

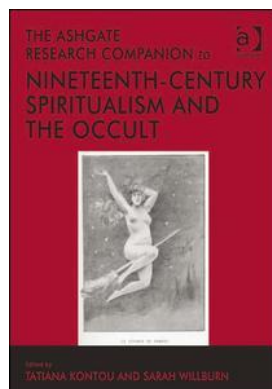
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 28 May 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult

Tatiana Kontou, Sarah Willburn

'Out of your clinging kisses ... I create a new world': Sexuality and Spirituality in the Work of Edward Carpenter

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315613352.ch7>

Joy Dixon

Published online on: 28 Jul 2012

How to cite :- Joy Dixon. 28 Jul 2012, '*Out of your clinging kisses ... I create a new world*': *Sexuality and Spirituality in the Work of Edward Carpenter from: The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* Routledge

Accessed on: 28 May 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315613352.ch7>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

‘Out of your clinging kisses ... I create a new world’: Sexuality and Spirituality in the Work of Edward Carpenter

Joy Dixon

Edward Carpenter was born in 1844, the seventh child of a well-off family in Brighton. In 1864 he went to Cambridge, where he studied mathematics; in 1868 he achieved a first-class degree and was granted a clerical fellowship. Ordained as a deacon in the Anglican Church, he served as curate to the reforming socialist theologian F.D. Maurice. In the early 1870s, Carpenter entered a period of religious and sexual crisis, gave up his curacy and became involved with the Cambridge University Extension movement, founded to take adult education to women and workers in the North of England.¹ Carpenter went on to become one of the best-known reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His ironic self-description – ‘a so-called “poet and prophet”’² – captures the difficulty of characterizing him. He was a socialist, a mystic, a sexual reformer, a humanitarian and an anti-imperialist; he did much to popularize contemporary philosophy and science in a progressive vein; he is best remembered today for his pioneering defence of homosexuality both in person and in print. When he died in June 1929, however, he was already seen as an anachronism in a world where, as H.G. Cocks notes, ‘religion had come under suspicion and fallen into decay as one of the principal locations for sexual expression of all kinds’.³ His friend, the novelist

¹ Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London and New York, 2008), pp. 13, 24, 28, 30, 36, 41.

² Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams* (London, 1916), p. 298.

³ H.G. Cocks, ‘Religion and Spirituality’, in H.G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds), *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (Basingstoke and New York, 2006), pp. 157–79, p. 175. As Cocks summarizes recent scholarship in this field, in the nineteenth century, in contrast, ‘religion had been allowed to be truly queer, in the sense that its cultural

E.M. Forster, observed, 'If my impression of him is correct, he is not likely to have much earthly immortality.'⁴ Since the 1977 publication of Sheila Rowbotham's account of Carpenter in *Socialism and the New Life*,⁵ however, scholarly interest in Carpenter has been significant, as the themes that were central to his work – a concern with social justice and sexual politics, and an effort to make connections between various radical causes, from socialism to feminism and sexual reform – are important issues in our own day.

In most of these studies, however, the element of Carpenter's work that was so often of first importance to his original audience – his status as a 'prophet' – remains marginal or is reduced to a function of some other more 'real' concern. In contrast, Siegfried Sassoon 'reverence[d]' him as 'the leader & the prophet' of a new movement; E.M. Forster approached him 'as one approaches a saviour'.⁶ John Addington Symonds described Carpenter's prose poem *Towards Democracy* as an account of 'what I think we may now call the new religion'.⁷ While Carpenter was neither a spiritualist nor an occultist in a strict sense, he was a prominent voice in articulating an alternative religious tradition which shared many of the concerns of movements like Theosophy or spiritualism. Carpenter developed a heterodox and mystical vision of sexual salvation which, many of his contemporaries believed, transformed the possibilities for thinking about the connections not only between spirituality and (homo)sexual desire, but also between sexuality, the body and social relationships.

Early accounts of Carpenter's impact on the British sexual reform movement (such as Jeffrey Weeks' *Coming Out* [1977]) deliberately downplayed the spiritual elements in Carpenter's work precisely because they seemed to stand in contradiction to reformist goals.⁸ More recently, while Tony Brown's 'Introduction' to the special issue of *Prose Studies* on Carpenter opens with a quotation from

prestige and immense social authority meant that it might cover a variety of polymorphous and unspecific transgressions of gender and sexuality'.

⁴ E.M. Forster, 'Some Memories', in Gilbert Beith (ed.), *Edward Carpenter: In Appreciation* (London, 1931), p. 80, quoted in Tony Brown, 'Introduction', in Tony Brown (ed.), *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism: Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism*, 13.1 (May 1990): 1–16, p. 1.

⁵ Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London, 1977). Weeks contributed the section on Ellis.

⁶ Siegfried Sassoon to E. Carpenter, 27 July 1911, MSS 386.179; E.M. Forster, terminal note to *Maurice* (1971; Penguin edn, 1972), both cited in Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 147–9.

⁷ J.A. Symonds to E. Carpenter, 20 March 1892, *J.A. Symonds Letters of John Addington Symonds: 1885–1893*, vol. III, ed. Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters (Detroit, 1969), p. 675. Symonds, like Carpenter, was impressed by the work of Walt Whitman, and saw Carpenter's work as an important statement of Whitman's philosophy. See Cocks, 'Religion and Spirituality', p. 169.

⁸ See Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (1977; rev. edn London and New York, 1990), p. 74, where he emphasizes that

Fenner Brockway that describes Carpenter as ‘the greatest spiritual inspiration of our lives’ and *Towards Democracy* as ‘our Bible’,⁹ the rest of the collection pays relatively little attention to the specifically spiritual elements of Carpenter’s life and writing. The two articles which deal most substantially with these dimensions – Parminder Bakshi’s ‘Homosexuality and Orientalism’ and Christopher Shaw’s ‘Identified with the One’ – are really concerned with other issues (in Bakshi’s case, the goal is to demonstrate the ways in which Carpenter exploited Hinduism to his own ends, while Shaw’s discussion is primarily framed in terms of ethics and the philosophy of science rather than religion).¹⁰

Given the extent to which scholarship on Carpenter emphasizes the importance of wholeness and interconnectedness in his life and writings,¹¹ the relative neglect of religious themes undercuts efforts to understand how the different elements in his work cohere, leading us to see as dichotomous elements that, for Carpenter and many of his contemporaries, were not only compatible but even conflated. As Sheila Rowbotham notes in her new biography of Carpenter, the tendency has been to “do” him in bits’ – she emphasizes, in contrast, ‘the remarkable range of *interconnections* evident in his life, through his networks, his mix of causes, his interests and his thinking’.¹² Carpenter’s work thus enables us to rethink some of the basic categories that we have used to organize our analysis of this period. In his essay ‘The Flight to the Real’, Terry Eagleton makes a compelling case for this kind of rethinking:

*Fin-de-siècle intellectuals blend belief systems with staggering nonchalance, blithely confident of some invisible omega point at which Baudelaire and Kropotkin consort harmoniously together and Emerson lies down with Engels. But for all their naive excitement and conceptual consumerism, these men and women saw no ultimate divide between the more rational organization of industry and the dismantling of the transcendental ego; ... today one party glowers suspiciously at the other over some well-policed frontier of the mind ...*¹³

we should not ‘over-stress’ Carpenter’s mystical beliefs (which Weeks characterizes as a conservatizing impulse).

