Forms of the Chronotope
in Fin-de-Siècle British Women’s Poetry

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Abstract

This thesis uses Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope to analyse the ways in which women’s poems at the fin-de-siècle are informed by particular gendered worldviews, often at odds with those of their male counterparts. It capitalises on the double nature of the chronotope as a literary/generic and cognitive tool to map the reactions of women poets to the wider cultural, ideological and literary contexts within which they were operating. Conceptually, this thesis regards fin-de-siècle women’s poems as nexuses of time-space interactions, which typify the writers’ multiple approaches to cultural domination, hegemonic power structures and contemporary debates, as well as their conceptualisation of the New Woman poet and/or motif. Chapters 1 and 2 explore the poetry of Rosamund Marriott Watson and May Kendall and study the chronotopic logics inherent to each poem/collection as a way of shedding light on these women poets’ engagements with masculine tradition. It posits time-space clashes between male-dominated chronotopes (science, progress, property, kingdoms, etc.) and disruptive chronotopes of the feminine as a structuring element of their poems. Chapter 3 widens the scope of its chronotopic analyses and studies fin-de-siècle women’s poetry at a cross-authorial level to highlight common time-space patterns and worldviews. This section explores the poems of a range of writers such as Amy Levy, Mathilde Blind, A. Mary. F. Robinson, Michael Field, Katharine de Mattos, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge and Dollie Radford, among others, through the prism of various motifs or local chronotopes, including the urban labyrinth, the moon, and the cigarette. The final chapter celebrates the diversity of women poets’ responses to essentialist masculine tradition and the ways in which they promote a movement away from patrilineal towards women-centred chronotopic structures. It shows how the matriarchal, women-only and/or homoerotic time-spaces that they open up typify their conceptions of New Women’s poetry and creation of their own mythos.
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INTRODUCTION

I come from nothing; but from where
Come the undying thoughts I bear?
Down, through long links of death and birth,
From the past poets of the earth.
My immortality is there.

I am like the blossom of an hour.
But long, long vanished sun and shower
Awoke my breath i’ the young world’s air.
I track the past back everywhere
Through seed and flower and seed and flower.

Or I am like a stream that flows
Full of the cold springs that arose
In morning lands, in distant hills;
And down the plain my channel fills
With melting of forgotten snows.

Voices, I have not heard, possessed
My own fresh songs; my thoughts are blessed
With relics of the far unknown.
And mixed with memories not my own
The sweet streams throng in my breast.

Before this life began to be,
The happy songs that wake in me
Woke long ago and far apart.
Heavily on this little heart
Presses this immortality.

[Alice Meynell, “A Song of Derivations”]

In her poem “A Song of Derivations” quoted above, Alice Meynell addresses the difficulty of situating the modern feminine subject – as a cultural and social, rather than essentialist construction – within her wider literary context. Her lyric voice both

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1 Excluded from her 1875 collection *Preludes*, Meynell’s poem found new popularity at the fin-de-siècle for the note of modernity that it stroke. It became one of her most reprinted pieces, at times appearing under the title “The Modern Poet: A Song of Derivations”, as in John Lane’s edition of her *Poems*. See: Alice Meynell, *Poems* (London: John Lane, 1896), 68-69.

2 This thesis builds on the works of French feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Bracha Ettinger and Hélène Cixous, published in the 1970s; and more specifically on Cixous’ essay “Le Rire de la Méduse” (“The Laugh of the Medusa”), which remains today one of the cornerstones of feminist criticism. In her essay, Cixous deconstructs the feminine (“le féminin”) in its essentialist acceptation, and offers new readings of the woman subject and women’s writings (l’écriture feminine). In her opinion, women’s “insurgent writing” does (i.e. performs a social function), allows women to reclaim their bodies, which patriarchal powers had confiscated from them, and opens up the “possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of
acksnowledges and dilutes binaries between poetic innovation and artistic heritage, male tradition and women’s poetry, individuality and community. While academics have debated to determine whether to read her work along the lines of a female Sapphic tradition or a masculine aesthetic, Meynell appears to embrace both trends in her search for poetic identity. Questions of mapping are omnipresent in her text, which paradoxically seeks to chart the speaker within their artistic context while refusing to unfurl specific time-space markers. The opening lines of the poem raise the question of canonisation through the blurring of time-space co-ordinates: while the genderless speaker (or modern poet) originates ex nihilo, the “nothing” from which they come derives from a specific, yet uncharted “there” where immortality lies. The series of natural metaphors that follows allows the poem to explore different time-space configurations and the ways in which they intersect with the speaker’s quest for identity. Is the modern poet merely the “blossom of an hour”, as illustrated by the brevity of line 6? The result of an endless alternation between “seed and flower and seed and flower” (l.10), as replicated by the poem’s rhymes and repetitions? A “stream that flows” with the lines, carrying the “forgotten snows” of the past (l.15)? Or is it all three at once, as suggested by the anaphora that ties the openings of stanzas 2-3?

While the first image undeniably invokes the time-space implications of the fin-de-siècle within the text (through ideas of modernity and transience), and binds the figure of the poet to a specific cultural context (that of the “young world”, l.12), the other two convey notions of tradition and genetic memory, and allow the time-space unfurled by the speaker’s mind to expand. In terms of temporality, the ontological boundaries between past, present and future collapse as they embrace a movement away from the synchronic to the diachronic. The uncanny voices that possess or haunt the speaker (l.16), both familiar and unknown, invoke ancient times through their reference to Gothic tradition. However, the deliberate confusion of the phrase “Voices, a transformation of social and cultural structures”. See: Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen (trans.), “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Signs 1, no. 4 (1976): 875-93.


4 Alice Meynell’s reflections on genetic memory might be a reference to Wordsworth’s own preoccupations in his ode “Intimation of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood”: “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting”. His voice adds to the ones haunting Meynell’s poem, reflecting upon the writer’s place within wider literary traditions and cultural domination.
I have not heard” – which could either be read as an expression of the past (voices I have never heard) or the future (voices I have not yet heard) – construes time as a continuum and questions chronological boundaries separating different literary eras. Spatial markers echo this temporal flexibility. While the preposition “down” (l.3) suggests the existence of a subterranean network of poetic intra-references nourishing the speaker’s poetry, the triple repetition of the adjective “long” (ll. 3; 6) defines its horizontal extension, and “back everywhere” (l.9) characterizes cross-generational and ubiquitous connections. As the poem’s time-space enlarges, situating the modern poet becomes paradoxically easier and more difficult. Although Meynell stays clear of gender assignation, the poet figure who fails to identify a clear line of ancestors (or arguably, literary ‘grandmothers’); the flower and water imageries pervading the text; and the mention of the artist’s “little heart” (l.24) in the closing stanza, cast the poem as a potential manifesto for fin-de-siècle women writers. Yet, the uncertainty that defines the time-space of the text as well as the gender identity of the speaker allows the modern female poet to exist both within and without the masculine canon.

Alice Meynell’s poem crystallises all the questions that this thesis addresses, by weaving together issues of canonisation, gender and time-space. Conceptually, this research uses Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope to chart fin-de-siècle women poets’ contributions to the period’s canon. It contends that the double nature of the chronotope – as a tool for literary analysis, as well as a cognitive concept shedding light on particular worldviews – elucidates the ways in which these writers reacted to the wider artistic, political and historical contexts within which they were operating. On a structural level, this theoretical frame works as a lens for close reading a wide range of poems by women who earned a living through writing in the 1880-90s. Using Bakhtin’s mapping techniques, this thesis analyses the myriad of chronotopic markers that these women’s poems contain (e.g. meter, repetitions, pauses, ellipses, rhymes, colour codes, alliterations, or assonances.) and studies the generic, cultural, historical and political implications of the time-spaces that they unfurl. The maps that emerge from these textual analyses illuminate complex spatial-temporal relationships in which various layers or forms of the chronotope co-exist, complement, challenge and oppose one another. This thesis contends that the dialogic relations between these embedded chronotopes in fin-de-siècle poems by women typifies the authors’ sense of identity, their gendered experiences of the fast-paced world in which they lived, as well as their reactions to cultural domination through the construction of their own mythos.
Recent developments in fin-de-siècle studies clearly suggest the emergence of a scholarly interest in these questions of mapping. As the period’s literary canon outgrew the patriarchal and chronological boundaries imposed by immediate critical reception, academic efforts to situate the Decadent, sexual, political or New Woman subject within this wider frame grew considerably. These approaches to the field have raised contradictions and difficulties of interpretation. Fresh research on late-nineteenth century Hellenism and European Decadence for instance, has incited academics to ponder upon apparent tensions between the image of the modern poet as individualistic and self-absorbed, and the cosmopolitan identity of many fin-de-siècle writers whose involvement in larger cultural networks threatened nationalistic discourses.\(^5\) Similarly, the expansion and democratisation of the canon in favour of forgotten female writers has encouraged scholars to question, redefine and justify the relevance of a women’s tradition.\(^6\) Two coalescing tendencies in apparent opposition emerge in their papers, both investigating fin-de-siècle women’s affiliation to an aesthetic of their own and aiming to re-anchor these women within the broader canon of the period. Despite thriving research on the impact, influence and roles of women writers within literary circles, editorship, periodicals and other networks of influence, the question of their place within the canon continues to spark debates. In July 2018, the organisers of the conference “Women Writing Decadence: European Perspectives 1880-1920” at the University of Oxford\(^7\) opened the event’s discussions by inviting scholars to reflect upon new ways of mapping women’s participations within the Decadent movement. This thesis argues that pre-existing categories as well as the pervasive characterisation of women poets as forgotten, marginal or liminal in even the most recent publications have worked at the expense of their inclusion within the

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\(^5\) In his book chapter on irremediable death in Decadent poems, Bristow addresses and partially solves this tension by arguing that self-centred attention to mortality contributed to the poets’ awareness of their role within a broader tradition (notably through parallels with Greek and Latin decadence). Joseph Bristow, “How Decadent Poems Die,” in Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin de Siècle, eds. Jason David Hall and Alex Murray (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 28. For discussion on European Decadence and its influence on imperialistic and nationalistic discourses, see Stefano Evangelista’s AHRC-funded research project titled “The Love of Strangers” and series of events and conferences: https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/readwatchlisten/features/the-love-of-strangers/.


\(^7\) The conference “Women Writing Decadence: European Perspectives 1880-1920” was held on 7-8 July 2018 at the University of Oxford and organised by Katharina Herold and Leire Barrera-Medrano: https://decadentwomen.wordpress.com/
canon. It contends that a fresh approach to fin-de-siècle poetry is needed to overcome tensions; and proposes the chronotope as a lens for charting women’s poems anew.

In *Women Poets in the Victorian Era*, Fabienne Moine challenges labels and other forms of rigid categorisation by returning to the texts and focusing on isolated motifs. Her micro mapping enables her both to shed light on a category of literature loaded with misconceptions (“nature poetry”) and to enhance rather than conceal the diversity of women’s poems. Her perspective on female poetic production as a literary practice that “illustrates the social and cultural identity of women poets” at a given point of history, and as tactics against hegemonic power structures, bridges her focus on the textual with the cognitive dimension of her analysis. This thesis deploys a similar approach to canonisation through its study of motifs and poetical devices. While the chronotope shares Moine’s goal to re-centre genre analysis onto the study of texts, the connections that it weaves between poetry and the socio-cultural identity of women writers operate at a higher level and relies on the generic dimension of the concept to reshape an entire canon through the lens of time-space constructions:

We will give the name chronotope (literally, “time space”) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. […] In the literary chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. The chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time. [Bakhtin, *Forms*, 84-5]

Bakhtin defines the word “chronotope” (chronos-topos) as the configuration of time-space markers and intersecting axes that underpin all narratives. His concept also works as a generic tool for establishing categories in literature. In spite of this generic function, the categories that the chronotope creates are anything but sclerotic, and are in fact highly porous: they overlap and enable a rich variety of chronotopes of all forms (from the ones unfurled by a phoneme to the overarching structure of the plot) to cohabit and interact with one another.

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Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships. The relationships themselves that exist among chronotopes cannot enter into any of the relationships contained within chronotopes.10 [Bakhtin]

Beyond his attention to major chronotopes for the sake of his classification system, Bakhtin concludes his conceptual essay by hinting at the immense profusion of coalescing chronotopes that even the most minimalist forms of narratives are bound to generate. In her most recent article on the chronotope, Joy Ladin draws on this specific point and explains how the trope of the bride for instance elicits a “concatenation of intimate time and space” in the overarching narrative.11 Placed in a different reality (e.g. a heroic chronotope), the “highly compressed narrative” unfurled by the bride would interfere with the creation of a “spatially and temporally coherent fabula”.12 While overarching chronotopes strive to shape a myriad of competing time-space markers into a coherent whole, the unlimited number of embedded (local) chronotopes that they encapsulate irremediably emit chronotopic energies, which at times contradict the logic of the plot.

Bakhtin’s theoretical frame is thus malleable and offers flexibility for mapping 1880-90s women’s contributions to the canon without compromising the diversity of their aesthetics, or downplaying their attempts to create a cultural network of intra-references of their own (and generate their own New Woman mythos through internal dialogues). While this thesis seeks to find out whether common or dialogic chronotopic patterns emerge in fin-de-siècle women’s poems, it embraces and enhances rather than reduce or resolve the multiplicity and contradictions inherent to female poetry at the end of the century. For this purpose, this research spans a wide range of fin-de-siècle women poets whose artistic careers peaked in the 1880s and 1890s, and a variety of literary genres – from the revolutionary border ballad and the scientific satirical poem to impressionist verses on the modern city.

10 Bakhtin, “Forms,” 252.
1. The Poetic Chronotope in Context

1.1 Current Research on the Chronotope: Generic versus Cognitive

This thesis participates in a thriving and freshly revived scholarship. Over the last decade, the resurgence of academic interest in self-referential narrative studies and questions of space, time and identity has resulted in a wide range of publications on the chronotope. The myriad of topics that they analyse through this theoretical lens exploits the freedom offered by Bakhtin’s argument according to which a chronotopic matrix underpins any given narrative, as minimalist as it may be – down to the very roots of language. Among these recent works and their various approaches to time-space mapping, two distinct trends seem to emerge. Some of these articles capitalise on the generic dimension of the chronotope as a way of defining new categories in twenty-first century literature, or bringing fresh perspective on older forms of literary writings. In 2013, Harriet Earle for instance used Bakhtin’s mapping tools to explore the ways in which motifs of flashback, recurring nightmares and catatonia in comics modify time-space relationships to convey traumatic sequences. Another example is Andrés Romero Jódar’s 2006 article, which posits the difference between the graphic novel and the comic strip by studying oppositions in their chronotopic perceptions. The second trend among recent articles on the chronotope focuses more specifically on the cognitive dimension of the concept, and shifts away from its literary aims. In 2006 for instance, Jordynn Jack studied chronotopes in speeches by biotechnological lobbies (e.g. Monsanto), contending that their focus on the need for...


fast progress elides the irreversible effects of technology and affects decision-making processes.\textsuperscript{17}

This binary highlights an obvious and unnecessary rupture between literary and historical (or ideological) understandings of Bakhtin’s time-space theory. In this respect, many of these recent articles have failed to grasp the twofold nature of the chronotope, and only a few have attempted to bridge this gap in their argument. A good illustration of such exceptions is Timothy Van Compernolle’s monograph on the modern Japanese novel (2016), in which he explores the ways in which fiction and cultural conceptions of the nation in Japan intersect within chronotopes of success.\textsuperscript{18}

A series of compelling articles on the chronotope gathered in \textit{Bakhtin’s Theory of the Literary Chronotope} (2013) elucidate under-developed arguments in Bakhtin’s essay and explore the ways in which the various dimensions of the concept intersect.\textsuperscript{19} In the introduction, Nele Bemong and Pieter Borghart explain that the reasons why scholars have reduced the concept to a classification tool lie in the abstractedness of its definition in the original essay (quoted earlier). Bakhtin’s famous opening lines in “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” have been widely quoted in academia, to the extent that they have overshadowed aspects of paramount importance in the text. His definition fails to prescribe a systematic method to use the chronotope other than the one readers can infer from the compelling series of close-readings that follows. Reducing the chronotope to a simple device for analysing time-space markers and coining sub-genres within a wider classification system means overlooking its intrinsic ideological significance. Bakhtin insists on the potential of his concept to determine “to a significant degree the image of man in literature” in relation to the historical stages that have marked human development, and sees in this theory a new paradigm for analysing the “historical poetics” of novels.\textsuperscript{20} In other words, Bakhtin

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Jordynn Jack, “Chronotopes: Forms of Time in Rhetorical Argument”, \textit{College English} 69, no. 1 (2006): 52–73.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Timothy J. Van Compernolle, \textit{Struggling Upward: Worldly Success and the Japanese Novel}. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Published by the Harvard University Asia Center; Distributed by Harvard University Press), 2016. His argument, reflected in the title of his study \textit{Struggling Upward}, sheds light on the ways Japanese conceptions of time-space are organised around a vertical axis.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} The conference that inspired these essays occurred in 2008 in Brussels. It aimed to support the revival of interest in space-time studies and to create a community of Bakhtinian scholars interested in the concept of the chronotope. Nele Bemong et al., eds. \textit{Bakhtin’s Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives}. Gent: Ginko, Academia Press, 2010.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Bakhtin, “Forms,” 84-85.
\end{itemize}
conceives artistic production in terms of people’s relation to time-space and equates genres in literature with particular worldviews. The temporality that typifies Greek romance for instance – reducing the plot of the novel to an extra-temporal hiatus of interchangeable adventures between two predetermined biographical poles (love encounter/wedding) – dramatizes an image of humans in terms of conflict with nature, which “predates class distinctions” and does not take into account issues of freedom.

This thesis capitalises on the twofold nature of the chronotope and allows the literary-generic and cognitive-ideological dimensions of the concept to intersect. It weaves connections between literary chronotopes in 1880-90s poems by women and their authors’ perceptions or experiences of the fin-de-siècle – a period that opened up new worldviews and forms of poetic vision as detailed later on in this introduction. In other words, it aims to study their works and the modern, gendered conceptions of time-space that they unfurl as a means to determine the image of women – and more often than not, of the New Woman – in the texts. Essentially, it studies their poetry as a dialogic space and nexuses of cross-references and shared motifs through which the aesthetic, gendered and social identity of the female poets is constructed. Chapters I and II demonstrate how Rosamund Marriott Watson and May Kendall’s poems engage in dialogues with normative (i.e. masculine) traditions and approaches to motifs such as progress, history and revolution, as well as with the wider scientific, political, moral and aesthetic debates of the era. The chapters explore how the ways in which different chronotopes complement or oppose one another typify the image of the New Woman in their poems – in the form of the wild, monstrous woman in Rosamund Marriott Watson’s work or the socially committed New Woman artist in Kendall’s poetry. Chapter 3 looks at the ways in which fin-de-siècle poems by women promote women-only traditions, societies and communities. In the same way that Jerusha McCormack investigates the role that fin-de-siècle poems by men played in generating the mythos of the male Decadent poet with loose morals, this research evidences how women writers sought to produce synchronised discourses against masculine cultural domination and through them, to reflect on their historical identity as a group.  

1.2 The Chronotope in Feminist and Gender Studies: 1980s Onwards

[Language] lies on the borderline between oneself and the other [...]. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes one’s “own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language [...] but rather it exists in other people's mouths, [...] contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.22 [Bakhtin]

The use of chronotopes as a theoretical frame for the gendered interpretation of a text is not new. When Bakhtin’s essay became available for the first time in English in 1981 – at a time when queer and gender theory began to thrive –, feminist academics appropriated his time-space methodology to challenge patriarchal forms of language. In A Dialogue of Voices (1994), Karen Hohne, Helen Wussow and Suzanne Shumway reflect on the inherent compatibility of Bakhtinian theories with their gendered approaches.23 In her chapter “Is Bakhtin a Feminist or Just Another Dead White Male”, Denise Heikinen lists the ways in which the literary critic contributed to feminist theory, even though he never openly mentioned gender in his works.24 She reads the famous passage from “Discourse in the Novel” quoted above as a direct invitation from Bakhtin to adapt his findings to her own feminist intents. In this chapter as well as the introduction to the book, Hohne, Wussow and Heikinen remind their readers that Bakhtin understood identity and language as two connected and inseparable forms of reaction against dominant cultures. Later on in the book, Suzanne Shumway compares feminist and Bakhtinian theories in terms of their common focus on heterogeneity and on the marginalised other – oppressed by the “hegemony of dominant [and] internally persuasive languages”.25 For instance, Bakhtin’s work on dialogism and heteroglossia aligns with the premises of feminism by decentring language to accommodate voices that normative discourses repress.

In her chapter on “The Chronotope of the Asylum” in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Suzanne Shumway elucidates the ways in which Bakhtin’s conception of time-space (chronotope) enters in a dialogue with, and enables clearer understanding of his views on language (dialogism and heteroglossia). Her main line of argument opposes the “independent feminine other” to the “dominant masculine voice”, which enforces a totalising structure on narratives and precludes all forms of alternative subjectivity. She contends that the ultimate goal of recent feminist literary theory should be to re-examine “the very basis of narrative” as a way of detecting resistance (also referred to as “anti-” or “competing narratives”) at the micro-level of the text itself. She associates the “feminine element of narrative” with the disruptive, and exhorts the feminist critic to find efficient ways to “seek out contradictions, heterogeneity [and] ruptures in the fabric of representation so thinly stretched (if powerful) to contain excess, division, difference”. Bakhtin’s chronotope provides her with a template to conceptualise and situate the feminine subject at the level of the word. For that purpose, she borrows his binary between centripetal forces (e.g. the plot, or any literary agent working towards “unifying and stabilising meaning”) and centrifugal forces (which relentlessly strive to “undo this unification”) to close-read *Jane Eyre*, with specific attention to the representations of madness. Her analysis shows that centrifugal (or disruptive) forms of language (laughs, screams, silence) predominate in the narrative spaces that allow the ‘mad woman’ to exist. In the chronotope of the asylum, subversive language opens time-spaces in which “alternate narrative possibilities can be imagined”.

In Shumway’s essay, the ontological boundaries between the “feminine” and the “centrifugal” collapse: the terms are used interchangeably throughout her study. This thesis builds on Bakhtin’s dualism between the centripetal and the centrifugal as a prism through which to analyse fin-de-siècle women’s reactions to traditional forms of storytelling and cultural domination. My close-readings of the texts pay attention to breaks, pauses and silences through their analyses of meter, ellipsis and other poetic devices. My research focuses on the roles that centrifugal features play in challenging the main structure of the plot and in enabling the disruptive feminine to surface in the lines. However, I contend that full semantic assimilation between the centrifugal and

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28 Ibid,” 157-158.
the feminine is reductive, and particularly misleading as feminine disruption can locate itself beyond local chronotopes. In the case of Michael Field’s or Mathilde Blind’s poetry for instance, my thesis’ findings evidence that overarching chronotopes (e.g. the plots, which are clear instances of centripetal forces) place the action in a women-only or feminised setting (e.g. Lesbos) from the onset. Another limitation of this semantic association between the feminine and local chronotopic disruption lies in the very essence of poetry, which naturally tips the balance of forces in favour of the centrifugal and the evocative power of language. In this respect, even canonical poems by men writers (especially short, non-narrative ones, which were omnipresent at the fin-de-siècle) mostly consist of centrifugal energies. The thesis argues that the disruptive feminine is located at the intersections between local and main chronotopes and in the dialogue that they create, rather than in the centrifugal only.

1.3 Bakhtin’s Chronotope and Poetry: Tensions, Adaptation, Application

It is important to understand the differences in the chronotopic environments of poetry and fiction in order to conceptualise the applicability of Bakhtin’s theory to the study of verses. To this day, Joy Ladin is the only scholar who illuminated, rather than presupposed or questioned, the relevance of the chronotope for poetry analysis. Capitalising on Bakhtin’s definition of language as fundamentally chronotopic, she daringly argues against the author of the essay that poems “generate chronotopes much more readily than prose”. In “Fleshing Out the Chronotope”, Ladin attempts to map chronotopic layers in terms of their interrelations and creates a taxonomy of chronotopes that my thesis uses. First, she identifies *intrasubjective* chronotopes tied to the characters’ perceptions. In my thesis, Chapters 1-2 capitalise on these distinctions and concentrate on the ways in which the intrasubjective time-spaces of the disruptive feminine or the marginalised other confront the overarching chronotopes of male narration – often in line with the second type of chronotopes identified by Ladin, i.e. the *intersubjective* ones, involving more than one character and typifying social time-space. The last layer of chronotopes is *extradiegetic* (or transsubjective) and perceptible to narrator or author and reader only – which I use, for instance, to explore Kendall’s use of humour in her poems.

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Ladin’s kaleidoscopic conceptualisation of chronotopes undercuts the stability of the genres that Bakhtin determines in his essay; but provides Ladin with the tools for examining time-space relations in poetry at an intricate level. In her first essay on the chronotope, she discusses methodological adjustments for using Bakhtin’s concept to study poetry, by analysing differences in the chronotopic environments of genres:

In the centripetal environment of most prose narratives, the stable chronotopes and the relationships among them defines consciousness, world and values. In the centrifugal environment of poetry, chronotopes flicker and flow in a series of hints, glimpses, dissolves, defining consciousness, world and values via evanescence rather than stability. [This evanescence is] as central to the vitality and meaning of those texts as the stability of chronotopes is to the vitality and meaning of prose narratives.\(^\text{30}\)

In her opinion, prose automatically generates chronotopes as a direct consequence of situating and describing action (plot). This time-space arrangement results in greater stability and arguably, lesser time-space vitality. Poetry, on the other hand, mostly relies on diffusing the chronotopic energies inherent to language. In this configuration, the formation of coherent chronotopes is more difficult, as devices such as motifs, line breaks, metre, rhymes and repetitions tip “the balance of forces from the centripetal to the centrifugal” by magnifying “the chronotopic implications of words and sentences”. These poetic features are “irrelevant to syntactical structures” and disrupt overarching structures by distracting readers from their “sense of the whole”. Ladin gives the example of “tongue-slowing” sounds, which participate in “stretching” the times of narration, as well as in introducing other layers of meaning in the poem.\(^\text{31}\)

In both of her essays on the chronotope (1999; 2010), Joy Ladin chooses not to engage with debates on the difficulties that scholars are bound to encounter when using Bakhtin for analysing poetry. It is important to note that Bakhtin’s problematic relation to poetry may provide a first answer as to why chronotopic studies of poems have remained a liminal attempt in academia. In the last chapter of *A Dialogue of Voices* devoted to Pernette du Guillet’s “Dialogic Poetics”,\(^\text{32}\) Karen Simroth James engages

\(^{30}\) Ladin, “Fleshing Out the Chronotope,” 224-225.


in a dialogue with the depreciative views on poetry that Bakhtin adopts in “Discourse of the Novel”. His argument in this essay hinges on a binary between dialogism (novel discourse) and monologism (poetic language). James dispute the relevance of such line of demarcation, and allows her argument to intersect with issues of gender. In her compelling close reading of du Guillet’s Renaissance poetry, she demonstrates how divergent and inherently subversive voices permeate the lines of the poems and “allow for a new poetic subjectivity” deconstructing notions of hegemonic truth, to surface.

In the light of Bakhtin’s later essay on the chronotope, readings of his views on poetry as monologic seems paradoxical and misleading. Despite his obvious endorsement of novelistic genre in “Forms” and “Discourse”, Bakhtin’s understanding of language as inherently discursive and chronotopic (i.e. multi-layered and informed by social and political contexts) expands beyond strict dichotomies. Michael Eskin solves this tension by asserting that treatments of Bakhtin’s “numerous unfavourable pronouncements on poetry” as representative of his views on the genre are reductive, and embrace only one of at least “two plausible interpretative options allowed for [by the author]”. Eskin reminds us that Bakhtin’s invective against “the language of poetic genres” mainly targets symbolists’ claims according to which verses ought to mediate between the human and the divine (i.e. a conception of poetry predicated on ideas of a unitary language). This opinion does not intersect with his conception of poetry as a whole. For Eskin, poetic and novelistic discourses must be interpreted in broader terms in Bakhtin’s essay: they merely correspond to “diametrically opposed modalities of literary discourse” and mark “the lower and the upper limits […] of the degree of a literary utterance’s enactment of the natural dialogicity of language”. This is evident in Bakhtin’s numerous admissions that prose can sometimes be monologic and, as indicated in a footnote, that poetry can be “novelistic” – that is, polyphonic:

It goes without saying that we continually advance as typical the extreme to which poetic genres aspire; in concrete examples of poetic works it is possible to find features

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34 Hohne and Wussow, A Dialogue of Voices, xxi.
36 Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” 287: “The language of poetic genres […] becomes authoritarian […] , sealing itself off from the influence of extraliterary social dialects. Therefore, such ideas as a special ‘poetic language’, a ‘language of the gods’, a ‘priestly language of poetry’ and so forth could flourish on poetic soil. It is noteworthy that the poet, should he not accept the given literary language, will sooner resort to the artificial creation of a new language specifically for poetry rather than using actual, available social dialects”.
fundamental to prose, and numerous hybrids of various generic types exist. These are especially widespread in periods of shift in literary poetic languages.\textsuperscript{37}

Here, Bakhtin’s clear distinction between “poetic genres” and “concrete examples of poetic works” corroborates Eskin’s understanding of the critic’s views on poetry. In his opinion, Bakhtin’s emphatic assertion of the poet’s answerability for his or her utterances is a double-edged sword that can empower poetry as the “exemplary mode of speech”. The poet can choose to stand against official discourses and to enact an “invested criticism” of “those who are in power” through the medium of poetry.\textsuperscript{38}

This thesis approaches female poetic production as strategies against cultural domination. The concrete examples of works by fin-de-siècle women poets that it close-reads all encapsulate the novelistic dimension described by Bakhtin in that they provide a political analysis of power structures. Chapter 1 shows how Marriott Watson’s use of a Scots dialect for the writing of her border ballads provides her poems with a pattern of linguistic disruption that fits her political and proto-feminist agenda. Chapter 2 explores the various ways in which Kendall alienates her marginal (and feminised) characters from Darwinian discourses on Empire, race and power to challenge the hierarchy that it implies. Bakhtin’s mention of periods of shift as a fertile ground for poetry’s aspiration to prose-like features echoes the thesis’ interest in the fin-de-siècle as a period of innovation and change in cognitive perceptions. The epistemological debates that aestheticism and Decadence opened in their days enabled to deconstruct ideas of a unitary language and vision of reality (as detailed in the section on literary impressionism below). For these reasons, fin-de-siècle women’s poetry is compatible with Bakhtin’s views on the stratification of language, on its natural dialogicity and, by extension, on the concept of chronotopes. This thesis contends that Bakhtin’s terminology enables us to refine the mapping of poetic dialogism and its intersections with issues of gender, power and poetic genres.

