists in holding together, [sic] the

“retire into himself” and find developed within himself this faculty of discernment, he would be happy because he would know, More wrote, “with a conviction which no science or philosophy falsely so-called can shake, that beside the passions and wandering desires and blind impulses and the cravings for pleasure and the prod of sensations there is something within him and a part of him, rather in some way his truer self, which controls and checks and knows and pronounces judgment, unmoved amid all motion, unchanged amid continual change, of everlasting validity above the shifting valuations of the moment.”³⁹

Moreover, and most significantly, this ability to judge rightly revealed to the learned man one of the most valued lessons of life: that some things were inevitable no matter how much man wanted to believe to the contrary. Chief among these was the simple, ever-present certainty of social injustice. “Injustice is inherent in the imperfection of man,” wrote More, and acceptance of this fact was the prerequisite of a happy life. “The first step towards the equipoise of a soul just within itself is to recognize the necessity of a measure of injustice in the relation of man with man and with the world.”⁴⁰

In the years following World War I Paul More along with Irving Babbitt led the New Humanism movement, a movement that suited conservative intellectuals who

conception you have, allowing no idea of rights or wrongs from the outside to effect *[sic]* your integral idea. To have the power to outlast analysis and the disintegrating influences of outside prejudices moral or immoral. Then your work, good or bad will be symmetrical *[sic]*, solid, faithful and accurate.” Corra had learned from More that one’s own moral compass was the correct standard by which to judge the legitimacy of an idea. (Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 10 Oct. 1901)

³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 214-216.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 133, 123.

wanted to steer philosophically between organized religion and science. More was careful everywhere, however, to distinguish his humanism from “its presumptive brother, humanitarianism.”⁴¹ Dualism was the foundation of his philosophy and informed all of his essential beliefs (and is covered more fully below). It was, he declared, “the distinctive mark of humanity.”⁴² As the central premise of his belief system, dualism inclined More to juxtapose polarities. This he did to differentiate his own humanism, which he associated with idealism (that of Plato), from humanitarianism, which he associated with materialism or naturalism. Or rather, he saw himself as one representing those who believed in the fundamentally spiritual essence of humankind as opposed to those humanitarians who believed all human needs to be strictly material. “In a word,” More wrote, distinguishing his more “honest and decent” humanism from the deceptive brand of the social reformer, the true “humanist is simply one who takes his stand *on being human*.” He and like thinkers stood “[a]gainst those who still hold that man is only a fragmentary cog in the vast machine which we call the universe, moved by the force of some relentless, unvarying, unconscious law, the humanist asserts that we are individual personalities, endowed with the potentiality of free will and answerable for our choice of good and evil. Against those who reduce man to a chaos of sensations and instincts and desires checking and counter-checking one another in endlessly shifting patterns, the humanist points to a separate faculty of inhibition, the inner check or the *frein vital*, whereby these expansive impulses may be kept within bounds and ordered to a design not

⁴¹More, *On Being Human*, New Shelburne Essays, III (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press) p. 10.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 164.

of their making.”⁴³ Humanitarians, he wrote as Phillip Towers, had a “tendency to place humanity before God, material needs before ideals,” which made them, in his thinking, “the most insidious foes of true religion.”⁴⁴ “They do not perceive that the only remedy against this degeneracy is the renewal of faith in something greater and higher than our material needs.” That “something greater” could be gained if only they would “preach for a while the blessings of poverty and otherworldliness” they might come closer to the kind of changes that would make a real difference.⁴⁵ “I feel certain that the common need today,” More wrote, “is more conviction of the positive reality of the otherworld and less talk about God; for a while at least more sermons modelled on the *Phaedo* of Plato and fewer on the *Confessions* of St. Augustine. . . . Men must be made to believe, and to confess with more than lip-service, that there are laws which govern the spirit-world as rigid and exacting as those which control a steam-engine.”⁴⁶ It was the responsibility of a few to make believers out of the many. The “hope” of the world, More believed,

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁴*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 126. The “tender-hearted materialist,” John Dewey and William James were two humanitarians More believed were especially misleading. They were so particularly for their present-mindedness. (For his thoughts on Dewey, see “Religion and Social Discontent” in *On Being Human*, pp. 117-143; on James, see “The Pragmatism of William James,” *Shelburne Essays*, VII, pp. 195-212.) Dewey’s philosophy was leading people to believe that “existing forms of government, established order, property, the church, institutions generally . . . [were] . . . the dead hand of the past clutching the throat of the living present.” (“Religion and Social Discontent,” p. 118). Dewey and James both were enslaved in “the vicious circle of the present.” In James’s works it was, More cautioned, the “smart contemporaneity” that “most deserve[d] censure.” Philosophers like James and Dewey either refused to consult the past, or they misread it, especially Plato. Had James been “freed” from his present-mindedness, “he would have known that in denouncing Platonism as the type and source of rationalistic metaphysics, he had in mind not the Greek Plato viewed through [Kantian] spectacles.” (“The Pragmatism of William James,” pp. 202, 204, 202)

⁴⁵*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 126-27.

⁴⁶More, *Pages from an Oxford Diary*, no. XIII (pages are not numbered).

depended “primarily, not on the elevation of the masses . . . but on the ability of a few men to hold fast the ancient truth and hand it down to those who come after. So shall beauty and high thought not perish from the earth.”⁴⁷

Humanitarian social reformers were bad enough, but the humanitarian minister was worse. He had lost sight of the Church’s true purpose. The chief focus of the Church should be the individual, as an individual, unburdened by the needs and concerns of anyone outside himself.⁴⁸ If the Church did not make the interest of the individual its purpose, organized religion would, and actually should, become another relic of western society. “Unless the pulpit can give us something different from the exhortations of reformers,” More wrote, “unless it can give us an individual religion, unless it can bring my soul, with no thought of any other man’s soul, into immediate communication with God, I can see no reason why the Church should continue to exist as a separate institution.”⁴⁹ The God of More’s faith was more that of the Old than the New Testament. He was the “Lord of order and righteousness, the Foe of tumult and of sloth, the fighting Jehovah whose arm can slay as well as save,--not by expansion of instinctive desires, nor by sentimental revery, nor by mere letting-go, is His presence felt, but by a certain constriction and bracing-up at the centre of one’s being. . . . His uttered commands are chiefly: Thou shalt not.”⁵⁰ Sentimental ministers blinded by the humanitarian impulse

⁴⁷*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 299-300.

⁴⁸To use the feminine gender here would be to violate More’s meaning. The kind of spiritual communion he refers to he believed was beyond the grasp of women which is made clear below.

⁴⁹Letter from More to Richard W. Boynton, 18 June 1918, quoted in Dakin, p. 117n.

⁵⁰More, *Pages from an Oxford Diary*, no. XVII.

failed to reveal adequately the prohibitive side of God.

Human suffering, More acknowledged, was so much greater than it had to be, but the wrong solution applied to the problem was worse than the problem itself. It was unchecked “expansive impulses” in man that produced the misery of the world. To deny the source of the misery was inevitably to pose the wrong solutions. Philip Towers, More’s fictional identity in *The Jessica Letters*, illustrates the point. Towers was moved to sympathy by Jack, “a child, a little pale, peaked boy, who seems to belong to no one and to have nothing to do--[who] sits staring out into the filthy street with silent, wistful eyes. There is only misery and endurance on his face, with some wan reflection of strange dreams smothered in his heart.” An image of the young boy’s face “haunted” Towers wherever he went and reminded him every day “of the long agony of human history,” of the true source of that agony, and of the failed attempts to find a remedy. “Because I know the misery of that face,” Towers continued in the letter to Jessica, “and the evil that has produced it, because I know that misery has been in the world from the beginning and shall endure to the end, and because my heart is sickened at the thought,-- that is why I rebel so bitterly against a doctrine that turns away from all spiritual consolation for some vainly builded hope of a socialistic paradise on this earth.”⁵¹ The genuine remedy for human suffering like Jack’s was the provision of spiritual resources, not the false “doctrine” of a “paradise on this earth.”

There was no remedy, however, for the *cause* of human suffering. There never had been and never would be. It was the inevitable fate of humankind--poor and rich;

⁵¹*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 80-82.

healthy and sick; young and old; man and woman (and any other polar opposites); all alike. Society owed Jack and the rest of those who were socially disadvantaged the same thing it owed the privileged few, and that was the means to pursue a rich and abundant spiritual life. The only legitimate level playing field was in the spiritual realm, for it was there that all gained alike the “consolation” for their particular fate. Philip assured Jessica that he was “not so foolish as to despise charity or true efforts to increase the comfort of the poor.” The poor deserved comforting. It would behoove social reformers, however, to come to terms with what was possible, and stop suggesting the impossible. Consolation for fate was within the realm of the possible. To change fate was futile and to suggest otherwise was to breed false hope and thereby to foster social discontent. “I know that poverty and pain and wretchedness can never be driven from the world by any besom of the law, and I do see that humanitarianism . . . has bartered away the one valid consolation of mankind for an impossible hope that begets only discontent and mutual hatred among men.”⁵²

The dualism that governed More’s thinking made it impossible for him to see anything but polar opposites. Human sympathy was a romantic notion associated in his mind with man’s lower nature, and as such, not to be trusted. It was a “bitter fact” of life “that wherever sentiment comes into open conflict with the innate egotism of mankind and the innate will to power, sentiment simply shrivels up as a motive of conduct.”⁵³ Significantly, human sympathy was at odds with virtue and personal integrity. The

⁵²*The Jessica Letters*, p. 104.

⁵³More, *On Being Human*, p. 147.

former, in fact, would invariably diminish the latter, which explained why social reformers had too much sympathy and no personal integrity. His advice to Corra regarding social reformers was strong. “As for those socialists, nihilists, and other ists, remember one thing: No reformer is ever to be trusted! My hand and seal to that.” The reason reformers could not be trusted was simple. “The amount of virtue possible to cram into any one man is limited. If he uses that virtue in regulating society and the lives of sinners generally, he is pretty sure to have little left for himself. As for me, not being a reformer, I am virtuous or nothing!”⁵⁴ Virtue shared was virtue debased.

More believed that the “personal integrity” of human beings demonstrated in their private lives was far more important for society than abstract feeling for the masses that motivated socialists and humanitarians around him. “[S]ympathy prefixed by the word ‘social,’ (as it commonly was used in his day),” Tanner writes explaining More, “takes on dangerous connotations.”⁵⁵ Sympathizing with humanity because of what it potentially could be, instead of dealing with humans based upon what they actually were, would invariably lead to exempting individuals from personal responsibility. And personal responsibility, after all, was the only legitimate “doctrine” to teach; the “preaching of any doctrine that minimizes personal responsibility is likely to increase the evil.”⁵⁶ “The whole effect of calling sympathy justice and putting it in place of judgment is to relax the fiber of character and nourish the passions at the expense of reason and the

⁵⁴Paul Elmer More to Corra Harris, 8 March 1909. (The year of this letter might possibly be 1907, but the more likely date is cited.)

⁵⁵Tanner, p. 59.

⁵⁶More, *Aristocracy and Justice*, p. 210.

will.”⁵⁷ Humanitarianism informed chiefly by sentiment and sympathy “externalizes evil from the individual. This leads to a shirking of individual responsibility which in turn poses a serious threat of social disintegration.”⁵⁸ More believed we must “fortify ourselves against such a perversion of the institutions of government as would adapt them to the nature of man as he ought to be, instead of the nature of man as he actually is, and would relax the rigour of law in pity for the degree of injustice inherent in earthly life.”⁵⁹ In keeping with his propensity to find duality behind all meaning, More believed that social policy makers were informed by two extremes: the mindless “sentimentalists” and “theoretical socialists” on the one hand, or the soul-less financiers of the stock market on the other.⁶⁰ “Because men today have no vision beyond material comfort and the science of material things . . . their aims and actions are divided between the sickly sympathies of Hull House and the sordid cruelties of Wall Street.”⁶¹

It seems that of the two, the “sickly sympathies of Hull House” disturbed More more than the “sordid cruelties of Wall Street.” The compassion that inspired Hull House was a classic example of a “false sympathy,” a “pity [which] merely degrades by obscuring the sense of personal responsibility.”⁶² Sympathy was after all “a perilous guest, and only too often drags down a man to the level of that which he pities.” And it

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁵⁸Tanner, pp. 61-2.

⁵⁹More, *Aristocracy and Justice*, p. 140.

⁶⁰*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 270-71.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 297.

seemed to More that everyone around him had let go of the “twin paths of responsibility to God and to a man’s own self,” the two “manly sentiments,” and instead had gone “the way of all-levelling human sympathy,” modeled by the “hysterical parvenu.”⁶³ Sympathy in particular and human emotions in general were the most dangerous of human faculties, and therefore to be guarded at all times. The ability to keep emotions in check was, in fact, a “clear definition of justice: it is that government and harmonious balance of the soul which arises when reason prevails over the feelings and desires, and when this dominance of the reason is attended with inner joy and consenting peace.” Such a personal victory happened “not infrequently with mortification of the feelings”; furthermore, it was “satisfaction of the reason” and not sympathy that led to “the attainment of justice.”⁶⁴

More was well aware of his reputation as a “cold and heartless intellectual,”⁶⁵ and knew early in his writing career of just how far he had grown away from any feeling of sympathy. The following passages from a letter to his sister and to a friend are lengthy but revealing. In a letter to his sister Alice in 1906 More wrote imploring her to guard her capacity for human sympathy perhaps to compensate for his own loss of the same. “If I wrote what was really in my heart,” More confided,

I should merely blacken paper with a long commentary on the emptiness of life-- of my own life in particular. Here I have been toiling and renouncing and wrestling with heartache since I was a boy for fame, and now, when enough praise falls to me to show what fame would be, I find it adds not one jot to the meaning

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁶⁴More, *Aristocracy and Justice*, pp. 110-11.

⁶⁵More, *Pages from an Oxford Diary*, no. V.

of life or to the pleasure in my work. This is a mystery the world has been trying to solve for a good many years, and apparently the solution is not to come from me. And withal I have a number of things which you have not. I do not wonder that you feel the bitterness of it. I beg of you, however, to keep one thing which I have lost--that is the power of sympathy. I won't say that either. I have not lost it; in some ways it is quicker than it ever was; but continual absorption in study, and the endless necessity of writing, bury the simpler personal modes of expression and cut me off from more than you know. And above all don't grieve over having spoiled me! I have not yet found that anyone has been spoiled in this world by affection, have you? As for Darrah [his daughter] I feel sometimes that my own absorption produces a chilly atmosphere about her, not altogether wholesome.⁶⁶

Neither was the sentiment a passing one. Four years later he wrote Alice, "The dreadful truth is that the struggle for life has a sad disheartening effect on most of us. I feel it only too strongly in myself--feel a kind of hardening of the fibres, a disinclination to give myself out in sympathy, a shutting in within an ever narrowing circle."⁶⁷ It is not clear how his "power of sympathy," mentioned in the former letter, was "in some ways . . . quicker than . . . ever," but he leads us to believe that it was not in the nursery of his daughter.

If young Darrah More was to develop "power of sympathy" it would have to come from her mother, Nettie More, who was the heart and soul of the family; the "active and stabilizing factor"; the one known within and without for her "charitable disposition."⁶⁸ More must have appreciated his wife, even if he had misgivings about the propriety of

⁶⁶Letter to Alice More, May 23, 1906, quoted in Dakin, p. 98.

⁶⁷Letter to Alice More, Aug. 6, 1910, quoted in Dakin, p. 110.

⁶⁸Dakin, p. 110.

marriage for serious scholars.⁶⁹ Decidedly, though, whatever “curtailment of . . . liberty” marriage brought a man, in the balance, More believed, it enhanced his life more.⁷⁰

Biographer Arthur Dakin writes about the complementary domestic relationship between Paul and Nettie More, and the benefits to the former from the typical sexual division of labor. “Fortunately for Paul the details of daily existence, so boring to him, fascinated his wife,” Dakin writes.⁷¹ “She devoted herself as intensely to housekeeping as he did to intellectual work. This, from a writer’s point of view, being an ideal division of labor, he left everything, except the ordering of the coal, which he claimed was a man’s job, to her, aided by such occasional cleaning women and maids as they could afford. When he closed the library door, she saw to it that no uninvited caller or other annoyance obliged him to open it.”⁷² Whatever anxieties More suffered over his decision to marry Nettie before the wedding, it is likely that he soon realized the folly of his anguish. And no doubt, he must have thought of Nettie when he wrote, “And always by kindly service, by goodness and modesty, by her pliant ways, she gladdened her new friends, pleasing her new mother with a handmaid’s care, and . . . by piety towards the gods and by humble

⁶⁹See note no. 91 below for More’s sentiments on what marriage by faculty at Oxford, a relatively recent phenomenon, had done to the caliber of instruction there.

⁷⁰In a letter to his sister Alice in 1900, More wrote about his anxiety over his forthcoming marriage: “I cannot but feel a little anxious about my approaching marriage. I have no doubt I shall be happy, and it is probably the best thing for me from every point of view; but on the other hand I have done so little and want to do so much, that I dread any curtailment of my liberty and choice in working. At any moment I may feel a terrible impulse to throw up everything and follow some new impulse. . . .” (quoted in Dakin, p. 76).

⁷¹The evidence for the conclusion that Nettie More found domestic work “fascinating” is not entirely clear.

⁷²Dakin, p. 82.

speech. And all the time with loving words, serenity of heart, and secret services she made her new lord happy.”⁷³ More, as “lord” of the relationship could trust in his wife’s sympathetic nature to shield him from the mundane necessities of life. He could also assure himself that whatever share of sympathy he as an individual might owe to anyone outside himself would be met by his union with one so abundantly filled with sympathy.

Some of More’s observations on human nature were confirmed by personal experience after having spent time fairly well confined at a Lake Seneca farmhouse with his family. Normally, Nettie More ran interference between her husband, her relatives, who vexed him, and the unpleasantries of the nursery. On vacation in 1907, however, close confinement with them behind the walls of a summer cottage, made that impossible. More remarked in a letter to a friend that after “a month in ‘that home of bawdy, bedlam-and-babies,’” he no longer doubted what he had always believed about the nature of human nature. His own suspicions had been confirmed, and he had thus gained inspiration to write the essay on Pascal that he had been struggling with for some time.

[Y]ou will be surprised to hear that the people of the house here have in a way, and certainly without their own volition, helped me in this task. You see Pascal’s faith was based on a contempt for human nature unrestored by Grace. Ordinarily the conventions of life so overlay the real instincts and acts of men that we see mankind in a kind of solid respectable gray. Now here I have been brought in contact with real unadulterated undisciplined human nature, and it has the effect of opening one’s eyes to what we all at bottom are--a poor, restless, animal, evil thing. And as a moral I have before me the two opposite results of indulgence--a stupefied paralytic [his wife’s aunt] in whom the springs of action have been dried up, and an imbecile [his wife’s mother] who has lost all power of inhibition so

⁷³Quoted in Dakin, pp. 82-3.

that there is no buffer of convention between fluttering impulse and action.⁷⁴

His view of human nature caused him to fear the world, to view it with suspicion, even trepidation. "The world at large," he wrote his sister in 1898, "seems to be only a great instrument ready to the hand of the jealous Nemesis . . ." ⁷⁵ In 1909 his cosmic outlook had grown only dimmer. "My own life . . . is a crushing grind," he wrote his sister that fall. "I feel that cynicism and indifference creep every day closer to my heart; I read books by habit, and write for God knows what reason."⁷⁶ Still, even if his professional environment did not bring the satisfaction he sought, he was more comfortable behind the closed doors of his study, where he could remain lost in the abstract, keep his hands clean, and continually "see mankind in a kind of solid respectable gray," rather than in his personal world where there were diapers and wheel-chairs, and where he saw his fellow humans for what they really were "at bottom . . . poor, restless, animal[s], evil thing[s]." In either case, his dualistic thinking made it "hard" for him, he declared, "to establish any sufficient bond between my intellectual life and my personal relationships."⁷⁷ Life for More was a series of unresolved bifurcations.

The reserve, aloofness, and disinterested nature of More was no secret to anyone, not "even those closest to him, acquainted with the outline of his career and with the facets of his character discernible in their association, [those who] had . . . means of

⁷⁴Dakin, p. 104.

⁷⁵Letter to Alice More dated March 15, 1898, quoted in Dakin, p. 61.

⁷⁶Letter to Alice More dated Oct. 7, 1909, Quoted in Dakin, p. 110.

⁷⁷*The Jessica Letters*, p. 36.

obtaining a reasonably full and intimate account of his personality.” “Apart from other causes, [his disinterestedness] was due to . . . the complexity of his nature,” Arthur Dakin wrote.⁷⁸ But many others were less generous and described More’s character as stiff and intractable rather than complex. H.L. Mencken, not surprisingly, had no patience with More’s lack of tolerance. In a review of More’s *A New England Group and Others. Shelburne Essays*. XI, (Houghton Mifflin, 1921) Mencken wrote describing More, “High above the blood-bathed battlements there is a tower, of ivory within and solid ferro-concrete without, and in its austere upper chamber he sits undaunted, solemnly composing an elegy upon Jonathan Edwards, ‘the greatest theologian and philosopher yet produced in this country.’”⁷⁹ Some of his college classmates saw him as “critical, self-centered, unsociable, and aloof.” One of them wrote, “He felt his superiority . . . and was at no pains to hide it.”⁸⁰ And in an edited selection of More’s works Daniel Aaron wrote that More was limited by his “inability to face up to the abhorrent or to identify himself vicariously with sensual, feckless, and untidy human nature.”⁸¹

None of this was lost on Corra, who, though enamored of More’s intellect, was not without harsh criticism of his bankrupt emotions. Her criticisms and judgments are insightful. So also is the fact that later in life, she valued his rather than her own

⁷⁸Dakin, p. v.

⁷⁹Aaron, pp. 10 & 11. Mencken, though a harsh critic of More’s, was not without some praise. He considered him “the best of all the Humanists,” Daniel Aaron writes. Dakin quotes More’s account of a conversation when Mencken told him that he “should [have been] a good fellow” if he had only “drunk more whiskey and begotten more bastards.” Quoted in Dakin, p. 278.

⁸⁰Quoted in Dakin, p. 20.

⁸¹Aaron, ed., p. 9.

judgments. Corra had no compunction, however, even early in her relationship with More, about calling him a “stiff faced man” who “should burn for being so cold.”⁸² She told him once in her typically all too-familiar tone, “I know the cold scholarly atmosphere of your mind as well as you do yourself.”⁸³ He was, in fact, *all* mind, the closest entity she knew to a “disembodied self,” a type for whom she felt a “natural antipathy.” “You seem to me,” she wrote, “to be, not a person so much as a mind of varying moods when it comes to personal contact of any sort. I have never got acquainted with you. The fact is you are not *there*, your personality seems to me to have been sublimated into some sort of intangible intelligence”--an intelligence which had “long since slipped out of the current world and become dishoused.”⁸⁴ In another of Jessica’s letters to Philip she told him that she knew his mind but not *him*; in another that his spirit had “dissolved into these strange illuminations which [he] called thought.” “With you life is but a breath without form,” she wrote, “a whisper out of your long eternity. And I confess that to me the impression of a man not being at home in his own body is nothing short of terrifying.”⁸⁵ In a letter from Corra to More she accused him of being “a wanderer out of time into space and mysteries. . . . You dont need people. You could go on freezing forever and never know any better.”⁸⁶ Loneliness was a feeling that haunted Corra; something she could hardly bear, but at least loneliness was a normal human response. “But *you* dont know anything

⁸²Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 24 Aug. 1903; 15 April 1903;

⁸³Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 18 Nov. 1902.

⁸⁴Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 28 May 1902; 14 Jan. 1902; 15 Jan. 1905.

⁸⁵*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 93; 40.

⁸⁶Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 15 Jan. 1905.

about it!" she wrote More. "You were born lonesome and you like it."⁸⁷ Once after he wrote her that the "bowels of human feeling" had "dried up within" him, she informed him that, while he might have many traits to recommend him, including "an impersonal faculty for justice and mercy," when it came to human feelings, he was clueless.

"[M]an," she wrote, in one of her astutely insightful moments,

you do not know any thing about "bowels of feeling." That is an inordinate figure of speech with you. You can interpret the spirit of man, but his heart action is a blank mystery to you. There are certain places in human nature that have been domesticated, the "bowels of feeling," etc., but I believe you crawled out of your cradle beyond them. There are *homeless* tracks in human nature that lead "to fair lands forlorn" with which you are well acquainted. Their topography belongs to the spirit altitudes of man, and few have the speech to define them, but you can. You can give a voice to this region, cold, thin, remote and to most people unintelligible. Witness your *Shelburne Essays*. . . . I mention all this lest you should imagine you had really lost something in realizing the fact that the "bowels of feeling have dried up in you." Dont worry about it. You never had any.⁸⁸

More's lack of empathy or ability to relate to others really bothered Corra, but she understood it because she knew at least some of its origins: It was his classical education. She admired the classically trained mind, no doubt. Once when More wrote approving words about something she had written, she knew it was no small victory on her part. "I always think that a word of praise wrung from a man with the Greek 'accent' of mind and spirit is a great concession to a barbarian like me."⁸⁹ But the classically trained mind could be blind in some ways, the way his was as he revealed in his discernment of the

⁸⁷Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 29 Oct. 1903.

⁸⁸Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 15 Jan. 1905.

⁸⁹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, March 3, 1902.

reason why women at Bryn Mawr did not like him. He believed it was ““Not because I was unamiable, but because I was indifferent.””⁹⁰ Corra set him straight. He was not “indifferent” to women. No man in his right mind, or no man who was not “stupid or very old” could be indifferent to women. No, his attitude toward women was much more pernicious. “Mr. More, you exorcise women, you cast them out of your mind like you would seven devils.” To be able to “exorcise women” was not a common ability. In fact, the only men she knew capable of such an exploit were those like More trained in “ancient classics whether Greek or Sanscrit.” She had known many of them, all of whom had the dubious talent of being able to “cast out from his consciousness every living vital thing.” Corra’s feelings about such people certainly were not indifferent, but strong and decided:

That is why if Lundy dies and I am asked to marry again, I shall ask the rash man if he knows any of the ancient languages. If he does, I will not marry him though he owned a whole big forest and a castle besides! I know some of the pangs of being exorcised, cast out, looked at as if my features [illegible] some kind of hieroglyphics! Never call a classical minded man’s attitude to women mere “indifference.” It is something far more offensive.⁹¹

⁹⁰Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, probably Nov. 10, 1901, (the second number in the day is illegible). Here Corra is quoting back to him his own words.

⁹¹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, Nov. 10, 1901. Corra comes much closer than does More in rightly explaining why the women at Bryn Mawr might not like him. Although they could not have read what he would write and publish several years after his visit there about women in higher education in “Oxford, Women, and God,” the last chapter of *A New England Group and Others*. Shelburne Essays, XI, the sentiment he reveals in that chapter was most likely evident in his mood and manners at Bryn Mawr in 1901. In accounting for why the quality of education at Oxford had declined since mid-nineteenth century, More writes: “At least one can safely say that a unique interest was lost to learning with the admission of women into Oxford’s cloistered society and the banishment of God” (p. 287). Moreover, it was not just “the presence of the undergraduate in petticoats that marked the revolution; wives, too, were multiplying, and with them came a great alteration in the habits of the faculty. In the generation preceding none of the tutors were married and very few of the professors . . .” (p. 262-3).

The classically trained mind also had a tendency to dominate the person's being. A man trained in the classics was more mind than anything. Jessica rebuked Philip for his lofty intellectual airs and predicted that they would become an irreconcilable difference between the two. She could respect his intellect, but she could not love a man who was nothing more than a mind. She was "too much alive to be offered up on such a table."⁹² Jessica compared Philip as she saw him to "Nature." At first that might have seemed like a compliment, considering the appreciation they both had for nature, and especially for the sacredness of the trees in the forests of Jessica's hometown. But Jessica meant it as no compliment. Humankind might be a part of "Nature," but it was also distinct.

For in the forest, ever present, is the intimation of Nature's indifference to pain. There is no charity in the commonwealth of trees. They live, decay, and die, and there is no sign of compassion anywhere. It is terrible, but there is a Spartan beauty in the fact.

But suddenly, as we sat there in the sweet green twilight, the thought pierced me like a pang that after all you are more nearly related to the life of the forest than I am. I merely love it, but you are like it in the cold, ruthless, upward aspiration of your soul. I long for a word with the trees, but you are so near and kin that your silence is speech. And then I asked myself: "What is the good, where is the wisdom in loving a tree man, who may shelter you, but never can be like you in life or love?" Always his arms are stretched upward to the heavens in a prayer to be nearer to the light.⁹³

That "light" in Corra's mind was cold, clinical, and impersonal. There might be a

⁹²*The Jessica Letters*, p. 190.

⁹³*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 95-96.

“Spartan beauty” in nature’s impersonality, and even in the “cold ruthless, upward aspiration of [the] soul” stretching heavenward toward the light, but it was not human because it lacked feeling. It lacked the capacity either to empathize or sympathize with anything outside itself. In her early life, such was a repulsive state to Corra. She valued the ability to feel and remain personally in touch with others. In time, however, as life brought one personal tragedy after another and all she felt were painful emotions, she would think differently.

Corra was nothing in her relations with others if not personal. And her personal nature contrasted sharply with More’s own impersonality. She was particularly self-revealing to More whether she was writing as Jessica or as Corra. “There are some people whose demands are always personal,” Jessica wrote unapologetically in an early letter to Philip. “I think it is their limitation, resulting from a state of naturalness, more or less primitive, out of which they have not yet evolved. . . . Thus, here am I . . . taking liberties by impressing *personal* demands.”⁹⁴ She knew it about herself and even realized it could at times be inappropriate. Nonetheless, she believed it was better to be too personal than to be impersonal, even void of personality, as she believed More to be. She looked on the choice of preferring and being more personal as a “state of naturalness.” But significantly, and of consequence to her self-image, she saw it as a “limitation.” Although she favored the personal over the impersonal, she regarded it, even then, as a “more or less primitive” state, and herself because of it, as having “not yet evolved,” having not yet matured, having not yet outgrown the limitations of her humanity.

⁹⁴*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 18-19.

Corra believed at the core of every soul, even for those like More who had outgrown or evolved beyond the limitations of their humanity, there was at least the vestige of the *real* person, the part of the individual with whom she hoped always to connect and relate. There was a self, she wanted to believe, that was at home with itself, without the need or haunting aspiration always to transcend to heights above and beyond the human. A true love story Corra wrote about to More illustrates the point. It was the story of a secret love affair between a woman Corra had known personally who had grown to middle age caring for her elderly mother and a man in late middle age waiting for her to be free for marriage. Since middle aged women had little usefulness left in them, this man had to find something else in the woman to love besides her sexual traits.⁹⁵ Corra actually witnessed a “transfiguration” in this woman when the woman saw her lover again for the first time in years. This woman was “forty years old, a weary, hollowed eyed, homely woman, (or so I thought) whose life has been dull and uneventful”; she had a face that “was old and homely with grief,” hardly a woman the typical man could love. When she discovered him on her return to the house, however, “her face was illuminated as she beheld him sitting there.” The love of this “ordinary fool of a man” had changed her. “It was the sublime spirit of a woman who has sacrificed [sic] all, looking down in a blessing upon the man who loved, not her, but the fragrant goodness that is in her.” Not the woman who had “grown homely with grief” but the part of her that had remained in love in spite of what seemed a hopeless situation. To Corra there was a distinct difference between “her,” or the physical self, and the “fragrant

⁹⁵See chapter six for Corra’s ideas on age.

goodness that is in her,” or the ability to remain in love against the odds.⁹⁶ Just so, there was a difference between the lofty “philosophic propositions” Jessica coveted in Philip and Philip himself as her lover, and between the judgment, wisdom, and sympathy of Philip and Philip himself. Early in their correspondence, Jessica had explained to Philip that when she wrote letters making “*personal* demands,” she was not “appeal[ing] to your judgment or wisdom or even to your sympathy, but to *you*,” or the part of him to which she could relate.⁹⁷ The relational self was always the person to whom Corra as Jessica and as herself would make her personal appeals.

Drawing these distinctions helped Corra early in her intellectual development to deal with the mysteries of life, one of which was the complexity of human nature. A tragedy of her life, however, was that the proclivity to think of the self in such ways inclined her toward the dualistic philosophy of More, which offered her two consolations: an explanation for some of life’s most perplexing mysteries, and an antidote to the emotional pain for which she was not equipped otherwise to deal. The self that she had early in life celebrated became later in life something to fear and constantly constrain. The emotions she had early appreciated, she later came to begrudge and finally to repress until there was nothing left to feel but emptiness and regret over what she no longer had the capacity to feel and appreciate. A brief examination of More’s dualism helps explain some of the fatalism expressed in Corra’s later life.

More had an unbending belief in dichotomies and dual natures that only grew

⁹⁶Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 13 July 1901.

⁹⁷*The Jessica Letters*, p. 19.

stronger with time. His “response to the writings of Plato was a response to what he saw as a dualistic interpretation of life.”⁹⁸ It is especially telling in the ways it informed his ideas about human nature. “There is this duality in man’s nature,” he wrote in *The Jessica Letters*. “The ambition of his intellect, the passion, it may be, to force upon the world some vision of his imagination . . . works side by side with his personal being, and the two are never quite fused.”⁹⁹ Nor were they in actuality “side by side,” but rather ranked vertically with one higher, the other lower. “Our ideal of justice would be fulfilled if we saw that Nature satisfied two different faculties, or kinds of activity, of the soul--the reason, which demands that what is the stronger and more like itself should prevail, and the feelings, which demand that the higher should prevail with no suffering, but with the happy acquiescence, of the lower.”¹⁰⁰ Attitude was important. The lower faculties were not merely to submit; they were to do so with “happy acquiescence.”

For More a “true humanism,” or proper human *modus vivendi*, was one that could “mediate” between the dualisms in man’s nature. “And such a mediation is not a mechanical compromise or a flabby wavering between two moods,” he explained to friend Robert Shafer, “but an intimate marriage between passivity and activity, contemplation and self-direction, emotion and will, of which is born a certain *tertium quid*.”¹⁰¹ This *tertium quid* was the consciousness of the individual whose “lower nature”

⁹⁸Tanner, p. 30.

⁹⁹*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 162-63.

¹⁰⁰More, *Aristocracy and Justice*, p. 109.

¹⁰¹Letter dated Sept. 13, 1931, quoted in Dakin, pp. 311-12.

had been “charmed by the voice of his higher instincts.”¹⁰² More explains this condition and its relevance in a letter to his sister, Alice:

One key, one solution to the mysteries of human condition, one solution to the old knots of fate, freedom, and foreknowledge, exists, the propounding, namely, of the double consciousness. A man must ride alternately on the horses of his private and his public nature, as the equestrians in the circus throw themselves nimbly from horse to horse, or plant one foot on the back of one, and the other on the back of the other. So when a man is the victim of his fate, his sciatica in his loins, and cramp in his mind; a club-foot and a club in his wit; a sour face and a selfish temper; a strut in his gait and a conceit in his affection; or is ground to powder by the vice of his race; he is to rally on his relation to the Universe, which his ruin benefits. Leaving the demon who suffers, he is to take sides with the Deity who secures universal benefit by his pain.¹⁰³

All men suffer; each man alike was “victim of his fate.” Whether his fate happened to be the physical pain of “sciatic loins,” emotional pain from a deformed body (club foot) or mind (club wit); whether his limitation was that of conceit or selfishness, or he happened merely to be “ground to powder by the vice of his race,” no man could legitimately question his fate, nor could he claim to be baffled by “the mysteries of the human condition.” The problem was solved by recognizing the universal existence of the “double consciousness,” which, because it was universal, it was also democratic--no respecter of individual men so to speak. Each man needed to believe that thereon was the level playing field. No man’s pain was more or less than the other, but again, his attitude toward it was the important thing. Instead of lamenting his particular fate, if he “rallied” to the Universe and “took sides with the Deity,” he could rest assured his pain brought

¹⁰²More, *Aristocracy and Justice*, p. 174,

¹⁰³Letter dated 12 March 1894, quoted in Dakin, p. 46.

“benefit” to the whole.

Interestingly, this dualism, More believed, was not actually a universal human trait; it was exclusively a masculine trait, which explained one of the irreconcilable differences between the sexes. “[I]n this duality lies all the reason of that enmity of the sexes,” More wrote, “which draws us together yet still holds us asunder.”¹⁰⁴ It also explained why men understood women better than women understood men. “It is so much easier for me to understand you than for you to understand me,” More wrote as Philip Towers, “because a woman’s nature is single, whereas a man’s is double.” Because man had both a public and a private experience, and a natural capacity for both within himself, he could understand woman’s private nature but because she had only a private nature, she could never understand his “iron determination . . . in public affairs.” The duality between his private and public self was but “one case in point of the eternal dualism in masculine nature which a woman can never comprehend . . . For a woman is not so. There exists no such gap in her between her heart and brain, between her outer and inner life. And the consequence shows itself in many ways,” More wrote, then proceeded to explain the mystery of differences between the sexes. They were inherent in the male and female natures.

She is less efficient in the world and is never a creator or impresser of new ideas; but on the other hand, her character possesses a certain unity that is the wonder of all men who observe. She calls the man selfish and is bitter against him at times, but her accusation is wrong. It is not selfishness which leads a man if needs be to cut off his own personal desires while sacrificing another; it is the power in him

¹⁰⁴*The Jessica Letters*, p. 162.

which impels the world into new courses.¹⁰⁵

Here Philip was responding to an accusation by Jessica that his escape into his inner life to ponder and meditate on “philosophic propositions” was merely an excuse to forego the constraints of personal commitments, specifically his emotional availability to his lover. How could any woman argue, “resent,” or be “bitter against” a man who sacrificed his own or her desires when he was merely using the “power in him” instead to “impel the world into new courses.”

When it came to the subject of romantic love, Jessica argued that the dual nature reasoning was laughable. It was a flimsy ruse, the trick of a “magician.” “Two things I never suspected: that love is the kind of romantic exegesis you represent it to be, or that every lover, psychically, is a sort of twin phenomenon--that he is *two* men instead of one! And after he is married,” she wrote facetiously, “I suppose he will be a domestic *trinity*, but with his godhead concerned with the affairs of the world at large.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed she was right. Such was the source of man’s virtue, Philip explained. Moreover, virtue was not the same for man as for woman. A man’s virtues “are aggressive and turned outward toward conquest . . . But a woman’s virtues are bound up with every impulse of her personal being; they work out in her a loveliness and unity of character which make the man appear beside her coarse and unmoral.” Virtue was “not a man’s character, but a faculty of his character.” It was something “removed from himself, something which he analyses [sic] and governs and manipulates.” In the woman, however, virtue was “an

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 162-64.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 178-79.

integral part of her character.”¹⁰⁷ The unspoken implications in the arrangement were not lost to Jessica. Men could take credit for the virtue they “analyze, govern and manipulate.” Women, on the other hand, could claim no part in the development of their virtue--it was a gift of nature. It all sounded like a cheap trick to Jessica. The “way you have multiplied yourself and doubled forces upon me,” she wrote, “may be good masculine tactics, but I am sure it is an unparliamentary advantage you have taken.” Just who to blame for it Jessica was not quite sure. “I do not know whether I cherish [my convictions] against you or against the God who made me simple and you double.”¹⁰⁸ Whoever was to blame, the whole thing was unfair and, in Philip’s case, hypocritical. “But granting all you say to be true,” Jessica wrote, “that every man has a personal life and at the same time a universal life energy as well, that there is in him a little domestic fortress of love, and a battle power of life apart,--admitting all this, how do you reconcile justice with the fact that you frankly offer only half of your duality for all of Jessica?”¹⁰⁹ It seemed dishonest to her that someone who spoke so often and eloquently of justice could be so blind to this unjust reasoning against women. Unfortunately, though she never got a satisfactory answer from Philip on this issue, Jessica buried her misgivings and married him in the end. His concessions were few, but he learned to temper his opinions.

In a moment of regret and grief over what seemed his loss of Jessica, Philip had mused on the power of romantic love to reconcile the irreconcilable differences between

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 163-65.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 180.

the sexes. It might be after all something that could “fuse” together the dichotomy. Philip discovered the power of romantic love when Jessica’s Methodist father refused to accept him because of his eastern philosophy. The two could never think of marrying without the father’s consent, and he could not consent to wed his daughter to an infidel. In all of Philip’s philosophical ponderings on life and meaning, he discovered that love was the only reality. With that reality he saw a way to harmonize, if only temporarily, the otherwise “eternal dualism” from which all men suffered. “You see I am welded more than I could believe into a feminine unity by your mystic touch, and that masculine duality of which I spoke is passing away.”¹¹⁰

However, if Philip was to gain some kind of unity from the union with Jessica, she had plenty of misgivings about what would be the meaning for her. To say yes to a lover for a woman, Jessica knew, meant “annihilation, [an] absorption of character and personality.” Even “in the midst of her great happiness,” Jessica reflected, every woman who falls in love feels “an irremediable loss, for which nothing ever fully atones.” It meant a “loss of self,” and something to which she could not at first willingly agree. Even though she knew that union between man and woman was supposed to be “life’s dearest fulfilment,” and that “against [her] own will” love would make her “surpassingly happy,” she still could not “agree to be taken.” What Philip should do about it she did not know. “All I am sure of,” she wrote, “is that I love you, and that I belong to you if only you can get my extradition papers from Nature herself.”¹¹¹ Knowing that giving in to a

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 232.

¹¹¹*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 154-55; 319; 314.

man meant giving away self, Jessica explained how she, or any woman, could finally do so.

Men had the ability to be complete; women did not.¹¹² As an autonomous being, man could save woman from herself, or her inability to be complete or whole. “A man is always sufficient unto himself,” she wrote Philip, “particularly if he can abstract and divert himself into a line of thought as you are able to do, but a woman without a lover is a pathetic thing. There is no real reason for her existence; all her little miracles of expression and posing are for naught. . . . There is no one to give her the happy cue to the whole meaning of life.” Because only men held the “cue to the whole meaning of life,” women had to look to them for life’s meaning. Also for that reason Jessica could chasten Philip for his greater part in their break up. Even though she had actually “ended [their] engagement and forbade [him] to come” back, the long duration of the breakup was ultimately his responsibility because he was supposed to be the wiser of the two. He was at fault for “assenting to such an unnatural sacrifice.” As a woman, her “vision never [went] far beyond the green edges of this present world.” It was she as the woman, who had been suffering from “delusions.” Hence, he was the culpable party for not “rescuing” her from those “delusions.” But she was willing to forgive him, and to surrender her freedom to him to gain from him something of the meaning of life. Women were willing to surrender to men in romance and marriage ultimately because men alone saved them from their delusions. When Jessica realized how vital the connection, she began to think of Philip as someone bigger than life. “I remembered the silent young sage in his upper

¹¹²Her reasons for thinking so are in chapter five.

chamber, and I felt that indeed it was to this esoteric personality that I must pray for help.” Jessica did not doubt that Philip had “some more natural way of sanctifying” her from the “vagabondage” she had fallen into. He alone could save her. “I doubt now if I shall ever see heaven unless I may ascend through your portals.” The awareness caused Jessica to claim, “Oh, my Love! I *cannot* live without a lover.”¹¹³

Before Jessica made such proclamations of love, however, she had to penetrate Philip’s natural reserve, a forbidding task. And it was his reserve toward her, not toward humanity, that was her concern. Ostensibly, she was supposed to be chiding him for his harsh judgments against humanitarians and humanitarianism.¹¹⁴ In actuality it was not sympathy for the humanitarian cause that provoked her responses. Her grievance was that the same dispassion and indifference Philip felt toward humanity at large also ultimately governed his private relationships. While Philip maintained that what Jessica interpreted as indifference was actually his “*sereine contemplation de l’univers*” which was essential to the “peace and better growth” necessary for him to do his work, Jessica focused on the result: his complete self-absorption. She saw early that he was ultimately incapable of grasping anyone’s needs but his own. This was hardly more evident than when he wrote in his diary months after their engagement ended at her father’s insistence

¹¹³*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 121-122; 309; 325; 320; 311.

¹¹⁴Talmadge finds a paradox in the purported objective of *The Jessica Letters*. “Paradoxically, the characters do not express the prevalent economic and social views of their sections. Phillip’s [sic] attacks on social humanitarianism would have found no favor with Northern intellectuals, and Jessica’s defense of this trend would not have been echoed in the South. In reality More and Mrs. Harris saw eye to eye on such questions” (p. 35). Talmadge is correct that they “saw eye to eye on such questions” but a careful reading of Corra’s “defense of this trend” would have revealed no defense at all. Her complaint was with More’s aloof, cold-heartedness in his personal relationships, not with its manifestations in the public realm, something she had no resources to appreciate.

that suddenly he wondered if perhaps she too might be as aggrieved and distressed as he. “My own misery has lain so heavily upon me that it has not occurred to me to imagine what you too must have suffered. Indeed, the wonder of your love has been to me so incomprehensibly sweet that the notion of any actual suffering on your part has never really entered my thought. My own need I understood,” Philip confessed, but it was months before the thought of hers ever occurred to him. “[C]an it be that our separation has caused the same weary emptiness in your days that has made the word peace a mockery to me? Can it even be that while I have sought refuge and a kind of forgetfulness in the domination of my work, you have been left prey to unrelieved despondency?”¹¹⁵ Jessica knew that Philip’s self-absorption was not malicious; rather that his was merely a trait common to those who lived the life of the mind to the exclusion of all other. Jessica’s chief complaint was that for Philip the preoccupation tended to be total. But more importantly, that part which he jealously withheld from his lover was what Jessica could not abide, because it was the part of him she coveted most.

[Y]our faculty for projecting yourself in spirit further than I can follow, excites in me a terror of loneliness that sharpens into resentment. I am widowed by the loss of the higher half of your entity. Can you not see, Philip, it is not your views I combat, your theory about humanitarianism and all that? They are but the geometrical figures of thought in your mind; and I have no wish to disturb your “philosophic proposition.” The point is, I love that in you more than I love the lover. And the passion with which you cling to it as something apart from our relationship offends me, excites forebodings. Tell me, are “philosophic propositions” alien to love? And after all do you think you are the only one who may claim them?¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 305-06.

¹¹⁶*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 182-83.

Why could not Philip share the “higher half of [his] entity” with Jessica? She feared that he never would, and pondered her fate if he never learned to do so. It would likely be the same as that of Jack, the orphan child he rescued from the New York ghetto. “So you are keeping Jack mured up with you and your *magnum opus*,” she wrote. “No wonder he ‘crouches in sphinxlike silence on the curbstone.’ He prefers it to your company. You once told me that you found humanitarians difficult to lie with. I wonder what Jack thinks of mystical philosophers in the domestic relation. It almost brings tears to my eyes. And some day in a similar situation I may be driven to seek the cold curbstone for companionship.”¹¹⁷ But she married him anyway. It seemed worth the risk--she might indeed wind up “seeking the cold curbstone for companionship,” but marriage was the only chance she would ever have of finding the “whole meaning of life,” and that was something she was willing to take a chance on.