⁹ Fenner Brockway, ‘A Memory of Edward Carpenter’, *New Leader*, 5 July 1929, p. 6, quoted in Brown, ‘Introduction’, *Prose Studies*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Parminder Kaur Bakshi, ‘Homosexuality and Orientalism: Edward Carpenter’s Journey to the East’, in Brown, *Prose Studies*, pp. 151–77; Christopher E. Shaw, ‘Identified with the One: Edward Carpenter, Henry Salt and the Ethical Socialist Philosophy of Science’, in Brown, *Prose Studies*, pp. 33–57.

¹¹ See Tony Brown’s claim that ‘The recurring theme is wholeness, the transcendence [*sic*] of division and inhibition both in the individual and in society’ (‘Introduction’, *Prose Studies*, p. 4). See also Shaw, ‘Identified with the One’, p. 52.

¹² Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, p. 4.

¹³ Terry Eagleton, ‘The Flight to the Real’, in Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (eds), *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 11–21, p. 12.

As Ruth Livesay summarizes the implications of Eagleton's claim, we need to recognize that – for Carpenter and many of his generation – the relationships between categories that we think of as 'either/or' were actually 'both/and'.¹⁴ Along these lines, and based in part on her own reading of Carpenter, the postcolonial literary theorist Leela Gandhi calls for a new 'empirical-metaphysical politics of hybridity' which can incorporate the 'refusal of secular rationality'. According to Gandhi, 'a belief in the spiritual basis and potentially progressive nature of "mixed" identity produced in Carpenter the informing conviction that the rigid antimonies of species, class, race and gender could only be resolved through a cultivated hybridisation of subjectivity'.¹⁵ Recognizing the self-consciously hybrid nature of Carpenter's thought – its deliberate cultivation of apparently contradictory positions, its emphasis on movement across categories, and its oscillation between the poles of various opposites – forces us to recognize both 'the sexual' and 'the spiritual' as historically contingent and as operating in dynamic relation to each other.

What studies there are of sexuality and spirituality in Carpenter's work have tended to take a reductive approach to both categories, collapsing one (usually the spiritual) into the other. So, for example, Parminder Bakshi describes Carpenter's use of Hinduism as governed by 'the sexual impulses which underlie Carpenter's approach to India'. While Bakshi correctly identifies the theme of sexual colonialism here, there is little room for recognition of the ways in which (for Carpenter) the sexual was a crucial component of both his anti-imperialism and his appreciation of Hindu spirituality.¹⁶ Tariq Rahman's 'The Alienated Prophet' provides an excellent account of the overall unity of Carpenter's social, political and scientific programme, and of the crucial role of his homosexuality as the basis for that programme, but Rahman's tendency to assume (rather than demonstrate) the primacy of an ahistorical sexual domain tends to leave the category of the spiritual as it functions in Carpenter's life and work untheorized.¹⁷ In contrast, Carpenter himself described the unhappiness

¹⁴ Ruth Livesay, *Socialism, Sex, and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain, 1880–1914* (Oxford, 2007), p. 6. Livesay's concern is with the relationship between politics and aesthetics, but the same consideration holds for that between politics (or other categories) and religion.

¹⁵ Leela Gandhi, 'Other(s) Worlds: Mysticism and Radicalism at the *Fin de Siècle*', IV Congresso Internacional da Associação Portuguesa de Literatura Comparada [n.d.], available at www.eventos.uevora.pt/comparada/VolumeI/OTHER%20WORLDS.pdf, pp. 3, 25.

¹⁶ Bakshi, 'Homosexuality and Orientalism', p. 170.

¹⁷ See, for example, his characterization of Carpenter's 'tendency to relate this homosexual yearning to some compensatory mystical theory', in Tariq Rahman, 'The Alienated Prophet: The Relationship between Edward Carpenter's Psyche and the Development of his Metaphysic', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 23.3 (July 1987): 193–209, p. 196. More recently, Antony Copley's *Spiritual Bloomsbury* is similarly based on a relatively ahistorical understanding of sexuality (and, in Copley's case, of religion as well), invoking a biologicistic vocabulary of 'drives': 'Given two such powerful drives as the sexual and the religious, often in conflict, it is deeply intriguing to see just how any one individual manages their rivalry and seeks their reconciliation.' See Antony Copley, *A Spiritual Bloomsbury: Hinduism and Homosexuality in the Lives and Writing of Edward Carpenter, E.M. Forster, and Christopher Isherwood* (Oxford, 2006), p. 1.

of his time in Cambridge as *simultaneously* religious and sexual: 'I don't know what kind of longing it was – something partly sexual, partly religious, and both, owing to my strangely slow-growing temperament, still very obscure and undefined; but anyhow it was something that brooded about and enveloped my life.'¹⁸

In his sense that the sexual and spiritual were intimately linked, Carpenter was part of a much broader tradition in mid-to-late nineteenth-century Anglo-America. In the US in particular, 'the application of spirituality to sexuality' had been a distinctive element of 'religious revivals and consequent communitarian experiments' from the beginning of the century. In Britain, prominent Protestants like Charles Kingsley 'regarded marital sex as a religious and spiritual rite, a kind of "communion" between husband and wife'.¹⁹ Similarly, in the 1870s the social purity activist Ellice Hopkins created an account of sexual desire which drew on incarnational theology to celebrate the human body and marital sex.²⁰ In America, the spiritualist and free love activist Lois Waisbrooker argued (as Sarah Willburn puts it) that 'sex is the way to heaven and is also the vehicle through which spirits rule the world, making women a natural, sexually active, sexually evolved part of the divine order'.²¹ The spiritualist séance was also a space in which transgression of the social, sexual and gendered order was enabled, even encouraged, by the presence of 'spirits'.²² For most of these commentators, however, it was heterosexual sex which was seen as linked to salvation; sexual 'perversion' was still often linked to spiritual 'perversion'. The Theosophist G.R.S. Mead put it bluntly:

*At all times of great spiritual revival, the foul reflection, the distortion, the perversion of the most Sacred Mysteries accompanies it; at all such times the true Mysteries have been surrounded and be-smirched with the foulest of sex-crimes. For the high Mysteries have to do chiefly with the Mystery of Regeneration.*²³

¹⁸ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 49.

¹⁹ Cocks, 'Religion and Spirituality', pp. 159–60, 166. For Kingsley, Cocks draws on John Maynard's *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (Cambridge, 1993).

²⁰ See Sue Morgan, "'The Word Made Flesh": Women, Religion and Sexual Cultures', in Sue Morgan and Jacqueline deVries (eds), *Women, Gender, and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800–1940* (Abingdon, Oxford and New York, 2010), pp. 159–87, p. 166.

²¹ Sarah A. Willburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot, 2006), p. 72.

²² See Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (London, 1989); Marlene Tromp, *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (Albany, 2006). As Willburn notes, these encounters could also include same-sex eroticism (*Possessed Victorians*, pp. 87–8).