The thesis re-engineers Ladin’s work on the poetic chronotope as well as her charting of the different chronotopic layers by further exploring poetry as a form of resistance against hegemonic discourses. While Ladin does investigate some of the minor cognitive aspects of the chronotope by investigating the cultural and social implications of motifs in a given poetic context, she excludes dimensions of gender


\textsuperscript{38} Eskin, “Bakhtin on Poetry,” 388-389.
from her analyses of Emily Dickinson’s poetry. Her essay remains mainly limited to the study of one author and, in that respect, does not make efficient use of the generic dimension of the chronotope. This thesis uses Ladin’s conceptualisation of the adaptability of the chronotope to poetry as a starting point to chart an entire canon and to evidence the relevance of the concept to fin-de-siècle women’s poetry.

2. Chronotopes, Women’s Poetry and the Fin-de-Siècle

2.1 The Fin-de-Siècle as a Chronotope

The relevance of Bakhtin’s theory for studying fin-de-siècle poetry is evident in the phrases that Ladin chooses to describe the time-space environment of verses. In her own words, the chronotopes that centrifugal forces invoke at the micro-level of the lines “flicker”, “flow”, dissolve and “define consciousness, world and values” through “evanescence” rather than stability.39 Her focus on the momentariness of chronotopic impressions in poetry, as well as on the interconnection between literary representations of time-space and cognitive conceptions of reality (that is, individual consciousness and specific worldviews) find striking echoes in conceptual essays on aestheticism, Decadence and literary impressionism at the end of the century. In his work “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863), Charles Baudelaire famously defines modern art in terms of transience, contingency and fleetingness.40 Similarly, in his conclusion to The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry (1873), Walter Pater analyses the dissipating power of the observer’s mind, which deconstructs objects into groups of “unstable, flickering and inconsistent” impressions, suspended “like some trick of magic” by invisible “cohesive forces”.41 In Ladin’s terms, centrifugal energies disrupt the coherent whole, or “main chronotope”, and enable new time-space relations to emerge within the intrasubjective chronotopes. If poems are prone to generating multiple and dynamic chronotopes, fin-de-siècle poetry – which turns the fleeting into its very object of study – particularly lends itself to Bakhtin’s theory.42

42 Lately, a few academics have built on the chronotope to study the characteristics of single-authored collections of poems. In 2017, Zorica Đergović-Joksimović, for instance, analysed the ways in which the “utopian chronotope” serves to advocate a classless society in Darko Suvin’s poems: Zorica Đergović-Joksimović, “The Poetry of Estrangement or Utopia Suviniana,” Utopian Studies 28, no. 1 (2017): 45–71. None, however, has chosen to capitalise on the generic nature of the concept,
According to Bristow, the long-standing debates on (and difficulties in grasping) the literary and historical significance of the 1880-90s in academia have been rooted in the terms that contemporary critics chose to define their period. For what flickers, dissolves and constantly changes, by definition, never stops moving away from our knowledge and understanding. The phrase *fin-de-siècle* itself, which was coined at the end of the century and suggests a liminal position on the timeline of history, made it difficult for scholars to valorise the era as independent and innovative. In his introduction to his edition of *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem*, Bristow deplores this widespread academic tendency to regard the 1880-90s as an “effete transitional era located between two altogether more momentous epochs”.\(^4\) The poetry that has been categorised under this term has been valued “not so much for its artistic eminence or technical prowess” as for its bearing witness to the “attenuation” of a monumental age and the “need for cultural revitalization by another”. Similarly, as Bristow notes, the heightened attention (and reduction of the canon) to fin-de-siècle poems by men on death, indulgence and loose morals spring from the immediate reception of the period by contemporaries who were actively involved in its literary circles. Members of the Rhymers’ Club, for instance, reflected on their social interactions, “fetishized their own decay” and generated a myth that reshaped an altogether far richer canon around a truncated segment predefined by these male writers. This notably worked at the expense of women poets’ inclusion within the literary landscape of the 1880-90s.

In her book *Les Fins de Siècle* (published in the 1990s), Elaine Scarry overturns discussions on the ends of centuries as liminal periods in the history of literature by enhancing the roles that successive turns-of-century cultures – from the 1690s to the 1990s – have played in fostering poetic innovations. While her argument remains centred on a conception of these eras as transitional (characterised by a mixture of “sensuous exhaustion” and “inaugural attempt to endow the coming century with new tools”), she insists on the novelty that they brought. She illustrates her point with a series of examples including that of the sonnet sequence (1590s) which “in its exhausted, repetitive, unending display of virtuosity” seems, “like the century itself”, omnipresent in novel studies, to map the works of a group of female poets within the wider canon of a given period in literature.

“uncertain of its ability to end”. 44 Scarry’s most interesting contribution to the debate around the significance of the literary history of the fin-de-siècle lies in her emphasis on the correlation between the “act of counting”, and poetry: she argues that as the “calendar turns over”, attention to numbers grows and fosters creative approaches to prosody. 45 Here, Scarry weaves connections between literary production at a given point of history, and cognitive perceptions of time-space, shaped by this very period.

The recent renewal of interest among scholars in charting the fin-de-siècle canon afresh has revolved around this connection between poetic innovation in the 1880-90s and cultural shifts in conceptions of time-space and worldviews (following the rapid transformation of the urban landscape, creation of the railway and development of cosmopolitan networks of influence). The latest research on periodical studies, for instance, has shed light on the ways in which the market-oriented production of literature reshaped spatial-temporal relations between artists and their circles, and affected the nature of their works. In “Time and the Poetess”, Kathryn Ledbetter for example evidences how the ephemeral nature of periodicals transformed readership, editorship and questions of celebrity. 46 In her monograph Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism, Ana Parejo Vadillo suggests that these environmental changes in the 1880-90s provided poets with new perceptual paradigms or modes of poetic vision. 47 In this respect, these scholars have chosen to celebrate the literary innovations of the century by approaching the period in terms of its unique time-space configurations and the ways in which they shape cultural attitudes and lived experiences. This thesis contends that such academic perspective on the era equates regarding the fin-de-siècle as a chronotope. One in which the freshly re-organised time-space coordinates of the city favoured the emergence of new forms of identity (the New Woman for instance) and communities (e.g. the Literary Ladies, which displaced women-only literary circles onto the nocturnal social scenes of London, as explored by Hughes). 48

45 Scarry, Fins-de-Siècle, 7. Scarry backs up her argument of a correlation between poetry and counting by citing the common etymology of meter and measure.
48 Linda Hughes, “A Club of Their Own: The ‘Literary Ladies,’ New Women Writers, and ‘Fin-de-
By approaching the end of the century as a chronotope, this thesis engages in and responds to the debate on the significance of the period. If worldviews inform and underpin different genres, as Bakhtin argues, then the fin-de-siècle with its drastic cultural, historical and technical reshaping of time-space constitutes a fertile ground for innovation in poetry – and thus does not merely work as a bridge between two important epochs.\textsuperscript{49} This thesis mostly concentrates on London as the epicentre of 1880-90s literary culture. It weaves connections between fin-de-siècle women poets’ specific experiences of the new time-space matrixes that modelled their works, and the evolution of their sense of cultural, social, poetical and professional identity. This thesis contends that people’s increased attention to time and space (perceived by some as liminal, apocalyptic or declining) at the end of the century testifies to the singularity of the period as a chronotope of its own in which the re-organisation of – and adaptation to – new time-space co-ordinates conditioned cultural and historical awareness. Chapter 3 contrasts masculine pessimistic attitudes with women poets’ experiences of the 1880-90s as a crossroad (rather than a simple threshold), wherein multi-directional time-space echoes the opportunities that the city offered to them. The thesis studies the non-linear, instantaneous characters of women’s verses as well as the ways in which they aestheticize prospects of openness in a decade of closure.

2.2 Hegemonic Narratives at the End of the Century

The thesis engages with women’s reactions to hegemonic (masculine) narratives that arose from the time-space configurations of the fin-de-siècle chronotope, as a way of resituating them within the debates of their time. While Chapter 3 focuses on the construction of their own mythos (network of intra-references) and negotiation of a women-only space within this chronotope, Chapters 1 and 2 concentrate on Marriott Watson’s and Kendall’s responses to two central narratives in the 1880-90s. The first, literary by nature, concerns both visual arts and poetry. As Vadillo explains in her book on modern transports, impressionism was a key component of fin-de-siècle women’s aesthetics. Rosamund Marriott Watson and Alice Meynell’s city songs, for

\textsuperscript{49} In “Forms”, Bakhtin himself deconstructs the opposition between transitions and (culturally or historically) significant moments by positing the first as a time-space of its own. The “chronotope of the threshold”, as he names it, displays unique time-space characteristics: it is “highly charged in emotion and value”, construes time as non-linear and is essentially instantaneous. Bakhtin, “Forms,” 248-249.
instance, absorbed defining urban attributes (such as motion and speed) to reconstruct
the metropolis as a time-space continuum and legitimise the relationship between the
city and the female poetic self.\textsuperscript{50} In his review of \textit{A Summer Night}, William Watson
referred to Rosamund Marriott Watson as a painter of obscure shapes and shadows,
and depicted her poems’ settings in terms of the “huddled” and “blurred” outlines of
impressionist canvas.\textsuperscript{51} By borrowing the main characteristics of this art movement,
women anchored their verses within the epistemological debates rooted in the origins
of Pater’s reflections. In the conclusion of \textit{Studies in Art and Poetry}, Pater explains
that impressionism finds its predicate in relativism (i.e. the belief that an object is not
possibly knowable per se but only perceived through the distorting prism of one’s
biased perception). He asserts that subjective experience “already reduced to a group
of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality
through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us”.\textsuperscript{52} His insistence on the
role that subjective appreciation plays in clouding and paradoxically, revealing reality,
as well as his rejection of a unique hegemonic truth (as opposed to the multiplicity of
experiences), corroborates feminist and Bakhtinian visions of the world as multivocal.

Through its close reading of Marriott Watson’s poems, this thesis explores fin-de-
siècle women’s appropriation of impressionistic methods and poetic interest in
continuum, blurred boundaries and disrupted linearity. In her border-ballads,
impressionism reifies and gives momentum to female rebellion against patriarchal
order. By expanding and suspending revolutionary moments in her poems, Marriott
Watson disrupts the linearity of history and provides her final lines with the quality of
‘open time’. This form of temporality, which stands in strict opposition with scientific
and religious determinism, constitutes the prerequisite for disruptive liberty in
Bakhtin’s “Forms” and enables Marriott Watson to poeticise the freedom of the New
Woman. The kaleidoscopic and metamorphic qualities of the chronotopes that she
unfurls in her impressionist verses allows her to deconstruct the time-space boundaries
that restrict feminine poetry in essentialist discourses (e.g. its longstanding links with
domesticity) and question the canon’s authoritarian voice.

\textsuperscript{50} Vadillo, \textit{Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism}, 97-102 (Meynell and motion); 146-153 (Marriott
Watson and speed). Both passages discuss the authors’ poetry in relation to impressionism.
\textsuperscript{51} Found in: Linda K. Hughes, \textit{Graham R. Rosamund Marriott Watson, Woman of Letters} (Athens:
Ohio Univ Press, 2005), 146.
\textsuperscript{52} Pater, \textit{The Renaissance}, 235.
The second hegemonic narrative that this thesis examines is of scientific, historical and political nature. At the fin-de-siècle, tales such as Wells’ *The Time Machine* constituted a particularly apt vehicle for the representation of “chaos wed to a time-bound process” – a phrase under which Martin Meisel gathers well-known polemics around entropy and degeneration.\(^53\) According to Tina Choi, the first law of thermodynamics, which posited that energy in a given system always circulates but neither runs out, provided novels (e.g. those wherein the orphan hero finds his long-lost relations in those closest to him) with virtuous closure.\(^54\) The second one, from which the concept of entropy was born, reinforced social anxiety about degeneration and nourished apocalyptic narratives. In her essay, Choi opposes entropy to the narrative of order and progress told by social Darwinism. While her claim does corroborate those of some of the writers who inscribed their works in the line of social Darwinism, it contradicts Darwin’s original claims in *The Descent of Man*. The author’s views on evolution offer open-ended prognostications and express concern regarding the reversibility of evolution and the British Empire’s decline. These scientific discourses coexisted with and mostly fed the rise-and-fall narratives that permeated the literature of the period. This sense of impending doom is omnipresent in Decadent poetry by men who regarded their Greek and Latin ancestors as doubles:

> Paris and London, World-Flowers twain  
> Wherewith the World-Tree blooms again,  
> Since Time hath gathered Babylon,  
> And withered Rome still withers on.\(^55\)

In the final stanzas of his “Ballad of London”, Richard Le Gallienne poeticises this parallel between the modern cities of the fin-de-siècle, Paris and London, and the “withered” glory of Rome. Seasonal time in the poem expresses the twinning of rise and decline in fin-de-siècle discourses. However, as Bristow asserts in *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem*, critical focus on the limited repertoire of masculine verses that engage


with such patterns of “disillusioned self-destruction”, imminent death and “sensual indulgence” is misleading and obscures other fundamental aspects of the canon.  

This thesis uses the theoretical frame of the chronotope to evidence that fin-de-siècle women poets mostly ignored this pessimistic discourse or subverted it for their own intents. Their exclusion from the “chronotope of progress” that Darwinian texts unfurled paradoxically served their interests as it exempted them from having to engage with narratives of decline. Chapter 1 demonstrates how Marriott Watson appropriates the idea of “time-bound chaos” through her count-down temporality, as a subversive way of emancipating women from the predetermination of patriarchal history. Chapter 2 shows how Kendall’s humorous poems capitalise on fears of entropy and degeneration to challenge conceptions of the world as hierarchical and masculine, and replace the feminine at the centre of her poetic time-space. Chapter 3 analyses the motifs of the clock, the cigarette and the hourglass in poems by fin-de-siècle men and women authors, to point at the ways in which the latter revised tropes of decline and closure. While the ‘hour’ is a duration in poems by men, which literalises the temporal distance between their present and their death, it is a starting point (their hour) in female poetry, anchored within their chronotopes of the future.

2.3 Mapping the Fin-de-Siècle: Women’s Poetry & the Pitfalls of Liminality

Women poets’ participations in the debates and literary canon of the period has arguably been the strongest research focus of fin-de-siècle scholarship over the last decade (from the mid-2000s to the 2010s). Anthologies, biographies and open-access electronic resources have offered fresh material for study and incited academics to find ways of organising the profusion of data that has emerged. Current research on the 1880-90s seeks to re-map literary trends and artistic networks as well as to chart women’s contributions within the wider cultural and ideological context of the new canon. Vadillo’s Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism perfectly epitomizes this trend. The book weaves connections between modern forms of transports, bohemian...

56 Bristow, The Fin-de-Siècle Poem, 1.

57 Recent biographies include but are not limited to: James Diedrick, Mathilde Blind: Late-Victorian Culture and the Woman of Letters (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016); Linda Hunt Beckman, Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000). Electronic resources on the fin-de-siècle include: The Yellow Nineties Online (http://1890s.ca/) For more details on recent monographs and anthologies, see: Nick Freeman, “‘Poisonous Honey’: Recent Writing on Decadence and the 1890s,” in Literature Compass 14, no. 9 (September 2017).
districts in London, and new forms of female poetic vision as illustrated by the urban aesthetics of the five women writers whom she studies: Marriott Watson, Amy Levy, Alice Meynell and Michael Field (Katharine Bradley and Emma Cooper). Her monograph contains fin-de-siècle cityscapes as well as maps of the Metropolitan railway and areas known for their thriving artistic life (Bloomsbury, Kensington and St John’s Wood). Linda K. Hughes also participated in charting women’s active role in the artistic life of fin-de-siècle London (and desire to construct a gender exclusive community of their own) in her publications on the “Literary Ladies” and Sylvia’s Journal. Stefano Evangelista’s AHRC project on transnational Decadence as well as the “Women Writing Decadence” conference that occurred at the University of Oxford in July 2018 have worked to situate female writers within larger cultural circles by evidencing their roles as networkers, publishers, editors and translators within these cosmopolitan communities. Recent developments in both print and periodical studies share this interest in mapping. Hughes’ article “Women Poets and Contested Spaces” quantifies the instances of women’s poems in the Yellow Book and demonstrates the predominance of works by men in all volumes except for those published during Oscar Wilde’s trial. Sarah Parker’s essay on women in William Archer’s anthology Poets of the Younger Generation demonstrates that women were seen as ‘minor’ writers. Her study of the decorative frames that bordered their lyrics enhances the editor’s attempt to decontextualize them from the period’s canon, and place them onto a different map. This non-exhaustive list highlights a line of demarcation between two forms of mapping: the first, seeking to re-centre the figure of the woman poet, and the second to assess their liminality within print culture.

In his roundup of the most recent developments in Decadence studies freshly issued in September 2017, Nick Freeman retraces the impact that gender and queer studies in the mid-1980s had on the revival of the field in the 1990-2000s and on the

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expansion of the canon in favour of forgotten women poets. While he insists on recent academic efforts to move away from the “aphorism-bearing fridge magnet” figure of Oscar Wilde and to approach the fin-de-siècle era as a complex theatrical performance by multiple poets, his own essay falls into the trap of canonisation. His mentions of women writers such as Amy Levy and Alice Meynell remain anecdotal and do not suffice to counterbalance his lengthy focus on the trio Wilde, Symons and Michael Field. His essay does very little to serve current academic objectives to depolarise fin-de-siècle literature, and displays limited awareness of the period’s social dynamics by omitting a figure as important as Marriott Watson.62 Hughes’ biography Graham R.63 and miscellaneous articles on the poet shed light on the central role that she played in the artistic networks of the 1880-90s as a writer, an art and fashion critic, a leader and role-model among women-only communities (at the Literary Ladies’ dinners notably64) and as the editor of Sylvia’s Journal. This last position enabled her to foster the diffusion of female poetry and engage with New Women issues as part of her “ambitious intellectual agenda”.65 Despite Hughes’ efforts to place Marriott Watson at the centre of her artistic network, academics have continued to treat her as marginal. In Alex Murray and Jason Hall’s introduction to their edition of Decadent Poetics (2013) for instance – which contains essays by fin-de-siècle scholars as central as Vadillo and Marion Thain –, Marriott Watson is cast among the writers “whose work still inhabits the margins of scholarly treatments of decadence”, as opposed to the central figures such as Wilde, Symons or Dowson.66

Largely, recent academic works have responded to the challenges offered by the new canon and looked for various ways to situate the urban, lesbian or New Woman figures within their context. A number of eminent scholars such as Hughes, Thain, Yopie Prins and Vadillo to name but a few, have worked to bring fresh light upon the poetic innovations and contributions of female writers such as Marriott Watson, Amy Levy, Kendall, Meynell or Mary Robinson. Why, then, has the canon been unable to

62 Freeman, “Poisonous Honey”.
63 Hughes, Graham R.
64 Hughes, “A Club of Their Own,” 233-60.
65 Hughes, “A Female Aesthete at the Helm,” 177.
66 Jason David Hall and Alex Murray, eds. Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British Fin-de-Siècle (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), ix.
This thesis contends that the marginal-central binary that academic narratives on the fin-de-siècle have constructed has worked at the expense of women writers by impeding their integrations. As important as published works have been in enhancing tensions between the central roles of women writers in fin-de-siècle literary culture and the marginalised status that male-centred editorship assigned to them, they have failed to reshape scholarship around the understanding of the period as democratic and non-polarized. In her chapter “Poetry” published in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin-de-Siècle*, Marion Thain deconstructs this binary by describing the 1880-90s as a period during which the “marginal became central”, and remaps the canon with different criteria in mind:

Diversity, and the absence of a figure-head icon, might justly be said to characterise poetry of the period. By the 1890s there was a dizzying array of poetic movements, genres, types and coteries. This was beneficial for women poets, *who no longer had to negotiate a relationship with a canonical trajectory*, and deal with all the problems of gender this inevitably raises. In fact, women poets were publishing in such great numbers and with such vigour by the end of the century that there is *no longer a polarity between a ‘woman’s tradition’ and a mainstream*. True, women poets sometimes bring distinctive issues or concerns into poetry […] – but *their position is not one defined by marginality*: they are *woven into the core of fin-de-siècle poetics*, and must not, within this chapter, be segregated into a separate narrative.

Here, Thain distinguishes between women’s poetry from the 1830-70s which operated within a separate feminine tradition, and that of the 1880-90s, during which women participated in the egalitarian poetic era that followed Tennyson’s death. At the end of the century, women poets were indeed the friends and rivals of the writers that immediate reception remembered as central. As Thain refuses to build her vision

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67 Over the last decade, scholarly efforts to retrieve, explore and value women’s poetry (as evidenced in the blooming of anthologies and essays on women’s cultural, political and literary contributions) have sustained the illusion of an extensive canon, aiming to become all-inclusive. Yet the term canon in itself necessary implies notions of hierarchy, clearly differentiating between authoritative and liminal authors. As Mary Ellen Waithe’s recent article “From Canon Fodder to Canon-Formation” contends, efforts to bring more women writers to light have participated in extending the *compendium* of literary texts, but has de factor failed to extract a revised canon (based on new criteria to canonicity) from this compendium. The hierarchical principles shaping the 1880-90s canon thus predate – and predetermine – the retrieval of women’s poetry and their inclusion within the set of works that we recognise as valuable. This thesis explores the ways in which the immediate reception of fin-de-siècle poetry carried out by 1880-90s male writers themselves has overly determined our approaches to the writings and writers of this era, and locked women poets within a binary opposing the marginal (feminine) to the central and normative (masculine). See: Mary E. Waithe, “From Canon Fodder to Canon-Formation: How Do We Get There from Here?”, *The Monist* 98, no. 1 (1 January 2015): 21–33.

of the canon around a gender paradigm through which to map the dizzying diversity of poetic genres that emerged in the 1880-90s, she offers a fresh categorization system subdivided into three categories. The first is “Decadence”, defining poetry in terms of an opposition between transience and universality, and finding illustration in the works of Wilde or Marriott Watson. A second category coined by Thain is that of “commentary poetry”, spanning a wide range of verse “that is not well known, but which was a powerful flavour at the fin-de-siècle”. These poems, often “humorous, debunking and satiric” are “primarily political in intent”. A good illustration of this category is the work of Kendall, as discussed at length in Chapter 2 of the thesis. The last sub-section that Thain establishes within the fin-de-siècle canon is “counter-Decadence” – which finds its essence in nationalistic and fundamentally masculine pride, as epitomised by the poetry of Kipling. This category intersects with questions of gender and seems to thwart Thain’s effort to ignore this dimension completely.69

Thain’s argument crystallises the tensions that underlie scholarly approaches to the fin-de-siècle canon. On the one hand, the desire to incorporate women poets within the literary traditions that they actively helped shaping, despite the central-liminal narrative that immediate reception by men imposed on the literature of the period. On the other, the awareness that women poets “bring distinctive issues or concerns” into poetry (as Thain admits in the quote above), which can be conceived as a form of reaction against certain aspects of these emerging trends but must not be regarded as a distinct category. A last source of tension concerns the appearance of the New Woman and her stances against the misogynistic discourses that underpin reflections on aestheticism and Decadence in conceptual essays by men, as well as women’s marginalisation in their editions and literary circles – both contradicting the idea of a horizontal or democratic period of poetic production. While male poets may have genuinely perceived their female counterparts as their equals, the masculine landscape of literary production hindered the ideal of an egalitarian canon.

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69 Interestingly, Thain’s assertions contradict her own argument in “What Kind of a Critical Category Is Women’s Poetry?” [Victorian Poetry 41, no. 4 (2003): 575–84] where she enhances the need to consider “gender as genre” and describes women’s writing as an essential framework for reading late nineteenth century texts. She notes that Alfred Miles’ anthology (1890s) devoted two of ten volumes to women’s verses, as a marginal section; but that the preface to these segregated volumes defines the female poet as a “development of the period”. Thain contends that this definition “does […] show a recognition of a certain kind of poetic genre (as do the other volumes outside the core chronology)”.
This thesis contends that difficulties in bridging conceptions of the fin-de-siècle canon as one that thwarts central-marginal dichotomies on the one hand, and the acceptance that women writers approach certain motifs in distinct ways within this canon on the other, lies in the overall mapping of the period’s literature and in definitions of the feminine. In other words, the problem that emerges in fin-de-siècle academia is two-fold and concerns the conceptualisation of the links between genre and gender, and chosen approaches towards the definition of the 1880-90s canon. The thesis argues that Moïne’s approach to the feminine and to mapping has helped bringing the debate forward and constitutes the ideal starting point for the chronotopic analysis of fin-de-siècle women’s poetry as detailed in the next section.

2.4 Micro-mapping the Fin-de-Siècle and the Feminine

This thesis aims to deconstruct the marginal-central binary on which recent scholarly works hinge, and calls for fresh ways of remapping i.e. of re-centring women’s participations to the canon. At the same time, it argues that the specific issues brought by women into poetry – and dismissed by Thain as anecdotal – spring from different worldviews, that is, for Bakhtin, different literary approaches (genres). The difficulty is to find a categorisation system that recognizes the particularities of women’s time-space poetics without segregating them into a separate narrative. The tension mostly lies in the lack of distinction between a ‘women’s category’ or canon, invoking the pitfalls of essentialist considerations, and women’s ‘literary practices’ (as Fabienne Moïne defines them) within this canon. In many ways, Moïne’s recent monographs on the feminine have brought the debate forward by conceptualising the relations between gender, genre and cognitive perceptions of reality. In Poésie et identité féminines en Angleterre (2010) and Women Poets in the Victorian Era (2013), Moïne approaches Victorian women’s poems as sites of resistance against cultural domination, and considers the feminine to perform a social function. She allows her close readings of a wide range of poems to intersect with historical and ideological dimensions, by exploring (for instance) the role that anthologies played in permitting a dialogue between the texts. Both of her books engage with the strategies at play in women’s poems, and enhance the importance of issues of gender in questions

of canonisation. As she explains in Women Poets, men and women’s poems on nature highlight the same motifs, fears, desires and share the same titles. Yet, her study argues that women’s nature poetry cannot but be studied through the prism of gender and the ways in which women engaged with long-standing cultural discourses that posited the existence of a symbiotic woman-nature connection. While she admits that most women poets of the 1830s-1900s did not reject this special bond with nature and often contributed to enhancing gender divisions, she singles out those who challenged cultural preconceptions through their verses and analyses the ways in which they capitalised on alliances with nature in unexpected ways. Both of her books mostly focus on women’s methods to thwart hegemonic discourses on the feminine by using the very weapons of essentialism for their own political intent.

This thesis contends that Moine’s conceptualisation (and revalorisation) of the feminine as a strategy allows us to invalidate the relevance of a central-marginal binary. Fin-de-siècle women and men poets participate in the same trends, tackle similar topics and use the same titles – but the poetic production of the first is informed and underpinned by other problematics linked to questions of gender and specific perceptions of the new time-space configurations of the 1880-90s. While Moine mostly focuses on the ways in which women writers overturned tools and traditions that essentialist discourses defined as fundamentally feminine, this thesis explores the techniques that they used to appropriate tools and traditions regarded as essentially masculine (Decadence, Impressionism, the border ballad, scientific verses, poems on the city, prostitution or cigarettes, to name but a few examples). Another way in which the thesis revises and tailors Moine’s perspective on the feminine to fit its focus on the fin-de-siècle concerns periodization. In Women Poets, Moine draws a line between Romantic and Victorian nature poetry (1830s-1900s) to mark the difference between contemplation on the one hand and scientific observation on the other – justifying her book’s focus on how women engage with individualised features rather than with nature in its general acceptation. This thesis demarcates between the 1830s-70s and the 1880-90s due to its approach to the fin-de-siècle as a chronotope of its own, and its analysis of the New Woman figure that emerged from new time-space matrixes.

Moine, Women Poets in the Victorian Era, 8.

Moine, Women Poets in the Victorian Era, 6.
Moine’s approach to the feminine as tactics against hegemonic power structures motivates a return to the texts as the basis for categorisation. For this reason, *Poésie* and *Women Poets* analyse a broad range of long-neglected women poets through the study of distinct motifs. In her second book, for instance, Moine explores treatments of the garden, the park, the flower, the pet or the fossil motif in women’s verses. This micro mapping technique – or bottom-up approach – to the category of nature poetry enable her to avoid the pitfalls of essentialist considerations and the tensions that have emerged from the use of pre-existing categories. In the same way, this thesis uses Bakhtin’s chronotope as a close-reading tool for the study of time-space motifs and devices in poems by fin-de-siècle men and women. This allows me to evidence the participation of the latter within the set canon, as well as to determine the extent to which revisions of metrical patterns, tropes or other features enabled women to challenge hegemonic traditions and open up internal dialogues in their poems. While Chapter 1 and 2 mostly focus on questions of prosody (as well as themes of progress, revolution and the perspectives on history that they unfurl), Chapter 3 investigates differences in treatments of the clock, the street, the moon and the cigarette. The results highlight the many ways in which women’s cognitive perceptions and poetic recreations of time-space underpin the modalities of their participation to the canon.

3. Outline of the Chapters

This thesis is intended to contribute to the critical discussion of fin-de-siècle women’s poetry. The first two chapters offer an in-depth exploration of the works of Rosamund Marriott Watson and May Kendall respectively, while the third chapter operates at a cross-authorial level and engages with a wider range of women poets. Throughout the thesis I use Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope to analyse the

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73 For the purpose of this thesis, tackling questions of intertextuality and collective constructions of the New Woman mythos, my study relies on a corpus of women poets who knew one another, either directly or indirectly. They participated in the same social events, lived in the same city (London) of which they had similar time-space experiences, used the same work spaces (e.g. the British Museum) and reviewed each other’s works. My work approaches figures who were liminal to this network (with May Kendall, who was published by Rosamund Marriott Watson and communicated with her through letters but lived in York, outside of the capital time-space dynamic; and Mary E. Coleridge, who did live in London but avoided circles of New Women writers) to highlight aesthetic diversity. However, it does not (at this stage) engage with the poetry of working-class women poets, whose perceptions and experiences of modern time-space differed from those of their middle and upper class counterparts. For information on the relationships between the women in my corpus, see: Hughes, Graham R., 93-180 / Hughes, “A Club of Their Own: The ‘Literary Ladies,’ New Women Writers, and ‘Fin-de-Siècle’ Authorship,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35, no. 1 (2007): 238 / Vadillo, Women Poets, 212 / Bristow, *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem*, 36 and 240-2.
specificities of fin-de-siècle women's poetry, and argue for the existence of a range of distinctive feminine chronotopes. In addition, my thesis examines the extent to which fin-de-siècle women's poetry works in dialogue with masculine poetic tradition.

