"A truly happy woman has, it is said, no history": Relational Utopia in *A Woman of To-Morrow*: *A Tale of the Twentieth Century*

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British novelist and feminist essayist Alice Coralie Glyn is rarely mentioned in studies on Victorian feminism or speculative fiction, despite the distinctive nature of her literary work and biography. Alongside the feminist critical trend exploring the paradigm of the "lost," "forgotten," or "overlooked" female author,[5] this paper argues that the hybridity of Glyn's work may also have further contributed to her marginalization.

If Glyn's first novel, *The Idyll of the Star Flower: An Allegory of Life* (1895), did not particularly impress H. G. Wells (Philmus 181), her second novel, *A Woman of To-Morrow: A Tale of the Twentieth Century*, published in 1896 by The Women's Printing Society, seems to have received wider critical acclaim (see especially Glyn "Nature's Nuns" (422) and *A Drama in Dregs* (213)). The following year, Glyn released a play titled *A Drama in Dregs: A Life Story* before joining early feminist movements, advocating for female workers and for women's education ("Contributions" 221). In 1898, she founded "The Camelot Club" in London that "was intended as a convenient meeting place for working professional women. There was no entrance fee . . . . In 1901, there were 70 members" ("Sunday" (4) cited in Gordon and Doughan (30)). Upon her death in 1928, she bequeathed £25,000 to Lois Twenlow. Following Twenlow's death, and in accordance with Glyn's will, the remainder was given to Welwyn Garden City to create housing for older women, inspired by Ebenezer Howard's work on garden cities (Emily Hamer (1-13) and Colin Wilson).

[5] See Talia Schaffer *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late Victorian England* (2000), Katherine Binhammer and Jeanne Wood *Women and Literary History:* "*For There She Was*" (2003), and Deborah M. Withers *Virago Reprints and Modern Classics: The Timely Business of Feminist Publishing* (2021).

Many of these biographical elements are reflected in *A Woman of To-Morrow*, a satirical and futuristic tale composed of excerpts from the journals of Miss Letitia Primington, who awakens in the family vault in 1996 after a hundred-year coma, wearing nothing but a shroud. Letitia quickly realises that gender equality has become the norm in twentieth-century London and that she will have no choice but to adapt to her new environment. While the novel needs to be read within the tradition of feminist utopias,[6] which in the words of Barnita Bagchi "conjure up an idealized world where active, thoughtful women ameliorate the 'wrongs of women'" (47), Glyn's text distinctly differs from more famous utopian writings from late-Victorian feminist authors, such as *New Amazonia* (1889) by Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett or *Gloriana; or, The Revolution of 1900* (1890) by Lady Florence Dixie, which rely on their protagonist's adhesion to the utopian world, detailing the workings of the utopian technologies and political system via systematic comparisons with their Victorian background. Similarly, Helen Kingston argues that

> in the great surge of utopian writing that was produced during the fin de siècle, Edward Bellamy, William Morris and H. G. Wells among others . . . made a radical shift in utopian thinking by drawing a historical trajectory between their own time and that of utopia: Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000–1887* (1888) and Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) are narrated from an imagined future, and Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905), though nominally set on a "distant planet," is nonetheless preoccupied with how to make the transition from this world to that. (58)

By contrast, *A Woman of To-Morrow* humorously emphasizes the subjective and emotional experience, as well as the intellectual journey, of a reluctant middle-aged woman who has no choice but to come to terms with an utterly new *zeitgeist*. While Letitia is indeed initially

[6] See Alison Byerly *Are We There Yet?: Virtual Travel and Victorian Realism* (2013) and Ignatius Frederick Clarke, *British Future Fiction, 1700-191, Volume 6: Woman Triumphant* (2017).

unconvinced and generally unimpressed by either gender equality or most technological progress—particularly in urban planning, transportation, and clothing—she eventually partially adapts to twentieth-century habits by forcing herself to propose marriage to the eminent Professor Ambrose Lexicon, a specialist in the Victorian Era who is ironically described as "the greatest antiquarian authority of the day" (15) and whose obsessive fieldwork on Queen Boadicea's remains adds to the novel's tongue-in-cheek revisiting of the marriage plot.

The utopian program, therefore, does not lie so much in the content of the 1996 world imagined by Glyn—a mostly undesirable horizon to Letitia—but rather in the protagonist's ability to reassess Victorian values and norms in light of an ideal of equality that she initially does not approve of. Overall, the text demonstrates the necessity of supporting the acceptance of change and uses the landmarks of speculative and utopian fiction as a means to pursue a textual strategy that highlights the importance of feminine solidarity, as expressed by secondary female characters: Lettice, her brilliant great-grandniece, and to a lesser extent, Madge Speedwell, a "harum-scarum" novelist (16, 68, 156), as well as Sister Monica, a nun who helps underprivileged pensioners in East End. Letitia's gradual and conflicted integration into an egalitarian twentieth century allows Glyn to mock her protagonist's ingrained Victorian traditions in order to explore feminine bonding as a more ambitious and inclusive utopian horizon. She does so by employing an ironic and political writing style that not only revisits the conventions of utopian and speculative fictions that

are part of a broader and feminist renewal of utopian writing,[7] but also of the diary[8] and the *bildungsroman*.