²³ The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, taught an eclectic blend of evolutionary science, spiritualism and ideas drawn from Hinduism and Buddhism. *The Leadbeater Case: The Suppressed Speeches of Herbert Burrows and G.R.S. Mead at the Annual Convention of the British Section of the Theosophical Society* (Privately printed, [1908]), p. 25. On Theosophy and the relationship between sexuality and spirituality, see Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore, 2001), pp. 94–118.

Carpenter was, therefore, relatively unusual in the positive role he gave to non-marital, non-heterosexual forms of sexual desire.

By the time that Carpenter died, however, scholars in a range of academic disciplines had begun to characterize the religious impulse itself as a 'perversion' of the sexual impulse. By 1930, a year after Carpenter's death, when Sigmund Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents* analysed mystical experience ('the oceanic feeling') as an example of the 'primary narcissistic union between mother and infant', the characterization of Carpenter's brand of mysticism as both sexually and spiritually deviant was becoming the common-sense wisdom of scholarly commentators.²⁴ The historical triumph of this way of understanding the relationship between religion and sexuality has made it difficult for historians to recognize the powerful ways in which sex and spirit were, for Carpenter, mutually constitutive, entangled in complex (and sometimes contradictory) ways.

This sense of the mutual entanglement of religion and sexuality in Carpenter's life and writing was evident in his early writings, and especially in the text he considered his most important work, the prose poem *Towards Democracy*. For Carpenter, the writing of the poem was itself a struggle against constraint of all kinds; he later claimed that he spent these years fighting his way out of more classic forms of verse into the 'looser and freer rhythm' which marked *Towards Democracy*.²⁵ Influenced by his reading of Walt Whitman and of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the poem was written in what he described as a 'mood of exaltation and inspiration – a kind of super-consciousness – which passed all that I had experienced before, and which immediately harmonized all these other feelings, giving to them their place, their meaning, and their outlet in expression'.²⁶ He was only able to finish the poem after giving up his work as a lecturer and retiring to the country. This move 'back to nature' was crucial to the composition of the poem. Whenever he tried to write indoors he found himself (by his own account) tending always to 'break back into distinct metrical forms'. So, he built a little hut in the garden and wrote in the open air where, he felt, he was able to capture the more 'universal feeling' he aimed for in the poem. When it was finally published in 1883, Carpenter recorded, it 'got a load off my mind which had been weighing on it for years – a sense of oppression and anxiety which I had constantly suffered from before'.²⁷

²⁴ William B. Parsons, *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the Psychoanalytic Theory of Mysticism* (New York and Oxford, 1999), p. 4. See also Cocks, 'Religion and Spirituality'.

²⁵ Edward Carpenter, 'A Note on "Towards Democracy"', reprinted from *The Labour Prophet* (May 1894), in Edward Carpenter, *Towards Democracy* (complete edn, 1905; London, 1949), p. 414.

²⁶ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 106.

²⁷ Carpenter, 'Note, *Towards Democracy*', pp. 410–11. In his autobiography, Carpenter described *Towards Democracy* as 'the start-point and kernel of all my later work, the centre from which the other books have radiated' (Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 190). The text expanded over the years with new parts appearing in 1885, 1892 and 1902. I have used the complete text here.

The poem developed an immanentist vision in which all life was connected at the cosmic level. This new theology of immanentism was not unique to Carpenter; it was an important factor in the much broader rejection of classical liberalism in the late nineteenth century, and helped to make possible new forms of collectivism both within New Liberalism and in a range of socialist movements.²⁸ Carpenter, however, used this idea to develop a highly sexualized understanding of the relationship between this universal spirit and individual men and women. So, for example, the spirit comes as a lover to men and women all over the world:

*Lo! the spirit floats in the air.
On his lips it kisses the young man from China, and the patient old man, and
the spiritual-faced boy;
... Come!
... to the young Tamil boy holding up flowers and pouring his morning
libation of water to the Sun, and to his grandmother superintending the
household with quiet loving care;
... And to the sweet healthy-bodied English girl, and to the drink-marked
prostitute,
... Lo! my children I give myself to you; I stretch my arms; on the lips each
one in the name of all I kiss you:
Come! And out of your clinging kisses, see! I create a new world.*²⁹

According to Carpenter, political change could not come without a radical transformation of morality, especially sexual morality. Real change was not the result of intellectual argument or political activism but of a generalized spiritual lust. Real democracy would come when 'men are amorous for the naked stinging touch of the world ... and fierce endurance is fused in one passion with love, and the glitter of concealment is torn away, and the loins are compressed and the eyes aflame with lust'.³⁰ The Christian vision of the millennium – the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth – was reworked within a highly unorthodox sexual theology:

*I conceive a millennium on earth – a millennium not of riches, nor of
mechanical facilities, nor of intellectual facilities, nor absolutely of immunity
from disease, nor absolutely of immunity from pain; but a time when men
and women all over the earth shall ascend and enter into relation with their
bodies – shall attain freedom and joy.*³¹

²⁸ See Mark Bevir, 'Welfarism, Socialism and Religion: On T.H. Green and Others', *The Review of Politics*, 55.4 (1993): 639–61. On the importance of this idea of immanentism or the 'One Life' in Theosophy, see Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, pp. 121–51.

²⁹ Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, pp. 22–3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 14–15. Rahman characterizes this as a 'homosexual utopia', but Carpenter's goal here appears to me to be much broader. See Rahman, 'The Alienated Prophet', p. 202.

Sexuality, for Carpenter, did not divide human beings from God; it was the key to human redemption. The sexual body was the means of salvation, the way to acquire knowledge of the divine: 'Sex still goes first, and hands eyes mouth brain follow; from the midst of belly and thighs radiate the knowledge of self, religion, and immortality.'³² The sexual, for Carpenter, was thus literally divine, and sexual experience and desire were refigured as redemptive moves towards the divine itself.

This was a radically inclusive vision, and one which helped to move Carpenter into more active socialist work in the years after the first instalment was published.³³ As Scott McCracken has pointed out, however, the valorization of diversity in *Towards Democracy* was not unproblematic: 'Celebration of a plurality of difference slips into domination by inclusion' as a range of different peoples and places 'are incorporated into a consuming text, as part of a universal list'.³⁴ In fact, in his later works Carpenter was increasingly explicit about the ways in which each of these peoples and places occupied a particular place within an elaborate evolutionary schema. Although that schema was framed in conventional late Victorian terms as a movement from 'primitive' to 'civilized', Carpenter complicated and collapsed these distinctions in ways that, paradoxically, celebrated and criticized both the 'primitive' and the 'civilized' simultaneously.

Carpenter first began to develop his account of the stages of human development in *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure*, first published in 1889.³⁵ In the first stage, before the coming of civilization, human existence was characterized by an instinctive unity with nature and with that 'universal spirit' which, Carpenter argued, is also the 'foundation element of religion'. With the introduction of private property came the breaking up of this natural sense of unity. Civilization is the time in which consciousness of the individual self becomes dominant, and while men and women are aware of themselves primarily as individuals, it becomes difficult for them to see how all parts of nature are interconnected: 'so in our modern life we find the unity gone which constitutes true society, and in its place warfare of classes and individuals, abnormal development of some to the detriment of others, and consumption of the organism by masses of social parasites'. Modern civilization was literally diseased, and in need of a cure. In the next phase, the individual and society were to become one again; the 'unit Man' is reconciled with the 'mass-Man'. Once it is discovered that there is no 'ultimate antagonism between [the individual] himself and society' then 'all the distinctions collapse again; they do not hold water any more'. In this final phase, human beings come to conscious awareness of the relationship between the 'mortal man who dwells here and now' and the 'divine and universal Man'.³⁶ Within this framework, the supposedly primitive first phase has more in common with the final, utopian post-civilization stage than either

³² Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, p. 25.