Chapter 1 focuses on the poetry of Rosamund Marriott Watson. It contends that exploring her supernatural ballads and city songs through the prism of the ‘spectral chronotope’ sheds light on the common aesthetic pattern shaping her collections; one which construes the feminine as hybrid, monstrous and inherently disruptive. My chapter analyses the ways in which time-space, gender, genre (the border-ballad and the cityscape) and the motif of (domestic, political or sexual) revolution intersect in her verses and typify the image of the New Woman in her wider work. Sections 1 and 2 focus on the writer’s predilection for border-ballads and investigate the ways in which her spectral poetics and female figures unfurl what I name ‘wild women chronotopes’, disrupting the tyrannical time-spaces implied by masculine traditions. Section 1 focuses on domestic revolutions in “Ballad of the Bird-Bride” and “Ballad of the Werewolf” i.e. on the ways in which the monstrous, uncanny feminine forces the male-dominated chronotope of the house to collapse. Section 2 explores issues of political revolution in “The Quern of the Giants” – a socialist and feminist poem, which I read as a response to Swinburne’s ballad “Song in Time of Revolution – 1860”. Both sections demonstrate the existence of a time-bomb aesthetic which literally counts down to the emergence of ‘wild women chronotopes’. Section 3 studies connections between Marriott Watson’s border-ballads and her cityscapes, by linking the motif of revolution and time bomb aesthetic with the monstrous sexual awakenings of the chimera, the sphinx and the prostitute in the metropolis. The section contends that the identification of spectral urban chronotopes and monstrous wild women time-spaces typifies the author’s conception of the New Woman in the city.

Chapter 2 explores the poetry of May Kendall and focuses on the overarching chronotopic patterns unifying her cityscapes and her satirical poems. It analyses the ways in which Kendall’s poems stage a confrontation between masculine, tyrannical and hierarchical time-spaces, which I call ‘chronotopes of the inhuman’ on the one hand, and what I refer to as ‘human’ or ‘non-human’ chronotopes on the other. These confrontations are informed by Kendall’s aesthetics of decline or failure, which also underpin the anti-climaxes ending her poems. The chapter explores the ways in which satirical humour, especially the poems’ punchlines align with Kendall’s anticlimactic and deflationary agenda to oppose male power structures. Section 1 explores time-
space structures in Kendall’s city songs, wherein ‘inhuman’ chronotopes of progress and ‘human’ time-spaces (comprising the chronotopes of holiday, poetic creation and daydreaming) oppose each other. The chapter contends that the anti-climaxes resulting from the demise of the latter reflect Kendall’s understanding of progress as social regression for the marginalised, as well as of the role of the poet in fostering political reform. Section 2 focuses on the author’s satirical poems, which revolve around chronotopic clashes between the anti-heroic time-spaces that male intellectuals open up (the ‘inhuman’ chronotope of evolution allowing the author to engage with Darwin) and ‘non-human’ time-spaces unfurled by fantastic creatures such as aliens or speaking fossils. My analysis highlights the ways in which final anti-climaxes serve to deflate hegemonic male chronotopes and challenge hierarchical understandings of society, in which women and the working class are consigned to the margins.

Chapter 3 studies the poetry of a wide range of fin-de-siècle women writers and focuses on their revisions of specific motifs – or local chronotopes – as a way of illuminating common patterns in their approaches to challenging and reconfiguring essentialist masculine time-space matrixes. Focusing on these motifs enables me both to celebrate the diversity of women’s responses to hegemonic power structures and to explore common chronotopic patterns in their poems. These feminine chronotopes are conceived as dialogic spaces wherein multi-vocal yet synchronised discourses against cultural domination emerge. The chapter elucidates the ways in which notions of a women’s tradition and artistic community finds a central stage in poems promoting women-only, homoerotic and/or matriarchal chronotopes. Section 1 looks at the motif of the metropolis as a complex branching of streets in the forms of mazes and labyrinths (often shaped by the myth of Ariadne), and the ways in which it facilitates a movement away from patrilineal to women-centred, homoerotic and gender-free time-spaces. I compare their cityscapes with those of three canonical writers (Wilde, Symons and Baudelaire), whose poems enclose the ‘public woman’ within the essentialist and liberticidal time-spaces of the pavement, the gaslight and the street. Section 2 studies the chronotope of the moon in poems by fin-de-siècle women, seeking to reassert the potential of feminine creation, which masculine treatments of the motif negated. In particular, I investigate the ways in which lunar time-spaces, capitalising on the myth of Artemis, fostered the exploration of cosmogonnic or matriarchal chronotopic configurations, and challenged masculine power structures. Section 3 focuses on the motifs of the clock, the hourglass and other forms of timers.
(music beats, water drops, and the cigarette) in fin-de-siècle poetry. It argues that transitional approaches to the turn of the century were gendered, and shows how poems by women – unlike poems by men, which focused on closure, entropy and degeneration – fostered a more optimistic aesthetics of expectation.
CHAPTER 1: SPECTRAL & ‘WILD WOMEN’ CHRONOTOPES IN THE POETRY OF ROSAMUND MARRIOTT WATSON

1. Introduction: A Province of her Own – The Spectral Chronotope

It is the mystery of the half-seen, the ghostliness of blurred and huddled outlines, the obscure confusion of shadow and substance that she loves to paint, and in the treatment of such material, she has the gift of an eerie and uncanny touch (Sir William Watson on Rosamund Marriott Watson’s *A Summer Night*, 1892).74

In his three-column review of Rosamund Marriott Watson’s most acclaimed collection of poems *A Summer Night* published at the peak of her fame in 1891, Sir William Watson wrote what Linda K. Hughes deemed to be “one of the most astute analyses of [the poet’s] work during her lifetime”.75 The critic indeed managed to capture the essence and originality of his contemporary’s aesthetics by illuminating inherent connections between two major and distinct trends of her poetry: her fin-de-siècle inclination for modern city songs on the one hand, and predilection for the poetic treatment of old myths in supernatural border-ballads on the other. *A Summer Night*76 may have appeared to be a rather heterogeneous collection to Marriott Watson’s readership, as its disparate content allowed the juxtaposition of rather short-breathed verses that conveyed the fleetingness of urban impressions, with her longer narrative poems on monstrous and unruly women. Nevertheless, William Watson expressed what he believed to constitute the profound unity of her poetry, and was pleased to see that Marriott Watson had found a way of merging the “special province” that she had invoked in her earlier work *The Bird-Bride* (1889) with her impressionistic cityscapes. By creating a “spectral air” from London’s “constantly shifting views”, the poet had succeeded in fusing together her modern subject matter with the eerie and uncanny nature of her border-ballads.77 For William Watson, Marriott Watson’s new aesthetics was a mere continuation of the first, and the connection between the two lay in their inherent spectral dimension, which he proclaimed to be the defining trait of her poetry.

75 Hughes, Graham R., 146.
76 All poems by the author are taken from the following complete edition: Rosamund Marriott Watson, *The Poems of Rosamund Marriott Watson* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1912). The original dates of publication are stated between brackets.
77 Hughes, Graham R., 146.
In this quotation, William Watson clearly anchors Marriott Watson’s poetry within both pre-Victorian and late-Victorian time-space configurations. His painting metaphor casts his peer as an impressionist artist using modern techniques to blend time and space in a poetics of blur. His reference to the “ghostliness” of her lyrics, on the other hand, inscribes her work within Gothic tradition – more specifically, within fin-de-siècle revisions of this tradition, which supported a literature characterised by transgression and a search for identity.\(^78\) William Watson’s depiction of the dim region that Marriott Watson’s ballads invoke as a world “shadowy with legend” wherein “the human touched hands with the spectral” expands the poet’s frame of references to encompass older narratives – hinting at the importance of intertextuality for reading her poems, which constantly draw from the otherworldly settings of myths. William Watson, who perceives in this referential diversity a common aesthetic pattern, does not define the specific ways in which these various influences intersect in his peer’s spectral poetry. In this chapter, I choose to read the spectral as a chronotope, which allows me to bridge the dichotomy between definitions of the spectral as an aesthetic (impressionism) and a central motif\(^79\) (ghost stories); and to highlight the intersections between Marriott Watson’s poetic trends, studied as separate in previous scholarship.

Scholars such as Ana Parejo Vadillo and Linda K. Hughes have written on the impressionism of Marriott Watson’s city songs, the paradigm of speed that she uses to dissolve her spatial boundaries, and the (erotic) freedom that results from this spectral modelling of space.\(^80\) In terms of temporality, they have explored the rhythms of her city songs as ones that mimic the clinking of machinery, the pounding of the speaker’s

\(^78\) The Victorians’ love of ghosts informed fin-de-siècle literature and culture, as shown by the birth of the SPR society and other psychic groups studying paranormal events. In literature, Dickerson explores the links between the feminine and the supernatural in the 1880-90s by studying the ghost story within its ideological context i.e. the rise of New Women: *Victorian Ghosts*, Vanessa D. Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 133. On ghosts and the self at the fin-de-siècle, see: L. Anne Delgado, “Psychical Research and the Fantastic Science of Spirits,” in *Strange Science: Investigating the Limits of Knowledge in the Victorian Age*, eds. Lara Karpenko and Shalyn Claggett (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 236. On ghosts and queer identity, see: Mark De Cicco, “‘More than Human’: The Queer Occult Explorer of the Fin-de-Siècle,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 23, no. 1 (2012): 4-24.

\(^79\) The ghost story occupied a prominent position in nineteenth-century literature. While belief in occult events is ancient, “the acknowledgement of supernatural phenomena in the Victorian era remains unparalleled”: Vanessa D. Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts*, 13. The ghost became a central figure with the emergence of the gothic novel, casting the motif as its centrepiece when older traditions used it as a simple stage device: Ashley Mike, “Ghost Stories,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, eds. John Clute and John Grant (London: Orbis, 1997): 403-7.

heart, or the beating tempo of the rain. The uncanny dimension of these city songs, however, has not received much critical attention and remained limited to the mention of the Decadent figures that populate Marriott Watson’s London (e.g. the Revenant, the Sphinx and the Chimera). The ways in which these motifs conjure up specific time-spaces on the modern stage of the fin-de-siècle metropolis remains to be studied. Similarly, academics such as Hughes and Lee Christine O’Brien have studied the eerie dimension of the poet’s monster ballads, the ways in which the texts resort to (and feminise) the uncanny to deconstruct the familiar sphere of the domestic and challenge Victorian conventions of marriage and beauty. O’Brien has notably explored the topic of metamorphosis as an important device that creates a pattern of disruption in the ballads and allows such transgressions to occur.\textsuperscript{81} However, the exact ways in which shapeshifting as a motif or local chronotope, participates in a wider spectral aesthetic of blur affecting the metre and poetic features of the texts have not been investigated.

This chapter argues that a chronotope of the spectral provides both a common aesthetic pattern in Marriott Watson’s work, and facilitates a dialogue between its thematic, generic and ideological functions in her poetry. In other words, it studies the ways in which the spectral is aestheticized and feminised – rather than merely thematised –; as well as how its unique perspective on time-space construes specific worldviews that typify the image of women in the poems. The chapter connects the uncanny and the ghostly with the impressionistic and the blurry (which William Watson unifies under the umbrella term of “spectral”) by studying the ways in which Marriott Watson’s poetics of shadows and metamorphosis is informed by and underpins her characterisation of the feminine as monstrous, hybrid and shapeshifting. It approaches female figures in the poems as local chronotopes, releasing specific time-space energies in the lines – at times disrupting or enhancing metrical patterns. Throughout this analysis, I use the term of “wild woman chronotope” to describe the relations between spectral time-space and the monstrous feminine. This term also allows me to show how the poet capitalises on Eliza Lynn Linton’s critique of “wild women” as toxic insurgents – more specifically, how she mischievously exacerbates the monstrosity of her female characters as a way of working against and overturning

Linton’s derogatory concept in favour of her own protofeminist aesthetics. This first chapter contends that the interactions of the ‘wild woman chronotope’ with other interior or intra-subjective male time-spaces (whether conflictual or complementary) typifies the poet’s subversive construction of the feminine as well as her literary-political agenda of resistance against patriarchal structures and normative literary traditions. The sub-division of the chapter into three sections considers the ways in which gendered time-space also intersects with issues of genre, and demonstrates how border-ballads and impressionist city songs support the writer’s spectral chronotopes.

Approaching Marriott Watson’s spectral aesthetic through a chronotopic prism requires a definition of spectral time and space. The spatial nature of the spectral is patent in William Watson’s quotation whose references to the blurred outlines, the half-seen and the confusion of substance in Marriott Watson’s poetry hint at the holographic and metamorphic qualities of spectres. With regard to temporality, Derrida’s definition of spectres in Échographies as entities that constantly hover between the present and the absent, the discernible and the imperceptible, clarifies the intrinsic connectedness of spectral time and space. The precariousness of spectres’ assertion in space characterises their transient qualities. In Spectres de Marx, Derrida adds a second crucial dimension to spectral time: that of untimeliness, both in its meaning of bad timing (disturbance) and as the negation of time (un-timely). The apparition of the spectre “does not belong” (and is not “docile”) to time as we conceive it, he explains. This chapter explores the various ways in which the local chronotopes conjured up by the presence of the spectral feminine disrupt the metrical patterns and general time-space matrixes of the poems by allowing the irruption of the uncanny within familiar plots, spaces and ancient rhythms (disturbance). It investigates the open and liberating qualities of the ‘wild woman chronotopes’ that domestic (Part I), political (Part II) and sexual revolutions (Part III) invoke, and pays attention to the new forms of time that they imply. Whether in the form of rage or of sexual climax, the final explosion of the female ‘time-bomb’ around which the poems revolve,


construes time as the “zero hour” of change, in which – as Benjamin argues – time
stops. This arrested present is not transitional i.e. out of this time, and bears a logic of
its own (un-timely).85 Each analysis shows how this double untimeliness participates
in the poet’s resistance against patriarchal norms and revision of masculine tradition.

In his book *Victorian Hauntings*, Julian Wolfreys interprets the spectral in
Derrida’s work as that which appears at the threshold of two ontological categories.
Spectres escape “any positivist or constructivist logic” and emerge “between, and yet
not as part of, two negations: neither, nor”.86 Through this negating frame, Wolfreys
chooses to read the spectral in terms of rupture. For Derrida, however, the spectre is
both (“à la fois”) present and absent, as illustrated by the oxymora that he uses in his
book (e.g. “the presence of its absence”, “the visibility of the invisible”).87 Thus, the
spectral logic is deconstructive, less because it escapes categorisation than because it
exceeds and bridges dichotomies. In this chapter, Derrida’s conception of spectres as
a continuum serves to analyse Marriott Watson’s characterisation of the feminine –
her hybrid figures’ incomplete and/or unfixed spectral metamorphoses allowing her to
challenge essentialist views of womanhood and encroach on masculine territories.88

**Part I** of this chapter is devoted to the topic of domestic rebellion and focuses
on two of Marriott Watson’s poems: “Ballad of the Bird-Bride” and “Ballad of the
Were-wolf”. This section seeks to illuminate intersections between genre (the border
ballad), gender and spectral forms of time-space. It contends that the poet’s ‘time-
bomb’ temporality and aesthetic of blur underpins a pattern of disruption that supports
Marriott Watson’s agenda against the patriarchal norms of marriage and domesticity.

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86 Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny, and Literature* (New
York: Palgrave, 2002), ix-x.


88 On the chronotope, continuums and gender, read: Mary Bratton, “Winterson, Bakhtin, and the
on the lesbian hero chronotope in Jeanette Winterson’s fiction, Mary Bratton hints at the potential of
continuums for studying literature from a gender or sexual bias. The quote that she draws from
Winterson’s note in *Sexing the Cherry* highlights the freedom that arises from space-time continuums
as tools for questioning narrative frames and normative representations: “The Hopi, an Indian tribe,
have a language as sophisticated as ours, but no tenses for past present and future. The division does
not exist. What does this say about time? Matter, that thing […] which you are holding in your hands
and which makes up your body, is now known to be mostly empty space; […] What does this say about
Part 2 explores Marriott Watson’s most openly political piece, i.e. “The Quern of the Giants” – a border-ballad narrating the proto-feminist and socialist revolution of two sisters. This study constructs a dialogue between Marriott Watson’s poem and Swinburne’s “Song in Time of Revolution”, with specific focus on the ways in which ‘chronotopes of revolution’ are conjured up in the texts. It demonstrates how spectral time and countdowns give momentum to female revolution and allow Marriott Watson to inscribe the New Woman figure both at the centre and the origins of history.

Part 3 engages with normative cultural discourses on Decadence and the city, and compares Marriott Watson’s urban songs with those of her friend, Oscar Wilde. It contends that the monstrous – in such Decadent figures as the revenant, the chimera, the sphinx and their cultural double, the prostitute or femme fatale – and modern London in the poems are two inseparable constituents of the poet’s spectral aesthetic of female (homo- or auto-erotic) desire. The analysis shows how the ‘chronotope of the wild woman,’ and that of the metropolis intersect, challenge and echo each other. As the spectral dissolves the chronotopic boundaries between the speaker and the city, the poems culminate in sexual climaxes, sharing many attributes with the time-bomb explosion found in the revolution ballads. The section capitalises on the common etymological roots of “phantasm” (illusion, apparition) and “fantasy” to shed light on Marriott Watson’s poetics of desire. Similarly, it builds on the shared origins of spectres and spectrum as a back door into discussions of culturally encoded colours in the texts, and the ways in which they unlock new forms of feminine identity.

All three sections study these new representations of women’s identity by highlighting the parallels that Marriott Watson creates between monstrous, spectral, political, disruptive or ‘wild’ women (in Linton’s terms, as explained earlier) and the fin-de-siècle New Woman figure.

2. Counting Down to Domestic Rebellion: Border-Ballads, Time Bombs and the ‘Wild Woman Chronotope’

“Ballads are awkward things,” David Buchan admits in the opening line of his book The Ballad and the Folk, tackling the refractory problems that scholars are bound to encounter when attempting to “unriddle the enigma” of the genre.89 This early confession of the author highlights a striking common point between balladry and the

spectral: both excel at resisting categorization. In her more recent work on balladry as a vernacular poetic resource, Mary Ellen Brown corroborates Buchan’s assertion and insists on the instability of a word (“ballad”) which was “indeed many things”. While a loose approach to the genre is justified, in her opinion, by the “lived, historical use” of the term, scholarly attempts to classify and delimit ballads as “narrative songs” have relegated “materials primarily lyrical” to the margins.90 As Marriott Watson herself remarks in the introductory note to her anthology Ballads of the North Countrie, the genre is characterised by its hybridity and substantial flexibility: “not infrequently the story was both sung and said;” and some pieces were “prose and rhyme intermixed”.91

Operating at the threshold of oral folkloric tradition and poetry, ballads were partly improvised and partly memorised or inherited. The wandering singer (or “hereditary preserver and reciter of oral traditions”92) allowed the ballads to shapeshift as he invented entire sections of the stories anew at every one of his public performances.

As the title of her edition reveals, Marriott Watson was particularly interested in a very specific type of balladry known as northern or border ballads. This disputed corpus, drawing its name from a historical (rather than generic) term, refers to the set of texts that emerged at the frontiers between Scotland and England. As Buchan explains in his monograph, this territory, situated at the crossroad between different folk cultures (the Scots, Scandinavians, Saxons and Gaels), constituted a highly fertile ground for poetic production.93 One aspect of northeast balladry that could explain Marriott Watson’s passion for this specific genre lies in its multi-faceted liminality – of a formal, cultural and geographical nature, as explained, but also linguistic. With its use of the Doric, a Scots dialect which “stubbornly [resisted] Anglicisation”94, the border ballad carried a distinctive local touch with obvious political implications, and provided poets with wider linguistic possibilities. Marriott Watson’s “Ballad of the


92 Ibid.

93 Buchan, Ballad, 4-9.

94 Buchan, Ballad, 9.
Were-Wolf” (1891)\(^95\) studied in this section most evidently epitomises the author’s interest in the aesthetic and subversive potential of this prominent regional feature.\(^96\)

Fin-de-siècle authors such as Swinburne and Andrew Lang worked to revive interest in the border ballad. As Beth Newman asserts in her article on Swinburne’s prosody, the poet’s affection for this liminal genre expressed the “regional pride of [the aristocrat] with deep roots in Northumberland” as well as his desire to explore the “aesthetic possibilities of non-English models”.\(^97\) Marriott Watson on the other hand was eager to find a literary form that would complement her fin-de-siècle aesthetic and allow her to challenge power structures. As Hughes and O’Brien have noted, the border ballad as “a literary form prior to and outside the established canon” provided her with the “elements ready-made to undercut assumptions about the feminine”.\(^98\)

In her introductory note to the edition of Ballads of the North Countrie, Marriott Watson identifies four main types of border ballads, two of which are at the centre of her own spectral poetics. The ballad of wild historical adventure, first, capitalises on the rebellious and violent character of border ballads (referred to as “poems of a hot-blooded people”) in which topics of raids, revolts, rescues and stratagems abound. While these attributes may seem to inscribe the border ballad in an archetypically masculine epic tradition, Marriott Watson points at the recurrence of strong women protagonists featuring in all different versions of the tales across the world. Defined as “frank heathens,” carrying a knife in their hands and “neither hesitating in love nor in hate,” border women are “wild” women; the expression used by Eliza Lynn Linton at the end of the century to cast the New Woman as a toxic social insurgent.\(^99\) The poet’s appropriation of this derogatory term allows her to politicise her approach to womanhood and create intrinsic connections between the feminine and revolutions. In “Ballad of the Were-Wolf” and “Ballad of the Bird-Bride”\(^100\),

\(^95\) Marriott Watson, Poems, 148-9.
\(^96\) Buchan, Ballad, 9.
\(^100\) Marriott Watson, Poems, 21-23.
studied in Part I, this revolution is of domestic nature, as the introduction of the hybrid woman’s chronotope forces the house walls to collapse, and allows the (untamed) wives to reclaim narrative control. Part II will focus on “The Quern of the Giants”, in which revolution is of socialist and proto-feminist nature, as the unleashed wrath of the sisters enables a shift of narrative focus in favour of the marginalised working-class and the feminine. This second section will explore intrinsic links between this ballad by Marriott Watson and Swinburne’s “Song in Time of Revolution”. Both parts will explore the ways in which the ‘chronotopes of the wild woman’ (wherein female rebellion against hegemonic structures is made possible) interacts with the inherent qualities of the spectral chronotope to challenge tyrannical, masculine time-spaces.

The second type of border ballad that Marriott Watson identifies creates links between spectral chronotoposes, wild women and the genre – ballads of the supernatural, defined as either ghostly in nature or based on the belief in fairyland. The otherworldly universes in which the poet places the action not only participate in a fairy-tale like aesthetic, but also patently display spectral attributes – with their focus on blurs, continuums, dissolution and metamorphosis. Characterisation in the poems equally participates in unfurling spectral time-space. The figures that Marriott Watson adopts in her monster ballads – the bird-bride (“Ballad of the Bird-Bride”), the were-wolf (“Ballad of the Were-Wolf”) and the giant (“Quern of the Giants”) – are all described as immaterial and/or spiritual beings in their myths of origin. As John Fiske explains in a contemporary article on these creatures, the werewolf in folklore did not bear a canine appearance and often took the form of a tempest, a night-wind, a shapeshifter or a god of shades. Its function as the “leader of departed souls” echoes that of the swan maiden, who was supposed to “summon the dying to her home”.  

The shift that Marriott Watson operates in “Ballad of the Bird-Bride”, from swan to grey gull, adds to the uncanny dimension of the poem through the intra-reference that it unlocks. Sea birds were believed to embody the souls of drowned mariners, as featured in Coleridge’s poem. In Norse mythology, in which Marriott Watson finds inspiration, giants play the part of “evil spirits” presiding over the chaotic “world of natural processes” with female supernatural beings such as the Norns (Fates).  


102 Margaret Clunies Ross, A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewel, 2005), 93.
of giants, Marriott Watson characterises her protagonists as god-like creatures who can control the forces of nature and determine the course of history. Their spectral nature as shape changers, and martial deeds, endow them with the attributes of the Valkyries – other female war spirits who chose which soldiers to bring to the afterlife.

Part I and II explore the ways in which the traditional time-space elements of the border ballad model these figures as much as the latter’s shape-changing spectral attributes create a pattern of disruption, which allows the emergence of wild-women chronotopes. In other words, it investigates the ways in which spectral chronotopes determine the image of women in the border-ballads, as much as the feminine acts as a powerful disruptive and creative agent, opening up new worldviews in the texts.

In “Ballad of the Bird-Bride” (1889) and “Ballad of the Were-Wolf” (1891), dealing more specifically with matters of domestic rebellion (Part I), Marriott Watson connects her spiritual creatures – and their original functions as “psychopomps”103 – with a third entity: the angel. In his article, Fiske draws this comparison by suggesting parallels between the were-wolf, the swan-maiden and the large-winged female angel “bearing mortals on high-toward heavens” in popular pictures.104 In Marriott Watson’s poetry, as Hughes remarks, this third entity features in its tamed version: that of the “Victorian Angel in the House”.105 The intersubjective chronotope of the house (whose time-space is shaped by the submissive wife) and the intrasubjective chronotope of male narration are set in contrast with the spectral ‘wild-woman chronotope’ that the hybrid monster creates in the final stanzas. The first poem studied in this section, “Ballad of the Bird-Bride”, received William Watson’s praises for its creation of a province of shadows, wherein humans “touched hands with the spectral”:

(Eskimo)

They never come back, though I loved them well;
I watch the South in vain;
The snow-bound skies are blear and grey,
Waste and wide is the wild gull's way,
And she comes never again.

Years agone, on the flat white strand,

103 Fiske, “Werewolves and Swan-Maidens”: in Greek mythology, “psychopomps” refer to the leaders of departed souls, guiding spirits to the afterlife.
104 Fiske, “Werewolves and Swan-Maidens”.
105 Hughes, “Fair Hymens”, 105.
I won my sweet sea-girl:
Wrapped in my coat of the snow-white fur,
I watched the wild birds settle and stir,
The grey gulls gather and whirl.

One, the greatest of all the flock,
Perched on an ice-floe bare,
Called and cried as her heart were broke,
And straight they were changed, that fleet bird-folk,
To women young and fair.

Swift I sprang from my hiding-place
And held the fairest fast;
I held her fast, the sweet, strange thing:
Her comrades skirled, but they all took wing,
And smote me as they passed.

I bore her safe to my warm snow house;
Full sweetly there she smiled;
And yet, whenever the shrill winds blew,
She would beat her long white arms anew,
And her eyes glanced quick and wild.

But I took her to wife, and clothed her warm
With skins of the gleaming seal;
Her wandering glances sank to rest
When she held a babe to her fair, warm breast,
And she loved me dear and leal.

Together we tracked the fox and the seal,
And at her behest I swore
That bird and beast my bow might slay
For meat and for raiment, day by day,
But never a grey gull more.

A weariful watch I keep for aye
’Mid the snow and the changeless frost:
Woe is me for my broken word!
Woe, woe’s me for my bonny bird,
My bird and the love-time lost!

Have ye forgotten the old keen life?
The hut with the skin-strewn floor?
O winged white wife, and children three,
Is there no room left in your hearts for me,
Or our home on the low sea-shore?

Once the quarry was scarce and shy,
Sharp hunger gnawed us sore,
My spoken oath was clean forgot,
My bow twanged thrice with a swift, straight shot,
And slew me sea-gulls four.

The sun hung red on the sky’s dull breast,
The snow was wet and red;
Her voice shrilled out in a woeful cry,
She beat her long white arms on high,
‘The hour is here,’ she said.

She beat her arms, and she cried full fain
As she swayed and wavered there.
‘Fetch me the feathers, my children three,
Feathers and plumes for you and me,
Bonny grey wings to wear!’

They ran to her side, our children three,
With the plumage black and grey;
Then she bent her down and drew them near,
She laid the plumes on our children dear,
‘Mid the snow and the salt sea-spray.

‘Babes of mine, of the wild wind’s kin,
Feather ye quick, nor stay.
Oh, oho! but the wild winds blow!
Babes of mine, it is time to go:
Up, dear hearts, and away!’

And lo! the grey plumes covered them all,
Shoulder and breast and brow.
I felt the wind of their whirling flight:
Was it sea or sky? was it day or night?
It is always night-time now.

Dear, will you never relent, come back?
I loved you long and true.
O winged white wife, and our children three,
Of the wild wind’s kin though ye surely be,
Are ye not of my kin too?

Ay, ye once were mine, and, till I forget,
Ye are mine forever and aye,
Mine, wherever your wild wings go,
While shrill winds whistle across the snow
And the skies are blear and grey.

[“Ballad of the Bird-Bride”]

Marriott Watson’s contemporary readers were most likely able to identify the plot of this ballad as yet another rewriting of the world-revisited myth of the Swan-Maiden. While Hughes’ article on the poem only mentions the Arabic and European
origins of the folktale, research has shown that twin versions of the story exist all around the world. In his essay “The Swan-Maiden Revisited”, Alan L. Miller, for instance, investigates the influence of this ancient motif on Japanese literature and culture.\(^{106}\) The myth of the Swan-Maiden also featured among the various medieval tales and popular superstitions that Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould (Marriott Watson’s contemporary) compiled in *Curious Myths of the Middle-Ages*, a book which revived no less than twenty-four representations of legendary characters in Victorian minds. The framework that the plot follows in “Ballad of the Bird-Bride” corresponds to the one Baring-Gould identified as a common feature to all fables on hybrid women:

1. A man falls in love with a woman of supernatural race; 2. She consents to live with him, subject to one condition; 3. He breaks the condition and loses her; 4. He seeks her, and A. recovers her; B. never recovers her.\(^{107}\)

By drawing on such widespread folkloric material, Marriott Watson chooses to anchor her poem into a pre-existing narrative frame and enduring tradition (reinforced by the border-ballad genre) that shaped her readers’ expectations in terms of plot and setting.

Marriott Watson’s primary focus on narration and tradition directly affects the time-space markers of the poem’s first half. As in the Greek version of the Swan-Maiden’s tale featuring in Baring-Gould’s book, the scene is set in a supernatural Scandinavian scenery. The action occurs at an unknown period, in a mysterious world of ice, as hinted by the subtitle of the poem – Eskimo. The phrase “years agone”, together with the lack of spatial coordinates in the immensity of the sky and the iced land invoke the chronotopic indefiniteness of myths and fairy tales in the text. Despite the lack of precisions, the picture of the achromatic setting is eloquent and has already been printed into the minds of the readers. The image of a bare ice field (“white strand”) set on a huge maritime horizon, which extends for as far as the eye can see, is reminiscent of the otherworldly Nordic landscapes that Morris described in his collection *The Earthly Paradise*, and notably its lengthy narrative poem “The Land East of the Sun” drawing on the Swan-Maiden motif.\(^{108}\) Besides anchoring her work


\(^{107}\) Sabine Baring Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (London: Rivingtons, 1897), 485.

in a frame of masculine tradition, Marriott Watson reproduces the male perspective that characterises all traditional versions of the folktale. As signified by the ‘up-down’ camera-like movement shifting the masculine narrative focus from the sky and the present tense in stanza one to the land and the past tense in stanza two, the poem’s ‘intersubjective’ (or social) chronotope in which the characters evolve is also ‘intrasubjective’ in that it is tied to the narrator’s consciousness, vision and memories.