The Politics of Female Time Traveling

In *A Woman of To-Morrow*, time traveling is very political; and, as its dedication to "Madame Sarah Grand" (i) reminds us, the text fully belongs to first-wave feminism, which, in the UK, notably focused on women's right to vote—starting with the creation of the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies in 1897 and the founding of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903—and also on the rights to own property (Married Women's Property Act of 1870), to choose a career and go to university (with the foundations of the first two women's colleges, Girton and Newnham, at the University of Cambridge, in 1869 and 1871, respectively[9]), and to gain custody of their children after a divorce (thanks to the Custody of Infants Act of 1839, which followed a campaign led by Caroline Norton). These numerous advances in society were reinforced by the advent of subsequent cultural phenomena, including the New Woman, heralded by Sarah Grand in her influential essay "The New Aspect of the Woman

[7] See Lyman Tower Sargent "Women in Utopia," especially p. 279, and Nicole Anae "Ecofeminist Utopian Speculations in Henrietta Dugdale's *A Few Hours in a Far-off Age* (1883); Catherine Helen Spence's *A Week in the Future* (1888); Mary Anne Moore-Bentley's *A Woman of Mars*; *Or, Australia's Enfranchised Woman* (1901); and Joyce Vincent's *The Celestial Hand: A Sensational Story* (1903)" in *Dystopias and Utopias on Earth and Beyond: Feminist Ecocriticism of Science Fiction*, edited by Douglas A. Vakoch (2021).

[8] Lorna Marten's authoritative study *The Diary Novel* (1985) shows that the fictional genre borrowed from the sea journal and travel diaries and dates back to the late seventeenth century (64). While it is concomitant to the birth of the adventure novel, both Puritan diaries and satire quickly followed, with Thackeray's *Jeame's Diaries* (1845), for example (65-68). Catherine Delafied's study on women's diaries as narratives, *Women's Diaries as Narrative in the Nineteenth-Century* (2009), prolongs Marten's analysis, and shows how female diary writing transformed the epistolary novel while embracing the tensions between authorship and (male) editing. See especially pp. 157-74.

[9] Lettice mentions these constituent colleges in her speech: "But the remarkable records left by women of their achievements at Girton and at Newnham, even in the face of chilling opposition, seem to prove incontestably that the 'raw material' of brain-force was there" (76).

Question" (1894), which manifested, among other things, a keen enthusiasm for cycling (Katrina Jungnickel) and a need for more practical clothes, leading in turn to the Rational Dress Movement[10]—all of which are prominently featured in Glyn's novel. While Letitia wakes up in an environment both familiar and foreign to her—as in many travel narratives and other canonical utopian stories—the novel, from the very first pages onward, ironically focuses on the protagonist's gradual and painful realization that she has become irrelevant and outdated, and that the social progress she used to disapprove of has now become the norm. Much to Letitia's dismay, the women of 1996 London dress as they please, go to university, have the right to vote, and hold the same jobs as men, thereby outwardly challenging the legitimacy of Victorian feminine and domestic values and ideology.[11]

Lucy Sargisson asserts that utopian literature is characterized by a "wilful transgression of time" (57), to which Anna Gilarek adds that this genre utilizes "a temporal displacement technique which is intended to break with the linear perception of time and, consequently, to challenge accepted modes of thinking" (35). This "willful transgression" induces overwhelming tension and disorientation for Letitia, as in her first meeting with Lettice, where, despite being dressed in a shroud, she criticizes the unladylike—if not androgynous—attire of her great-grandniece:

[10] See Sarah Parker "Fashion and Dress Culture" and Diana Crane "Clothing Behaviour as Non-Verbal Resistance: Marginal Women and Alternative Dress in the Nineteenth Century."

[11] In her fascinating study of the social conventions of middle-class and bourgeois domesticity, Elizabeth Langland examines the "mystification of the Angel in the House" (9) and explains that while "the pioneering work of social historians like Leonore Davidoff, Carol Dyhouse, Catherine Hall and Anne Summers has already begun to challenge the historical portrait of the Victorian woman as the passive, idle and dependent creatures of the prevailing ideology" (11), the "discursive formation of domesticity" influentially sustained values of control, responsibility and duty as well as "the mystique of the happy, harmonious Victorian home as a refuge" (14) for women, despite the growing existence of countervailing social forces. Similarly, Kay Boardman's study of the numerous women's magazines shows the ubiquity of the domestic ideology and social paternalism "centred around the concept of separate spheres" (150) and relying on a specifically feminine sense of responsibility.