³³ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 114.

³⁴ Scott McCracken, 'Writing the Body: Edward Carpenter, George Gissing and Late-Nineteenth Century Realism', in Brown, *Prose Studies*, pp. 178–200, pp. 186–7.

³⁵ Edward Carpenter, *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure and Other Essays* (London, 1889).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3, 13, 23–4, 124–6.

has in common with civilization itself, marred as it was by discord and disease. Carpenter thus develops, as Leela Gandhi puts it, a categorical rejection of the 'foundational laws of western civility, on the grounds that they inhibited rather than promoted the free ethical development of human community'. In this sense, Carpenter asserts the superiority of the 'savage' or 'primitive' over the civilized.³⁷

As societies move from the 'primitive' to the 'civilized', one of the organic unities destroyed is that between sex and religion. The 'disownment of the sacredness of sex' introduces the 'complete divorce between the spiritual reality and the bodily fulfilment', as inner and outer, love and desire, are bifurcated. Characteristically, Carpenter identifies the introduction of the commercial element as the sign of the corruption of sexual/spiritual relationships. The split between 'love and desire' which is also, Carpenter argued, a split between the spiritual and the bodily, took place as both are inserted within 'a vast system of commercial love, bought and sold, in the brothel and in the palace'.³⁸ Carpenter's main criticism of prostitution was not that it was immoral or promiscuous, but that it had been corrupted by commercialism. He suggested, in fact, that 'a certain latitude in sexual relations is not only admissible but in the long run, and within bounds, desirable'. While the idea of monogamous marriage was a 'splendid' one, it was nonetheless the case that 'the prostitute is that person who against heavy odds, and at the cost of a real degradation to herself, has clung to a tradition which, in itself good, might otherwise have perished'. The modern prostitute, Carpenter suggested, was the last vestige of a sacred tradition in which sexual acts were part of religious worship, and the prostitute was 'consecrated to the temple-service'.³⁹ Prostitution and monogamous marriage were both to be embraced, not in a commitment to moderation in all things, but (as he put it in a slightly later text, *Angels' Wings* [1898]) as a 'Bold statement of seeming opposites and the slow patient loving disclosure of the harmony underlying: this in the long run is the only method'.⁴⁰ 'In the future', he concluded in *Civilisation*, 'there will come a time when, as free companion, really free from the curse of modern commercialism, and sacred and respected once more, she will again be accepted by society and take her place with the rest.'⁴¹ Body and spirit would no longer be antagonistic, and just as sexuality and religion had been inseparable before the coming of civilization, so they would be recombined in the next phase:

³⁷ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham and London, 2006), pp. 61–2.

³⁸ Carpenter, *Civilisation*, p. 26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 121–2. Although Carpenter questioned whether the term 'prostitute' was appropriate in the case of temple prostitution, he was clear that there were important continuities between temple prostitution, modern commercial prostitution and the 'free companion' of the future.

⁴⁰ Edward Carpenter, *Angels' Wings: A Series of Essays on Art and its Relation to Life* (London, 1898), p. 224.

⁴¹ Carpenter, *Civilisation*, p. 122.

*The meaning of the old religions will come back to him. On the high tops once more gathering he will celebrate with naked dances the glory of the human form and the great processions of the stars ... once more in sacred groves will he reunite the passion and the delight of human love with his deepest feelings of the sanctity and beauty of Nature; or in the open, standing uncovered to the Sun, will adore the emblem of the everlasting splendor which shines within.*⁴²

Sex and nature, human and divine, inner and outer, nature and society are fused in this religion of the future.

In a chapter of *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* entitled 'Exfoliation: Lamarck versus Darwin', Carpenter elaborated the distinctive evolutionary mechanisms which drove this process. Neo-Lamarckians like Carpenter argued that evolution was driven not solely by changes in external conditions and the 'survival of the fittest' but also by need (Lamarck's *besoin*) which Carpenter, influenced by Walt Whitman, translated as 'desire', a word (as Tony Brown notes) 'with altogether more conscious, more active, and arguably more personal connotations'.⁴³ 'Exfoliation' captured a process by which, as Sheila Rowbotham puts it, 'Human desire is the force which causes the chrysalis of convention to crack ... opening the way out of the grim and vacuous circumstances of the everyday'.⁴⁴ In Carpenter's words: 'Desire, or inward change, comes first, action follows, and organisation or outward structure is the result.' Whether the result was a person building a house or a gastropod growing antennae, evolution was a 'true *unfolding* of a higher form latent within – an organic growth of the creature itself'.⁴⁵ Naming this process 'Exfoliation' – the point at which the old forms are 'thrown off like a husk'⁴⁶ – emphasized the moment at which desire or feeling broke through into the material world, transforming it. The result was to blur the distinctions between the ideal and the real, presenting the material world as a kind of crystallization of desire, and as continually susceptible to being modified by the power of that desire.

The ideas developed in *Civilisation* were amplified and made more explicit in later works dealing with art and creativity, such as *Angels' Wings* (1898) and *The Art of Creation* (1904). Carpenter was writing at a time when the relationship between thoughts and things was especially tense. Movements like Theosophy and spiritualism had developed elaborate accounts of the materiality of thought (as in the case of Theosophy's 'thought forms') and of the spiritual qualities of material objects (as in spiritualist accounts of the literal animation of the séance table).⁴⁷ The

⁴² Ibid., pp. 46–7.

⁴³ Harry Gershenowitz, 'Two Lamarckians: Walt Whitman and Edward Carpenter', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, 2.1 (Summer 1984): 35–9, p. 38; Brown, 'Introduction', *Prose Studies*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, 71.

⁴⁵ Carpenter, *Civilisation*, pp. 133–6.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 138.

⁴⁷ On Theosophy, see Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, pp. 127–9; on spiritualism, see Willburn, *Possessed Victorians*, pp. 93–114.

nineteenth century was also, of course, the period when the notion of the 'fetish' – an animate object which was perceived as both material and spiritual – found its way into various social scientific vocabularies.⁴⁸ Drawing on these themes, *The Art of Creation* opened with an epigraph from *Towards Democracy* that highlighted that text's implicit Lamarckianism: 'When a new desire has declared itself in the human heart, when a new plexus is forming among the nerves, then the revolutions of nations are already decided, and histories unwritten are written.'⁴⁹ Here again we find the sense that the real and the ideal are simultaneously polar opposites and simply different aspects of the same thing: 'Things (so-called) are but unapprehended Thoughts. Matter is Mind in an opaque state.'⁵⁰ This was an argument that Carpenter was to return to in his elaborate rethinking of consciousness and culture.