Although apparently restricted by the solid frames of mythical tradition and masculine narration, the chronotope that Marriott Watson unfurls throughout the first half of the text actually provides her with substantial artistic freedom and the potential to address unbalanced gender power structures. As the hunter’s confession of failure demonstrates in the early lines of the ballad (“I watch the South in vain”), masculine control is defeated by the setting’s lack of boundaries. While the plural form of the “snow-bound skies” highlights the substantial openness of the landscape, the “waste” and “wide” “wild gull’s way” creates a general sense of freedom and breadth reinforced by the alliteration in “w” sounds. The lack of visual distinction between the “snow-bound skies” and the “flat white strand” enhances the endless dimensions of the landscape. For Hughes, the displacement of the poem’s action into such a non-referential (and non-restrictive) place is typical of Marriott Watson’s most evocative poems. This setting not only frees the author from the “emotional restraints which she customarily imposed on her poetry”, but also allows the “articulation of liminal states” poised between the familiar (i.e. the elements that she draws from folkloric tales) and the alien (the changes she introduces within the frame of tradition). In other words, the indefiniteness of the chronotope that initially typifies the scenery enables the poet to challenge essentialist conceptions of feminine poetry (through the topic of female anger, for instance) and constitutes a fitting medium for the expression of her spectral aesthetic. Freed from time anchoring and space delimitations, the open world in which the story is set (hereafter referred to as ‘intersubjective chronotope’) enables the occurrence of supernatural events centred on the mutability of the bird-woman’s body.

It is through the prism of tradition that Marriott Watson introduces the most disruptive dimension of her main chronotope: its feminisation. While presented

Morris described the specificities of the Nordic scenery in the travel diaries that he kept as he journeyed through Iceland in the 1870s.

through the perspective of the hunter, the scenery shares the same inherent chronotopic qualities as the “bird-bride” or “sea-girl”. The absence of boundaries between the sea, the sky and the land in the text incidentally echoes the origin of the swan-maiden in ancient tales. In his article on “Werewolves and Swan-Maidens” (two of the legendary figures that Marriott Watson uses in her ballads) published in 1871, Fiske explains that the “Aryans originally regarded the sky as a sea or great lakes”. From this conception of nature was born the figure of the Apsaras (or “cloud-maiden”), often represented with a shirt of swan feathers – a depiction that Morris borrows in his own version of the myth. Marriott Watson’s “sea-girl” thus appears to reflect and shape the specificities of the setting.110 Through the subtle affiliation of the bird-woman to the scenery, the poem upholds a sharp opposition between two conflictual chronotopes within the broader time-space of the story. The “wild woman chronotope” – i.e. the sky-land characterised by indefinite spatial-temporal markers – is opposed to the domestic chronotope, circumscribed by the male-dominated time-space of the house.

This chronotopic opposition serves to highlight an initiating moment in the poem: the scene of the bird-woman’s capture. The spatial shift from the outdoor to the indoor that occurs in stanzas 4-5 sets the emergence of enforced domesticity against the openness that characterised the first lines. The ambiguity of the reference to the hunter’s “hiding-place,” blurring the boundaries between a scene of romantic contemplation and a hunt, is reproduced by the “warm snow house” (an image of safety), which constitutes the bird-woman’s cage or prison. The insistence on domestic comfort refers back to the masculine bias of the narration, which justifies the violence of the deeds perpetrated by the lyric voice (described through verbs and adverbs of action such as “sprang”, “swift”, “fast” as well as the repetition of “held” actualising the capture). The speaker in Morris’ poem “The Land East of the Sun” uses a similar excuse as he steals the bird-woman’s “swan-skin” (which enables her transformations) “for her sweet sake”. It is as in a trance that the male narrator bewitched by the swan-maiden’s beauty “almost without his will” lays hands on her dearest possession:

His hand upon the skin did fall
Almost without his will, while yet
His eyes upon her form were set.111

110 Fiske, “Werewolves and Swan-Maidens”.

In her book *Women Poets in the Victorian Era*, Moine identifies the trope of the “feathered prisoner” as a recurring motif in the nature poetry of nineteenth-century women writers. Of all the pets that female authors chose as allies in their fight against patriarchal power structures, the caged bird permitted the most radical use of gender identification. Both mute and locked in their “gilded prison,” the woman and the bird share similar feelings of oppression.\(^\text{112}\) In the older versions of the swan-maiden myth, this alliance takes the form of female metamorphosis: the woman may turn into a swan if she abides by certain conditions (in most cases, whether she wears a tunic of feathers or magic necklace).\(^\text{113}\) In Marriott Watson’s ballad, however, the identification between woman and bird reaches the level of symbiosis by blurring the ontological boundaries between the two entities, and takes into account a third factor: the alliance between the wild setting and the bird-woman. Unlike older versions and Morris’ revision of the tale in which the option of a departure is conditioned and *external* (the metamorphosis being activated by an object, which may be removed), Marriott Watson’s ballad allows the “constant threat that the bride will fly away at the first opportunity”\(^\text{114}\) to become *internal* and inalienable. In the poem, the woman’s metamorphic gift is inherent to her hybrid nature. In other words, while in traditional versions the protagonist is *either* a bird or a woman, Marriott Watson’s bride is *both/neither* a bird *nor* a woman.\(^\text{115}\) This is evident in the description of the capture, when the bride-to-be struggles to break free: her eyes “quick and wild”, anxiously look around while her wing-like, “long white” arms beat nervously as spasmodic reactions to the call of the shrill winds. In this particular moment, whether the character bears the appearance of a woman or bird is impossible to determine. The uncanny effect it produces disrupts the familiar sphere of the house, by allowing the spectral and the unpredictable to seep through its walls.

Despite the feminisation of the wild scenery and the threat of the spectral to the sphere of the house, the narrative shift of focus from the sky-land to the domestic


\(^{113}\) Fiske, “Werewolves and Swan-Maidens”.

\(^{114}\) Hughes, “Fair Hymen,” 103.

\(^{115}\) It is interesting to note that this symbiosis finds a direct echo in the compound nouns referring to the protagonist: “bird-bride”, semantically coupling the two terms through the alliteration and anagram-like effect; and “sea-girl” playing on the sonorities of “sea gull”.

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chronotope appears to tighten male narrative control in the first half of the story. This masculinity supremacy culminates as the bird-woman becomes the hunter’s wife (“But I took her to wife, and clothed her warm”) and a mother (“When she held a babe to her fair, warm breast”). The insistence on warmth enhances a neat rupture with the opening wintry scenery, weakens the symbiotic connection between the bird-woman and the outdoor world, and actualises her taming (“her wandering glance sank to rest”). While the “changeless frost” of the feminised wilderness suggested time-space stasis, the domestic chronotope anchors the bird-woman within ‘life-time’ – marked by milestones such as marriage and childbirth, as well as daily routine (“Together we tracked the fox and the seal”). The sudden temporal hiatus that follows the enunciation of the hunter’s promise (stanzas 8–9) with its unexpected shift back to the present tense, both characterises masculine loss and narrative control. While the sorrow of the hunter and the description of his wife in strict animal terms (“my bonny bird, / My bird”) predicts the end of marital harmony, the chronotope introduced by the hiatus – in which the male voice clearly dominates – also serves to justify the reintroduction of masculine violence. When, in a moment of hunger, the speaker breaks his promise not to hunt sea gulls out of respect for his wife’s kind, his murderous bow twangs “thrice with a swift, straight shot”. Despite the justification of the famine as a way of preserving the reader’s sympathy for the hunter, the number of his victims, elevated to four despite his shooting three arrows, indicates the symbolical death of his wife.

The condemnation of the male speaker’s behaviour, although latent, does occur at an intertextual level, as Marriott Watson sets masculine tradition against masculine tradition. In Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” the death of the innocent albatross that had come to help the sailors (81–82) enacts a curse suggested through sudden chronotopic change: the breeze drops down; the sky becomes hot copper and the sun bloody.116 In “Ballad of the Bird-Bride,” the chronotope of female rebellion (hereafter, ‘wild woman chronotope’) in the second half of the poem is characterised by a similar transformation of the scenery and sudden change in the poet’s palette of colours. The dull landscape, formerly symbolized by its nuances of white and grey, is scattered with touches of red, tinting the sun and staining the snow. The chronotopic

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116 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Poems of S. T. Coleridge (London: William Pickering, 1848), 225. Marriott Watson’s also appropriates Coleridge’s metre in her poem (four-three beat patterns) and uses the motif of the sea bird (gull) for her character instead of the traditional swan motif to echo Coleridge’s choice of the albatross.
identification of the woman and the setting is re-enacted through the anthropomorphic depiction of the bleeding sky’s breast, symbolising the bird-bride’s broken heart.

This turning point in the poem enacting a shift in narrative control goes beyond a simple change of colour code and directly affects its chronotopic characteristics. The very nature of the ballad, until now firmly anchored in myth and tradition, and of its time-space markers whose function was so far subjected to the action, undergo radical changes throughout the last stanzas. At the end of the poem, Marriott Watson makes space for the expression of her preferred spectral aesthetic by endowing the lines with chronotopic blurriness. As the body of the woman undergoes spectral mutation, the setting mimics her metamorphosis. While her arms, mentioned twice, suggest that she is still in her human form, the reference to her feathers indicates, on the contrary, that she has already mutated into a bird, and conveys a sense of nightmarish distortion. As her hybridity reaches its peak, the poem’s scenery – her twin and ally – goes through similar changes. Its snow and “salt sea-spray” become undistinguishable and echo the absence of separation between the sea, the land and the sky in the opening stanza. The sense of openness of the poem’s beginning, and the possibility of an escape, are thus re-established. Just as the setting’s indefiniteness permitted the early transformations of the gulls into women, it now enables the children to disappear into the void created by their mother’s black feathers (covering their “shoulder and breast and brow”); i.e. to be sucked in by the vortex-like “whirling flight” into which they make their escape. The theatrical dimension of their departure (as they literally storm out of the house), challenges normative conceptions of domestic space and patriarchal power structures.

Time markers undergo similar changes throughout the second half of the text, which are best epitomised by the poet’s use of repetitions. While iterated patterns with slow variations are structural in traditional border-ballads (and in nineteenth-century poems appropriating the codes of the genre, e.g. Swinburne’s “The Bloody Son”117), repetitions in Marriott Watson’s poem do not serve the same unifying purpose as they only appear at the end of the text. As Punter notes in his analysis of Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, another key function of the iterative in balladry is to provide

117 Algernon Charles Swinburne, Poems and Ballads (New Edition. London: Chattos & Windus, 1899), 323-327. Most of the ballads in this collection participate in Swinburne’s attempt to revive the border ballad tradition.
the text with a sense of déjà-vu within which the uncanny appears. In “Ballad of the Bird-Bride”, this familiar frame is assumed by the poet’s use of tradition and the net of intra-references (to Morris, Coleridge, and folkloric mythopoeia) that she weaves within the lines. The repetitions that she uses at the end of her text incidentally function the opposite way: they de-familiarize the setting, deconstruct linearity and disrupt the narrative tempo as they portray a hectic scene of rebellion. Thus, for instance, the bird-woman shriils, and beats her arms in the eleventh stanza; beats her arms and cries in the twelfth. In this example, the chiasmic structure of the iteration expresses cyclic movement. In the same way, the final line of the poem invoking the blear, grey skies of the opening, ties the poem into a loop. The sense of nightmarish dizziness conveyed through the echoes and swirling movements of the text finds a perfect metaphor in the image of the whirling storm that swallows the bird-woman and her three children.

As impressionist features (e.g. distortions, blurs and swirls) prevail and testify to the intrasubjective nature of the ‘wild woman chronotope’, time-space absorbs and displays the defining qualities of the spectral. Temporality, alienated from the tight frame of masculine tradition, is now anchored within an inescapable, spiralling loop. As the final scene becomes ‘un-timely’ (i.e., not ‘docile’, in Derridean terms, to traditional representations of time), the ‘wild woman chronotope’ allows Marriott Watson to break with the previous flow of the story’s plot – and normative tradition as a whole –, by enabling the final scene to stand out, and bear a logic of its own. Here, female rebellion functions as a local chronotope, enhancing intimate connections between women’s liberation and the introduction of new time-space configurations. In the same way Benjamin associates the French revolution with the introduction of a “new calendar”, marking the implosion of “the continuum of history”, spectral time in the ‘wild woman chronotope’ conveys a moment of renewal – a “present which is not a transition”, in which “time originates and has come at a standstill”. As the bird-bride explicitly mentions that the “hour is here”, that “it is time to go” (my emphasis) and exhorts her children to follow her outside the domestic sphere, readers understand the predestined nature of the scene. The poem entirely revolves around this climactic

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moment of chronotopic renewal, and, as a time bomb, counts down to the ‘zero hour’ of revolution, triggered by and triggering the ineluctable flight of the avian woman.

As the ‘wild woman chronotope’ enacts the dissolution of the poem’s time-space co-ordinates, a sense of confusion permeates the mind of the hunter and allows a shift in narrative control. Having lost his bearings, the speaker wonders whether his family departed in the sea or the sky, at day or night. In Matthew Arnold’s earlier poem “The Forsaken Merman”, the figure of the husband goes through a similar phase of mourning and confusion (“Children dear, was it yesterday […]”). Yet, the strict chronotopic separation between the sea world – where the merman lives –, and the prison-like, achromatic city in which the deserting spouse chooses to lead a pious life of sacrifice, does not allow the same level of time-space confusion to occur. In “Ballad of the Bird-Bride”, masculine narrative control is denied at the end of the poem as the speaker is unable to situate himself within his own narrative. As the intrasubjective chronotope shifts from an alliance with the hunter’s consciousness to the woman’s, the male speaker is lost and stranded at the heart of a story that used to be his own. His world becomes a foggy space reminiscent of the distorted passing scenes of a dream or a nightmare, in which time-space representations grow to become subjective.

Questions of narrative control in the text highlight the gendered dimension of the chronotopic conflict at stake. While the spectral qualities of the bird-woman allow her to escape normative definitions of womanhood, they also serve to reinforce one unbridgeable binary: that of gender. In Morris’ version of the tale, the possibility of a chronotopic conflict is annihilated by the very characterisation of the bird-woman. As Carole G. Silver explains in her book Strange and Secret Peoples, the swan-maiden figure “dwindles into a somewhat conventional spouse” in Morris’ treatment of the motif. As a local chronotope that may only invoke the social implications of the archetypical Victorian wife, the woman remains locked within hegemonic tradition. The otherworldly scenery to which she (unwillingly) retreats not only lies out of her control but also serves to negate her agency: as she walks off barefooted into the snow, the trance-like spell that is cast upon her forces her to fall into a deep slumber, anchoring her within the time-space of a male-dominated fairy-tale tradition. In this

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120 Matthew Arnold, Poems (New York: Macmillan & Co, 1890), 263.

respect, it is fair to say that the otherworldly landscape from which she originates is embedded within the wider chronotope of masculine narration – and, more especially, the heroic time that defines it, as enhanced by the narrator’s role as a saviour at the end of the tale. In “Ballad of the Bird-Bride”, the bird-woman on the contrary wakes up from the trance effect of the hunter’s house, and the time-space that it entails. The chronotope that she triggers empowers her to escape masculine narrative control and to reclaim her initial agency. As her rebellion reshapes time-space configurations, she is suddenly endowed with a voice of her own in the final stanzas, which hints at her new function as a conflicting narrator. The otherworldly language that she uses when she shrills out (like the wind) and reclaims the time or hour of narration, foregrounds questions of gendered miscommunication through chronotopic incompatibility. The balance between these two conflicting traditions interestingly tips in favour of the woman’s: while the bird-bride manages to break free from the restraints of masculine time-space, the hunter’s confusion and loss of control over narration is irreversible.

While narrative control is suggested through the sudden voicing of the bird-bride in the first ballad, it is paradoxically enacted through a subversive form of female silence in “Ballad of the Were-Wolf”. In this second poem, the clash between the main (gendered) chronotopes goes a step further, as it results in the brutal assassination of the narrator. Despite obvious similarities in the ballads, William Watson condemned the latter for the “too purely physical” horror that it contains (more precisely, suggests) through the deconstruction of domestic time-space.122 As in “Ballad of the Bird-Bride”, this subversion is internal and occurs within the tight frame of folklore and masculine tradition. With its thematic violence, use of a Scots dialect (Doric) and invocation of supernatural time-space, the poem evidently draws upon the distinctive attributes of the border ballad. The plot of the poem itself finds its immediate source in one of the anecdotes told by Howard Williams in “The Superstitions of Witchcraft”:

A gentleman while hunting was suddenly attacked by a savage wolf of monstrous size. Impenetrable by his shot, the beast made a spring upon the helpless huntsman, who in the struggle luckily, or unluckily for the unfortunate lady, contrived to cut off one of its fore-paws. […] On the road he met a friend, to whom he exhibited a bleeding paw, or rather (as it now appeared) a woman’s hand, upon which was a wedding-ring. His wife’s ring was at once recognized by the other. His suspicions aroused, he immediately went in search of his wife, who was found sitting by the fire in the kitchen, her arm hidden beneath her apron, when the husband, seizing her by the arm, found his terrible

122 Hughes, Graham R., 146.
While Marriott Watson changed very few details of the story, she appropriated it for the purposes of her own political agenda against hegemonic power structures, using her spectral aesthetics to enhance the uncanny dimension of the scene and strengthen the disruptive qualities of the monstrous feminine. The domestic setting of the poem, the language that it uses, as well as the introduction of murderous violence within the sphere of the nuclear family constitute a response to Swinburne’s border-ballad “The Bloody Son”. While “Ballad of the Were-Wolf” deals with the brutality of a mother slaying her husband and children, Swinburne’s poem tackles the topic of fratricide.

Once again, Marriott Watson’s main contribution lies in her feminization of issues of anger and violence, as well as of the mythical figure that she chooses – here, the werewolf. Fiske’s depiction of werewolves in strictly masculine terms throughout his article only corroborates the etymological roots of the word – *wer* in Old English deriving from the Latin word *vir*, translating as man, hero or warrior. While Marriott Watson displaces these qualities onto the figure of the hybrid woman by allowing her spectral chronotope to blur the limits of the domestic sphere and encroach onto male territory, she also capitalises on the linguistic history of the word to enact her poetics. In Latin, the term *versipellis* – used for describing werewolves – literally means skin-changer, shape-shifter or turncoat, and serves to highlight the metamorphic attributes of the hybrid woman and her accompanying chronotope in the ballad. This intrinsic connection between time-space and the werewolf is clear in Fiske’s article, shedding light on the origins of the myth. Just as the “Apsaras” (or swan-maiden) traditionally displayed chronotopic qualities through inherent connections with the sea and sky, the werewolf took the form of a tempest, a night-wind, or a canine god of shapes coming to summon the souls of the dead. Marriott Watson’s interest in the shapeshifting, the supernatural and the spectral once again has a direct impact on her time-space poetics, actualizing the battle of the sexes between husband and wife in chronotopic terms:

The gudewife sits i’ the chimney-neuk,
An’ looks on the louping flame;
The rain fa’s chill, and the win’ ca’s shrill,

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124 The feminine equivalent of *wer* in Old English is *wif*, making the poet’s figure a wifwolf.

125 Fiske, “Werewolves and Swan-Maidens”.
Ere the auld gudeman comes hame.

“Oh, why is your cheek sae wan, gudewife?
An’ why do ye glower on me?
Sae dour ye luik i’ the chimney-neuk,
Wi’ the red licht in your e’e!

“Yet this nicht should ye welcome me,
This ae nicht mair than a’,
For I hae scotched yon great grey wolf
That took our bairnies twa.

“Twas a sair, sair strife for my very life,
As I warstled there my lane;
But I’ll hae her heart or e’er we part,
Gin ever we meet again.

“Gae tak’ the foot o’ the drumlie brute,
And hang it upo’ the wa’;
An’ the next time that we meet, gudewife,
The tane of us shall fa’.”

He’s flung his pouch on the gudewife’s lap,
I’ the firelicht shinin’ fair,
Yet naught they saw o’ the grey wolf’s paw,
For a bluidy hand lay there.

O hooly, hooly rose she up,
Wi’ the red licht in her e’e,
Till she stude but a span frae the auld gudeman
Whiles never a word spak’ she.

But she stripped the claiths frae her lang richt arm,
That were wrappit roun’ and roun’
The first was white, an’ the last was red;
And the fresh bluid dreeped adown.

She stretchit him out her lang richt arm,
An’ cauld as the deid stude he.
The flames louped bricht i’ the gloamin’ licht –
There was nae hand there to see!

[“Ballad of the Werewolf”, 1895]

A woman calmly sits by the hearth while waiting for her husband’s return. The image that Marriott Watson conjures up (and almost immediately overturns) in the opening lines of “Ballad of the Were-Wolf” – that of the ideal “gudewife”, or the angel in the house – could not have been more familiar to her late-Victorian readers. The trope of the “gudewife”, working as a local chronotope, is sufficiently rich in cultural connotations to invoke the time-space implications of her social context within the lines. For this reason, the description of the domestic sphere, merely signified by the
presence of the fireplace ("chimney-neuk", 1) remains minimal. This patent lack of specificity (or chronotopic bareness) coupled with the use of the present tense deprives the action of its singularity. The ballad acquires the timelessness of myth and displays the aphoristic qualities of general truths and long-standing archetypes. The stillness of the scene and of the waiting wife in this opening chronotope is set in contrast with the mentions of the rain and the shrill wind. While such space markers may retrospectively be read as omens of spectral disruption (storms originally standing for the werewolf), the lurking danger is at this point distanced from the eventless sphere of the house.

The impression of comfort and safety created by the first stanza is immediately challenged by the underlying eeriness that permeates the next lines. In many ways, the second stanza is a literal revision of the first (as suggested by the structural repetitions that connect the lines), reinterpreted from the husband’s perspective, or intrasubjective chronotope demarcated by the sudden use of speech marks. The reassuring warmth of the hearth in the opening lines suddenly turns into a source of concern as the woman’s fiery look unsettles the ‘gudeman’ upon his return. The close-knit association of the flames with the glowering eyes of the ‘gudewife’ finds a subtle echo in the pun on “louping”, sounding like lupine and hinting at the underlying threat of the monstrous feminine. In the same way that the chronotopic affiliation of the bird-bride to the winds challenged the speaker’s understanding of time-space, the link between the ‘gudewife’ and the menacing flames suggests the precariousness of male control over narration.

The shift to the preterit in stanzas 3-5 constitutes a desperate attempt by the ‘gudeman’ to reassert control. Within the intrasubjective chronotope that his speech opens up, the scene is endowed with historical specificity (through the use of the past tense) breaking with the timeless dimension of the opening. As the ‘gudeman’ narrates the legendary story of his fight against the wolf that killed his children, the chronotope becomes characterised by masculine epic time. While “Ballad of the Bird-Bride” to a certain extent managed to arouse the reader’s sympathy for the hunter, “Ballad of the Werewolf” derides its hero. The repetitions (e.g. “sair, sair strife”, 1.13) and hyperbole in the text, together with the characterisation of the “great grey” wolf as an archetypal fairy-tale villain, cause the speech to lose its legitimacy. They also serve to mark the chronotopic incompatibility between the time-space of the speech and the one within which it occurs. As Ladin explains, “heroic and domestic chronotopes are mutually exclusive: heroic gestures become absurd in domestic time-space [as] the series of linear dramatic events and locales characteristic of heroic time is in direct conflict with
the recurrent rhythms and closed spaces of domesticity”.

It is clear at this stage that the chronotopes to which each figure belongs are distinctly gendered. While the ordinary after-work setting of the house is subverted by the historical nature of “this ae nicht mair than a’” (l.10) standing out as a specific moment in this particular man’s life, the marginalization of the wife within the sphere of action is made explicit. Although she is admitted within epic time-space in the form of the man’s addressee, she is de facto excluded from it – since the discourse, as a monologue, relegates its audience (the ‘gudewife’) to the background and reduces it to a mere spectral presence.

While the ‘gudewife’ occupies a marginal position within this chronotope, her secret double – the monster – takes on a central role. Through the diffusion of local chronotopic energies (or the centrifugal power of language), the identification of the woman and the wolf is evident and clearly tips the balance of time-space control in favour of the not-so-good wife. In stanza 5, a grammatical ambivalence marks the first point of collusion between the ‘gudeman chronotope’ and the ‘wild woman’ one:

An’ the next time that we meet, gudewife,
The tane of us shall fa’
(ll. 19-20, my emphasis)

The confusion in the referents of the personal pronouns “us” and “we” is enabled by the intermediary mention of the “gudewife”, visually framed and enhanced by the two commas. This interjection can stand both for the addressee of the husband’s discourse (the wife) and for the object of the heroic speech (the wolf) – these possibilities being coupled at the micro-syntactic level of the lines. In this moment, the lack of physical categorization of the spectral feminine is patent as the liminal ‘wifwolf’ operates at the threshold between the natural and the monstrous. At this point, the identification of the wife with the monster has already been suggested through the use of feminine pronouns and possessive adjectives to describe the wolf. This symbiotic connection between the two figures also finds expression in textual space – the word “gudewife” being placed in a way to mirror the “drumlie brute”. This coupling directly affects time-space configurations: while the ‘gudewife’ is limited to the house, the spectral ‘wifwolf’ allows her to encroach on the heroic chronotope and challenge boundaries.

As the woman steps up to challenge her husband within his chronotope, the entire story shifts to the preterit at the end of the speech (at a moment when the readers

126 Ladin, “Fleshing Out the Chronotope,” 225.
expect a logical return to the present). As the wife obtrudes upon masculine historicity, the boundaries between the gudeman’s and the wild woman’s chronotopes dissolve. The reversal of gender power that ensues is actualized at the end of the poem, when the correspondence between the sliced paw of the wolf and the missing “bluidy hand” (l. 24) of the wife is finally disclosed. The immediacy of the metamorphosis enhances the spectral nature of the ‘wifwolf’ and of the temporality that it implies: as in the bird-bride ballad, the woman is neither/both a human being nor/and a beast. The metaphor of the sliced paw is interesting as it suggests loss and control at the same time. While the unanimated thing landing on the woman’s lap (generally associated with fertility) acts as a reminder of the monstrous infanticides that she committed, the severed limb’s status as a trophy to be hanged “upo the wa”’ (l. 18) encourages a different reading. The man’s tossing the hand onto his wife is a form of violence as well as a sign of power transfer – the pouch and the hand standing for phallic agency. Choosing one of the readings is not essential as both fulfil the same role in the poem: that of a trigger.

As in “Ballad of the Bird-Bride”, this trigger allows the emergence of the ‘wild woman chronotope’. In the last stanzas, time-space reconfigurations highlight a power shift. At this moment of theatrical importance, the actors now face each other on stage, as the woman, formerly sitting in a subordinate manner, stands “a span frae the auld gudeman” (l. 27). The spotlight dramatically shifts onto the void left by the woman’s severed hand when she stretches “him out her lang richt arm” (29), suggesting the intrasubjective character of the ‘wild woman chronotope’. Once again, a change in the poet’s palette is operated: the colour red becomes omnipresent and stands for revenge and bloodshed. This diffusion of colour as well as the impressionistic repetitions at the end of the poem serve to disrupt normative time-space and give momentum to the scene of rebellion. While the iteration “roun’ and roun’” (30) endows the poem with the same swirling, dizzy sense of confusion as in the first ballad, that of “hooly, hooly” (l. 25) considerably slows down its temporality. Similarly, the repetition of the “lang richt arm” (ll. 29; 33) – also present in “Ballad of the Bird-Bride” – suggests hybridity and uncanny physical distortion (space) as much as it invokes a moment of uncanny immobility (time) at odds with the temporal specificities of the heroic chronotope.

\[127\] In her biography, Hughes notes that the line “hooly, hooly rose she up” was taken verbatim from one of the border-ballads (“Bonny Barbara Allen”) that Rosamund Marriott Watson’s included in her anthology [Graham R, 141], evidencing how the poet used tradition to serve her own political agenda.
Once again, female revolution conveys a “present which is not a transition”, in which (spectral) “time originates and has come at a standstill”. As the trigger (male violence) is pulled, the time bomb counts down to revolution. The hands of the poem’s broken clock, as if “angered by time’s way” (here, normative heroic time) feverishly spin around the dial, marking the zero-hour of change. The ‘gudeman’, marginalised within this new time-space configuration, silent and still (“cauld as the deid”, 1.34), loses his authority as a teller. His death, suggested by the sudden drop of curtains, testifies to the end of masculine tradition. Without uttering a word, the woman takes narrative control of the man’s story, and brutally puts an end to it.

Marriott Watson’s time bomb poetics in “Ballad of the Bird-Bride” and “Ballad of the Werewolf” constitutes the poet’s most original contribution to the wild/new woman tradition, and participates in a radical reading of history – one defined in terms of rupture and eruption – underpinned by her choice of a liminal and revolution-driven genre. Her explosive endings, published in 1890s London, carried particular connotations in the aftermath of the Dynamite Campaign that terrorised the capital in 1881-1885 and provided source material for many artists. This particular context may have explained why Marriott Watson’s most political and violent piece, “The Quern of the Giants” (in which her time bomb poetics finds its best expression), written in 1888, was only accepted for publication in 1895 as her editor exhorted her not to include it in her Bird-Bride collection. Criticised for emulating the aesthetic of William Morris (Norse mythology), this socialist and proto-feminist work also finds its roots in the revolutionary lyrics of her most admired poetic father, Swinburne.

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130 Hughes, Graham R., 71; 243.
3. The New Woman and the Revolution Chronotope in “Quern of the Giants”

The relationship between Swinburne and Marriott Watson has surprisingly received little critical attention. This second part seeks to address and bridge this gap in fin-de-siècle scholarship by comparing the authors’ respective approach to the border ballad, revolution and history as a whole. In this section, I read Marriott Watson’s “The Quern of the Giants” as a revision of Swinburne’s “Song in Time of Revolution, 1860”, in which the writer expresses his early republican enthusiasm. I explore the ways in which the intersections of gender and genre in the ballads are informed by, and underpin the chronotopes of the spectral and of revolution. More specifically, I argue that these time-spaces enable the poet to posit the feminine as an indomitable force of disruption countering patriarchal history. While the ‘wild woman chronotope’ allowed to destroy the sphere of the domestic in “Ballad of the Bird-Bride” and “Ballad of the Were-Wolf” (Part I), it empowers the poet to typify women in “Quern of the Giants” as both political (New women dissenters) and mythological figures (giants and muses) disrupting the continuum of history through revolution.