> I glanced at her attire. It consisted of a drab cloth covert-coat made very full and long, a blue and white checked waistcoat, tweed inexpressibles and very high Russia leather boots. . . .
>
> "Do you mean me to understand . . . that you habitually dress—in this immodest, and I may add, indecent manner?"
>
> "Look here, great-grand-aunt, if you and I are to be friends (and I'm sure I for one am quite prepared to be), don't let us begin by calling each other names. . . . It's a great waste of time for a woman to stand chattering over dress." (8-9)

While Letitia seeks to impart her values of modesty and reserve, the old dress norms hold no authority for young Lettice, who, on the contrary, is driven by an unflagging curiosity about the language and objects of the Victorian past:

> "But have you no—chaperon?" I enquired with a feeling of dismay for Lettice was young, and despite her strange attire, quite pretty.
>
> "What's that?" my niece demanded. "Is it an animal, vegetable, or mineral product? Never heard the name; I suppose it is some early Victorian animal? Was it vertebrate or invertebrate?"
>
> "A chaperon," I rejoined with some emphasis, "was in my day considered absolutely indispensable to any well-brought-up young girl who went 'out'!"
>
> "Went out. Oh, I see! The weather was every bit as uncertain in those days as it is now, and you were never safe without an umbrella!" (10-11)

The satire continues as Lettice explains the uselessness of such a function in her era, which has gotten rid of the Separate Sphere doctrine, further noting that men and women now wear the same clothes: "'My suits are just like everybody else's in these days'" (9). As she lends Letitia some clothing of her own, the conversation shifts to hygiene, ventilation, and comfort:

> "Whalebones! and steels!" echoed Lettice. "Why, what a barbarous idea to encase one's frame in such things. . . . Do you not think that a certain knowledge of the laws of hygiene, of heredity, and of sanitation presents a kind of moral responsibility for everyone? . . . All our lives are more or less interdependent. . . . Take, for instance, the laws of sanitation. . . . [T]he picturesque cottages which look so comely to the eye may be very graves of disease, built perhaps over the very brink of cesspools or stagnant wells! . . . [T]he moral point is to awaken their own sense of individual responsibility. . . . The laws of sanitation affect everyone more or less." (44-5)

These exchanges clearly demonstrate that the didactic transmission in this story operates in reverse: it is not Letitia, the ancestress, who teaches the Victorian norms and customs, as she would have wished, but Lettice who imparts the knowledge of her time, eventually providing Letitia with clothing that is equally suited to contemporary tastes and to her great-grandaunt's reservations, thereby initiating an intergenerational bond. And while the "contagion" mentioned by Lettice (which also clearly alludes to Letitia's illness and ensuing coma) reinforces the initial scathing critique of Victorian habits, the debate is eventually resolved when Letitia opts for a kilt (44), supposedly preserving her "dignified reserve" (46) while helping her avoid any option that might evoke the Rational Dress Movement (41), which she deems utterly ridiculous. As Sarah Parker notes, women's clothing became a true strategic issue in the Victorian Era: "During the 19th century, dress was a battleground" (583). Additionally, Hughes reminds us that, in the fiction of the time, clothing was intimately linked to action and power (105). In the novel, however, clothing is more of a locus of constant and intricate negotiation as Letitia eventually marries in white and revels in having her sartorial choice respected (159). While this victory testifies to a persistence of Victorian traditions, it also reveals that Letitia has had her say and that the new century readily

accepts diverse practices. Through its satire of supposedly feminine menial concerns, Glyn's novel represents the nearly systematic search for compromises, while reminding readers of the absurdity of both Victorian constraints and of time traveling.

The dialectic of materiality and values eventually leaves the dressing room, as Letitia is forced to revisit every aspect of her past life as a Victorian woman:

> The Adolescent Club [was] a large and beautifully furnished building, very modern in its luxuries, and seemingly furnished with every artistic and practical requisite which the mind could dream of.
>
> "I do not . . . approve of Ladies' Clubs. The idea of women being 'clubbable' seems to me so very unwomanly. Still, I must admit, that this club looks as though it were a success." (58)

One should note that Letitia's critique of egalitarian society is not without nuance and that she gradually comes to appreciate several advancements in 1996 London. This is particularly evident in the way she experiences various locations that she and Lettice visit. Although most of the novel is set at "Primington Manor, Quietshire," the precise geographical detail vanishes once Letitia awakens in 1996, suggesting a shift into a space and time no longer marked by quiet, thereby mirroring the character's confusion. Primington Manor, the family home isolated from the rest of the world, described as "[a]n ancient high-gabled Elizabethan structure encompassed by a solid stone wall" (5), has changed significantly over a century. In what was once "her mother's sanctum" (5), Letitia is shocked to see a "lounging ottoman freely littered with comic prints and papers, and with a banjo also thrown carelessly across it" (5), philosophy books (including *The Subjection of Women* (1869) by John Stuart Mill), university magazines, pen-and-ink caricatures, and a cigarette case, leading her to initially think that her cousin Tom has taken over the place, while astute readers

may recognize some of these as typical accessories of the "New Woman." Lettice's library also includes numerous fictional essays such as *The Data of Ethics* and *Modern Morality*, written by a secondary character, Madge Speedwell, a novelist who embodies an utterly modern version of femininity that resembles a modernized "New Woman" and opens up Letitia's intimate, cloistered domestic space onto a social and intellectual macrocosm.[12] And while Letitia feels at times trapped (32), bored (53), lonely, and isolated (132), the domestic space in 1996 London is intricately connected with the outside world and plays a key role in the circulation of knowledge and political debates. In Lettice's London apartment, the library mainly consists of intellectual and scientific journals, such as *The Political Review*, *The Legal Times*, *The Philosophical Record*, and *The Scientific Quarterly* (50), which contrast sharply with Letitia's preferred readings: "Miss Yonge and Miss Jane Austen" (14), and "[s]tories . . . about love-affairs, or home-life, or romantic scenes, or rescues from murder or something of that sort: or even papers about parties, or clothes, or hats" (50)[13]—one could add to Letitia's reading list a later literary reference, Charles Kingsley's 1859 historical novel, *Westward Ho!*, whose hero, Amyas Leigh, seems to embody a particularly irresistible type of masculinity for the Victorian protagonist (59).