Like many of his generation, Carpenter wrote under the influence of E.B. Tylor's evolutionary anthropology, which described the development of human culture as moving in stages, from savagery through barbarism to civilization.⁵¹ Critiques of the primitive/civilized binary which underpinned Tylor's anthropology were, however, becoming increasingly influential from the mid-1880s, and Carpenter was familiar with many of the key figures in the debate, including the anthropologist Ernest Crawley and his friends Edward Westermarck and Havelock Ellis, all of whom Carpenter read and cited extensively.⁵² Carpenter's contribution to this debate was the claim that the process of civilization was a necessary stage, but not a final one, and his discussion of mind and matter was one opportunity for him to develop this claim. According to Carpenter, conventional distinctions between subjects and objects were an illusion fostered by the civilizing process. In the primitive phase, now described as 'Simple Consciousness', and found among animals, very young children and 'some primitive men', there was no sense of a separate self. The knower, the thing known and the knowledge of the thing were not differentiated, and there was a natural sense of community and of the oneness of all things. With the emergence of the idea of the individuated self, the phase of 'Self Consciousness', a 'fatal split' emerges between the self and the objective world, and objects come to be seen as lifeless, existing only to serve the needs of the self:

⁴⁸ See William Pietz, 'The Problem of the Fetish: I', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 9 (Spring 1985): 5–17.

⁴⁹ Edward Carpenter, *The Art of Creation: Essays on the Self and its Powers* (London, 1904). The epigraph is from Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, p. 45.

⁵⁰ Carpenter, *Angels' Wings*, p. 216.

⁵¹ Peter Melville Logan's recent study of Tylor suggests that the opposition between savagery (as the beginning of human culture) and civilization (as its endpoint) was unstable, and that in many ways Tylor himself collapsed the distinction between the two. See Logan, *Victorian Fetishism: Intellectuals and Primitives* (Albany, 2009), p. 111. Tylor's account remained dominant in British anthropology until the emergence of functionalism in the 1920s (*ibid.*, p. 104).

⁵² Andrew P. Lyons and Harriet D. Lyons, *Irregular Connections: A History of Anthropology and Sexuality* (Lincoln, NE, and London, 2004), pp. 100–30.

... there sets in the stage of Civilisation when self-consciousness becomes almost a disease; when the desire of acquiring and grasping objects, or of enslaving men and animals, in order to minister to the self, becomes one of the main motives of life; and when, owing to this deep fundamental division in human nature and consciousness, men's minds are tormented with the sense of sin, and their bodies with a myriad forms of disease.⁵³

At the point of 'the complete antagonism of subject and object, of "self" and "matter", and all the antagonisms which follow in its wake', human beings move into the final stage, now (here drawing on the work of the Canadian Whitmanite, Dr Richard Bucke) designated 'Cosmic' or universal consciousness.⁵⁴ At that point, the distinctions between subject and object, mind and matter, dissolved naturally.

The spiritual shift from Simple to Self to Cosmic Consciousness was embedded in a racialized evolutionary process. Just as a human body is made up of cells, 'so is a (human) Race a complex of bodies', a super-organism with its own Ego or consciousness.⁵⁵ Consonant with Carpenter's Lamarckian belief that the exfoliated body was the materialization of feeling or desire, the 'corporal organism' literally embodied the thoughts and desires of its ancestors, it was a physical manifestation of the 'race-life' and contained within itself the 'immense heritage of race-memory': 'The "I", the Ego, of his race is not only present, manifesting itself in Time and History – but an aspect, an affiliation, of it is now, to-day, present and existent in that man, in his Body.'⁵⁶

The emergence of a racial 'Ego' through an organic and evolutionary process was one aspect of the larger spiritual process of creation itself, the manifestation of 'the great Life which underlies and is the visible universe': 'this great world of Nature, just as much as the world of Man, is the panorama of conscious life ever pressing forward towards Expression and Manifestation'.⁵⁷ For Carpenter, this way of thinking about evolution allowed him to make sense of both unity and diversity. Once again, the point was not to find some compromise between two extremes, but

⁵³ Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, pp. 46, 50.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51. On Bucke, see Richard Cavell and Peter Dickinson, 'Bucke, Whitman, and the Cross-border Homosocial', *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 26.3 (Autumn 1997): 425–48.

⁵⁵ Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, pp. 90–91. There are important similarities here to the pantheist philosophy of the Victorian free-thinker Charles Bray, whose work emphasized the role of 'mind over matter' and a 'eugenic approach to social change'. See Willburn, *Possessed Victorians*, p. 25.

⁵⁶ Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, p. 96. Carpenter here relied on an idiosyncratic reading of the physiological literature, to argue that the history of the race was encoded in the sympathetic nervous system, the seat of the emotions, while the brain served to develop and extend the capacities of that race. On this idea, which was derived from Dr Bucke's *Man's Moral Nature* (1879), see Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, pp. 274–5.

⁵⁷ Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, pp. 22, 30.

to embrace both poles of the opposition, continually oscillating between the claims of the individual and those of the collective:

*This aliveness of all Nature, and its derivation from one absolute and eternal Self, must be realised. And if at times the multiplexity of egos, as of gnats in the summer sunshine, in myriad procession and endless turmoil, seems appalling and fatiguing; then at other times their fusion and affiliation with each other into larger and grander beings of comparative fewness seems consoling; and even the conclusion of their ultimate Oneness may bring a sense of immense majesty and calm – which, if it should be touched with melancholy, would lead us back quite naturally to the multiplexity again!*⁵⁸

The eternal self or Being at the root of the race-life was simultaneously one and many, generating many different forms and types, but also present within each individual.

In the 'race-life', sex and religion were organically united. In the process of reproduction – 'the very centre and focus of race-life' – the eternal self or Being 'who is at the root of this life comes one step farther to manifestation'. At the same time, the spiritual ideals and values of each race – the 'race-gods' – have, through the actions of heredity on racial development, embedded themselves in the body: 'The gods, in fact, may be said not only to be aspects of the life of the race, but to dwell in some sense in the organic nuclei and plexuses of the body, and to be centres of command and service there.' Not only primitive deities but also their more civilized counterparts actually resided within the human body itself:

*All those deities I have mentioned – the gods and goddesses of Day and Night, the Gods of War and of Love, the Hero-god or Saviour, the King-god or Lord of heaven, and many more, represent very distinct centres and co-ordinations of feelings and activities in the race; but they also, as we have hinted, represent very distinct centres of organic life in each human body, which is indeed an epitome of the race.*⁵⁹

It was for this reason, as he suggested in his pamphlet *Sex-Love* (1894), that sex was such a difficult topic, for it was impossible to escape 'of what vast import Sex is in the scheme of things, and how deeply it has been associated since the earliest times

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 103.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 136–7, 148–9. Carpenter appears to be drawing here on the monist understanding of protoplasm popularized by the German evolutionary biologist Ernst Haeckel, in which protoplasm became 'the bearer of memory and heredity'. See Robert Michael Brain, 'How Edvard Munch and August Strindberg Contracted Protoplasmania: Memory, Synesthesia, and the Vibratory Organism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe', *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, 35.1 (March 2010): 7–38, p. 33.

not only with man's personal impulses but even with his religious sentiments and ceremonials'.⁶⁰