As explained, questions of rebellion and revolution abound in border ballads. Their understanding of history is revolution-oriented in that it focuses on specific moments of break or transformation. Their tales of heroic deeds through passionate rhythms and natural metaphors (storms and surging waters) inspired poetical renewal and metrical experimentation at the fin-de-siècle. The motif of revolution encourages Swinburne and Marriott Watson to create new modalities of time-space, to explore innovative methods of rendering the ‘here-and-now’ of history in its making, and to reflect on the power structures that shaped their reality. In the ballads, the politico-literary agendas of Swinburne and Marriott Watson suffuse their handling of prosody:

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131 This section is further developed in my article “Gender and Chronotopes of Revolution in the Border Ballads of Swinburne and Marriott Watson”, forthcoming in Summer 2019 in the special issue “Gender and Genre” of Victorian Poetry.

132 Surprisingly, Marriott Watson’s obvious tribute to her predecessor has not yet received the academic attention it deserves. In fact, no thorough comparative study of the two authors’ works, let alone the specific modalities of their approach to balladry, exists. Although Maxwell and Evangelista’s recent monograph on Swinburne acknowledged the impact of the “unofficial laureate” on the fin-de-siècle poetry of male and female writers, Marriott Watson is not part of his successors, and has de facto rarely been able to make the list. To my knowledge, only Hughes has established a direct connection between the authors in one article, her contribution to “The Yellow Nineties Online,” and her biography. See: Catherine Maxwell and Stefano Evangelista, eds., Algernon Charles Swinburne: Unofficial Laureate (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2013), 5; Hughes, Graham R., 71; Hughes, “Daughters of Danaus and Daphne: Women Poets and the Marriage Question,” Victorian Literature and Culture 34, no. 2 (2006): 487; Linda K. Hughes, “Graham R. Tomson [Rosamund Marriott Watson] (1860-1911),” The Yellow Nineties Online, http://www.1890s.ca/HTML/tomson_bio.html (accessed March 28, 2018).
The heart of the rulers is sick, || and the high-priest covers his head:
For this is the song of the quick || that is heard in the ears of the dead.
[“Song,” 1-2; my emphasis]

In “Song in Time of Revolution” (hereafter, “Song”), Swinburne revives the
ergetic rush of the Homeric dactylic hexameter to couple the border ballad with the
Apollonian myths in which he had an interest.\textsuperscript{133} The overwhelming presence of
monosyllables in his poem, as epitomized in the lines quoted above, stems from the
vigorous metres of the border ballad and recreates the militaristic dimension of these
martial poems. Yet it is through Swinburne’s subversion of this model that the rousing
force of its rhythm most vividly stands out. While the quatrains structure of the border-
ballad stanza subsists through caesuras highlighting internal rhymes (“sick”; “quick,”
ill. 1-2), the use of couplets condenses what might have been four trimetric lines into a
pair of hexameters. The accelerated tempo that ensues mimics that of the battle: the
metre of the poem “takes on flesh” as it simulates textual space; and space, in turn,
becomes “charged and responsive”\textsuperscript{134} to the different scales of poetic time. While the
elongated lines replicate at their micro-level the distance covered by the army on the
battlefield, the metre echoes the soldiers’ pace and the heartbeat of the kings. Despite
this sense of speed, the regularity of the metre restores the poem’s stability, just as the
fragmentation of the lines maintains internal balance in the stanzas: if the plot deals
with political chaos, the lines’ centre of gravity (caesuras) remains mostly undisturbed.

For Marriott Watson, the soothing tempo of such metrical choices is at odds
with the essence of the border ballad and the haste of its “hot-blooded people” to “be
done with dishonourable or intolerable life”\textsuperscript{135} Her poem builds on this tradition by
relating the story of two sisters violently putting an end to their own enslavement.
The ballad starts with the tale of a capricious monarch, King Frodi, who discovers that the

\textsuperscript{133} During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, English and European translators had flattened the
metrical dynamism of the form through their use of iambics, and in the Victorian era they suppressed the
accentual tones of the English language to align their translations with the rules of quantitative metre.
Alexander Pope, for instance, translated the \textit{Iliad} using the heroic couplet (iambic pentameters), which
was then considered to be the appropriate measure for “serious” poems. Criticisms of this metre often
pointed at its “metronomic monotony,” which failed to convey the energy of Greek poetic diction. See
Swinburne, as a reaction against both traditions, turns to anapaests (freely mixed with iambics) and their
distinctive galloping rhythm to reproduce the charge of the battalions.

\textsuperscript{134} Bakhtin, “Forms,” 84.

\textsuperscript{135} Marriott Watson, ed., \textit{Ballads of the North Countrie}, xxxiii.
Quern-stones he inherited have the potential to grant his wishes. After understanding that the stones can be turned by none of his men, Frodi buys the twin giantesses Menia and Frenia, who are strong enough to grind the stones. Toiling unceasingly, the bondwomen bring wealth and joy to the kingdom. The utopic results of their hard work encourage them to ask their ruler for some well-deserved rest. As Frodi turns down their request twice, they join forces with the magic Quern to annihilate the kingdom’s newly found happiness. In “Quern of the Giants” (“Quern”), Marriott Watson revives old rhythms to convey the sisters’ rage. In the preface to her ballads anthology, she expresses disdain for the heroic couplet and advocates the revival of “rural measures”:

The merit of our Northern ballads is to be “passionate, sensuous and simple.” It is a commonplace of criticism to show how those qualities of the ballad awakened the drowsy Muse of England, lulled by the monotonous cadences of the heroic couplets.\(^{136}\)

The influence of Swinburne’s prosody, themes, and aesthetics is clear from the opening lines of Marriott Watson’s poem, which adopts his metre, topic, and narrative focus on the ruling class (highlighted by the repetition of “king,” l.1). Like Swinburne, Marriott Watson rejects the metronomic rhythm of the iambic pentameter found in heroic couplets, and mostly uses anapaests. But her deconstruction of his metrical balance constitutes a strong twist enabling the political instability of her ballad to seep through and affect its rhythm, and create a pattern of disruption for her ‘wild women chronotope’. An example of this revision is her displacement of the lines’ caesuras:

\[
\text{Lo, this is the song of a king} \parallel \text{and his kingly desire,} \\
\text{The story of wrong and undoing} \parallel - \text{of terror and fire} \\
\text{["Quern," lines 1-2; my emphasis]}
\]

Swinburne’s clear division of his hexametric metre into two groups of three strong syllables is subverted in Marriott Watson’s poem, mostly constituted of anapaest pentameters (three-plus-two sets of beats). In the opening lines, the rhythmical unbalance created by delayed caesuras is further enhanced by the triphthongs on “desire” and “fire”, slowing down the pace of the verses and attenuating the conclusive strength of Swinburne’s masculine rhymes.\(^{137}\) In the rest of the poem, the prosody

\(^{136}\) Marriott Watson, Ballads of the North Countrie, x-xxxv – my emphasis.

\(^{137}\) Whether to define “fire” and “desire” as feminine rhymes opens up a long-lasting debate among linguists trying to determine whether triphthongs are monosyllabic or disyllabic. See: John Wells, “Triphthongs, anyone?,” John Wells’s Phonetic Blog (accessed March 28, 2018), http://phonetic-blog.blogspot.co.uk/2009/12/triphthongs-anyone.html.
further internal disruption, and deviates from the hexametric and anapaestic forms. Line 6 for instance (below) is stripped of its final caesura by the late introduction of an adjective clause (“that lay / Dull and hoar”) that enforces an enjambment and the rhythmical continuation that it implies. Line 7 follows a two-plus-four beat pattern separated by a comma, with a metrical inversion placing an extra stress on “Dull”:

But strangest and rarest of all were the Quern-stones that lay
Dull and hoar, ’mid the gleam of the gold and the woven array;

[lines 6-7; my emphasis]

The fragmentariness of lines 21-22 (below) also subverts Swinburne’s ‘centric’ metre by occasioning multiple pauses and enforcing a beat on “smiled.” Menia and Frenia (22), isolated by the punctuation, are placed at the heart of a one-two-two pattern:

And the monarch, his friend aforetime, smiled, musing, and said,
“Let the bondwomen, Menia and Frenia, be hitherward led.”

[lines 21-22; my emphasis]

Through the expression of her flexible metre, Marriott Watson appropriates Greek epic traditions to destabilize them. In her poem, the growing impulsiveness of the giant sisters echoes that of the “old rural measures” that she praises in her border-ballad edition, and hints at the spectral qualities of the pattern of disruption that she creates.

The decentring effects of Marriott Watson’s metrical techniques are doubled by a displacement of the revolutionary moment towards the final stanzas of “Quern,” allowing a redefinition of power from its margins. In Swinburne’s “Song”, the ostensible narrative decentring constituted by beginning in medias res has the effect of re-centring the action onto the historical events at stake. Marriott Watson’s ballad, on the contrary, is divided into two moments: pre- and post-revolution. This allows tension (in the form of female rage) to accumulate and finally explode at the end of the poem. Postponing the moment of revolution works in favour of female working-class characterization. In fact, despite the subversive purpose of Swinburne’s attention to the “rulers” seeking to keep the spotlight on the text’s disempowerment of these figures, his poem remains ‘centric’ in that its deconstruction of power minimizes the importance of “the poor and the halt and the blind” (1.3) as direct agents of

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138 ‘Centric’ is used throughout this article to refer both to Swinburne’s prosodic emphasis on the centre of gravity of each line through caesuras, and to his understanding of power as masculine and hegemonic – an understanding that fails to convey the agency of peripheral forces.
chronotopic change. Marriott Watson emphasizes the moment of empowerment of her figures by displacing them from the margins of the intersubjective chronotope (the male-presided kingdom) to its centre, and enabling the sisters to remodel time-space.

Throughout the first part of the plot, the bondwomen’s relegation to the outskirts of their adoptive land suggests their lack of control over the chronotopic elements of the story, even though their work on the Quern-stones results in the time-space transformation of the country. The utopic landscape that they enrich is described at length in the text, through both visual terms (the “fair […] light of the sun on the blossoming leas,” l.42) and description of sounds (the “chime of great bells undersea or the cooing of doves,” l.40). This spatial peacefulness is reinforced by the smooth chronological succession of time-markers (“summer-time”, connected with “winter” through the flow of gold that shines like a “river of light”). While the causal link between the sisters’ toil and the release of beneficial energies is clear, the bondwomen are left “shelterless” at the margins of the kingdom. The space they occupy works as a heterotopic counter-site that neither constitutes an integral part of the country nor really situates itself outside of it: estranged from their hometown, strange to their new land and to the human race, the sisters are all at once located within and without the male-dominated territory. Their exclusion is spatial and temporal, as a life dictated by “work-discipline” alienates them from the timeframe of the kingdom and the tale of enrichment it unfolds. This prequel to the revolution highlights the sisters’ agency in the chronotopic changes that are described in the second half of “Quern.”

In “Song,” the connection between the protagonists and time-space markers is, at first, merely expressed in analogical terms. The “noise of the blowing of wind” is like “the sound of the noise of their feet” (l. 4); the “heart of the nations is made as the strength of the springs of the sea” (l. 12); the “priests are scattered like chaff and the rulers broken like reeds” (l. 6). This comparative modality generates a shift towards a metaphorical depiction of the revolution that work at the expense of the people’s representation. As natural forces appropriate their political deeds, their actual presence disappears from the text, giving way to the supremacy of the passive voice and the depriving prefix “un”: the rulers are “smitten” and “pained” (9), “grieved” and “taken”

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of tradition. 

Thus, as nature takes over narrative control in Swinburne’s “Song”, the reddening of the corn “that was green” (l. 36) understates, if not fully ignores, the blood-shedding responsibility of the rebels; and the disincarnated “shouting of mirth” (l. 36), merely carried by the wind (ll. 5; 33), suppresses the importance of the mouths that issue it. This clear rupture between the proletarians and the actions that they carry out in chronotopic terms precludes an equal relationship between the two: one (the people) has to be subjugated to the other (nature) and is consequently disempowered.

This rupture reveals the macrocosmic dimension of Swinburne’s ballad (and poetry as a whole) that shapes his conception of power and history. As Rosenberg explains in his chapter on the effects of time in Swinburne’s work, the poet’s focus is less “upon the small celandine than upon the spines of mountains”\(^\text{142}\); and in the case of “Song,” it is less upon the achievements of a few individuals than upon the wider forces that determine their world. This view of historical events is omnipresent in the predominantly masculine tradition of Chartist poems.\(^\text{143}\) In his analysis of “The Voice of the People” by W.H.C, for instance, Sanders notes that the disembodied voice of the dissenters is “located in a series of generalized settings,” such as high peaks, skies, and “wide fields of heather”.\(^\text{144}\) This grandiloquent focus on sizeable natural entities and phenomena (e.g. earthquakes) recurs in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetry


\(^{143}\) Eliza Cook is perhaps the most famous female contributor to radical poetry and the Chartist literary tradition. Her poems, however, do not focus on the cosmos and sizeable natural elements, unlike those of her male contemporaries. On the contrary, they concentrate on small natural items (worms, buttercups and daisies, etc.), which aligns them with Fabienne Moine’s arguments about feminine literary tactics.

\(^{144}\) Sanders, “Poetic Agency”, 113.
by men, but is much less present in verses by women. In her book, Moine notices the rarity of large or abstract spaces (e.g. oceans, the universe or mountains) in the works of female poets, who prefer to concentrate on small and peripheral natural objects, and who “turn to nature as a resource to challenge or overcome that marginalization”.\footnote{Moine, \textit{Women Poets in the Victorian Era}, 7.}

Swinburne and Marriott Watson’s ballads exceed Moine’s parameters (being more than nature poems) and do not corroborate strict associations between the macrocosmic and the masculine, the liminal and the feminine. Indeed, by anchoring her work in the tradition of myths and border ballads, Marriott Watson does participate in an abstract vision of history and invokes substantial natural actors such as surging waters and ravaging fires. However, Moine’s claims help to shed light on the general movements and gendered politics of the two ballads. “Quern” starts with a broad narrative focus on the kingdom’s intersubjective chronotope, only to finally zoom in onto the specific changes triggered by female agents (in intrasubjective chronotopes). It decentres the revolutionary moment to re-centre these instances of marginal power. The monstrous alliance the sisters make with nature enables to both capitalize on and subvert essentialist discourses positing the semiotic association of the two. In this respect, the poet employs the forces of nature as a way for her figures to overcome chronotopic marginalization. Swinburne on the contrary opens his ballad with the time-space of the battlefield (with a focus on ‘centric’ forms of power), and then zooms out, to the detriment of local agencies and in favour of greater ‘centric’ forces:

\begin{quote}
The wind is thwart in their feet; it is full of the shouting of mirth; 
As one shaketh the sides of a sheet, so it shaketh the ends of the earth.

The sword, the sword is made keen; the iron has opened its mouth; 
The corn is red that was green; it is bound for the sheaves of the south.

The sound of a word was shed, the sound of the wind as the breath, 
In the ears of the souls that were dead, in the dust of the deepness of death;

Where the face of the moon is taken, the ways of the stars undone, 
The light of the whole sky shaken, the light of the face of the sun:
\end{quote}

[“Song”, ll. 33-40]

In the passage above, as the laughing wind of change that swept the fields of the battle reaches and “shaketh” the “ends of the earth” (l. 34), the reality of the civil war is blurred by the metaphorical expansion of the poem’s chronotopic focus. In line 35, the reiteration of a military motif (“the sword, the sword”) acts as a local chronotope,
which, for a short instant at least, invokes the time-space implications of the battlefield back into the text. In line 36, however, the narrative scope is once again elevated to a cosmic level – with celestial agents (the stars, the sky, and the sun) as its protagonists.

Interestingly, Swinburne’s disorientation of his poetical world’s co-ordinates is expressed through the reinforcement of the text’s metre and chiasmic structure, that is, of the anchoring rhythm and ‘centric’ balance of the lines. The sonic effect of the alliteration in “d” in line 38 (“dead, in the dust of the deepness of death”), together with the semantic redundancy of the line, for instance heightens the regularity of the action’s tempo. Similarly, the repetitions of “shaketh” (l. 34), “sound” (l. 37), and “light” (l. 40) near the beginning and end of each half-line strengthen the “insistent, mesmeric” metre of the poem and the inner division of its lines. As much as these iterations reinforce the lines’ centre of gravity, they convey the rotating movement of revolutions in their primary meaning. These swirling gestures of the text do not further change: as Sarah Eron argues in her essay on time-space in Swinburne’s work, “this circular pattern of time is one which accentuates both the stasis and the movement of the circle”: that is, “things change but never change; move and yet go nowhere.”

This tension is patent at the end of the ballad: when the world’s co-ordinates shift, “the waves of the water are stayed” (l. 41) and conjure up an overwhelming sense of death in the final lines, the anapaest metre keeps replicating the rhythm of the sea and conveys continuity – at the crossroad of ever-changefulness and eternal sameness.

This vision of history as an undulating continuum, which favours continuity over radical change, anticipates Benjamin’s concept of “progress” – which he conceives as the strict antithesis of revolution. The breath of the Lord at the end of “Song” standing for the wind of fate corresponds to the image of the storm in the philosopher’s essay:

Where we perceive a chain of events, [the Angel of History] sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned. This storm is what we call progress.

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In both representations, history is conceived as an incessant, self-reproduced and meaningless vortex of chaos stretching invariably, and negating the role of political forces as agents of change. Like the Angelus Novus of poetry, Swinburne witnesses and writes about this “storm” or divine “breath” that blows, unstoppable, from Paradise and gives metrical impulse to his ballad. Despite his mention of the Christian Lord at the end of the poem, his depiction of destiny, cosmic forces, and poetry as an endless series of waves or crises betrays the influence of Greek myth on his poetry. As Yisrael Levin demonstrates in his recent book, Swinburne’s Poems and Ballads followed the early lines of a “mythopoeic project” by placing the figure of Apollo at the centre of a poetics that abounds in solar and astral imageries.149 In his republican verses such as “Song,” the double-natured god of sun and poetry is both a “destroyer” striking oppressive institutions, and a “source of dynamic regeneration”.150 In spite of essentialist links between femininity and cyclic nature, Swinburne’s poetic perspective on revolutions as rotations participates in a normative masculine tradition.

In one of her articles, Julia F. Saville studies this patriarchal understanding of time-space configurations by brilliantly untangling tensions between the republican beliefs of young Swinburne and his representations of social change (as patriarchal, natural, apolitical, universal and repetitive) in “Song”.151 While acknowledging the influence that democrats like Hugo, Mazzini, and Whitman had on Swinburne’s writings, Saville suggests that his “idiosyncratic views were often at odds with theirs”.152 To support her claims, she analyses the ways in which Swinburne’s views on historical time corroborate ancient Greek understandings of *fortuna* (i.e. fate):

For instance, his passionate investment in aesthetics and varieties of imaginative pleasure is motivated by a sense of temporality that blends ancient and modern and regards fate or *fortuna* (an indifferent, impersonal, and random force) as the determinant of world events. Time is therefore no secular progression to be fulfilled in an afterlife, but an alternating rhythm, exemplified in the rhythms of the sea, and replicated in the


152 Saville, “Cosmopolitan Republican Swinburne”, 694.
rhythms of poetry, delivering joy and sorrow, not through a morally coherent system of reward or punishment, but arbitrarily, through the interventions of fate.  

The importance of *fortuna* in Swinburne’s “Song” is clear in the ways in which the “indifferent, impersonal, and random force” of natural energies leads the rulers to meet their tragic destiny, independently of the people’s revolutionary endeavours. In such approach to time, individual action has little to no influence on the course of history. As Sanders explains in his article on Chartist poems, naturalizing radical change as an “inexorable […] process” is a double-edged sword that casts doubt on the relevance of “political strategy”.  

Apollo (“the face of the sun,” l. 40) embodies this change. While the healing and destroying god arbitrarily puts an end to tyrannical (unnatural) structures of social order, his almighty reign does appear to counter disruptive liberty and to anchor “Song” within a patriarchal understanding of history and of power.

Swinburne’s macrocosmic, circular, and masculine take on revolution is not present in “Quern.” Marriott Watson’s keen interest in re-centring the liminal, the insignificant and the ostracized participates in a wider literary practice that Moine identifies as a feminine tactic for opposing the strategies of hegemonic (or ‘centric’) structures of masculine power. In “Quern,” Marriott Watson’s magnifying attention to the “submissive and meek” bondwomen (l. 26) is translated in terms of the sisters’ height. If a character in George Egerton’s *Discords* (1894) describes the figure of the New Woman as a “desexualised half man”, Marriott Watson literally turns her characters into double-sized versions of “the children of men” (l. 24). The sisters do share their defining attributes with the New Woman – their occupation (evolving outdoors), imposing physical appearance (“stalwart” and mightier “of limb and of stature” than men) and status as agents of disruption align them with the parodic representations of independent women in the late-Victorian press. Marriott Watson capitalizes on these descriptions to operate a gender shift on the mythological figure of the giant. Famous fictional giants such as Goliath in the Bible, Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*, Blunderbore in Cornish folklore, and Rakshasa in Hindu tradition (a “great

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153 Ibid., 694-695.
154 Sanders, “Poetic Agency”, 121.
misshapen” creature with a “red beard and red hair,” as described by John Fiske156) are endowed with superhuman height and strength, two qualities attributed to men in essentialist discourses. In an article describing Charles H. Shannon’s illustration of “Quern” (“The Grinding of the Wrack”), Bristow notes the “colossal strength” of the sisters’ bodies drawn in a “supportive embrace”157. This image of “indomitable femininity” does not appear to “conform to the late-nineteenth-century figurations of the femme fatale”, but “reminds readers that Menia and Frenia are working women, ones whose backbreaking industry decides whether the world will reap a harvest or suffer a famine”.158 Through the characterization of the sisters, Marriott Watson thus feminizes three typically male figures (workers, giants and dissenters) mischievously exacerbating contemporary fears about New Women as disruptive political agents.

The empowerment of her female characters is echoed in the second half of the poem, as the giants not only coexist with nature, very unlike Swinburne’s rebels, but also display full control of it: while the disempowering natural energies of “Song” are presented as an independent force, those in “Quern” are enacted by the sisters. In the quotes below, the repetition of “rent” shows this individualized performativity: the giants at first defined by their silence (“no word,” l. 25; “mute,” l. 29; “murmured not,” l. 32) suddenly own powerful, rebellious voices that say and do all at once:

And Menia said: “Now shall we grind till the King be content
With the fruit of our toil – till the walls of the palace be rent;159
[lines 79-80; my emphasis]

The red flames brake forth from the earth and her furrows were rent
[line 93; my emphasis]

This affirmation of the sisters’ supremacy over nature impacts time-space indicators, which become part of the wild women’s intrasubjective chronotope. While the sisters’ voices find a double in the “hoarse” and “hollow” murmurs of the Quern, their bodies share a close-knit, if not symbiotic, connection with the natural elements of the text. In the quote below, the deliberately unclear attribution of a personal pronoun suggests the assimilation of the sisters with the fire – and, by logical extension, the inherent

156 Fiske, “Werewolves and Swan-Maidens”.


158 Ibid.

159 It is interesting to note that “rent” might also allude to the extraction of surplus value by property owners and symbolically reinforce the power shift (in favour of working classes) at stake in the poem.
feminization of the latter. As the destructive and sterilizing potential of the flames is grafted onto the identity of the giant sisters at the micro-level of the poem’s syntax, this space marker not only becomes an extension of female body; it also allows the poet to decouple essentialist links between womanhood and fertility. Building on the nature of border ballads as tales of revenge, Marriott Watson thwarts hegemonic discourses of femininity by recasting her giants as agents of death and destruction.

And red shone the feet of the maidens, the Quern-stones were red,  
As they ground, dealing death to the living and flame to the dead;  
[line 99-100, my emphasis]

Still over the dead and the dying the flames flickered high,  
They leapt in the blood-reek, rejoicing, and reddened the sky.  
[lines 103-104, my emphasis]

Here, while the grammatical subject of the verb “leapt”, “[t]hey” (l. 104), works as a pronominal substitute for the noun “the flames” (l. 103) in the previous line, the earlier mention of the maidens’ “feet” (l. 99), and the link between “blood” (l. 104) and “red” (l. 99), erase the ontological boundaries between the two agents of disruption.

As the sisters become fire, they experience what Derrida calls “spectralising disincarnation,”160 thus growing closer to the representations of Giants (evil spirits of destruction) and Valkyries (spectral, female omens of death) in Norse mythology. The synchronization of their metamorphosis with chronotopic changes in the text provides a pattern of disruption that recasts the feminine as the main structuring force of the ballad. The spectral dissolution of the boundaries between nature and the giants’ selves is evidenced throughout the second half of the ballad, as chronotopic markers become emotionally anthropomorphic (“rejoicing,” l.104) and directly respond to the impulses of the sister giants. These transformations are expressed through yet another change in the poet’s palette: as the spectral feminine takes possession of time-space, colours are modified to encode the ‘wild women’s chronotope’. The prosperous landscape, formerly defined by its sunlight and shades of green, is now tinted with touches of black and strokes of red. While colours have a narrative role in Swinburne’s ballad (“his raiment bloodily dashed,” l. 7; “The corn is red that was green,” l. 36) and chiefly express martial violence, they serve symbolic functions in Marriott Watson’s spectral ballad. Her multiple repetitions of “dark” and “red” enable the words to discharge

160 Derrida, Spectres, 51.
centrifugal energies throughout the end of the poem, i.e. to diffuse their meaning in a way that challenges the metrical coherence of the text. When the sisters express their anger, for instance (“Dark, dark grew the face of the heavens, and dark grew the sea”, l. 71), the initial reiteration of the adjective produces a spondaic metrical violation.

These repetitions participate in this spatial dynamic as much as in the temporal transformations of the text. As explained, iterative patterns in Swinburne’s “Song” enhance the regularity of the metre and suggest the stasis of eternal rotation. Marriott Watson’s repetitions throughout her final stanzas work the opposite way: as in the previous two monster ballads, they unsettle the narrative tempo and convey the disorganized nature of the scene, as signified by the motif of the hurricane. These ravaging chronotopic changes are themselves engendered by a repetition in the plot – that of Frodi’s threat, which triggers the sisters’ rage and time-space reconfiguration:

So long as the pause of a song for the voices that sing,
So long as the call of the cuckoo is silent in spring,

So long shall ye rest and no longer, so long shall ye cease
From the grinding of pleasure and plenty, of treasure and peace.

[lines 53-56; repeated lines 65-67]

Time changes directly follow the King’s second demand. The chronology of seasons that characterized the opening brutally ends, with the mention of the untimely tide that provokes the sea to roar up, and of the “bent / Of the wheat-blades in spring” (ll. 94-95) that turns emblems of birth and fertility (“spring”; the Scots “bent” referring to a “field” 161) into a symbol of death (the “blades” of wheat as equated with the earth’s “steel-girdled sons”). The increased presence of enjambments and metre shifts at the end of the poem suggests the poet’s desire to recreate time disturbances at the level of the syntax. In the quote below, the disassociation of “bent” from its complement “[o]f the wheat-blades” enforced by the stanza break (like the semi-colon marking the start of a new clause in the middle of a line) mirrors the apocalyptic nature of the events:

The red flames brake forth from the earth and her furrows were rent
With the steel-girdled sons of her might, rising thick as the bent

Of the wheat-blades in spring; and the sea roaring up to the land

On its tide bore the ships of the foeman unhurt o’er the strand.
[ll. 93-96, my emphasis]

As Beth Newman demonstrates, Swinburne belongs to “a line of poets for whom the regularity of metre serves to restrain or [repress] the passions that seek expression through poetic language.” He desires to “feel the [bonds of verse] more keenly, in the paradoxical (but typically Victorian) belief that submission to the law was the highest expression of genuine freedom”. While Swinburne upholds this friction between repression and release, Marriott Watson makes them succeed one another: the hard shell of tradition in her ballad only exists to burst open and highlight her feminized, spectral aesthetics. Passions and rebellions not only predominate in the second half of her poem; they also seep through the metre and deconstruct its tempo. Her prosody in “Quern” participates in an impressionistic aesthetic of time-space blur that allows her characters to express their rage. Like the conductor of an orchestra, the sisters dictate rhythm at the end of the ballad. Their new role as narrators is enhanced by the metrical insistence on their victorious singing (l. 101: “And still, as they sang, sang the sword and the ravenging fire”). Tellingly, this singing ceases when the “song of [the] king” ends. Choosing to both conclude and reclaim Frodi’s song of a “glory gone by as a tale that is told,” the blood-footed sisters “dance the measure that is to be their last”. Marriott Watson’s displacement of the ‘wild women’ in all three ballads from the margins of the plots to their centre and origins (as new narrators) highlights her paradoxical approach to history as both predetermined and startlingly emancipatory. The loop that is tied between the first and last lines of “Quern” suggests circularity and closure reminiscent of Swinburne’s fortuna. The sisters’ role as healers (first half), destroyers (second half), and muses (ending) even echoes his Apollonian aesthetic. The time-bomb temporality that recurs in the ballads insists on this predetermination. This mythical fatality may appear to thwart progressive interpretations of the poem and enable defeatist readings; for “the very end of myth is to immobilize the world” and interpret history as the result of fate. But by appropriating the immobilising

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attributes of myths, Marriott Watson turns Swinburne’s view of revolution (as bloody events arbitrarily restoring natural order at certain points of history) back onto itself and challenges the masculine authority of his so-called ‘natural’ power structures. In her border-ballads, Marriott Watson naturalizes the feminine as an indomitable, disruptive force. Despite the undisputable predetermination of her narratives, Marriott Watson leaves space for progressive freedom. In “Quern”, her choosing to omit the end of the original myth (in which Frodi’s enemy captures Frenia and Menia and forces them to grind salt, until the sea flows down the millstone and becomes salty) evidences her desire to subvert Swinburne’s idea of revolution as the repetitive, endless pulse of history.165 Her time-bomb poetics allows her to insist both on the importance of liminal female agencies and on the revolutionary moment per sé.

In his article on “The Chronotope of Humanness”, Gary S. Morson reminds us that for Bakhtin, the prerequisite for disruptive liberty lies in a conception of time as “open” – and by extension, in an understanding of history that runs “counter to both scientific (or pseudo-scientific) determinism” and theology.166 This tension between fatalism and a philosophical understanding of people (women) as free agents is present and resolved in Marriott Watson’s poetry in two ways. Firstly, she inscribes female rebellion (and the possibility of female liberty) into her revised myths, at the origin of a new literary tradition. Secondly, her use of an impressionistic aesthetic allows her to expand and suspend the moment of revolution, thereby giving them the quality of (spectral) “open time” defined by Bakhtin as inherently emancipatory. In all three ballads, chronotopic freedom enables the deconstruction of masculine tradition and property, as well as the emergence of the wild woman, or New Woman. In her songs of the city, to which the upcoming section is devoted, the poet further explores the connections between monstrous and modern characterisation of the feminine, while attempting to offer gender-free perspectives on the chronotope of the city – at odds with the battle of the sexes that shape her border-ballads’ construction of time-space.

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165 Snorri Sturluson, The Prose Edda, Tales from Norse Mythology, Jean I. Young, trans. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press), 1954, p. 56.