London itself has also evolved and become structured around a new ideal of communication and exchange, and the description of London with its many networks clearly refers to the great

[12] Throughout the text, Madge Speedwell refers to many Victorian authors including Swinburne (67), Lewis Carroll (69), and Thomas Hardy (119), and Letitia says of her that "each fragment that she writes, however slight, is full of that passion and pathos which real genius alone can hold" (57). While Letitia expectedly criticizes Madge's unruly manners (33) and praises her Victorian ancestress, Lady Prudentia Speedwell ("an unusually superior and agreeable woman" (18)), the text does unambiguously take Madge's side.

[13] In response to Letitia's reading list, Lettice remarks "there may be some books of that sort left by one of my small child cousins who was here the other day" (50).

Victorian novels of technological progress.[14] In the London of 1996, the electric train allows for high-speed travel, but it is ultimately the introduction of gardens and balconies in the city—aligning with Ruskinian ideals—that catches Letitia's attention:

> On our arrival in London, so many new and astounding sights met my gaze, that the marvels of the electric railway seemed to sink into comparative insignificance. London, which in the nineteenth century was intersected with a veritable honeycomb of streets and squares, varying certainly in size and pretension, but all uniformly dreary and unlovely—this ancient London had entirely disappeared! Broad, beautiful, tree-shadowed roadways, adorned with fountains, statues, and with open spaces somewhat resembling the best of the Paris boulevards, traversed the city in every direction. The hideous jerry and stucco-built dwellings of the Victorian era had vanished, leaving the landscape ennobled by lines of picturesque red brick houses, . . . each one built with balconies . . . . It was indeed the London dreamed of by Ruskin. (48)

Here, the metaphor of the network ("intersected," "honeycomb," "ennobled by lines") suggesting how urban space is conceived as an actual driver for open and harmonious communication, allows female characters to walk safely through the city. However, and unlike other feminist utopias that propose a similar invention (Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's 1905 novella *Sultana's Dream*, for instance), Letitia's amazement does not extend to the "aerial cabs" (54) she sees floating above Piccadilly: "Only this morning I was whisked up to London like a telegram. And now you wish me to go in an aerial cab. No, I am at least a human being—if an old one—and I utterly and emphatically decline to be turned into a bat!" (54). This humorous refusal of modern

[14] See Nicholas Daly "Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses," Alison Byerly *Are We There Yet?: Virtual Travel and Victorian Realism* (2013), and Charlotte Mathieson *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation* (2015).

transportation, which she perceives as objectifying ("like a telegram") or dehumanizing (as she refuses "to be turned into a bat"), might amuse nineteenth- and twenty-first-century readers alike and reinforces the construction of Letitia as a conservative and down-to-earth character who resists these modern forms of transportation. Louise Kane argues that futuristic transportation is a distinctly modernist trope: "Flying machines in the work of science-fiction writers like H. G. Wells have been seen to embody 'the Machine Age'" (49) with what John Telotte refers to as this form of transportation's "modernist underpinnings" (3). Paradoxically, Letitia's hedging language ("if an old one," "at least"), along with her clear emphasis ("emphatically") and bombastic lexicon, also harken back to the range of efforts she makes to gradually adapt to 1996. Through Letitia, the text fosters a poetics of reluctance, often laced with irony, that, despite its progressive discourse, reckons that the modern ideal of communication championed by technological progress is not self-evident and may require a lengthy adaptative process.

Ultimately, the novel's speculative premise primarily serves to convey Glyn's elaborate social and political stance, which extends far beyond its initial feminist concerns. When Letitia and Lettice return from visiting a poorhouse in the East End, Letitia marvels at what she sees in a public garden: "Beneath the trees were groups of happy families; the children were playing about on the grass, the elders partaking of the refreshments supplied at the little kiosks . . . . Bands were playing lustily, and the whole scene presented a most festive and animated appearance" (116). This ideal description, set against the backdrop of a sunset, leads to a discussion about the right to leisure:

> "I think," said Lettice, "the indifference which the Victorian authorities seem to have shown towards providing harmless recreations for the poor was simply disgraceful. No wonder the public-houses were always crammed when the working man or woman was provided with

> scarcely any counter-attractions . . . . Drinks are to be obtained (together with food) at any of the kiosks, and . . . dancing, out-of-door minstrels, entertainments, etc. are all permitted and even encouraged."
>
> "And are the people orderly?"
>
> "Most certainly. Why should they not be? You see, in this century we have at last solved the problem of how to be good though happy." (117)