This sense that the sexual and religious impulses were intimately related was reinforced by his visit, in the early 1890s, to India and Ceylon, a journey recorded in *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta* (1892). The central chapters of *From Adam's Peak* were also issued separately as *A Visit to a Gñani*, which was bound with a lengthy extract from *Towards Democracy*, silently signalling that the *gñani* – a teacher of 'Divine knowledge or *gñānam*' – echoed or confirmed Carpenter's own 'super-conscious' vision.⁶¹ According to Carpenter, the *gñani* Ramaswamy spoke in the same universal 'I' that was a distinctive voice in *Towards Democracy*:

*It was a common and apparently instinctive practice with him to speak of the great operations of Nature, the thunder, the wind, the shining of the sun, etc., in the first person, 'I' – the identification with, or non-differentiation from, the universe (which is the most important of esoteric doctrines) being in his case complete.*⁶²

Carpenter even found, in the *gñani's* astrological teachings, 'a glimmering embodiment of the deep-lying truth that the whole universe conspires in the sexual act, and that the orgasm itself is a flash of the universal consciousness'.⁶³ Here again it is possible to trace what McCracken describes as 'domination by inclusion',⁶⁴ in which Carpenter interpreted the *gñani's* teachings through the grid of his own beliefs about the sacredness of sex.

But Carpenter's 'inclusive' vision, in which East and West converge on the same universal truths, was also complicated by the way in which his three-stage theory of the development of consciousness positioned England and India/Ceylon at radically different points on the evolutionary scale. In many ways, the *gñani* and his colleagues were far in advance of their English counterparts. As Carpenter put it in the *Art of Creation*, 'The recovery of the organic consciousness ... is not an impossible feat. The Hindus and other Orientals have in these directions, partly by deliberate practice, come into touch with and command of regions whose existence the Western peoples hardly suspect.'⁶⁵ Ramaswamy was, however, what Carpenter described as a 'pre-civilization man of a very high type', and for Carpenter this encounter brought him into contact with the deep past of humanity, the

⁶⁰ Edward Carpenter, *Sex-Love, and Its Place in a Free Society*, 2nd edn (Manchester, 1894), p. 3. A version of this pamphlet was later incorporated in the collection *Love's Coming of Age* (London, 1906).

⁶¹ Edward Carpenter, *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta: Sketches in Ceylon and India* (London, 1892), p. 140; Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñani. From Adam's Peak to Elephanta* (Chicago, 1900). 'Have Faith', from *Towards Democracy*, is reprinted at pp. 123–34.

⁶² Carpenter, *From Adam's Peak*, p. 145.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 193–4.

⁶⁴ McCracken, 'Writing the Body', pp. 186–7.

⁶⁵ Carpenter, *Art of Creation*, p. 101.

'root-thought of all existence' in which the oneness of life is known instinctively rather than intellectually.⁶⁶ As Tariq Rahman points out, even though he wrote as an anti-imperialist, Carpenter did not think 'the Indian [would] usher in the era of Cosmic Consciousness. He sentimentalize[d] them because they have not yet fully grown out of the stage of "simple consciousness"'. Rahman goes on to argue that English civilization remained inferior – morally and spiritually – to the culture of India but, since England had already passed through the 'disease' of civilization and survived, the English were poised to surpass their imperial subjects as they moved to the next stage.⁶⁷ Looking back on his experiences a decade later, Carpenter concluded, characteristically, that both 'East' and 'West' held only a partial answer: 'the true line is that ... which consists in combining and harmonizing *both* body and soul, the outer and the inner. They are the eternal and needful complements of each other.'⁶⁸ Carpenter reified 'East' and 'West' as spiritual opposites, but he did so in a way that attempted to embrace both, even as it ultimately privileged a 'Western' way.

Carpenter also criticized the 'East' for 'its little insistence on the idea of Love'.⁶⁹ Paradoxically, because civilization so privileged the atomized individual and devalued real connections between human beings, all of the 'great teachers of the West – Plato, Jesus, Paul – have indicated this method' of spiritual development through love, which leads to 'the enlargement of the said self through affectional growth and nourishment, till at last it can contain itself no longer. The bursting of the sac takes place; the life is poured out, and ceasing to be local becomes universal.'⁷⁰ For Carpenter, 'love' had to be the driving force behind evolution (or exfoliation); love was the life-force 'bursting' through the old dead forms of Western civilization to make way for new possibilities.

Carpenter was writing about love (and sex) at a time when both were at once controversial and highly politicized. Socialist and feminist critiques of marriage and male sexual licence sometimes opposed and sometimes made common cause with eugenic and imperial concerns.⁷¹ In a context where the dominant 'progressive' position on sexuality was represented by the social purity movement – which, as Lucy Bland has demonstrated, demanded "'sexual purity" – the "purity" or "sexual continence" of both sexes'⁷² – Carpenter attempted to theorize in a positive way the relationships between love, sex (including same-sex love), desire and the body. Carpenter was also writing in the shadow of the Labouchere Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which criminalized

⁶⁶ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, pp. 142–3.

⁶⁷ Tariq Rahman, 'The Literary Treatment of Indian Themes in the Works of Edward Carpenter', *Durham University Journal* (December 1987): 77–81, p. 78.

⁶⁸ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, pp. 144–5.

⁶⁹ Carpenter, *From Adam's Peak*, p. 179.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁷¹ See Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford, 2003).

⁷² Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (1995; London and New York, 2002), p. 52.

'gross indecency' between men, part of what Jeffrey Weeks has described as a 'background of a sharpening definition of and hostility towards homosexuality in the late nineteenth century'.⁷³ From his first development of these themes in *Towards Democracy*, Carpenter's vision of love and desire aimed at inclusion and universality even though, as we have seen, that effort was frequently vitiated by his tendency to downplay the very real and material factors which placed men and women or Europeans and their imperial subjects in very different relationships to cultural and political power.

In his early writings on sexuality – the publication of which was interrupted by the closing down of public discussion of homosexuality in the wake of the Oscar Wilde trial in 1895⁷⁴ – Carpenter attempted a limited defence of 'Lust' ('the corporeal amatory instinct'), stressing the interchangeability of lust and love, body and soul, and of the cultural and biological under the heading of the principle of 'Transmutation'. In *Sex-Love* (1894), he identified 'Lust and Love' as 'really and in essence one thing, with diverse forms of manifestation'.⁷⁵ All love had a physical side. He made this point explicit in *Homogenic Love*:

*Who knows ... how deeply the mother-love is intertwined with the growth of the lacteal vessels and the need of the suckled infant? or how intimately even the most abstract of desires – namely the religious – is rooted in the slow hidden metamorphosis by which a new creature is really and physically born within the old?*⁷⁶

Carpenter suggested that 'Desire in man has its physical emotional and spiritual sides', repeatedly running the words 'physical', 'emotional' and 'spiritual' together without commas to emphasize their interchangeability.⁷⁷ His main concern was that sex and desire should have a social rather than an individual aim, for 'to seek a social act for a private pleasure is a falsehood'. Sex 'throughout the domains of civilisation is thoroughly unclean' precisely because it had become a way to serve a purely individual desire.⁷⁸

⁷³ Weeks, *Coming Out*, p. 15.