RAIN in the glimmering street—
Murmurous, rhythmical beat;
Shadows that flicker and fly;
Blue of wet road, of wet sky,
(Grey in the depths and the heights);
Orange of numberless lights,
Shapes fleeting on, going by.
Figures, fantastical, grim—
Figures, prosaical, tame,
Each with chameleon-stain,
Dun in the crepuscle dim,
Red in the nimbus of flame—
Glance through the veil of the rain.
Rain in the measureless street—
Vistas of orange and blue;
Music of echoing feet,
Pausing, and pacing anew.
Rain, and the clamour of wheels,
Splendour, and shadow, and sound;
Coloured confusion that reels
Lost in the twilight around.

• • • • •

When I lie hid from the light,
Stark, with the turf overhead,
Still, on a rainy Spring night,
I shall come back from the dead.

Turn then and look for me here
Stealing the shadows along;
Look for me—I shall be near,
Deep in the heart of the throng:
Here, where the current runs rife,
Careless, and doleful, and gay,
Moving, and motley, and strong,
Good in its sport, in its strife.

• • • • •

Ah, might I be – might I stay –
Only for ever and aye,
Living and looking on life!

(“In the Rain” in A Summer Night, 1891)

 Upon reading Marriott Watson’s impressionistic tribute to London city, “In the Rain”, it is difficult to think of the poet’s monster ballads and urban songs as sister trends drawing on a common aesthetic. The chronotope of the metropolis in the lines quoted above is in many ways defined in strict opposition to the time-space attributes
of the previous poems. The writer’s focus on the modern mechanical rhythms of the fleeting present, for instance, vividly contrasts with her interest in myths and folkloric tales. Similarly, the vibrant display of colours in the metropolis is the antithesis of the monochromes that characterise her wild women chronotopes. Overall, the exhilarating sense of elation permeating the poem provides the lines with an altogether dissimilar atmosphere, at odds with the revengeful tone of her monster lyrics. Such differences may explain why late-nineteenth century and modern reception of Marriott Watson’s work treated her poetic trends as essentially distinct. This strict separation has led most critics to overlook a key dimension of the poet’s cityscapes – their uncanniness. In the poet’s border-ballads, the intra-references to Gothic tradition and folkloric tales allow the introduction of the eerie and uncanny in the texts by introducing the spectral within the familiar sphere of myth and tradition. In Marriott Watson’s songs of the city, however, this uncanny dimension emerges from the poet’s inscription within Decadent literature, and use of its tropes (e.g. vampire, femme fatale, sphinx, or chimera). In the example of “In the Rain”, the stanzas allowing the irruption of the Decadent motif of the Revenant occupy a central section (framed by the layout of the poem) which the author intended to highlight. Surprisingly, this very section has either been ignored by scholars (who instead focused on urban impressionism) or dismissed as anecdotal.

Literary impressionism and Decadence were often conceptualised as one very same movement in fin-de-siècle criticism. In Arthur Symons’ well-known essay “The Decadent Movement in Literature” (1893), these terms are used interchangeably:

“The latest movement in European literature has been called by many names, none of them quite exact or comprehensive—Decadence, Symbolism, Impressionism, for instance. It is easy to dispute over words, and we shall find that Verlaine objects to being called a Decadent, Maeterlinck to being called a Symbolist, Huysmans to being called an Impressionist. These terms, as it happens, have been adopted as the badge of little separate cliques, noisy, brainsick young people who haunt the brasseries of the Boulevard Saint-Michel, and exhaust their ingenuities in theorizing over the works they cannot write. But, taken frankly as epithets which express their own meaning, both Impressionism and Symbolism convey some notion of that new kind of literature which is perhaps more broadly characterized by the word Decadence.”

Recent reception of Marriott Watson’s city songs has largely commented on her use of impressionistic techniques to depict the modern city, and brought attention to some of the Decadent tropes that she uses in her poems. However, interconnections between these two elements (i.e. the ways in which the uncanny and impressionism unfurl a

common aesthetics) have been overlooked. In *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*, Vadillo’s ambition to re-inscribe Marriott Watson (and four other fin-de-siècle women writers) within the exclusively male narrative of urban aestheticism leads her to omit discussions of the Decadent aspects of her poetry, despite her focus on impressionistic literary techniques. Her study of the poet’s “voluptuous rendering” of the city and of her “intimate affinity with urban life” demonstrates how impressionism allows the coupling of the woman’s and the city’s bodies: by dissolving spatial-temporal frontiers between the urban and the erotic self, Marriott Watson’s poetics fosters the enacting of a sexually transgressive, proto-feminist agenda. Vadillo’s interest in studying this radical poetics of desire through the prism of speed, modern transports and maps (placing Marriott Watson within the geographical context of St John’s Wood, where she led a bohemian life) sheds light on the poet’s vision of the city as a continuum or flow of lustful voices. From Vadillo’s angle of study, the spectral (described by William Watson as the link between the writer’s poetic trends) becomes synonymous with impressionism; i.e. is limited to the aesthetic of blurred shapes and shadow.

Vadillo’s depiction of Marriott Watson as an “engaged, passionate, sensuous” urban passenger sharing an intimate relationship with the city is, to a certain extent at least reminiscent of Katharine Tynan’s 1892 review of Marriott Watson’s *A Summer Night*, depicting her friend’s verse as an emotional, ‘nervous’ response to London:

> Mrs Graham Tomson is very much the woman fin de siècle – *nervously impressionable* to the seen world and the unseen, finely touched to the magic of crowds, alert to the magnetism that is in the air of great cities, a maker of poetry whose very beauty tells us the writer is somewhat *unstrung*. [Katharine Tynan, “A Literary Causerie”, *Speaker* 29 (October 1892): 535; my emphasis]

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168 In the introduction to her book, Vadillo insists on the natural affinity of four women poets with the capital city to re-place them at the centre of a movement that immediate reception (primarily recorded by members of 1880-90s male circles) defined as essentially masculine. As Vadillo and Schaffer argue, this “skewed image” of the history of urban aestheticism and impressionism, which was perpetuated in subsequent scholarship, has created a “gulf between the foremost and the forgotten” which does not in any way reflect the experience of Marriott Watson’s contemporaries. See: Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*, 6-7; Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 6-7.


170 As Hughes explains in her biography, Katharine Tynan was part of Rosamund Marriott Watson’s circle of friends and, like her, a regular member of the Literary Ladies’ Dinner: see *Graham R.*, 89-90.

As Sir William Watson does in his own review of the collection (quoted at the start of the chapter), Tynan enhances the importance of the “unseen” – of the magnetic forces that are in the “air of great cities” – in her contemporary’s poetry. Nevertheless, while the “spectral air” that Watson detects in the urban songs invokes the eerie and uncanny dimensions of the ghostly, Tynan’s perspective on these spectral forces come closer to Pater’s aesthetic considerations in The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry. Like him, she draws a parallel between the writer’s creative mind (characterised by Pater both as a deconstructive and invisible cohesive force) and her rendering of the city as a group of flickering impressions, suspended in the air “like some old trick of magic”. Her use of words such as “nervously impressionable” and “unstrung”, like Vadillo’s book enhances intimate connections between the body of the city and that of the writer – whom she portrays as emotionally unstable or somehow detached (“unstrung”) from reality. Naturalising Marriott Watson’s urban poetics as an intimate, nervous reaction to the fleeting urban has downplayed the poet’s agency and, as a result, led most critics to overlook the purposeful – if not mischievous – intentions of the poet to allow the introduction of the monstrous feminine within the metropolis.

Unlike Vadillo and Tynan, Hughes does comment on the eerie dimension of the city’s spectral air, in at least two of Marriott Watson’s urban songs: “In the Rain” and “Chimaera” – both notable for their ability to “evoke from the clashes, speed and thrills of urban living the uncanny states of her supernatural poems via the decadal figures of the sphinx and the revenant”. While Hughes’ statement does corroborate this chapter’s argument of a common aesthetic in Marriott Watson’s poetry, it is left without further comment, examples or analysis in the biography. The exact nature of the clashes that Hughes mentions, or the specific ways in which the paradigm of modern speed may help introduce the topic (let alone aesthetic) of the monstrous within the lines of the cityscapes, are not defined. While Hughes’ analysis of the chimera figure allows her to shed light on the importance of perverse lesbian desire in the texts – i.e. to a certain extent, on the modern, monstrous feminine –, it mostly relegates the function of the Greek mythical beast to that of a motif, rather than a

173 Hughes, Graham R., 113.
174 Hughes, Graham R., 114-115. As Hughes notes, the “transient, elusive, shape-shifting” nature of the chimera allowed the poet to transcend conventional representations of Eros and to celebrate forbidden lesbian desire by assimilating the figure of the speaker’s lover with a female mythological beast.
conflictual or complementary poetics. Similarly, her mention of the revenant in “In the Rain” remains anecdotal, leading her to omit crucial aspects of the cityscape and reduce it to the impressionistic expression of the “sheer joy” of “living and seeing”.175

The first section of the chapter has discussed the ways in which the monstrous in Marriott Watson’s border-ballads informs and is underpinned by a poetics of blur (impressionistic aesthetic) that has been overlooked by scholars. This second section bridges similar gaps in the critical reception of the poet, by shedding light on the key (conflicting and complementary) function of the aesthetic of the monstrous within the overarching modern chronotope of the cityscapes. It contends that the clashes (in Hughes’ words) that the collision of modern and monstrous time-spaces engenders inscribe Marriott Watson’s poetry at the core of the Decadent movement, but also allow her to create her own aesthetic and typify the New Woman in her own terms.

In Marriott Watson’s “In the Rain”, the spectral aesthetic of blur (that defined the wild woman chronotope and emerged in the final stanzas or climax of the border-ballads) finds a central stage, and becomes the poem’s overarching chronotope. In this imagined city integrally made of “shadow” and “sound” (l. 21), immateriality presides over all impressions. The spectral entities gliding along the streets (“shadows”, ll. 3, 19, 27; “shapes”, l. 7; “figures”; ll. 8-9) find their metamorphic attributes heightened by their interactions with the city’s spectrum of colours. While chameleons – to which the spectral passengers are compared in line 10 – actively adapt to their environments in nature, it is the city, in the poem, that casts coloured stains onto the pedestrians. By choosing to turn the definition of the word inside out, Marriott Watson provides a level of uncanny agency to her spectral city, absorbing pedestrians as part of its aesthetic. For Vadillo, the ways in which this urban chronotope enacts change are twofold.

First, it enables the impressionistic dissolution of frontiers and creates a sense of freedom.176 The blurring effect of the rain, for instance, acts as a brushing technique covering the urban canvas with “coloured confusion” (l. 22); and the poet’s insistence on the city’s immensurability (“depths”, “heights”, “numberless” and “measureless”, ll. 5-6; 14) highlights the quasi-absence of geographical boundaries. The lack of chronotopic definition of the scene (wherein borders between the city’s “depths” and “heights”, its “wet road” and “wet sky”, vanish) anchor the poem within the tradition

175 Hughes, Graham R., 115-116.
176 Vadillo, Women Poets, 150-151.
of literary impressionism. The interest in filtering and depicting light effects through screens of fog, darkness or water, and the transcription of impressions through paratactic or non-verbal syntax – conveying fragmentariness or speed – are attributes of Decadent poetry. In the poem, the author’s recurring mentions of the rain enhance the role of the motif in creating a unified, blurred impression. In Monet’s painting Boulevard des Capucines (Annexe 1),\(^{177}\) the enveloping white fog of the dusky cold weather bears a similar function: bringing unity to the painting and to the disorganised movements of a fragmentary crowd (evoked by the dabs of the paintbrush). Similarly, in Whistler’s Nocturne in Black and Gold: the Falling Rocket (Annexe 2),\(^{178}\) the large strokes of black render the enveloping qualities of the night. In poetry, works such as Symons’ “Pastel” (decrypting an erotic urban scene through the smoke and faint light of a cigarette) and Wilde’s “Symphony in Yellow” (wherein the colour yellow unifies the city)\(^ {179}\) resort to similar blurring tools through which artistic creation is construed.

Second, the chronotope of the metropolis prosthetically makes up “for the deficiencies of nature” by producing colours “that the sky itself, in its greyness, seems unable to provide” (space). In terms of temporality, it functions as an artificial or mechanical ‘pacemaker’ pumping the crowd via the “mass-transport facilities” of the city, in the same way in which the “human heart pumps blood through the arteries”\(^ {180}\).

While Vadillo reads spatial-temporal dynamics in the poem through the lens of mechanisation, it is interesting to consider them from the perspective of a spectral poetics. From the very early lines of the text for instance, the shadows that flicker unarguably invoke ghostly undercurrents, and temporality, in the urban chronotope. Modern time thus appropriates the qualities of spectral apparitions – characterised by Derrida as “out” of this time, that is, both untimely and uncanny. The striking amount of repetitions in the text not only blurs spatial-temporal frontiers (e.g. line 4: “Blue of wet road, of wet sky”) as Vadillo remarks, but supports this spectral ‘on-off’ aesthetic,

\(^{177}\) Claude Monet, Boulevard des Capucines, 1873-1874, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, USA. See Annexe 1.

\(^{178}\) James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket, 1875, oil on panel, 60.2 x 46.7 cm (Detroit Institute of the Arts). See Annexe 2.


\(^{180}\) Vadillo, Women Poets, 149.
by echoing the discontinuous presence-absence of spectres. While Vadillo contends that the “endless city where streets flow without demarcation” takes the form of a continuum, this section conceives the chronotope of the city as one that operates at the threshold of continuity and discontinuity – and unlocks the uncanny states of Marriott Watson’s monster ballads within the city. London’s heart both beats at the rhythm of mechanisation (as shown by its trimetric metre, echoing the rhythm of the “clamour of wheels”, l. 18) and pulsates at the untimely pace of ghostly apparitions – which at times prove to disrupt the repetitive and predictable nature of mechanised rhythms.

This focus on continuity and discontinuity plays a key role in the spectral city. The urban scene, for instance, is set at the threshold of daylight and darkness, and the poet’s redundant allusions to the “twilight” and “crepuscle” (ll. 11-19) decisively put the emphasis on the importance of liminal states. The use of the French ‘crepuscule’ evokes Decadent forms of time-spaces in the text – invoking in the early lines of the poem the cultural context of the literary movement, with its inclination for artificiality, perverseness, hybridity or monstrousness, and the bizarre. Another way in which the poet plays with the threshold of continuity and discontinuity lies in her use of colours, spanning across the entire spectrum. The width of Marriott Watson’s palette contrasts with the traditional impressionistic penchant for monochromes, as best epitomised by Whistler’s famous shades of blue – sprinkled with touches of gold, for light effects – or Wilde’s diaphanous yellow (a metaphor for Decadence). In his poem “Impression du Matin”, Wilde pays tribute to Whistler’s nocturne Blue and Gold, Old Battersea Bridge by setting touches of ochre and gold onto the grey-blue back screen of sunrise:

The Thames nocturne of blue and gold
Changed to a Harmony in grey:
A barge with ochre-coloured hay
Droped from the wharf: and chill and cold

The yellow fog came creeping down
The bridges, till the houses’ walls
Seemed changed to shadows and St. Paul’s
Loomed like a bubble o’er the town.

Then suddenly arose the clang
Of waking life; the streets were stirred
With country waggons: and a bird
Flew to the glistening roofs and sang.

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181 As explained in the first section, the spectral is characterised in this chapter as the state by which an entity is both/neither present nor/and absent.
But one pale woman all alone,
The daylight kissing her wan hair,
Loitered beneath the gas lamps' flare,
With lips of flame and heart of stone.

[Oscar Wilde, “Impression du Matin”, 1881182]

The yellow fog of dawn in Wilde’s poem, much like Marriott Watson’s rain, acts as a unifying aesthetic tool, i.e. as the diaphanous veil through which the city is construed. The ensuing metamorphosis of the houses’ walls into shadows and of St. Paul’s into a floating bubble, endows the scene with further impressionistic and oneiric blurriness, whilst suggesting the modern shift away from the immutable to the transient. Wilde’s appropriation of Whistler’s monochromes connects the world of industry and artifice (the creeping yellow fog and the gas lamps’ flare) with the realm of nature (daylight).

In Marriott Watson’s poem, the rain has two main functions. First, as Vadillo notes, it acts as a veil that creates blurred coloured confusion and unifies the poem’s portrayal of the city (continuity). Second, it works as a catalyst that activates and decuples colour effects in the manner of a prism (discontinuity). In other words, the motif both emphasizes the continuity and the discontinuity of the colour spectrum – thus participating in the overall spectral aesthetic of the poem. While Wilde’s diaphanous yellow encourages a specific reading of the scene, Marriott Watson’s full use of her palette casts the city as a sphere of endless possibilities, and reinforces the spectral erasure of frontiers and blurring of essentialist categories. As signified by the metaphor of the chameleon (the epitome of a ‘colour shape-shifter’), the spectrum of colours hints at the metamorphic attributes of the spectral chronotope and of the entities populating this time-space. While the wild women chronotopes in Marriott Watson’s border-ballads approach metamorphosis through gendered colour encoding (white and grey becoming stained with red – i.e. feminized rebellion), the spectral chronotope in “In the Rain” invites genderless – or gender free – readings of the city, in which binaries are challenged. This difference highlights a reversal in the function of the spectral: while creative female freedom in the ballads solely occurs within metamorphic and intrasubjective women’s chronotopes (set in opposition with male property), the liberating qualities of the spectral urban are immediately unlocked within the overarching, intersubjective and gender-free chronotope of the cityscape.

The flickering ‘on-off’ tempo of the spectral combined with the poet’s focus on liminal states and coloured metamorphosis subtly paves the way for the emergence of a second form of time-space in the poem, more obviously characterised by the eerie and uncanny dimension of the ghostly. At the end of the third stanza, the frenzy of the metropolis suddenly pauses, as signified by the abrupt shift to the future tense and the unconventional layout of the poem, enhancing the clear-cut boundary between the chronotopes (more pragmatically, the limit between underground and above ground). Although the trimetric rhythm of the poem remains technically untouched, its previous euphoric, waltz-like effect is altered by the transition from impressionistic (nominal) depiction to narration, with the sudden introduction of a lyric voice and of the first independent clause (“I shall come back from the dead”) in the poem. The punctuation after “Stark” (l.25) and “Still” (l.26) incites the reader to pause – thus considerably slowing down the fast pace of the poem. This instant of uncanny immobilisation drives the narrative emphasis onto the undead speaker, who lies in a grave “with the turf overhead” (l. 25). The character acts as a local inrasubjective chronotope, invoking the time-space inherent to the Decadent trope of the revenant (as well as to Gothic motifs) and unlocking the eerie and uncanny dimension of the poet’s monster ballads.

The striking contrast between motionlessness in the chronotope of the undead monster, and dynamism in that of the city is reminiscent of Wilde’s “Impression du Matin” (quoted above). The oneiric scene appearing in the early lines of Wilde’s poem ends at the breaking of the day, triggered by the onomatopoeic clang of the awakening city. At this instant, nocturnal slumber is replaced by the hustle and bustle of the city’s chronotope. This agitation is set in sharp contrast with the unexpected introduction of a lonely woman in the final stanza of the poem, whose immobility is clearly out-of-tune with the rhythm of the city. While the enjambments, action verbs and punctuation in the third stanza suggest the hectic and metamorphic qualities of the fast-changing urban chronotope, the smooth rhythm of the final lines and descriptive focus on the woman’s physical appearance indicate an altogether different form of temporality. The erotic attention to the light of the day kissing the hair of the woman, as well as to her mouth, casts the loitering woman as a symbol of prostitution. While her enticing red lips and cruel heart endow her with the attributes of the femme fatale, the allusion to flames may also align her with the monstrous figure of the fire-breathing chimera. Despite her geographical presence in the city, she belongs to a different chronotope, embedded within that of the city. Her marginalisation within this wider time-space is
redundantly asserted (“one woman all alone”) – signalling that the gap between the erotic, somehow menacing ‘public woman’ chronotope and the city is unbridgeable.

In Marriott Watson’s poem, frontiers between the two chronotopes are porous. While the end of the framed section is still clearly anchored within the intrasubjective chronotope of the monstrous woman, the pace of the poem recovers its former speed. The punctuation, fast succession of words and repetition of coordinating conjunctions (ll. 33-34, “Careless, and doleful, and gay/ Moving, and motley, and strong”) restores urban dynamism. As the speaker exhorts her addressee to find her/him in a hide and seek fashion, she/he plunges into the running “current” of pedestrians, “deep in the heart of the throng” (l.31). Becoming a shadow among shadows, she/he seals the gap between the city and the intrasubjective chronotope of the revenant. Fin-de-siècle literature often depicted the grim, labyrinthine and deadly streets of London city as a logical continuation or modern version of the chronotope of catacombs in Gothic tales. In Mathilde Blind’s poem “Manchester by Night”, for instance, the chronotope of the city bears striking similarities to such subterranean, claustrophobic and mazy time-spaces, with its references to “intestine wars”, “monstrous sacrificial shrines”, “strife for breath” and “prostrate ones that groan beneath”. In Marriott Watson’s poem, this surfacing of the eerie undead is portrayed in positive, liberating terms. The immediate adaptation of the revenant to the time-space of the city testifies to the liberating nature of the spectral, shapeshifting city in which liminal states (signified by the figure of the undead) are defining. As the speaker’s body is pumped by the heart of the crowd and becomes an integral part of the city, the monstrosity of the urban chronotope is patent.

The feminisation of the monstrous and the urban is not obvious in the text; but a study of intertextuality within the lines facilitates a radical proto-feminist reading of Marriott Watson’s piece. First, as mentioned above, the subtle parallel with the figure of the public woman in Wilde’s poem (supported by the insistence on the body of the city in “In the Rain”) introduces an erotic dimension in the poem. The fast beat of the city’s heart – which may indicate arousal – and the allusions to fluids corroborates this reading. Marriott Watson thus appropriates essentialist connections of the public city with the public woman’s body, and overturns them in a way that celebrates female monstrosity as a medium for liberation. Besides echoes to Wilde’s poem, “In the Rain” directly alludes to Christina Rossetti’s “When I am Dead, my Dearest” – with its use of the future tense by a lyric voice contemplating death and revision of several motifs:
When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree:
Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain:
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget.

[Christina Rossetti, “Song – When I am Dead, my Dearest”, 1848 – my italics]

The references to twilight, shadows and rain, the horizontal posture of the dead lyric voice (“the green grass above me”, l. 5, echoing the “turf overhead” in “In the Rain”) and the plea to the speaker’s addressee (either exhorting them to follow or forget their lover) are common to both poems. In many ways, Marriott Watson’s revision revolves around a complete reversal of Rossetti’s paradigm: “I shall (not) see the shadows/ I shall (not) feel the rain”, ll. 9-10. The overlapping chronotopes of dream and death in many of Christina Rossetti’s poems, in which insentience, silence and reticence reign, allow her to counteract essentialist conceptions of, and cultural restraints on feminine poetry. In her fin-de-siècle poem “In the Rain”, Marriott Watson reclaims women’s legitimate right to experience those sensations (that is, the feeling of rain and the sight of shadows) and goes as far as to allow these experiences to happen within a typically masculine chronotope – that of the modern city. By appropriating and remodelling the time-space of the city in terms of the spectral, the shapeshifting and the undetermined, Marriott Watson facilitates the introduction of the undead woman trope within the urban chronotope. As the revenant encroaches onto urban territory, the opposite dynamic is patent: the anthropomorphic depiction of London (its heart and circulatory system) beats at the pace of the undead speaker’s emotions and suggests a shift from intersubjective to intrasubjective time-space modality. The ease with which the female

revenant is absorbed uncovers the identification of the monstrous – female – entity (together with the eerie and uncanny time-spaces it entails) and the city chronotope.

As in the border-ballads, intertextuality as a way of unlocking the monstrous feminine within the frame of masculine tradition has a central importance in Marriott Watson’s city songs. In the eponymous poem of her collection A Summer Night, for instance, Marriott Watson unfurls the monstrous, uncanny dimension of her spectral aesthetic through intra-references to French writer Victor Hugo’s “Guitare” (1840). In this earlier piece, a Spanish bandit falls in love with a temptress of unearthly beauty. Her night walks on the bridge of Toledo and black corset suggests her status as a sex worker – which is confirmed when she ‘sells her beauty’ in exchange for a golden ring. The speaker, constantly reminded of her departure by the wind coming from the mountains, slowly sinks into madness. Interestingly, Marriott Watson chose to revise a ballad as a city song – using Hugo’s refrain as her epigraph –, and to draw on key motifs in the French writer’s poem: madness, desire, prostitution and the femme fatale.

“Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.”

The linden leaves are wet,
The gaslights flare –
Deep yellow jewels set
In dusky air,
In dim air subtly sweet,
With vanished rain.

Hush! – from the distant street
Again – again –
Life’s music swells and falls,
Despairing – light –
Beyond my garden walls
This summer night.

[“A Summer Night”, first half]

In the poem’s first half, two chronotopes cohabit: that of the city, marked by the “distant street” and the “gaslights flare”, and that of the garden. As Hughes remarks


185 “Sabine, un jour,/A tout vendu, sa beauté de colombe,/Et son amour,/Pour l’anneau d’or du comte de Saldagne,/Pour un bijou …” [Sabine, one day/ Sold everything, her dove-like beauty/ And her love/ In exchange for the golden ring of the Count of Saldagne/For a jewel…]. Hugo, Oeuvres Complètes 487-8. My translation.

186 “The wind that comes through the mountains/ will drive me mad”. My translation.
in her biography\(^{187}\), this opening scene reflects the frontispiece of the collection – an impressionistic painting by the poet’s second husband, Arthur Tomson, in which an artist (Marriott Watson herself) looks “away from spectators, not from modesty but from indifference, entranced in the shifting borderland between nature and artifice, garden and city”\(^{188}\) (illustration below). While the gender of the speaker in “A Summer Night” is unknown, the frontispiece invites readers to read the poem from the perspective of the female author. The use of this liminal chronotope in fact participates in a wider gendered aesthetic. In *Women Poets in the Victorian Era*, Moine demonstrates how fin-de-siècle women’s poetry operated a shift away from the “garden of virginity” to the “suburban garden” – which, as an “intermediary space” constituted a “propitious site” for these poets to “analyse the momentous changes […] in the world around them”.\(^{189}\) As an inherently hybrid space at the threshold of artifice and nature, the suburban garden constitutes a fertile ground for Marriott Watson to explore topics of unsated, perverse desire. In “A Summer Night”, the lyric voice’s glances are directed beyond the garden walls. As Subha Mukherji explains in her book *Thinking on Thesholds*, this liminality expresses “enticement of what lies just out of reach” – i.e. the object igniting erotic desire (in the case of this poem, the city). While the walls highlight the demarcation between the chronotopes of the garden and of the city, the writer’s impressionist or spectral poetics – defined from the early lines of the poem, as Hughes remarks, by the “specific cast of light under specific sensory conditions”\(^{190}\) – enhances the porosity of this frontier.

\(^{187}\) Hughes, Graham R., 137. Frontispiece, 138.
\(^{188}\) Hughes, Graham R., 137.
\(^{189}\) Moine, Women Poets in the Victorian Era, 121.
\(^{190}\) Hughes, Graham R., 112-113.
In Marriott Watson’s “Chimaera”, also dealing with topics of perverse (possibly female) desire, the same chronotopic tension marks the opening lines of the poem:

The yellow light of an opal
On the white-walled houses dies,
The roadway beyond my garden
It glimmers with golden eyes.

Alone in the faint spring twilight,
The crepuscle vague and blue,
Every beat of my pulses
Is quickened by dreams of you.

[“Chimaera”, stanzas 1-2]
In both poems, the desired chronotope of the city is characterised as a yellow jewel or gemstone – which, in the case of the first poem at least, may refer to the golden ring that buys Sabine out of her native land. While this comparison aligns the speaker with the figure of the prostitute, the motif of the walls (echoing the chain of mountains that separates the Spanish bandit from the object of his desire) paradoxically casts the lyric voice as the lover, enticed by the city. In “Chimaera”, London is aligned with two hypersexualised Greek and Decadent tropes – the chimera (as the title indicates) often represented with the face of a woman; and the sphinx (signified by the mysterious roadway and glistening eyes) regularly used as a metaphor for the femme fatale in fin-de-siècle works by men (see Annexe 3). While this conceptualisation of the city chronotope as an erotically charged, monstrous and feminised creature is only hinted at in the poems, the final lines of Marriott Watson’s “London in October” confirms this interpretation by openly addressing the city as a fiery, sexualised and monstrous goddess and sphinx:

Lit with a million gems of living fire –
London, the goal of many a soul’s desire!
Goddess and sphinx, thou hold’st us safe in thrall
Here while the dead leaves fall.

[“London in October”]

Once again, the characterisation of the urban chronotope as a gemstone blurs the distinction between the lover and the treasured object of desire: the hybrid lascivious feminine is both within the chronotopes of the garden and the city, and is the city itself. The presence of an oversexualised woman on both sides of the desire axis suggests perverse lesbian desire, characterising the city as a same-sex, female-only chronotope. The identification of the monstrous feminine and the metropolis as an impressionistic spectral chronotope is patent in the temporality of the poems as much as in the visual or spatial tropes that they invoke. In “A Summer Night”, the music of the city that “swells and falls”, “again – again –” evidently reproduces the repeated movement of the speaker’s chest, just as the hectic, fragmented syntax of the poem echoes her sexual

191 See Wilde’s poem The Sphinx, 1894, comparing the cat-like figure to a goddess and treacherous temptress: Oscar Wilde, The Poems of Oscar Wilde, Vol. 2 (New York: F. M. Buckles and Company, 1906), 87-108. See also: Franz Van Stuck’s painting The Kiss of the Sphinx, 1895, in which a hybrid woman with threatening claws forcefully presses a man against her breasts and lips (Annexe 3).
excitement as the voice of the city reaches her garden. In “Chimaera”, the motif of the quickened heartbeat is omnipresent as the ghostly lover (defined in terms of transient spectral impressions, such as a “breath”, “shadow” or “footstep” in the “misty quiet”) or ‘chimera’ (fantasy) transgresses the walls to fulfil the woman’s sexual desire.

As the throbbing heart of the lyric voice and the pulse of the city force spatial boundaries between the two opening chronotopes to collapse, the poems’ temporality builds up to reach a climax. In the final lines of “A Summer Night”, the “wet eyes” fast beat of the woman’s heart suggest sexual satisfaction. In “Chimaera”, the layout of the poem itself marks the pause of the ‘small death’ (petite mort) of sexual climax, as Hughes notes in her biography[192] – at the moment when the lyric voice and the “world of glory” (i.e. the time-space of the city) become one “for a passing moment”:

The dim grass stirs with your footstep,  
The blue dusk throbs with your smile;  
I and the world of glory  
Are one for a little while.  
• • • •  
The spring sun shows me your shadow  
The spring wind bears me your breath,  
Your are mine for a passing moment  
But I am yours to the death.