Here again, physical and material considerations enable a broader debate on values, emotions, morality, and happiness, thereby suggesting the affective utopia has more weight than the idealized political or technological system of 1996. Like many other (feminist) utopian narratives, this is enabled by a guide or mentor figure (such as Sister Sara in *Sultana's Dream*, Principal Grey in *New Amazonia*, or the old man in the ninth dream of *Man's Rights* (1870) by Annie Denton Cridge) who reassures the protagonist and lessens their disorientation. The second section of this paper will thus aim to show how Letitia's singular portrayal—that of a time traveler who has left her Victorian context and initially resisted the utopian framework—contributes to showcasing the confusing, yet desirable, power of feminine voices and characterization across the political and temporal spectrum.

The Aporetic Utopia of Feminine Voices

Glyn's novel is built on the tension between an ambitious and elaborate social, affective, and political discourse and an unsuspectedly complicated character who finds herself in a new environment she deems hostile but that still enables her to develop her own ideas and to eventually find her own unique, albeit marginal, voice. While critics like Elizabeth Podnieks have often claimed that "New Women stories are more innovative in content than in the form" (175), I argue

that Glyn's hybrid work which combines an elusive utopian content with a conflictual character might actually be read as proto-modernist, even if it does not contain any of what Lyn Pykett refers to as a "modernist discourse of rupture" (57), if only because Letitia ends up marrying the slightly conservative Ambrose Lexicon.

I argue that the tensions of proto-modernity and formal experiment are first perceptible in the text's deep hybridity as well as in the unsteady emergence of Letitia's voice. Although Letitia's surprise and ignorance are two pillars of the narrative strategy, the entire text plays on Letitia's hesitation or rejection of twentieth-century England which, as in the more famous speculative novels of Edward Bellamy, for example, enriches or complicates the supposed message. As Richard Toby Widdicombe observes, "the narrator [is] so unreliable that meaning is seriously obscured and the would-be didactic becomes, in reality, markedly impressionist" (94). In other words, Letitia is not simply a one-dimensional foil for supposed Victorian conservatism. She is capable of self-deprecation, like when she says she feels like "a human failure" (133), and can change perspectives, as when she adopts the point of view of the undertaker who sees her rising from her grave: "[W]hat was the good man's amazement on beholding me!" (4).

However, in the preface signed by Coraline Glyn herself, the first portraits of Letitia are not particularly flattering: "Since it has fallen to my lot to 'edit' the Journal of Miss Letitia Primington, it has frequently been borne in upon me that this worthy lady—unlike the immortal Silas Wegg—was not 'a literary character'" (ii). The use of quotation marks, as well as the comparison with Dickens's character, seem particularly noteworthy and introduce a metafictional break with the Victorian canon. Letitia is presented as a bland character, "a guileless and blameless old spinster" (ii) who is paradoxically unlikely to interest the readership for whom she was created. Like the "nameless girl" whose face expresses "[t]he same one meaning, neither more nor less" (line 8) in

Christina Rossetti's "In an Artist's Studio," Letitia is "without history" (160), embodying a nondescript femininity that, in Glyn's text, suggests she has nothing to share but dogmatic references to the social status quo. Several later editorial notes seem to depict her as a rather faulty character, whose lack of education makes her particularly helpless: "Letitia's ignorance of the market value of 'untrained labour' may appear to professional people almost incredible. But the Editor believes that such ignorance is hardly exaggerated" (30). A later note (ironically illustrating Letitia's use of the term "rigmarole" to describe a mortgage) states that "Miss Letitia's knowledge of financial terms seems a little misty" (38).

Glyn's preface is followed by another preface, this time by Letitia, who situates her own point of view:

> I, Letitia Primington, desire to preface these remarks by stating that, alike by birth, parentage, and training, I belong emphatically to the nineteenth and not to the twentieth century. As, however, owing to a striking coincidence I have been enabled to extend my experience over two most eventful centuries, I propose to offer a few reminiscences for the benefit of those who are understood to represent what I believe is termed—The Modern Womanhood! (1)

This paragraph—which unlike Glyn's preface is not featured on a separate page—is immediately followed by Letitia's first diary entry, showing from the outset that the diary is not just for privately recollecting thoughts and states of mind. The writing in vignettes and the internal focus show that Letitia is securing herself a voice by putting her experiences down on paper: this is clearly what Catherine Delafield calls a "performance for outsiders" (1) that fully aligns with nineteenth-century experiments with diary fiction, conveying thoughts and ideas the protagonist has not conveyed elsewhere and passing them on to modern women. Letitia's didactic tone initially betrays the contradictions inherent in the heroine's status and desires for upholding the Victorian status

quo with Glyn's feminist agenda that aims to show the relevance of social progress and gender equality despite her conservative character's reticence. As a result, the text develops an aporetic utopia that echoes Widdicombe's analysis of the ambiguity inherent in utopian narratives: "the most enduring Utopian texts . . . are those which highlight textual ambiguity and aporetically retreat from the sort of textual closure which would suggest that the author is entirely satisfied with the Utopian vision he/she has created" (98).