⁷⁴ Carpenter was working on four linked pamphlets: *Woman and her Place in a Free Society*, *Marriage in a Free Society*, *Homogenic Love and Its Place in a Free Society*, and *Sex-Love and Its Place in a Free Society*. The publishing house Fisher Unwin dropped plans to publish the collection. *Homogenic Love* had to be privately printed; the others were published by the Labour Press in Manchester in 1894 and issued as *Love's Coming of Age* in 1896. A revised version of *Homogenic Love* eventually appeared in a new edition of *Love's Coming of Age* in 1906. See Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, pp. 189–90, 194.

⁷⁵ Carpenter, *Sex-Love*, p. 8.

⁷⁶ Edward Carpenter, *Homogenic Love and its Place in a Free Society* (Printed for Private Circulation Only; Manchester, 1894), p. 13.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁷⁸ Carpenter, *Sex-Love*, pp. 16–17.

These slippages between and deliberate confusions of the boundaries between soul and body, the spiritual and the physical, are one of the reasons why Carpenter has been so variously characterized by historians, who have described him both as an advocate of a 'strongly biological theory of sexual behaviour' and as arguing that 'homogenic love was primarily a question of sensibility rather than of congenital "orientation"'.⁷⁹ In his writings on the 'intermediate sex', Carpenter continually avoided resolution of these questions, simultaneously positioning sexual intermediacy as a distinctive (and perhaps superior) state *and* as a potential towards which all humanity was moving. The 'intermediate' was bisexual in the sense that he or she combined the characteristics of both male and female; in an 'extreme specimen' both body and behaviour might evidence traits usually associated with the other sex. The 'intermediate' was also a transitional type in the sense that she or he stood between the extremes of the manly man and the womanly woman. In *The Intermediate Sex* (1908), Carpenter concluded that the most recent and most reliable authorities agreed 'that the individuals affected with inversion in marked degree do not after all differ from the rest of mankind or womankind, in any other physical or mental particular which can be distinctly indicated'.⁸⁰ The 'Intermediate Sex' was, for Carpenter, a natural variation, the result of what he described as 'a mixture of male and female elements in the same person; so that in the same embryo the emotional and nervous regions may develop along feminine lines while the outer body and functions may determine themselves as distinctly masculine'. The 'problem' of the intermediate temperament (if problem it was) was, therefore, 'of Nature's own producing' and same-sex love was, according to Carpenter, 'not only natural, but needful and inevitable'.⁸¹

While Carpenter occasionally argued that this mixing of masculine and feminine produced socially beneficial results – a kinder and gentler man, a stronger and more intellectual woman – in this text he was actually very careful not to suggest that the homosexual is in some significant sense different or deviant from the general run of humanity. One explanation for his reluctance can be found in his concern to protect his spiritual vision from the charge of deviance and degeneracy; in the late nineteenth-century context (especially in the wake of Max Nordau's *Degeneration* [1892]) difference from the norm, whether sexual or otherwise, was

⁷⁹ For the first position, see Vincent Geoghegan, 'Edward Carpenter's England Revisited', *History of Political Thought*, 24.3 (Autumn 2003): 509–27, p. 514; for the second, see Harry Cocks, 'Calamus in Bolton: Spirituality and Homosexual Desire in Late Victorian England', *Gender and History*, 13.2 (August 2001): 191–223, p. 217.

⁸⁰ Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex* (1908), in *Edward Carpenter: Selected Writings. Volume 1: Sex* (London, 1984), pp. 185–244, pp. 196–7 and 209. The English term 'Intermediate Sex' was Carpenter's phrase; the concept itself was already in widespread use, particularly since the publication of Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* (published in German in 1903; English translation 1906), which Carpenter quoted on the first page of his text.

⁸¹ Carpenter, *Intermediate Sex*, p. 213.

as likely to be condemned as atavistic as it was to be celebrated as avant-garde.⁸² This tension emerged in his discussion of a contemporary study of Walt Whitman by Dr Edward Bertz. Bertz, who characterized Whitman as ‘a person of strongly homogenic temperament’, had objected to Whitman’s ‘gospel of Comradeship as a means of social regeneration’ because it ‘is founded on a false basis ... [it] derives from an abnormality in himself, and therefore cannot possibly have a universal application or create a general enthusiasm’. Carpenter, in contrast, argued that while the Uranian temperament was strongly developed in Whitman, ‘the germs of it *are* almost, if not quite, universal’. It was quite possible, then, Carpenter concluded, that ‘the Comradeship on which Whitman founds a large portion of his message may in course of time become a general enthusiasm, and the nobler Uranians of today may be destined ... to be its pioneers and advance guard’.⁸³

A few years later, with the publication of *Intermediate Types Among Primitive Folk*, the tension between the desire to assimilate the homosexual to the rest of humanity and the desire to emphasize the special gift of the Uranian temperament resurfaced. In the first section of this text, ‘The Intermediate in the Service of Religion’, Carpenter expanded on the idea that there was an organic link between intermediacy and ‘prophetic gifts and divination’.⁸⁴ He went on:

*... the blending of the masculine and feminine temperaments would in some of these cases produce persons whose perceptions would be so subtle and complex and rapid as to come under the head of genius, persons of intuitive mind who would perceive things without knowing how, and follow far concatenations of causes and events without concerning themselves about the why – diviners and prophets in a very real sense. And these persons ... in almost all cases would acquire and did acquire a strange reputation for sanctity and divinity – arising partly perhaps out of the homosexual taboo, but also out of their real possession and command of a double-engine psychic power.*⁸⁵

The claim that the intermediate was *more* likely than the ordinary man or woman to develop ‘that third order of perception which has been called the cosmic consciousness’⁸⁶ had, among other advantages, the result of reinforcing Carpenter’s own claims to spiritual authority. At the same time, it made him vulnerable to the charge that Bertz had levelled against Whitman, that his message was founded on a ‘false basis’, on an abnormality. Since a number of sexologists – from Richard von Krafft-Ebing to Havelock Ellis and others – had already begun to suggest that

⁸² See Brain’s discussion of Nordau on synesthesia for a parallel example. Brain, ‘Edvard Munch’, p. 17.

⁸³ Carpenter, *Intermediate Sex*, p. 238.

⁸⁴ Edward Carpenter, *Intermediate Types Among Primitive Folk: A Study in Social Evolution* (London, 1914), p. 15.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 62–3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

spiritual experience was itself closely linked to sexual mania, Carpenter risked being characterized as both spiritually and sexually deviant.⁸⁷

Perhaps the most ambitious of Carpenter's attempts to use science in support of his spiritual vision was *The Drama of Love and Death* (1912), a study of the nature, origin and destiny of the 'soul'. Here, Carpenter invoked the latest advances in science as proof of the oneness of the universe, the reality of the spiritual world and the immortality of the soul. Much of the text deals, however, not with the cosmos, but with the microcosmos, a world of chromosomes, centrosomes and psychomeres, in which Carpenter found a single-cellular justification for his understanding of both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, not only biologizing spirituality, but also spiritualizing the biological. Thus he distinguished between the creation of a new physical entity – a baby – and the creation of a new *spiritual* entity, a 'soul-bud', as he puts it. This 'soul-bud' may be produced by the mating of a man and a woman, but it may also emerge from some other passionate and loving sexual union, even one between two men or two women. The new soul could take possession of both lovers, making them one spiritual being; it could also (in cases of heterosexual love) 'descend into and vivify the physical germ of their future child' or it could find a physical home in some other developing human organism.⁸⁸ The spiritual thus preceded the biological. In a related discussion, Carpenter suggested that physical intimacy – even or especially at the cellular level – is a form, not just of generation, but of regeneration.⁸⁹ Of particular interest here is his discussion of the biological concept of 'conjugation', the union or fusion of two (apparently) similar cells. 'Conjugation in its primitive form (as among protozoa where there is no distinction of sex) takes place between similars, and is an exchange to some degree of cell-contents.' Furthermore, 'It apparently affords a superior nutrition, and is a kind of Regeneration, essential to the continued health of the species, and favorable to reproduction'.⁹⁰ Sexual love, including the possibility of same-sex love is, for Carpenter, inscribed at the cellular level.