[“Chimaera”, closing stanzas]

Interestingly, the city songs are built around and count down to this sexual climax just as the border-ballads espouse a time-bomb temporality, triggering the ‘zero hour’ of the wild women’s revolution. Just as the female monsters’ chronotopes in the ballads embrace an intrasubjective modality in the final stanzas, the time-space of the city and that of the oversexualised woman in the city songs merge as one inseparable entity as the poems reach their final climax. London, ‘goddess and sphinx’, both embodies the monstrous feminine, and embraces it within its spectral chronotope.

5. Conclusion of Chapter 1

Chapter 1 has explored the ways in which the interactions and confrontations of the spectral ‘wild woman chronotopes’ with other forms of male-dominated time-spaces typify Marriott Watson’s image of the New Woman in her work. It has studied the poet’s appropriation of masculine tradition as an internal way of disrupting hetero-

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patriarchal norms and imposing her own time-space matrixes, taking the form of feminine revolutions. As time bombs, the poems count down to these moments of domestic, political, sexual revolutions triggered by the emergence of the ‘wild women chronotopes’. Bakhtin’s concept has also allowed me to elucidate links between Marriott Watson’s city songs and border-ballads, by highlighting the intersections of gender, genre, spectral time-space and revolution against hegemonic power structures.

Chapter 2 highlights the great diversity of women’s chronotopic approaches to the fin-de-siècle, as much as it enhances common chronotopic stratagems in the works of May Kendall and Rosamund Marriott Watson. Their shared interest in urban time-space and authoritative male tradition underpins aesthetics that rely on chronotopic clash. In the same way that Chapter 1 creates a dialogue between Marriott Watson’s work and that of male poets, Chapter 2 shows how Kendall’s verses engage with capitalist and Darwinist male-dominated discourses, and how her chronotopic approaches to the fin-de-siècle directly challenges the pyramidal society that such discourses imposed onto women and the working class.
CHAPTER 2: CHRONOTOPES OF THE INHUMAN AND NON-HUMAN: ALIENATED TIME AND ANTICLIMAXES IN MAY KENDALL’S POETRY

1. Introduction: Chronotopic Tension in Kendall’s Urban & Satirical Poems

Small anguish have you undergone,
Poor fool, to write, with careful art,
Your melancholy sonnets on.
When some, to fail, would break the heart!

Go, look into some dingy street
Your mood aesthetic scorns to pace.
Mark well the throng; you will not meet
One happy or one careless face.
Have these not failed, on whom the rain
Strikes cheerless from the sky of grey?
No lurking comfort in their pain
Of subtle self-esteem have they.

[May Kendall, “Failures”, 1887193]

The analytical step from Rosamund Marriott Watson’s “In the Rain”194 to May Kendall’s poem “Failures” is of the steepest: despite their common setting (the modern city), their respective chronotopic approaches to the metropolis could not be more distinct. While Marriott Watson saw in urban time-space the ideal template for the creation of her iconoclastic and liberating ‘wild woman’s chronotope’, Kendall perceived in the city the reflection of a corrupt society, in which the poor lived “wasted lives” of toil. These stark chronotopic differences are best epitomised in the poems by their authors’ treatments of the motif of the rain. In Marriott Watson’s impressionistic song, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, it functions as a way to blur boundaries in order to create greater artistic and feminine freedom. In Kendall’s poem, however, it serves as a constant veil of sadness, and as a time marker echoing the monotonous pace of the workers’ cheerless existences. In the lines quoted above, Kendall berates the poet for being self-interested, and exhorts them to measure their so-called failures against the misery of common people and the shortcomings of society itself, which did not succeed in making technical or scientific progress and social justice coincide.

In such a world, the poem suggests, writers have no alternative but to renounce their privileged positions of observers and to commit as social actors. By urging them to “go, look into some dingy street”, “mark well the throng”, and genuinely listen to people’s silent misery, Kendall inscribes her work within the tradition of Blake’s “London”, as well as contemporary socialist movements. Her earnest preoccupation with the lower classes and criticism of industrial settings (defined by the regulated pace of the ‘work discipline clock’) hints at her commitment as a social observer and active leader at the Fabian society. As Moine argues in *Women Poets in the Victorian Era*, Kendall’s poetic recreation of a “hostile social environment”, illustrates her – and her fellow Fabian intellectuals’ – belief that the “environment should itself change”, instead of “urging women to adapt” to the modern life scene. While Marriott Watson suggested the possibility of aligning the urban with the monstrous feminine in her spectral chronotopes, Kendall’s poems tell the story of a failure. This failure results from a clash between the chronotopes of life, dream and creation on the one hand, and those of labour constraints and industry on the other.

As this chapter elucidates, Kendall’s urban characters themselves participate in diffusing the chronotopic energies at the source of their own oppression. As types or local chronotopes, their very presences unfurl the time-space implications of their social contexts within the lines. Unnamed, or rather named after – and by extension reduced to – their job titles (such as the “sandblast girl” and the “acid man”, “the maid of all work”, the “shop girl”, the “porter” and the “scholar”), their characterisation negates the possibility of their escape from the claustrophobic chronotopes in which they live. For Kendall, this characterisation also testifies to the alienating effects of reification in a world regulated by tyrannical work discipline.


As Diana Maltz states in “Sympathy, Humor and the Abject Poor”, that May Kendall should have published such sombre poem “may seem surprising to readers who know her only as a writer of light verse”. In fact, even after Maltz issued her article in 2007, Kendall’s depiction of industrial constraints in her city poems (for the most part, published in her second collection *Songs from Dreamland*) has not found a central stage in the reception of her work. Instead, most critics have concentrated on the second genre that the author explores in her poetry, defined by its humorous turn on Darwinist theories or progress, and its very different chronotopic approach to 1880-1890s debates. These satirical poems – which retained the attention of *Punch* editors and of Kendall’s contemporaries, before reappearing in her collection *Dreams to Sell* and revealing her identity as a woman – have constituted the core of recent studies by scholars like Fabienne Moine, Wolfgang Funk, Gemma King, Catherine E. Birch or John Holmes. These essays have inscribed Kendall’s poetry along the lines of the works of Mathilde Blind, A. Mary F. Robinson or Constance Naden (enhancing parallels between the women’s passion for science) rather than within the tradition of contemporary socialist writers such as Morris or Edith Nesbit.

In Kendall’s satirical poems, fantastic creatures (such as voluble fossils, alien scientists, an ichthyosaurus, a living doll or a stranded talking jellyfish) function as local chronotopes, unfurling time-spaces at odds with the scientific world of the male authoritative scholars and scientists with whom they interact. As Moine remarks in her book, Kendall diffuses her views on Darwin’s evolution theory through the voices of these unexpected figures, and thus finds a way of encroaching on male-dominated


debates; a common “literary practice” among women poets, who sought to confront hegemonic structures from the margins. As one reviewer of her collection noted, Kendall aimed to “show how the theory of evolution is ‘taken’ by a lady”. By siding with her fantastic figures – whose essentially feminine traits such as volubility, beauty, passivity, kindness and candour indicate their function as poetic doubles –, Kendall denounces the exclusion of the oppressed from the timeframe of the evolution narrative. With humour, she overturns the hierarchical oppositions that *The Descent of Man* (1871) draws between lower forms of life (such as the “savages”, working classes, animals, women and children) and civilized, middle-class English men. As her city songs, her science poems tell the story of a failure, aiming at those in power this time: that of arrogant scientists who failed to understand or rule over the world.

This chapter contends that the ways in which both trends are connected rely on the common motif of failure – either as the demise of dream and creation in the face of labour constraints in her city songs; or as the deflating of male rhetoric and intellectual or biological authority in her satirical poems. In Kendall’s work as a whole, such poetics of failure depends on the creation of chronotopic tensions between two conflicting forms of time-space. Her urban works oppose the chronotope of leisure and creative idleness (daydreaming) to the constrained and tyrannical chronotope of work discipline – to which I refer as the ‘chronotope of the inhuman’ throughout this chapter. The anti-climax that results from this chronotopic opposition, and resolution in favour of inhuman time-spaces, typifies Kendall’s vision of progress as a whole: that of the failure of social progress in line with technical progress. Her satirical poems, for their part, revolve around the time-spaces invoked by fantastic creatures, mainly defined by ‘deep’ (not measurable on a human scale) or ‘alien’ (otherworldly) time. This chronotope of the ‘non-human’, as I describe it in this study, opposes the time-spaces of masculine hegemonic scientific reality, embodied by the scholars that the poems both chide and deride. The anti-climax produced by the resulting spatial-

206 This is the term used by Charles Darwin to refer to non-European and colonialized people.
temporal tension typifies Kendall’s understanding of evolution. This chapter examines the specific timing of humour (punchlines) as a time-marker reinforcing this vision.

By deriding masculine supremacy and reversing (gendered) power structures, Kendall’s satirical poems and their humorous, anticlimactic endings capitalize on a specific understanding of evolutionary time, and the fear that this conception created amidst the white, British ruling class. Social Darwinism conceived the superiority of the British Empire over “less favoured nations”207 and thence justified its imperialistic accomplishments. As much as such discourses established a seemingly indomitable hierarchy, they also spread belief in the reversibility of this order. Also known as ‘degredation theory’, this idea was corroborated by the most eminent scientists, and fueled pessimistic discourses at the fin-de-siècle. As Ralph Leck argues in his essay on the origins of sexual science, the civic and scientific trope of degeneration was “preponderantly a cognitive framework [that favoured] bourgeois hegemony and [stigmatized] movements for economic and sexual equality”.208 In Darwin’s The Descent of Man, defending the privileges of “the better class of men” meant thwarting the expansion of the “inferior members of society” – and praising fierce competition within the logic of struggle for existence. The scientist exhorted his contemporaries to always “remember that progress [was] no invariable rule”.209 While Darwin suggested that civilization could potentially decline, Kendall’s poetry argued that it already had (in the form of moral corruption, as pictured in her ‘chronotopes of the inhuman’).

Interestingly, Kendall’s views on evolution differed from that of her Fabian friends, who devoted much attention to the ways in which they could adapt Darwinist discourses to fit their own agenda. As Christopher Shaw explains,210 Fabians criticised social Darwinism for legitimising brutal competition and capitalist economy; but, as “self-styled” advocates of science themselves, they did not deem possible to reject the “dominant complex of scientific ideas of their times” altogether. They believed that “Darwinism’s appeal lay in its malleability”.211 If the evolution theory could legitimise

207 Darwin, The Descent of Man, 168.
209 Darwin, The Descent of Man, 166.
211 Ibid.
Britain’s imperialistic and capitalist agenda, it was “amorphous enough to permit a re-definition more in keeping with the Fabians’ values and policies” i.e., to “support the social reformer’s belief in improving conduct by improving the environment”.

Kendall’s poetics of failure and anticlimactic punchlines in her satirical poems for the most scorn and negate the relevance of biological evolution. By deploying the time-space frame of degeneration, the writer challenges Darwin’s conception of order and hierarchy, and tips the balance of power in favour of the marginal. The chronotope that her fantastic figures invoke serves to blur the time-space coordinates that define the evolution narrative, and to advocate horizontal, rather than vertical societies.

This chapter draws links between Kendall’s inhuman chronotopes (city songs and satires) as opposed to non-human chronotopes (satires) and human chronotopes (city songs). Throughout this study, I regard the concepts of evolution and progress as chronotopes per se: the first defined by its opposition of past and present, as well as its pyramidal conception of reality; and the second, by its linearity and the regularity of its clock-discipline. The ways in which Kendall bends or alienates time to challenge masculine narratives, or time-spaces, constitute her contribution to the debates of her time and typify her understanding of the socialist poet’s role in fin-de-siècle society. As the titles of her collections (Dreams to Sell and Songs from Dreamland) show, the topic of creative idleness or reveries is central to her chronotopic aesthetic. While her city songs narrate the ‘end of dreams’ in industrial England, her satirical poems dare to dream of an end, by offering alternative realities through her dystopian plots.

**Part 1** of the chapter concentrates on Kendall’s city songs, wherein ‘inhuman’ chronotopes of progress and ‘human’ time-spaces (in the form of the chronotopes of holiday, poetic creation and daydreaming) oppose each other. The section revolves

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212 Shaw gives the example of D.G. Richie, who, in 1889, “identified the slogan [of] ‘survival of the fittest’ as the major factor in public misunderstanding” and broke the “commonly made link between competitive success and progress” by suggesting that the strongest and largest animals were not always those “capable of adapting to changed circumstances”. As David Stack (2003) summarises: “The left needed Darwinism for both positive and negative reasons: positively, as an alternative to the traditional forms of authority they were busy disavowing; negatively, as a way of disarming those erecting biological barriers to socialism by lifting the Darwinian mantle for the socialist cause.” In their minds, as Schneider asserts (1973), advancing the socialist cause in Britain needed to remain the absolute priority – to the detriment, sometimes, of support for other oppressed communities, as the Fabians’ lack of interest in (or endorsement of) the South African war suggested.

around this chronotopic clash and the anticlimaxes that it generates to represent the
demise of ‘human’ time-spaces (e.g. life time) and typify Kendall’s vision of technical
progress as social regression and source of oppression.

Part 2 explores Kendall’s satirical poems and the humorous confrontation that
they stage between ‘non-human’ time-spaces, unfurled by fantastic creatures such as
aliens, ghosts and speaking fossils on the one hand, and the anti-heroic chronotopes
that pseudo-intellectuals open up on the other. The section studies the ways in which
the poems’ final anti-climaxes (or punchlines) underpin Kendall’s deflational agenda
against masculine power structures and give a voice to the marginalized.

2. End of a Dream: Work-Discipline, Inhuman Time & Chronotopes of Idleness

The mansions they erected,
Erected were of brick,
And were by tiles protected:
The air with dust was thick,
As ‘twould the builders smother –
They built on unaware.
I dreamed of something other,
A castle in the air!

I said: “Your bricks and mortar
Are hideous to view
I’ll seek another quarter,
That shall be free from you:
A more imposing dwelling
You shall see, if you care,
A palace far excelling –
A castle in the air!

They guarded from disaster
Their roofs with wooden beams;
They fixed their walls with plaster –
I fixed my walls with dreams.
A dome of high expansion,
Alight with jewels rare –
That was a real mansion –
My castle in the air.

[“A Castle in the Air”, stanzas 1-3]

In Kendall’s Songs from Dreamland, an opening poem stands on its own in the
eponymous, prologue-like section of the collection. Highlighted in such a way by the
author’s printing choices, “A Castle in the Air” takes on the role of a manifesto, setting
the tone for the entire collection. The chronotopic tension that the poem constructs by
opposing the time-space of reverie (or creative idleness) and that of work-discipline forecasts the running aesthetic of the collection. In this opening poem, Kendall reflects upon the role and place of artistic creation in a world ruled by materialism and labour. Revising the trope of the artist in search of a haven of peace, she borrows the motif of the celestial palace from Tennyson’s 1842 “The Palace of Art”. In her predecessor’s work, it is through the architectural metaphor running throughout the text that aesthetic beauty finds its best expression. The technicality of construction terms in “The Palace of Art” (“smooth as burnish’d brass”) and omnipresence of artwork within the castle (fountains, statues or mosaic art) establish obvious parallels between the processes of building and creating. In Kendall’s poem, the minimalist description of the floating castle does not allow any clear mental representation of its appearance, and signals the writer’s contempt for decorum. While Tennyson’s art shelter stands “firm” in the form of a sumptuous structure, Kendall’s dream-filled castle does not belong to materialism.

The structuring importance of parallelism and pronominal antagonism in the poem typifies the unbridgeable gap that separates the two conflicting chronotopes. The italicized pronouns “they” (the ruling class) and “I” (the poet) not only signpost the line of separation between the intersubjective chronotope of the industrial urban and the intrasubjective chronotope of artistic reverie, but at times disrupt the regulated tempo of the lines. The regularity of the trimetric metre, invariably alternating between masculine and feminine endings, and the successive repetition of “erected” (l.1-2), typify the tyrannical and essentially masculine pace of work-discipline, modelled on the rhythm of clocks. Spatially, the motif of thick “dust” recurring in Kendall’s city poems (and nineteenth-century literature on industrial Britain), signposts the alienating nature of the intersubjective chronotope. Ironically, while the mansions are “by tiles protected” and the roofs “guarded from disaster”, the workers “smother” all day long, while remaining “unaware” of their life-threatening working conditions.

As the intrasubjective chronotope of artistic reverie is unlocked (l.7), the extra beat placed on the italicised pronoun “I” deregulates the metronomic tempo of the poem. On line 20, similarly, the possessive adjective “my” disrupts the metre, and enhances the wide, unbridgeable gap between the chronotopes. While the parallelism on lines 19-20 suggests the synchrony of the construction and creation processes, it also enforces the idea of an impossible reconciliation. As suggested by the repetitions of “dreamed/dreams”, the castle is of oneiric nature – which makes the poet’s allusions to the “dome of high expansion” and “jewels rare” less compelling than Tennyson’s
technical depiction. Despite this absence of materialistic inscription in the chronotope of reverie, the figure of the poet describes the castle as the only “real” mansion that exists, in the penultimate line of the second stanza wherein another temporal disruption occurs, with the italicisation of the deictic pronoun “That” and the extra beat it creates.

When ended were their labours
They entered in to feast,
They called their friends and neighbours:
The wind blew from the east.
To them it did not matter,
The gale their walls would spare;
It only chose to shatter
My castle in the air.

And now the shadows darken,
The wind blows through the rain,
Where the builders hearken,
Who safe at home remain,
In piles of brick undoubted;
Yet mine was far more fair,
My palace that they scouted,
My castle in the air!

[“A Castle in the Air”, closing stanzas]

After fighting incessantly with “spades and tools”, the workers enjoy a break from their labour and celebrate their achievements with the community in their newly built homes. In the closing two stanzas, another form of time-space replaces the labour chronotope: that of the holiday – a central theme in other poems by Kendall, as this study will show. As this new chronotopic opposition between labour and idleness emerges, the motif of the “wind” blowing from the “east” demolishes the time-space in which the figure of the poet had found a shelter. In the light of Kendall’s socialist affiliation, it is clear that the gust’s direction reflects the movement of progress in hegemonic discourses. Within this chronotope of progress, the poet figure finds herself unable to live secluded from the others any longer – as the intrasubjective chronotope of reverie irremediably moves into the sphere of the past – and must return to society.

In many ways, this conclusion both echoes and contrasts with the end of “The Palace of Art”, where the feminine soul of the impertinent artist plunges into despair and purges her guilt in a lonely cottage. As Tennyson’s contemporary James Spedding stated, the poem represents “the condition of a mind which in the love of beauty […] has lost sight of its relation to man”; and condemns not the “enjoyment, but the selfish
enjoyment” of beauty.\textsuperscript{213} This analysis corroborates the final request of the poet’s soul in the lyrics: “pull not down my palace towers […]. Perchance I may return with others there”. By opposition, Kendall’s poem condemns urban ugliness as the new norm in the chronotope of progress, and the materialistic ideology it entails. In other words, she points at the gap between fantasies of progress and their material reality. While the workers appear safe and contented at the end of the poem, the chronotopic markers of the rain and the thickening shadows echoing the grey drizzle of misery in “Failures” (issued in her earlier collection), function as dark omens. The world that they forecast is one in which progress (the wind) and materialism (the piles of brick) rise as the new “undoubted” gods (the indestructible walls) in a sky emptied of dreams. In the rest of her collection, Kendall explores the alienating nature of this ‘inhuman’ chronotope.

In her poem “The Phantom Train”, for instance, Kendall reuses the motif of holiday to denounce the illusion of social progress that industrial society constitutes:

THESE unbefriended city drudges,
At last they break away;
Not all the juries and the judges
Could force their longer stay.
There’s not a Philistine who grudges
The hard won holiday.

[“The Phantom Train”, opening stanza]

The poem opens on a sense of reward and liberation from the constraints of work discipline, as the motion of the train activates the “hard won holiday”\textsuperscript{214} and forces the “city drudges” to “break away” from the speaker’s sight. In de Certeau’s words, the passengers of the poem, “immobile inside the train”, watch “immobile things [here, the multiple factors of their oppression] slip by”.\textsuperscript{215} This emancipating spatial movement brings immediate rhythmical relief to the poem, thus affecting its micro-temporality. The hectic and clumsy pace of the opening line, epitomised by the length of the adjective “unbefriended”, contrasts with the simplified pace of the second line; its quasi-monosyllabic rhythm espousing the train’s mechanic regularity. The constant alternation of iambic tetrameters – carrying the mentions of rule-makers, such as the “juries”, the “judges” and the “Philistine” – and trimeters add to this sense of temporal


\textsuperscript{214} The importance of the motif is highlighted in the first stanza through rhythmical emphasis, with the use of a spondee on “hard won”.

\textsuperscript{215} Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life} (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2000), 111.
deliverance. Interestingly, while the spatial-temporal implications of the ‘holiday train chronotope’ modify the poem, the train as a textual and material entity is absent in the first stanza. The ‘phantom train’ of the title is entirely signified in terms of the freedom of movement in time-space that it generates i.e. of its chronotopic traces rather than its metallic shell and the confined space that it circumscribes. Both present and absent, the phantom train serves as a medium and symbol for the speaker’s inexorable escape.

Fades all the city’s hurly-burly,
They choose their bournes at will,
Yon grimy porter, rough and surly,
Is bound for heath and hill.
The shop girl toiling late and early
Lights at a hamlet still.

[“The Phantom Train”, stanza 2]

The emancipatory qualities of the ‘holiday train chronotope’ remain central in the second stanza, with metrical inversions on verbs of relief (“Fades”, l.7; “Lights”, l.12) and monosyllabic rhythm in the trimetric lines (ll. 8-10). The insistence on choice (“at will”, l.8) once again sets the holiday chronotope in strict opposition to that of industry and work discipline, regulated by clocks (“toiling late and early”, l.11). In spite of this time-space opposition, the use of job titles to characterise the passengers of the train, reinforced by the deictic “yon” and “the” to designate archetypes, hints at ambiguous inter-relations between the chronotopes. It is worth noting here the metrical emphasis on “shop girl”, allowing Kendall to admit women into the public sphere.

The dry old scholar, grey with learning,
Methought, no friends had he,
And yet some kindly face discerning
He surely seems to be!”
The wind to welcome his returning
Is blowing from the sea.

[“The Phantom Train”, stanza 3]

As Ladin suggests, “naming characters in terms of their role […] invokes the spatial and temporal implications of their social contexts”. The three figures of the “grimy porter” (l.9), the “shop girl” (l.11) and the “dry old scholar” (l.13) thus function as motifs or local chronotopes conjuring up and embedding the time-space specificities of work discipline within the overarching holiday chronotope. At this moment in the

poem, this chronotopic tension tips in favour of liberating forms of time-spaces – the mentions of the “hamlet still”, the wind and the sea countering the hectic rhythm of work (e.g. chronological inversion on “late and early”) – and restoring natural order. Yet, the paradox created by the collision of these mutually exclusive temporalities (i.e. ‘free time’ versus ‘work time’; a division inherent to industrial labour) interferes with the reader’s capacity to “create a temporally and spatially coherent fabula”.

The April sunshine has departed,
The city’s bleak and drear –
Who gaily on your revel started,
Alas, what do you here,
You passengers so heavy-hearted
That were so light of cheer?

A dream before the ledger flitted,
A dream before the brain;
Ah, yet the toil is unremitting,
The journeying is vain!
The train the city never quitted,
‘Twas but a phantom train!

[“The Phantom Train”, stanzas 4 and 5]

This tension foreshadows a shift in the second half and anticlimax of the poem. The sudden use of the preterit (“that were”, l.18) and reappearance of the “bleak and drear city”, which first appear to signify the extreme brevity of the holiday through time compression, serve to disclose the ugly truth: the holiday trip never happened. The word “dream”, repeated twice as if to actualise the speaker’s awakening, puts an end to the illusion sustained throughout the poem. The complex relationship between the overarching and opposing chronotopes in the first and second half of the text finds a perfect illustration in the penultimate line of the poem. Grammatically speaking, “The train the city never quitted” can embed two different interpretations: the train never quitted the city; or, more interestingly perhaps, the city never quitted the train. By embedding the holiday chronotope within the wider time-space of the industrial city, Kendall smothers all chances of the former’s actual existence. In other words, the holiday eutopia represented by the train chronotope is a mere utopia: a “no-place” locked up in the daydream of an exploited accountant (“A dream before the ledger”).


218 “Eutopia” as derived from the Greek εὖ (“good”) and τόπος (“place”).
Kendall’s chronotopic hierarchy – encapsulating the holiday time-space within that of work – corroborates Marxist understanding of industrial labour. In his later essay on free time, Adorno characterises holiday and the “hobby ideology” in similar terms:

   It means to say that even where the hold of the spell is relaxed, and people are at least subjectively convinced that they are acting of their own free will, this will itself is shaped by the very same forces that they are seeking to escape in their hours without work. 219

In his opinion, free time arises from the industrial opposition of work and leisure and therefore abides by the very rules of work discipline – making free time essentially ‘unfree’. Here, Kendall’s stance is clear: social progress is but an illusion.

While Kendall’s socialism inscribes her poetry within the tradition of Fabian literature, supporting reformers’ belief that the environment itself should change to accommodate social improvements, her use of the railway motif as a metaphor for the impossible escape from time discipline places her work within fin-de-siècle women’s trends. In Women and the Railway, Anna Despotopoulou studies the intersection of gender, temporality and visions of progress as symbolised by the train motif in mid and late Victorian fiction by women. She contends that 1880-1890s female railway stories dramatized women’s attempts to escape the “constraints of temporal discipline” symbolised by masculine railway time, notably through the tropes of daydreaming and mind wandering. 220 In these women’s “narratives of train journeys”, “two conflicting gendered worlds are juxtaposed: the objective with the subjective; technology with imagination; […] punctuality with irregularity; the rational with the irrational”. 221 In Mona Caird’s novel The Daughters of Danaus (1894), for instance, Hadria’s railway experience of time-space at first fuels her artistic capabilities (much like the speaker in Kendall’s poem, imagining the scholar’s life), creating in her mind the illusion of her emancipation from inflexible male temporalities. At the end of the novel, however, she is conscious of the “delusions that the initial journey generated in her”, and of the

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221 Despotopoulou, “Railway Space and Time”, 164.
ways in which rigid railway time both “disciplines her incoherent temporal and spatial fantasies” and extinguishes “progressive dreams of social and personal evolution”.\(^{222}\) This anti-climax is reproduced in Kendall’s poem, which dramatizes the clash between the chronotope of the inhuman that capitalist work-discipline represents, and ‘human’ forms of time-spaces – such as daydreams, holiday, enjoyment and poetic creation.

This chronotopic clash between lifetime and labour time is best epitomised in another poem by Kendall, which has surprisingly been overlooked by scholars: “The Sandblast Girl and the Acid Man”. As the title suggests, the poem centres on love and labour, and dramatizes the ways in which romance and hope are thwarted by work discipline, affecting life time-markers. Defined in terms of their job roles, the lovers may never escape the tyrannical time-spaces that their names participate in creating:

Of all the cities far and wide,
The city that I most prefer,
Though hardly through the fog descried,
Is Muggy Manchester,
Of all its buildings the most dear,
I find a stained glass factory –
Because the sandblast girl works here,
In the same room with me!

[“The Sandblast Girl and the Acid Man”, stanza 1]

The poem sets a touching scene of love and courtship between an “acid man” and his “sandblast girl” within a “glass factory” in the archetypical industrial city of Manchester. The chronotopic clash that ensues is evident from the opening lines of the text, through the rigid dichotomy between the characteristics of the city (described as “Muggy”, l.4) and the idealised vision of the enamoured speaker (“the most dear”, l.5). As she does in “The Castle in the Air” with the trope of the dust smothering the builders, Kendall uses the dense fog as a motif or local chronotope, unfurling the inhuman time-space qualities that the metropolis necessarily generates (“Though hardly through the fog descried”, l.3). While Decadent poets such as Marriott Watson and Symons construed urban space through streetlights, rain and cigarette smoke, Kendall perceived the city as a chronotope that altogether obstructed (poetic) vision.

The irreconcilable, spatial tension between the prettified locus of romance and the unpleasant atmosphere of the city affects the poem’s rhythm in the opening stanza. While the regular alternation of trimetric and tetrametric lines evokes notions of work-

\(^{222}\) Despotopoulou, “Railway Space and Time”, 171-172.
discipline and monotony, the rhythmical emphasis on lines 5 ("most dear") and 7 ("girl works here"), both testifying to the speaker’s affection for his co-worker, suggests a chronotopic clash between objective, mechanised time and the biased (and profoundly human) temporality of romance. Once again, the collision of the mutually exclusive chronotopes (romantic contemplation or idle time versus ‘labour time’; gloomy place versus idealised setting) interferes with the creation of a coherent fabula, and endows the lines with humour, triggering the reader’s sympathy for the hard-working man:

It made a most terrific din,  
Of yore, that sandblasting machine,  
I cursed the room I laboured in,  
And all the dull routine,  
And the old sandblast girl, who broke,  
Of coloured glass, so many a sheet,  
In fruitless efforts to evoke  
Tracery clear and neat.

["The Sandblast Girl and the Acid Man", stanza 2]

The humorous tone of the poem is patent in the second stanza, wherein the expression “Of yore” (used to describe the horrific noise of the sandblasting machine) echoes and deconstructs fairy-tale time, by confronting it with labour time and its monotonous cadence (“the dull routine”, l.12) causing the speaker’s despair (“I cursed the room I laboured in”, l.11). This monotony finds its best expression in the rhyme scheme (“in”; “ine”) in the first half of the second stanza – and the impression of eternal sameness that it produces. The metrical insistence on “old” to describe the former female worker, who preceded the lover’s entrance, testifies to the impossibility of a fairy-tale-like romance, by emphasizing the interchangeability of people within the workforce, and the objectification of individuals, solely defined through labour.

That sandblast girl, at last she left –  
They couldn’t let her blunders pass.  
But Maggie’s hands are slim and deft,  
They never break the glass!  
From ruby, orange, and from blue,  
The letters stand out clear as pearl.  
The fellows say they never knew  
So smart a sandblast girl!

[“The Sandblast Girl and the Acid Man”, stanza 3]

In the third stanza (above), these characteristics of labour are central, as epitomised by the euphemistic quality of the verb “left” (referring to the dismissal of an employee),
and the emphasis on Maggie’s busy hands. This last motif serves to highlight the opposing chronotopic visions at stake. The mention of Maggie’s name and romantic focus on her “slim” and “deft” fingers (suggesting the beauty, femininity and skills of the admirably “smart” woman) evidence the intrasubjective nature of the romance chronotope. Nevertheless, her being reduced to a pair of hands echoes contemporary discourses and considerations of workers as interchangeable and dehumanized tools – coming to reinforce the inhuman and alienating specificities of the labour chronotope.