While Letitia's is a particular case that defies the realist framework, she might be productively read with Ronjaunee Chatterjee's theory of "the feminine singularity" as "a model of subjectivity—particularly feminine subjectivity—grounded in what is partial, contingent and in relation rather than what is merely 'alone'" (3). Chatterjee also asserts that "To be singular is usually understood to be one and only one. Yet the grounds of what makes anyone—a subject and an individual—are multiple, fractured, and contested" (2). Early on, Lettice explains that "she was christened after her great-grandaunt 'who died ages ago. She was a sort of family model, I believe, and no doubt they wanted to keep her memory green and so they christened me Letitia. Most people, however, call me Lettice. It is less of a mouthful'" (7). That she and Letitia are "about the same build" (9) further reinforces the reworked *doppelgänger* aesthetic and inscribes Letitia within a wider network or community with which she initially refuses to connect. To quote Chatterjee again, there is an inescapable "form of likeness" that prompts interaction in the two characters and is the culmination of Glyn's relational utopia.

While Letitia refuses interaction and contingency in the first pages, she does come to her senses and the text also borrows from the *bildungsroman* trope of social integration. The protagonist is forced to adapt, be it only to Lettice's kindness and hospitality, and from Chapter II onward, the bulk of Letitia's diary extracts is based on conversations adapting the model of

Platonic dialogues. These dialogues show Letitia's development and dramatize her reactions to the new ideas that confront her. For instance, having discussed Lady Godiva and Griselda with Madge Speedwell (119-20), and having compared their respective readings of the two characters, Letitia becomes aware that there might be another interpretation on the latter character who might not be the paragon of patience and obedience she had always considered her to be: "I felt rather impatient. Grisilda[15] had always been one of the cherished heroines of my youth. But somehow I felt that Madge had artfully made out a very plausible case against her" (120). Madge's own reading, that Griselda's submission was "unreasoning and slavish" (120), prompts Letitia to take a step back and reinterpret both the texts and the wider gendered norms they rely on. This scene revolves around the foundational feminist gesture of reinterpreting tradition and of reconsidering given landmarks,[16] and shows the importance of feminine and communal conversations. On other occasions, notably when Madge talks to her about sexual attraction by quoting Schopenhauer (122), Letitia is much less receptive, saying things like "[Y]our remarks are positively improper" (122). But, if Madge is unable to get her to adopt her more subversive ideas, the offended Letitia still learns from their erudite conversations that notably include quotations from Shakespeare and Tolstoy (63), foreign words (64), and philosophical (64-5) and theological debates (68).

Even if Letitia thoroughly remains sceptical and does not agree with everything her modern counterparts tell her, she gradually emerges from their many conversations as a complex individual who is forced to negotiate and confront her ideas and values to her feelings, experiences, perceptions, and intuitions. Her half-hearted evolution shows precisely that, unlike what she claims, "A truly happy woman has, it is said, no history" (160), she does have a history, one of

[15] While Letitia calls her "Grisilda," Glyn spells it "Griselda" in "Nature's Nuns," which suggests her distance with Letitia's erroneous interpretation of the character.

[16] See Tania Modleski "Feminism and the Power of Interpretation: Some Critical Readings."

increased tolerance and adaptation that leads to building her own voice and developing her own ideas. She eventually dares to contradict her interlocutors (156-57), not because of a deep-seated reflex stemming from her conservative values, but because she has become able to formulate playful hypotheses, as when she says "I not unnaturally asked him whether, since he so strongly advocates professions for women, he would like *me* to become an M.P., or lawyer or something of that sort" (168), gradually developing her own way of thinking, bending her heritage here and enriching it there—which might be read as Glyn's adaptation of the *bildungsroman* formula.

Lettice and Letitia subsequently develop a trusting relationship over the course of their many conversations, and a freedom of tone is gradually established, as when Lettice subversively declares "I am sure that many good women find children as wearisome as a Wagner opera" (126). Later, she unambiguously deconstructs the maternal instinct, saying, "you see the natural instincts of one century are quite different to those of another" (130), before finally outlining a family ethic: "The 'monopoly instinct' which speaks of my child, my possession, must be got rid of before we can begin to call ourselves really civilized" (130). While several first-wave feminist utopias restricted reproduction and childbearing to eugenic practices (as in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) or Corbett's *New Amazonia*), Glyn's discourse differs significantly and introduces a particularly modern sense of relativism that anticipates second-wave feminist debates on reproductive rights, while prolonging many of the thematic concerns that were actually central to New Woman fiction, as Podnieks, drawing from Ellen Rosenman and Claudia Klaver, has shown:

> The maternal paragon was also disputed. . . . Rosenman and Klaver . . . conclude that images of the demonic and aberrant mother created "fraught sites of instability" generating "both anxiety and discursive possibility" (8-9). The reorientation of Victorian studies in the last few decades has dislodged "maternity from its imbrication in conventional formulations of

> domestic femininity" (Rosenman and Klaver 11), necessitating the reconceptualizing of motherhood as well. (178)[17]

Lettice's remarks do more than "defamiliarize maternity" (Rosenman and Klaver 19) by promoting a dialogue about motherhood's "numerous possibilities" (Podnieks 176) and casually offer what Bonnie Kime Scott calls "a radical critique of the patriarchal family . . . centred on alternate familial forms" (14), which favors the excitement of an intergenerational bond with her great-grandaunt over a normative maternal horizon.