The relationship between Corra Harris and Paul More was short-lived, only a few years, most of which they shared while he was editor at *The Independent*. Once he left there, the correspondence tapers off. When he moved from *The Independent* to the *Post*, the change was painful enough for Corra, but she continued to write him occasionally. When he moved from the *Post* to the *Nation*, however, she felt she had lost touch with him for good. She could no more “‘sass’ an editor of the *Nation* than [she] would the author of the Book of Job.” She had “missed [him] sadly” enough already.¹¹⁸ His move

¹¹⁷*The Jessica Letters*, pp. 202-03.

¹¹⁸Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 1 July 1906.

to the *Nation* would make the gulf between them not just distant but impassable. Although the correspondence between More and Harris grows sporadic by 1907, the impact of his ideas on her is evident in nearly everything she wrote and published afterward. Especially telling was the way she tried most of her life to adopt More's dispassion and his ability to transcend sympathy and human empathy. It seemed the best means of equipping her for two fates in life: success in the market, which for her was necessary if her family were to survive; and the steel will to weather the personal storms and tragedies that marked much of her life. By the time she realized what she had sacrificed to effect a dispassionate spirit, however, it was too late to change. Her autobiography *As a Woman Thinks* expresses the deep regret and loneliness she felt by denying the "female" side of herself, but by that time dispassion as the highest of valued traits had come to so govern her thinking, that it was not just a trait she exhibited, it was her moral compass, and it informs the tone and the message in nearly everything she published afterward.

Chapter 4

CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN ON HUMAN vs. SEXUAL IDENTITY

“She is feminine, more than enough, as man is masculine more than enough; but she is not human as he is human.” (Gilman, 1903)

The social philosophy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman contrasts sharply with that of Corra White Harris. They thought and viewed the world in ways that were, for the most part, fundamentally and categorically at odds. Why they did so seems apparent from their contrasting roots. Two white middle-class American women living at the same time could hardly represent more different backgrounds.¹ Harris’s origins were covered in chapter one, but suffice it to recall that she came from southern conservative agrarian roots, from family that resisted socially and politically even moderate changes identified with the New South. Gilman, on the other hand, came from one of the most popular and noted reform families in New England. Her paternal great-grandfather was Lyman Beecher whose children included not only the rebel son, Henry Ward Beecher, but rebel

¹To reiterate a point made in the introduction, the focus of this study is on the differences in Harris and Gilman’s thinking and philosophy and is not intended to be comparative biography. The study assumes at least relative familiarity with Gilman since she has been the subject and focus of a number of studies for the past three decades. Three insightful biographies to consult are: Mary A. Hill, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Making of a Radical Feminist, 1860-1896* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Ann J. Lane, *To Herland and Beyond: The Life and Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1990); and Gary Scharnhorst, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985).

daughters as well--abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe; domestic reformer, Catharine Beecher; and suffragist, Isabella Beecher Hooker. And most of her celebrated, reform-minded relatives Charlotte knew well and lived with from time to time. It is little wonder that she felt a sense of "social responsibility" even in her "baby years," at ten "was already scheming to improve the world," and at seventeen felt a burden to "help Humanity."²

But for all their differences, Harris and Gilman shared a number of common life experiences that make a little less easily explicable why they thought and viewed the world in such dramatically different ways. A few of the similarities between the women are worth noting. Although they were both culturally middle-class, they each (for different reasons) grew up in genteel poverty and remained relatively poor throughout their young adult lives.³ Each woman had a mother who was emotionally distant and

²Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, forward by Zona Gale (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1935), pp. 13, 21, 36.

³Corra's family's poverty was that of many of the planter-turned-yeoman-class of farmers in the New South, complicated and worsened by her father's alcoholism (see chapter one). Gilman's childhood poverty resulted from a distinctly different reason: her father's abandonment. Frederick Beecher Perkins left his wife and two children, Charlotte and an older brother, when Charlotte was an infant. With no way to support herself and children, Mary Westcott Perkins moved nineteen times throughout Charlotte's life, living with first one relative and then another, none of whom were able to support them fully and keep them out of debt. The experience of poverty and the sort of nomadic existence it led to affected Charlotte in untold ways, but she writes in her autobiography of two that were of considerable consequence. The experience gave her the opportunity to live with and among her Beecher relatives. It also taught her early in life and in explicit ways the consequences of women's economic dependence on men. The former accounts, no doubt, for her enlightened social consciousness and sense of self as social reformer; the latter, at least in part, for her feminism.

unavailable.⁴ Each woman had one child, a daughter, who remained financially dependent upon her until death. And each became nationally known writers and independently self-supporting women by their middle years. Any one of the life experiences they had in common might have tempered their political opinions, but none of them did. Harris and Gilman remained essentially stalwart in their beliefs--at least the beliefs they became noted for in their mature years; Harris remained a traditional conservative, anti-modernist, and southern political and social apologist throughout her life, and Gilman remained a socialist and radical feminist throughout hers.⁵ A central

⁴Corra's mother most often was preoccupied with Corra's father's sins and with her duty to reform him, as much to save the family financially as to save his soul. Charlotte's mother was tortured by her emotional dependence on Charlotte's father, whom she loved and remained loyal to until her own death. Mary Perkins withheld affection and emotional support from her children, ostensibly, Gilman explains in her autobiography, to make them emotionally independent. Biographers Hill and Lane speculate on the various other psychological reasons why she remained so cold to her children and the ramifications on Charlotte's own emotional development.

⁵To label Gilman anything without qualification invites challenge. Opinions on her political position are diverse. See those referred to in footnote no. 35 below. Also, for a distinctly alternative and antagonistic view, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) especially chapter four, "'Not to Sex--But to Race!' Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Civilized Anglo-Saxon Womanhood, and the Return of the Primitive Rapist," pp. 121-169. The biographers mentioned above acknowledge and account for Gilman's racism and ethnocentrism. Bederman, however, believes Gilman's racism so fully informs her thinking, including her feminist insights, that it undermines her entire social philosophy. She argues that Gilman's social philosophy as a whole is fundamentally flawed because it "was at its very base racist"; that it was "inextricably rooted in the white supremacism of 'civilization'" (122); that "the racism inherent in 'civilization' became an essential part of Gilman's feminist egalitarianism" rather than "merely an unfortunate lacuna in an otherwise liberal philosophy" (123-24, 122). Her reasoning derives from her interpretation of three elements of Gilman's life and writings: First, with regard to what shaped Gilman's philosophy, Bederman privileges the historical and anthropological texts which Gilman read early in life (as a teenager) at the expense of those she discovered in her maturity, most specifically the works of Edward Bellamy and Lester Frank Ward, which she read in her late twenties and thirties. Gilman's early education came from long-distance directed readings by her absent father and contained works on ancient history and anthropology. Bederman argues that these texts, "all shaped by the discourse of

purpose of this study is to discover what informs the thinking behind those divergent political positions. Among the fundamental differences between the two women, their beliefs about human nature and human vs. sexual identity form the most essential part of that core. For Gilman, individuals' conceptions of home, its function and purpose in society, were integrally linked to the way they perceived human nature and sexual identity. The mythology of home--some of which was good and timeless but most of which was destructive and timeworn--to Gilman, controlled people's ability to think socially, to think of self as a social being. To understand how these various ideas are related this chapter explores Gilman's works on home and its role in exaggerating sexual

'civilization,' provided her with a ready-made philosophy of the millennial significance of racial evolution, which she discerned and adopted as her religion" (127). In these early works, Bederman writes, Gilman "believed she saw a pattern in the *facts*, in fact, she saw a pattern provided by the *discourse*" (127). Undoubtedly these readings shaped Gilman's early thinking, and to some extent, her acceptance of biological and social evolution. However, their influence was tempered and, I would argue, largely displaced by that of Ward, Bellamy, the Fabian socialists, and others who had a more lasting impact and marked role in shaping the philosophy found in the writings of Gilman's mature years beginning with *Women and Economics* in 1898. There is a considerable philosophical gulf between the Social Darwinism that derives from theories found in the works she read as a teenager and the reform impulse deriving from the social evolution of Lester Frank Ward. Secondly, Bederman's thesis rests on the very few "rare" (p. 122) times Gilman explicitly addressed racial problems, and on a dubious interpretation of what Bederman finds as implicit racist assumptions. (Bederman cites four articles by Gilman focusing exclusively on race, but relies chiefly for her analysis on one: "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem," *American Journal of Sociology* 1 (July 1908):78-85.) Although I would not contend that Gilman was enlightened according to standards of late twentieth-century regarding minority races and ethnic groups, I do not see the kind of exclusivity and strident racism Bederman sees. Contrary to Bederman, I find that rather than Gilman's racism informing her social philosophy, the socialism inherent in that philosophy actually tempers her racism. And this is clear in all the works, even the four in which she deals directly with the issue of race. Thirdly, in addition to the dearth of explicit sources upon which to draw, Bederman's premise rests upon an equally debatable, and I would argue erroneous, interpretation of Gilman's use of the word "race," which Bederman reads to mean, in all cases, the white race. I would argue that unless she specified otherwise, when she referred to the human race, Gilman meant precisely that and nothing less. This is not to excuse Gilman's racism, but it is to challenge the supposition that she understood "her ambitions in terms of race instead of sex" (128), thereby undermining the viability of any of her ideas for reform.

identity and circumscribing human identity. Although inferred in this chapter, more direct parallels between Gilman and Harris, and the implications of the conclusions found here, follow in remaining chapters.

Confinement to the home, Gilman believed, more than anything else robbed women of their humanity. Gilman wrote often and passionately about what it meant to be human, but the freedom to be fully human, she believed, was strictly a male prerogative. Woman “is feminine, more than enough, as man is masculine more than enough; but she is not human as he is human,” she wrote. The reasons were due to social distortions of gender and not to innate limitations. If women had narrow perspectives, the explanation was simple enough. “The little-mindedness of the houselady is not a distinction of sex,” Gilman explained. “It is in no essential way a feminine distinction, but merely associatively feminine in that only women are confined to houses.”⁶

Domestic confinement was thorough in its effects: it robbed women of their “humanness” by forcing them to accept femininity, an exaggeration of their female nature, as a cheap substitute, and it caused “injury to the State” by robbing society of the creative resources of half its population.⁷ “That this entire half of the adult world should be denied the normal exercise of these legitimate social instincts, and forced to find expression for them, if at all, through primitive and circuitous methods, is an injury to the State. A democratic State, half of which is inert, is something like a monarchical State,

⁶Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Influence*, (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1903; reprint, 1970), pp. 217, 216.

⁷Gilman, “Women and Democracy,” *The Forerunner*, Vol. 3, 1912, p. 36.

whose king has partial paralysis.”⁸ “The economic development of society is arrested, permanently arrested, by the conditions of the home.”⁹ “The house-life does not bring out our humanness, for all the distinctive lines of human progress lie outside.”¹⁰ Church was the only place outside the home where women could realize their humanness because church was the one place where a woman could escape, if only “for the moment [and] forget her sex--always so harped upon elsewhere!--forget that she was a woman, and, for a time, feel that she was human.”¹¹ However, the church encompassed only a very small corner of the social world “outside” the home, and women ought to be everywhere. Of all the impediments to social progress the one Gilman believed most consequential was the fact that women were isolated in their homes and hence were not allowed full participation in the social sphere commensurate with their numbers.¹² The powerful ideology of domesticity with all its false trappings, and not women’s incapacities or limitations, was the only fundamental reason women were not more actively shaping and contributing to society.

Gilman challenged domesticity for its ill effects on society as a whole and on

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Gilman, *Humanness, The Forerunner*, Vol. 4, 1913, p. 245.

¹⁰Gilman, *The Home*, pp. 217, 216.

¹¹Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 136.

¹²Gilman, *Man-Made World*, pp. 50-51; *Our Brains and What Ails Them, The Forerunner*, Vol. 3, 1912, p. 274.

women more directly.¹³ Because of the painful and (she argued) irrevocable repercussions it had on her own life, she was perhaps most explicit when challenging the ways it crippled women personally.¹⁴ She writes about her experience in her

¹³The ideology of domesticity is identified by historians and anthropologists with historical time and place, i.e., with the emergence of modernity. The "close identification of home with family," emerged and evolved as a consequence of industrialization and capitalism. Tamara Hareven explains its development and the meaning attached to it: "The concept of home as a private retreat first emerged in the lives of bourgeois families in eighteenth-century France and England, and in the United States among urban, middle-class families in the early part of the nineteenth century. . . . Among such families 'home' began to assume an enormous symbolic meaning, distinct from the household, from the early nineteenth century on. . . . The cult of domesticity and the values associated with it were closely linked to the new family type and the ways of life that had become characteristic of the urban middle classes by the middle of the nineteenth century. The home became an essential aspect of the identity and self-definition of the middle class." Hareven, "The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective," *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Social Sciences*, (hereafter cited as *Social Research*) pp. 254, 258, 260, 264.

Without the same historical hindsight, Gilman saw modernity, or the time in which she was living, not as the apex of domesticity, but as the time when home mythology should be dying. Her acceptance of prevailing beliefs in social evolution, especially those by Lester Frank Ward, influenced her belief that "false" ideas about home existed because of their deep roots in human history. There might have been a time when "man could justly say that his first—i.e., highest duty was to his family." It was a time when "there was no state or nation . . . no civic duty, no public duty; the family was at the top." That time had passed, however. "The family [was no longer] the unit of the State. The individual is the unit of the State. The family is a pre-social group found among many animal species in a high and successful form." If society was going to prosper, the old ideas about home and the family's exclusive hold on its members' devotion, were going to have to pass as well, and to be replaced by another, higher "duty." "Which is your duty," she asked, "to utter the lie and serve your family, or to utter the truth and serve the world?" Although some men were effectively beginning to challenge the "lie" with their roles in public service, women were still bound by the understanding that for them service to the family was service to the world. "The Future of the Home," p. 788; *Humanness*, p. 246.

By way of further note and to reiterate that the focus of the study excludes lower and working classes, to understand how images and conceptions of home differed for them, consult, for the origins of working-class images of home, see Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987) and, "Women, Children, and Uses of the Streets: Class and Gender Conflict in New York City, 1850-1860," *Feminist Studies* 8 (1982): 309-35; and for a look at the period covered in this study, see Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London 1870-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁴Among other places, see *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, p. 98. Considering the volume of her publications, the success she knew in her own lifetime, and the revival of

autobiography, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, and in the autobiographical short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper," among other places. So the insights she shares about the effects of domesticity on women personally come from having experienced them first hand. For Gilman, domestic confinement unavoidably circumscribed wholeness for women, because wholeness depended upon the individual's awareness of her relationship to the whole of society, not just to her family, friends, or a few significant others in the domestic sphere. Personal growth and social growth had to be synchronous, otherwise wholeness was arrested in both.¹⁵ The home had its place in human development, but it was only a part of what made individuals whole. And to the extent that home was the only, or the dominant, part of any individuals' existence, it retarded growth toward integrity.¹⁶ Typically, the modern home made women, and more often than not, family

interest in her in the past three decades, both admirers and critics then and now find it difficult to take seriously Gilman's repeated lamentations that the nervous breakdown she suffered at the age of 24 crippled her for life and robbed her of her real creative potential.

¹⁵The wholeness referred to here recalls Eric Erikson's concept of ego-identity which requires both personal and social development. Social psychologists Patricia Gurin and Hazel Markus define Erikson's concept as "a persistent sameness within oneself, and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others. On the one hand, ego-identity represents a psychological achievement of the individual--a sense of being unique and the same person now as in the past and continuous into the future. On the other hand, ego-identity is inextricably embedded in social life, limited by as well as fitted to the socio-historical moment in which the individual lives." "Cognitive Consequences of Gender Identity," in Suzanne Skevington and Deborah Baker, eds. *The Social Identity of Women* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1989):152-172; p. 152.

¹⁶Home also led to a distinctly female experience of social and psychological alienation. To the extent that home became exclusively woman's work, as it did in the process of the specialization of labor, women became alienated from their work in ways different from men. Explaining the different experiences of alienation for men and women, because of the difference in their work, Ann Foreman writes, "The man exists in the social world of business and industry as well as in the family and therefore is able to express himself in these different spheres. For the woman, however, her place is within the home. Men's objectification within industry, through the expropriation of the product of their labour, takes the form of alienation. But the

members in general, “anti-social,” self-interested, and self-absorbed individuals. The home that secluded the nuclear family within repressed the natural sociability of its occupants and became, according to family historian Tamara Hareven, “a form of confinement for the individual rather than a nurturing environment.”¹⁷ For most middle-class women of Gilman’s day, home shaped their character, defined their outlook, controlled their choices and decisions, and modeled their perception of self and others. The ways in which it did this and the result for individual women and for society as a whole were themes in most of Gilman’s works.

Introduce the subject of home, however, and people grow guarded. They did when Gilman wrote as many do today. One of the central problems with critiquing domesticity is that its premises are still linked in people’s thinking integrally to home, family, loved ones, and much that is yet sacred in personal life. In other words, it remains stubbornly embedded in one of those categories of “self-evident truths,” or knowledge

effect of alienation on the lives and consciousness of women takes an even more oppressive form. Men seek relief from their alienation through their relations with women; for women there is no relief. For these intimate relations are the very ones that are the essential structures of her oppression.” Foreman, pp. 101-102.

¹⁷Quoted phrase from Tamara Hareven, “The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective,” *Social Research*, p. 271. In another article exploring the relation between claims of individuals’ rights, privatization, and social alienation, Elizabeth Schneider writes how and why these conditions affect women especially. “The locus of women’s subordination is frequently the private sphere--the home and family--which is perceived as isolated and experienced in isolation. Women also tend to see individual fault rather than to identify a systemic pattern of social discrimination.” Elizabeth Schneider, “The Dialectic of Rights and Politics: Perspectives from the Women’s Movement,” Linda Gordon, ed., *Women, The State & Welfare*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press) p. 238.

most people prefer not to question.¹⁸ It is difficult to separate domesticity from notions of home and then to dissociate notions of home from those of the nuclear family. They seem to inhabit together the same space in mainstream thinking and so together to represent something sacred and unquestioned. Gilman knew how difficult could be such entrenched thinking. The strength or resilience of ideas appears as a central theme in many of her works. “[W]hat we happen to believe,” she wrote, was of more consequence in determining “what we do, for the most part,” than either “hereditary or environmental influence.”¹⁹ Elsewhere she explained, “Habits of thought persist through the centuries, and while a healthy brain may reject the doctrine it no longer believes, it will continue to feel the same sentiments formerly associated with that doctrine.”²⁰ And ideas of home, she believed, were among those most resistant to change or growth, because they were

¹⁸On the meaning and implications of implicit knowledge, see Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London and Boston, 1975). Douglas writes about how some knowledge gets relegated to categories of the unquestioned. In a given society certain knowledge gets “regarded as too true to warrant discussion. It provides the necessary unexamined assumptions upon which ordinary discourse takes place. Its stability is an illusion, for a large part of discourse is dedicated to creating, revising and obliquely affirming this implicit background, without ever directing explicit attention upon it. When the background of assumptions upholds what is verbally explicit, meanings come across loud and clear. Through these implicit channels of meaning, human society itself is achieved, clarity and speed of clue-reading ensured. In the elusive exchange between explicit and implicit meanings a perceived-to-be-regular universe establishes itself precariously, shifts, topples and sets itself up again.” (p. 4)

¹⁹Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 81. This statement is more than a little significant in countering the assertion that Gilman “discerned and adopted as her religion” the “racial evolution” of the works she read as a teenager. See note 5 above.

²⁰Gilman, *The Home*, p. 36. In another place Gilman wrote about the persistence of ideas and even greater persistence of feelings. In addressing the issue of social progress, she wrote, “That the world is much farther along in fact than in feeling and thought; the ideas in our minds following slowly and reluctantly after the event and our emotions long ages behind our ideas.” “With Her in Our Land,” *The Forerunner*, Vol. 7, 1916, p. 292.

among those “held to be sacred and immovable.”²¹ But why was home considered sacred? It was a physical space no more or less sacred than any other place, public or private, where people met together. “A good, clean, healthy, modern home, with free people living and loving in it, is no more sacred than a schoolhouse.”²² But the belief in home as sacred was very real and its hold dynamic. Furthermore, it was only one in “a school of myths connected with home”—a school of ideas “more tenacious in their hold

²¹Gilman, *The Home*, p. 31. For understanding notions of home that existed in Gilman’s day, see Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); and especially, Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873-1913* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). For an understanding of why and how certain images of home have survived, and how nostalgia for home makes the images able to renew themselves perpetually, see anthropologist Mary Douglas, “The Idea of Home: A Kind of Space,” *Social Research*, vol. 58, no. 1 (Spring 1991):287-307. About the idealized family of today she writes, “As for those who claim that the home does something stabilizing or deepening or enriching for the personality, there are as many who will claim that it cripples and stifles.” How does this family ideal continue to survive with as much hostility as affection surrounding it? Douglas explains that the nostalgia for the ideal has been persistently stronger than the resistance opposing it. “Those committed to the idea of home,” she wrote, “exert continual vigilance in its behalf.” They do so because they “apparently believe that they personally have a lot to lose if it were to collapse.” More than that however the ideal continues to survive because the forces that hold it together are amorphous, elusive, and imminently adaptable. The element of potential harm is unidentifiable, omnipresent, and hides itself everywhere at once behind a facade of ideal imagery. Douglas explains: “The type of home that has been taken as exemplary has a lot of authority at its disposal, but it is not authoritarian or centralized. Everything happens by mutual consultation. Mutual adjustment of interlocking rules combines to meet functional requirements, personal claims on scarce amounts of time, space, and other resources. That is what makes this home so complicated, difficult to enter and difficult to change. This home emerges as the result of individual strategies of control defended respectively in the name of the home as a public good. Ideally the mother operates the system, so does the father, and so, undoubtedly do the children. It is extremely coercive, but the coercion is anonymous, the control is generalized. The pattern of rules continually reforms itself, becomes more comprehensive and restrictive, and continually suffers breaches, fission, loss at the fringes.” The home will continue to survive, Douglas maintains, “only so long as it attends to the needs of its members.” pp. 288, 305, 306, 307.

²²Gilman, *The Home*, p. 36.

on the popular mind than even religious beliefs.”²³ And challenging home as a sacred institution would be a task as ominous as challenging religion. “[T]o reach down into those old foundation feelings,” she wrote, “to disentangle the false from the true, to show that the true home does not involve . . . outgrown rudiments is difficult indeed.”²⁴

Gilman was acutely aware of the controversial nature surrounding her subject, of how fearful was the general public of any threat to the security of home. Home seemed, after all, one of the last refuges left in a world otherwise turning upside down with rapid social and institutional changes. Ideas that threatened what was seen as the one remaining safety net were not likely to find much tolerance. Aware of the fears people had, Gilman wrote in 1912, “Let it be clearly understood that this criticism is directed not against the home *per se*, but against the home as a cultural environment,” “not of home life *per se*, but of the kind of home life based on the sexuo-economic relation,” (or woman’s economic dependence on man).²⁵ Gilman assured her readers that she knew as

²³*Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁵Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 274; *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1898), p. 261. Likewise this chapter makes a similar disclaimer. The purpose here is not to question or discredit home as a concept central to and sacred in the human experience. The subject of this critique is the social and personal consequences of domesticity, or “the home as a cultural environment,” as it has evolved historically through the past two centuries. Historian and architect Gwendolyn Wright analyzes “home as a cultural environment.” In a study of the influence of moral suasion on architectural blueprints of the “model home,” Wright analyzed the ways domesticity affected home design in the high-Victorian era. As domesticity’s centerpiece the hearth “evoked the memory of the nuclear family as an eternal form of human social life.” Wright explored the influence of domesticity on house design through three generations of architects from 1873 through 1913, explaining how images of the modern domestic ideal survived the concerted reform efforts of the early twentieth century, and how they remain a “central value . . . within our culture” today. (Wright, *Moralism and the*

well as anyone the value and necessity of a private home. "That each private family should have its private home is as necessary for social health as that each individual should have a personal body, healthy and strong," Gilman noted.²⁶ Further, "There is no cause for fear" that home or home life will be "abolished," Gilman wrote. Nor that "monogamous marriage," which does not "injure society," will end.²⁷ "So long as life lasts we shall have homes; but we need not always have the same kind."²⁸ Home would always be safe, marriage would always be safe, but certain features of the modern home and family life would not and should not survive society's advance forward.

First of all, the facade of privacy needed to be addressed. In spite of the fact that the modern home had become an extremely "privatized abode,"²⁹ there was no genuine privacy within its walls. In fact, there was anything but privacy for the individual. The home guarded, protected, and isolated the family from the outside world, but it failed of giving even minimal privacy to those inside. And privacy was essential. It was a basic human need, "one of humanity's most precious rights," Gilman wrote.³⁰ The privacy of individuals within the home should be as zealously guarded as the home's privacy in the

Model Home) pp. 32, 292-293.

²⁶Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 137.

²⁷Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 247.

²⁸Gilman, *The Home*, p. 80.

²⁹The term "privatized abode" is taken from Gwendolyn Wright, "Prescribing the Model Home," *Social Research*, p. 221.

³⁰See: Gilman, *The Home*, p. 41; *The Man-Made World or, Our Androcentric Culture*, p. 165; and *Women and Economics*, p. 243.

world. "Such privacy as we do have in our homes is family privacy, an aggregate privacy; and this does not insure--indeed, it prevents--individual privacy."³¹ Every home, she wrote, reminiscent of Virginia Woolf, should have "one room at least for each person." However, it did not. "In the home who has any privacy?" she asks. "Privacy means the decent seclusion of the individual, the right to do what one likes unwatched, uncriticised, unhindered. Neither father, mother, nor child has this right at home. The young man setting up in 'chambers,' the young woman in college room or studio, at last they realise what privacy is, at last they have the right to be alone. The home does provide some privacy for the family as a lump--but it remains a lump--there is no privacy for the individual."³² Mothers were especially deprived. She--"poor invaded soul--finds even the bathroom door no bar to hammering little hands. From parlour to kitchen, from cellar to garret, she is at the mercy of children, servants, tradesmen, and callers."³³ Nor did children have privacy in the home. They had, "if possible . . . even less than the mother. Under the close, hot focus of loving eyes, every act magnified out of all natural proportion by the close range, the child soul begins to grow. Noticed, studied, commented on, and incessantly interfered with; forced into miserable self-consciousness by this unremitting glare; our little ones grow up permanently injured in character by this lack" of privacy.³⁴ According to Gilman, if as much time was spent promoting and

³¹Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 258.

³²Gilman, *The Home*, p. 39.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 40.

³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

supporting the privacy of individual members within the family as that guarding and protecting the nuclear family's property rights and privacy in the home against outside interference, home life would be a healthier environment.

The "filmy fiction of the privacy of the home" was only one of the myths about home that Gilman wanted to reconstruct. Another was the notion that "home-made" was better.³⁵ "Why it is more sacred to make a coat at home than to buy it of a tailor, to kill a

³⁵This study is concerned primarily with Gilman's theoretical solutions to the problems of domesticity, but others have explored the ways she challenged those deeply ingrained assumptions through domestic architectural design. Gilman's solutions and plans for redesigning the physical space of home, and for collectivizing and socializing the duties of the private sphere have inspired women looking for answers to the perplexities of production and reproduction in the home. Critiques of her plans for restructuring the physical space of home point out both Gilman's remarkable vision as well as the limitations of her vision. In *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981) Dolores Hayden identified Gilman as the leader of a number of "material feminists" in the decades around the turn of the century who "expounded one powerful idea: that women must create feminist homes with socialized housework and child care before they could become truly equal members of society." (p. 1) However, the unprecedented contributions these material feminists made toward liberating women from the "double duty" of home and work were not enough to compensate for one particular shortsightedness: They "fail[ed] to develop a full critique of industrial capitalism . . . [because of] their belief in social evolution as an agency of economic and urban transformation." (p. 8) In another place Hayden writes that Gilman's strategies "to support women's economic independence turn out, upon close examination, to reflect her belief in benevolent capitalism rather than socialist feminism." "Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Kitchenless House," *Radical History Review* 21(Fall 1979):225-245; p. 245.

In *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1988) Polly Wynn Allen credits Gilman for her formulations in social ethics. Allen notes, "In versatile ways, Gilman set forth the message that domestic circumstances are a serious moral/political concern, a social problem deserving a coordinated public solution." (p. 6) Her "moral passion" sometimes blinded her, though. "In straining to express her zeal in an abstract, universalistic idiom, she lost touch with the particular truths of her own life and thus her capacity for connecting with other people's truths. Laboring with an elitist sense of calling, she wrote her formal ethics in a highly solitary, pretentious manner. Although she was unusually articulate, bold, and well-read, her heavy sense of moral mission was directed, condescendingly, at helping other people." (p. 7) Allen believed ultimately, though, that Gilman's contributions to resolving the dilemma of domesticity far exceeded her limitations. For Allen, in spite of Gilman's cultural confines, her "passion to bring about more democratic environments," which is found in all that she wrote on social ethics, records a timeless message. (pp. 54, 178)

cow at home than to buy it of a butcher, to cook a pie at home than to buy it of a baker, or to teach a child at home than to have it taught by a teacher, is not made clear to us, but the lingering weight of those ages of ancestor-worship, of real sacrifice and libation at a real altar, is still heavy in our minds.”³⁶ The labor of one individual--the wife and mother--to do all those things proves “wasteful,” but worse than that, because it is done in isolation, it “acts to maintain primitive sentiments and limitations often distinctly anti-social.”³⁷ The “anti-social” individual was certainly limited in her ability to learn the moral values necessary to a progressive society.

Furthermore, Gilman challenged the inability of the modern home to be an environment for teaching or instilling those values. It was another myth that home was where people learned “the virtues needed in society,”³⁸ at least in a democratic society--virtues like love, courage, and justice. The highest human virtue, Gilman believed, was the genuine love taught by Christ. To Gilman, Christ represented the Divine in his incarnated self; but, importantly, he represented the divine potential in all of humanity. Christ “taught unmistakably of God in man, of heaven here, of worship expressed in love and service of humanity.”³⁹ Clearly the love Christ taught was a love that extended beyond the circle of one’s family and the walls of one’s home. “The love that we call human, the love of one another, the love Christ teaches us, is extra-domestic,” beyond the

³⁶Gilman, *The Home*, pp. 45, 36, 49, 33-34.

³⁷Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 247.

³⁸Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 223.

³⁹Gilman, *His Religion and Hers: A Study of the Faith of Our Fathers and the Work of Our Mothers* (Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1923) p. 35.

walls of home.⁴⁰ It was the kind of love that should be taught at home, but was not. At best, one learned at home to love one's immediate family, if that, but home was not a natural environment for learning the kind of love that taught and prepared individuals for democracy, the kind of love that bred tolerance, nurturing, and caring for others outside oneself and one's family. A democracy also needed people with the courage to challenge injustice. "Courage to think and speak the truth; courage to face convention and prejudice, ridicule and opposition. We need courage in men and women equally, to face the problems of the times; and we do not get that courage from the home."⁴¹ Being confined to the home instead bred cowardice in women,⁴² a situation that was immoral for at least two reasons. The fact that it was considered a feminine virtue and "admired" as such when women displayed it was bad enough, but beyond that, women passed along the flaw to both their sons and daughters. Nor was the home a training ground for teaching the concept of justice, which was a virtue "wholly social in its nature--extra-domestic--even anti-domestic."⁴³ Justice certainly was not learned from example in the private home. "In the home is neither freedom nor equality. There is ownership throughout." The traditional home where "each man" had "one whole woman to cook for and wait upon him is a poor education for democracy."⁴⁴ "The home, as such, in no way promotes

⁴⁰Gilman, *The Home*, p. 166.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 169-70.

⁴²Gilman, *The Home*, p. 167; *Women and Economics*, p. 330.

⁴³Gilman, *The Home*, p. 172.

⁴⁴Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 42.

justice; but, in its disproportionate and unbalanced position to-day, palpably perverts and prevents it.”⁴⁵ The home environment taught none of the virtues necessary for democracy, neither love, courage, nor justice, but rather it modeled for posterity selfishness in men and cowardice in women.

When women were confined to the home and limited by their services to and relationships with family within the home, they cannot think beyond self. Everything for them is personal, “life is one of personal relation”;⁴⁶ they become, some might conclude, pathologically relational. Home “arrests development” of women, and hence, of society and culture.⁴⁷ “The main feature of her life--the restriction of her range of duty to the love and service of her own immediate family--acts upon us continually as a retarding influence, hindering the expansion of the spirit of social love and service on which our very lives depend.”⁴⁸ Confinement to home made women “social idiots,” made them “little-minded” and completely self-absorbed.⁴⁹ They can “only think personally . . . each one blindly buried in her own home, like the crafty ostrich with his head in the sand.”⁵⁰ The woman whose life is lived exclusively within the confines of her home has, Gilman explains,

⁴⁵Gilman, *The Home*, p. 173.

⁴⁶Gilman, “Women and Democracy,” p. 36.

⁴⁷Gilman, *The Home*, p.166.

⁴⁸Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 336.

⁴⁹Gilman, *The Home*, pp. 315, 216.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 116.

[a]n intense self consciousness, born of ceaseless contact of close personal relation; an inordinate self-interest, bred by the constant personal attention and service of this relation; a feverish, torturing, moral sensitiveness, without the width and clarity of vision of a full-grown moral sense; a thwarted will, used to meek surrender, cunning evasion, or futile rebellion; a childish, wavering, short-range judgment, handicapped by emotion; a measureless devotion to one's own sex relatives, and a maternal passion swollen with the full strength of the great social heart, but denied social expression.⁵¹

Where or how was the home-defined woman to find the personal resources to be anything but self-conscious, self-absorbed, or "little-minded."

This narrow, self-absorbed vision prevented women from having and passing on to their children the "power to see things collectively." The ability to think collectively was actually innate but had been suppressed in the modern home. Gilman writes,

This capacity to think and feel collectively is not one waiting for adolescence or maturity. It is born in group creatures, and we are most emphatically that. We are fitted by nature to think with and for our fellows; to enjoy common action; to feel common needs. The modern human brain is well endowed with this capacity. But the antique human home furnishes no possible exercise for it. . . . The woman, her own human faculties denied free exercise; her personal emotions and functions developed to excess; concentrates upon her child an intensity of feeling, a nervous activity, unknown in the simpler periods when the relation of mother and young was mutually sufficing.⁵²

So long as she remained exclusively at home, she remained underdeveloped. "Only as we live, think, feel, and work outside the home, do we become humanly developed, civilized,

⁵¹Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 337.

⁵²Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 275.

socialized.”⁵³ It was virtually impossible, then, for the woman in the home ever to be complete as a person.

In theory, the sacrifices domesticity required of women were compensated for by the rewards of motherhood, by the gratification of loyal, devoted, well-adjusted children. In practice, domesticity made women slaves, not to their children, but to their houses. And more often than not it alienated children from, rather than endeared them to, their mothers. The demands of housekeeping made it very difficult for women to put motherhood, or nurturing, before cleaning.⁵⁴ Domesticity made the kitchen rather than the nursery the mother’s focal point.⁵⁵ Ideally, Gilman believed, homes where children lived should be designed first and foremost with them in mind, and what went on in the nursery and the playroom should be privileged over what was served at breakfast or dinner.⁵⁶ Unfortunately this was not the case in most homes, where practically all of “life consists in getting dinner and in getting the money to pay for it.”⁵⁷ “It is not motherhood that keeps the housewife on her feet from dawn till dark; it is house service, not child service.”⁵⁸ Though the “Puritanism” still alive in society, might have fostered a facade of appreciation for the wife and mother who was “overworked, careworn, dirty, anxious

⁵³Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 222.

⁵⁴Gilman, “Home-Worship,” p. 792.

⁵⁵Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 82.

⁵⁶Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 275.

⁵⁷Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 261.

⁵⁸Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 20.

from hour to hour as she tries to ‘mind the children’ and all her other trades as well,”⁵⁹ it was an artificial valuing. In children, domesticity fostered a “righteous indifference” to their mother’s “futile waste of life.”⁶⁰ Mother was the “Great Object Lesson” to her children, who--when they saw her “spending her entire time at the cook-stove and sewing-machine, with broom and tub; unless she can hire servants and spend it at the bridge table”--felt for their mothers not love and gratitude but hostility and resentment.⁶¹

Since mother was to her children the “Great Object Lesson,” she had the ideal opportunity for instilling a social consciousness, but that was practically impossible; “she cannot teach what she does not know.”⁶² “It is very difficult for a mind that has always confined itself to the question of what to get for dinner to rise to consider the question of how to ensure pure food to the world.” The role of mother promoted by domesticity was hardly a role to inspire “philanthropists and philosophers, citizens and heroes.”⁶³ It modeled the opposite, in fact. Domestic relations instilled a very narrow perspective, one limited to the circle of one’s own family rather than one that extended broadly to include any sort of community beyond. And this was the lesson children learned no matter what they were taught at school, in church, or elsewhere. Gilman explains:

We may preach to our children as we will of the great duty of loving and serving

⁵⁹Gilman, *The Home*, p. 293.

⁶⁰Gilman, *The Home*, p. 328.

⁶¹Gilman, “Home-Worship,” p. 791.

⁶²Gilman, *Women and Economics*, pp. 277-78. Chapter seven below discusses the meaning of social consciousness and what Gilman and Harris thought about the concept.

⁶³Gilman, “Home-Worship,” p. 792.

one's neighbor; but what the baby is born into, what the child grows up to see and feel, is the concentration of one entire life--his mother's--upon the personal aggrandizement of one family, and the human service of another entire life--his father's--so warped and strained by the necessity of "supporting his family" that treason to society is the common price of comfort in the home. For a man to do any base, false work for which he is hired, work that injures producer and consumer alike; to prostitute what power and talent he possesses to whatever purchaser may use them,--this is justified among men by what they call duty to the family, and is unblamed by the moral sense of dependent women.⁶⁴

Because motherhood "forced us into a widening of the sympathies, a deepening of sensitiveness to others' needs" it should logically have led to a widened consciousness of those beyond home, but it did not. Unfortunately, "Mother-love" as it was defined by domesticity was "precisely limited to its own children." "Few indeed are the mothers who love other women's children."⁶⁵ The fact that a mother's love, the love regarded most highly by Gilman, when functioning within the confines of home, was incapable of instilling in children the knowledge of themselves as social beings was the strongest indictment Gilman could pass against domesticity.

If not conducive to a social consciousness, however, domesticity was conducive to exaggerated personality, which to Gilman, was its antithetical counterpart. Recall briefly, that to Harris personality was woman's one legitimate expression of individuality (pp. 66-7 above). Gilman would argue that such thinking was precisely why personality was overdeveloped and hence a hindrance to genuine personal growth. The modern home, to

⁶⁴Gilman, *Women and Economics*, pp. 277-78.

⁶⁵Gilman, *The Home*, p. 165.

Gilman, was an “atmosphere of concentrated personality”⁶⁶ “The first tendency of the incessant home life is to exaggerate personality. The home is necessarily a hotbed of personal feeling.”⁶⁷ The “major hindrance” of the domestic ideal, Gilman wrote, was “the perversely dominant concept of personality.”⁶⁸ The perverse thing about personality to Gilman was its contrived nature, its inauthenticity. Significantly, personality and individuality were not to be confused. Individuality, not personality, was the expression of the individual’s human spirit.⁶⁹ “Our humanness is seen to lie not so much in what we are individually, as in our relations to one another; and even that individuality is but the result of our relations to one another.”⁷⁰ Ideally, individuality was something developed legitimately through human work, and through each individual’s capacity to excel at

⁶⁶Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 83.

⁶⁷Gilman, *The Home*, p. 217.

⁶⁸Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 25.

⁶⁹If it seems on the surface a contradiction to promote individuality on the one hand while opposing individualism on the other, as Gilman did, it is more likely a conundrum. In a work analyzing the position of feminism *vis a vis* postmodernism and the apparent irreconcilability of the two, Susan Hekman explains how the concepts of individuality and individualism present problems as well as potential solutions for feminists seeking to reconcile what appear to be antithetical positions. Among the critics of modern liberal Enlightenment philosophy Hekman cites Zillah Eisenstein, for example, who believes it not only possible but necessary for women to accept the former while dismissing the latter from their social philosophy. “‘This theory of individualism must recognize the individual character of our social nature and the social nature of our individuality,’” Eisenstein concludes. Although Hekman finds Eisenstein’s position untenable--that it “makes very little sense,” and that “it seems fair to remain skeptical as to the feasibility and wisdom of the course that she advocates,”--Gilman’s linking individuality to work and work to social value lends credibility to Eisenstein’s statement. Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990) p. 58; quote from Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981) p. 191.

⁷⁰Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 16.

some form of work. "In [individuals'] difference lies their social value," Gilman wrote.⁷¹ But the difference was expressed in the individual's aptitude and developed talent and only incidentally in her personality. It was the talent that had social value not the personality, which had none. Personality was overdeveloped in individuals unsure about the legitimacy of their work, as were most women whose work was confined to home. This explained why, because of their exclusive gender identity, women developed personality and not individuality.⁷² The implications for women were obvious. They were "more personal than men, more personally sensitive."⁷³ It was very difficult for the individual focused on "visible personalities" in particular and the personal in general to view her relation to the whole of society, or to think in terms of "social unity."⁷⁴ "We need a recognition," Gilman wrote, "that the permanent and holy thing in human life is not personality but Humanity."⁷⁵ The perspective of women confined to the home, however, was quite naturally limited. They simply did not have the wherewithal to grasp such a "recognition."

Moreover, the homes of women whose only form of personal expression was personality reflected that obsession in several ways. First of all, the woman with material

⁷¹Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 221.

⁷²Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 32.

⁷³Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 83.

⁷⁴Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 190.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, p. 334.

resources accumulated “things.”⁷⁶ She vested herself in the furnishings of her physical space. “She has crowded her limited habitat with unlimited things,--things useful and unuseful, ornamental and unornamental, comfortable and uncomfortable; and the labor of her life is to wait upon these things, and keep them clean.”⁷⁷ It was also the labor of her life to be learned and conversant about her accumulations. But what did it all gain her? She was “still the lady prattling of her circumambient house, as snails might (possibly do!) dilate upon the merits of their ever-present shells.”⁷⁸ In addition to filling their physical space with “things” to express their personalities, women used their homes for socializing. The need for social interaction was as natural and compelling as the need for self-expression, but home was not the natural place, and should never be used for realizing that need. Homes should naturally be the place where individuals realized their need for privacy. But when women were denied the opportunity to fulfill their need for social interaction in the public sphere, their homes became an arena for entertaining.

The foundation error lies in the confinement of a social being to a purely domestic scale of living. By bringing into the home people who have no real business there, they are instantly forced into an artificial position. The home is no place for strangers. They cannot work there, they cannot play there, so they must be “entertained.” So starts the merry-go-round. The woman must have social contact, she cannot go where it is in the normal business of life, so she tries to drag it in where she is; forcing the social life into the domestic. The domestic life

⁷⁶It seems important to reiterate here that the focus is limited to the middle and upper classes. The lower and working classes had neither the time nor the resources to express themselves through material possessions in their homes. See Ross and Stansell noted above.

⁷⁷Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 257.

⁷⁸Gilman, *The Home*, p. 219.

is so crowded out by this foreign current, and, as there is no place for legitimate social activities, in any home or series of homes, however large and costly, the illegitimate social activities are at once set up.⁷⁹

Using the home for entertaining was an effort on the part especially of the upper classes “to meet a normal need in an abnormal way.”⁸⁰ Entertaining was another illegitimate means of compensating for the absence of genuine social interaction; merely further evidence of the distortions and perversions that resulted from the ideology of domesticity.

Just as it distorted the role and purpose of home, the ideology of domesticity distorted what was human. Built into the ideology were exaggerated gender roles and traits that were thought of as *natural* for each sex. There had always been gender roles and discrimination based on sex, but never before in history had the reproductive capabilities of women had so many cultural consequences. “We have been so taken up with the phenomena of masculinity and femininity, that our common humanity has largely escaped notice.”⁸¹ Never before had the sexual traits of men and women had quite the same implications for their corresponding gender roles. As the measure for the norm--for the human--had always been man, with domesticity that standard became not merely male but masculine. Thanks to domesticity the generic man was more strongly gendered than ever. Well before we developed the language describing man as the universal norm, the Enlightenment paradigm, the western model for the measure of humanity, Gilman

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 202-03.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 13.

wrote of its consequences. "Man is the human creature. Woman has been checked, starved, aborted in human growth; and the swelling forces of race-development have been driven back in each generation to work in her through sex-functions alone."⁸² Elsewhere she wrote, "In our steady insistence on proclaiming sex-distinction we have grown to consider most human attributes as masculine attributes, for the simple reason that they were allowed to men and forbidden to women."⁸³ In the human race man is "held the human type; woman a sort of accompaniment and subordinate assistant, merely essential to the making of people."⁸⁴ "Acting on this assumption, all human standards have been based on male characteristics, and when we wish to praise the work of a woman, we say she has 'a masculine mind.'"⁸⁵ "We should have avoided that general prejudice born of the exclusive rule of man, which called all the conduct natural to him 'human nature' and all that was natural to her 'feminine'. His conduct he assumed to be typical of the race, and hers he deprecated as weak and unworthy."⁸⁶ What a mockery this hierarchical

⁸²Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 75.

⁸³Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 51.

⁸⁴Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 20.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸⁶Gilman, *His Religion and Hers*, p. 115. In contradistinction to Gilman's belief that traits associated with woman were more human than those associated with man, modernity's paradigm holds the fraternal relationship between brothers to be the model for instilling social identity. Seyla Benhabib explains how personal identity is formed according to the western world's paradigm. The individual moves from awareness of self as autonomous, to awareness of self in conflict with other selves, to awareness of self as a socially responsible being. Quoting Hobbes, Benhabib writes, "Let us consider men . . . as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other.' This vision of men as mushrooms," Benhabib writes, "is an ultimate picture of autonomy. The female, the mother of whom every individual is born, is now replaced by the earth. The denial of being born of woman frees the male ego from the most natural and basic bond of

ordering of the norm.