In one of his last major works, *Pagan and Christian Creeds: Their Origin and Meaning* (1920), Carpenter provided his most direct discussion of the relationship between sexuality and religion. This was a theme that he had touched on in many places in his earlier work, most significantly in a short section published in *Love's Coming of Age*, entitled 'Some Remarks on the Early Star and Sex Worships'. That text captured the simultaneous embrace of extremes which was characteristic of so much of his work, arguing that the 'oldest and most universal cults' have been the worship of the stars (and of all that is most abstract) on the one hand, and of sex (and of all that is most intimate) on the other.⁹¹ In *Pagan and Christian Creeds* he

⁸⁷ See Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, p. 96, and Joy Dixon, 'Modernity, Heterodoxy and the Transformation of Religious Cultures', in Morgan and deVries, *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures*, pp. 211–30, pp. 223–4.

⁸⁸ Edward Carpenter, *The Drama of Love and Death: A Study of Human Evolution and Transfiguration* (London, 1912), pp. 239–41.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁹¹ Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age*, p. 153.

focused primarily on the worship of sex, which he argued was the oldest and most basic phase of religious life. Christianity, with its emphasis on individual salvation, was an inherently 'Second Stage' religion, and therefore brought 'corruption'. As sex was 'diverted from its true uses ... and appropriated by the individual to his own private pleasure – no sooner was its religious character as a tribal service (often rendered within the Temple precincts) lost sight of or degraded into a commercial transaction – than every kind of evil fell upon mankind'.⁹² Christianity was a necessary period of corruption, part of a process in which love and sex had become artificially separated in order to be transformed and recombined in the final cosmic stage. The pre-civilization 'Phallic cults', which connected 'religion with man's own body and the tremendous force of sex residing in it – emblem of undying life and all fertility and power', were an indication of ways in which religion and sexuality were to be (re)combined in the future;⁹³ as Sheila Rowbotham puts it, 'the pre-civilised past could provide alternative sources of feelings and values which could indicate the synthesis of cosmic consciousness'.⁹⁴

With its oscillations, exchanges, transmutations and conflations, Carpenter's political and sexual programme was an inherently unstable and often problematic one.⁹⁵ In his memoir, *My Days and Dreams*, Carpenter himself referred to 'the native vagueness of my thought',⁹⁶ and it would be easy to multiply examples of his impatience with details and his relative neglect of the specifics of achieving political and social change.⁹⁷ The drive for what Rowbotham calls 'epistemological wholeness' could also be frustrating in its refusal to take a clear position. In 'Nothing Less than All', from the final instalment of *Towards Democracy*, Carpenter himself addressed this question, and renewed his commitment to the deferral of resolution:

*For the moment I am pledged to this or that;
Yet I feel that in the end I must accept all,
And shall be content with nothing less than all.*⁹⁸

At the same time, however, Carpenter's resolute deferral of resolution reminds us that our efforts to see writers like Carpenter in terms of 'either/or' rather than 'both/

⁹² Edward Carpenter, *Pagan and Christian Creeds: Their Origin and Meaning* (London, 1920), pp. 248–9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

⁹⁴ Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter*, p. 408.

⁹⁵ For a valuable discussion of the conservative side of Carpenter's politics, especially his Anglocentrism and anti-Semitism, see Geoghegan, 'Edward Carpenter's England Revisited', pp. 521–6.

⁹⁶ Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, p. 69.

⁹⁷ See Keith Nield, 'Edward Carpenter: The Uses of Utopia', in Brown, *Prose Studies*, pp. 17–32, pp. 27–8. Nield also notes the ways in which Carpenter's work could be put to uses of which he was unlikely to have approved, as, for example, in the popularity of German translations of his work which aligned it to *völkisch* ends (*ibid.*, p. 26).

⁹⁸ Carpenter, *Towards Democracy*, pp. 391–2.

and' is itself a product of our own, historically contingent, analytic categories. Tariq Rahman's claim that Carpenter's 'metaphysic was a product, as were the social theories, of his homosexual orientation'⁹⁹ captures something crucial about Carpenter's project, but it is also worth noting that one implication of this claim is that religious experience is, in some straightforward sense, derived from another (more 'real') sexual subjectivity. It assumes a desiring sexual subject – constituted elsewhere – which then confronts 'the spiritual'. This assumption still underpins the vast majority of studies which have explored the intersections of sex and spirituality. So, for example, Craig Atwood characterizes the eighteenth-century Moravians – who employed a highly eroticized devotional imagery – as channelling and controlling sexual desire through religious imagery.¹⁰⁰ Or, in a collection of articles on the Bible in lesbian and gay culture, Biblical imagery is appropriated, contested or challenged in the service of a lesbian or gay identity which is formed *prior to* and outside of the encounter with scripture.¹⁰¹ The result is to reify 'the sexual' and implicitly to render it as foundational, rather than to see sexuality as historically contingent and in dynamic relationship to (equally contingent) formations of 'the spiritual'.¹⁰² Rather than seeing sexuality and spirituality at the *fin de siècle* in 'either/or' terms, we can, through a study of Carpenter's work, see their mutual imbrication; this shift to 'both/and' allows us to see the sexual/spiritual as it operated in this historical moment in the context of a range of hybrid forms (thoughts/things; individual/collective; 'East'/'West'; self/other; male/female; biological/spiritual), reminding us again of the radical contingency of our analytic categories and the need to subject those categories to an ongoing historical critique.

⁹⁹ Rahman, 'The Alienated Prophet', p. 194.

¹⁰⁰ Craig D. Atwood, 'Sleeping in the Arms of Christ: Sanctifying Sexuality in the Eighteenth-Century Moravian Church', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8.1 (1997): 25–51.

¹⁰¹ Raymond-Jean Frontain (ed.), *Reclaiming the Sacred: The Bible in Gay and Lesbian Culture* (New York and London, 1997). There are some notable exceptions in the collection, for example, Ed Madden's excellent 'The Well of Loneliness, or The Gospel According to Radclyffe Hall', pp. 163–86.

¹⁰² Two recent studies which have played an important role in my thinking here are Frederick S. Roden, *Same-Sex Desire in Victorian Religious Culture* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002); and Richard Dellamora, 'The Well of Loneliness and the Catholic Rhetoric of Sexual Dissidence', in Lowell Gallagher, Frederick S. Roden and Patricia Juliana Smith (eds), *Catholic Figures, Queer Narratives* (Basingstoke and New York, 2007), pp. 114–28.

This page has been left blank intentionally