Similarly, and in keeping with many New Woman texts as Ann Heilman[18] and Pykett have convincingly shown, Glyn uses the futurist scheme to revisit the predominance of marriage in women's narratives, as when Lettice tries to make her great-grandaunt understand that wedlock is no longer the primary vocation of every woman: "It is some women's vocation . . . but a special aptitude for marriage, like a special talent for art, is not granted to us all" (56-57). As Heilman and Pykett both note, the discourse conveyed here as a 1996 norm is in line with many New Woman claims, but was nonetheless a rather seditious statement to make in the late Victorian Era. The text introduces a counter-discourse within the formula of the "marriage plot" that concludes her text, albeit in an ambiguous manner, as marriage only happens because of a joke played by Madge Speedwell. As she pretends to educate Letitia on 1996 norms, just as Lettice has done throughout the novel, Madge playfully explains that it is up to women to propose marriage in the twentieth century and that Letitia's flirty behaviour may have compromised Ambrose Lexicon's integrity as per twentieth-century standards. Letitia falls for Madge's joke and sets out to write a love letter to Lexicon and ask him to marry her—and narrowly avoids being ridiculed thanks to Lettice's

[17] Podnieks also draws from Ann Ardis's work, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (1990).

[18] See *The New Woman and Female Independence* (1998) and "Marriage and its Discontents."

thoughtful intervention, but she does not escape unscathed. This misadventure allows her to put her feelings into words and to appropriate emotions she had not previously allowed herself—eventually accepting Lexicon's proposal in the penultimate chapter.

Like her politics that extend the feminist claims upending Victorian patriarchal norms, and like her protagonist's hesitant and reticent integration into the twentieth century, Glyn's depiction of feminine solidarity and bonding is not straightforward. Even if she acknowledges her modern friends' rejection of most of her Victorian values, Letitia tries to expound to them how certain nineteenth-century cultural landmarks work, giving them real history lessons and developing her own thinking in the process. The most eloquent example is probably her attempt to explain the character of Mrs. Grundy (23). Without explicitly referring to Thomas Morton's *Speed the Plough* (1798) or to the line that has made her an icon of a certain form of conservatism, "What will Mrs. Grundy say? What will Mrs. Grundy think?"[19] Letitia explains that Mrs. Grundy's "personality . . . did not exist at all in what you call a human sense. She was a sort of abstract idea of what people ought to do and what they ought not" (23). Mrs. Grundy later reappears in Lettice's speech on women's rights, as a counterexample to be laughed at in 1996: "Such a state of things could merely have existed during the Great Glacial Period dominated by the late Mrs Grundy!" (77), while conversely the quotations from Sarah Grand, George Egerton, and Ella Dixon are widely applauded (82) and sustain the extradiegetic reflection on feminist heritage and unsuspected tradition. Most of what Letitia wishes to pass on constitutes an obstacle to the *bildung* program, which, according to Amanda Auerbach,[20] is equally based on integration into society and on

[19] See Anette Wheeler Carafelli "What Will Mrs. Grundy Say? Women and Comedy" for a detailed analysis of the comic issues associated with Mrs. Grundy.

[20] Auerbach expands on the classic works by Georg Lukács and Franco Moretti and defines the plot of the *bildungsroman* as follows: "a plot that foregrounds development in a specific direction— that of self-awareness and self-control" Auerbach (686 n5).

emotional development leading to some degree of autonomy. In contrast, Lettice's speech on women's rights, which deconstructs the arguments against feminist movements and revisits the history of European first-wave feminism, complicates the interplay of Letitia's Victorian views and Lettice's modern perspectives. By confronting Letitia with her great-grandniece's reading of the nineteenth century, the text indirectly shows how the heroine is forced to distance herself from her initial point of view, or to "self-distance"—a climactic *bildung* moment according to Auerbach's study (667).

Unlike Lexicon's talk, which is not reproduced in Letitia's diary,[21] Lettice's discourse runs over twelve pages (73-84) and silences most of Letitia's habitual reticent comments: "'My dear Lettice, I was greatly interested. Of course,' I felt bound to add, 'I do *not* approve of women on platforms. I think our sphere lies elsewhere. Still, on the whole, the lecture interested me not a little'" (84). Lettice's brilliant rhetoric is a turning point in Letitia's integration into the twentieth century as she witnesses feminist ideas puts into practice firsthand. While Letitia's hedging language and usual emphasis are still here, she stops criticizing the habits of the twentieth century after her great-grandniece's speech, only occasionally engaging in more moderate, if not supportive comments, such as:

> [T]hey gave me some food for reflection. I thoroughly disapproved of the twentieth century and of most of its proceedings, still I could not feel sure whether perhaps—had I been born in the poorer class of life—I should not have found more sympathy for my needs amidst twentieth century people than would have been the case amidst my nineteenth century contemporaries. (106)

[21] She says, "But deeply interesting and profitable as I know it to have been, I do not think that it left a sufficiently definite impression upon my mind for me to reproduce it in these pages" (70).