Emotion more than any other human faculty made women appear as “weak and unworthy.” As long as people had been considering the nature of woman, women had been considered “the emotional” and hence “the weaker sex.” What simpletons people were for not questioning such a ridiculous assumption. “What is ‘emotion?’” Gilman asks. Are not “ambition, pity, grief, hope, anger, scorn, hatred, triumph, mirth” expressions of emotion? Do women only feel these? Do men always act primarily from judgment and not primarily from feeling? And is crying the only expression of emotion? What about acts of physical violence, and which sex “commits the most ‘crimes of violence,’ either the ‘cold-blooded’ ones urged by avarice, ambition or revenge, or those we call ‘hot-blooded’--and then tacitly condone because so common--among men.” Are men exercising judgment over feeling at the “football field”? Are the “yelling crowds at a horse race, the hot frenzy of thousands ‘bawling out’ the umpire,” most of whom are men, expressing rational judgment. Why is it that “when a theatreful of women weep at some pathetic play we call them emotional, while a theatreful of men, roaring with laughter at a comic play, we do not call emotional”? Moreover, emotions were not faculties to be feared. They might need discretionary governing, but even so, women

dependence.” “The early bourgeois individual not only has no mother but no father as well; rather, he strives to reconstitute the father in his own self-image. What is usually celebrated in the annals of modern moral and political theory as the dawn of liberty is precisely this destruction of political patriarchy in bourgeois society.” “The constitution of political authority civilizes sibling rivalry by turning their attention from war to property, from vanity to science, from conquest to luxury. . . . Competition is domesticized and channled towards acquisition.” The relationship, however, that actually “humanizes” man is his with his brother. “From Freud to Piaget, the relationship to the brother is viewed as the humanizing experience that teaches us to become social, responsible adults.” (pp. 156-57.)

were actually better at that than men. About the issue of emotion, Gilman wrote,

Human conduct as a whole is largely governed by emotion, in both men and women, and this is by no means an evil. We need in ourselves, as in our horses, 'spirit' as well as bone and muscle; it is the force that lifts and drives us, a useful, a valuable force. But when we try to discriminate between the sexes in regard to controlled emotion, to the relative strength of judgment, of conscience, of forethought, prudence, personal decision, it is not a self evident proposition that 'the emotional sex' is the one longer called weaker. Whether in love or in anger, in panic fear, in religious frenzy, even in grief, shame, despair--it is not the women who most gives way.⁸⁷

Women may have never had an easy time claiming their humanness, but the comparison was relative. For most of history, claiming one's humanness was limited not generally to men, but to a select few men. With the advances in science and technology that simplified the processes of day to day life, and with the general spread of the concept of democracy, came the possibility for the realization of human potential not only for a select few men but, theoretically at least, for every male in society. As long, however, as the norm, the standard of measure was man--even generic man--and as long as man was defined relative to his degree of masculinity, woman had little hope of being anything but "the sex." "When we learn," Gilman wrote, "to differentiate between humanity and masculinity we shall give honor where honor is due."⁸⁸ Unfortunately, though, the process of learning was painfully slow. "So absolutely interwoven are our existing concepts of maleness and humanness," she wrote, so sure are we that men are people and

⁸⁷Gilman, "The Emotional Sex," *The Forerunner*, 1914, pp. 270-71.

⁸⁸Gilman, *Man-Made World*, Preface.

women only females, that the claim of equal weight and dignity in human affairs of feminine instincts and methods is scouted as absurd.”⁸⁹ Gilman attempted to redress this injustice by redefining what was human, by discovering and revealing what were distinctly human traits as opposed to distinctly sexual traits and demonstrating the cross-sexual applicability of the former.

For Gilman there were several distinctly human traits, and they had nothing to do with reproduction, with sexual attraction, mating, or parenting, which were common among all animal species.⁹⁰ There were many traits, however, that were distinctly human. The ability to communicate through speech was one.⁹¹ The ability of self-assessment--the ability to “ascend and *look down upon itself* (emphasis hers)” is another.⁹² The inclination to produce, to work was an important human distinction.⁹³ The desire to produce was distinctly human. “[H]uman labor is an exercise of faculty, without which we should cease to be human.”⁹⁴ “Our power to make and use things is essentially human.”⁹⁵ The ability to imagine was found in no other animal species.⁹⁶ But the most

⁸⁹Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 237.

⁹⁰Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 32.

⁹¹Gilman, *Man-Made World*, pp. 88-93.

⁹² Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p.332; *The Man-Made World*, p. 128.

⁹³Gilman, *Humanness*, pp. 79, 80, 108; *Man-Made World*, p. 231; *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, 134; *Women and Economics*, pp. 3, 67, 116, 140, 157.

⁹⁴*Ibid.* p. 157.

⁹⁵Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 15.

⁹⁶Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*. pp. 25, 50.

valued human trait to Gilman was simply the ability to think socially, to think beyond self, and to live a life of service. It stands out as a common theme or at least an informing principle in every major work she published. "More prominent than either of these [traits] is the social nature of humanity."⁹⁷ Moreover, it was an instinctive trait. "It is born in group creatures, and we are most emphatically that. We are fitted by nature to think with and for our fellows."⁹⁸ "Our Humanness lies not in us, but between us, among us. Its structure and its functions are for mutual service, not for individual service."⁹⁹ "Yes, women are different; and *men are different!*" she wrote. "Both of them, as sexes, differ from the human norm, which is social life and all social development."¹⁰⁰ But this trait, this proclivity toward social thinking, was not masculine or male. It was actually the opposite. If there was a trait responsible for social thinking, perhaps it actually was sex-related. Indeed, the nurturing trait in mothers, because it necessarily forced them beyond the self, forced them to relate to others outside self, to provide for their off-spring, was the training grounds for social thinking, and hence was the most civilized, and so to Gilman, the most human of traits. Though not without apparent contradictions, her reasoning that "maternal impulses are far more nearly in line with human progress than are those of the male" bears examination and leads to a discussion of Gilman views on

⁹⁷Gilman, *Man-Made World*. p. 15.

⁹⁸Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*. p. 275.

⁹⁹Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁰Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 91.

the nature of human nature.¹⁰¹

The nature of human nature is a timeless subject that has occupied professional and lay-philosophers forever. It is a fundamental premise of this study that beliefs about human nature are consequential in determining individuals' social philosophy. Hence, although it might seem like hair-splitting the extraneous, articulating what Gilman thought about human nature, about what were instinctive human traits, and the way she distinguished and made relevant the differences between instinct, human nature, and humanness is necessary. Her ideas and reasoning on the issues are of considerable consequence in determining what shaped her social philosophy, and are essential to understand if any part of them are to be offered as a viable alternative to the existing paradigm.

What is at the core of human nature? What is the most instinctive trait of humans? Is human nature inherently evil? Is it inherently good? Is it unchanging or does it evolve? Is it inherently self-interested, or is it inherently social? And of considerable consequence, how does human nature stand *vis-a-vis* sexual nature? Once what is human is defined, can it be said that one sex is more or less human than the other? The issues were of more than passing concern to both Corra Harris and Charlotte Gilman, and more

¹⁰¹Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 235. For Gilman the "maternal" or "mother instinct" was not the same as motherhood. Gilman believed there was a big difference between bearing a child and parenting one through childhood, and that the sentimentality attached to the former had serious consequences for the latter. She argues that while "Every normal woman should know the joy and pride of motherhood, . . . she is not, [necessarily] . . . a suitable person to educate young humanity." To require mothers to be educators beyond their capacity was a disservice to mother and child, and to society as a whole. Gilman, "Paid Motherhood," the *Independent* (62(10 January 1907):75-78; p. 77.

than perfunctory to them in the effort to articulate their social theories. They each had to come to terms with what they thought about these fundamental and philosophical questions.

For Gilman there was little that could actually be considered natural. She agreed with many of her contemporaries in the new social sciences that culture not biology was the shaper of human destiny. Social evolution she believed was as certain as biological evolution. But Gilman followed the lead of Lester Frank Ward and other like-minded social scientists who saw social reform as the compulsory responsibility of those who understood social evolution, rather than the lead of William Graham Sumner and like-minded Social Darwinists who believed social reform counterproductive at best and destructive at worst. Social evolution for Gilman was not an excuse or even an explanation for the evils of society but rather it was an opportunity, actually a burden, for certain institutions and individuals in society to facilitate the process.

In keeping with her evolutionary thinking, Gilman believed that whatever was natural or instinctive in human nature, especially if it seemed contrary to social advance, was no cause for consternation, because human nature was evolving; it was immanently changeable and changing. "Back of all the inherited tendencies," she writes, "the acquired information, the enforced habits, sits that Inner Consciousness aware . . . and able to rehabilitate its own machinery if it chooses."¹⁰² "Humanity's power to consciously remake itself is a unique advantage possessed by it alone."¹⁰³ In another place,

¹⁰²Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 304.

¹⁰³Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 329.

“Humanity, thus considered, is not a thing made at once and unchangeable, but a stage of development; and is still, as Wells describes it, ‘in the making.’”¹⁰⁴ “We are a race of animals developing into Humanity.”¹⁰⁵ The evolving nature of human nature is a central theme in many of Gilman’s works. But what human nature was evolving from as well as into was important to understand. The Christian doctrine of original sin had done untold damage to the believer’s psyche, and it served as the best example she knew of to demonstrate the harm to society of unquestioned beliefs, of the reverence for and “the accumulation of mental heirlooms.”¹⁰⁶ Not only was human nature changeable and constantly evolving, what it was changing from was not the inherent evil that had been the common understanding of Christian believers for centuries. Evil was not a trait of human nature; nor was it the explanation for crimes against the individual--personal injury, murder, rape, theft--or crimes against society-- “poisoning a community with bad food . . . defiling the water . . . blackening the air . . . stealing whole forests,” etc. Evil and otherwise bad conduct was the result of erroneous moral training and the constant exercise of bad moral judgment.¹⁰⁷ Hence, it was by no means indicative of an irreversibly flawed natural state, but rather was assuredly rectifiable.

In addition to the fatalism surrounding concepts of human nature, of its inherent evil because of original sin, and of its unchanging nature, the bad image people had of

¹⁰⁴Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁵Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 137.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁰⁷Gilman, *Man-Made World*, pp. 203-06.

human nature was due to another misconception, Gilman explained. She wrote *The Man-Made World* to prove as much. The book was written to “show that what we have all this time called ‘human nature’ and deprecated, was in great part only male nature, and good enough in its place; that what we have called ‘masculine’ and admired as such, was in large part human, and should be applied to both sexes; that what we have called ‘feminine’ and condemned, was also largely human and applicable to both. Our androcentric culture is so shown to have been, and still to be, a masculine culture in excess, and therefore undesirable.”¹⁰⁸ While the western model might be based on man as the norm, it was masculine traits that gave human nature the bad name it had. It was actually the traits associated with the feminine that were the more human of the two. Proving this point was essential to Gilman’s overall social philosophy.

To understand what were natural, instinctive traits, Gilman returned the reader to humans in the traditional state of nature, the pre-social state, to examine what then distinguished male and female traits. The purpose for such a return was to discover what instincts possessed by each sex became through the process of evolution the more human of the two. For Gilman, that meant determining which traits tended to be more social. The instinctive traits themselves were not indicators of humanness, but were predecessors of that which became distinctly human. Instinct was to human what female was to woman and male to man. Females and males reacted from instinct; men and women acted from forethought. Importantly, instinct defined human nature, but social thinking defined humanness. The goal for Gilman was to reveal what in the instinctive natures of

¹⁰⁸Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 22.

males and females in a pre-social state--a state before masculine defined the male and feminine defined the female--led most directly to social behavior--social behavior which led inevitably to social thinking, which again, was the ultimate definition of humanness.

Above and beyond certain cultural interpretations there were only a few exclusively sexual traits that could be identified. The two most dominant were the competitive/combative trait in males, and the nurturing trait in females. Thus categorized there is no mystery about which of the two is problematic. "The competitive instinct is wholly androcentric, being in origin, a sex-characteristic of the male."¹⁰⁹ And though men had managed to civilize their combative traits and become the more human of the two sexes, nonetheless "their maleness . . . repeatedly warps and disfigures their humanness," and keeps them from advancing as far as they might in a culture not so androcentric.¹¹⁰ "The tendency to fight is a sex-distinction of males in general: the tendency to protect and provide for, is a sex-distinction of females in general."¹¹¹ "The mother instinct, throughout nature, is one of unmixed devotion, of love and service, care and defense, with no self-interest."¹¹² The nurturing capacity of the maternal instinct

¹⁰⁹Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 221. The only instinct stronger in the male than the combative instinct, Gilman believed, was the "mating instinct." Significantly, however, the latter "for all its intensity, [held] but a passing interest"; the former, unless purposely altered was with him for life. Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 99.

¹¹⁰Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 255.

¹¹¹Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 41.

¹¹²Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 131. Gilman's further observations on self-interest as inherent in human nature are interesting. Men were, in fact, self-interested by nature as she wrote in the citation above. Because they were dominantly self-interested, they could not conceive of any other human motivation being more dominant. It was this misperception that kept men from conceding suffrage to women. "It is the inextricable masculinity in our idea of

made females naturally less self-directed and more other-directed. Hence, it made them naturally more cooperative; it also made them naturally more industrious to provide for their offspring. "[T]he mother necessarily [was] the more intelligent of the two sexes in that her activities were more complex. She had indeed, in her maternal relation, the base of all higher brain growth; the need and capacity to think for more than one."¹¹³ Women by nature had "the quality of co-ordination,--the facility in union, the power to make and to save rather than to spend and to destroy."¹¹⁴ By definition then, the inherent traits of females were more human: "As it happens, the distinctly feminine or maternal impulses are far more nearly in line with human progress than are those of the male; which makes her exclusion from human functions the more mischievous."¹¹⁵ "The human faculties . . . are those qualities which enable human beings to communicate, to co-operate, to serve and help and mutually develop one another; and singly and collectively to produce and

government which so revolts at the idea of women as voters. . . . They cannot bear to think of the women as having control over even their own affairs; to control is masculine, they assume. Seeing only self-interest as a natural impulse, and the ruling powers of the state as a sort of umpire, an authority to preserve the rules of the game while men fight it out forever; they see in a democracy merely a wider range of self-interest, and a wider, freer field to fight in." *Ibid.*, p. 187.

Actually, Gilman believed, there was no such thing as "enlightened self-interest." Self-interest as it was being promoted at the time, she believed, was purely self-absorption, and bordered on being pathological. In any case, it resulted in an unhealthy society. "The human intellect is a social power, and to use a social power for private ends, is a morbid process." Just as "extreme self-consciousness" in the individual reflected a "diseased condition" of the mind, or a "chronic inflammation of the ego," and retarded personal growth, the promotion of self-interest as a first principle among individuals in a society retarded social growth. *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 81.

¹¹³Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 246.

¹¹⁴Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 129.

¹¹⁵Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 235.

distribute those works by means of which, both in the making and the using, we become ever more fully human.” The essence of humanness could be found in human relations, which came more naturally for women in a state of nature, who knew human relations instinctively through their relation with their offspring. Before civilization and social organization (and others might argue, until modernity), women were more relational than men, and hence more human, because of their natural relatedness to their children. Not until domesticity redefined womanhood did this tendency become “pathological.”¹¹⁶

The inclination to work, to produce, and to serve--exclusively and distinctly human qualities--therefore, derived from maternal origins. The maternal instinct that led to production and service for offspring predated human consciousness, social existence, and civilization. The maternal instinct was not uniquely human, all female animals had it, but it was the instinct that led, it was the essential link, to the traits that became

¹¹⁶Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 181. Significantly, Gilman is distinguished from her contemporaries who might be categorized as maternalists, maternal feminists (a subject of discussion recently [July & August 1996] on H-Women@H-Net.msu.edu), or those of some other descriptive title, who advocated women’s advancement based on their moral superiority to men. The second generation of woman suffragists, for instance, advocated political rights for women on the basis of their superior moral natures. For Gilman the fundamental issue was not morality (though she was not without opinion on the subject; among other places she writes about it in the chapter “Crime and Punishment” in *Man-Made World*). The issue for her was not which sex was most inclined to be more moral but which was most inclined to be more human, and they were not merely two sides of the same coin. In cases where women’s presence had noticeably improved the environment, it was not “due to any inherent moral superiority of women; nor to any moral inferiority of men.” It was due to the fact that women’s proclivities to be more relational happened more “normal” and that made them more human. “The woman, being by nature the race-type, and her feminine functions being far more akin to human functions than are those essential to the male, will bring into human life a more normal influence (*Man-Made World*, pp. 255-56). The operative word in this case is normal. Hence, it’s plausible that the phrase “women as more normal” rather than “women as more moral” better represents Gilman’s stand on the issue. And it also sets her apart from a whole category of “feminists” (the term is used advisedly) whose philosophies logically lead to gender polarizing or to privileging the feminine over the masculine.

uniquely human. There was no “paternal” instinct, on the other hand. There was a “lack of natural instinct for labor in the male of our species.”¹¹⁷ While it came naturally for women from their female instincts, importantly, men “had to learn to work, to serve, to be human.”¹¹⁸ It was their role as husband, father, and provider that had taught men something about working to serve; something about being uniquely human. With their superior strength men had subjugated women and appropriated the fruits of their production; but from that subjugation they had learned another role, to be providers; and with that role they had made cultural progress and social contributions. “The subjection of woman has involved to an enormous degree the maternalizing of man. Under its bonds he has been forced into new functions, impossible to male energy alone. He has had to learn to love and care for some one besides himself. He has had to learn to work, to serve, to be human.” Men, then, had to learn to be human; women had to recall what for them had once been instinctive. “By the action of his own desires [domination and control of, then providing for, women], through all its by-products of evil [suppression of women and its social consequences], man was made part mother; and so both man and woman were enabled to become human.”¹¹⁹ If men had exceeded women in “human development” it was due to a “distinction of humanity and not of sex.”¹²⁰ What made men human was having to care for their families.

¹¹⁷Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 233.

¹¹⁸Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 127.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 127-28.

¹²⁰Gilman, *Man-Made World*, Preface (not numbered).

This private lesson of learning could easily have been taken into the public realm. “There is no reason whatever why men should not develop great ability in this department of ethics [“the tendency to care for, defend and manage a group”], and gradually learn how to preserve the safety, peace and prosperity of their nation; together with those other services as to resources, protection of citizens, and improvement of morals.”¹²¹ The part of man that made him “part mother” and that “enabled” both him and woman “to become human,” would further facilitate social progress if left unhindered for a time; and in the scope of history, but a brief time, Gilman wrote naively: “A constant free responsible motherhood can cleanse the world of its worst disease in three generations.”¹²²

If female traits were the origins of civilization and those that were the foundation of what was the uniquely human, why then was not woman the norm, the standard by which humanness was measured? There were several reasons, not the least of which was the political economy. Monopoly capitalism could hardly survive on mother’s milk. Instead of promoting the superior instinctive traits evidenced in the parenting experience and originating in maternity--i.e., the cooperative spirit, the nurturing ambition, the need to serve-- what was advanced was the opposite, the harmful human traits of competition and self-interest. “Our current teachings in the infant science of Political Economy are naively masculine. They assume as unquestionable that ‘the economic man’ will never do anything unless he has to; will only do it to escape pain or attain pleasure; and will, inevitably, take all he can get, and do all he can to out-wit, overcome, and if necessary

¹²¹Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 210.

¹²²Gilman, *With Her in Ourland, The Forerunner*, Vol. 7, 1916, p. 292.

destroy his antagonist.” “Always the antagonist; to the male mind an antagonist is essential to progress, to all achievement. He has planted that root-thought in all the human world; from that old hideous idea of Satan, ‘The Adversary,’ down to the competitor in business, or the boy at the head of the class, to be superseded by another. Therefore, even in science, ‘the struggle for existence,’ is the dominant law--to the male mind, with the ‘survival of the fittest’ and ‘the elimination of the unfit.’”¹²³ All instinctive drives had a place in the evolutionary process, but societal evolution demanded that discernment and discretion be exercised, that instincts good for the whole be recognized and encouraged, while those injurious to the whole be held in check.

As a masculine sex-instinct competition is healthy, right and proper. By means of it males compete for the favor of females, to the improvement of the species. As a social instinct it is wholly out of place, and therefore mischievous. In economics it detracts from wealth rather than adds to it. In all trades and professions it degrades, and in the higher social functions, the arts, the sciences, in religion, in education, its evil results are most evident.¹²⁴

Unfortunately, competition and self-interest were promoted as the only natural, if not the most dominant of human instincts, and they were promoted at every institutional level; most regrettably perhaps, they were promoted in the schools.¹²⁵

That “the competitive system” had become an integral part of the “educative process” was especially disgraceful. In education more than any other institution might

¹²³Gilman, *Man-Made World*, pp. 235-36.

¹²⁴Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 221.

¹²⁵Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 187.

discernment be exercised and instilled for social direction, yet it was there that competition was being advanced as the most natural of human motives. “We use this sex-instinct [competition] as an incentive to spur the flagging energies of little children. We have, by making it an integral part of education, sought to develop it in girls as well as boys, though grossly foreign to their natures, and made it a common force in life. This is absolute social injury. As well might we set children to compete in eating as to compete in learning.”¹²⁶ When neither food, knowledge, nor any other resource necessary for a full life was scarce, it seemed the worst of travesties to make competition rather than cooperation the “common force in life.”

Charlotte Gilman thought much of her life about what it meant to be human, to co-exist in harmony and purposefulness with other human beings. She claimed a social consciousness from her earliest youth and a self-conscious sense of mission to “help Humanity” by the age of seventeen.¹²⁷ Her thinking was not without its limitations and contradictions, and her enlightened views on humankind not without encumbrances.¹²⁸ Her daughter, Katherine, claimed that her mother’s vision for the whole of humanity blinded her ability to see the individual.¹²⁹ That barrier no doubt explains why she

¹²⁶Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 221.

¹²⁷Gilman, *Living*, p. 36.

¹²⁸See notes five and thirty-five above for references to works by Hayden and Bederman that deal directly with the limitations of Gilman’s thinking.

¹²⁹Ann Lane quotes Katherine as saying: “My mothers [Charlotte and her stepmother Grace Stetson] wrote and supported themselves thereby--both worked for ‘causes,’ both were ‘advanced.’ Perhaps the greatest difference--though generalizations are never felt--is that Mama

preferred to write and theorize about social reform than to get practically involved. She could and did appreciate Jane Addams and the work that went on at Hull House, for instance, but when she tried to join them in 1896, to live among the poor immigrants, to help with hands-on application of her principles of social concern, she relapsed into a depression similar to the one that led to the break up of her first marriage.¹³⁰ Her belief in and understanding of the inevitability of progress through social evolution subverted substantial criticism beyond gender inequality. It did so because she believed that the main obstacle to society's full realization of its collective human potential was the inability of women to regard themselves and be regarded as humans. If and when gender equality was achieved, she believed, social justice would follow. That she did not more forcefully challenge capitalism, racism, and ethnocentrism is regrettable. Her negligence, however, does not invalidate the timelessness of her fundamental beliefs, which included faith in a common humanity, a belief in the inherent dignity of humankind, in the basic social nature of humans, in their ability to learn cooperation as easily as competition, and a belief that the search for meaning and purpose is a universal motive in the human experience. One essential belief (among others) that sets her apart from classical humanists, was hers that the trait most fundamental to humankind, that which, combined with self-awareness, sets humans apart from other living species, is fundamentally female in origin. That is, the instinct to nurture, to care for someone other than self, to be

saw Mankind as a whole and did not always understand the individual--whereas Grace understood the individual also." And later "Though my mother was always the most honest and generous of people--I never felt she understood people very well." p. 325

¹³⁰See Hill, pp. 272-82.

primarily other- as opposed to self-directed and self-interested, is the one that informs social identity, social consciousness, and thereby ultimately, human worth.

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**Gender Identity and Social Consciousness
in the Works of Corra White Harris**

By

Catherine Badura

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Chapter 5

“NOT QUITE NORMAL AND AT HOME IN OURSELVES”: IDEAS ON THE NATURE OF WOMAN

“We are not quite normal as men are. We still have a futile instinct to escape from what we are. Thousands and thousands of years have not made us contented and at home in ourselves.” (Corra Harris, 1925)

There may be no more poignant description of the experience of alienation for modern woman than Corra Harris's words above. When all was said and done, woman's situation was hopeless and without remedy, she believed, because of what woman was instinctively. “If we obtain the balance of power we seek, live the lives men live and do the things they do,” Harris wrote, “we shall still be women, subject as usual to fits of nerves and tears on account of the long strain of not being quite normal and [she repeats] at home in ourselves.”¹ Charlotte Gilman would have had many ready answers for the angst Harris expressed here and elsewhere, for the same angst Gilman herself and all women to some degree felt, no doubt. But the inability to feel at home in oneself was not an inherent trait of womankind, Gilman would have argued. It was because they were too strongly gender identified; because they believed without questioning pronouncements of authorities like Joseph Jastrow, Professor of Psychology at Johns Hopkins in the early

¹Both the leading quote and the one noted here come from Corra Harris's autobiography *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 247.

twentieth century, who wrote, “There are no human beings, only men and women.”²

Gilman spent her professional life challenging the notion that sexual identity was inescapably dominant; Harris lived much of her life lamenting the pertinence of it, while trying to discover ways to escape its grasp.

What individuals believed about the dominance of human and sexual identity relates directly to what they believed humans and the individual sexes were by nature.³ As shown in the previous chapter, for Gilman traits and behavior of either sex were much more cultural than natural, and hence what follows in this chapter from Gilman is a brief look at what, to her, women were not by nature, i.e. “the eternal feminine,” in refutation of the prevailing norm. Interestingly the beliefs of both Gilman and Harris about what women were by nature are not at every point necessarily opposed. For instance, they shared a similar disdain for aspects of the feminine ideal. Though Harris promoted the Victorian feminine ideal in most of her fiction, she contended in other places that it was a facade, most especially the physical expressions of it. Nor did she believe women were actually feminine by nature, at least not by some prevailing definitions of the term. But there are several important places where Gilman and Harris disagree on issues related to woman’s nature: namely, who or what was responsible for woman’s considered inferiority; what role women played, active or passive, in their own circumstances; and

²Joseph Jastrow, “The Implications of Sex,” in V. F. Calverton and S.D. Schmalhausen, eds., *Sex in Civilization* (New York: The Macaulay Company, 1929):129-145.

³For an understanding of the nature/culture dichotomy itself as a cultural construct, and of the evolution of ideas about the relevance of the natural vs. the cultural in western thinking, see L.J. Jordonova, “Natural Facts: A Historical Perspective on Science and Sexuality,” in Carole MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern, eds., *Nature, Culture and Gender*, 6th edition (Cambridge University Press, 1992):42-69.

what could and should be done about legitimate injustices. Gilman and Harris's response to each of those related issues explains something about their political perspectives.

For Gilman the imposition of femininity on women was as regressive as the continuation of outworn notions about the modern home. There was very little if anything about the feminine ideal promoted in her day, Gilman believed, that was innate in woman. The ideal was simply an inherent part of the ideology of domesticity, which transmuted sexual functions into exaggerated gender roles. It declared the natural masculinity of man and the natural femininity of woman. But in both cases gender roles had been unduly exaggerated, "excessive," well beyond what nature intended, and the consequences were disastrous all the way around, for society, for fathers, for mothers, for children. Gilman explains:

Our distinctions of sex are carried to such a degree as to be disadvantageous to our progress as individuals and as a race. The sexes in our species are differentiated not only enough to perform their primal functions; not only enough to manifest all sufficient secondary sexual characteristics and fulfil their use in giving rise to sufficient sex-attraction; but so much as seriously to interfere with the processes of self-preservation on the one hand; and, more conspicuous still, so much as to react unfavorably upon the very processes of race-preservation which they are meant to serve. Our excessive sex-distinction, manifesting the characteristics of sex to an abnormal degree, has given rise to a degree of attraction which demands a degree of indulgence that directly injures motherhood and fatherhood.⁴

The reason cultural traits of both sexes had been exaggerated was simple enough to point out. "The female is over-sexed because of her economic dependence on the male; the male is over-sexed because of his exploitation of the female, and the growth of natural

⁴Charlotte Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 33.

human faculties is checked by the interference of these abnormally developed sex-faculties.”⁵ Women cultivated perversely exaggerated gender identity obviously because of their economic dependence on man. To Gilman economic dependence on man was the controlling problem of woman’s existence, and the most deplorable because it made femininity her meal ticket. The “sexuo-economic relationship” or domesticity, “tended in all ways to develop the femininity of women, their sex attractiveness, and to leave them in a condition of sub-human dependence and tutelage.”⁶ Because of this “abnormal sexuo-economic relation,” her welfare was rooted in relationship with man, but since she was the dependent one, he determined the nature and rules of the relationship, as well as the very character of her being.⁷ “What women may and may not be, what they must and must not do, all is measured from the masculine standard.”⁸ Woman would live primarily by catering and appealing to man’s desires. She did this effectively by becoming “the eternal feminine.”⁹ For women femininity was a more thoroughly internalized *modus operandi* than masculinity was for men. Both sexes were over-sexed, but women were more so. “[I]n woman . . . we find most fully expressed the excessive sex-distinction of the human species,--physical, psychical, social.”¹⁰

Clothing designs as much as anything confirmed that women were more

⁵Charlotte Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 273.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Charlotte Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 23.

⁸Charlotte Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 169-70.

⁹Charlotte Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 45.

¹⁰*Ibid*, p. 43.

abnormally sex-identified. Gilman writes, "In garments whose main purpose is unmistakably to announce her sex; with a tendency to ornament which arks exuberance of sex-energy, with a body so modified to sex as to be grievously deprived of its natural activities; with a manner and behavior wholly attuned to sex-advantage, and frequently most disadvantageous to any human gain; with a field of action most rigidly confined to sex-relations; with her overcharged sensibility, her prominent modesty, her 'eternal femininity,'--the female of genus homo is undeniably over-sexed."¹¹ Fashion designers symbolized the prevailing ideology in their design of women's wear. "Seizing upon certain lines and proportions as distinctively feminine," Gilman chided, "they would out-feminize femininity by exaggerating them." Dressmakers see to it "that the woman shall have a small waist and large hips, quite regardless of her protesting bones and body, because she must not only be, but symbolize, femininity."¹² The chief symbol of femininity was the "hour-glass" shape, or the eighteen-inch waist found on the late-Victorian heroine of *Gone With the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara. Virtually everything

¹¹*Ibid*, pp. 53-54.

¹²Charlotte Gilman, "Symbolism in Dress," *The Independent* (8 June 1905):1294-1297; p. 1297. Explaining how the image of the feminine ideal conspired to limit women's function to the domestic sphere in the Victorian period, Susan Bordo writes, "The nineteenth-century 'hour-glass' figure, emphasizing breasts and hips against a wasp-waist, was an 'intelligible' symbolic form, representing a domestic, sexualized ideal of femininity. The sharp cultural contrast between the female and male form, made possible by the use of corsets, bustles, and so forth, reflected, in symbolic terms, the dualistic division of social and economic life into clearly defined male and female spheres. At the same time, to achieve the specified look, a particular feminine *praxis* was required--straitlacing, minimal eating, reduced mobility--rendering the female body unfit to perform activities outside of its designated sphere. Susan Bordo, "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity: A Feminist Appropriation of Foucault," in Jaggar and Bordo, *Gender/Body/Knowledge*, p. 26. Whether it was the 'hour-glass' figure of the past, the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit model of today, or the numerous ideals between then and now, this obsession with the physical feminine ideal turns the "life of the body into an all-absorbing fetish, beside which all other objects of attention seem pale and unreal." Bordo, p. 21.

conducting to the silhouette was unhealthy, though. Women had either to starve or bind themselves, and most often they had to do both.¹³ “[W]aistbinding,” or the corset, to Gilman was as unconscionable as Chinese foot-binding.¹⁴ This obsession with the feminine ideal undermined logical thinking about dress. Whether or not a fashion was practical or even healthy mattered little to women. “This dress of hers may or may not be healthful, may or may not be beautiful, may or may not be useful, may or may not be economical; but it must be ‘feminine’ above all!”¹⁵ Clothing more than any other artifice made women over-sexed. The fact that women never protested this forced identity should be scandalous, but it was not. Women embraced feminine fashions no matter how extreme they became. “Women wear beautiful garments when they happen to be the fashion; and ugly garments when they are the fashion, and show no signs of knowing the difference. . . . no hint of mortification in the hideous.”¹⁶

Women were neither “mortified by the hideous” in feminine fashion, nor apparently were they troubled by the hypocrisy femininity forced them into. The ideal woman was supposed to be modest, to blush when a man stared at her or made eye-contact. Yet, her clothing was designed exclusively for the purpose of getting a man’s attention, of making him stare. The “human female who is supposed to be pre-eminently

¹³Women starved themselves to achieve the hour-glass shape, but they did so because a woman with an appetite was not feminine. She “silently starves under the impression that it isn’t polite to be hungry,” Gilman writes. “The Duty of Surplus Women,” *The Independent* (Jan. 19, 1905):128.

¹⁴Charlotte Gilman, *The Home*, p. 154.

¹⁵Charlotte Gilman, “Modesty: Feminine and Other,” *The Independent* (29 June 1905):1447-1450; p. 1448.

¹⁶Charlotte Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 61.

‘the sex,’ and pre-eminently modest, must so dress as to cry aloud to all beholders, ‘I am a female--don’t forget it!’”¹⁷ It was doubtless that few women discerned the affectation or regarded the contradiction between their clothes that were designed to draw attention to them, and their prescribed shy and diffident manner. The consciousness of herself as a female, furthermore, began in the cradle. Instead of gaining “sex-consciousness” in puberty as they should, children were socialized from birth to adopt a particular gender role. “We carefully encourage it by precept and example, taking pains to develop [sic] the sex-instinct in little children, and think no harm. One of the first things we force upon the child’s dawning consciousness is the fact . . . that she is a girl, and that, therefore, [she] must regard everything from a different point of view.”¹⁸ Nor could the young woman expect to be able to relax her “unnatural exertion” toward femininity after marriage. Recalling a story from *Good Housekeeping* in which a young “extremely dainty and well-dressed stenographer” snagged and married her boss “by the force of her artificial attractions,” Gilman notes that she just as quickly lost him afterward because of her “sudden unaccountable slovenliness--the same old story.”¹⁹

It was difficult to say, Gilman wrote, where the principal fault lay for perpetuating the feminine ideal in fashion since both men and women played a role in it--men for continuing to insist on it, or women, for continuing to accept it, or at least for being

¹⁷Charlotte Gilman, “Modesty: Feminine and Other,” p. 1448.

¹⁸Charlotte Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 54.

¹⁹Charlotte Gilman, *Man-Made World*, pp. 174-75.

unwilling to protest it.²⁰ The reasons why women did not protest, though, were clear, if not excusable. Young, immature women were afraid to “face the problem.” But there was little wonder why. They recognized it as a “problem” only in faint and inarticulate ways. Furthermore, with what would they replace the feminine model? They had “no frank recognition of their own desire and hope.” But more importantly in explaining why young women did not protest, they each considered it a personal problem. “They look at the thing only as a personal matter, a private problem of their own, never once thinking of the thousands who share in it.”²¹ There was simply no sense of “we-ness,” no collective

²⁰Sandra Bartky explains why femininity was and remains even now a formidable obstacle for many women. There is more than ample evidence to suggest that many women enjoy fulfilling the demands of femininity and indulging their “narcissism,” Bartky explains. Therefore to be able to challenge these alienating images of femininity, women have to understand the role played by not only males in general, or even significant male others, in causing women to internalize the desired image, but more especially they have to see the subtle role of the “fashion-beauty complex.” “Like the ‘military-industrial complex,’ the fashion-beauty complex is a major articulation of capitalist patriarchy,” Bartky writes. “Overtly, the fashion-beauty complex seeks to glorify the female body and to provide opportunities for narcissistic indulgence. More important than this is its *covert* aim, which is to depreciate woman’s body and deal a blow to her narcissism.” (Bartky, p. 135.) Each woman responds to the “blow” in her own way; generally always with self-loathing, but oftentimes in physically damaging and sometimes irreparable ways, such as eating disorders or risky cosmetic surgery. At any rate most women spend their lives imprisoned by an image that only a fraction of the female population can achieve, and none of whom can indefinitely sustain. Naomi Wolf, in her study of the “beauty myth,” explores the power of the “fashion industrial complex.” The myth of the feminine ideal survives even today for several reasons, two of which are its immanently lucrative nature, and the fact that women continue to be seduced by it as a cheap form of power. “[T]he unconscious hallucination grows ever more influential and pervasive because of what is now conscious market manipulation: powerful industries - the \$33-billion-a-year diet industry, the \$20-billion cosmetics industry, the \$300-million cosmetic surgery industry, and the \$7-billion pornography industry - have arisen from the capital made out of unconscious anxieties, and are in turn able, through their influence on mass culture, to use, stimulate, and reinforce the hallucination in a rising economic spiral.” p. 17. “‘Femininity,’” Wolf writes, “is code for femaleness plus whatever a society happens to be selling.” Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*, (New York: Anchor Books 1991). The images society sells produce a paradox, moreover, because more than enough women enthusiastically buy into those images and willingly promote them.

²¹Charlotte Gilman, “The Duty of Surplus Women,” p. 128.

identity, among most young women.

There were examples, however, of more mature women who actually did resist and follow their own promptings, which was a “further proof [that women would choose differently given reasonable opportunity] . . . is shown in this; that in exact proportion as women grow independent, educated, wise and free, do they become less submissive to men-made fashions.” But at what cost? The price those few women paid gave the rest pause to think. “Was this improvement hailed with sympathy and admiration--crowned with masculine favor,” Gilman asked. The answer was obvious. “The attitude of men toward those women who have so far presumed to ‘un-sex’ themselves is known to all. They like women to be foolish, changeable, always newly attractive . . .”²² Why should this matter to a woman who had “grown independent, educated, or wise and free”? Perhaps it should not, but it inevitably did. The cultural mandates of femininity and all its trappings “bind us with a gentle dragging hold that few can resist,” Gilman explains. Writing as if from personal experience, Gilman notes, “Those who do resist, and who insist upon living their individual lives, find that this costs them loneliness and privation; and they lose so much in daily comfort and affection that others are deterred from following them.”²³ To “un-sex” the self, to be true to the self, in essence, may have freed woman from one form of alienation, but it imposed another, perhaps more threatening form. When identity was developed through intimate relations, as woman’s was foremost

²²Charlotte Gilman, *Man-Made World*, p. 176.

²³Charlotte Gilman, *Women and Economics*, p. 260. Below Harris confirms the validity of this observation, with her own, that “a defiant woman is an unhappy woman.” See footnote 109 below.

through her relationship with man, to alienate him and lose his affection was more frightening than to alienate herself. He, through his own self-assurance, offered more affirmation to her of herself than she could alone with all of her diffidence and self-doubt. Her reflection was more safely mirrored in his eyes than it was her own.

Who was more responsible for this masquerade and how was it to be reversed? Both sexes, Gilman claimed, were responsible. Men continued to demand a certain standard of sexual identity from women. For that, Gilman believed, they must be held accountable. "If men did not like changes in fashion be assured these professional men-pleasers [dressmakers] would not change them." Equally unconscionable as man's promotion of a certain feminine standard in women's clothes was his unwillingness to accept any part of his role in the charade. He instead blamed women. "But the Arbiter, the Ruling Cause, he who not only by choice demands," Gilman writes, "but as a business manufactures and supplies this amazing stream of fashions; again like Adam blames the woman--for accepting what he both demands and supplies."²⁴ Women were not without some responsibility for "accepting what [man] both demands and supplies," and they needed "a healthy pioneering spirit among . . . themselves."²⁵ But since it was man who manipulated the market, who "by choice" demanded a certain identity of women and through his role in "business manufactures" supplied the means of fulfillment, he was the chief "Arbiter, the Ruling Cause," and so to him fell the heavier burden of guilt, the primary culpability, and greater responsibility for redressing the injustice.

²⁴Charlotte Gilman, *Man-Made World*, pp. 175-76.

²⁵Charlotte Gilman, "The Duty of Surplus Women," p. 129.

However, in spite of which sex was most responsible for perpetuating artificial sex distinctions, assigning blame was counterproductive. Neither sex alone could remedy the situation, nor was it a problem of individuals the way young women most often perceived it. In modern society “there is a strict sense of individual accountability, a constant effort to ‘fix the blame,’” Gilman wrote. “This attitude of mind,” however, “is most out of place in a democracy, where the responsibility rests on all of us, and cannot be shifted off upon individuals.” For the “true nature of a democratic government” to be able to function, every mentally competent adult “must begin to see that the troubles of the world are not things to ‘fix the blame’ for, but to shoulder the blame for--we are all responsible and must all take hold and help improve things.”²⁶ The key was to take action. “If marriage laws are wrong, mend them. If marriage customs offend, change them. If other people’s marriages do not please, improve on them.” Change was essential but it would not come about of its own accord. It demanded “the ability to get up and do something instead of forever twiddling one’s thumbs inertly.”²⁷ Gilman was a firm believer in the progressive trend her era would come to signify, if not fulfill.²⁸

Likely nothing better represents the differences in thinking between Gilman and Harris than this understanding of change and of humans’ capacity for and responsibility consciously to pursue and effect change. Gilman had the typical progressive thinker’s

²⁶Charlotte Gilman, “The Work Before Us,” *The Forerunner*, vol. 3, 1912, p. 7.

²⁷Charlotte Gilman, “The Duty of Surplus Women,” p. 129.

²⁸Gilman was also troubled by the same dilemma of those in the academy for the past three decades for whom theory and practice are in perpetual conflict. She could advocate activism but she could not implement it as evidenced by her failed efforts to be a part of the Hull House professional staff. See final foot note in the previous chapter.

faith in the possibility of fundamental change. Harris had the skeptical traditionalist's firm conviction in the unchangeable core of human nature. Human nature, though, to Harris, was relative, and hence its changeability relative. There were two "classes" of humans: males and females, and of the two the latter had more stubbornly unchangeable natures. What Harris believed women were by nature, as well as what she believed they were not, explains a great deal about the tenacity of her ideas opposing social, and especially gender, reform.

That women were designed by nature to be domestic creatures was one of the chief tenets of the ideology of domesticity, as well as a central argument against suffrage and the general advancement of women's rights. To take woman out of her domestic role would be to take her out of her natural environment, which would not only harm her personally, but more importantly, the family and hence the social balance nature intended. The reasons were indisputable to those like Dr. Joseph Jastrow (mentioned above), who believed in the domestic nature of women. Male and female gender roles were what they were, Jastrow explained, because men were men and women were women. There simply were "no human beings, only men and women," Jastrow wrote. "Sex remains the eternal motive of nature's organic design; hence the eternal feminine and the eternal masculine." Moreover, what was true for men was doubly true for women. Both sexes were gendered, but women were more so. "A masculine body implies a masculine mind, and a feminine body carries even more significant implications." The reason had everything to do with motherhood. "The potential mother in every woman penetrates deep into her nature, radiates intimately to the finer modes of expression, more than any other feminine trait." It explained why women should not seek entry to the public but should remain in the

domestic sphere.

Being a woman is almost in itself a profession; far more so than being a man. A man may be anything from a hobo to a genius and even a bit of both, and still carry on with slight concern about his sex role. He can take being a man as casually as he likes. It is as though nature had a deeper concern for women as the conservative element, the race-guardian.²⁹

Dr. Jastrow's philosophy represents mainstream thinking of the day. It was simple enough yet explained well why society was and should remain so ordered.

Like Jastrow Corra Harris had strong ideas about nature, and about what women were naturally. She would have agreed with him that there were no human beings, only men and women, and that this was best for the social order. But unlike Jastrow, she would not have been happy about it. What she believed about woman's nature and how she felt about it are telling. Women by nature were emotional; they were sacrificial; and unlike men who could be complete in and of themselves, a woman was incomplete without a man, either his love or his authority; and finally, women were innately jealous of and naturally despised other women. Believing in the natural origin and irreversibility of each of these traits insured the conservative nature of Harris's overall social philosophy.

A woman's nature was unchangeable, but her character was not; it was actually quite malleable. In the hands of the right man, woman was a bit like human clay. "They can become anything, they are barbaric, pagan, pious all in one body." Women had a natural "instinct for being altered in mind and spirit." "A man has only to behave

²⁹Joseph Jastrow, "The Implications of Sex," in V. F. Calverton and S.D. Schmalhausen, eds., *Sex in Civilization* (New York: The Macaulay Company, 1929), 129, 130, 131, 141.

naturally” to craft woman into the creature she was meant to be.³⁰ Importantly, a woman’s “mind and spirit” could be shaped by an individual man, but women’s “original elements cannot be modified by education and training as in the case of men.”³¹ Not even if women gained every political and social right they believed they deserved would it make a real difference. To quote a telling passage again, even if “we obtain the balance of power we seek, live the lives men live and do the things they do, we shall still be women, subject as usual to fits of nerves and tears on account of the long strain of not being quite normal and at home in ourselves.”³² The volatility and vulnerability of woman’s nature would inevitably undermine any political or legal gains in gender parity.

Most significantly, women by nature were emotional, with a “zodiac of emotions scattered to the four winds.”³³ As such they were naturally responders to men. Ideally, woman was to man what emotion was to volition--the passive appreciator. And any woman who tried to reverse the order or to gain mastery over her emotions, was no longer natural, and hence something a bit profane.³⁴ “[O]nce a woman’s mind is divorced from

³⁰Corra Harris, “Her Last Affair,” *SEP*, 1 Sept. 1917, p. 18.

³¹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 10 Nov. 1901.

³²Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 247.

³³Corra Harris, “What Men Know About Women,” *The Independent* (Mar. 13, 1916): 379.

³⁴Granted, all southerners as romantics were emotional, but there was a vast difference between the emotional sensibility of any southern man, and the emotional volatility of woman. The southern man was not only the master of his own fate, but the master of his person as well. Even if he had strong emotions, he was nonetheless ultimately considered to be in control of them--except, of course, when he was defending his honor, or his woman’s virtue, which were one in the same, and then any behavior was forgivable. Conversely, it was believed women were never in control, but were controlled by, their emotions. The fear of emotions and of losing control because of them, or being controlled by them, led Corra to cultivate the dispassion she admired in Paul More.

her affections it is a trifle unbalanced and untrustworthy,” Corra wrote, “no matter how brilliantly and broadly she uses it.”³⁵ A woman’s heart was her natural and rightful compass. A woman who conquered her emotions was unnatural and even untrustworthy.

The emotional nature of woman *vis-a-vis* the rational nature of man is what most set the two sexes apart--worlds apart. “The difference,” she wrote, was “not so much in character as in consciousness.”³⁶ And consciousness was pervasively revealing itself in physical as well as spiritual ways. Woman, Corra wrote,

would suggest the ethereal by wearing ‘angel wing’ sleeves, by the plume on her hat, by the very train of her gown. And she does. But while this lace and feather manifestation of spirituality appeals to the man’s adoring imagination, it also convinces him that no trousered materiality can possibly be kin to such a furbelowed soul. Even in her termagant moods the same sense divides them in consciousness. Her plummage is ruffled, indeed, but she is no less winged. And her mind usually acts in the same confused fashion observed in an angry hen bird circling distractedly about her roof tree. The man looks on phlegmatically and knows that he is of a different species.³⁷

This fundamental difference did not necessarily bother man, but it grieved woman. She constantly sought to bridge the gap that divided the sexes with love. This explained why wives were forever “challenging the heart of their husbands” with the question, “Do you love me?” Women believed, or rather hoped, that love would be the common denominator, the means by which she gained affinity with her lover, but it was not. The consciousness of the two sexes on the issue of love set man as far apart from woman as

³⁵Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 104.

³⁶Corra Harris, “A Man’s Relation to the Two Sexes,” *The Independent* (26 May 1904):1188-1190; p. 1189.

³⁷*Ibid.*

any other issue over which they differed. Corra explains,

She is related in mind, body and spirit to a creature who is no more kin to her than the anvil is kin to the ring that is beaten and welded together on its surface. She feels this beneath all the bell-clatter of her fire-forged spirit, and the little question is a sort of near prayer which he never really hears. He answers automatically with all the love phrases in his vocabulary, but he never understands that she is seeking in his regions for the bond of kinship, *likeness*, because he has no such bond. He is intended to be reasonable, not emotional.³⁸

Though not meant to be their social equals, women by nature were intended to be lovers and companions of men. They were so because they craved romantic love more than anything else in life. With men love was never overwhelming, Corra surmised, nor were they incomplete without it. For man love “is an intelligent philanthropy”; with woman, however, “it is a divine compassion.” As such, woman “makes a religion of love.” “Women are easily managed, once they are ‘in love,’ because then they give up their minds and follow their hearts.”³⁹ Women’s obsession with romantic love created in them a “power of illusion.” Romantic “love is the strongest illusion” in woman’s life. Because of this illusion they were actually willing to “sacrifice self-respect” and could do so “with a clear conscience.”⁴⁰ Even though Corra writing as Jessica knew instinctively as did all women that love for and by man “depleted a woman, deprived her of that inward sense of liberty so essential to her profounder self-respect,” and that once she surrendered to love, her own personal “evolution ceased,” nonetheless she was, as any

³⁸Corra Harris, “A Man’s Relation to the Two Sexes,” *Independent*, 26 May 1904, pp. 1188-90.

³⁹Corra Harris, “A Man’s Relation to the Two Sexes,” p. 1190.

⁴⁰Corra Harris, “The Women and the Future,” *The Independent* (14 May 1908):1092.

normal woman naturally would be, willing to “exchange [these] for tenderness, shelter and obedience,” the promises man agreed to in the romantic exchange.⁴¹ For women this “illusion” was their protection, their shelter from reality, and in Corra’s mind, their sole viable refuge from social injustice.

Marriage, not surprisingly, was the only legitimate expression of romantic love, and marriage was woman’s only salvation or, to recall Jessica Doane’s attraction to Philip Towers, her only chance of being whole. Many men could be complete, could function adequately, contentedly, even happily without a mate. Yet no normal woman could do so without a husband. Until marriage, “every woman is the unclaimed part of some man. She is his complement as he is her completion. And if she is never married, she is never finished,” Corra wrote.⁴² This was by no means true for men, though. A woman needs a husband, “although she isn’t needed by one. A woman is born in search of a husband, just as a man is born in search of adventure.”⁴³ Furthermore, marriage fully defined a woman; it only partially defined a man. A woman was not only not complete without a husband, she was not a good woman unless and until she was a good wife. Conversely, marriage actually depleted the male’s manhood. A man “could not go on being a man at the same time” if he were an “ideal husband.”⁴⁴ This was so because a “husband is

⁴¹Corra Harris, *A Daughter of Adam*, (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1923) pp. 278-9; 287.

⁴²Corra Harris, “A Woman’s Relation to the Two Sexes,” *The Independent* (Apr. 21, 1904): 906.

⁴³Marguerite Mooers Marshall, “Every Women [sic] Is Born in Search of a Husband: The Shop Girl Has Better Chance than Rich Girl,” *The Evening World*, 14 March 1914. Interview with Corra Harris.

⁴⁴Corra Harris, “Ideal Husband,” *Harper’s Weekly*, Sept. 17, 1913.

merely one of the circumstances of being a man; it does not change his nature.”⁴⁵ Man was not necessarily designed to be a husband, but woman was designed by nature exclusively and for the sole purpose of being a wife.

Furthermore, the happiest wives were those with problem husbands. It gave their lives more meaning. It was not only every woman’s primary “duty to save a man’s soul if she can,”⁴⁶ without a husband to reform or save from his sins, women were generally implacable. A male character in one of her short stories explained to another, “That is why they change the fashion of their clothes so often. Can’t stand the same shaped sleeve two seasons in succession. Can’t sleep in their own bed, unless they move it to the other side of the room now and then.” When the second male character chanced to defend womankind as being “remarkable for their constancy,” the first retorted,

Oh yes! they are faithful enough, of course. That is not the point. You see, spiritually speaking, not morally, they are a kind of sediment. By nature they are inclined to settle down to the bottom. Can’t rise much of their own accord. That is why they are more religious than we are. They pray more because they really lack the capacity to rise to the sublimity of faith in themselves. They require a stimulant, something to lift their spirits.

This story reveals that the best remedy for woman’s natural, instinctive, discontent was a husband who was unreformed. The “ideal husband” was not the one who had responded to his wife’s efforts to reform him, but the one who had not. Once a woman reformed a man she lost not only respect and love for him, but “the animation of anxiety.” Furthermore she “cease[d] to make the effort to be dear and beautiful and entrancing by

⁴⁵Corra Harris, “These Husbands,” p. 84.

⁴⁶Corra Harris, “A Man’s Relation to the Two Sexes,” p. 1189.

way of holding him. . . . [and she lost] that tremendous passion of acquisitive femininity.” Even worse, once she reformed her husband, her natural insatiability would lead her away from him to others that needed fixing, the seasoned husband told the novice lover, either “children, housekeeping, society, church work, something to occupy [her] - because you don’t,” “That’s the fate of an ideal husband - loses his wife every time.”⁴⁷ An ideal husband in Corra’s mind was something less than a real man.

Another natural trait women had that men did not was a sort of instinct to be loyal. It was a part of her naturally sacrificial nature. The ability to sacrifice self was one area in which normal women were “genius.”⁴⁸ “[T]he nature of the elemental woman . . . is to succor and minister to men without question.”⁴⁹ This natural compulsion was actually “deeper than religion.”⁵⁰ It was a “bondage of love,”⁵¹ that made women willing to sacrifice themselves and surrender to a man’s will. “[A]ll women . . . are born with the inspiration to sacrifice themselves and with a genius for achieving this pathetic end. [This inspiration] is not their principle, but their motive for existence.”⁵² Actually, marital fidelity was not really a sacrifice for women, it was a part of their nature. Husbands--at least the ones who remained faithful--were the ones making the sacrifice. It

⁴⁷Corra Harris, “Ideal Husband.”

⁴⁸Corra Harris, “Reflections Upon Old Bachelors in New England,” p. 1493.

⁴⁹Corra Harris, “The New Militants,” *SEP* Nov. 21, 1914, p. 3.

⁵⁰Corra Harris, “Price of Suffrage for American Woman,” *SEP*, Oct. 23, 1909, p. 10.

⁵¹Corra Harris, “The Happy Woman: Does the Dynamic Marvel of Today Gain Peace or Regret?” *Ladies Home Journal*, September 1923, p. 33.

⁵²Corra Harris, “Superwoman,” *The Independent* (21 Feb. 1907): 426.

was “man’s nature to wander from one woman to another, [but] it was woman’s nature to be faithful to her mate.”⁵³

When husbands did “wander,” even though it was their nature to do so, “yet” it was the wife’s “fault.” Modern women and wives did not fare well in Corra’s estimation of them. They were largely responsible for the personal problems they encountered as well as, she would argue, many of the social problems. One of the chief marital problems the middle class woman lamented was her husbands’ infidelity. The reasons he was unfaithful could be identified in every case, though. Either the wife provoked him to stray by her unfeminine behavior, or she invited him to stray by investing herself outside the home. Among her many sins against him, “a venomous tongue” could be one of the most lethal. It could explain why in the morning he would sit across the table at breakfast, “read the paper and ha[ve] nothing to say to” his wife. If she did not offend him with her “venomous tongue,” she “sinned against her marriage” with a slovenly appearance. What man would not seek out other feminine company when he had to sit across the breakfast table from a wife who “does her hair up in kid curlers, creams her face and appears shamelessly disfigured before the man who chose her because he thought her pretty.” A wife also provoked her husband when she “always has a headache or a pain in her side or a sad tale to relate about her household difficulties.”⁵⁴ Another reason women lost their husbands to “the blandishments of . . . felonious ladies” had to do with the relaxation of the double standard in sexual conduct. That unarguably was

⁵³Corra Harris, “Wife Often to Blame If Husband is Unfaithful,” *The Omaha Daily News*, 17 March 1914.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

woman's fault too for coveting man's "moral license." Corra explained that,

every indictment that women bring against men as husbands is really an accusation of their own sex. What I mean is that where formerly there was that one unmentionable class known as bad women, now we have an ever-widening group who claim as one of their equalities with men the right to conduct themselves with the same license in morals. And there are enough of these "advanced" women prancing in every walk of life to be largely responsible for the ludicrous deflections of middle-aged husbands, so indignantly accused in divorce courts and dramatized in decadent fiction. They are the victims of errant femininity.⁵⁵

Not just husbands but modern man in general had won Corra's sympathy. She had learned the "wisdom" of looking "leniently upon the shortcomings of men." Granted, he had his share of failings and imperfections. And he might be insensitive sometimes, preoccupied at other times, and he might even be adulterous at times, but modern man was "not a rogue, nor a criminal, nor selfish, nor mean";⁵⁶ "at bottom" he was just "a generous creature, only a trifle set in his ways."⁵⁷ He had grown strangely "sort of *shrunk*" in modern times compared with the way he was before.⁵⁸ But Corra could forgive him for this, and for all his weaknesses, because they really were not his fault.

⁵⁵Corra Harris, "These Husbands," *Ladies Home Journal*, June 1925, p. 27. Gilman also derided modern women for using their newly acquired rights and liberties as a license to sexual immorality, but Gilman's invective was directed at men as well as women. She wanted to end the double standard not by granting to women the same liberal moral standard men had operated under for centuries, but by imposing on both men and women the same restrictive moral standard women had been held to for the same length of time.

⁵⁶Corra Harris, "What Men Know About Women," p. 370.

⁵⁷Corra Harris, "Men and Women--and The 'Woman Question,'" *The Independent* (Feb. 2, 1914):165.

⁵⁸Reporter unknown, "A Woman Who Likes Growing Old," *Columbus Enquirer*, 21 March 1929.

The fault lay with the modern woman for a number of reasons, but an obvious one was that she had “stopped idealizing him.”⁵⁹ That explained why “modern man [had] failed as a lover.” “Man was a good lover until woman slapped his face and walked off and left him standing there.”⁶⁰ His natural generosity had been met with provocation. “A man will give a woman almost anything in the world unless she provokes him, but she mustn’t provoke him!”⁶¹ Unless and until modern woman woke up to the error of her judgment in relationship with modern man, she would lose irretrievably his love and the pedestal he had so thoughtfully designed for her protection. None of these things were likely to make any woman happy; but then, “women [were] by nature and condition,” Corra believed, “singularly subject to unhappiness.”⁶²

Notwithstanding the anxieties of married life for women, any woman who claimed to want to remain single was either “unsexed,” “proudly concealing her lack of lovers, . . . or her nature has been singularly perverted from the eternally feminine desire for love--for all normal women wish to be loved even more than they are ever capable of loving in return.”⁶³ Woman’s relationship to man through marriage was her only natural state, and if she were daring enough even to contemplate happiness, her relationship to a

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰Marguerite Mooers Marshall, “Every Woman Is Born in Search of a Husband: Shop Girl Has Better Chance Than Rich Girl,” *The Evening World*, March 14, 1914; based on interview with Corra Harris.

⁶¹Marshall, “Every Woman Is Born in Search of a Husband.”

⁶²Corra Harris, “On the Management of a Husband,” *Ladies Home Journal*, March 1925, p. 30.

⁶³Corra Harris, “Reflections Upon Old Bachelors in New England,” *The Independent* (29 Dec. 1904): 1493.

man through marriage was the only possible way there. “[N]o thinking can get you beyond the everlasting truth that man is the misfortune to which every woman must submit in order to obtain a modicum of happiness and to be normally unhappy,” Corra wrote in response to one of her fictional anti-heroines who had committed her life to social reform and to remaining unwed. “Every other happiness and unhappiness for her is unnatural, harassing, never satisfying.”⁶⁴ Even if a woman found herself unhappy in marriage she had the consolation that it was at least “normal” unhappiness, and that she was regarded by those around her as normal. But there was something pathological even “perverted” about the single woman, whether she was happy or unhappy.

To Corra Harris womanhood in itself actually was pathological.⁶⁵ Women in and of themselves had nothing going for them. Maybe it did or maybe it did not explain why women seemed inherently contentious to each other, but whatever the explanation, innate or learned, women obviously despised each other. Corra was by no means alone in her thinking. It must have seemed apparent in 1904 to the readership of *Everybody's Magazine* that there existed in the female sex “an instinctive suspicion and dislike” for each other. That there was a naturally “strong sex antagonism” was a truism so “obvious” people might attempt to explain it, but no one would question it as a fact. “In the hope,” however, “of learning the reason for this attitude,” the editors of the magazine asked

⁶⁴Corra Harris, “Her Last Affair,” p. 16.

⁶⁵A letter from George Horace Lorimer to Corra dated June 16, 1910 reveals something of Corra’s belief in the pathological nature of womanhood. In responding to one of her letters in which she must have expressed concern over the impropriety of something of a personal nature she had written earlier, Lorimer wrote, “I know it isn’t ladylike to talk about your insides, but being a lady all the time must be pretty tiresome business.” Then he responds, “As to being pathological, two thirds of life is pathology.”

journalist Dorothy Dix in 1904 to write an article on “woman’s inhumanity to woman.” All things considered, it was simply one of the mysteries of life, a puzzle even to the wisest sages. “Just why women, who are gentle and considerate, tender and forgiving, in their dealings with men, should exhibit to their own sex a callousness that is almost brutal, even when they are not actively cruel, is one of the anomalies of life that no one can explain,” Dix wrote. “Her heart is a storehouse full of tenderness and forgiveness and the milk of human kindness, but man has a monopoly of the latch-key that unlocks it. Whether or not this is because women have to use so much altruism in getting along with men that they exhaust their supply and have none left for the service of other women, can never be definitely ascertained; but certain it is that when it comes to dealing with her own sex the average woman is a female Ishmael, whose hand is against every other woman.”⁶⁶ Actually the attitude was not really a mystery. Dix concludes the article with the observation that the attitude of mutual hostility among women is neither natural nor innate, but more the result of her continued, forced dependence on man. “This theory is borne out by the fact that wherever women are most independent and freest, there does the spirit of sisterhood prevail”⁶⁷ If contemporary society failed to find a sisterhood among its women, the explanation was not within them it was within their social environment.

Dorothy Dix lamented the absence of a sisterhood, but Corra Harris did not. She really wanted nothing to do with sisterhood, and seldom had anything generous to say

⁶⁶Dorothy Dix, “Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman,” *Everybody’s Magazine*, Vol. 10 #5 (May 1904):633-635.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 635.

about womankind. "All women are a foreign language," she wrote. "Most women are pathetic, pidlin' souls."⁶⁸ In spite of her purported ideal of Victorian womanhood that glorifies the angel-in-the-home concept, most of her writing, public and private, in some places subtly, in other places not so subtly, betray contempt for anything female.⁶⁹ Her oppositional attitude toward women and her means of keeping herself and her daughter from entrapment within their own female identification, are revealing of a deep-seated fear, mistrust, and ultimately, a revulsion, of anything associatively feminine.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Corra Harris, "A Southern Woman Author: Mrs. Corra Harris on the Problems of her Sex," *The Sun*, 3 June 1911.

⁶⁹The attitude of antipathy toward other women was by no means unique to Corra Harris according to Darlene Rebecca Roth, who finds this sort of rejection of womanhood in most southern women's literature of the period. In a study of women's organizations in Atlanta from 1890-1940, Roth found prevailing in women's literature in the New South a strongly individualistic nature as well as a rejection by most southern women authors of the time of any form of women's "collectivity." Corra Harris, Roth writes, merely represents the "clearest expression of this rejection among the southern female writers." After quoting a long passage from *As a Woman Thinks* in which Corra derides women's organizations as parasites of individuals' achievements, Roth goes on to conclude: "What seems to emerge from this is the expression of the individualistic artistic tradition in a previously unrecognized form: this is the artist against society, but not the society at large, or the society of men, but the artist in revolt against her own, explicitly female society--one created by women, for women, to which she does *not* (by choice, whim, accident, or exclusion) belong. This is an important point, as it appears that the female literary tradition (at least in some of its forms) has evolved in conflict with other female traditions within the American culture. That is to say, not only has it evolved separately (alienated, perhaps) from the female collective experience, it supposes itself to be in actual conflict with that collectivity." *Matronage: Patterns in Women's Organizations, Atlanta, Georgia, 1890-1940*, Series in Gerda Lerner, ed. *Scholarship in Women's History: Rediscovered and New*, (New York: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), pp. 104-05.

⁷⁰Part of the revulsion Corra had against anything feminine can be traced to what she would have considered the pathology of woman's biology. It was evidenced in her correspondence with Faith who apparently suffered much of her adult life with gynecological ailments, and finally died from a related complication. Corra and Faith both--not untypically for the time--referred to Faith's menstrual cycle as the time when she was "unwell" or "sick." (See letters between them dated June 7, 1916; July 20, 1916; Aug. 21, 22, 1916; Aug. 6, 1917; June 9, 1917.) A letter from Faith to her mother on the subject demonstrates the point. "[P]lease, Mama," Faith begged her mother, "do me this kindness. I have a horror of the gossip of women back and forth when another woman goes to a doctor especially if its anything to do with female organs. If people ask you about what's the matter or anything please say I have something the

The revulsion expressed itself most obviously in Corra's belief that women simply could not get along with women. Women quite naturally "despised and envied" other women.⁷¹ There was a more natural kinship between men and women, and a natural antipathy among women that made the "sisterhood of women inconceivable." The reason was simple: "They have no mutual consciousness upon which to base such an ideal; . . . They will never co-operate with one another, because, in the very nature of things, their chief hope and happiness depend upon their co-operating with men." "It is not that they are vicious," she wrote, "but naturally treacherous to one another."⁷² Men, conversely, never "felt the antagonism of sex, because they ha[ve] more than sex as the basis of consciousness."⁷³ It was clear in Corra's mind that the limitation to strictly sex consciousness was an exclusively female dilemma.

Jealousy and envy were innate female traits. The unmarried woman was especially prone to jealousy. The single woman was "restless, dangerous and incapable of a loyal, generous friendship for another woman, because she will not endure competition when it comes to the art of feminine blandishments, any more than the

matter with my stomach or my liver or anything just so it isn't distinctly female. This may be morbid but I can't help it. I'd like to survive the gossip of a doctor's examination which is more than most women do! You remember Maria and the cancer. There's no telling what they would attach to me!" (Faith Harris Leach to Corra Harris, 7 June 1916.) Corra respected Faith's wishes to keep the nature of her illness a secret. In a letter to a Mrs. McCrary, as she would often do in similar situations at Faith's behest, Corra reported, "It is now a month since the operation which was a very serious one, the appendix showing an advanced case." (Corra Harris to Mrs. McCrary, 20 July 1916, Family Correspondence, File 7:1)

⁷¹Corra Harris, "If You Must Come to New York," *The Independent* (Aug. 6, 1914): 31.

⁷²Corra Harris, "A Woman's Relation to the Two Sexes," p. 906.

⁷³Corra Harris, "Ideal Husband."

intellectual woman will tolerate greater wisdom in one of her own sex.”⁷⁴ The latter condition Corra knew from personal experience. She admitted to Paul More that she was green with envy anytime *The Independent* published a good review by someone else.

“When I saw that some one else was writing reviews of fiction for you, I was as grieved as the child I used to be when my sister snatched half of my sugared biscuit. But that was merely the assertion of my feminine instinct of jealousy.”⁷⁵ For instance, she wrote later, “The review of Henry James . . . in last week’s *Independent* is particularly good, which is much for me to say considering that I did not write it. Who ever writes a review of fiction in *The Independent* must over come my native jealousy before he can win my admiration. I groan as I give away and admit that the thing is splendid.”⁷⁶ But the plainer truth was that Corra was not jealous of everyone who published fiction in *The Independent*; she was really jealous only of other women. She did not feel threatened by male reviewers because she never presumed to be in the same “class” with a man. She wrote Paul More about how the distinction played out in her mind:

When I see a review written by a person of the mental calibre shown in “[?] Ibsen,” I recognize the master hand. I am not over come. I read it with decision and sit in judgement as usual, *but* I am not *jealous*. It is quite different when I recognize the pen of a person in my own class [sex]. . . . I am not mean, I do not say that I could have written them better, I do not sulk at you . . . But I am frankly, sadly jealous. . . . [But] for goodness sakes, dont [sic] tell the person that I am this kind of fool. She is a woman and would be correspondingly disgusted. She wears the bridle reins of a splendid education also which would make her the more

⁷⁴Corra Harris, “A Woman’s Relation to the Two Sexes,” p. 906.

⁷⁵Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 7 June 1901.

⁷⁶Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 18 Nov. 1902.

intolerant [of] my elemental weakness.⁷⁷

All women were jealous, but not all women were as frank about it as Corra was. The least tolerant, moreover, were the smart ones, the ones with “splendid education,” who would have no time for Corra’s kind of uncensored self-revelation.

When it came, however, to romantic relationships, one should never be frank with, confide in, nor confess jealousy to one’s husband. Not because there were not legitimate grounds for concern. “So long as there is another woman in the world,” Corra wrote, “there are faint, potential grounds for jealousy.”⁷⁸ Women should keep these feelings to themselves because husbands would use the knowledge of it, would use their wives’ vulnerability against them. She knew this as well from personal experience. As was most often the case with all adulterous husbands, the problem in her case was not with Lundy. He “was a good man and a devoted husband,” and she trusted him.⁷⁹ But he was human, and, she wrote, it was “not the nature of a man to take ten thousand romantic dares from other women.”⁸⁰ A man can only be expected to take so much before he understandably gives in. In Lundy’s case as a minister, the temptation came from pious young women with troubled souls. She did not trust the “morbid feminine saint,” the type of women lying in wait to trap innocent, honorable, and pious men. She faced the same problem that most every pastor’s wife faced when their husbands were “out attending to

⁷⁷Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 14 Sept. 1901.

⁷⁸Corra Harris, “On the Management of a Husband,” p. 30.

⁷⁹Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 105.

⁸⁰Corra Harris, “These Husbands,” p. 84.

[their] pastoral duties.” The problem was with female parishioners. She recalled from their early years when Lundy was a minister, that

. . . the morbid feminine saint is the most unscrupulous moral phenomenon in the spiritual world. You cannot tell what she may do. Her sneaking little soul may lead her to confide the secret griefs of her life to her pastor with tears in her lovely eyes. And she is always gifted with sweet sorrows that crown her like a halo-- whereas a real good woman never makes a declaration of her troubles, but digests them and goes on bravely about her business.⁸¹

Jealousy was a dangerous emotion, one that unfailingly left its victim weak, vulnerable, and inevitably defeated. To “confess” jealousy “is a plain and ignoble admission of defeat,” Corra warned her readers in 1925 in an article on managing husbands. If a woman was smart, she would not give her husband this advantage over her. She might and should level with herself, but she should never admit jealousy to her husband. It would be “stooping to be conquered.”⁸²

There were some cases of exception to the rule of the jealous nature in women, and that was among a particular breed of intellectual women, those for whom Corra felt most contempt and perhaps those from whom she feared most given their obvious self-possession. Not all intellectual women were above jealousy, though. There were some

⁸¹Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 105. Thankfully for Corra, Lundy never gave in to any of those “morbid feminine saints,” and he may not have even been so tempted by them as she suspected. Recall from chapter one that he preferred women of color who had no use for halos and likely were less troubled spiritually than the kind Corra faults here. Although Corra was humiliated by Lundy’s public confessions of his sordid sin, and although he felt as guilty of sinful indulgence as if he had been with a white woman, there is no evidence that Corra felt toward Lundy’s black women lovers anything resembling the jealousy she expresses above toward the “morbid feminine saint” she would have regarded as more of a threat. That says more than enough about her racial attitudes.

⁸²Corra Harris, “On the Management of a Husband,” p. 30.

who could not share the spotlight with other women. Unlike male intellectuals, she explained, who “may work together in harmony . . . brilliant women are stars that demand single orbits, and they insist upon shining alone around the whole circumference of their circle.”⁸³ But at least intellectual women who were jealous of other women retained some degree of their womanhood. As far as that class of intellectual women who had a “mental affinity to men on the one hand and [a] temperamental antipathy to women on the other” - they were most unnatural of all. To feel no jealousy of the same sex was not only unnatural, it was unattractive, unbecoming. “[I]t is the most attractive of all women . . . who is most antagonistic to her own sex.”⁸⁴ Conversely, the woman who felt no antagonism must have been plain and uninteresting to men.

Jealousy among women was natural. The same was not true of men, however. Though there might be a bit of natural antipathy of men for other men, it “rarely reaches the savage phase of rivalry or jealousy,” Corra wrote, as it did with women. The reason for these distinctions was simple. Men were capable of objectivity because they were not enslaved by their emotions. For this reason they were also capable, at least to a greater extent than women, of “respect, justice, co-operation” among themselves. They were capable, as women were not, of dealing in justice. This is what allowed them to enjoy

⁸³Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 237.

⁸⁴Corra Harris, “A Woman’s Relation to the Two Sexes,” p. 907. Near the end of this article we discover, surprisingly, considering all else that she writes, that the female type she is discussing here is the single woman who remains in competition for a husband; that in fact, “after middle age, . . . the average woman begins to care more for women than she does for men. Her allegiance undergoes a psychic change, her eyes are opened, her judgment cleared, and she learns to appreciate her own sex fully. . . . [H]owever much she remains dependent upon [men], she is no longer related to them in the same near way. She has survived them and returned to her own.” I deal with this passage as one of the many contradictions and sane lapses in Corra’s thinking when I deal with her passages on issues of age in chapter six.

“the comradeship of other men without becoming sentimentally attached or weakend by the relation,” as women inevitably were.⁸⁵ For one thing, men did not require the same degree of intimacy between themselves that women required of both men and other women in their relations. Intimacy inevitably involved emotions and emotions were too precarious ever to trust. The “friendships [of men] with one another last longer,” Corra wrote,

because they are less exacting and because they do not burden each other with dangerous confidences as women do. Two men will work together, move in the same circle of society, be the best of friends without knowing one another as confidentially as a woman will after one informal conversation with either one of them.⁸⁶

Corra’s antipathy to women can be found in her advice to her daughter. When Faith was in college and wrote home about trouble she was having with two friends, Corra wrote her back advising her where and to whom to go for help. She actually advised her to seek out a woman to counsel and guide her, but the directive came with very specific stipulations. She told her to choose a wise, older woman. She wanted to tell her to go to a man, but she would not because what she would get then would be fatherly, not objective, advice, which is clearly what she needed with this particular problem. It was a “pity” too that she could not direct her to a man, because “really there is more light in men for women, than in women for women”; men understood women better than women understood themselves. She decided in this case for Faith, the best confidante might be “the artist woman,” Faith had written about earlier, “because some

⁸⁵Corra Harris, “A Man’s Relation to the Two Sexes,” p. 1189.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 1188, 1190.

sentence of yours sketched her character for me in big lines. I inferred that she was sane, a rare quality in any female.”⁸⁷ That she believed sanity in women was rare probably explains why Corra “instinctively look[ed] to men.” Why she was “determined” to the end of her life that it was best, even if she did not always do so, to play the part of “the weaker vessel and to hold [men] to the higher altitude of superior beings.”⁸⁸

Corra felt uncomfortable in the presence of women, and particularly disliked speaking to women as a group. Although she had fears about public speaking in general, she learned that most of those fears came from her fear of women. After a successful speech in Atlanta at a banking convention where she was the only woman present addressing over two hundred men, she wrote her daughter. “Faith,” she wrote, “there is no doubt about it, men are so much more generous and cordial to a woman than women are. This was my first men’s audience and I felt the difference. There is a certain element of competitiveness or antagonism in women to another woman. If I could speak always to men, I could *speak!* [emphasis hers]”⁸⁹ With similar sentiments she wrote John J. Spurgeon, a journalist and editor in Philadelphia that she would like very much “to make an address to a great body of men, just men you understand, because if there should

⁸⁷Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 18 Nov. 1908. Once after she was married and was having problems, Corra agreed to offer advice if Faith wanted it, but added, “My opinion is that if you need advice, you’d better go to a man anyhow. Your husband could out wit any woman.” A man, however, would be a formidable challenge to Harry, whose abuses of women Corra believed was well-known. “[T]he opinion of any man upon [Harry’s] conduct to you, to me, to his mother would bring an end to his hysterical tyrannies as public opinion often corrects secret abuses.” Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, Feb. 1917; exact date unknown, Box 7:13.

⁸⁸Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 237.

⁸⁹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, April 1919, only date given. Family Correspondence, Box 12:3.

be a single woman present she would tie my tongue. I am mortally afraid of women, and there lives not a man in creation whom I fear.” She informed Mr. Spurgeon that she had “just declined to address the Convention of Business and Professional Women which meets this month in Chattanooga, because I would not dare to appear before an audience of highly efficient, mechanical feminine intelligences.”⁹⁰ Well educated and successful women both intimidated and angered Corra. When she felt generally humiliated by their ability to articulate with more sophistication their thoughts and ideas in speech, she consoled herself with the fact that theirs was merely a learned, “mechanical” intelligence, not the personal and creative talent that she and other writers shared. Like many other writers who “acquire the habit of thinking in terms of the written word, [she had lost] the babbling use of [her] tongue.”⁹¹ Once she began writing she “practically lost [her] oral faculties,” and could not “scintillate on a rostrum,” the way she might have been able to had she not spent herself writing.⁹² Besides, she was sure that real men did not like “brilliant women,” in which case she was not going to lament her limitations on that score.⁹³

⁹⁰Corra Harris to John J. Spurgeon, 3 July 1922, General Correspondence, Box 27:16.

⁹¹Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 240.

⁹²Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 144.

⁹³Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, letter undated, but it follows one dated “Saturday Night” and precedes one dated March 21, 1903. Sensing perhaps that Paul More quite naturally would not care for smart women, she assured him before they met that he had nothing to worry about if ever they did finally meet. Corra wrote, “Anyhow, as we know one another very well, I wish with all my heart that we might talk some. In that case, you should do the greater part. For, since I have learned to write, I do not talk as much nor as well as I did. This is a recommendation I think to you, and a very shrewd one. My observation is that men find brilliant women rather trying. It is not that they feel the comparison, but it is a fundamental defect in the woman, for no matter how well she talks there is something lacking, and generally the *more* brilliantly she talks the more it is lacking. I do not know what it is, sanity, propotion [sic] a

Perhaps more significant than what Corra believed women were by nature, is what she believed they were not. Women might be natural slaves to their emotions and incomplete without men, but they definitely were not naturally domestic creatures. “Women are not by nature domestic.” “They do not belong in their homes any more than birds belong in the cages where they have been imprisoned,” she writes (borrowing, unwittingly no doubt, a classic feminist metaphor). “They are there for the same reason-- caught and put in and trained to service some thousands of years ago by men who chose them singly for this purpose. . . . Women have been trained merely to do what is to be done whichever way they are told to do it. . . . We are merely the trained automatons of an order of things we did not invent.”⁹⁴ Ask “any modern American woman you will find” and she will tell you that “she does not really like housekeeping. She is restless, dissatisfied, and feels that she was cut out for something else.”⁹⁵ “Cut out for something else,” practically anything else, Corra might have added believing that domestic work, by its very nature, even with the house full of servants she had, was unarguably some of the most burdensome, thankless, least gratifying work a person could do, and certainly not the way for a creative person to spend her time.

If nature had not designed women for the domestic sphere and housework, though, how did they get stuck there? It was by design but not God’s, at least not nature’s

proper valuation, something that men have more of than women, that is all I know.” “But don’t worry,” she reassured him lest he should think that her lack of brilliance might make for dull conversation, “when I see you, if ever I do, I will do my part of the talking before anything shall go unsaid!” Corra was only at a loss for words when speaking extemporaneously on an impersonal rostrum. When she could speak personally, one on one, she was in her element.

⁹⁴Corra Harris, “Women Are Not Domestic,” *Louisville Courier*, 2 Nov. 1913.

⁹⁵Corra Harris, “Price of Suffrage for American Women,” p. 11.

God. It was man's making. Cleverly and "shrewdly" men had crafted an ideal which included temperament, disposition, and virtues. This feminine ideal, or this woman-in-the-abstract, was not really a person at all. She was a "character," a creation of man's own mind. Corra's thinking on the formation of the feminine ideal is captured in "The Migration of Women," an unpublished piece about the character of modern woman.⁹⁶

The introduction to this essay is lengthy but worth noting. It reveals ideas that potentially could have undermined more self-destructive traits she believed borne in women. "Until the present time," Corra writes,

women have figured chiefly in religion, poetry and romance. They have been that part of the imagination of men which creates creeds, poetry, windmills and fiction. They have no reputation for any other form of existence. They are purely imaginary beings living in physical bodies. The quality of their intelligence, their emotions, even the fashion of their clothes have been made to confirm this figment of themselves. Their character is a legend invented by men. It is not a real character and could never fit real human beings. Yet they have accepted it and believed in it even more than the men do who mystified them with it. From Juno and Helen to Sarah and Mary, they have been merely the feminine, instead of the divine part of the creeds of men. They are not the authors of a single standard governing their own lives. They have never been priests. They have only obeyed priests. If it had been left to them to discover Almighty God, we should all have remained in ignorance of Him. They lack the tablelands of the Moses soul. This was why in the olden days the angels appeared first to men. No mere woman could have withstood their shining faces, nor believed them divine messengers. Women are the inventors of fairies, not angels. They were so made that they could only take the word of men for these things. But accepting that, they have been the portion of the race set aside more particularly by their helplessness to

⁹⁶Corra Harris, "The Migration of Women," *Corra Harris Collection*, Box 78:23. This might possibly have been prepared as a speech. I was not able to determine if it was ever delivered or published, however. It does not show up, at least under this title, in any bibliography consulted.

pray and believe in prayer and to practice the piety which was chosen for them.⁹⁷

Significantly, women had not been the architects of their own design, “the authors of a single standard governing their own lives.” God and man had conspired together to bring about woman. But while God might have been responsible for the fact that women had “been the portion of the race set aside more particularly by their helplessness to pray and believe in prayer and to practice the piety which was chosen for them,” it was man actually who “even set the Lord himself up to be feared and served more particularly by women with their heads modestly covered, while they continue to hobnob opportunity with the easier devil. It has all been very shrewdly managed,” she noted.⁹⁸ Women might have been “set aside” and “chosen” for their submissive roles by God, but it was not nature’s God, it was the God of man’s own making.

So had the feminine character of woman been contrived by man. She was a figment of man’s “imagination.” This woman was a “purely imaginary being living in a physical body.” Her character was a “legend invented by men.” Furthermore, it was a character suited only for the imaginary world and in no way “fit [for] human beings.” The motivation was obvious. “Whenever he considers woman, he is himself the standard, and he considers her only in relation to himself, what he needs, what he will have of her, more particularly what she cannot give and what he does not want of her, and

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁸Corra Harris, “Women Are Not Domestic.”

nothing else.”⁹⁹ Men had “defined all the virtues for their own convenience.”¹⁰⁰ Women did not “own their own virtues, [because] they ha[d] never chosen them.”¹⁰¹ To own a virtue, one had consciously to choose it, or choose to claim it. The feminine “virtues” ascribed to women as women--modesty, chastity, deferential emotions--expected and demanded of women, were “invented by men.” This woman was “modest and chaste”; she “was sensitive, easily moved to tears or to laughter and was not expected to be healthy.” She “was bound to her pedestal by strangely enslaving virtues,” but they were fabricated virtues.¹⁰² This creature was a phenomenon, “probably the most convenient ideal men ever actually produced in this world, one that never failed them in fidelity.”¹⁰³ All this contrivance was clear. Men had determined what women were and what they were not, and by claiming it was their nature, had justifiably left them at home where they conveniently belonged--home which was a dirty place where some of life’s most irksome tasks had to be done daily and when necessary, around the clock.

If man not nature had put women in the domestic sphere, why was Corra unwilling to challenge men as the source. If she knew, in fact, that women were oppressed, and that they were not naturally designed for that oppression but that it had been a “shrewdly managed” hoax, why did she remain so ardently opposed to women’s political and social advancement? Why, instead of joining the cause of women as agents

⁹⁹Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p.241.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹Corra Harris, “The Migration of Women.”

¹⁰²Corra Harris, “The Synthetic Girl,” *Ladies Home Journal*, April 1928, p. 37.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

in their demand for justice, did Corra become an acquiescent victim, resigned to accept woman's "ancient fate." Why, after a relatively insightful critique of a patriarchal social order, does she conclude demurely, "I do not know if men are to be praised or blamed for this situation." Either way, it was "doubtless for the best."¹⁰⁴ The question of what stood between Corra's awareness of woman's oppression on the one hand, and her lack of will to resist on the other is a central one behind this study.

For one thing, socially Corra feared revolution more than any other possible social situation, and to force man to come to terms with his responsibility for the oppression of woman would involve him in an act that was "more revolutionary than if [he] were called upon to surrender his property."¹⁰⁵ To surrender his control over woman would be "like asking him to commit a personal violence against his own nature"; it would be "more awful than if he were required to surrender his religious faith [or] his system of philosophy."¹⁰⁶ Besides, if domestic work was really as bad as women claimed, they should have done something to relieve the onus. If they did not have the wherewithal to challenge the injustice, were not "capable of exercising the genius of civilization," then obviously they deserved the consequences. The evidence that they lacked in such a way was overwhelming; the facts hard to refute. Women had been around, after all, as long as men had, yet clearly, "every [technological] device known in the modern establishment for comfort or convenience was invented by a man."¹⁰⁷ One could find "few traces of the

¹⁰⁴Corra Harris, "Women Are Not Domestic."

¹⁰⁵Corra Harris, "The Migration of Women," Box 78:23.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷Corra Harris, "Women Are Not Domestic."

feminine imagination in . . . great accomplishments. . . . [Women] are . . . at best the patient conservators of what men make, win, and produce.”¹⁰⁸ Apparently women had simply drawn the short straw in the struggle for existence. As losers, they were responders not initiators. Woman was “originally designed by her Maker to be the complimentary mirror in which Adam might gaze to spoof himself to greater endeavors.”¹⁰⁹ Corra was convinced that not just man but “all history and the whole of Nature conspire to keep us in our former place.”¹¹⁰ Those were pretty dreadful odds: “all history and the whole of Nature.” Stronger, it seemed, than the energy and commitment to challenge them of any women she knew. Furthermore, it seemed that women who did were as discontented as those who accepted their fate, and some even more miserable. “A defiant woman is an unhappy woman.”¹¹¹ Besides not seeing any evidence that the women who challenged their fate were any happier than the ones who did not, Corra’s own experience had taught her that acceptance was better than defiance. “I seem to have learned with awful submission to say ‘Thy will be done.’ I do not seem able to resist or question as normal people do the ways of God in their afflictions.”¹¹² To question

¹⁰⁸Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 240-41.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p.241.

¹¹⁰Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 222.

¹¹¹Corra Harris, “Do Women Miss Happiness? Modern Life as Seen Through Grandmother’s Eyes,” London *Evening Standard*, Dec. 5, 1928. An interesting title considering Corra Harris was never a grandmother. Harris’s statement here confirms Gilman’s noted earlier in this chapter on the subject of women who resisted conformity to femininity: “Those who do resist, and who insist upon living their individual lives, find that this costs them loneliness and privation; and they lose so much in daily comfort and affection that others are deterred from following them.”

¹¹²Corra Harris to a Mrs. Ottley, 6 June 1921.

disturbed her peace, and peace seemed woman's best consolation. To submit, to adjust herself, was the only way to achieve peace of mind. "I never pray for rain when it is dry, nor for sunshine when the skies are dark. It all comes out exactly right at the right time, even if in the meantime you must get up and hurry out and lay your body earth to earth and dust to dust in the grave."¹¹³ To challenge "why things are as they are," Corra believed was illogical if not pointless. When women came face to face with the fact that man "is simply the one sex there is in the human or any other specie"; when she faced the fact that no matter what else, she "could not get around that with all the thinking and doing that can be thought or done"; and when she accepted that "this is the secret which explains the whole phenomenon of man, including woman"; when women could accept these invariable facts of life, they might be able to live at peace with themselves.¹¹⁴ Resignation was a way of coping that Corra learned early in life.¹¹⁵

And it is what she advised her daughter once the burdens of married life caught up with her. Passages from two letters to Faith demonstrate Corra's thinking on how best to play cards with the hand life had dealt her.

Pinkie, darling, there is such a thing as peace and happiness. But both depend not upon any outside source. But upon your adjustment to the inevitable. Practice that and shrewdness, but not malice. Take care of the honor of your soul. . . . Be

¹¹³Corra Harris, "In the Valley," *The Independent* (24 July 1916):124.

¹¹⁴Corra Harris, "What Men Know About Women," p. 370.

¹¹⁵It was a philosophy her fiction readers found helpful. One woman in a loveless marriage wrote after reading one of Corra's novels, that even though her husband was a 'better business man than he is husband' nonetheless "he is good to the children and pays the bills cheerfully and what more ought I to expect." Lillian Rines of Durant, Oklahoma to Corra Harris, 23 Jan. 1911.

patient but do not be a patient fool. There is a tremendous difference. And avoid bitterness. It produces a [sic] acid of the mind far more fatal to peace and enjoyment than anything else. . . . I am glad to see that you are learning “indifference.” You will find that a hard plant to cultivate in your nature. But cultivate it. Study the philosophy of life--what it shall profit you to earn. I found the less agonizing I cared, the less I suffered.

Faith, avoid the pulsing spirit of martyrdom, which is the lifetime temptation of all decent married women. Permit nothing to down you. Choose your happiness and make it . . .¹¹⁶

Happiness was a choice to be made. The married woman had to choose to accept the inevitable, or one’s fate in life, and to do so without bitterness, without malice, and without martyrdom. Granted it was a tedious balancing act--resigning oneself, adjusting oneself, submitting oneself, all patiently, without malice, bitterness, or other similar expressions of an ill disposition. Bitter resignation was as bad as defiance. And martyrdom made one a casualty. But there was a way. It was not as Corra had advised the “clever maid” (in chapter two) who was to be “adorably adjustable” by being “sweet.”

The advice to Faith was, with “shrewdness” to “cultivate ‘indifference.’” To be “indifferent” meant to be numb or immune to emotional pain. It was the most effective and faithful survival technique life had taught Corra. The “less . . . I cared, the less I suffered.” It was a trait that Corra grew instinctively to respect early in life, and later consciously to cultivate. The trait she called indifference implied strength of character, a kind of self-possession that put one some distance from the crowd, and it recalled the traits she once disdained, then came to emulate, in Paul More. In retrospect, it was the

¹¹⁶Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, n.d. 1910 is date speculated, but since Lundy died in September and Faith did not announce her marriage to Harry for certain until after her father’s death, I expect the date is likely later.

thing about Corra's father that had "augmented his importance in [hers and her sister's] eyes" when they were children.¹¹⁷ Indifference was an asset that the "public-minded" woman stole for herself; it was the trait about her that "excited the marauding masculine instinct of each lover in turn to win her."¹¹⁸

Indifference attracted and seduced some men while it intimidated and repulsed others, but at all times it kept them off guard. It was not a feminine trait; it was a means of power and as such, quite unfeminine, and hence unattractive. But if a woman was willing to trade love for power, cultivating indifference was the key. It was unfeminine because it was a means of power. "For men are certainly more easily attracted by the self-conscious woman, whether she is shrinkingly so or boldly so, than they are by one who sleeps soundly unmindful of them and who goes about her business the next day with no animated sense of them."¹¹⁹ Indifferent women were unmoved either way by men. It was a sort of neutral state of mind that kept one's emotions in check, and hence kept one in control. When one could control little else in life, control of self was all the

¹¹⁷Corra Harris Notebook, Essay titled "Early Recollections of Mortality."

¹¹⁸Corra Harris, "Her Last Affair," p. 16. This is another story that has mixed messages and reflects Corra's divided loyalties and values in conflict. The central character in this story, Laura Monteath, is a woman who commits her life to social reform and to "defeating love." She is one whose "vanity of indifference" earns both Corra's contempt and admiration. Miss Monteath is slain in the end by love, which reads as bittersweet victory that is clearly more bitter than sweet. It is unlikely that Corra envied much the Miss Monteath that "effaced" her image with "twenty years in social service", the one who "had dangerous leanings toward civic life and social service," but the one who was "of a strong character," who was "the affirmation of an ardent and willful woman who exercised the vanity of indifference," who was foremost a "thinking" woman, the latter traits Corra clearly envied and admired. She was rescued from being an old maid by a lover, and that was good. But that she had to sacrifice her strength of character, her strong resolve, and surrender her cultivated indifference made the rescue a paradox.

¹¹⁹Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 253.

more essential, and learning to practice indifference was the best way Corra knew to self-control. Corra advised Faith at all times to remain in control, especially with her husband, which was where she was weakest. She told her never to “allow anything to produce a scene between you [and Harry].” Especially not jealousy. Jealousy, again, was an emotion that left women particularly vulnerable. “If you show jealousy (and he again complained of that!) you confess defeat and degrade yourself. Allow nothing to excite your opposition or anger. . . . Your only chance of peace and happiness with him is not to yield your soul to the indignity of scenes.”¹²⁰ For married women especially, shows of emotion were “confessions of defeat” and “degradation” that caused “scenes” for which they were always considered liable. Only the indifferent person, in control of her emotional faculties, had any chance of “peace and happiness.”

In addition to teaching her daughter how to gain some control over her life by gaining control over her emotions, Corra instructed Faith how to deal with what she could not control in her life.

You must try to get this in your mind, my dear. Peace of mind and spirit are not dependent on outside conditions. They are *entirely* dependent upon *inside* conditions, your health, and your mental ability to order your life, harmonize it[,] adjust it to whatever is inevitable for the *moment*, remembering that there is *nothing* more transient than the inevitable. . . . Submission and cunning are the great elements of peace making in life. Submission to what is and a fixed invincible purpose to make the future nearer to your liking.¹²¹

The way one “ordered” one’s life was by developing the “mental ability” to submit.

¹²⁰Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, Feb. 1917.

¹²¹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 11 Nov. 1918.

However, when coupled with “cunning,” submission could be as much an active as a passive decision, and hence seem in effect to be at least some means of control. This philosophy had seemed to work in both Faith and Corra’s lives. If Corra had wondered at one point when Faith was young whether or not she had the spiritual resources to be “adjustable,” she learned better once she witnessed her in the midst of her own marital trials. “At one time I thought you would never be [adjustable] . . . but how you are,” she wrote proudly.¹²² Whether by example or precept, the mother’s lessons had been well-learned and fruitful.