As Lettice's speech posits contemporary feminist authors as key figures of a widely acclaimed tradition, this induces a deep sense of estrangement in Letitia akin to "the Novum," which, as Gilarek explains, is

> a concept introduced by Bloch and later applied to science fiction by Darko Suvin (1998, 68). In Bloch's understanding the Novum was a "genuinely new thing" (Brown 2003), something that raises awareness of future prospects and provides new energy to transcend the present (Csicsery-Ronay 2008, 48). Suvin sees it as a "cognitive innovation," a literary creation which deviates from "the norms of reality known to [the character] (1998, 68). 36-37

Letitia's cognitive distancing or decentering, induced by Lettice's depiction of the new feminist movements as a milepost of women's history, is part and parcel of her *bildung*, and eventually of Glyn's utopian program. Letitia is forced to curb her scepticism towards New Woman movements and to consider their victories and achievements. In other words, through Lettice's speech, Glyn creates for her contemporary readers a utopian community of women that started with the New Woman activists of the late nineteenth century that ultimately included the initially resistant voices that opposed most of their claims.

In addition, the development of a deep, feminine solidarity facilitates Letitia's integration into the twentieth century. First, Lettice and Sister Monica—through her good works and unfailing support for the inhabitants of the almshouses of the East End—constantly show her the extent to which women's lives are inherently linked, as when they tell her "we modern women mean to help each other" (82) and "all our lives are more or less interdependent" (44). However, in a final ironic twist, Letitia insists on being officially entrusted or "given away" (158-59) to her husband by an older man at the wedding ceremony, in order to respect her family's customs ("none of the

women—widows excepted—of my family ever dreamt of marrying without being given away. It would be so unseemly, so indecorous" (158) and to obey what she imagines to be the law ("I am not at all sure if it is legal? If the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Lord Chancellor or someone could not interfere" (158). When she finds that such "transfer" cannot take place, Letitia, reassured by her great-grandniece, concludes "The matter was thus arranged. And if any persons are desirous of further information thereon, I must inform them that Lettice was right in the view which she predicted all the authorities would take of the question" (159). The patriarchal transmission of the female body therefore does not take place, and it is the great-grandniece who steers operations, not with a constant concern for order and respect for the law, but by taking into account the affects and histories of each individual.

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While the first section of this paper demonstrates how political discourse was bolstered by the protagonist's reluctance to embrace what the diegesis posited as a desirable future, the second part suggests that Glyn's hybrid text plays with the inherent ambivalence of utopian writing through her use of equivocal voices, exploring how feminine solidarity and inclusivity across the political, social, or temporal spectrum is the actual cornerstone of Glyn's utopian program. Gilarek observes that

> Experimenting with the temporal aspect makes the readers realize that the course of history is not predetermined, fixed and inevitable, but that the future can be shaped to fit whatever dreams and ideas people might have about living a better life. Therein lies the reality-altering potential of feminist speculative fiction. (44)

While Gilarek's analysis bears on late-twentieth-century utopian novels, I believe that Glyn's text might have striven to appeal to her readers in a similar way, using her reluctant protagonist as a case in point.

As the text confronts Victorian feminine values with a complex materiality initiated by the futurist narrative, it offers a radical critique of Victorian gendered politics while initiating a feminine and intergenerational dialogue that enables the protagonist to actively negotiate with her Novum and try to find a place within it. As hybrid diary, the text borrows as much from the *bildungsroman* as from the utopian novel, and shows the inadequacy of the two generic categories as soon as the writing focuses on the singularly absurd female experience of time travel. In other words, time travel has a dual political and aesthetic significance in which disorientation and hesitation, alongside the impossibility of value transmission, are part of a narrative strategy that aims to promote social progress and gender equality while allowing the supposedly nondescript and eminently conservative Victorian protagonist to find her voice and her place. Despite the utopian feminist agenda, and despite Letitia's ingrained will to enforce the Victorian status quo, the text's descriptions of conflicting affects and constant play on generic categories, fully illustrates Widdicombe's analysis and deploys a veritable praxis of inclusive transmission, which still resonates today: "[the greatest utopian authors] depart . . . from the world not to a utopia or alibi, but to another created universe . . . whose essential characteristic is to be infinitely transmissible" (98). While Glyn's hybrid text offers a social and relational utopia that differs from two major subgenres of New Woman fiction, the realist and didactic novel chartered by Nathalie Saudo-Welby[22] and Ann Heilmann,[23] and the lesser-known experiments with science fiction that

[22] See *Le Courage de Déplaire: Le Roman Féministe à la Fin de l'Ère Victorienne* (2019).

[23] See "Marriage and Its Discontents" *New Woman Fiction* (2000).

Susan Gubar named “femtasias” and “femtopias” (80) almost forty years ago, one cannot but hope that its wide range of elusive formal experimentations will hopefully garner more critical attention.

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