Faith indeed had to learn several lessons about adjusting herself to those significant others around her. She first had to reconcile herself to living with a husband that she discovered would never be able to “love enough to sacrifice” his “fatal gift of pride,” which came to light once, after a series of quarrels between him and Corra over how to run the Valley farm. Whether unwilling or unable to coexist with his mother-in-law, Harry declared his and Corra’s relationship irreconcilable, and moved Faith out of the Valley and away from her mother. The anguish it caused Faith was nearly unbearable. She was perpetually torn between the two. Shortly after the quarrel between Harry and Corra that led to his final estrangement and their move, Faith wrote her mother about her upcoming visit to the Valley and future visiting arrangements:

I wish I could stay longer and in time I may be able to manage it but just now Harry is still *wildly* hostile. When he sees me go to the Valley it is as if I had gone into the enemy’s camp and he wants my stay to be short. . . . I am sorry that the situation is what it is . . . You are disappointed that I do not come oftener and stay longer. He is irritated that I go as often as I do. And I--I vacillate between

¹²²Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, 6 March 1918.

the two of you as I have always done trying to adjust myself to you both and satisfying neither!¹²³

Caught between Scylla and Charybdis Faith had to search her soul for the best solution. After a couple of years of futilely hoping for a reconciliation between her husband and her mother, Faith gave up “vacillating” and was able to take her mother’s advice, which seemed, under the circumstances, the only way. “I have waked up at night and cried and cried. But I had to adjust myself,” she wrote resignedly, “or have something tragic happen so that’s what I have done--adjusted myself, ceased to hope, just thankful that I am here close to you where I can see you occasionally!”¹²⁴

With Lundy’s death Corra had escaped some of the fated burden of having to submit to the inevitable. With Faith’s death, she escaped much of the remainder. A letter to Arthur T. Vance, editor of *Pictorial Review*, reveals the restraint, and the motive for restraint, that Corra had exercised in her relationships with editors. It reveals something also of what she believed to be the relationship between one’s commitment to authority outside the self and submission to inevitable forces beyond one’s control. “I am no longer under that sublime necessity of love and sacrafice [sic] which compells [sic] submission to the inevitable. Faith is dead. No earthly fortune can affect her immortal prosperity. I am not extravagant nor in debt. . . . I am ready to earn and to spend. But, my

¹²³Faith Harris Leach to Corra Harris, 19 Sept. 1916.

¹²⁴Faith Harris Leach to Corra Harris, 19 April 1918. Harry finally relented after over three years of attempts by Faith and Corra to reconcile the two. They all shared one cordial visit together in The Valley before Faith died unexpectedly in May 1919.

dear sir, I will not work for less than I have worked for in the past.”¹²⁵ Corra had taken without challenge what she considered in some cases to be unfair and even patronizing treatment from editors because of what was at stake. She had to safeguard not only her own, but her daughter’s publishing future. With Faith’s death, that impediment was lifted. From that point Corra would be less willing to accept without challenge what she considered unfair treatment. There would be more risk-taking, and a greater exercise of a new-found personal freedom; less resignation and a little more protest.

This chapter has covered the differences between Gilman and Harris specifically on the nature of woman’s nature, and it asked what each woman believed about who or what was responsible for woman’s considered inferiority and the resulting circumstances, and what could or should be done to remedy gender injustices. That they agreed on a few fundamental issues is significant. They actually agreed that marriage and monogamy were natural and good for women. Gilman, even allowing that “one may deliberately renounce [marriage] for social service and be right in doing so,” argued nonetheless that to do so would be “a grave loss.”¹²⁶ They agreed also, for instance, that women were not naturally designed for the domestic sphere, that woman’s relegation there was unarguably the conscious design of man. They agreed that man was the measure of all things human, the norm, the standard by which woman was compared. Where they disagreed, however-

¹²⁵Corra Harris to Arthur T. Vance, 20 Oct. 1920. Corra thought Vance was trying to take advantage of her in her grief by offering her less money for her work. This was by no means the first time Corra thought an editor was not dealing honestly with her, but the tone of her response changed after Faith’s death.

¹²⁶Charlotte Gilman, “The Duty of Surplus Women,” p. 128.

-on who was responsible and how to redress the problems--is more significant and explains the fundamental differences in their perspectives.

Considering their political positions it is hardly surprising that Gilman and Harris have a fundamental difference of opinion on woman's nature as it relates to the nature/nurture or nature/culture controversy. For Gilman little of what women in society (though not the prehistoric female) were was attributable to nature. From the preceding chapter we saw that she believed in a maternal instinct of sorts, though a short-lived one lasting for a mother perhaps only through a child's infancy. For the most part, however, woman's inferior status in society was not a part of natural evolution but rather a part of cultural prescription, and hence, with the appropriate measures, subject to change. For Harris, biology essentially was destiny for women. And if it did not fully explain the origin of her inferior role in society--if in fact man was responsible, and she admitted he most definitely was--woman's natural physical and emotional weakness nonetheless justified her relegation to the lesser status. Harris's belief in the natural physical and emotional weakness of women, and her judgment that such was bad, explain why--even when she admitted man's culpability in first putting and then keeping women in a socially inferior position--there is such a strident anti-woman tone to her work. It explains why she blamed women for nearly all marital problems, for their own restlessness, for their own unhappiness, and even for the foibles and moral indiscretions of their husbands. Woman's natural physical and emotional weakness was very simply a part of the way things were, and the notion that one did not challenge "why things are as they are" was a fundamental governing principle of Harris's thinking. If change were possible, the extent to which it was, would and could be effected only by men, because they were in authority,

and authority was something one did not question, and certainly did not challenge. But significantly, when all was said and done, no matter what social and cultural changes had been effected, the nature of woman was not subject to change, and to Corra Harris, the nature of woman, not her social, legal, or political status, was the chief bane of her existence.

Chapter 6

“A KIND OF IDIOT, FEMININELY SPEAKING”: CORRA HARRIS ON HERSELF, VALUES IN CONFLICT

“[W]hen you have been a woman a long time, and have grown accustomed, you may say by defeat, to the sensations of being one, you may look back through your mind, which is quite different from looking back through your history, and pick up much strange information about yourself which you would never discover except in the retrospect.

“For example, seeing the woman I used to be more clearly than I could possibly have seen and measured her then, it occurs to me that I may have been a kind of idiot, femininely speaking . What I mean is that I seem to have been almost totally devoid of that engaging self-consciousness which makes women noticeable and attractive to men. I am embarrassed lest my husband may have found me delinquent in the mere airs of femininity. I do not recall ever being coquettish or feeling attractive; merely honest, kind, devoted, and at times freakishly witty or gravely intelligent.¹

The way Corra thought about and chose to identify herself tells us a lot about both what gender traits she truly valued as well as why her own gender identity confused and troubled her at times. “Modesty” and the “fine art of self-consciousness,” she knew, were the traits that made the “more womanly women . . . the dearer kind to men.” But

¹Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 248.

this did not describe Corra. She had plenty of “sense” in other ways, but basically was “femininely stupid.”² Women were not supposed to be “femininely stupid.” Something had to make them that way. For her, it had been the life she lived. “The life you live never reveals the person you are by nature;” she reflected, “only the kind of person you have drifted into being or have been constrained to become.”³ The life she had lived, with all the personal losses she had suffered, she believed, had robbed her of being what she might naturally have been had she not “been constrained to become” what she was, or what she believed herself to be. Whatever the difficulties life robbed Corra of, though, she knew they still had made her a strong person and brought her relative success and financial security.

One of the central keys to understanding Corra’s social identity lies in an analysis of her own gender identification, and an analysis of personally developed character traits she valued compared with those she disparaged. Corra’s private self is much less gender identified than her public persona. In private correspondence with family, she refers to herself in more gender-neutral terms, and at times, even in masculine terms.⁴ In most of her private correspondence Corra revealed herself as strong, motivated, ambitious, self-directed, self-sufficient, and self-confident. Most often these positive references are to herself as a person, not as a woman, though there were times she used the description of

²*Ibid.*, p 252-53.

³Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 270.

⁴That she had an appreciation for things masculine is found in plenty of her written works, but also illustrated in the brass knucks she used as a favorite paper weight on her daily calendar. Photographed in Wyllie Folk St. John, “Now Hollywood Has to find A Circuit Rider’s Wife,” *The Atlanta Journal Magazine*, April 27, 1947.

herself as a “strong woman.” In many of her published works, and in personal correspondence with certain of her editors, she assumes a feminine identity when referring to herself or writing about herself. In published autobiographical works especially she described herself in more self-effacing, apologetic, defensive, and significantly, feminine terms. Her gender became something of an apology and an excuse, the cloak behind which she hid her inadequacies, her insecurities, her limitations, her weaknesses, and all about herself that she believed did not measure up. But it was not merely an excuse. It is also evidence of how gender identity informed and relates to her values and beliefs. What follows below is an examination of the way Corra sees and presents herself, of the traits she admires and attempts to emulate, and of those she criticizes and attempts to avoid and of the gendered thinking that surrounds each.

Corra identified herself in a number of ways in her private correspondence; the most persistent image of herself is that of a survivor, a strong woman with both physical and emotional resolve. She could sometimes be “a fierce person to deal with,” especially when it involved what she believed were her “rights,” which she fought for and most often “got them.”⁵ Corra claimed with pride that she was never “neuresthentic [sic]” nor “given to complaining.”⁶ She hoped no one ever thought of her as “a mean, niggardly person.” She knew that when she was not around her servants accused her of it often, but

⁵Corra Harris to Bessie Rains, 11 July 1925.

⁶Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 8 Oct. 1916. Corra had no patience with “neuresthentic” people. Nor in her mind was the condition limited to women. She was convinced that Faith’s husband, Harry, labored “beneath a pathological condition known as neuresthenia, [a condition with] motives that are hereditary, practiced by his father upon his mother, and as strong as instincts.” Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, Feb. 1917; Box 7:13.

she knew in her heart she was not.⁷ Corra believed herself to be a strong woman with a “mule like endurance,”⁸ but her strength had not come naturally; it had taken a lot of work on her part. “I am a wonderfully strong woman, and I have needed strength.” she wrote Faith encouraging her to take heart, that she might expect someday to outdo her own frail health.⁹ “Sometimes I think it is a thing one achieves, physical strength and endurance, and that it can be done in spite of ill health.” She believed she was a self-made person. “The forces that create us,” she writes, “pass away, whether they are parents, teachers, or books, and we are left at last to re-create ourselves in the image of our own minds.”¹⁰ Corra “re-created” herself according to a very specific image.

The “image” Corra had in her own mind, was one of a person governed by an unshakeable resolve to be free, to be self-reliant and independent in every sense, but certainly financially and emotionally. After her husband’s death she began to realize that she could not have emotional without financial independence and vice-versa. If she was going to be free, it was going to take a lot of hard work and an inordinate amount of self-discipline, both of which she mastered. The emotional stamina and resolve Corra gained from many sources: from suffering financial hardship throughout her marriage, from

⁷Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, June 9, 1916.

⁸Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, Aug. 27, 1918.

⁹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 1918, Box 11:9. The theme of herself as a “wonderfully strong woman” appears over and over in letters to Faith, both to model the trait to her, but also to reassure Faith so she would not worry about her mother. Faith worried about everything, but nothing more than her mother’s health and safety. Corra reflected more than once after Faith’s death that as unbearable as was the loss of her daughter, it was a merciful act of God that she did not die first.

¹⁰Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p.156.

coping with her husband's depression and volatile temperament, and finally from dealing with his death through suicide. By the time of Faith's untimely death ten years after Lundy's, Corra had gained a well-deserved reputation in her family for being the veritable Rock of Gibraltar. She described herself as "triumphant." "I shall go to my grave ascendant, not vanquished, nor beaten," she wrote Faith in one of her many efforts to "empart" to her daughter similar confidence and courage through a difficult situation.¹¹ Corra was known by her family for that kind of resolve, and they were as convinced as she of her inner strength. Her father was especially proud of the way she endured the grief of her daughter's death. Faith had been Corra's one true friend, her closest confidante, the only intimate human relationship she had known since her husband's death. The loss might have devastated his daughter, Tinsley Rucker White, reflected, but it did not. "I could not see hardly how Corrie could stand her affliction," he wrote his other daughter, Hope. Fortunately for them all, Corra met her deepest sorrow with her greatest resolve. Tinsley was "so happy to hear she has brought to it her full will power."¹² The strength of her "will power" was Corra's most valued personal trait, and the chief source of confidence in her private life.

The stoic resolve Corra managed at Faith's death was attributable in no small way to Faith's husband. Nothing could have tried Corra more for the ultimate tragedy of her life, or proved her a better person than dealing with her son-in-law, Harry Leech. Corra

¹¹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 24 July 1917. On this occasion Faith was worried about whether she or her husband could survive if he were drafted for the war as it looked like he would be, though he managed in the end to dodge it.

¹²Tinsley Rucker White to Hope White Harris, 9 May 1919.

and Harry simply brought out the worst in each other. The enmity between them began early in their relationship and lasted practically throughout the decade of Harry and Faith's marriage, ending just before Faith's death in 1919. Corra had not wanted Faith to marry in the first place, but her choice of Harry Leech was especially disappointing. That in short time Harry confirmed every fear Corra had about him--that he was temperamentally unsuited for Faith, that he was emotionally unbalanced and would become abusive, that he would never be able to make a respectable living, and that he deeply despised and resented Corra because of her success--that all this came true only made matters worse.

Publicly Corra promoted marriage as the normal state for women. In her private life, however, she counseled her daughter, and later her adopted daughters not to marry, and she herself remained a widow from the age of forty-three until her death at the age of sixty-eight. Corra abhorred the thought of Faith sacrificing herself in marriage, and implored her never to do so.

Corra never hid her personal feelings about the subject of Faith's marriage from Faith.¹³ She knew from Faith's early days in college when she edited the school paper and began publishing for George Lorimer that she had the potential to write and to become a successful author on her own, but only if she remained single. "I know that you do not want me to marry," Faith wrote her mother two months before her wedding. "I

¹³Though she might not have been as blunt as she was on the same subject in a letter to Paul More. Corra knew what marriage and inevitable motherhood would do to Faith. Those same grand children that Corra imagined "wearying" her to death, seemed "to stand and threaten Faith, little fiends and bloodsuckers that shall destroy her before my very eyes!" Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, Oct. 14, 1907.

know you think that after I am married I will lose my mind and my ambition.” Faith really did not believe she was destined to such a fate, and she tried to assure her mother as much. “I am not so foolish as to look forward to life as being anything easy but I am going to try very hard to make a success of my share of it. . . . I shall not believe I am incapable of holding myself together mentally till I have proven it literally.” Nothing Corra could say privately could dissuade her daughter. Faith had rather been persuaded by the notion that normal women marry. Of all the lessons she might have learned about the hardships of marriage from her mother’s recently published and nationally acclaimed first novel, *A Circuit Rider’s Wife*, the one about the virtue and credibility of the long-suffering, sacrificial wife--the image that made her mother famous--is the one she chose for a model. Furthermore, she simply would not hear her mother’s written and verbal warnings that she would regret following her heart. “You can’t make me believe that I am going to lose out. I *won’t*.”¹⁴

The decision to marry had not been an easy one for Faith, especially knowing how Corra felt. Faith knew her mother had sacrificed as much for her as for her father. She tried to explain the dilemma she faced in having to decide between what she wanted and what her mother wanted for her. She wrote that she feared her decision to marry implied that she was “sacrificing you to my own selfishness and it has nearly run me to distracted [sic].” Knowing that her mother “had given and given and given” to her all her life, she censured herself for what seemed a lack of gratitude.

I feel that I should have given up my marriage or postponed it indefinitely, but Mither [a pet derivative of Mother], I am ashamed to say it but somehow I

¹⁴Faith Harris to Corra Harris, 17 Oct. 1910.

couldn't face the strain of years of waiting or of not marrying at all. . . . If I had waited two or three more years or even one the whole romance of everything would have worn off and I would either have entered marriage prosaically but very probably not at all.

Faith was not only going to marry, but do so when she wanted to because timing was everything--because romance was everything. Seizing the romance of the moment was essential. It might, in fact, be all the romance there was to it, but Faith was not going to miss the chance at least to begin her marriage on the right foot. To wait until the romance had fizzled and enter marriage "prosaically" would rob the couple even of the honeymoon, not to mention facilitate the stress of quotidian routine. Whether or not to marry was a moot issue for her by the time of this letter anyway. Faith had already made up her mind. She would not "give up Harry." She loved him and it was "too late to try to stop even if I were inclined to try. I couldn't stop."¹⁵ In a culture where romance was everything and marriage the only legitimate avenue to romance, most women were willing to take their chances.

Harry's failure ever to gain financial security strained relations on all sides. It was most directly the source of his disdain for Corra. It was finally the cause of the irretrievable break between himself and his mother-in-law. The breach between the two strained relations between Faith and her mother and alienated them, but only for a short time. Within weeks of Faith and Harry's move from the Valley, Faith and Corra had reconciled their differences. Corra grieved for months over the situation, though--first the alienation of her daughter's affection, then the fear that Faith would live her life in the

¹⁵Faith Harris to Corra Harris, 17 Oct. 1910.

same desperate financial straits that Corra had in her married life, and consequently would never be allowed to realize her potential as a writer--and the heartache took a toll.

The heartache also strengthened her resolve, though, in ways that perhaps nothing else could have. At the height of the personal conflict, Corra wrote Faith that the tensions had not worn her down, but had actually made her stronger. Because of them she had become “a stern woman resolved that no man shall make me suffer.”¹⁶ In another letter she revealed that the humiliation and personal insults had merely made her “resolved henceforth to endure nothing which takes from my liberty or taxes my self respect.”¹⁷ Corra learned from the conflict that self-respect was essential to personal liberty. She had suffered enough in her life that it would take more than the grasping vengefulness of an upstart with half her sense to more than temporarily shake her self-confidence. She wrote Faith, who was worried about her mother and the effect of the breach on her, “I have lost too much in my life not to know by this time how to do without what I should be glad to have, [Faith’s company] with decent grace.”¹⁸ Thankfully Corra and Faith worked out arrangements so that they did not have to “do without” each other for long and managed at least monthly visits.¹⁹

Conflict with her son-in-law and other personal trials brought Corra the emotional

¹⁶Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, Feb. 1917; and 1916; Box 7:9.

¹⁷Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, Feb. 1917; Box 7:13.

¹⁸Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, Feb. 1917; Box 7:13.

¹⁹After their breach Harry refused to allow Faith to take any monetary support from her mother and at first tried to pressure her not even to visit Corra. That didn’t last long, though, and once it became obvious that Faith was going to visit her mother, he had to agree at least to allow Corra to fund the cost of her trips to the Valley.

stamina and self-control she needed to feel free, while hard and steady work gave her the financial independence necessary for personal liberty. Hard work, in fact, characterized Corra's life. When people commented on her productivity, Corra would explain that her "mule like endurance" came from laboring most of her life "under hard work sentences."²⁰ She was up no later than 5:00 every morning, and worked most days "from morning until night."²¹ In addition to the physical work it took to run the Valley farm, many times Corra wrote 4,000 to 7,000 words a day on any given assignment.²² "In addition to signed articles, and a few short stories, I read and reviewed twelve hundred books, mostly novels," between 1900 and 1904.²³ Corra worked hard as wife, mother and writer in the days when she first started writing professionally, and her role as wife could be particularly difficult when Lundy was suffering with one of his depressive episodes as he did with intermittent frequency the last ten years of his life, which were essentially the first ten years of her professional life. "I was his nurse every day during [one] long illness, from seven in the morning until twelve at night. Between midnight and daybreak I rested. From five in the morning until seven I worked at my desk, turning out articles and two or three short stories, enough to make our financial ends meet."²⁴ After Lundy's

²⁰Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 27 Aug. 1918.

²¹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 1916; Box 7:9.

²²Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 11 Oct. 1916; 7 Nov. 1916; letter dated 1916, Box 7:9.

²³Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 187.

²⁴Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 253. The particular depressive episode happened after Lundy sided with the trustees at Vanderbilt University and they lost to the Methodist Church in their bid to control the university.

death the work-load was hardly less, rather it was pressure of a different kind. She had become her sole means of support, and for all practical purposes, even though Faith married within four months of her father's death, her daughter's as well.

When she was especially pushed with deadlines, she would recall her mother's philosophy on work. Mary White believed that work itself was to be enjoyed, that to work to get through with work was a sign of indolence. Corra wrote Faith about her mother's work creed at the end of one day that had been particularly tiring when she had written over 7,000 words on a serial. "If I give it up," Corra wrote referring to the delusion that the fun in work is when it's over,

[I know] I should find peace in just *doing*. I remember my mother used to throw up to me that the laziest woman she ever knew was one who worked herself to death in order to sit down and do nothing. I used to do that way everytime she made me work. I *hated* work so that I worked hard so as to finish it. Well, work cannot be finished, I know now, until you cannot work any more. Some day when I can't, I think I shall begin to enjoy life exceedingly.²⁵

As long as she could work, however, work she would. And even when she complained that she had too much to do, a part of her knew that she "had not been working too hard, because nobody can. You are supposed to work up to your limit like every other living thing in Nature, thus meeting death on good terms according to your season."²⁶ If this-- "working up to your limit"--were the only criteria by which Corra judged herself, she no doubt met her death on "good terms."

Corra knew that no woman, no matter how strong or how smart, however, could

²⁵Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 1916, Box 7:9.

²⁶Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 274.

be a successful writer and at the same time do her own house work, so once she could afford to, she hired domestic help. She had actually managed at one point in her life to write and clean at the same time, but at no point did she pride herself on being “an exquisitely neat housekeeper.”²⁷ What a waste of energy. “I would rather have my reputation as a domestic animal riddled than to have my dearer faculties destroyed by a flatiron or dishwater,” she wrote.²⁸ Especially annoying to Corra were those women who bragged that they did all their own housework. She had no doubt that such women, if they actually did what they claimed, had lost their personableness, charm, and the “graceful elasticity of the spirit.” “Some instinct for liberty warned me from the beginning,” she wrote, “to avoid the fate of these unfortunate best-of-all women.” “Liberty” and “domestic drudgery” could not coexist.²⁹ Yet this mythical woman still made Corra feel guilty. “I am of the earth earthy, due entirely, I suppose, to the effect her obvious worth has upon my stricken conscience.”³⁰ Guilty conscience or not, however, Corra would not be forced to leave her desk for the broom, the sink, or the stove. “Dishes and laundry are not mentioned in the Scriptures, therefore they are not obligatory. I will let my faith praise me rather than my doughnuts.”³¹

But housekeeping was a huge chore whether or not one was a model housekeeper, and Corra knew what it had cost her in health when she had no domestic help. She was

²⁷Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 119, 151.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 154.

²⁹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 1916; Box 7:9.

³⁰Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 152-53.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 154.

determined her daughter was not going to suffer the same, not while she had more than adequate means to provide otherwise. Making that provision, though, was never easy and required of Corra clever games of family diplomacy since Harry refused to let Faith take any monetary support from her mother. Corra used several tactics to persuade Faith. One was to argue that writers were a special breed and required special provisions. “We who do this kind of work,” Corra wrote Faith when Faith’s career was getting under way, “require a personal caretaker to make things easy for us as a man needs the same thing.” Writing was special as the business of man was special. Those who wrote deserved a “caretaker” as men had always had in wives. “I think more and more this is the reason why men are so helpless. Their minds are absorbed in business or in the life which men have made [sic] a business life removed from the small cares necessary for their comfort. This is what Addie [Faith’s housekeeper funded by Corra] is doing for you.”³² Thanks to Addie, Faith could be as helpless as any man, and thanks to Corra she could be as free from guilt over her domestic helplessness as was possible depending upon which of her mother’s philosophies she chose to believe.

Corra finally was able to persuade Faith to agree to let her send Addie, one of her former housekeepers, to Atlanta to live near Faith to help with the domestic chores, but it had taken years of reasoning with her daughter. Although Corra knew the reason was always Harry, to avoid that as an issue when Corra broached the subject, Faith would try to argue that if Corra had had to do her own household chores and write at one point in her past, that Faith could do the same. Corra had to explain that Faith simply did not

³²Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 20 March 1919.

have the physical or psychological constitution to “do domestic drudgery” while trying to write. “I am made of fairly durable stuff,” Corra wrote Faith, “but I do not come from a line of people who can work that way. And so you can’t do it. . . . [I]n the end you’d collapse if you tried to do your own [house]work. You are not made that way. And you may as well make up your mind to yield the point.”³³ Corra rarely imposed anything on Faith against Faith’s judgment, especially when money was concerned and she knew how Harry felt about any support from her, but on this issue she was able to stand firm. “I will see you soon and we will talk over what can be done for your peace and comfort. I strongly advise you not to consider light ‘housekeeping.’ It means an exhausting labor for you which will give you no time nor strength for the work you are really fitted to do.”³⁴ After two years of reasoning, plotting, scheming, cajoling--and not least of all, the personal experience of success of her own--Faith finally put her foot down to Harry, accepted her mother’s offer. Shortly after, Addie moved to Atlanta just across the tracks from the Leeches.³⁵

³³Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 1916; Box 7:9. Faith and Harry at the time of this exchange were boarding in someone’s home in Atlanta, but they were both unhappy with the arrangements and wanted to move into their own home. However, Corra knew what would happen if Faith took on even “light-housekeeping.” Since she knew Harry would not agree to let her fund domestic help, she advised Faith strongly against moving where would have to do her own.

³⁴Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 19 Mar. 1917.

³⁵In the interim, until they managed to get Addie to Atlanta, Corra talked Faith into letting her set up a bank account for her in case of emergencies. She knew from her own past what it meant to have to write under pressure, and she knew what similar pressures Faith was under from her living arrangements in the boarding house, and trying to meet deadlines for editors when under that kind of pressure. “I cannot do [the necessary] work,” Faith had written, “unless I have quiet and I cannot get it here. . . . I cannot assemble ideas with so much to disturb me. I shall either have to go to the state library to work or we shall have to take rooms somewhere and do ‘light-housekeeping.’” Corra could not allow either. They both finally

Domestic work was one thing, if mostly a nuisance when it did not consume a person; the real work for Corra was writing. In one of her many efforts to convince her daughter not to worry about her, Corra wrote, "My work is just hard work to me, not much affected by temperament."³⁶ Corra would tell Faith just about anything, though, to keep her from fretting. The truth was, Corra's work was everything to her, from the time she started writing and then throughout her life. In the early days she worried mostly over her lack of training and education. Shortly after she began publishing reviews in *The Independent*, she came face to face with the stark realization that she was in no way prepared for a career in writing at that level, and realized all the implications of not having the "scholarly background" needed by a reviewer for *The Independent*. She did not know enough even to have a "sense of [her] own" about her writing. She depended on More's "opinion alone [to] steady" her and show her "for certain whether [she was] going right or wrong."³⁷ "For myself," she wrote More, "I have never written anything over a three inch review of a novel that I did not actually suffer over the uncertainty of its

agreed that Harry was being too unrealistic, and that Faith's peace of mind was more important than her devotion to a husband's irrational demands. Corra must have sighed long and slept better after reading, "I can't tell you what the bank account gives me in peace. I wake in the morning with a start and a strain and then I remember all at once that I don't have to write, that you have given me rest, and--well--you can't know how grateful I am. I feel easy all over." Then, "There isn't a day that passes that the money you have let me have doesn't smoothe the way." Faith Harris Leech, to Corra Harris March 15, 1917; June 11, 1917; June 22, 1917.

³⁶Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 30 Nov. 1916. They were working together on the book they co-authored *From Sun-up to Sun-down* and were critiquing each other's work. Faith had criticized something in a passage of her mother's and was concerned that it might have offended her. Corra was trying to assure her that it had not, but that she understood why she might have wondered about it. "I suppose it is natural that you should interpret me through your own more poignant sensibilities," Corra reasoned, "but it is a mistake." "For example, I was not discouraged. I did not brood over the criticism as you imagine."

³⁷Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 25 July 1901.

merits. And *anybody* can convince me that what I have written is a poor thing.”³⁸

Thinking about it all could make her physically ill. She wrote More about being stricken with a fever and being put to bed by friends one day when she grew ill over realizing what a “fool” she had been for publishing book reviews and pretending to know what she was doing:

The day before I had spent reading over all my reviews of the past year in the *Independent*. There was not an intimation in a single one of them that the critic had ever read what the masters say of the *art* of criticism. All of them were idiotically original, impudently so, truthful, I *will* say that for them, but there was no foundation of information back of them. How could there be? I don’t know anything! . . . “I have just discovered that I am a *fool*,” I explained, between chattering teeth [to “every woman in the house”]. “I have no sense at all for the sort of work I have been doing!” Enough to give anybody a chill, wasn’t it?³⁹

If Corra felt an inferiority at times because of the lack of a classical education, she was consoled at other times that ignorance could be, and in her case was, an asset-- ignorance was the innocence that made Corra’s “discoveries” “natural” and “inspired” if not necessarily “right.” “My phenominal [sic] ignorance,” she wrote More, “makes originality my only escape.”⁴⁰ Her “originality” was evidence to her of inspiration, and she would rather be inspired than right or “righteous” anyday. “Now I look for inspiration, more than I do righteousness,” she wrote More. She wanted to remind him, just in case he had forgotten, of the greater value of work that was inspired as opposed to

³⁸Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 14 Feb. 1902.

³⁹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 18 Nov. 1902.

⁴⁰Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, July 1901. The precise date of this letter is difficult to determine, but it clearly was written some time between the 1st and the 12th of July, 1901.

work that was merely knowledgeable or well-informed. "When my heart tips over like a cup of red wine in me and I feel the beads of my spirit rise up in it, I write with as much assurance as if I were a belle-angel, and never give a qualm as to whether what I say is right or just inspired." Obviously this had to mean something. "[M]y stuff continues to go--its because anybody can be right who tries, but not many have the time or disposition to let go and be inspired!"⁴¹ Reflecting a few years before her death on the source of her inspiration, she wrote, "Some spire of me far above mind caught and held the light. I had a curious confidence not justified by facts. I was a furious worker at such times, supported by this idea of being backed by the Almighty. If it was foolish, what I want to know is why did it work?"⁴² As long as More believed, so would she, in the "arch wisdom of [her] ignorance."⁴³

Like most writers, Corra was her harshest critic. Even after she was well established in the popular press, she still doubted her merit and reflected how her alter ego never would let her rest. "The smart old bareheaded woman of me who always sits in the back door of my mind . . . never has had any confidence in me as an author. She suspects it is a trick I turn. For years her secret criticisms have embarrassed and hindered me in my work like the snicker of an unfriendly audience sitting off somewhere in the dark."⁴⁴

But self-criticism aside, writing served many ends for Corra. Most immediately it

⁴¹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 1 July 1906.

⁴²Corra Harris, "The Pharisee's Lament," *SEP*, 19 Dec. 1931, p. 32.

⁴³Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 14 October 1907.

⁴⁴Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 180.

provided financial relief, kept her family fed and housed and kept Faith in college. But it was an escape as well. Corra lost herself in her work as often as she could. “Nothing in all my life has ever afforded me half the pleasure as does this work,” she wrote Paul More when her career as a reviewer was just beginning.⁴⁵ It became such a source of “pleasure,” that she was not above writing repeatedly to ask for more books. “Do not mind when I write to you for books. I know exactly how you are situated, but if I want a thing, I want it so I am sure to commit the indignity of asking for it,” which she did many times as often as “the spirit move[d]” her.⁴⁶ Writing brought her closer than anything else had to that elusive happiness she always sought. It was work, but it was a different kind of work from what she had been used to, work that was both drudgery and bore. “I came nearer to what happiness must be,” she wrote, “a sort of deliverance from the things that are, after I began to do creative work. Once I had a pen in my hand and the use of my faculties, the casements of all my darkness were flung wide and I escaped into a very bright, quiet, good world of thoughts.”⁴⁷ With time, though, the responsibility of being a writer could make her feel more trapped than anything else. It made her wish sometimes that she could just live the “good little life, with no publicity screen in the background, with less confusion and certainly less embarrassment to peace and happiness.”⁴⁸ But like all writers who were “slaves” to their “thoughts that must be written before they fade into

⁴⁵Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 25 July 1901.

⁴⁶Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, date of letter unclear, but it follows an envelope dated 11 Jan. 1904.

⁴⁷Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 183.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 141.

forgetfulness,” she would write as long as she could think.⁴⁹ “Because thoughts ‘are like children born to us.’ They must be developed, and shaped up into words so that the reader may enjoy them without thinking.”⁵⁰ “I would give much to cast my pen far from me and follow it out and away,” she wrote. “But I cannot take the day off. I must stay here and write down the things my mind makes believe.”⁵¹

Writing was a means of psychological survival for Corra. “I should have been dead years ago,” she wrote Faith, “slain by the griefs and terrors of life if I had not escaped into self-expression, congenial work.” She advised Faith to do the same. “The way is open to you. Don’t be afraid!”⁵² “[D]o not bear your burdens,” she wrote. “Escape in your work.”⁵³ Corra bore her own burdens through work. “The only way I could save myself,” she wrote Faith shortly after the breach between herself and Harry, was “*not* to think, but just to *work* from morning until night. I have done that as much for you as for myself, that I might not lose my spirit, nor my interest in life. . . . I have not and I will not allow myself to suffer.”⁵⁴ Work was a shield for Corra, a hiding place and a remedy for pain. It kept her sane and balanced during the most trying times. It even sustained her through the shock and grief of her daughter’s death. What work meant to Corra is nowhere more poignantly captured than in a passage written about that

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁵⁰Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 274.

⁵¹Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p.144.

⁵²Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 13 Oct. 1917.

⁵³Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 19 March 1917.

⁵⁴Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 1916, Box 7:9.

experience: “The night after her death I slept soundly for the first time in thirty years. I seemed to have passed, too, into a sort of quietness. I had a terrible peace. I could not think, but I rested. What I kept saying to myself was that I would get up presently and go back to work.”⁵⁵ Work was the intimate companion that alone could console, or perhaps numb, her through a grief for which there would have been no other relief.

The financial self-sufficiency she gained from her work gave Corra the self-confidence she reveals in her private correspondence. She was never more self-assured than when attempting to relieve Faith of worry over financial insecurity. This was especially an issue in the months surrounding the United States’ entry into the first world war when Faith was worried both about their financial well-being as well as Harry’s being drafted (which he managed to avoid). “You are provided for,” she promised her daughter confidently. “You are not in desperate straits. You need have no fear of the future. You will not be broken upon the wheel of adversity like so many young people. . . . What you fear is a phantom. It never can happen. You will never be brought to want, nor to grief.” As long as Corra was well, there would be no need to worry, and Corra was determined she would not only stay well, but predicted with uncanny foresight that she would even outlive Faith.⁵⁶ “[T]hink of your Mother! She is well, and doing well. You do not have her on your heart for a burden in this trying time, but you have her behind you before you, beneath your feet and like a wing over your head, cheerfully, gladly

⁵⁵Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 302.

⁵⁶Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 12 July 1917.

prosperous for your sake.”⁵⁷ Then she assured her just how “prosperous” she was. “Now I ask you to verify my confidence and pride in you. . . . gird up the loins of your spirit, and fear *not!*” There was nothing to fear because Corra was sure the war would not last long, and she had enough to keep them secure for its duration. “I shall keep money enough to face emergencies for you and me and yours. . . . There has never been a time since 1914 that I could not have laid my hands at once on enough money to take care of us for two years.”⁵⁸ Even though she was not always able to be openly generous with Faith because of the rift between Harry and herself, she believed clearly it was one of her “inalienable rights as a Mother” to see that Faith was secure.⁵⁹

Corra was perpetually torn between two fundamental beliefs that, in her case, were at odds. She firmly believed it was her “inalienable right” to share her prosperity with her daughter, but at the same time, she also believed and taught Faith that she had to “keep faith with her husband.” This was especially difficult when Corra would remind herself that Faith and Faith’s security had been, in fact, one of the primary motives behind her own ambition. She often sent Faith money or offered her money that she knew she

⁵⁷Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, no date; Box 14B:1

⁵⁸Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 7 Feb. 1917.

⁵⁹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 16 Mar. 1917. Of course this “right” was forever being challenged and undermined. Somehow, it seemed, Harry was always finding out about the monetary contributions Corra tried to make to his household, and when he did there was inevitably domestic turmoil between the Leeches. Corra tried to help settle the two in the Majestic, a respectable hotel in Atlanta so that Faith could be spared the chore of housework. She did so by guaranteeing to the proprietor that she would be responsible for the bills. The effort failed however. “We should have gone to the Majestic in the first place,” Faith wrote, “but Mr. Barnes the manager was so impudent as to give Harry to understand that you garaunteed [sic] the payment of our hotel bills. That ended it all there.” Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 15 Mar. 1917.

might not be able to accept. "But when I look back upon the years of indefatigable labor I have lived through in order that you might not suffer the terrors and anxieties which have ruined and darkened more than half of my life, I know you will understand and pardon me for offering you this small sum even if you cannot keep it and keep faith with your husband."⁶⁰ To take care of her, she wrote Faith, "is now the only real interest I have in life which is my own and dear to me. I still have a few duties to perform. But within a few months, I shall refuse to bear a single responsibility except those incident to my own life, and the comfort of yours."⁶¹

If not always, at least sometimes Corra's assurances worked at bringing about the result she wanted, namely Faith's peace of mind. Faith wrote her, "Your love and the knowledge that you have a home and an income that makes you secure from the world are my great comforts. I revel in them and hold them close to me in my times of trouble."⁶² Ultimately, Corra's security was Faith's and instinctively she knew it, and was assured by it even though "keeping faith with her husband" kept her from actually realizing it. Faith knew that she would have to try to emulate her mother, not just professionally as a writer, but as a person who had weathered certain personal storms and survived. Faith's domestic trials proved she would also have to develop her mother's same emotional fortitude, which, considering that she inherited her father's temperament, would be no

⁶⁰Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 13 Jan. 1917.

⁶¹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 4 May 1917. Among the "few duties" Corra had left to attend, most important were caring for her father in the Confederate Soldier's Home in Atlanta, and aiding her sister who was plagued in her mid years with ill health.

⁶²Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 15 March 1917.

small accomplishment. She fully believed she and her husband would financially “always have to be struggling.”⁶³ Their economic future seemed so bleak at one point, she feared if Harry had to face reality, at least as she saw it, “the horror of it would kill him.”⁶⁴ Though neither one of them could “face uncertainty with proper stolidity,” of the two of them, she was stronger, and if they had any chance of moving away from the edge financially, she knew she was the ticket.⁶⁵ “Our great chance I know lies with me,” she wrote Corra.⁶⁶

Once Faith started making money with her stories and articles, she became a different person. Confidence instead of fear defined her attitude and the tone of her letters to her mother. Gaining economic independence gave her an uncharacteristic optimism and self-confidence. “Mitherkin, don’t worry about me. The clouds have really lifted considerably and whichever way the cat jumps now I think we shall land on our feet.”⁶⁷ She no longer felt obliged always to “keep faith with her husband” or to acquiesce in his unreasonable demands governing their domestic situation, or her relationship with her mother. She, not he, would decide how and with whom she would spend her time, what she would do with her money, which would include relief from

⁶³Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 3 Aug. 1918.

⁶⁴Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 15 March 1917. Shortly after this forlorn letter from her daughter, Corra managed to get Faith to agree to allow her to set up an account for her in case of emergencies.

⁶⁵Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 3 Aug. 1918.

⁶⁶Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 15 March 1917; 11 June 1917; 22 June 1917.

⁶⁷Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 19 Aug. 1917. “Mitherkin” was one of Faith’s pet names for her mother.

domestic chores, and where she would spend Christmas. "Hereafter the 23rd and 24th of December are going to be spent with you," she wrote her mother. "I shall tell Harry that those days hereafter are yours. I have done my best these past two years. I think now I deserve a little lee way. At any rate I shall take it."⁶⁸ This was a phenomenal change of attitude coming from a young woman who had been taught to be "absolutely faithful" to her husband "even when [he is] entirely wrong." Corra continued to tell her daughter, even after Corra and Harry parted on such bitter terms, that a woman's faithfulness to her husband "is the only proper attitude for a wife."⁶⁹ Faith's life was torn for years by the dilemma between being the strong, confident, successful writer her mother encouraged her to be (and modeled for her), and the unflinchingly devoted wife to a husband who very often, where she was concerned, was "entirely wrong."

Nothing fed Faith's confidence more than making her own money and being able to pay her own way. She wrote her mother:

Its [sic] one pleasure that has come to me with this work--the ability to be financially dependent upon myself. You know from your own experience what freedom of spirit that gives one. That seems a little mean in me to say when I know how willingly and generously you have always given and I have taken it knowing that but still there is nothing that has given me so much peace of mind as to know that I may be able perhaps all of my life to make enough money to smooth off sharp edges of life myself. You have done it for me hitherto.⁷⁰

It was time, Faith knew, to began to pay her mother back and return the favors she had

⁶⁸Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 19 Dec. 1917.

⁶⁹Corra Harris to Harry Leech, 31 March 1916.

⁷⁰Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 30 Aug. 1918.

received. "I forgot to say," she wrote Corra almost as if in passing, "that I can readily let you have the money I owe you." In addition she was willing to go in with her mother on a loan that could become an investment. "I will gladly let you have \$500 of my own money and the stamps if you want to make that loan. That will leave me still a secure nest egg."⁷¹ Having a "secure nest egg" gave Faith the confidence she needed to begin to make potential plans for the future. She thought about the possibilities once she started making real money. If Harry could not "do his man's part," perhaps she could.⁷² "I tell you--if I can make the money I am going to get a farm and remove Harry from all this."⁷³ Corra was gratified by Faith's new-found confidence and for what looked like the prospects of a "brilliant career,"⁷⁴ and she believed that her daughter would far surpass her in both personal achievements and literary success. The gratification for Corra was shortlived, of course, since Faith died just a few months after telling her mother how great it felt finally to be financially independent.

Of all that Corra gained from her work, the Valley farm was to her the most tangible evidence that her life was a success. The Valley was proof that the sacrifices of a writing career were worth it. "[I]f I had not won to a great extent," she wrote Faith, "you would not crave as you do to come to the Valley."⁷⁵ The Valley, Corra believed, had

⁷¹Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 15 Aug. 1918.

⁷²Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 15 March 1917.

⁷³Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, 3 Aug. 1918. Corra was delighted by Faith's new-found independence but counseled her strongly against going back into farming.

⁷⁴Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, 24 July 1917.

⁷⁵Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, Mar. 6, 1918.

always had her name on it. In *My Book and Heart* she explained, "You do see things sometimes which belong to other people but are by nature your own." The Valley was that for Corra. Her "real reason" for moving there "was to escape the mind and will of the world, to practice my own will and mind in living and so find happiness."⁷⁶ That Faith loved the Valley and considered it her one escape accounted certainly for some of Corra's pride in the place. "You can't know how I enjoy those golden days with you in the Valley," she wrote her mother after one visit. "Your real gift to me is the trips to the Valley," she wrote asking her mother not to spend so much on them for Christmas. "No money could give me the lasting joy they do."⁷⁷ "I wish there were nice newsy things to write you but I feel as you did in New York," Faith wrote once. "The most interesting things happen in the Valley!"⁷⁸ "I do wish I could impart [sic] to you some of the peace . . . of my dear Valley," Corra wrote Faith once when she knew she was distraught. "When you are tired and worried, just please think of you sitting by your Mother for a quiet hour in the swing on the porch in the dark, not saying anything, just feeling safe from the terrible world and the still more terrible war."⁷⁹ Besides one of those problems was Harry's depression, and indirectly, he too was helped by Faith's trips to her mother's. "It is those trips that keep me up. It makes me feel selfish when I look at Harry and see how he needs diversion now and then and never gets any. The only comfort I have is the way he keeps up when I keep up and cheerful so that in an indirect way he really gets the

⁷⁶Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 245.

⁷⁷Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, Oct. 19, 1916.

⁷⁸Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, Aug. 18, 1916.

⁷⁹Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, June 4, 1918.

benefit one way or another.”⁸⁰ After Faith's death The Valley became Corra's nearly exclusive *raison d'être*. “The only ambition I have now,” she wrote Arthur T. Vance of the *Pictorial Review* the year after Faith died, “is a passionate devotion to this little square of earth.”⁸¹

Corra's greatest pride in the Valley, however, came from ownership. Her attitude toward ownership of the Valley reflects part of the same value system informing her personal and political identity. Corra lived in a time and place where land was security in a way no other means or investment could be. That she understood its value in real and relative terms is obvious. “I walked up and down the rainbow path,” she wrote Faith. “It was mine, this green earth. I had conceived that rainbow path and made it. The Wall was mine, paid for. The Valley was mine and all the green things in it. I had a good conscience and a clean heart. I was satisfied with it.”⁸² The Valley was not just a place to live, it was “*Land*,” which to Corra was “*everything!*” “When you think about it that is the one verity which nothing changes,” she wrote editor George Horace Lorimer, proposing it as the subject of a new novel. It was the one thing that “outlasts civilizations and consumes us at last,” she wrote, apparently totally unaware of the incongruity of that observation with her pride in ownership of such a huge piece of “verity.”⁸³ The Valley itself, the “rainbow path,” the “green earth,” and “all the green things in it,” were not in and of themselves satisfying. It was satisfying because, “It was mine.” Because she

⁸⁰Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, , Mar. 15, 1917.

⁸¹Corra Harris to Arthur T. Vance, Oct. 20, 1920.

⁸²Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, July 8, 1917.

⁸³Corra Harris to George Horace Lorimar, Oct. 21, 1920.

“own[ed] it to the center of the earth and beyond the last star that shines above it.”⁸⁴

Owning the Valley gave Corra a sense of victory in life and a hold on the treasured personal liberty she craved. But the prerequisite to gaining the Valley and the freedom ownership represented was losing her husband. Corra’s public and private ideas on widowhood reveal more of the struggle she engaged in with conflicting values. Her thinking about personal liberty and the relationship between personal liberty and happiness explain in part why she chose to remain a widow. If “one must be free to be happy,” as Corra wrote in her first autobiography, one must be a widow, if a woman, to be truly free.⁸⁵ It had been the case legally for her foremothers that “prior to the Civil War, an unmarried woman stood equal to her brother before the bar, but in her husband she found her legal grave, and by his death her resurrection.”⁸⁶ If not legally, at least socially, the same was true, for women of her day, Corra would argue. While she wanted to think that she had been a “free moral agent all [her] life,” she actually knew well that “no woman except a widow ever is . . . a free agent.”⁸⁷ The single woman, Corra explained, “however mature and capable, lacks [the widow’s] subtler knowledge and experience in dealing with men. The wife never can exercise it, because no woman can live in love and charity with her husband and be a free agent.”⁸⁸ This probably accounted

⁸⁴Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 293.

⁸⁵Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 183.

⁸⁶Boatwright, p. 25.

⁸⁷Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, pp. 309-10; “Concerning Widows, Or How to be a Widow,” *Ladies Home Journal*, Sept. 1920, p. 13.

⁸⁸Corra Harris, “Concerning Widows,” p. 13.

for the fact that though most men “resume the rank of husbands” after being widowed, “a woman clings to her widowhood.” Knowing as much about widowhood, Corra determined to be a “permanent” not a “temporary widow,” with plenty of advice to other women who decided the same.

“If your husband dies you lose your identity,” she wrote. But a new one could be tough to find. Widows were identified by their deceased husbands just as wives were by their living ones. The same was not true of widowers, of course. “No one ever heard of a man’s being known as an estimable ‘Christian widower,’” she wrote, “not even in his obituary.” A man was “still a man in life and in death, and is so called even if he has been thrice bereaved of a wife,” she wrote. A woman, once married, even after her husband’s death, was never just a woman. “You become a word of two syllables in black which refers not to you but to the fact that your husband is no longer living.” If a woman was ever to be able to live down--or to rise above--this identity as an appendage, she had a lot to learn.

In the first place, she had to “break the habit of obedience” that she had blindly followed in marriage. Obedience might have been the proper role of the good wife; it was disastrous for the widow. If they had not been cerebral before, women who became widows and wanted to remain widows had to learn to think. Indeed it was true that thinking spoiled the attraction of the single, never married woman, but widowhood changed the rules. The widow was different; she had already paid her debt to society through at least one marriage. “Permanent” widows needed to learn only how to handle men, not how to attract them.

Corra's advice to widows was to gain "judgment [and] experience in financial matters." To remain ignorant of finances was not just foolish, it was "a form of moral laziness." Widows should never "take the advice of excellent business men about the investment of [their husband's] insurance, not even if they were the friends of your dear, dead husband." They should be careful about investing, and be fully informed about the stock market. "Do not be persuaded to buy any kind of stock the majority of which is owned by a great and rich corporation . . . Avoid stock the value of which depends on some kind of public franchise and the now highly sensitized labor temperament." Never listen to "stock-selling agents." Not even if they claim to represent "Reverend So-and-so." Preachers could be and often were the most reckless of investors. They had "formed the habit of thinking, hoping and living by faith. They [had] an immortal instinct for believing in the evidence of things unseen and unknown to them." Widows could not afford to be so naive. Corra told widows to "invest your insurance money in something you can see with the naked eye, put your foot on and feel and know it is yours any time you desire to reassure yourself by going to look at it and seeing if this property is really there and not merely folded paper in your safety box." Widows should "never take a second mortgage on anything." And never "lend money to another woman, because, if she cannot or will not pay, she weeps and fits you out with a reputation for oppressing widows and orphans."

However, all this was advice to the widow left with funds. The unfortunate woman left with nothing to invest had the real burden. By no means, though, should this woman become the biblical "widow indeed," or the "mendicant in the uniform of grief

whose piety and poverty entitle her to charity.” Such a woman had to earn her livelihood whatever the personal cost. Work was not the “curse which labor unions and polite society would have you believe,” Corra cautioned. Whatever work a widow had to take to stay off public relief, she was honor bound to do it. “Even if it brings you down in the mere world, you are more than compensated by being exalted in your own estimation.”⁸⁹

A short story published just a month before the article on widows, reveals a great deal about the tension for Corra over values in conflict.⁹⁰ Corra clearly admired Miriam Ambrose, the forty-five year old widow of a small-town lawyer who left her with a “modest competency.” But she just as clearly admired Millicent, the narrator, who was a thirty-eight year old single, never married woman. Much of Mrs. Ambrose’s life paralleled Corra’s. She cared little for going out in public, but rather “conducted” “her social life . . . in her own house at Sassafras Plantation, where she had the advantage.” Corra and Mrs. Ambrose had many of the same traits, physical and otherwise. They both moved from town to a farm at their husband’s death, and neither of them was typically feminine in dress, speech, or manner. Mrs. Ambrose, in fact, was almost masculine. She was rather “tall” and “portly,” “a fine fighting man of a woman, with a gleam in her eye.”⁹¹

The bane of Mrs. Ambrose’s widowed life, as it had been much of Corra’s, was the hired help on her farm. “She was subject at all times to altercations with her hired

⁸⁹Corra Harris, “Concerning Widows,” p. 64.

⁹⁰Corra Harris, “The Widow Ambrose,” *Ladies Home Journal*, Aug. 1920, pp. 7-9; 151-152.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 7.

men or with her tenant.” Corra’s unforgiving sentiments toward “labor” are reflected in Mrs. Ambrose, who discussed the “question of labor with the wit of one who is eye to eye with a dangerous force.” And, like Corra, Mrs. Ambrose “thought her difficulties came in a great measure from being a woman. The most ignorant man resented taking orders from a woman, she said.” Like Corra, Mrs. Ambrose believed not even suffrage would help. She doubted “if having the ballot would afford me any additional advantage in managing labor on this place.” In fact, having the ballot, Mrs. Ambrose believed would handicap her in her relationship with the hired help. She knew that to manage men--her own personal nature to the contrary notwithstanding--women had to be “feminine, utterly feminine and more so to the last. We must do what we can do as women, employing the usual arts and policies of the strictly feminine in our relations to men.” Mrs. Ambrose knew she had the solution, but since it contradicted her own self-image, it would take some time and thought before she could “find out how to apply [her] theory” to practice. Once time passed, however, and Fortson, her tenant, began “practicing [the] newfangled doctrines” of labor, that “dangerous force” that “had its head in the air,” Mrs. Ambrose swallowed her pride and turned to what she had known all along would work. She--a strong-minded, self-confident, independent woman, who had dressed for comfort in some of the “homeliest and most durable garments” a woman could wear--donned the dress and manner of a delicate, dainty, and somewhat helpless woman, and took on her tenant.⁹²

When asked by Millicent, the narrator of the story, what had brought about the change, Mrs. Ambrose responded that she had finally, after “studying . . . these men who

⁹²*Ibid.*, p. 8.

work for me . . . [put] two and two together.” She found out for herself, “where they were least guarded against me. It is what everyone does in the competition of working or selling the other fellow.”⁹³ She did not care at all for the frills she wore. She dressed “attractively for purely business purposes,” she told Millicent. “If you are a woman,” she continued,

you must answer first to what men think women are, which is not what they are at all, nine times out of ten, but what their clothes represent them to be. And the lighter, more frivolous these are the less they resent you, the less you must overcome in order to carry your point, whatever kind of a point it is. They will not allow *you* to do it, but they will allow your frocks and parasol to do it for you. . . . You can do infinitely more with one of them, from the lowest to the highest, if your dress satisfies his fundamental conviction that you are a weak and foolish creature. It puts him off his guard.

She had put Fortson “off his guard” and had him eating out of her hands. Nor did it bother her that he began taking credit for implementing all her ideas. As long as he was getting the work done, she could tolerate the “theft.” “Now he begs my brains, uses them, and does without knowing it what I want him to do. It is an excellent arrangement,” she added proudly.⁹⁴

Not surprisingly, soon the new Mrs. Ambrose unwittingly gained a lover on the side and became betrothed. She “had not only dressed for purely ‘business purposes,’ conquered the will of her tenant and hired men with her organdies and silken girdles. She had achieved a lover--at the age of forty-nine!” Corra’s message in the story becomes

⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 151.

mixed with this change in the heroine. Mrs. Ambrose moved from the self-confident, hard-working, sure-of-herself woman one meets in the beginning to one who is as self-conscious and diffident as her dress and manner are feminine and dainty. “The snap seemed to have gone out of her,” the narrator wrote. “She was placid and uninteresting.” Some of her friends had surmised that there was a man in the picture because she showed all the “signs” of being a “gratified woman.” “She showed other evidences,” as well, Millicent tells us, like “a somnambulant [sic] wit, peculiar to people who have lost the edge of their desires.” The “signs” seem to be in conflict. There is evidence love had made her a “gratified woman,” but at the same time she had lost her “snap,” her quick “wit” now slumbered, and she had “lost the edge of her desires.” Where before Mrs. Ambrose had dominated all the conversations between herself and the narrator, after her “metempsychosis,” the narrator wrote, “I only remember that, if anything, I had the conversational advantage because she forced it on me with undue silences.”⁹⁵ Was the change in Mrs. Ambrose qualitatively positive or negative?

In spite of the apparent devolution of Mrs. Ambrose, the narrator seems to become envious. Referring to herself metaphorically, Millicent wrote “the cat in me wondered,” about Mrs. Ambrose’s clandestine affair. “When you are thirty-eight,” she wrote reflectively,

and have never had a lover it is very difficult to purr at the sight of a woman eleven years your senior who has got one.

She waved to me, she quickened her steps. She was smiling, not the smile of a productive and satisfied farmer, but one of radiant, strictly feminine happiness. She was pink and she was flustered. I arose languidly to meet her and she

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 9.

embraced me, a thing she had never done before.

The narrator seemed to envy the woman lost in love. She seemed to prefer the “radiant and strictly feminine happiness” of the Mrs. Ambrose transformed by love to that of the “productive and satisfied farmer” she might have been without a lover. “For the briefest moment,” she confessed, “I had a vision of myself in a pansy-figured organdie of robin’s egg blue with a ribbon tied around my waist and a rose-colored parasol over my head sitting in a meadow somewhere. How would I look; above all, how would I feel?”

Would she feel at home with herself, would she be comfortable with the alien identity?

Probably not. She regained her senses, as she relates, “I perceived that she was a shattered woman, that she had lost her grip; she laughed at nothing at all. Then she laughed again. For the only time in my life, I felt superior to her. I was still sane, and I belonged to nobody but myself.”⁹⁶ Does Corra want the reader to value more the

“radiant, strictly feminine happiness” of the heroine, or the “sanity” of the narrator who “belonged to nobody but [her]self”? It is not entirely clear which of the two women

Corra valued more, though she seems to try to persuade the reader with certain imagery to sympathize with Mrs. Ambrose. Certainly none of the alternative images of Millicent are appealing: “I sat down, feeling more like a priest about to receive a confession and less like a cat ready to scratch somebody,” as she had felt when she first recognized the change. It is likely that both the narrator and the main character reflect some of the traits Corra aspired to for herself, and that something in both lifestyles appealed to her as well as repelled her. The story reveals more than a little about the nature of femininity, about

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 152.

its affects as a two-edged sword in the life of women who use it and lose themselves in the process, and it helps explain some of the contradictory feelings Corra had on the subject. The options in her thinking seem pretty limited. To be loved by others, one had to be feminine. To have self-respect, meant to deny much of that prescribed femininity. Either way, operating under this principle, the consequences were costly.

Through the character of Mrs. Ambrose, Corra exposes the powerfully alienating effects of femininity by pointing out the way Mrs. Ambrose, by internalizing the superficial behavior and mannerisms required of the feminine ideal, literally became that ideal, the woman who wore the “white organdie . . . the skirt . . . garlanded with ruffles . . . [with] a girdle of narrow black velvet tied in a smart little bow behind, as if she still felt dainty and slender within her waist line, which she was not.”⁹⁷ Mrs. Ambrose became what she was not, a dependent and “irresponsible” woman, willing to relinquish all the traits that the narrator had admired about her in the beginning. Why? Mrs. Ambrose explained her personal surrender:

I have proved my point, that a woman can farm and make it pay, that she can control labor and make labor earn its wage. What else can I do that would not be a vain repetition? I am tired of the repetition, even of good harvests. . . I am worn out watching the weather and trying to outdo it and outwit it. I want to be just a woman again and fold my hands and not be obliged to do and do and think and think. It really is very hard on a woman.⁹⁸

The narrator understood very well. She herself was worn out. “How many times had I longed, not for a husband, maybe, but for the feminine state of irresponsibility

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 152.

which they provide.” The end of the story leaves the reader with a forlorn image of the narrator. After being invited to be the widow’s bridesmaid, Millicent left knowing that after the wedding she would never go back. “I pinned my hat on and took my way back to town along the shadowy road, feeling very lonely, merely one of the bystanders, watching life and love pass by, fading and growing dimmer in the minds of men and women, while yet I lived and went on working just to live.”⁹⁹ To have the freedom necessary to belong to oneself and no other, for a woman, meant to shoulder alone the burden of supporting herself in a competitive world where even honest men sold their souls for some kind of security. “In this desperately competitive world an honest man may change his character overnight,” Corra wrote advising widows not to tempt their financial agents, even those proven honest, by trusting them with their inheritances.¹⁰⁰ If an honest man could not be expected to keep his soul untarnished, how could anyone expect it of a woman with far fewer means financially and psychologically to take care of herself.

The characters of Millicent and Mrs. Ambrose reflect an internal struggle, a dialogue that Corra engaged in herself. Femininity necessarily represented mindlessness, and actually the death of part of one’s self, the part that was independent in thought. Millicent was unwilling to give up that part of herself by surrendering to femininity. But without femininity women could not attract men and therefore could not be complete. Millicent’s loneliness and sense of loss and Mrs. Ambrose’s loss of self represent the

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁰Corra Harris, “Concerning Widows,” p. 64.

only two alternatives Corra believed existed for women. To some extent she experienced both alternatives, and in her later life laments the price women had to pay in their search for personal identity. Millicent has much in common with the woman Corra reveals herself to be in *As a Woman Thinks*. They both knew professional success and hence, relative independence and personal liberty, but both Corra and Millicent express serious doubts about whether the sacrifice to achieve those goals was perhaps too much. That neither of them could appreciate the achievements and accomplishments that brought them personal liberty, and that they blamed, if in sometimes inarticulate ways, the suppression of traits identified as feminine for their inability to appreciate that personal freedom reveals more about the conflicting values at the core of Corra's thinking.

Corra's views on widowhood might have confused any of her readers concerned about a consistent position on gender roles since otherwise she was most often in public predictably traditional in her support of marriage and gender roles of women. Although Corra thought of herself privately as a strong, determined, and courageous person, to her readers and to others outside the family, she presented herself quite differently. Her descriptions of herself as a woman are more than deferential, humble, or merely self-effacing; they are at times actually self-deprecating. There is an obvious awareness on her part of her role as not quite a first-rate writer, and to some extent she uses her gender to explain or excuse being second best. But behind the excuse of gender is a strong gender aversion and discontent that go beyond career disappointment, and become a part of self-aversion, confusion, and conflict.

She was "just an ordinary woman with a good deal of common sense," she stated

when asked by a reporter to describe herself. Unlike most writers known for their conceit, she was merely a “respectable woman” with no “trimmings,” and “no little green bay ego” to distort her sense of self.¹⁰¹ Corra admitted that she was “not temperamentally fit to go among strangers.” When in the company of others, especially celebrated writers, she simply had “no confidence in [her] self,” and with them often “acted from cowardice not from grace.”¹⁰² Nowhere is her tone more self-deprecating, apologetic and self-effacing than in her two autobiographies, *My Book and Heart* (1923) and *As a Woman Thinks* (1925). In both books she most often identified herself not as a person, but as a woman, with emphasis on her gender’s shortcomings. She did so obviously to explain why her work was not better, why she was not a great writer, that she was handicapped by her gender. Being a woman always meant being less than; it meant being limited intellectually, and in other ways that made a difference in a career as a writer. “I am a woman, and it is not the nature of woman to achieve more than the minor notes in living, no matter which way she lives.”¹⁰³ That explained why her personal story would not be a great story. There never could be “such thing as a great autobiography written by a woman.”¹⁰⁴ No matter how hard she tried--and Corra had tried most of her life--she could not once and for all “overcome” the “accident of [her] gender”; it always

¹⁰¹Corra Harris to Mrs. Strong, 27 April 1922; “A Southern Woman Author: Mrs. Corra Harris on the Problems of Her Sex,” *The Sun*, 3 June 1911.

¹⁰²Corra Harris to Adelaide Neall, 15 Feb. 1914.

¹⁰³Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 221.

¹⁰⁴Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 222.

came back to haunt her.¹⁰⁵

The “accident of gender” meant to Corra that women were not “real people,” or that they were subordinate human beings. Even if women ever became “real,” however, by gaining full social and political rights, they would never be able to subdue fully the source of their limitation. “[I]f we ever do become real people,” she wrote, “we will never produce a psalmist or an Isaiah.”¹⁰⁶ Never would the world see a great woman writer, architect, engineer, or inventor of any kind. What was it about women that made them incapable of greatness? Women were permanently and irredeemably handicapped by their emotional, sentimental natures. Expressing a view that medical science would have confirmed in her day, she wrote that the “purely feminine soul . . . is so intimately connected with her nervous system that only her Heavenly Father can locate it from day to day.”¹⁰⁷ Corra believed this was a mystery best left unexplored and unexplained. A woman’s soul, or nature, or perhaps it was something without a name, but “whatever” the “thing” was, it was the “secret psychic stuff which determines our place in the order of things [and] accounts for the fact that we have so few monuments raised to us.”¹⁰⁸

Although she would not advise the same for other women (except Faith), Corra spent much of her life trying to subordinate this “psychic stuff” in herself to some “higher faculty,” trying to deny in herself traits identified as feminine, and claiming for herself

¹⁰⁵Corra Harris, “Robin Hood Roosevelt,” typed speech with no information on date and place of delivery, though it is clearly after 1932. Box 81:6.

¹⁰⁶Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 222.

¹⁰⁷Corra Harris, *A Circuit Rider's Wife* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Co., 1910) pp. 165-66.

¹⁰⁸Corra Harris, *A Circuit Rider's Wife*, p. 166.; *My Book and Heart*, p. 222.

traits identified as masculine. She had long since trained herself to live “with all [her] feminine vanities prayerfully suppressed.”¹⁰⁹ But then that suppression had its price. As Corra advised Faith to master the art of self-control, she made it a priority early in her own life. For Corra self-control meant denying her feelings. Emotions, though they were natural in women, were enemies of self-control, of self-possession, and she wanted no part of anything that would limit her control over herself. Later in life she began to wonder if it had not cost her more than it had benefitted her. She wrote of how she longed to be able to lose control of her emotions like most women she knew could, but because of the standard she had set for herself, she never had that luxury. “I desire to show my tears like an honest woman, . . . Not that there is anything the matter; I simply wish to exercise the emotional birthright of my sex. But I have never had the chance to do so.”¹¹⁰ Being a woman meant being naturally emotional, which was equated in her mind with weakness. Corra had learned to cope, to adapt, by becoming “indifferent” rather than by using what she considered the same feminine wiles she had seen others use so effectively to their own advantage. This nonemotional sort of reserve had in fact given her some “private peace” and a “quiet heart,” but she wondered in her later years if it was “peace” and “quiet” or numbness and emptiness.¹¹¹ “I am merely intimating that it is dry

¹⁰⁹Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 223.

¹¹⁰Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 310-311. She had actually “suppressed” her chance sometime before she ever became writer. She explained in a letter to Paul More Nov. 18, 1902: When a friend asked her why she didn’t simply “just cry instead” of getting sick for days over a particular disappointment. She explained to the woman that “I had got out of the habit of crying and could not even when I wished now.”

¹¹¹Corra Harris, “The Happy Woman: Does the Dynamic Marvel of Today Gain Peace or Regret?” *Ladies Home Journal*, September 23, 1923. p. 33.

stuff being a woman when some dull wisdom in you keeps you from acting altogether like one.”¹¹² “[I]f it was all to do over again,” she wrote, “I should be careful not to develop a strong character.”¹¹³ She would concentrate less on “strong character” and give in to the instincts that endeared women more to men. “Sometimes it has occurred to me,” she wrote in *My Book and Heart*, “that I might have done well to stick closer to my pudding making talent” than to developing a literary talent. “The feeling I have now is that I missed part of my conduct as a woman at a time when it might have contributed some to that happiness which I have also missed.”¹¹⁴ At least then, if she had been merely her female self, no one would have resented her.

I have observed that a woman may boast of the cake she bakes and no one resents her pride. On the contrary, men praise her, and women plagiarize the cake if they can. But give yourself some airs about a book you have written and see what happens! If we must solve the problems of life by the psychoanalytical process, here is one for you that is more important than it appears to the naked eye: Why do men praise a woman for her cookies--I never knew one to despise a woman on account of her cakes--and shun her if she writes a poem? Maybe the divine fire that produces verse does something to her personally, liquidates her dearer-to-man charms. . . . I am not complaining. What I mean is that there may be something

¹¹²Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 253.

¹¹³Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 311.

¹¹⁴Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, 249. Corra’s biographer, John Talmadge, had a different explanation for the overriding tone of angst in this autobiography. Obviously Talmadge was not interested in any sort of analysis of Corra Harris’s gender identity. He believed the tone merely reflected the physical and emotional exhaustion she was experiencing because of the intense pace she had been working at since Faith’s death five years earlier. (Talmadge, pp. 120-21) No doubt exhaustion can explain depression, but the themes in *As a Woman Thinks* that are relevant to this study are echoed in others written and published at different times in Corra’s life.

everlasting and providential in these instincts.¹¹⁵

In the case that they were “everlasting” and “providential” suppression of them might not, she reflected, have been the best thing.

In one place Corra wrote, “Gender is not a curse if you live in the right place. It is about the only blessing we are born with that cannot be changed or taken away from us.”¹¹⁶ It seems, however, that heaven was the only such “right place” where gender served as a permanent “blessing.” The passage follows some of Corra’s reflections on how social problems, including gender conflict, might look if viewed from the perspective of one who had been lifted up into the presence of God through prayer. In the real world, Corra had to concede honestly, gender was anything but a blessing for women. For a few years little girls might be spared a full understanding of the “sad limitations of our sex.” The older they got, however, instinctively they grew in gender-consciousness until it became a “barrier in our minds against the uttermost possibility of achievement [sic].”¹¹⁷ If the truth were known, every woman probably wished she were a man, at least every woman who sensed her true value in the scheme of things. The following passage speaks to the effects of internalized gender roles (and includes the excerpt that begins this chapter).

I suppose women are one of the essential provisions of Nature, but in our minds

¹¹⁵Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, pp. 90-91.

¹¹⁶Corra Harris, “New York as Seen from a Georgia Valley,” *The Independent* (19 Jan. 1914): 99.

¹¹⁷Corra Harris, “Early Recollections of Mortality: First Impressions,” Notebook, Box 99:11.

we have never been satisfied with the arrangement. We feel that there is some kind of imposition connected with it. We were simply thought of afterwards; we were not an inspiration of creation, but we were created to meet a necessity afterwards. This makes a difference. We are not quite normal as men are. We still have a futile instinct to escape from what we are. Thousands and thousands of years have not made us contented and at home in ourselves. No man ever wished himself a woman, but ask any one of us and if she is in a truthful mood she will admit that she wishes she were a man. I have no doubt Eve regretted she was not Adam.¹¹⁸

Women were an “afterthought” of nature; they were “not quite normal”; and they regretted not being born male. Most depressingly no woman could ever be “content” or “at home in herself.”

Two telling passages from letters to Paul More demonstrate that Corra had fully internalized certain beliefs about what women were by nature--that they were passive responders to men; that a woman was incomplete without a man; that women were helpless victims of their emotions; that women were sacrificial lambs on the altar of marriage. Among other things the passages reveal how damaging in effect such thinking could be. In the first passage Corra responded to a letter from More cautioning her against being quite so boorish in her statements in print about the propensity of southern women to need ruling with an iron fist.

You advise me to be careful about cultivating the Southern point of view about women,--and for instance some body is annoyed because I said that it requires a proportion of Oriental brutality to govern women. I am very sorry I said that then. The truth is so often incredible even to those who practice it. But *is* that a

¹¹⁸Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 247.

particular Southern observation? I should have supposed that even the polar bears in the far North knew that about women by this time. You have to frown and show your teeth when you advise a woman, or she will not think you are divinely appointed to look after her welfare[sic], and she will do the job herself.¹¹⁹

One could not be gentle with a woman or she would take matters into her own hands.

What was so indelicate about that “observation”? Certainly it should not seem “incredible . . . to those who practice it.” Nor was this a regional phenomenon. Women everywhere were basically the same. The difference for southern women was that men there had more success convincing women of men’s “divine appointment” to “look after her welfare.”

In another equally revealing passage Corra responded candidly about letters she had received from some angry male readers. She wanted More to know that angry men did not frighten her. Actually, they entertained her. “And while I am on this subject I will end the discussion by telling you how it makes me feel to see a man furiously angry with me. I feel as if I were sitting in a two wheel sulky¹²⁰ with my feet braced against the dashboard, holding the reins of a wild horse, having a good time. It dont [sic] matter in the least if he gets the bit between his teeth, they all do that, as long as the sulky holds out I am clucking just behind. The fact that sooner or late [sic] I get my tumble only makes me enjoy the ride all the more. When I am down God will take care of my bruised and

¹¹⁹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 19 July 1901.

¹²⁰A “sulky is a two-wheeled carriage for one person, especially used in harness racing.” *Oxford American Dictionary*.

wounded spirit.”¹²¹ It does not take a degree in clinical psychology to see the repression behind this image. If one had to deal with angry men and could not respond in kind, the sanest thing to do seemed to best him by finding a way to enjoy the ride, and to trust God to take care of the “bruised and wounded spirit” that inevitably followed.

Corra attributed her literary success at least in part to her ability to transcend a feminine voice in writing. Literary editor of the *Independent*, Edward Slosson confirmed her ability to do so. “Did I tell you that the editor of *Current Literature* wrote in to inquire whether it [a review of *Marriage a la Mode*] was written by a man or a woman,” he wrote Corra. In keeping with Corra’s wry wit, Slosson responded to the inquiry simply “that it was.”¹²² She no doubt valued highly a commendation from Will Harben. “The last sentence of your review is fine enough to be graven on the walk of the very Temple of Heaven,” Harben wrote. It was so inspiring in fact, he claimed, “I am making arrangements to have it put on my tombstone as a justification for my having lived and,” [in a statement she must have found particularly affirming] “as a lasting bit of philosophy too masculine for Mark Twain or Abraham Lincoln.”¹²³

Corra’s favorite nephew, Al Harris, wrote her often with reviews of her work. They no doubt had discussed the subject of voice in literature, and of the effect of the gendered voice. Once when Al felt particularly moved by a piece of Corra’s writing, he attributed the piece’s success to Corra’s ability to achieve “sexlessness” in her writing.

¹²¹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 13 July 1901.

¹²²Edward E. Slosson to Corra Harris, 13 July 1909.

¹²³Will Harben to Corra Harris, 10 Nov. 1908.

He wrote in response to one of her articles published in *Pictorial Review* in 1922. "The great trouble with women writers," he begins,

. . . is they are moved to words by the impulses of their sex rather than by cold, solemn facts. . . . That woman Clark who writes editorials for the *Pictorial* impresses me in this way. Her thoughts are splendid, but they need B.V.D.'s. There is a modesty to expression, an occasional note that bespeaks a friendly word for the great shortcomings of mankind, and this is the salt of literature. We refuse to view naked truths, there is something repulsive about them.

But Corra had an uncanny ability, Al sought to convince her, of being able to reveal "naked truths" as they were. "What I started out to say," he goes on, "is that more and more I am discovering the power of sexlessness in your copy. Sex is more than a physical thing, it is spiritual and mental, and the only thing that overshadows sex, is the common heart. You appeal to this heart."¹²⁴ (Interestingly, to Al Harris B.V.D.'s signified not a masculine, but a "sexless" voice.) Clearly here was a nephew after his aunt's own heart.

Corra's belief that anatomy was destiny colored her ideas about youth and aging. One newspaper reporter who interviewed her on the celebration of her sixtieth birthday described her as "a woman who likes growing old," as one who had a "complacent contempt of Archaiphobia . . . a word to denote the fear of old age."¹²⁵ Nor was she above describing herself in aged terms, as she did to an editor she was trying to persuade to accept her proposal for a story. She was simply, she wrote John Spurgeon, "an old

¹²⁴ Al Harris to Corra Harris, 30 Dec. 1922.

¹²⁵ "A Woman Who Likes Growing Old," *Columbus Enquirer* 21 March 1929.

woman, with a fat face, a sardonic eye, a tender heart, a mischievous and valliant [sic] mind with two fighting horns in front and a forked tail of humor behind and a highly developed spiritual nature, commonly known as imagination.”¹²⁶ But these sentiments belie the strong feelings found elsewhere in Corra’s writing, feelings of fear and anxiety over the idea of aging.

If Corra portrayed women in general uncharitably in most of her writing, she could be harshest when portraying older women. In a short story about what traits actually make an ideal husband, she described a scene in a hotel lobby where five women sat eaves-dropping on a conversation between two men. Two of the women who were young sat together exchanging “offensive glances.” They typically had nothing but contempt for each other. “Being women, they did not like each other,” and “carried on a dialogue of silent antipathy.” The image of them is not flattering, but that of the older women is worse. These were far from just elderly women, but rather “very old” ones who had lost to age any of the feminine virtues they might have known in their youth. One of them in particular bore some of the coarsest marks of old age. She “had palsey. Her head wagged incessantly, and she turned it from side to side like an ancient wrinkled faced witch looking for mischief.” She awakened one of her companions whose “eyes [flew] open like the eyes on a pivot in the wooden head of a doll.” At the end of the story all three of the older women “tottered forward and climbed the stairs like little old girls with withered faces who are frightened of the dark.”¹²⁷

¹²⁶Corra Harris to John J. Spurgeon, 3 July 1922, General Correspondence, Box 27.16.

¹²⁷Corra Harris, “The Ideal,” *Harper’s Weekly*, Sept. 17, 1913. This quote comes from a type-script in the Corra Harris Collection, Box 77:6.

Images like these made Corra self-conscious about what age she appeared to others. She was quick to defend her looks to Paul More. “[Y]ou can tell him,” she wrote More about a comment by Hamilton Holt about her, “I am not the only woman in the world with crow stitches under my eyes, in fact, [I] have fewer than most women of my age.”¹²⁸ After having met More, Corra responded to something he said about the way she looked. “I am glad you felt some interest in my personal appearance. You refer to the ‘solidity’ of my brow. It *is* solid, and I suspect *thick*. I do not actually look younger than I am, without a strenuous effort.”¹²⁹ A later letter to More reveals the attitude more in keeping with Corra’s general ideas about age. “It frightens me,” she wrote More,

to think of the time when this great power to live dies in me with advancing years--to think of the polite indifference of the world to me, fading like a rose upon its breast.--For I have noticed that old people are not loved. We do our duty by them, we have a deep patient affection for them along with the [?] of our sense of obligation to them, but I do not think we love them with that immortal power of loving. Therefore the most earnest prayer I have prayed for many a day is that I may not live past this middle age that I am in now. I’d rather be in a green grave somewhere, forgotten, than an old lady in an armchair with whom my own grandchildren would have to learn to be patient.¹³⁰

¹²⁸Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 17 June 1901.

¹²⁹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 14 Sept. 1901.

¹³⁰Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 14 Oct. 1907. To be even more brutally candid, Corra wanted nothing to do with grandchildren. “Do you ever think of your grand children?” she asked More. “I cannot bear mine. I cannot yield me to them, this weary heart, nor confess[?] them! . . . The Good Lord preserve me from grand children!”

Corra could never be satisfied with being the object of loved ones' "duty" or their "deep patient affection," but it is interesting to note why she believed no one could love older people "with that immortal power of loving" that they felt for the younger. For one thing, she wrote, "age does make astonishing changes in the human countenance," and more so for women. In fact, "nature seems to lose interest in you, once you have fulfilled her purpose." The forces of nature mocked and played tricks on the aged. "I have noticed this about the wind", she wrote: "when it catches the skirt of a middle-aged woman, it flaunts the thing roughly, as if nothing mattered; but it whisks the skirt of a girl softly, meaningly, as a handkerchief is prettily used in a flirtation, or like a neat little cloud that belongs to her."¹³¹ When nature had no more use for a woman, "the wind," or life, flaunted or exposed her. For a woman without a purpose, "nothing," not even such exposure, "mattered." Life has "meaning" for and "belongs" only to the young woman, for which there is yet a natural, biological purpose. Her feelings on aging are captured in a haunting way in a birthday note to Faith on the occasion of her twenty first birthday. Corra was sorry Faith would have to 'come of age' alone, without the "props of father's and mother's presence," but considering that Corra sent her to college to grow up and "learn how to live," being alone on her twenty-first birthday actually might be the "proper way to do it." "And here is my wish for you," Corra wrote,

my only child, my dearest possession in the world, my peace and my crown--That you may learn to make life your own, not to be driven and frightened by it. That you may achieve peace and happiness out of the strength and calm of your own spirit. That you may have health and hope and energy and much to do in the

¹³¹Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 69-70.

world, and that you may do it well with all your might and mind. That you may be a good woman, live well and die before you are old.¹³²

Likely this wish was a painful recollection for Corra when Faith died not long after her thirty-first birthday.

Corra's fears over aging and her disregard for life beyond middle age become something of a puzzle when one considers her thoughts early in her writing career on the capacity of older women to outgrow natural and characterisic jealousy and rivalry of other women that they felt through their mid years. At the age of thrity-five she wrote the article, "A Woman's Relation to the Two Sexes," discussing the reasons women could never think in terms of solidarity, at least women through their middle ages. After explaining all the reasons there never would or could be a "sisterhood" among women, Corra ended the article on a different note. If up through middle age women were naturally "treacherous" to each other, "[a]fter middle age, however," she wrote,

the average woman begins to care more for women than she does for men. Her allegiance undergoes a psychic change, her eyes are opened, her judgment cleared, and she learns to appreciate her own sex fully. The characteristics that seemed to her hateful frailties long ago are defended now as their poetic distinctions. She

¹³²Corra Harris to Faith Harris, Nov. 18 and Dec. 22, 1908. Faith mirrored her mother's sentiment on growing older. "Just think," she wrote home from college a few days before her Christmas Eve birthday, "nearly nineteen years old! It sounds pretty old but not as bad as twenty-one. I have a kind of feeling that I'm going to become positively sullen my twenty-first birthday." (Faith Harris Leech to Corra Harris, Dec. 20, 1906.) The tone of her letters around the date of her twenty-first birthday do not sound "sullen," but she was clearly thinking about aging when she wrote her father a few days afterward that she was "turning grey rapidly." (Faith Harris to Lundy Howard Harris, Dec. 29, 1908.) Maybe the birthday wishes from her mother made her think more consciously of the affects of aging.

sees in every girl the fair mirage of her own youth, in the pathetic careworn face of the young matron the gentle heroism of *her* other years; in the mother of a grown family her own queen days when sons and daughters suddenly grew tall and proclaimed her. And for them all she has a chastened affinity. Men have passed out of her calculations. They are the things with whom she failed or succeeded, from lover and husband down to her youngest son. And however much she remains dependent upon them, she is no longer related to them in the same near way. She has survived them and returned to her own.¹³³

Coming from a woman who was otherwise obsessed with peace and harmony, these observations make it difficult to believe that Corra valued youth more than the golden years. But considering that she shared only her most treasured advice with her daughter, and that she confided some of her most intimate thoughts with Paul More, the more likely case is that even if she knew old age meant harmony, it also meant a time when one's purpose in life--determined by nature--was exhausted. It was a time when a woman was yet "dependent upon" whatever man or men happened to be in her life, but a time when she was "no longer related to them in the same near way." Her relation to men was from beyond the pale of nature so to speak. And neither her "opened eyes," nor her "cleared judgment," nor her "chastened affinity" for other women around her, nor the consolation of once again "returning to her own," compared in Corra's mind to the bliss of romantic love between a man and a woman.

Corra's fears of aging, in kind if not in degree, likely were more typical than

¹³³Corra Harris, "A Woman's Relation to the Two Sexes," *Independent*, 21 April 1904, pp. 907-08.

atypical of her female contemporaries. Victorian notions of women's primary role as that of mother and wife were strong, and some of the most resilient under attack of modernity. Charlotte Gilman represented a countervailing view from Corra Harris's. Images of women in most men's minds, Gilman wrote in "The Woman of Fifty," was that "of a young and beautiful woman, and the latest limit a mother of young children." A woman beyond the age of fifty was "non-existent," because, in the Victorian mind, she was not functional. The key to "the non-existence of the woman of fifty" is that "she is not, as a rule, marriagable. She is no longer a potential mother; and her actual mothering is largely accomplished." This view was being replaced, Gilman believed, by the same thinking that was replacing the view of man as the norm or the standard for humanity, and woman as the Other. For the purpose of contrast, a lengthy passage from the essay deserves quoting. "In the old view," she explained,

men were the people and women the sex; in the new view women are the people and men the sex. . . . The woman, the race type, spends part of her life in being a female--and outgrows it; she then becomes human, pure human, the only pure human type, for men do not outgrow the disabilities of sex till a far later period...

So long as women had no activities but those of sex, life ceased with the ceasing of those activities.

The old woman whose own career of motherhood was fulfilled became merely a grandmother, tagging along, in varying degrees of usefulness, behind the younger ones who were still in the full flush of "womanhood."

The new woman now finds that after "womanhood" is ended, "humanhood" begins, and that being human is a far larger, longer, more interesting field of life than being woman. . . .

She may be a grandmother--as her husband or brother may be a grandfather--but not as a business. . . .

Life is not done, for her; it is beginning--just beginning. She has the detached vigor, fresh, untried, of the human faculties so long suppressed in favor of the feminine ones; and wide fields of pleasure in the development of these new faculties; to learn to use new powers is Youth.

A healthy woman should be able to do good work till she is eighty; many do. She has at fifty, thirty years before her, an outlook as long as that between twenty and her present age, and far richer.¹³⁴

Gilman saw middle age and senior years as the best of a woman's life. Much the opposite, Harris saw them as little more than a prelude to her death. There was little in Harris's thinking to provide alternative ways of viewing the aging process, and hence of retaining a sense of human dignity beyond what she regarded as her productive years. To Harris, to affirm her own female gender identity traits was ultimately to be powerless. To deny them offered temporary empowerment, if over nothing else, at least over self. By "prayerfully suppressing" her female traits, Harris learned to control her emotions, and she learned a stoic means of dealing with the exigencies of life. But later in life she realized that suppressing those emotions, and all that she identified as the female side of herself, left a void that memories alone could not fill. In her strongly gender thinking compassion, empathy, and mercy were weak, female traits, while dispassion, indifference, disinterest, and justice were strong, enduring, masculine traits. In a world that seemed to her from an early age to be growing increasingly more hostile and confusing; where temporal survival for herself and family fell to her; where most emotions experienced were painful and threatening; it is no wonder that Corra Harris chose the identity that

¹³⁴Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Woman of Fifty," *The Forerunner*, Vol. 2, 1911, pp. 96-98.

seemed to offer her some degree of control in a life in which many of the consequential circumstances were well beyond her control.

The message Corra preached she knew well. She had had a lifetime of rehearsal, and was surrounded by a culture that celebrated the tradition she kept up in the popular press. Furthermore the success of her publications had to be in some sense an affirmation to her of the veracity of her homespun truisms about gender roles, or at least the long period of their marketability kept them alive in her mind, and perhaps explain some of the lamentation and confusion she expressed over her own gender identity in the last decade of her life. She had chosen to pursue personal liberty rather than femininity and, in her mind, where had it gotten her. The loneliness of her later years seemed to blind her to the personal and professional accomplishments of her life and to magnify the only thing she could conclude was her error.

The contradictions between what Corra advocated in her work and the life she lived as a successful woman writer are not in and of themselves necessarily noteworthy. As she wrote to Paul More after confessing candidly her fears over becoming a grandmother, "All of [this] is very inconsistent with the doctrines I preach about marriage, etc.--But who on earth ever made a doctrine for his own consumption! None, but a fool or a crank!"¹³⁵ Corra was neither "fool" nor "crank," nor was she a dishonest person. She was a woman with many strong passions, and just as many strong beliefs instilled since birth by a culture thoroughly pervasive in its grasp. Significant about the

¹³⁵Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 14 October 1907.

contradictions is what they reveal about how one might deal with enormous psychological tensions over values in conflict. For Corra the choices were relatively limited because her resources for thinking about alternatives were limited. The reason why had everything to do with her inability to think of self outside her own private world, to think of herself in social terms.

Chapter 7

“AN ABORTION OF NATURE”: WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE, or GENDER AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

“No matter how stringent is the government under which he lives,
every man finally manages to be a law unto himself.”
(Corra Harris, 1918)

Corra Harris had a strong sense of self, a core of personal identity that transcended the limits of gender as she perceived them, but it was an abstracted self, one that could exist only in isolation or self-enclosed. She had little if any sense of herself as a social being. She had a sense of individual freedom, an “instinct for personal liberty,”¹ she wrote, but in her mind the freedom she guarded so jealously was antithetical to and could not survive outside an extremely privatized environment. Liberty in her mind existed only in the private. The public sphere was a place to be avoided. She believed that any involvement outside the Valley besides promoting her own writing career, would rob her of the liberty she had suffered and sacrificed so much to gain. But it was not just a lack of interest in public work or women’s organizations that made Corra purposely avoid them. She had a strong aversion to anything outside a very private domestic circle.

¹Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 170.

Humans to her were “extremely private”² beings, for whom the “chief end of life,” she lectured, was “to do your job, and to bring up a private personal family of your own . . .”³ When it came to involvement in anything outside her own “personal family” or private interests, her motto was very simply, “[l]et somebody else do it!”⁴ This chapter examines her thinking on the public/private dichotomy, her particular conceptualization of both spheres, her fear of the former and preoccupation with the latter, and the reasoning behind her position on both.

This study and the questions that have informed it have assumed the relevance and value of a social consciousness.⁵ The modern meaning of the concept became a focus for reformers in the Progressive Era. Charlotte Gilman was only one of a number of social critics to analyze, define, and clarify the term, but her inclusion of gender as a factor in its development, and more specifically, her explanation of domesticity and femininity as reasons why a social consciousness eluded women more often than men is what makes her work useful here. The essential need for a social consciousness on the part of everyone in society as a theme informs practically everything Gilman wrote. Contrary to

²Corra Harris, “Upton Sinclair and Helicon Hall,” p. 712.

³Corra Harris, “Marriage--New Profession or Old Miracle,” p. 234.

⁴Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 101.

⁵This is not to deny the simplistic solutions implied by Gilman’s conceptualization of the social consciousness, the model for comparison used here, or the weakness of her interpretation of social evolution. Some of the limitations in her thinking are acknowledged and explored further in the concluding chapter. Suffice it to say here that the timeless principle of interconnectedness as an essential human need exists at the core of the concept, and so makes the concept a prerequisite to experiencing human connectedness. That Gilman understood the need only on an intellectual level (I will suggest) does not inhibit her ability to articulate the concept clearly, but, again, especially relevant is her awareness and articulation of how and why a social consciousness eluded women more often than men.

Harris's belief that a social consciousness and the responsibilities she believed attached to it would compromise personal liberty, Gilman believed a social consciousness was essential to the preservation of liberty. It was the only way a democracy could survive, a democracy which "rests on the capacity to feel, think and act together for the common good," Gilman wrote.⁶ Without it there was no genuine personal liberty. She believed that the instinct for social preservation was actually stronger than the instinct for self-preservation.⁷ Furthermore, without a sense of self in relation to others, there was no healthy sense of self. To Gilman, a self in isolation was a partial self for whom there could be no wholeness, and liberty was a mere illusion. The abstracted self free from the world was trapped by her own isolation. Gilman's ideas of how domesticity worked to prevent a social consciousness, especially in women, were covered in chapter four. The brief focus here is on definition, as much for the purpose of contrast with its opposite, or the absence of a social consciousness, as to define and clarify the concept itself.

Gilman defined a social consciousness in ecological terms: it meant an awareness of self as an integral part of something larger; an awareness "that we are each and all continuously and absolutely interdependent; that the work we do is for others, and the power we do it by is from others." This awareness was "what gives dignity to the individual, his membership in something greater," something outside the self. Furthermore, the "dignity of the individual," which was inherent, was not complete, or completely realized until the realization included awareness that self was an integral part

⁶Charlotte Gilman, "Women and Democracy," *The Forerunner*, Vol. 3 (1912):35.

⁷Charlotte Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 52; *Humanness*, p. 133.

of “something greater,” membership in the rest of humanity. This realization rendered the individual complete, brought a sense of wholeness. Significantly, it gave life meaning and purpose. Without taking away the mystery of life, it took away the fear and dread of an arbitrary fate; it countered the perpetual “submission of the fatalist,” Gilman believed.⁸ The sense of self as an integral part of a larger whole served to dispel some of the “discouragement and perplexity” of life that characterized so much of human experience otherwise.⁹ A sense of struggle and futility were replaced by a sense of belonging in a common purpose. Thinking of self in relation to the whole would bring a new perspective to private life, and refocus the notion of fault or blame from personal culpability to social justice. The absence of a social consciousness explained many of the difficulties attaching to many human relationships, including romantic but all relationships; its presence, conversely, would redress many of those same relationship problems.¹⁰ If children were taught early that they were part of this “vast entity,” that behind them was the “power of Humanity,”¹¹ they would grow up with a sense of purpose rather than a vague sense of fear and angst.¹² They would understand that “the faults of our time are ours in common, and that we must work together to outgrow them; that the glory and joy and beauty of life lies in our social consciousness, our social service. That God is in man--not merely in the Jones family, but in the human family; and that religion

⁸Charlotte Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 48.

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 160, 165.

¹⁰Charlotte Gilman, *Women and Economics*, pp. 23-25.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Charlotte Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 246.

is in the right relation of man to man, so fulfilling the work of God.”¹³ Once children began learning to think socially, Gilman believed, fundamental change would begin to take place, and that within three generations society would be transformed.¹⁴

Furthermore, the primary purpose of a social consciousness was not to preserve the status quo. It was not, for instance, so that the poor would have someone to take care of them, so that the well-off could be kept honest and made better people by having been compelled to share their material resources. Poverty should not be accepted as a fact of life. There should be no poverty in the first place.¹⁵ And there would be none if a social consciousness was universal. Nor was a social consciousness the same as class consciousness, which Gilman believed was divisive and counterproductive. What the working class needed was not “that of a class,” but rather that of “the social consciousness itself, and the very basis of it is recognition of our mutual interservice and dependence. What these legitimate members of society have to struggle with is not evil persons, but false ideas, and those false ideas are quite largely lodged in their own heads.”¹⁶ If the working class were taught that their enemy was ideas and not people, they

¹³Charlotte Gilman, “Home-Worship,” p. 791.

¹⁴Charlotte Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, pp. 24, 79, 307, 333; *With Her in Ourland*, p. 290.

¹⁵Charlotte Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 163.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 81. Their promotion of class-consciousness was only one of the reasons that Gilman distanced herself from the Socialist Party. “To that end [Socialists] now appeal mainly to those who suffer most under Individualism, on the theory that a sufficient sense of wrong will rouse the masses to irresistible revolt.” “But will it? Why should it? It never did in the past. Humanity has labored on through thousands of years of chattel slavery, wherein the majority of mankind suffered abominably. But their sufferings, and their rage on account of their sufferings, never developed a better way of doing business.” The Socialist Party was filled with ideologues who had lost track of their supposed subject, namely “Humanity.” To the extent that Socialism

would have a different understanding of what they otherwise presumed was their “fate.” They would be less inclined to internalize as personal failure the hardships they suffered, and as a result, they could more effectively challenge their real “enemy.”

False ideas were to Gilman, as we saw in chapter four, the fundamental obstacle to social progress.¹⁷ It was ideas about home and about woman’s nature that kept women

had “in hand the most comprehensive and correct plan for human advancement yet brought before us” Gilman considered herself a Socialist, but those identified with the Socialist Party in America were too doctrinaire for her. Her “socialism was of the early humanitarian kind,” she wrote. American Socialists had lost “interest in the study of the very Life they seek to serve-- Humanity.” Furthermore, she had no tolerance for the “rigid adherence of all orthodox Socialists to the Marxian theory of economic determinism,” nor the “political methods pursued by Marxians.” Their theory of economic determinism was to them “a religion *par excellence*, with its bible, its preachers, its martyrs and devotees.”

To Gilman “the real principle of Socialism is . . . the social administration of social functions--meaning all human work.” The “class struggle” and “class consciousness” upon which economic determinism depended were concepts too narrow in Gilman’s thinking. She wanted to remain always open to the possible. The Socialists’ belief that “class struggle” was the prime mover of history, and that “class consciousness” would become the prime mover of workers were, to her, misguided notions and goals. Not until the time was right and the activity to end a certain system of oppression, would fundamental change come. The “world advances through its exertions, not by a negative freedom, but by a positive activity.” For workers to become more acutely aware of their sufferings and the source of those sufferings would prove no more effective in bringing about change than it had done in the past. People had always been aware of being exploited and oppressed. “But their sufferings, and their rage on account of their sufferings, never developed a better way of doing business.” The change or “better way of doing business” would come not with the negative awareness by workers of their mutual oppression, but with the positive awareness on the part of both the workers and their employers that certain change was in the best interest of both. The ending of the slave system was a prime example. “When people reached the stage when they would do more and better work for wages than for owners, the end of the chattel slave system had come--and not until then. The reason for the change was the superior advantage to the world of wage-labor above slave-labor, and not at all that the slave-men were unhappy, or the wage-men happier.” Just as the slave system had ended after having served its purpose, so would the contract system on which the economy was currently based. “So we are now approaching the end of the contract system because in our stage of development people can do more and better work under the force of social interest than under the force of self-interest.” (“Suffering and Socialism,” *The Forerunner*, Vol. 7 (1916):18-19; *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, pp. 131, 247; *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 193; “A Summary of Purpose,” *The Forerunner*, Vol. 7, 1916, p. 290; *Humanness*, pp. 21, 330.)

¹⁷Charlotte Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, pp. 26, 80, 134; *Humanness*, pp. 28, 48; “Growth and Combat,” *The Forerunner*, Vol. 7 (1916):47.

confined within home, that explained why a social consciousness eluded women even more than men. Individualism, Gilman believed, was another idea that prevented social thinking, especially among men, since women had little opportunity to claim it for themselves.¹⁸ It thwarted “normal social progress,” “social feelings,” and “social capacities.” And it bred “ego-centric persons unable to see the common good.”¹⁹ Tradition and the attendant blind submission to authority was another destructive idea that needed challenging. If not for the “adding of Authority to Tradition,” the “normal growth of a society,” would have led to a “very different history from what now shows.”

Unfortunately for us, our natural growth in that field has been handicapped from the first We were not content with repeating what our ancestors believed, and leaving it to the comment and readjustment of later minds and new discoveries. We forced old views upon new minds with a vast pressure of collateral emotion. We added ethical values to their reception and retention. We so worked upon the human mind for so long as to induce a general belief that a thing must needs be true, merely because it was old--that there was essential virtue in antiquity.²⁰

As long as a people continued “training” their children in “unreasoning submission to other wills” there would be an inordinate appreciation for “powers that should have been long since over-ruled and dominated by the more human faculties.”²¹ Ideas, however, no matter what they were, should always be distinguished from the people who believed them. “What we have to fear is not a few evil individuals,” Gilman wrote, “but the

¹⁸Charlotte Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 105.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 162.

²⁰Charlotte Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 107.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 279, 26.

widespread continuance among the people at large of the basic ideas which alone enable such evil individuals to exist.”²² A social consciousness allowed one simultaneously to love the individual while hating the evil ideas that motivated the person (i.e., to love the racist while hating racism, to borrow a recent derivation).

Finally, the way a social consciousness was developed was simply by “action,” by doing.²³ If children were “accustomed” early in life “to perform social processes,” then they would “develop social faculties.”²⁴ Gilman believed “doing” would eventually lead to “being,” or would change peoples’ attitude; if people worked together, they would eventually think together, think collectively, and eventually, if people worked for the social good, they would acquire a social consciousness. A conscious choice would make the difference.²⁵

Corra Harris proved, however, the futility of trying to impart a social consciousness through modeling, persuasion, or any other known means, to someone who had otherwise a strong aversion to one.²⁶ To Harris, people who advocated a social consciousness were innocuous at best, but more probably, they were evil. Both the theorist and the activist were bad, but the former threatened Harris most. The worst of

²²Charlotte Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 162.

²³Charlotte Gilman, *Humanness*, p. 76; *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 246.

²⁴Charlotte Gilman, *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, p. 246.

²⁵Charlotte Gilman, *Women and Economics*, pp. 2, 42, 66; *Our Brains and What Ails Them*, pp. 52, 246; *Humanness*, pp. 20, 275, 330.

²⁶If Harris confirmed Gilman’s contention that domesticity thwarted a social consciousness, the complexity of her nature and her conflicted identity challenge the naivety of Gilman’s faith in the possibility of social transformation in three generations.

the theorists to her were professing socialists. Gilman was certainly one of them and had been a nemesis of Harris since their early debate on home in 1906 in *The Independent*, but Gilman caused Harris less grief than either Jack London or Upton Sinclair. In chapter two we noted that her debate with Gilman actually enhanced her reputation and brought out numbers of supporters. But when the subject was home, the debaters were women, and the issue tradition vs. anything besides tradition, the woman standing under the banner of the traditional home came out the winner every time. Position that same woman against a man, however, and the odds changed. Harris carried a few battle scars away from her rows with London and Sinclair. Her squabble with London caused her to resign her membership in the Author's League of America,²⁷ and her altercation with

²⁷However, it would be difficult to say which incident that happened at the Author's League banquet was the leading cause of Corra's resignation, whether it was the altercation there with London or the fact that she was "extremely unhappy over having dined with a negro" that evening. London was "probably far from being as decent a man as [W.E.B.] DuBois," she wrote a friend, but character had nothing to do with propriety, which London and DuBois both transgressed, London by behaving like a "ruffian," and DuBois by being "a negro." (Letter from Corra Harris to Adelaide Nealle, Feb. 15, 1914.)

Harris and London crossed swords through the mail in 1906 (see note 111 in chapter two), after publication of "The Walking Delegate Novelist," (*The Independent* {May 24, 1906}: 1214-15), but they did not actually meet each other until they both attended the Author's League banquet in 1914. Although the meeting between the two made Corra "miserable" and "embarrassed" her, the retelling of it is comical, and to a lesser extent, revealing of her disdain for his type. The effeminate language she uses at times to describe him is especially noteworthy.

Knowing that Corra would be at the banquet, London wrote the month before to ask if he could "call on" her sometime before the banquet but after he was finished with his business, to which he attended "like so much medicine. When the dosing has been accomplished I shall become human and social and come to take you by the hand and arrange truce or loose the dogs of war according to your heart's desire." (Jack London to Corra Harris, Jan. 22, 1914.) For whatever reason, whether her unwillingness or his failure to follow through, he did not "call on" Corra, but met her for the first time at the banquet.

She was surprised to discover about him that he was after all not "a magnificent brute of a fellow with noticable [sic] fists" that she had always "supposed" he was, but was rather a "fake ruffian." His behavior that evening was scandalous to Corra, and the fact that she catered to, rather than ignored him, became a source of humiliation and regret. So much so that she decided afterward "never to go again among so many strangers, not even in Paradise." Shortly after they had all finished listening to "William Jennings Bryant [sic]. . . make one of the poorest Sunday

Sinclair temporarily put a brake on her publication with *The Independent*.²⁸

School speeches" she ever heard, Corra wrote that London "caught sight of the name tag on [her] button." Nor was it an accident. She was embarrassed to admit to Ms. Nealle that she had actually "meant that he should." But she had no idea what would follow. He "stood up and announced [her name] so loud that Charlie Towns the poet heard him." Towns then responded, "'Corra Harris! Madam I love you! I always have.' I did not think that was so bad," Corra confessed, "though I was embarrassed [sic]." But "everybody seemed to be loving somebody." "I just bowed to him and said I was much obliged." Unfortunately for Corra, London would not let it go at that, but came over and "sat down by me." He managed in the brief encounter with his "loud talk" and audacious behavior to offend practically every sensibility Corra had. So to try and calm him down, she "compromised by writing my reply to something he said on a little pad he had. He retorted, begging the question, but telling me quite gratuitously that he was 'born in the stocks' and that he did not believe in God." It was the height of impropriety for a southern woman to be conversing openly with a professing atheist, but she had lost her window of opportunity by that time and she could not figure out how graciously "to get rid of him." Besides, something in her kept her from either excusing herself or bidding him leave. "I . . . know that he is a man of genius. That he is doing better, not worse with himself. It seems to me honorable always to be for such a man, not against him." Clearly, she had mixed feelings. As much as she despised him, he touched some heartstring. "I know that such a man must be at bottom sensitive," she observed, but then curiously wrote, "that he has good reason to despise himself, so I didn't want him to think I did not like him." As unruly as he was, for whatever reason, "I couldn't bear to snub him."

Finally, London did go away, and parted with a gesture that left Corra the golden opportunity to put him in his place, which, she was confident she did. "At last he did go, tearing the leaves out of his little pad and presenting them to me. I think he thought he was presenting me with a valuable souvenir. The next moment he knew he was not. I tore them up and laid them in my coffee cup saucer." Then she began to ponder what had made her feel so "miserable" and "embarrassed"; was it more his obnoxious behavior or the fact that she had indulged him. Likely it was because she simply had not been able to expose him in all his "conceit," and she felt "miserable" for having tried. "I hope God counted it to me for a grace that I endured it and was as nice to him as I knew how to be," she wrote. "I told him he made a fuss like a lion and that he had the heart of a lamb. I did not really believe that, but I did not think I ought to tell him he made a fuss more like an ass. An ass never likes to be recognized by his voice if he is a man." But London was no man. He was a "fake ruffian," merely a pretender of a man, and no such effeminate infidel should have been able to get the best of her. But the fact that he had and that the Author's League officials had set her at the table with "a negro" was more than she could take. She resigned within a matter of days. (Quotes taken from letter Corra Harris to Adelaide Nealle, Feb. 15, 1914. There are parts of three separate, handwritten copies of the same letter with slightly different wording in each. Quotes here come from all three. Letter to Robert Otis Haward of the Author's League on her resignation dated Feb. 1914, though the day is not clear.)

²⁸Corra's disregard for Upton Sinclair was no secret. *The Independent* had published many of her tirades which had proved to be good for business. While some of the editors there (Ward and Slosson to name two) wondered how far they should let her go, *Independent* editor, Hamilton Holt told her he would not "have [her] limited in [her] freedom of speech on account of a 'few old socialists,'" and "to keep it up," (Hamilton Holt to Corra Harris, Feb. 11, 13, 1909.) which she did for a while, until she stepped over the line in a review of Sinclair's *The Advance*

Harris believed both London and Sinclair did more harm than good with their heightened social awareness. London's "cosmic consciousness" and "splendid sense of humanity," were not "altogether desirable morally in their effect upon others," she wrote in "The Walking Delegate Novelist," an article published by *The Independent* in 1906. Moreover, that "consciousness" and "sense" were contagious. His uncanny ability to capture and recreate the consciousness of the "enemic classes," and thereby to "preach the gospel of the poor" was so persuasive that he had the average man on the street who formerly "was content to be a respectable member of society" wishing that he could "know how it feels to be a tramp also." In "The Walking Delegate Novelist," Harris exposed not only London and Sinclair but the likes of Edith Wharton, Frank Norris, and

of Civilization. It was apparently more than Sinclair could take and he came out fighting in a rebuttal. The incident caused such a row, Faith wrote home from college: "What on *earth* have you been doing lately to Upton Sinclair, Mama, that he should be so bursting with rage? . . . He is mad with a vengeance." Faith suggested that perhaps her mother should just dismiss Sinclair as a misguided writer who simply didn't understand all there was to know about the form and function of literature. If he were "sincere" in his cause, Faith said, he would avoid novels. He should know they "are weak mediums for a great movement of reform." "He has missed the whole calling of fiction. If he has anything to write why doesn't he put it in straight-forward article form?" (Faith Harris to Corra and Lundy Harris, Jan. 17, 1909). The altercation temporarily halted Corra's publication with *The Independent*. The response of the editorial staff actually made her angrier than did Sinclair's rebuttal. Editors Ward and Slosson refused to publish Corra's "temperate" response to Sinclair's "half a page of invective at my expense." Their reason for not doing so was what stirred her most. "Slosson and Ward said it would be a reflection upon my hosts among the socialists I met in New York two years ago." She was particularly incensed that she had not been "allowed since then to express a single opinion of socialism without having my obligations as a guest cast up as a buffer" (Harris to More, Feb. 24, 1909).

Talmadge explained why this incident caused such a fracas. "In 1907 [Sinclair] tried to appease and enlighten her with an invitation to Helicon Hall . . . She repaid his hospitality by an article in the *Independent* which announced that Mr. Sinclair's charitable hostelry 'sheltered more ungrateful guests and ignoble spies than any other home in New Jersey.' The host could, but did not, point out that she had qualified for both categories. Two years later, however, she goaded him beyond endurance. In reviewing Sinclair's *The Advance of Civilization* she stated as fact a rumor that he had served as a butler in a rich man's house to collect damning material for this book" (p. 32). Corra wrote More that Sinclair "said he would like for me to be sentenced to a year of poverty and misery in a garret" (Harris to More, 24 Feb. 1909).

William Dean Howells for inciting “lasting hatred between the masses and the classes.” They all had “the literary neurosis of a sort of moral despair.” The article made her fair game for critics, of whom Sinclair became only one of many noted writers.²⁹ The next year she accepted, reluctantly albeit, an invitation to stay at Sinclair’s Helicon Hall, or, as she called it, “some wild-cat club on Fifth Avenue.” Hamilton Holt had suggested that a stay there might have “a good and broadening effect . . . upon [her] soul,” and might give her “southern prejudices” a needed “shock.”³⁰ It had the opposite effect, however, and merely roused further contempt on her part for socialists and their cause. Her stay there, “for which [she] paid regular hotel rates!” convinced her only that socialists were guilty of “bribery” and double motives.³¹

However, writing to or about hard-core socialists like Gilman, London, or Sinclair caused fires she had too often to put out. It was safer to write about anonymous activists, or simply about the misguided cause of social reform, or “public-mindedness,” in general. Her favorite focus on the subject was women involved in the public sphere, whether in social reform or civic responsibilities. They were perhaps the last women with whom Corra could relate. “I could never lead a movement or get stirred up about public affairs,” she wrote. “Let the public manage its own affairs, was my motto.”³² Indeed she had

²⁹Novelist Rebecca Harding Davis, for instance, wrote Hamilton Holt Jan. 3, 1908 about another but similarly inflammatory story of Corra’s they had recently published. “The whole story is manifestly an invention and its only purpose can be to fan the hatred between the two races. Is that a purpose which it is wise for you to encourage?” In General Correspondence in the *Corra Harris Collection*.

³⁰Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 13 Dec. 1906.

³¹Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 24 Feb. 1909.

³²Corra Harris, “Obsolete Womanhood,” *Saturday Evening Post*, Aug. 24, 1929, p. 6.

declined the request of a particular “personable old maid” who had asked her to “lead a liberty loan Drive.” Corra simply was not cut out for that sort of thing. “I told her how it was. She was impatient but I think she got it clearly in her mind that I was not the person to do that work.”³³ However, it was not just “personable old maids” that she rejected. She refused to accept the governor’s appointment of her to a committee “to get up the memorial for the soldiers [of World War I] who fell in battle.” She wrote him to “decline this honor,” explaining to her daughter, “I have no time, and it would weigh on me all the year, a job never done, involving much labor and voluminous correspondence.”³⁴

She wrote about the socially and economically damaging effects of women in reform efforts: “Mark my words,” she warned, “the rich, restless, tender-hearted, public-spirited women are doing as much as the most adverse conditions in the labor market to increase pauperism in the country.”³⁵ And she remained convinced that there was a distinct “connection between the development of women’s interest in the welfare of the whole world and the astounding increase in the youthful criminal class.”³⁶ But it was not the effect women’s involvement in the public had on society that Corra was most passionate about. It was what it did to them personally. It ruined them for private life.

What happened to women once they gained a social consciousness was to Corra worse than any good they could possibly accomplish in the balance. Once women gained a “sense of their duty to the world,” then “a pain[ed] and changed expression” came over

³³Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, Sept. 1, 1918.

³⁴Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, April 1919, Box 12:3.

³⁵Corra Harris, “Sob Sister Citizens,” *Ladies Home Journal*, Feb. 1925, p. 29.

³⁶Corra Harris, “The Happy Day,” p. 26.

them. "They no longer merely twinkle; they achieve and shine." No longer was a sense of "being" good enough for them; they now had to be "up and doing." This new consciousness caused them to "wear the sharpened, hurried, worried look of workers and burden bearers at large, not the sweet dim, withered look women wear like decoration, performing their own duties and prayers."³⁷ This awakened consciousness was "bad for [the women themselves], profaning to some essential decency and delicacy of womanhood."³⁸ The more militant the woman was, especially if the cause was her own rights, the more unattractive and unnatural she was. Militant women were inevitably "cruel women," who were "an abomination, an abortion of Nature," she wrote.³⁹ Active involvement in social reform made women physically unattractive. Once women became involved in reform efforts they lost their personal appeal in general, but more particularly they lost their appeal to men. No man "could give his whole heart to such a woman."⁴⁰ Corra was willing to concede "the sincerity of their purpose to reform, improve, and save the world." "But I mistrust their judgment,"⁴¹ she wrote. "I particularly mistrust their power to achieve their own wills."⁴² Any woman who would choose a cause over the approval and love of a man had dubious judgment. But even if their judgment were

³⁷Corra Harris, "The Happy Day," p. 26.

³⁸Corra Harris, "Notes About Women," Box 70:11. Typed manuscript, possibly a speech.

³⁹Corra Harris, "The New Militants," *Saturday Evening Post*, Nov. 21, 1914, p. 3.

⁴⁰Corra Harris, "Notes About Women."

⁴¹Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 166.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 166.

correct, women in general were incompetent to achieve their ends.

Being the highly visible person she was in the national press, Corra could remain aloof but not always completely removed from public issues. Two in particular drew her reluctantly into the political fray: She was forced to take a stand on both U.S. involvement in World War I and also on Suffrage for women. Her waffling over the issue of suffrage shows Corra at her political worst. She never fully supported suffrage, was never able to “commit” herself to the idea of suffrage, she told a group of club women assembled to hear about her trip abroad to gather “impressions” on the “variations of femininity according to nationality.”⁴³ She never supported suffrage without reservation, not even after it was politically correct to do so. “I am not a sufferage [sic] by conviction, not by temperament or disposition. I am one regretfully because I ought to be one,”⁴⁴ she wrote the county commission trying to persuade them to pave the road in front of her house by threatening to use her soon-to-be-acquired political right to vote as leverage. Her reasons for not supporting suffrage until the end, and then only “regretfully,” reveal just how keenly gender identity could depoliticize women’s opinions.

In the first place, in her thinking, “The ballot has already been too carelessly bestowed in this country,” she wrote. In fact, “one of the greatest problems that the next generation is to face,” with regard to the franchise, “will be disfranchising enough people.

⁴³Corra Harris, Untitled speech written and delivered sometime between 1911 and 1913, Box 98:17.

⁴⁴Corra Harris to a Dr. Young, Apr. 5, 1920. Dr. Young was on the board of the county commission.

And nothing should be added to the increasing political confusion of our times by enfranchising all women at once.” There was “nothing more injurious to a race or class of people than to have the ballot given them before they achieve it.”⁴⁵ Voting was, in fact, a civic obligation Corra found onerous once she gained it, and would have preferred personally not to have had it. Unfortunately for her, instead of being able to “slip down into the drooling peace of old age” that she had planned for herself when she was younger, now that she had lived beyond suffrage, she “must keep [her] wits sharpened for conscience sake.” She would accept her responsibility of voting, but she had serious doubts about what would be the outcome of full citizenship. It seemed to Corra it was voting that led to the power that corrupted. “I must begin to mix politics with religion,” she complained, “which may teetotally ruin my religion at the very last, when I shall be in the gravest need of it. Apt as not I shall backslide and turn some trick in the fervor of a political campaign. Better people than I have fallen from grace this way.”⁴⁶ Human nature was simply incapable of resisting the will to power. In keeping with her southern roots, several years before suffrage passed, Corra wrote, “I have never worried over the serfdom of my sex as some nobler women have because I have observed the

⁴⁵Corra Harris, “Price of Suffrage for American Women,” *Saturday Evening Post*, Oct. 23, 1909, p. 11. Unlike some of her contemporaries who shared her belief that the franchise was too broadly offered already, she did not, like they, believe the remedy was to extend the franchise to women, but simply to disfranchise undesirable men, i.e., illiterate immigrants, free blacks, and, theoretically since practically it was of no effect, freedmen in the South. For the origins of racist and ethnic bias in the thinking of women suffragists see Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent women's Movement in America 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), especially chapter four.

⁴⁶Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 309.

disintegrating effects of the ballot upon men.”⁴⁷ It had a corrupting influence about it that had brought out the worst in men. There was no telling what it would do to women.

“[N]o one can even imagine what faults women will develop as citizens,”⁴⁸ once they had to “face his temptations and risk the chance of being elected to some indelicate office, like that of sheriff.”⁴⁹

But since she had to take a stand as a public personality, she would choose her position carefully, and that careful choice would be determined, not by principle but by appearance. Although she would never join any women’s organization⁵⁰ whether pro or anti-suffrage, she was not about to ally herself, even in stated position, with any group acting out of line. Corra believed that agitating for anything by anybody was bad form,

⁴⁷Corra Harris, “The Women and the Future,” *The Independent* (May 14, 1908): 1090.

⁴⁸Corra Harris, “Price of Suffrage,” p. 56.

⁴⁹Corra Harris, “The Women and the Future,” p. 1090.

⁵⁰For a contemporary, non-historical look at the issue, especially as it relates to women’s inability to connect with other women, see Patricia Gurin and Hazel Markus, “Cognitive Consequences of Gender Identity,” in Suzanne Skevington and Deborah Baker, eds. *The Social Identity of Women* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1989), pp. 152-72. Gurin and Markus are two contemporary social psychologists who were interested in discovering the relationship between a woman’s political and gender identity. The inability to identify with other women they discovered to be a common trait of strongly gender identified women. Gurin and Markus concluded that traditional gender identity impedes the development of political identity by impeding the cognition of any kind of common cause or common consciousness among women. Women with strong, traditional gender identities were incapable of thinking in terms of “we” with other women. The disability was more than incidental, it directly undermined social awareness and political consciousness. Gurin and Markus “found that the sense of common fate would be influential in political consciousness because it involves an awareness of categories and of categorical treatment that is necessary to perceive group disparities; it helps members overcome attributional biases that limit perception of structural and therefore illegitimate causes of these disparities; and it stimulates collective approaches to the removal of barriers now perceived as categorically based.” Women with traditional gender identities were unable to perceive that they had anything in common with other women. “[C]ommon fate representations were less prevalent in the identities of traditional women. But when they were present, they promoted feminist, not anti-feminist, political cognitions.” Gurin and Markus, pp. 167-68.

but it was a form made worse when women were the agitators. Even when she was a professing (but always reluctant) suffragist, she was not part of the suffrage movement.⁵¹ She explains, “though I am a suffragist, I have not allied myself with any suffrage body, because I do not, I cannot, approve of the development of a spirit of antagonism between men and women.”⁵² The most important issue to Corra was private relationships between men and women; there could be no larger concern.

Women might consider an alternative to “abusive methods in their suffrage pleading”⁵³ that promoted antagonism. They might resort to “printer’s ink,” or the written word, the way Ida Tarbell did, for instance. Miss Tarbell was an enigma to Corra, but one to be studied. It is unclear from her published remarks on Ida Tarbell if Corra knew Tarbell was an antisuffragist. What is clear is her admiration for a woman who managed to keep the appearance of femininity while at the same time being active in political affairs. It was to her nothing short of a “miracle.” “There is something funny about a lady in a lace waist and fancy skirt asking for the ballot,” Corra wrote in an article warning of the “price” American women would pay for suffrage. “[B]ut Miss Tarbell’s exposure of the Standard Oil Company, and her even more significant revelations of the high-tariff trust, are not humorous.” Whatever her position on suffrage, Corra admired her tactics in

⁵¹Corra may have chosen to support suffrage if only in a lukewarm way in the early days instead of openly oppose it for Faith’s sake. The college Faith attended in Baltimore supported suffrage. It would have been difficult for Faith to save face if her mother, who was somewhat a celebrity there, if only because of Faith’s status as student, had been a vocal anti-suffragist.

⁵²Marguerite Mooers Marshall, “Every Women [sic] Is Born in Search of a Husband: The Shop Girl Has Better Chance than Rich Girl,” *The Evening World*, Mar. 14, 1914. Interview.

⁵³Corra Harris, “Men and women--And the ‘Woman Question,’” *The Independent* (Feb. 2, 1914): 164.

investigating without fanfare and revealing through the printed medium what she uncovered about Standard Oil. Tarbell's tactics were so clever that, if only a "few thousand well-informed women with a place to publish what they discover" would follow her lead, "suffrage [would] be actually offered as a bribe of silence."⁵⁴

Corra believed someone should set the record straight about Ida Tarbell, who had been misrepresented by pictures in the press. "They represent her with a severe, almost masculine countenance. As a matter of fact," Corra wrote, "she is distinctly feminine in appearance." It was difficult to believe that the "gentle and engaging expression" on Ida Tarbell's face actually managed to "conceal a mind which has so tenacious a grip upon affairs usually left for men to discuss."⁵⁵ But Tarbell did, and Corra believed that Tarbell and her type, not their vocal and visible counterparts, were the women who should be cast as ideal role models for young girls. Tarbell contrasted sharply with Carrie Chapman Catt, an activist that Corra "respected," but, because she did not have the same soft appearance of Tarbell, Catt was not someone to emulate. Corra's "first impression [of Catt] was that I could never love such a woman, even in case I should feel obliged to honor and respect her." Nor could any man "give his whole heart to such a woman," which again, for Corra, was the real issue.⁵⁶

For women who did not have the savvy or other intellectual wherewithal to follow Miss Tarbell's lead, they still might employ more feminine tactics in the cause. Corra

⁵⁴Corra Harris, "Price of Suffrage," p. 56.

⁵⁵Corra Harris, "The Literary Spectrum of New York," *The Independent* (Mar. 30, 1914): 442.

⁵⁶Corra Harris, "Notes About Women."

was convinced such tactics would be more effective. "They say we will never get the suffrage by asking for it prettily and sweetly. I say we will never get it any other way. . . . I have no use for the shrew-citizen or for the potential shrew-citizen."⁵⁷ The archetype of this "shrew-citizen" was, of course, the suffragettes in England. "If Mrs. Pankhurst and the other hunger-strikers were made to work while they are in prison, they would have to eat. Being alone in a cell only makes them morbid," she told a news reporter.⁵⁸ Corra would distance herself as far as possible from this type. She would support suffrage, only if she could be "gentle, mild, peaceful, not excited over it."⁵⁹ Too "excited" and disorderly was the way Corra saw women in the movement, at least until just before the amendment passed. Then a change in their manner was obvious. She was present in the senate when the amendment was turned down for the last time in February 1919. "I noticed a great change in the mind and manner of these people in two years' time," she reported on her way back to Georgia. "I heard not one shrewdish remark or bitter comment when the resolution was lost, i.e. in the suffrage part of the gallery, though I did hear some cat-spitting on the other side of the gallery."⁶⁰ "Cat-spitting" was anything but feminine. It was no doubt those "cat-spitting" Antis who caught the eye of legislators that did harm to their cause. It also helped explain, no doubt, to Corra why the amendment

⁵⁷Marshall, "Every Women [sic]"

⁵⁸Corra Harris, "Woman Writer Leaves New York for Georgia Home," *Evening Post*, Mar. 14, 1914.

⁵⁹Corra Harris, "A Southern Woman Author: Mrs. Corra Harris on the Problems of her Sex," *The Sun*, June 3, 1911.

⁶⁰Corra Harris, "Mrs. Corra Harris Discusses the Defeatt [sic] of the Anthony Amendment," clipped from newspaper marked Montgomery, Alabama, Feb. 17, 1919.

finally passed the next time around.

Remarkably, Corra had a hard time understanding why organized suffragists did not like her. "I am interested in suffrage," she told a reporter, "and the keenest disappointment of my visits to New York is that I've never been invited to a meeting to see the suffragists actively at work, but my interest is like that of Zaccheus up the tree."⁶¹ But suffrage as an issue, as a principle of rights, never meant anything to Corra, which must have been obvious to those at the national level, and Corra was notorious for turning down offers to get involved in any reform efforts at a lesser level. She engaged in the debate only when forced to do so, and then only by expressing the most politically expedient position. The personality, bearing, appearance, and tactics of the activists determined what Corra's position would be. Which ever groups of them were unacceptable to public opinion would be even more unacceptable to Corra.

The heart of the issue for Corra was that she believed men could not love women who fought for their rights. "I prefer to remain the victim of man's love and injustice rather than compete with him politically."⁶² To Corra, rights were a laughable substitute for the love of man. No cause for any woman should ever threaten her relationship with man. Anything she did to jeopardize that was wrong and unnatural. In Corra's mind the love of man was woman's only real security. As long as romantic love and women's rights could not coexist--and in her mind, they never really could--Corra would choose the security of man's love over the novelty of rights. She would not take her chances in

⁶¹Corra Harris, "A Southern Woman Author."

⁶²Corra Harris, "The Women and the Future," p. 1090.

unchartered territory.

A similarly expedient motive governed her involvement in the war cause. Her patriotism was never in question, at least not to her, and neither should patriotism be in question for any woman. She addressed the Women's Council of National Defense in Cartersville, Georgia in January 1918:

[I]t is immoral and dishonorable to show by word or act your antagonism to the aims of this Government. If you are opposed to this war, if you have made yourself the carping critic of the demands that are laid upon us by this great emergency, you should get out of this organization, and stay out. You are not fit to serve and the government does not need or want you.⁶³

Pacifism was not a pretty trait, and it made women "carping critics." But then, even patriot women turned Corra off. Her aversion to any organized group became a real obstacle around the time of the war. It was a genuine dilemma for her, she wrote Faith:

I do so want to feel that I did not fail to help, but I cannot bear the feminine machinery of women war workers. It makes too much fuss. It requires too much publicity. I cannot help thinking all the time that it is in some measure the pastime of idle women, or women so accustomed to idleness that they make a great fuss about anything.⁶⁴

Anytime there were women in numbers, Corra got nervous. She felt guilty about her apparent lack of patriotism, but she just could not bring herself to ally with other women in the cause.

The best way for Corra to contribute to the war effort, she became convinced, was to do so quietly through her routine publications. She had reason to believe they were

⁶³Corra Harris, Address to Women's Council of National Defense in Cartersville, Georgia, Jan. 24, 1918. Box 98:5.

⁶⁴Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, "Sunday afternoon, 1918," Box 11:8.

successful. George Horace Lorimer of the *Saturday Evening Post* who appointed her as one of the magazine's first war correspondents told her in the early years of the war, "it seems to me that the best writing which you have done for the past few years is in these papers on the war."⁶⁵ Who could question her patriotism when someone from the War Department wrote "thanking [her] for 'the splendid article' [she] sent them," which she had written on the war. It was among the ones considered "anti-German propaganda" by authors Ernest Pool and George Creel, both responsible for getting such copy to foreign countries. Pool wrote advising her how they were using her articles and asking her for "more stuff."⁶⁶ Nonetheless, even with such assurance, she still wondered about her image. In spite of all her articles, "I feel a bit guilty because I do not seem to show up at all as a patriot."⁶⁷ Political appearances, if not political issues, meant everything to Corra.

Corra's social philosophy relied heavily on the separation of spheres. There should be a distinct and permanent divide between private life, which included one's property and nuclear family, and public life, which included virtually everything else. Corra regretted that the personal and private had become so political. Institutions in the public sphere had reached well beyond their legitimate boundaries in the efforts of the public-minded to reshape society. She lamented the fact that the personal was becoming political:

⁶⁵George Horace Lorimer to Corra Harris, Nov. 20, 1914.

⁶⁶Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, "Sunday afternoon, 1918," Box 11:8.

⁶⁷Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leech, "Sunday afternoon, 1918," Box 11:8.

The greatest change I have seen during my lifetime . . . is that there is now no distinction between the problems men formerly worked out for themselves and public problems; but every issue that arises now in the lives of the American people, whether private, social or industrial, is immediately resolved into a political issue.⁶⁸

At bottom, the private sphere was the only place where good could be found, and the public sphere a place incompatible with good in any form. The reasons had to do with the affinity of humans for private existence. "The human animal is wild, an extremely private kind of a creature. He loves, sins, does what he does as secretly as possible. That is his nature."⁶⁹ As soon as Corra had the means, she bought the kind of privacy she believed everyone needed to live happily. The Valley was her fortress against the cares of a troubled world. It was a place far removed from people, a place "where the song of birds is the real language one hears," a place where there was "no wealth, no learning, and much natural wisdom of the woods, the hills and streams." The few people there were in the Valley Corra knew, but "only as one knows a little prose, a little poetry, and a few Scriptures, not personally nor intimately." Her "real reason" for moving there "was to escape the mind and will of the world, to practice my own will and mind in living and so find happiness."⁷⁰ But the Valley was not able to bring Corra the happiness she moved there to find. Actually she was not exactly sure what happiness was. But she was pretty sure it was something "selfish and satisfying." She knew that much about it by having

⁶⁸Corra Harris, "A Woman Takes a Look at Politics," p. 133.

⁶⁹Corra Harris, "Marriage--New Profession or Old Miracle," p. 234.

⁷⁰Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 245.

“missed it.”⁷¹

As Corra saw it, social problems could be traced to close living conditions found in cities. “We are trying to live too close to one another when it is the very nature of every one of us to live at least half a mile from the next man.”⁷² When man was forced to live among others, it was not that he lost his innocence; oddly, he shared his personal guilt and by a sort of osmosis, took on the guilt of the “aggregate life of the world.” “He is no longer guilty of his own sins,” and that was not good. He lost “sight of the everlasting truth which belongs just to the individual”: that his “own personal virtue” should remain personal and private. When instead “he makes a gift of [his personal virtue] to civilization,” develops his own “phase of ‘social conscience,’” and attempts through his work to bring about reform, he wastes his personal virtue, then “die[s] leaving behind [him] a thousand more things wrong than were wrong when [he] began this business” of reform, she wrote reminiscent of Paul More.⁷³ Having one’s home as isolated as possible made it so much easier to fulfill one’s “chief end of life,” which, again, was “to do your job, and to bring up a private personal family of your own . . .”⁷⁴

Although it was more in character for Corra to blame women than men for most everything, she believed the trend that was moving people from the private to the public sphere was actually the fault of men. Men were “no longer husbands and fathers,” she wrote, “so much as they are citizens, financiers, wage earners, persons who live outside

⁷¹Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 184-85.

⁷²Corra Harris, “New York as Seen from a Georgia Valley,” p. 97.

⁷³Corra Harris, “New York as Seen from a Georgia Valley,” p. 97.

⁷⁴Corra Harris, “Upton Sinclair and Helicon Hall,” p. 712.

the home and whose interests are too much on the outside.” Nothing men could offer their wives could make up for their absence at home. Corra believed herein could be found all sorts of reasons why there had grown a “feminist movement” of late. She explained:

To be sure, as many of them as can afford it have satisfied their consciences and vanity by providing their women with good homes, luxuries, and servants. But this has only added to the woman’s discontent. She does not want to stay in her home. Her companion has deserted her. Naturally she wishes to follow him. That is the milk in the coconut, the reason why she stays upon the streets so much, why she passes the time dressing herself and just dancing, or in agitating for her rights. She really wants to follow him the same as Ruth followed Moab. And she is right about it. His god should be her god, his people her people, where he goes she will go, and he cannot keep her from following. A woman who is left behind with the children and the baggage is bound to make too much fuss to be endured.⁷⁵

If men wanted to end the “fuss” being made by feminists, they should go home where good people belonged and their women would follow.

Corra’s belief that women were even more private by nature than men explained the thinking that women governed more effectively through influence than action. “Nature intended us [women especially] for private life,” she told one reporter who interviewed her about the social changes since World War I. It was regrettable that the “war made a lot of women with neighborhood minds world conscious.” Taking them out of the home “brought only an increase of personal expenses and more competition against” them. It might be true that “the service of women in public affairs . . . commands immense respect,” still they would be much better off to return to their homes,

⁷⁵Corra Harris, “Men and Women--And the ‘Woman Question,’” p. 164.

to their “career behind the scenes, where most power is exerted with less noise.”⁷⁶

As archly private creatures women naturally “exerted power” through influence, but the range of that influence was limited to their immediate families. She explained:

[W]omen are all tribal in their instincts. Their diplomacy has to do with one man, not with a thousand, and this is one pathetic boundary of their political faculty. They cannot think beyond the tent shadow of something primitive in them. There is something catholic about political thinking of which they are still incapable.⁷⁷

Women were a lot more effective at making “the world safer and better for men and children . . . before we lost our grip on the situation and became public-spirited citizens at large.” When women stuck to the “strictly interior department of national governments known as the home,” they were effective at “the nose-leading of intractable husbands and the souls of growing children,” which was woman’s purpose. But that environment was “the private school of politics” only, and did not train women in the kind of “sound doctrines” useful in the leading of national governments.⁷⁸

Women who were public spirited, who spent their lives on reform efforts and in public work, all were bound to find out in the end that they had been duped. “Our national life must be enriched by her efforts, but it doth not yet appear what her own personal reward will be.” Whatever good she accomplished would be little consolation for her when she faced old age alone. She will have spent herself for society only to

⁷⁶Frank Daniel, “Corra Harris Gives Views on Woman Auto Drivers, Careers and Ruth Elder,” *The Atlanta Journal*, no date. Box 110:30.

⁷⁷Corra Harris, “Price of Suffrage,” p. 10.

⁷⁸Corra Harris, “A Woman takes a Look at Politics,” *Saturday Evening Post*, June 14, 1931, p. 25.

discover in her old age that her sacrifices cost her personal fulfillment. She would reach her seniority a lonely and empty woman. “[T]o have been able, efficient or even famous in the days of your strength is neither comforting nor satisfying at the very last, when you are old and tired and in need of the intimate consolations of love and a softer companionship than political associations can give.” In Corra’s mind women who left the private sphere had nothing to gain and everything to lose. “What will it profit the modern middle-aged woman to gain the whole world and reform it if she loses her mental and spiritual attitude toward peace and happiness at the very end of her days. . . . Merely worldly praise makes her peevish then; what she needs is private peace and a quiet heart, not so much wisdom of life which has become useless.”⁷⁹

This gentle art of affecting through influence rather than direct agency lies at the root of Corra’s thinking on the proper role of women in society and can be found in one of her speeches glorifying the “woman of yesterday” as an ideal. This woman had been the salt of the earth, she had “produced” rather than “consumed” as the vulgar trend was coming to be. She had “founded the best and most stable American home that has ever existed, and she maintained it with a dignity and dilligence [sic] which the woman of today cannot surpass. She produced great men, not great issues.” Significantly, however, all her production was a passive exertion. She produced almost mysteriously everything good around her, but

she did not produce herself at all. She was only the blessed modicum through which all life flowed, receiving from her a certain fineness, a color of the spirit, a

⁷⁹Corra Harris, “The Happy Woman: Does the Dynamic Marvel of Today Gain Peace or Regret?” *Ladies Home Journal*, Nov. 1923, p. 33.

vague and gentle effulgence. She was not the epocal [sic] woman, she was the mother and patient prophet of that woman.⁸⁰

No matter how visible were the new women, the career women, the “advanced women,” “the great majority of women are still just women.” And that was good, because those who were “just women,”

belong to the order of eternal women that remains the same in all times. Education does not change them, experience does not enlighten them. It only confirms them. They are the same cryptic mother-eyed creatures that have always lived silently behind the scenes and in the dim wings of the world. They do not belong to the stage of action, but to God, and to men and to little children. They have never lived in the sense that people of the world live, but their lives have been preordained and put upon them, like some Order of the Virgin which binds them to Heaven. They do three things with ineffable grace. They pray, bear children, and keep hearthstones like altar places for purity and brightness. They survive the monotony of their existence without becoming listless, rebellious or depraved, because over and above the capacity for faith common to us all, they possess a power of illusion peculiar to themselves. . . . And once this illusion she casts between her and the dark is destroyed, she is ready to fling herself “anywhere out of the world.” For it is not the nature of such women, good or bad, not to be able to deal with reality. There is no wit in their wickedness and no ethics in their goodness.⁸¹

This ideal woman whose power was not of action but of influence had perhaps the greatest responsibility. By surviving the “monotony of [her] existence,” she kept the social order intact. She “prayed, bore children, and kept hearthstones like altar places.” But the hearthstone this woman guarded was a lonely place, so lonely that she survived

⁸⁰Corra Harris, Speech at a Home Economics Dinner, at the Hotel Astor, New York, May 25, 1916.

⁸¹Corra Harris, “The Women and the Future,” p. 1092.

only through the power she had of illusion, a power stronger than faith. Because without that illusion she would leave the hearthstone and “fling herself ‘anywhere out of the world.’” Someone had to keep up the illusion of the sanctity of the hearthstone in Corra’s world or all would crumble.

This ideal woman had no capacity to think or feel for anyone or anything beyond her family altar, nor to Corra did she need the capacity to think or feel for anyone other than her own. Corra never learned to think or feel beyond a very self-enclosed world, although she had an intellectual understanding of the need for compassion, and how sometimes the “aching of one’s own bones makes one compassionate in a general sense of other people’s feelings,” she wrote Paul More. “And if this is the way I reason, I have no doubt you gentlemen in the office wish that mine ached oftener.”⁸² But Corra’s “bones ached” plenty. She had more than enough heartache in her lifetime, that if the common experience of painful loss had been all that was necessary to effect empathy, compassion, and a sense of connectedness to others, she would have been overflowing. But she was not. She purposely made herself stop feeling. It seemed easier that way. She discovered as we saw in the last chapter that “the less agonizing I cared, the less I suffered.”⁸³ Empathy and compassion, or the capacity to feel for others, were feminine and hence weak traits. Besides, without them there was less pain. The equation of compassion with weakness and femininity, and the belief that without them one could avoid pain were

⁸²Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, July 19, 1901.

⁸³Corra Harris to Faith Harris Leach, n.d. 1910 is date speculated by the archivist, but since Lundy died in September and Faith did not announce her marriage to Harry for certain until after her father’s death, I expect the date is likely later.

compelling motives to deny their impulse, which she managed to do so thoroughly there finally was no more impulse left. Thirty years after she wrote the above letter to More alluding to the absence of compassion in herself, she stated at a public forum in a discussion on what to do with misguided youths: “I have discovered in myself that remorse is a weakness.”⁸⁴ Remorse or any empathetic feeling to Corra was a sign of weakness; one might even conclude that she considered empathetic feeling a character flaw. The “sentimental conscience,” she wrote in *As a Woman Thinks*, “is the thief in your breast. The more you give, the more will it urge you to give; the more you sacrifice, the greater sacrifices will it demand of you. I am determined to stop gratifying my conscience. I am far more honorable and sensible than it is. I shall be guided by my sense.”⁸⁵ Living the exclusive existence she chose guaranteed that Corra’s values and moral choices would survive any challenge self-doubt might have introduced from time to time.

When asked, she was glad to share her belief that the same “sense” that governed her personal choices should govern those as well of political leaders and policy makers who should be even more uncompromising in their standards than she or any individual. They should be kept to the eternal principle that justice should always precede mercy. That was an unbending rule. Only God in his “omniscience, omnipotence and wisdom” could show mercy, but humans should never “try to imitate” God. “Never be deceived;

⁸⁴Corra Harris, “Discussion on Evil.”

⁸⁵Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 311.

justice comes before mercy--otherwise mercy becomes a crime against law and order.”⁸⁶ “So much compassion” in the public sphere merely nurtured crime.⁸⁷ “Our sentimental citizenship in this country is fostering too many weaklings now.”⁸⁸ It was a sad day for civilization when “Whole nations [were going bankrupt] on a jag produced by the inebriation of sentimentality.”⁸⁹ “What the world really needs is to have its emotional nature disciplined and trained even more carefully than we take the pains to develop the purely mental faculties.”⁹⁰ When compassion became a principle of government, government lost control of the people. Religious societies that had ruled through fear had much more control over their citizens than this country had in the twentieth century. Control by fear might no longer be popular, “but there were worse things than control by fear,” she wrote, “such as no control at all.”⁹¹

For Corra there were no in-betweens. There was either “control by fear” or “no control at all,” but control was the issue. On a more personal level, which is where Corra preferred to stay, one either controlled one’s emotions or was controlled by them. In her world, her own self was for so long all she had any power to control, and she developed that ability to a fine art. Although she managed to develop a strong core of personal identity, a strong sense of personal freedom, it was an identity she could experience only

⁸⁶Corra Harris, “Sob Sister Citizens,” p. 29.

⁸⁷Corra Harris, “A Woman Takes a Look at Politics,” p. 129.

⁸⁸Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 311.

⁸⁹Corra Harris, “The Pharisee’s Lament,” *Saturday Evening Post*, Dec. 19, 1931, p. 32.

⁹⁰Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 124.

⁹¹Corra Harris, “The Pharisee’s Lament,” p. 83.

in isolation. The women in her stories and those she describes elsewhere as ideal have no core identity, or those who do suffer the same kind of alienation and regret that she did. The ideal women had strength, but it was not a strength of character, it was a power over themselves of illusion. They nor she ever had, nor in her mind did they ever need a sense or appreciation of others outside self and family. The limits of her understanding of human connectedness was family, close family. That was why romantic love was everything to her; why, more than anything else in life, fame, “riches,” or “salvation,” “what I wanted above everything,” she wrote in *My Book and Heart*, “was a lover”;⁹² why women made a “religion of love”; and why romantic love was the “strongest illusion” in woman’s life.⁹³

Corra blamed her sense of alienation late in life on having denied her feminine side, or having denied traits she identified as feminine--emotion, sentiment, empathy, compassion. It was the ultimate “mistake” of her life, she believed. Reflecting on the sort of emptiness she felt and pondering its cause, she wrote, “nothing we win, even if it is everything, can possibly satisfy us. I suppose this is one of those terrific provisions of Providence to keep us doing and moving toward some far-off divine event.” After “wearing her virtues to a frazzle and ...about to grow old in sorrowful defeats without attaining even the bright rim of the cup of happiness,” Corra discovered “now, when

⁹²Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 60. Because of what it did to prevent women from realizing their human potential, Nobel Laureate, Toni Morrison, wrote that romantic love was probably one of the two “most destructive ideas in the history of human thought.” (The other “idea” was physical beauty.) *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972, orig. published 1970) p. 97.

⁹³Corra Harris, “A Man’s Relation to the Two Sexes,” *Independent* (26 May 1904): 1190.

maybe it is too late, . . . the mistake I made.”⁹⁴ The “mistake” she identified was that of “thinking” and writing instead of “practicing some kind of feminine wit,” instead of learning the “mysteries of feminine consciousness.”⁹⁵ But she wanted to be able to feel what she believed a woman was supposed to be able to feel for the purpose of being able to appreciate what she had attained, not for the purpose of feeling for others. The realization of a need for human connectedness never penetrated Corra’s consciousness. Furthermore, even after acknowledging that the emotional side of humanity was a fundamental part of what gave life meaning, she nonetheless still referred to the feelings she identified as desirable in patronizing terms. They remained in her thinking inferior traits.

It was not, however, gender or gender identity *per se* that explains the absence of a social consciousness in Corra’s perspective, and by inference, the sense of alienation she expressed in most of her later works. It was a cultural environment that ascribed rank and value to various human traits in gendered terms. Feeling, emotion, empathy, compassion, were feminine traits and considered inferior; reasoning, rationality and an absence of feeling were masculine and became the standard. The latter traits were considered superior since they were the ones supposedly necessary to succeed in the modern world. Moreover, the modern world required, not human connection, but rather human control. But because the facade of freedom and liberty had always to survive, that human control had to remain in the subtlest of forms. To the extent that control became even more

⁹⁴Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, 245-46.

⁹⁵Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 250.

essential in the South than elsewhere, the exaggeration of gender differences there, the genuine valuing of the masculine over the feminine, were even more deeply rooted, human control even more essential (if not more subtle), and the facade of liberty even more spectacular considering the obvious existence of the race and class caste there.⁹⁶ And while Corra fought to deny her feminine side, she never once failed to claim her southern identity. It was a constant source of pride. Considering the complexity of regional and gender identity in Corra's life, the wonder is not that she lived a life of contradictions, but that she managed any degree of personal identity of her own.

Whatever her complex personal identity, though, even that which transcended the limits of gender, it is vital to understand what made her believe, as quoted in the beginning, that after all, "every man finally manages to be a law unto himself."⁹⁷ That was the real "illusion" that afflicted Corra's thinking, that blinded her vision, and in very complex and invidious ways prohibited any chances that she might come to think of herself as a social being, as one connected in integral ways with the rest of humanity outside herself. The ideas that encouraged and sustained that "illusion" are the subject of the concluding chapter.

⁹⁶The proverbial pedestal, of course, was the ultimate facade of women's superiority, but there is literature in abundance, primary and increasingly secondary, to indicate that many southern women were always aware of the pedestal as a mockery, and hence aware that female traits were considered inferior. Corra is a classic example of a woman who refused in her private life to be relegated to a pedestal. Her fragmented essence, however, is the strongest evidence possible of the double bind women face when they pursue personal liberty by means of the existing paradigm.

⁹⁷Corra Harris, "A Woman Takes a Look at Politics," p. 133.

Chapter 8

“IT ALL DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU MEAN BY HOME”: A PRIVATIZED ABODE vs. A ROOM OF ONE’S OWN

The challenge in conclusion is to distinguish how Corra Harris’s notion of privacy differs in fundamental ways from that of the human need for a “room of one’s own,” and how that fundamental difference was enough to prevent her, and anyone whose thinking was similarly circumscribed, from ever developing a social consciousness. Part of the challenge is in defining precisely what is meant by home, which is both a physical space and a timeless idea. Home as a very powerful idea, a concept that transcends time, takes precedence here. To be able to comprehend the difference between “home as a physical place and space, and being at home as a mental or spiritual condition” is essential here.¹

It is also essential to be able to comprehend how the “images” we harbor about home

¹George Kateb, “Exile, Alienation, and Estrangement,” from special edition of *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Social Sciences*, Vol. 58, no. 1(Spring, 1991):135-138; p. 135. (At the time of this publication George Kateb was professor of politics at Princeton University.) A number of presentations from this particular journal and issue are cited below, which hereafter will be abbreviated, *Social Research*. This special edition resulted from a conference called in the fall of 1990 by the New School for Social Research and various museums in the New York area to think and talk about the growing problem of homelessness. “The timeliness of this project is surely obvious,” Editor Arien Mack wrote in the introductory remarks. “We live at a time when the idea of home has become problematic. We are confronted every day with painful images and stories about the growing numbers of homeless people, about criminal violence toward children, and about the plights of those exiled from their homelands. And all of this coexists with the persistent images of home as a place of comfort, safety, and refuge.” The national conference was “designed to explore the ideology of home, its meaning as a central human idea as well as the crises engendered by its loss in homelessness and exile and by the experience of loss suffered in alienation.”

“can constrain us.”² This chapter explores what it is about home that makes it, in terms of moral development, either a good or bad, a nurturing or destructive experience, but ultimately, an experience that either induces to wholeness and authenticity or one that holds individuals in a permanent state of alienation. For help articulating the points at issue here, I have turned to works produced by several scholars who pondered many of the same questions asked in this study about home. These scholars gathered in 1990 at a conference in New York sponsored in part by the New School for Social Research to discuss the subject of home in view of the growing problem of homelessness. They represent various academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Their combined analysis on the subject initially helped clarify the issues in my own thinking and help here to articulate them in conclusion.

To refocus the study, we return to a few basic questions asked at the beginning. If women in fact are socialized to be relational, and hence have a greater proclivity to think beyond self to others, why do only some of them manage in their thinking to penetrate the barrier of the exclusive family, or the private realm, and manage to think in more holistic terms? Why, to return to the period under study, the Progressive Era, when women’s presence in the public sphere became more apparent,³ did some of them “respond to the pressures to create and maintain an ideal home in isolation from the rest of the world by

²Arien Mack, Editor’s Introduction to “Home: A Place in the World,” *Social Research*, pp. 5-6; 5.

³This is not to say that there were not women involved in reform and other activities in the (amorphous and disputed) public sphere in earlier eras. The field of women’s history is dedicated in part to proving that women have been in the “public sphere,” if not visibly so, there nonetheless, from the beginning. But it is to say that it was not until the Progressive Era that women began to move there professionally in numbers, and significantly, to draw their chief identities from their roles in the public sphere, that it became a historic phenomenon.

taking the ideals of domesticity into the larger society, and by investing their energies in various reform movements and purity crusades,” while others of them conversely embraced those same “pressures to create and maintain an ideal home in isolation”?⁴ Why, in other words, were some of them able to think of themselves, their private lives, and their families as integral parts of something larger, while others of them distinctly could not? And even more specifically, why did the latter not only never develop a social consciousness, but intentionally reject, and actively oppose one? The answers to these questions have been variously addressed or inferred throughout this study through an analysis of two women who fit respectively in each category.

To recap briefly, the distinctions between these two women, most obviously their regional backgrounds--i.e., New England reformism *versus* conventional southern conservatism--were certainly factors in their personal and political identity development. At the outset, however, we noted that these women actually represent extremes. Neither Gilman nor Harris was typical of anything, anytime, anywhere. Although each was clearly and emphatically shaped by her regional culture, both their lives (if not Harris's stated philosophy) mocked their culture's convention. Through the extreme expression of their identities, however, they managed to articulate well-defined philosophies which were used in this study as archetypes. The archetypes simply cannot be said to represent any particular region, group, or organization, but rather a mind-set, a way of perceiving the world and of ordering one's life. There were many women in Gilman's New

⁴Tamara K. Hareven, “The Home and the Family in Historical Perspective,” *Social Research*, pp. 253-286; p. 285. At the time of this publication Tamara K. Hareven was Unidel Professor of Family Studies and History at the University of Delaware.

England, for instance, as well as every other region of the country, who were as private in their perspectives, if not as intentionally exclusive, as was Corra Harris.⁵ And there were many women, relatively speaking, in the South in Corra's lifetime, that were reform and public-minded.⁶ So regional influence, though it is a decisive factor, does not in and of itself explain these two women's (or any other two or any other combination's) strident differences of opinion, and that, as noted, becomes even more problematic as an explanation when one considers the number of common experiences they shared. Besides regional culture, they also had distinctly different ideas about the nature of human nature in general, and the nature of woman's nature more specifically, which also become fundamental parts of the whole explanation.

Additionally, however, a central, if more inferred, premise informing the study has been that the way individuals perceive home, and by extension, concepts of public and private, sheds even further light on some of the fundamental ideas that shape personal and political identity. To the extent that ideas about home, although perpetually in flux, have always existed, and always will--home is where humans live, no matter how diverse the models are (even Bedouins understand the concept--they merely carry their home with

⁵For example, Mid-western and New England Anti-suffragists Edwina Stanton Babcock, Amelia E. Barr, Margaret Bisland, Alice Hill Chittenden, Heloise Jamison, to name only a few, expressed views similar in every way to Corra Harris's, with only the southern hubris missing. Cathy Badura, "'Home is Where the Heart Is?': Conceptions of Home, Woman's Nature and Social Responsibility Held by Women in the Suffrage Debate, 1890-1920," seminar paper for Twentieth Century U.S. history course, Michigan State University, Spring, 1993.

⁶For secondary sources, see Virginia Bernhard, Betty Brandon, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Theda Perdue, eds., *Histories and Identities* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992); Caroline Matheny Dillman (New York: Hemisphere Publishing Corp., 1988); Joanne V. Hawks and Sheila Lloyd. Skemp, eds., *Sex, Race, and the Role of Women in the South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983); and Roth's *Matronage: Patterns in Women's Organizations, Atlanta, Georgia, 1890-1940*.

them)--home as a concept is central to understanding human as well as sexual identity. The purpose of this chapter is to understand the difference between home as a "privatized abode," and home as "a room of one's own."⁷ The means of doing so is by exploring home as a metaphor for wholeness, and its opposite, homelessness, as a metaphor for alienation. The absence of home as a space and the transformation of home as a concept mean something in the analysis. "Home moves us most powerfully as absence or negation," those at the conference on home agreed. "Homelessness and exile are among the worst of conditions, alienation and estrangement, the feelings of greatest despair."⁸

Significantly, however, even though home represents wholeness and homelessness alienation, without the experience of homelessness or exile, whether self-imposed or involuntary, wholeness is an illusion, home, merely a facade of security, and one that becomes a means of perpetual alienation and disillusionment. So that, on the one hand, while "homeless and exile are among the worst of conditions," and "alienation . . . [among] the feelings of greatest despair," avoidance of the condition, if not physically, "mentally" or "spiritually," arrests one's personal or moral growth. George Kateb explains this as one of the central ideas of the conference: "The idea is that alienation or estrangement is good, and hence that wanting to be at home mentally or spiritually is questionable and ought to be questioned."⁹ The premise here is that the acute exclusivity

⁷The term "privatized abode" is taken from Gwendolyn Wright, "Prescribing the Model Home," *Social Research*, p. 221. At the time of this publication Gwendolyn Wright was professor of architecture and history at Columbia University.

⁸Preface to "Exile: A Keynote Address," *Social Research*, p. 63; no author credited.

⁹Kateb, p. 135.

attaching to the modern home inclines toward the latter, and blinds individuals to the essential need for leaving home, spiritually and metaphorically speaking, and suffering through the experience of homelessness for the purpose in the end of becoming whole, or a morally developed, individual.

A brief review of the private and exclusive nature of home as a distinction of modernity helps refocus the point. Family historian Tamara Hareven explains the evolution of home into an exclusively private sphere. “The family in preindustrial society was characterized by *sociability* rather than *privacy*,” Hareven writes. The home of the modern family, on the other hand, becomes a “private retreat from the outside world.”¹⁰ Its development as such furthermore is “relatively recent,” she explains. “The concept of the home as the family’s haven and domestic retreat emerged only about one hundred fifty years ago, and was, initially, limited to the urban middle classes.” It is a myth, however, that the nuclear family is a modern phenomenon and that the preindustrial family included extended family members. The nuclear family predates modernity considerably. The extra-nuclear family members of preindustrial households were more often unrelated apprentices or other workers than relatives. The issue is important for clarifying how the home was a place where one learned “sociability.” “Preindustrial households rarely included relatives other than the members of the nuclear family, but they often contained unrelated individuals whose presence in the household reflected the various special functions that the family held,” Hareven explains.¹¹ The presence of

¹⁰Hareven, p. 256.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 254-55.

unrelated others within the close confines of a household instilled “sociability” (if not necessarily neighborly love).¹² “The home became an essential aspect of the identity and self-definition of the middle class.”¹³ And by inference, the middle class definition of home became a standard or norm against which identity in western thinking was measured. A crucial issue for family historians and social scientists is determining “when domestic privacy becomes a form of confinement for the individual rather than a nurturing environment”¹⁴--when the “tyranny” of the home thwarts instead of promotes moral development for the individuals within.¹⁵

Beyond how home affects individuals’ personal growth is how it affects society. Architectural historian Gwendolyn Wright explains how and why the physical space of home, or the modern house, becomes an acute issue explicitly for those who have comfortable homes, and implicitly for those without adequate living space. The threat of losing home--typically one’s most materially valuable asset--becomes a chief source of insecurity and can lead to socially irresponsible means of trying to effect security. “The notion of the perfect fit between the person or family and the dwelling can easily become a form of bondage,” Wright notes, “preventing recognition of problems in our own lives, and in the multiplicity of family lives in our society. Confronting the problems of those

¹²For an extended definition of household and perhaps a different interpretation of the “sociability” factor within, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

¹³Hareven, p. 264.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 271.

¹⁵Mary Douglas, “The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space,” *Social Research*, pp. 287-307; p. 287. Mary Douglas is a noted anthropologist who has taught at the University of London, Northwestern University, and Princeton University.

for whom 'home' is lost or denied can intensify the potency of this ideal, making one's own 'perfect home' seem all the more essential and precarious. This fear prompts large numbers of Americans to turn away from the injustice they see around them."¹⁶ When insecurity and the fear of losing one's home, of joining the ranks of the homeless, cause people to withdraw behind the walls of their homes, and to ignore social injustice, it is an unhealthy environment both for society and for the individual.

David Bromwich describes how for numbers of people home becomes an escape from reality, and a place that retards personal and social growth. Many of these people "are keepers of social propriety[,] who go so far and no farther: usually, their family marks an outward limit of their affections; and if you said to one of them, Why no more than this? the answer would be, It is not for me to invent obligations. They believe with the peculiar hardness of the well fed that the reach of sympathy goes exactly the length of the duties laid on us by social convention."¹⁷ Their use of home as an escape from reality has fully circumscribed their perception of self and the world. Professor Kateb writes:

So what is not praiseworthy, I would say, is praise of being at home in the mental or spiritual sense by those who have a home. All they are--these spiritually homesick ones . . . is unhappy. . . . At home, they want more home. They are homesick, even though they are home. What is their desire? They crave that the self be made of answerable questions. They want no real self-process. They want an identity, a self-same self.¹⁸

¹⁶Gwendolyn Wright, "Prescribing the Model Home," *Social Research*, pp. 213-26; p. 223.

¹⁷David Bromwich, "Alienation and Belonging to Humanity," *Social Research*, pp. 139-158; p. 151. At the time of this publication David Bromwich was professor of English at Yale University.

¹⁸Kateb, p. 137.

Those who “want more home” and fear “self-process” are the ones for whom home has become more a “form of confinement” than “a nurturing environment,” those for whom home has numbed their sense of concern for anything that goes on outside its own enclosure. Significantly, as long as one feels alienated from the world, or those who make up the world, one is inevitably alienated from the self. Freedom from alienation comes only after one experiences the “queer sensation of being at home only in humanity.”¹⁹ Or as John Hollander writes, “it may be that being a person entails being able to be, and having to be, at home, in the world at large and, by extension, in a successively narrowing set of loci.”²⁰

Part of the problem in explaining how home can both perpetuate alienation and also be the metaphor for wholeness is the limitation of language. In the English, instead of a variety of words to define home as both concept and place, one has maxims or quips, such as: “It takes a heap ‘a livin’ to make a house a home.” “Home is where the heart is.” “Home is where I hang my hat.” “There’s no place like home.” “A man’s home is his castle.” And to borrow again from Robert Frost, “Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.”²¹ But these phrases and quotes do not adequately define the concept, not to mention that they are timeworn and cliché. Eric Hobsbawm and John Hollander use three German words to elaborate the meaning of

¹⁹Bromwich, p. 156.

²⁰John Hollander, “It All Depends,” *Social Research*, pp. 31-50; p. 46. At the time of this publication, John Hollander was A. Bartlett Giamatti Professor of English at Yale University.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 33. The title to this chapter, as well as the excerpt here, comes from Robert Frost’s poem “Death of the Hired Man” which is quoted in Hollander’s presentation.

home: *Heimat*, *Heim*, and *Geheim*. They help significantly to remedy what is more a linguistic than a conceptual limitation. Hobsbawm defines the former two:

For home in the literal sense, *Heim*, *chez soi*, is essentially private. Home in the wider sense, *Heimat*, is essentially public. . . .*Heim* belongs to me and mine and nobody else. Anyone who has been burglarized knows the feeling of intrusion, of a private space violated. *Heimat* is by definition collective. It cannot belong to us as individuals. We belong to it because we don't want to be alone.²²

Further Hollander explains how the term *Geheim* differs from the other two. His definition is especially helpful to the task here of distinguishing between home as merely a place of privacy and home as a "privatized abode." Hollander writes:

The range of concentricities is interestingly marked in German by the range of senses of the word for "home," *Heim*, from the widened boundaries of *Heimat* to the extremely constricted notion of secrecy, let alone mere privacy, in the extended form *Geheim*. The feeling that one's home is itself really the center of a series of radiating circles of hominess becomes most apparent when we consider how one returns to a slightly different sense of "home" from the one which one ventures forth from.²³

The "different sense" is that of the Greek word *nostos*, Hollander explains, which means journey, the implication being that the journey home at one point was properly an end in itself, so that the experience of the journey rather than the destination was what shaped individuals' identity. By inference, the difference was qualitative. It was the journey not the arrival that brought wholeness. Finally, home defined "is as the human point of

²²Eric Hobsbawm, "Exile: A Keynote Address: Introduction," *Social Research*, pp. 65-8; pp. 67-8. At the time of this publication Eric Hobsbawm was Emeritus University Professor of Politics and Society at Cambridge University and a member of the graduate faculty of the New School for Social Research.

²³Hollander, p. 37.

ultimate return.”²⁴

The return signifies wholeness, or “at-homeness,” after having suffered homelessness through alienation and estrangement. To clarify the notion of “at-homeness” Hollander uses the exile of Adam and Eve in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Exiled from Eden, Adam and Eve carry with them, if not Eden, at least the memory of Eden, the “invisible germ of at-homeness which will flower when they have by hard labor wrenched, urged, twisted a place of dwelling out of the earth.” Significantly, the germ does not sprout until after they have journeyed from Eden, or the past home, and built another one anew. Then, through the tale of Abram, another Old Testament figure, Hollander notes further how that sense of at-homeness comes about. “Abram leaves the northern land of Hur to find and make a new home that will be . . . a future *Heimat* but only after long years of being not at home.”²⁵ The security and the full benefits of *Heimat* can come only after the experience of the journey there. The journeys away from the comfort and security of Eden and Hur both represent alienation as the means to the end of “at-homeness” in the new home.

The distinction between Corra’s notion of home as a fortress against the world and that of a room of one’s own is easier to discern with this linguistic help. Where her thinking fits in these definitions of home is no puzzle. There was no sense of *Heimat* in Corra’s thinking--no sense of a place that was “by definition collective,” a place that could not “belong to [one] as an individual.” But then that sort of thinking was alien to

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 39-41.

the southern mind in general. Not even one's southern identity was a collective experience. Recall from chapter two Corra's belief that the personal was everything, and her explanation of why an arch form of individualism rather than community described the way of life in the south. "[E]very man [in the South]," she wrote, "lays more stress upon his own individuality than upon the needs of the community."²⁶ That was why in the South, they "do not know how to pool [their] means, organize and work together. There is too little room for personal dignity in organization."²⁷ In the mind of the southerner, "the needs of the community" and the notion of "working together" were inherently at odds with the expression of individuality. There was too little room for individual personality in organized efforts to suit him,²⁸ and personality was as important to the southerner as personal dignity. As "partisan" as the southerner was about his regional identification, it never conflicted with his image of himself as a unique individual, set apart from the rest of humanity, even other southerners, by his own unique traits. This proved a handicap in some ways by limiting creativity. The South, Corra noted, had never produced "writers of any note upon philosophic subjects," because southerners were not capable of drawing "the artist's line between personality and composite humanity." This limitation stemmed from the fact that southerners "think too much in terms of mere personality" Southern distinction came from the "mystery

²⁶Corra Harris, "The South's Way," *The Independent* (Nov. 26, 1908):1275-76.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸She was discussing the southern gentleman here but as we have seen, in her mind, on this subject anyway, the same applied for southern women, only if in a more circumscribed way.

back of them which has to do with temperament and personality.” The southerner “could not abnegate his own monumental sense of personality . . . enough to see clearly and to tell truthfully anything apart from his own experience.”²⁹

Such an intense focus on personality, Corra admitted, had thwarted southern literary talent to that point in time, but the alternative would not have been better, or even viable, because it would have meant surrendering personality in some senses. To identify with “composite humanity” necessarily meant to sacrifice individual personality. In many cases, personality was practically all the southerner had. S/he was taught to value it as one’s most treasured possession. One possessed oneself by being the architect of one’s personality, which was not to be confused with one’s character. Character development and personality development were two separate things to the southerner. Character was not what set people apart. One needed character, “virtue,” or “honor,” but it was one’s individual expression of that character that was most important. To be able to identify with some amorphous, with “composite humanity,” whole would be to compromise one’s individuality the way the southerner saw it.

To further clarify the relevance, for Corra, home was not the “center of a series of radiating circles of hominess,” that John Hollander described. Home to her was a separate and independently existing circle surrounded by other separate, independently existing circles. Visualizing it as such helps. The South was one huge circle, but within there were no series of concentric circles--no interdependent, interconnected, overlapping, circles; no communities, in other words. There were just large numbers of independently

²⁹Corra Harris, “Southern Writers,” included in L. Moody Simms, Jr. “Corra Harris, William Peterfield Trent, and Southern Writing,” *Mississippi Quarterly*, Fall 1979, p. 647.

isolated circles--independent and to the farthest extent possible, self-sustaining. Her home in the Valley was not merely *Heim*, that “belonging to me and mine,” but that captured in the word, *Geheim*, an “extremely constricted notion of secrecy.” That, in fact, described the notion of home for the whole of the South. Familiar throughout the South was the region itself as its own *Geheim*, a cultural fortress that existed to protect the inner circles or homes primarily from *Heimat* at large, or the nation as a whole. Southern culture functioned powerfully in all ways to protect against outside influences that threatened its cultural hegemony. This kind of cultural hegemony was maintained through promotion of personality and the kind of “cussed independence” described in Corra’s words in chapter two. Moreover these traits survived best in an environment of *Geheim*. The more privatized the environment, the more individualized could be the personality.

There were other reasons besides for the purpose of developing personality that home as *Geheim* demanded arch privacy; for Corra, home was a hiding place. As the preceding two chapters illustrated, home, to her, meant more than merely a room of one’s own, more than a retreat, a place where one rejuvenated oneself at the end of a day or a week of work. Home was a place to hide from what she feared most in life, which was other people. It helps here to recall why. Her belief in the irredeemably corrupt nature of human nature remained central and fundamental to her understanding of life. Human nature in her thinking was basically evil, a belief that explained how she could claim that people were “despicable, absurd by-products of evil in the world”; that “every man and every woman is a criminal, either really or potentially”; that there was “nothing good” in

human nature; and that of all things humans were capable of changing about themselves, their affinity toward “vice” was something they could never change.³⁰ Home, for Corra, became a place to hide--to hide her own human nature and to hide from others’ human nature. This fear of human nature made her suspect people as individuals and fear them in the aggregate of the social whole. Corra wrote about how her fear of people kept her perpetually on guard: “[T]o be human is to be on the defensive, somewhere, somehow,” she wrote. “My fear is not of the Lord, which is a virtue I have never had; but I do fear the judgments of men and women. I am on the defensive. I have never achieved that sublime deliverance from the mind of the world about me of which other saints boast.” The last line in the passage is especially telling: “Somewhere far within me,” Corra wrote, “I am like the wicked who flee when no man pursueth.”³¹ She was always “fleeing” psychologically not from anyone’s active pursuit, but from what she believed other individuals were innately. Her belief that evil was at the core of human nature dominated all others and colored her entire perspective on life. It certainly shaped her thinking on the public and private spheres. Corra fled from the public sphere because the public sphere was people, whom she feared acutely. It was a fear that assured she would never know what it was like to be “at home only in humanity,”³²

Breyten Breytenbach, a white South African “poet, painter, political activist, and

³⁰Corra Harris, “Mrs. Harris to the Editor,” *The Independent* (July 18, 1912):147; “New York as Seen from a Georgia Valley,” p. 97; “Discussion on Evil”; “The Literary Spectrum of New York,” p. 443.

³¹Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, pp. 50, 56.

³²Bromwich, p. 156.

prisoner,”³³ describes how the experience of exile is both death and resurrection.

Significant in his telling of how it was so for him is the role played by human volition in choosing to surrender to the experience. Breytenbach believes that exile and alienation are the only true means of ever experiencing authenticity, though he infers that one does not have to be physically exiled to have the experience. “To be in exile is to be free to imagine or to dream a past and the future of that past.”³⁴ In trying to reconcile the contradiction between the alienation of exile and exile as “a privileged status,” exile as the only means of ever truly finding home, Breytenbach writes, “It has been my purpose to try and reconcile the contradictions which I have experienced, to go beyond them, to dissolve them. Using exile as a *pense-bete*, I have endeavored to make of that condition a survival technique. In other words, to wipe out the self.”³⁵ The need to reconcile contradictions is a compelling human need, because contradictions are painful to the human psyche. It wants reconciliation; it wants harmony, but the soul in exile is in a perpetual state of chaos, of anguish, of pain, of homesickness. For Breytenbach, the only way out of that state was through it, and the only way through it was annihilation of the self, but he makes clear that that was a choice. The exile of the body was involuntary; that of the soul deliberate. The only way to redeem the self was to “wipe out the self.” There could be no resurrection without death. But none of this was a guarantee of exile.

³³Hobsbawm, p. 68. This comes from Hobsbawm’s introduction of Breytenbach at the conference cited above. Breytenbach was exiled, Hobsbawm explains for being a “white South African married to a Vietnamese wife in a society which made interracial marriage a crime [he became] a stranger in his own country . . . a prisoner in solitary confinement in South Africa.”

³⁴Breyten Breytenbach, “The Long March from Hearth to Heart,” *Social Research*, pp. 69-86; p. 73.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 73.

The exiled might have denied the pain of a cross and saved the self, but s/he sacrificed wholeness in the process.

Breytenbach explains how the feeling of exile and the resulting alienation became a journey from alienation to “at-homeness.” The passage is lengthy but worthwhile. He writes,

In the beginning there is the hearth, the ancestral fire, and you are a native of the flames. You belong there and therefore it belongs to you. Then comes exile, the break, the destitution, the initiation, the maiming which--I think--gives access to a deeper sight, provides a path into consciousness through the imitation of thinking. Now you can never again entirely relax the belly muscles. You learn, if you're lucky, the chameleon art of adaptation, and how to modulate your laughter. You learn to use your lips properly. Henceforth you are at home nowhere, and by that token everywhere. You learn to live with the flies, and how to slide from death into dream. You learn about creation--because you must compensate--and thus transformation and metamorphosis, although you also come to realize that everything is since all time.

So you begin to understand the feel of harmony, if only because it has become a conscious construct from which you are excluded. Therefore you acquire a knowledge of the tension between the jump or the break, and harmony, and how the one is in fact the other.³⁶

Because in exile one is “at home nowhere” one comes “by that token,” to be at home “everywhere.” He writes, “I have experienced that alienation allows one to go to the essential, the existential.”³⁷ Alienation “allows one.” The exiled one might just as easily have refused to “compensate,” refused to learn to practice the “chameleon art of adaptation.” The exiled might have refused after “the initiation” of “maiming” and

³⁶Breytenbach, p. 74.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 79.

“destitution” to take the “path into consciousness through the imitation of thinking.” The “path to consciousness” was not an intellectual journey. For the one who chose to allow the self to be annihilated, not even thinking, but some simulation of thinking, was a solace. At bottom, one could not even “think” one’s way through alienation. Thinking was the closest experience one had--the most familiar method of reaction, of coping, of relating to loss and tragedy in life, but one could only “imitate” thinking in alienation, and hope if “lucky” to “acquire the knowledge” that explained the “tension between the jump [volition] or the break, and harmony, and how the one is in fact the other.” What one learned, however, made the experience immanently worthwhile, because it was the ultimate experience of connectedness, and not merely one with others, but one with all things. Breytenbach believes, “Exile teaches you about individual fate with universal implications--because it is eternal and has always been with us: we are all dimly aware of our incompleteness, of the thick veils of illusion in which we are draped.”³⁸

How this relates to Corra Harris is hardly a mystery, but a passage in Breytenbach’s presentation from French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze pointedly demonstrates its relevance: “To say something in your own name is very strange, because it is not at all at the moment of taking yourself for some special I, a person or a subject, that you speak in your own voice. Rather, an individual only properly acquires his own name after a severe exercise in depersonalization, when he or she lays himself or herself open to the multiplicities and the intensities which may run through him or her.”³⁹

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 81.

“Depersonalization” was the essential means by which one died to self. The experience would have taken from Corra all that she had been taught to treasure: the personal, the personality even. Willful depersonalization would have been an existential crisis for which Corra had no spiritual resources to handle. To be able to choose alienation and “depersonalization” one had to have somewhere in the consciousness, some model or myth of wholeness toward which to journey, in which to have faith.

The myths and models in Corra’s mind were circumscribed at every step. For her there could be and was the metaphorical death, the “wiping out of self.” She purposely chose to “wipe out” a fundamental part of her being, what she identified as feminine--the emotive faculties, or those that give individuals the capacity to relate to others outside their own. But if she could experience the alienation and death, she could not experience the transformation, the eventual “at-homeness,” because there was no model or myth of wholeness for women in her thinking. The best the ideal woman she writes about in fiction and nonfiction could achieve was to retain her “power of illusion,” a permanent state of alienation but one not felt. Through their power of illusion they were able to cheat reality by denying that it existed. It was an empty, illusory life, but relatively painless. Corra lost her “power of illusion” by denying her “feminine” side, but instead of wholeness, she gained only the felt pain of alienation without the hope ever of transformation.

Transformation depended upon one’s ability to survive the psychic damage of alienation; it also depended upon, in the process, the development of one’s ability to connect with non-significant others outside self, with a “common humanity.” The

wholeness of the transformation represents the “opposite of alienation.” David Bromwich discusses “what the opposite of alienation might be.” It relates to the ability to feel for others outside self and self’s own, but importantly the feeling is not, in fact, cannot be, dependent upon reciprocity. The feeling is both “impersonal” and “cannot be private.” Bromwich writes,

On the view that is explored here, the opposite of alienation turns out not to be a state of healthy functioning, social usefulness, self-understanding and self-esteem. It may have more to do with one’s capacity to participate in a free act of sympathy. But the idea of sympathy itself, in the argument I offer, will come to have a sense that is unfamiliar. It is feeling for another person. But, from the operation of respect and distance, it is feeling of an impersonal sort, and it does not include the possibility of feeling *as* another person. Nor does it include any expectation of reciprocal feeling. Sympathy is my recognition of someone else--a recognition that cannot be altogether private--under the aspect of a common humanity. This recognition is usually followed by, or anyway related to, an action that I perform. The action like the feeling anticipates nothing in return.⁴⁰

“[T]hrough the sympathy I feel for another person,” Bromwich continues, “someone whose claim on me was not to be taken for granted, but took on reality only by vivid interest and recognition--I can come to feel what it is for me to belong to humanity.”⁴¹

For a person to feel genuine sympathy entails the ability to feel it for one outside one’s circle of family and friends. This was virtually impossible for Corra. Her noted stand on

⁴⁰Bromwich, p. 139. At the first reading of this, I thought of Kohlberg’s sixth and seventh stages of moral development as I understand them, i.e., the ability to relate to others more in the abstract than in the actual. But as I understand it, sympathy as Bromwich describes it here is not a prerequisite of those stages. In looking for a paradigm, I prefer to return to compassion as a counterpart to sympathy, and as an example of the kind of Christian love Gilman saw modeled in the humanity of Christ, and by inference, representative of the potential for divinity in all of humankind.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 140.

charity partially demonstrates the point.

Charity was something Corra knew she was a “trifle short” on.⁴² “I practiced charity when I should have practiced wisdom--all more or less in vain here.”⁴³ In her mind, charity and wisdom were incompatible. Charity was a weakness, wisdom a virtue. Charity was motivated by feeling, wisdom by thinking. But the main reason Corra could not practice charity was the impossibility for her of being in a non-reciprocal relationship. The charity of the giver for Corra was entirely dependent on the attitude of the recipient. The “ingratitude of the poor toward their benefactors,” she wrote during the Depression, “their abuse of those who serve and feed them, is becoming notorious. For this reason, I cannot help believing that there is something radically wrong with the accepted doctrine of charity”⁴⁴ The “accepted doctrine” Corra lamented was government involvement. But, again, as we saw, it was not that Corra believed there should be no charity, simply that they should be wisely chosen, private acts.⁴⁵ Obviously there was a need for charity, she believed, because there would always be poverty, and a very likely cause for the existence of the poor in Corra’s mind was to provide the better-off with an opportunity to exercise their virtue. Corra could not fathom a world without poverty. “Who would be charitable,” Corra wrote, “if no one was in need of charity?” Or, who “would know how

⁴²Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, p. 258.

⁴³Corra Harris, *My Book and Heart*, p. 56.

⁴⁴Corra Harris, “The Problem of the Unemployed,” Typed manuscript, possibly a speech, no date; Box 93:18.

⁴⁵For additional works on Corra’s personal attitude toward charity see, Corra Harris “Candlelit Column: Maneuvering Toward the Kingdom of Heaven,” *The Atlanta Journal*, Nov. 10, 1933; Lois P. Dowdle, “A Visit With Corra Harris,” *Progressive Farmer* (Sept. 1932):7, 29.

to practice mercy, forgiveness, and long-suffering if there were no faults or weakness in others to forgive? And how in heaven shall we be able to use all these virtues so hardly acquired here if there is no occasion to exercise them in heaven? How can we possibly enjoy ourselves where all the other saints are as good as we are and no distinctions made?"⁴⁶ Even in heaven Corra was counting on the benefits of personality and distinction.

The genuine emphasis on personality and the self-enclosed nature of her core identity explain why Corra's sense of self-reliance was delusive. Corra understood the need for self-reliance, and the essential need for personal space to cultivate it. George Kateb explains the distinction between someone with an understanding that disconnected her from all around her and the understanding that leads to a self-reliance that does not result in exclusivity and self-enclosure. "Each one of us needs a little distance," Kateb writes, "needs to learn to see as from a distance." Then he explains the extremes of thinking on this distance by juxtaposing the "distance" Nietzsche promoted and that of Emerson. The difference is that between anarchy and democracy. For Nietzsche, distance meant "to see as from a height." "But," Kateb continues,

in a democracy--the only culture of individual distance as distinct from group distance--distance should not mean height, because height means disdain or even insolence. These latter sentiments poison democracy. Rather, democratic distance is part of what Emerson calls self-reliance. To be alienated, to some appreciable degree, then, is to be on the way to self-reliance. Self-reliance is thinking one's own thoughts, and thinking one's own thoughts through. Self-reliance is a process; it is arduous, intermittent, expressed in and defeated by

⁴⁶Corra Harris, *As a Woman Thinks*, pp. 70-71.

moods. Self-reliance is actually, in Emerson's conception, self-recovery.⁴⁷

Corra could see as "only from a height." The self-reliance she sought, and to all practical appearances achieved, she did so necessarily at the expense of others, which made hers not democratic but anarchic. But as Kateb explains, genuine self-reliance is not the kind of self-control, voiding oneself of emotions, that Corra opted for. Self-reliance is a "process" involving self realization through the use of all one's faculties, including what was felt: "it is arduous, intermittent, expressed in and defeated by moods." But ultimately, self-reliance was "self-recovery." By absolving herself of emotions to avoid the accompanying pain, Corra relinquished her potential means of self-recovery, and retained only the means of feeling the pain of alienation.

Social theorist Barrington Moore suggests why people like Corra are unable to see, or if they see, are unable to challenge, injustice around them. Many of them cling tenaciously to a fatalistic belief in the inevitable that simplifies their lives and makes challenging it more than merely difficult, but in their minds, morally wrong. "People are evidently inclined to grant legitimacy to anything that is or seems inevitable no matter how painful it may be," Barrington Moore writes. "Otherwise the pain might be intolerable." As noted previously, resignation to the inevitable was a chief means of coping for Corra. It was the way she dealt with what otherwise would have been "intolerable pain." It also explains why she and others like her were the "spiritually homesick ones" wanting and needing "more home," why they were "homesick, even

⁴⁷Kateb, pp. 135-36.

when at home,” and why they “crave[d] that the self be made of answerable questions.”⁴⁸ Inevitability was a ready answer and one that made sense. But resignation to the inevitable was at least one distraction from what fatalists needed most, according to Moore, which was moral outrage. “The conquest of this sense of inevitability is essential to the development of politically effective moral outrage. For this to happen, people must perceive and define their situation as the consequence of human injustice: a situation that they need not, cannot, and ought not to endure.”⁴⁹ Clearly people like Corra never experience moral outrage even when they stare injustice in the face, see it for what it is, and suffer from it personally.

In her more candid moments, for instance, Corra conceded that the relegation of women to the home was neither fair nor just. As we saw in chapter five Corra admitted that man was rightly to blame for much of woman’s domestic misery. But as quickly as she admitted man’s guilt, and hence, the possibility of some moral outrage, she just as quickly backed away from the opportunity of externalizing rather than internalizing the blame. Man might be guilty, but if woman had been truly smart enough, up to the task, worthy in other words, then she would have managed, after all the centuries of civilization to set things right. The fact that she had not was evidence enough that her natural disposition, a result of her reproductive capacity, justified the inferior social role to which she had been relegated.

Such moral “anesthesia” was attributable to “certain specifiable sociological and

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴⁹Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (Whiteplains, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1978) p. 459.

psychological conditions,” Moore writes.⁵⁰ How do people “awake from anesthesia, how [do] they overcome the sense of inevitability and how [does] a sense of injustice . . . take its place,” he asks, especially when “[t]here are too many potent social and psychological mechanisms that can prevent human beings not only from expressing moral outrage at their situation but sometimes even from feeling it. There is no guarantee that exploitation, or just plain human misery, will somehow secrete its own antidote.”⁵¹ Corra confirms that “human misery” does not necessarily “secrete its own antidote.” One reason why is explained by a particular potent “mechanism” that blinded her as it blinds others to injustice or paralyzes their will to challenge injustice, while at the same time satisfying their “craving that the self [or life] be made of answerable questions.” It was their preference for “premodern forms of authority,” that is “those that appear to them as gruff, unpredictable, but protective of all their concerns.”⁵²

This aptly describes Corra’s attitude toward and relationship with authority. When she wrote that women just naturally wanted to be ruled with “Oriental brutality,” that when dealing with women “you have to frown and show your teeth . . . or she will not think you are divinely appointed to look after her welfare[sic], and she will do the job herself,”⁵³ she was not expressing (at least not exclusively) some Freudian example of repressed sexuality. She was writing from personal experience, hers as well as women she had observed around her throughout her life. At base, authority, in her thinking, no

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 460.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 457.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 463.

⁵³Corra Harris to Paul Elmer More, 19 July 1901.

matter what the outward manifestation, was inherently goodwilled. “The supreme authority appears as a benevolent paternal figure,” Moore writes, “who needs only to hear about injustice in order to correct it.”⁵⁴ This was obviously Corra’s attitude. In 1908 she wrote that she “preferred to remain the victim of man’s love and injustice rather than compete with him politically.”⁵⁵ In 1931 she was still “superstitiously reverent toward those in authority.”⁵⁶ Faith in the principle of authority dies hard. Hers went with her to the grave.

The “strong moral feelings and indignation” necessary to “act against the social order” simply were not possible in Corra’s world.⁵⁷ When the measure of morality in one’s thinking includes the innate goodness of hierarchical structure, “moral feelings and indignation” against authority is an oxymoron. Indignation against authority was in itself immoral. Southerners who were inclined to believe in the inevitability of their own particular fate, which in all but a few white male cases, was determined for them, did so because it simplified the ultimate complexity, the ultimate mystery of life. It satisfied the need that life and self be made of answerable questions. The culture surrounding them, moreover, made sure they did not have far to search for answers. They were woven in the fabric of every institution, public and private, of life in Corra’s South.

What, to refocus the study for conclusion, does home as an institution, have to do

⁵⁴Moore p. 471.

⁵⁵Corra Harris, “The Women and the Future,” *The Independent* (May 14, 1908): 1090.

⁵⁶Corra Harris, “A Woman Takes a Look at Politics,” *Saturday Evening Post*, June 13, 1931, pp. 25, 128-29, 133; p. 128.

⁵⁷Moore, p. 469.

with promoting or retarding growth of a social consciousness? The answer by now is obvious. The extent to which the arch-privacy of home promotes self-absorption, self-enclosure, and exclusivity, it retards social consciousness. What perhaps has not been obvious but rather implied is the limitation of a social consciousness. To take something of a departure, let me say explicitly something only inferred to now--which is, that the concept of a social consciousness is hardly the ultimate in human identity development. In fact, Charlotte Gilman demonstrates some of its most obvious limitations. To illustrate that point alone would take another dissertation or two, and plenty of work toward that end has already been done. One need only recall her daughter's observation that while she clearly was able to understand, or perhaps better said, to conceptualize, humanity as a whole, she could not see or relate to the individual. Furthermore, even though her works are filled with prescriptions for an improved society, there is something sterile about her vision. There is a lot about humanity in her works, but very little of the human. One might even conclude from her published works that she was as void of the ability to feel empathy as Corra Harris was. There is little warmth or sense of genuine connection, for instance, between and among her fictional characters, though there is plenty of humanitarian rhetoric.⁵⁸ Suffice it to say here, that one can, and many do, develop social and political identities to the exclusion of the personal, and hence are no better capable of relating to others at the level suggested here as reflective of the ultimate stage of moral growth.

⁵⁸Compare the characters in Gilman's fiction with those in the fiction of Sarah Orne Jewett, for instance, whose works do reflect the consciousness of one who understands the need for human connection that transcends a social consciousness.

Furthermore, it has served little beyond a purely academic purpose to compare two individual women as radically different in political opinion as Corra Harris and Charlotte Gilman. It is especially unfair in the clinical environment of a dissertation to strip them bare of anything but their political identities before an audience of (supposedly) “liberal” minds and expect any sort of fair, not to mention sympathetic, assessment of the professing anti-feminist, racist, and one with a host of other politically and morally offensive opinions. Clearly, in strictly political terms, Gilman has been the heroine here, and Harris the anti-heroine, which has been more than obvious from the beginning. What has not been obvious is what, beyond Gilman’s well-defined and well-developed social consciousness, might be desirable for the wholly identified, morally developed individual?

I would like to suggest that, although integrity and moral maturity necessarily include a social consciousness, it alone does not guarantee the kind of development needed to face the dilemmas posed by cultural diversity. The ethnic and racial bias that blinded Gilman and countless other theorists and reformers of her generation and since demonstrates this in painfully obvious ways. A social consciousness is not an antidote to cultural arrogance, just as pain and suffering, Moore makes clear, is not an antidote to injustice. A social consciousness certainly carries individuals farther than the alternative, but it still allows seeds of cultural exclusivity to lie dormant and too often come to life in those who make political decisions from the local to the global level.

Charlotte Gilman understood the need for human connection, but there is little evidence that she had more than a theoretical understanding, in other words, that there

was any experiential understanding of human connection whatever. A genuine felt sense of human connection is necessary for moral maturity, but, contrary to the Kohlberg model (or the western paradigm to depersonalize it), that sense of connection does not need to be, in fact it should not be, abstract in character. To be real, it has to be relational, experientially, even spiritually, one might say, relational. The sense of human connection, to be sustained, to transcend cultural arrogance--to the extent transcendence is possible--has to be relational. To the extent that women are socialized to be relational, theoretically they stand a better chance of experiencing human connectedness on this deeper level. But Corra Harris is only one of countless examples of how female socialization does not promote but most decidedly prevents this sort of consciousness. To the extent, in other words, that the artificial trappings of gender identity--i.e., domesticity more so in the past but still relevant to some extent today, but femininity in its various guises fully operational today--to the extent that those trappings of gender identity keep both men and women behind a private facade to sustain them, to that extent gender identity thwarts the sense of human connectedness and is responsible for retarding moral growth.

Without an awareness that empathy, compassion, and deep human feeling are not feminine but human traits to be valued as the very essence of human need, there can be no transcendence of cultural arrogance. Genuine human connection depends upon the ability to relate to non-significant others, not at the abstract but at the felt level, in the gut, so to speak. From the experience of the exiled and others noted here, the path to genuine human connection is the willingness to experience the pain and alienation of spiritual

homelessness. When economic insecurity threatens one's physical home, or by inference, any equivalent, that willingness to leave home spiritually becomes difficult and in some cases impossible. Corra Harris demonstrates how it can be especially impossible for women, because personal identity confronts them in intimate ways and at psychic levels that material insecurity alone cannot reach.

Sandra Bartky explains why for women a "willed transformation of the self" cannot and should not be expected. "Anything done [through cultural conditioning] can be undone, it is implied; nothing has been permanently damaged, nothing irretrievably lost. But this is tragically false," Bartky writes. "One of the evils of a system of oppression is that it may damage people in ways that cannot always be undone," she writes. People may be able to make decisions daily "around issues of personal transformation" but once and for all to "decolonize the imagination" is an unrealistic goal. "Many human beings . . . may have to live with a degree of psychic damage that can never be fully healed." For those already socialized by oppression, not even a "political movement . . . with a highly developed analysis of sexual oppression, can promise an end to sexual alienation." At least not for the generation involved. Political movements, however, ultimately have more promise for all generations than the solution most often tried, which, for the generation we live in now, is an endless search for the right self-help book or group. For alienation, whose roots are more social and political than personal, self-absorption, or any attempt to heal the self in isolation only exacerbates the condition. Bartky writes:

In a society with little cohesiveness and less confidence in its own survival, an obsessional preoccupation with self has come to replace more social needs and

interests. For many people, there is no higher obligation than to the self--to get it "centered," to realize its potentialities, to clear out its "hangups"--and little to life apart from the self-absorbed trek through the fads, cults, and therapies of our time. But how compatible is such a surrender to the "new narcissism" (the old "bourgeois individualism") with a serious commitment to radical reform?⁵⁹

Alienation, Bartky emphasizes, is not a personal but a social problem.

Finally, Corra Harris demonstrates not only the peculiar nature of female alienation, but the facade of gender transcendence. Unless and until human connection replaces human control as the ultimate focus and goal of social and political policy, the model for human development will remain exclusive of the very traits essential to individual and social integrity. When empathy, compassion, and the ability to connect with others are traits by which the human is measured, traits valued as essential and not merely auxiliary, women and men both may claim that part of their humanity not as a compromise but as the highest stage of human growth.

⁵⁹Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge Press, 1990) pp. 45-62. At the time of this publication Sandra Bartky was professor of philosophy at University of Illinois at Chicago.

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