I raise my eyes: I see her stand,
A sheet of glass her arms embrace;
Out spurts the narrow stream of sand,
On each uncovered space
Till perfectly the work is done,
And clear again grows Maggie’s brow –
Till a fresh labour is begun,
She’s merely human, now!

[“The Sandblast Girl and the Acid Man”, stanza 4]

The fourth stanza drives further focus onto the labour chronotope, through its technical depiction of Maggie’s work in the factory. Sandblasting refers to the act of etching glass with a jet of sand, driven at high velocity by compressed air or steam – a craft that required much precision and skills when the machine appeared in the mid-1880s. The poem depicts the sand stream, the sheets of glass and the entire process through the perspective of the admiring lover and intrasubjective chronotope. Despite the speaker’s bias, the inhuman attributes of labour time-space permeate his account, evidencing the chronotopic tension at stake within the lines. The metronomic, iambic rhythm of the stanza defining the lines whenever Maggie toils (ll.25-29; l.32) echoes her technical precision and the timing of the work-discipline clock. In the interstice between her work on the first and second sheet of glass, when the temporality of romantic contemplation takes over (l.30-31), the meter’s regularity tellingly stops. The labour chronotope also interferes with romantic vision itself as it modifies space. Within labour time-space, Maggie’s furrowed (most likely, unprotected) brow and the steam or sand particles that partially conceal her face, make her look “merely human” (l.32). The short break enhances the poem’s constant alternation between the inhuman chronotope of labour, and the human chronotopes of romance, idleness and dreams.

She has a dress of navy blue,
A turn-down collar, white and clean
As though no smoke it travelled through,
And smuts had never seen.
I’ve noticed that white snowdrop bells
Have a peculiar look of her!
And nothing but her pallor tells
Of Muggy Manchester.

[“The Sandblast Girl and the Acid Man”, stanza 6]

In stanza 6, this alternation revolves around the motif of whiteness – in the same way in which the third focused on the poem’s dual chronotopic approach to the motif of the hand. While the woman’s immaculate dress, untouched by smoke and dirt, reveals once again the idealising character of the romance chronotope, the sudden parallel between the colour of her clothes and the pallor of her face, tips the balance in favour of labour time-space, revealing its effect on the woman’s physical health.

Just twenty shillings every week!
And always somebody distressed
Wants helping; and you feel a sneak
If you don’t do your best.
Suppose that I began to hoard,
And steeled my heart, my coffer hid,
I wonder if I could afford
To – Would she, if I did?

She has a mother to support,
And I’ve a sister. Trade’s not brisk,
And for a working man, in short,
Life is a fearful risk.
The Clarion I sometimes read,
I muse upon in winter nights,
I wonder if they’ll e’er succeed
In putting things to rights!

I’m vastly better off than some!
I think of how the many fare
Who perish slowly, crushed and dumb,
For leisure, food and air.
‘Tis hard, in Freedom’s very van,
To live and die a luckless churl.
‘Tis hard to be an acid man,
Without a sandblast girl!

The poem’s second half most clearly reflects the author’s political opinions, with the mention of The Clarion (an activist working-class newspaper founded in 1891) and the fight for workers’ rights that it advocated. While the speaker’s dreaming of a better future (“muse”, l.62) remains untouched by the chronotope of labour, his thinking of marriage in pecuniary and materialistic terms (“afford to” l.56, “Without a
sandalblast girl!”, l.72) dramatizes the domination of the private sphere by capital. The overlapping of romantic and economic discourses is evident in the poem’s final line – which both pertains to the intrasubjective chronotope of love (it is hard for the man to live on knowing he cannot marry Maggie), and the intersubjective time-space of the factory chronotope (the woman and man’s roles at work being interdependent). The unaffordability of marriage enhances the role of the chronotope of labour in thwarting the time markers (e.g. wedding) which punctuate life. The anticlimactic ending of the poem, closing on a privative preposition, typifies Kendall’s poetics of failure and chronotopic tension, in favour of inhuman time-spaces. The poet’s cynical views are evident in the ways in which the worker describes his condition at the end of the last stanza. Conceptualising his workplace as “Freedom’s very van”, the worker is shown to have partially internalized the alienating nature of his labour.

Kendall’s anticlimactic endings dramatize the impossibility of her characters’ escapes from the time-spaces prescribed by capitalist society. The evocative, spatial-temporal power of imagination and poetic creation is thwarted in “A Castle in the Air”; the chronotope of holiday proves to be locked within and annihilated by that of labour in “The Phantom Train”; and the temporality of romance is disrupted by the clock discipline of work in “The Acid Man and the Sandblast Girl”. In all these urban songs, the chronotopes of labour, technical progress and materialism impose their roles as overarching and hegemonic time-spaces, enforcing social repression and regression. Kendall’s views on modernity implicate a necessary chronotopic struggle, which finds resolution in the final anti-climaxes, signifying the demise of ‘human’ time-spaces.

One poem included at the beginning of her collection’s sub-category “Songs of the City”, however, approaches this aesthetic of decline and failure from a radically different perspective. Rather than concluding on an anti-climax, Kendall explores an essentially anticlimactic poetics, shaping the lines of the poem from the outset. The inclusion of “In the Drawing Room” within her urban section unsettles, as the title of the work unambiguously sets the scene within the domestic (rather than public) sphere. The chronotope of the drawing room, or ‘with-drawing room’, unlocks social and cultural implications of women’s subordination, enforced domesticity and passivity within the text. In Our Homes and How to Beautify Them (a guide on interior design), H. J. Jennings describes this space as “pre-eminently” the “ladies’ room”, “as sacred
to their influence and rule as the smoking room is to the regnancy of men”\textsuperscript{223}. It is also a middle-class environment, which vividly contrasts with the other poems’ settings.

\begin{verbatim}
FURNITURE with the languid mien,
On which life seems to pall –
With your insipid gray and green
And drab, your cheerless wall –
To think that she has really been
An hour among you all.

[“In the Drawing Room”, stanza 1]

The poem opens with a depiction of the room and the overwhelming sense of listlessness that seeps through its walls. The absence of independent clauses and finite verbs of action on lines 1-4 suggests the inertia of the scene. This is reinforced by the lifeless surroundings (“languid mien”, “pall”, “insipid”, “drab”, and “cheerless”), the rhymes in /i:/ and /ɔː/ that slow down the micro-temporality of the poem, and the dashes creating through textual space the impression of a pause that drags on. While the quasi-regular pace of the poem accentuates the monotony of the scene, the metrical inversion placing an extra beat on “furniture” – the inanimate and personified addressee of the speaker (“your”, ll.3-4) – reveals the relevance of materialism in the poem. The final lines of the stanza introduce a female figure (“she”, l.5) who is both absent from the main chronotope, and present in the time-space memory of the room. Her mention coincides with the first occurrence of an independent clause in the stanza (“…she has really been/An hour among you all”, l.5-6) – making the first movement in the poem, a movement away and the only instance of a successful escape in the urban songs.

I wonder, since she went away,
Has no one ever guessed
Why constantly you look more grey,
More green and more depressed.
I know – you know, you had your day,
Now you need only rest.

[“In the Drawing Room”, stanza 2-end]

The alternation between present, perfect and preterit in stanza 2 encapsulates the temporal tension that defines the domestic chronotope, revolving around an empty figure whose faint presence is still pinned to the house walls. The verb “went”, stressed

by the metre (l.7), and the pronoun “she” (l.7), rhythmically unstressed, de-actualise her presence through the micro-temporality of the text, despite palpable evidence of her physical influence upon the room. The metrical emphasis on the adverb “more” (ll.9-10), repeated three times, suggests gradual deterioration (rather than a fixed state) of a room whose life energy is being drained. This process of energy loss echoes the law of entropy, omnipresent in contemporary scientific discourses. As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, the second law of thermodynamics (contrary to the first, which provided novels with virtuous closure), by nature anticlimactic, heightened social anxiety around degeneration and radically opposed linear views of progress. In this poem, Kendall appropriates a poetics of loss and decline as a way of counteracting the essentially masculine and oppressive timeframe of modern progressive discourses.

The following stanzas open up intra-references to another form of masculine narrative, by offering a direct response to Robert Browning’s poem “Love in a Life”:

Yon heavy, yellow easy chair,  
Right opposite the door,  
Ah, how impassively you stare  
Across the dreary floor;  
Yet even you would be aware  
If she should come once more.

I see the dingy curtains stir  
With a faint memory;  
The grand piano dreams of her  
In a drowsy minor key.  
Rest tranquilly, old furniture,  
To-night it may not be!

[“In the Drawing Room”, stanza 3-4]

These lines from Kendall’s poem are in dialogue with Browning’s following stanzas:

1  
Room after room,  
I hunt the house through  
We inhabit together.  
Heart, fear nothing for, heart, thou shalt find her  
Next time, herself! — not the trouble behind her  
Left in the curtain, the couch’s perfume!  
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew:  
Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

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II
Yet the day wears,
And door succeeds door;
I try the fresh fortune
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
Still the same chance! She goes out as I enter.
Spend my whole day in the quest, who cares?
But ‘tis twilight, you see, with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!


Previous scholarship has not drawn any parallel between the works of Kendall and Browning, although striking similarities in the poems support the hypothesis of a direct tribute. The motif of the stirring curtains, moved by the “faint memory” of (l.20, Kendall’s) or “trouble” left behind the elusive woman (l.5), the empty centres around which the domestic chronotopes revolve, and the writers’ focus on the furniture (“Yon heavy, yellow easy chair”, l.19 in Kendall’s; “Yon looking glass”, l.8 in Browning’s) create an internal dialogue between the texts. In both poems, the presence-absence of the ghostly feminine disrupts the spatial-temporal configuration of the room. The faint breeze forcing the curtains to stir in Kendall’s poem triggers a rhythmical inversion on line 20, suggesting the woman’s influence on temporality, at the micro-level of the metre. The diaeresis on “piano” (l.21) similarly bears the trace of the ghostly feminine and its impact on poetic time. While this presence-absence is translated in terms of the room’s growing decay in Kendall’s poem, it carries positive connotations in the work of Browning’s; suggesting the fairy-like magic of the ideal woman, refreshing flowers and polishing mirrors (II.6-8) whilst remaining unnoticed and enticingly unattainable.

The main differences between the poems lie in their approach to gendered power structures and narratives. Browning explores the trope of love as a hunt, in which a man tirelessly chases after a woman in an attempt to possess her. The lovers’ encounter never happens, as the woman endlessly manages to escape her pursuer, leaving him with an ever-growing desire to find her (as suggested by the increasing lengths of the lines building up climax, as opposed to Kendall’s anticlimactic chronotope). The lyric voice of the poem is endowed with the specificities of the hero on a “quest”, exhorting his heart to “fear nothing”, to “search”, and “explore” the house “room after room” –

creating a clash between the heroic and domestic chronotopes, which Ladin defines as incompatible.\textsuperscript{226} This time-space struggle and introduction of the heroic within the house provokes the objectification of the woman as a prey. While her ghostly attributes allow her to acquire ubiquity and elude the gaze of her harasser, this ability acts as a catalyst for the man’s erotic desire, and does not end her confinement within the domestic chronotope. The symbiotic connection that she shares with the house turns her into a space to be transgressed by the man, as hinted by the sexual innuendos at the end of the second stanza (“Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!”).

In Kendall’s poem, the gender-free speaker deconstructs the gendered hierarchy that Browning construes. While the presence of the woman is indelible, a symbiotic connection between the two is negated by the escape: her departure is actual, durable and emancipatory. In her essay on gender as genre, “What Kind of a Critical Category is Women’s Poetry?”, Thain elevates Kendall’s poem as the archetype of a fin-de-siecle, New Woman’s work, operating a shift from conceptions of womanhood as poetry to the assertion of female subjectivity and women as poetry-makers. She sees in Kendall’s poem the reflective and radical artistic act of a writer aware of the risk of female objectification within her own work – subverting the core function of the room:

While the poetess was trapped within the realm of the object, the depicted (the “room” of the “drawing”), the author of this poem has found her own theoretical space in which she can depict (“room” for “drawing”). […] That the woman of this poem has deserted that place of reticence implies a move into a space where she can find her voice.\textsuperscript{227}

In the light of this analysis, the time markers of the “hour” and “day” (ll.6–7) become metaphors of an era that came to an end, and witnessed the emancipation of women.

In Kendall’s poetry, counteracting masculine narratives on progress or literary traditions fetishizing the inferiority of women is one inseparable act. As suggested by her focus on furniture, “In the Drawing-Room” aligns female emancipation with the renunciation of domestic materialism, along with the chronotope of “routine” and “decorum” that it entails. These terms, coined by the poet, appear in her feminist piece “Woman’s Future”, wherein the lyric voice chides Victorian women for wasting time on “Fashion”, “antimacassars” and rugs. Relinquishing what Thorstein Veblen calls

\textsuperscript{226} Ladin, “Fleshing Out the Chronotope,” 225.

\textsuperscript{227} Thain, ‘What Kind of a Critical Category”, 581.
“conspicuous consumption” in The Theory of the Leisure Class published in 1899228, is the condition for escaping the “household paraphernalia”229 and the oppressive time-spaces that it entails. The poem not only embraces anticlimactic and entropic forms of the chronotope as a radical way to disrupt the timeframe of progress, but also reasserts the importance of the poet-dreamer, opening up opportunities for social change in her reveries. These aspects of Kendall’s politico-literary agenda find their most potent expression in her dystopian science poems, as explored in the next section.

3. Dream of an End: Evolution, Deep Time and Non-Human Chronotopes

Complacent they tell us, hard hearts and derisive,
In vain is our ardour: in vain are our sighs:
Our intellects, bound by a limit decisive,
To the level of Homer’s may never arise.
We heed not the falsehood, the base innuendo,
The laws of the universe, these are our friends.
Our talents shall rise in a mighty crescendo,
We trust Evolution to make us amends!

But ah, when I ask you for food that is mental,
My sisters, you offer me ices and tea!
You cherish the fleeting, the mere accidental,
At cost of the True, the Intrinsic, the Free.
Your feelings, compressed in Society’s mangle,
Are vapid and frivolous, pallid and mean.
To slander you love; but you don’t care to wrangle:
You bow to Decorum, and cherish Routine.

Alas, is it woolwork you take for your mission,
Or Art that your fingers so gaily attack?
Can patchwork atone for the mind’s inanition?
Can the soul, oh my sisters, be fed on a plaque?
Is this your vocation? My goal is another,
And empty and vain is the end you pursue.
In antimacassars the world you may smother’
But intellect marches o’er them and o’er you.

On Fashion’s vagaries your energies strewing,
Devoting your days to a rug or a screen.
Oh, rouse to a lifework – do something worth doing!
Invent a new planet, a flying-machine.
Mere charms superficial, mere feminine graces,
That fade and that flourish, no more you may prize;


But the knowledge of Newton will beam from your faces,  
The soul of a Spencer will shine in your eyes.  
Though jealous exclusion may tremble to own us,  
Oh, wait for the time when our brains shall expand!  
When once we’re enthroned, you shall never dethrone us –  
The poets, the sages, the seers of the land!  
[“Women’s Future”]

Kendall’s chiding and rebellious tone in “Women’s Future” is unmatched across the entire collection to which it belongs, *Dreams to Sell*. As Moine notes, the poem stands for the only one “directly addressing the woman question” in the poet’s oeuvre as a whole.\(^{230}\) Despite sustained interest in the fin-de-siècle and New Women’s poetry, the few scholars who have studied Kendall’s poetry (such as Gemma King, Catherine E. Birch, Marion Thain and Wolfgang Funk) have overlooked this particular proto-feminist piece.\(^{231}\) In the lines quoted above, Kendall reprimands her fellow Victorian women for bowing to “Decorum” and cherishing “Routine” – a view that is central in shaping her urban chronotopics, highlighting the oppressive constraints of materialism and labour. Kendall’s approach to the time-spaces of progress and evolution in this poem, however, appears to endorse Darwinist theories and to oppose the rest of her work. This ambiguity in her attitude towards scientific discourses, and difficulties in situating her within the middle-class feminism that typified New Women’s poetry, may explain why “Women’s Future” has not yet received the attention it deserves.

In Kendall’s city songs, as demonstrated in the first section, the poet recreates the hostile time-spaces of industrial fin-de-siècle England, which she defines as essentially ‘inhuman’, that is, at odds with social progress and life time-markers. The chronotopic clashes that shape her anticlimactic poetics dramatize the irreconcilable tension between inhuman time-spaces, and the chronotopics of dream, leisure and creation. In “Women’s Future”, Kendall exhorts her “sisters” (l.10) to embrace new modes of action and to become an integral part of the timeframe of progressive history and the scientific discoveries that punctuate it (embodied in the lines by the figures of Newton and Spencer). By urging women to “invent a new planet” (l.28) and elevating them to the rank of “poets” in the closing line, Kendall also seems to bridge the gap between female creation and the typically masculine time-spaces of evolution. In fact,

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\(^{231}\) To my knowledge, Fabienne Moine is the only academic who has paid close attention to the poem (*Women Poets in the Victorian Era*, 246-247).
by displaying knowledge of philosophy (e.g. of the traditional dichotomy between the accidental and the intrinsic, omnipresent in the works of Plato, Kant or Nietzsche), she actualises, as well as justifies, her presence on the masculine territory of the ‘fittest’.

As evidenced by Kendall’s wider work, however, the chronotopes of evolution and progress in her poetry are inseparable from the hegemonic masculine discourses that they underpin. Society’s equation of women (and the working class) with lower forms of life is necessarily tied to specific time-space matrixes, informing a pyramidal understanding of society. In the poem, the domestic chronotope that cages women imposes fleeting and repetitive temporality onto their lives, as opposed to that of truth and history – i.e. universal and eventful time. Women’s exclusion from the timeframe of history and the chronotope of Evolution also finds a metaphor in the dichotomy that the poem establishes between masculine heights (“arise”, 1.4) and feminine lowness (“bow”, 1.16; “marches […] o’er you”, 1.24), referring to their intellectual and physical submission. More than restricting women to belittling and oppressive time-spaces, the main chronotope of evolution also casts their anatomy as a prison. ‘Femaleness’ as a motif invoking the biological arguments of Darwinist chronotopes turn women into their own enemy. Their intellect “bound by a limit decisive” in the poem (l. 3) directly refers to Darwin’s views on women’s intellectual inferiority, and craniology.\(^{232}\)

In this respect, encroaching on the masculine territory of science via literature, as advocated by Kendall, amounts to radically challenging normative structures and imposing equalitarian time-space configurations. As Moine remarks, it also operates a shift from biological arguments (caging women within their own bodies) to cultural ones, putting the focus on social and environmental conditions, on which women may have an impact.\(^{233}\) The motif of the “mighty crescendo” in the poem (l.7) not only challenges masculine views on hierarchy by suggesting that women have the potential to rise to their level, but also overturns the ineluctable demise of the oppressed figures in the poet’s anticlimactic city songs. While Kendall’s urban poetry is fatalistic in that it is shaped, and centres on the characters’ predetermined decline (time-space closure), this particular poem empowers the oppressed to bring change through creation.

\(^{232}\) Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 622: “The female, however, ultimately assumes certain distinctive characters, and in the formation of her skull, is said to be intermediate between the child and the man” [my emphasis]. Analogies between women, “savages” (that is, non-white people in Darwin’s words), dogs and children are omnipresent throughout the book, and serve to legitimate their categorisation as “lower races” or “lower life forms”.

“Women’s Future” to a certain extent aligns with the views of Fabian writers, who sought to capitalise on the Evolution paradigm and “the laws of the universe” to back up their socialist agenda. More importantly, however, it works as a manifesto for the collection, wherein the oppressed are “enthroned” in order to “dethrone” male figures (1.35) through their own inventions and the egalitarian time-spaces that they unfurl. In Kendall’s mind, the new planet or otherworldly setting that women “poets” and “seers” (carrying the supernatural or magical dimension that her fantastic satires explore) invoke, act as a counter-chronotope where hierarchy, scientific categorisation of life forms, as well as male intellectual hegemony, become empty shells of meaning.

While Kendall’s modus operandi in her satirical poems does constitute a strong attack against Darwinian justifications of social, racial and gendered oppression, her time-space approach operates both within and outside her contemporaries’ scientific logic, using their own language to suggest the inadequacy, incorrectness or irrelevance of their reference system. This criticism of pyramidal societies arises from chronotopic tension between two distinct forms of time-space in Kendall’s satirical poems, at times opposing or complementing one another: ‘non-human’ chronotopes on the one hand, deployed by fantastic creatures and defined by ‘alien’ or ‘deep’ time; and scientific chronotopes on the other hand, ruled by masculine authority figures. In “The Fatal Advertisements”, Kendall literally abides by the recommendation that she makes in her proto-feminist piece “Women’s Future” by setting her poem on a different planet. While Marriott Watson resorts to otherworldly sceneries to break free from “emotional restraints” customarily imposed on women’s poetry, as stated in Chapter 1, Kendall sets her plot on the “sphere of Mars” to dethrone masculine power figures on Earth.

The poem recounts the story of a presupposed scientific breakthrough on the planet of Mars, where “two chief astronomers” gazing at our planet through a giant telescope mistake advertising signs for local pagan gods. While casting materialism as a divinity invokes the inhuman time-space of progress, the chronotopic model that Kendall explores in the lines of this poem differs from the one of her urban songs:

From all the sphere of Mars they pressed,
The wonder to inspect –
A telescope, the mightiest
A planet could erect.

234 Kendall, Songs from Dreamland, 91-93.
And the two chief astronomers
Controlled the huge machine,
And first of all the universe
They sought our orb terrene.

[...]

The elder first our orb discerned,
And gazed; and by his mien,
When mute with ecstasy he turned,
They knew that he had seen.

[“The Fatal Advertisements”, stanzas 1-2 and 5]

While displaced to another sphere, the poem “translates slyly to the human sphere”\(^{236}\) as Virginia Blain remarks in her book’s introduction to Kendall’s work. The motif of astronomy invokes the scientific and ideological context of the fin-de-siècle, together with the masculine and hegemonic chronotope that it implies. It is interesting to note that what constitutes two distinct and inherently incompatible chronotopes in most of Kendall’s satirical poems – i.e. otherworldly time-space (here, ‘alien’) and scientific time-space – merge as one undividable entity at the start of this poem. The chronotope that the Martian scientists open up relies on competitive, innovative and essentially masculine time-space configurations: the most learned men on the planet (“two chief astronomers”) control the “mightiest” machine ever built. The reference to the “huge” dimensions of the telescope –the largest “a planet could [possibly] erect” reinforces the masculinisation of the overarching chronotope through clear phallic connotations.

This humorous sexual overtone allows Kendall to erode the power structures that the poem’s chronotope construes, by reducing scientific competition to a trivial ‘size contest’ between knowledgeable men. Her use of action verbs in these stanzas (“inspect”, “controlled”, “discerned”, “gazed”) both underpin masculine intellectual hegemony or control, and invoke mock-heroic time-space in the lines, undermining the overarching chronotope of science. As Richard Terry explains, the purposes of the mock-epic or heroic genre, used as a tool for political commentary in poetry,\(^{237}\) are ultimately “deflationary”.\(^{238}\) In other words, while heroic time-space aims to build up


\(^{237}\) As explained in the introduction to the thesis, Marion Thain coins the term of “commentary poetry” for “humorous, debunking and satiric” poems, which are “primarily political in intent”. She quotes Kendall as one example of this particular category. See: Thain, “Poetry”, 224.

\(^{238}\) Richard Terry, Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper: An English Genre and Discourse (Routledge, 2017), introduction.
climax, mock-heroic chronotopes are anticlimactic in nature. This tension is evident in stanza 5 and the pantomimic scene that it stages to render the dramatic nature of the scientific discovery. The last line of the stanza (“They knew that he had seen”), which omits to mention the object of the breakthrough, functions as a cliffhanger, suspending temporality to build up the poem’s climax on the one hand. On the other hand, the use of the verb ‘to see’ as an intransitive one, as well as the theatrical focus on facial expressions (“his mien…mute with ecstasy”, l. 19) provokes humour by casting the discovery as a transcendental or spiritual revelation, bestowed upon the alien planet.

Then in exultant, anxious awe,
While all the throng were dumb,
He traced the characters he saw,
The sign “Linoleum”.

Tears rose in eyes unused to weep,
The portent as they scanned.
All felt some meaning dread and deep,
But did not understand.

They said: “Strange undulations roll
Of cosmic woe and bliss.
New darkness dawns upon the soul
From gloomy galaxies.”

Then, altering the field of view
A trifle ere he gazed,
The next astronomer looked through,
And started back amazed.

“A new solution I discern,”
He cried. “The old must go.”
Slowly he copied in his turn
The sign “Sapolio”.

[“The Fatal Advertisements”, stanzas 7-11]

Stanzas 7 and 11 provoke the first anti-climaxes of the poem by enhancing the incongruity between the trifling and materialistic chronotope that the advertising signs represent (i.e. “Linoleum” and “Sapolio”) and the emotional agitation of the Martians, moved to tears as they feel the presence of “some meaning dread and deep” in their discovery. The “inflationary and circumlocutional” language that they use to wrap up their trivial findings in stanza 9 (“Strange undulations roll/Of cosmic woe and bliss”) show their biased understanding of our own time-space representations and

239 Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, introduction.
their cultural significance. At this stage, a clash occurs between the chronotopes of the mock epic and pseudo-science on the one hand, and that of reality on Earth and factual knowledge on the other hand, shared by the author and the readers only – a chronotopic layer characterised by Ladin as “transsubjective” or “extradiegetic” time-space.\(^{240}\)

No farther they could contemplate;
A meteor – alas,
That it arrived a little late! –
Shattered the mighty glass.

[“The Fatal Advertisements”, stanza 12]

The next anti-climax directly follows (stanza 12), with the burlesque intervention of an anti-Deus ex Machina: a meteor breaking the “mighty glass” of the machine and leaving the alien planet in a state of eternal “confusion, doubt, and dread” (stanza 13).

And future spheres will sure behold,
When pondering on the stars,
Two signs imprinted on the cold,
Dejected sphere of Mars.

The strife of cycles long ago
Will be no longer dumb.
Some will maintain Sapolio,
And some Linoleum.

[“The Fatal Advertisements”, final stanzas]

The closing punch lines of the poem humorously depict the ideological rupture dividing Martian people around the opposing ‘concepts’ of “Sapolio” and “Linoleum”. This final anti-climax evidences the ways in which masculine intellectual supremacy is both fraudulent and detrimental to society, as the misinterpretation and distortion of signifiers affect the very structures of collective time-space. The ‘alien’ chronotope in the poem thus echoes the alienating qualities of authoritative pseudo-knowledge, and its masculine agenda on Earth, reinforcing the authority and power of those already at the top. At the end of the poem, readers understand that the signs now “imprinted on the cold, dejected sphere of Mars” will reach “future spheres”, who will in their turn misunderstand their meanings and participate in spreading ignorance across galaxies. Using humour, Kendall both negates and ironically recasts the ‘superiority’ of male scientists in terms of their ability to spread chaos and stupidity across the universe.

\(^{240}\) Ladin, “Fleshing Out the Chronotope”, 224.

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As the limits between the chronotope of intellectual progress and that of pure fantasy or speculation are blurred (to disrupt the former’s validity), science becomes a correlative of fiction in “The Fatal Advertisements”. Similar time-space interactions shape the plots of two other poems by Kendall: “A Pure Hypothesis”, in which the time-space of dream and scientific reality are interchangeable; and “The Conscientious Ghost”, wherein work-discipline and pseudo-science effect fictitious worlds.

“A Pure Hypothesis” as in “The Fatal Advertisements” sets its action on another planet, where time-space configurations and their cultural implications differ, as a way of commenting on the real-life settings of fin-de-siècle Industrial England. The text openly discusses the “bounds of Time and Space” (l.5) and capitalizes on the plasticity of non-Euclidean geometry to explore the chronotopic potential of science – which, as a dream, accepts all possible scenarios. The subtitle of the poem (“A Lover, in Four-dimensioned space, describes a Dream”) bearing resemblance to the stage directions of a play, announces the spatial-temporal confrontation at stake in the poem, opposing the intrasubjective chronotope of dreams and intersubjective chronotope of science. The plot, setting the scene in “four-dimensioned space” is an obvious tribute to Edwin A. Abbott’s novel Flatland: A Romance of Two-Dimensions241, published three years prior to Kendall’s collection Dreams to Sell. Whilst her contemporary commented on his society by opening a two-dimensioned chronotope, Kendall situates her action in a space more evolved than our own to fit her anticlimactic agenda:

Ah, love, the teacher we decried,  
That erudite professor grim,  
In mathematics drenched and dyed,  
Too hastily we scouted him.  
He said: ‘The bounds of Time and Space,  
The categories we revere,  
May be in quite another case,  
In quite another sphere’.

He told us: ‘Science can conceive  
A race whose feeble comprehension  
Can’t be persuaded to believe  
That there exists our Fourth Dimension,  
Whom Time and Space for ever baulk;  
But of these beings incomplete,  
Whether upon their heads they walk  
Or stand upon their feet –

We cannot tell, we do not know,

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Imagination stops confounded;
We can but say “It may be so,”
To every theory propounded.

[Kendall’s “A Pure Hypothesis”, stanzas 1-3]

The incontestability of factual knowledge, embodied by the motif of the male professor, is once more challenged in the opening three stanzas of the poem, through the writer’s use of modality. The use and italicisation of the epistemic modal “may” (ll. 7 and 19), loosening the subject-predicate relationship, hints at the limits of science and facilitates the shift towards the chronotope of dreams. Similarly, the deontic value of “can”, used twice in its negative form (ll.11-17: “can’t be persuaded to believe” and “we cannot tell”) deconstructs the “erudite professor” as an authority figure and his theory about the existence of a “race” of “feeble comprehension”; Darwinian terms ironically are used to refer to Victorian society in the ensuing time-space of the dream. Chronotopic malleability, acknowledged by Science itself, enables Kendall to operate an internal reversal of power, by imposing her oneiric chronotope as the reality.

Too glad were we in this our scheme
Of things, his notions to embrace, —
But — I have dreamed an awful dream
Of Three-dimensioned Space! […]

I would not, if I could, recall
The horror of those novel heavens,
Where Present, Past, and Future all
Appeared at sixes and at sevens,
Where Capital and Labour fought,
And, in the nightmare of the mind,
No contradictories were thought
As truthfully combined”

Nay, in that dream-distorted clime,
There fatal wilds I wandered through,
The boundaries of Space and Time
Had got most frightfully askew. […]

Ah, what if on some lurid star
There should exist a hapless race,
Who live and love, who think and are,
In Three-dimensioned Space!”

[Kendall’s “A Pure Hypothesis”, extract]

As the dream chronotope unfurls, the poem opens up a window onto the real world, translating to the human sphere through the mentions of “Three-dimensioned
Space”, the “ lurid star” and the “ hapless race”. While the Victorian obsession for
categorization is reproduced in the poem through the listing of opposing concepts,
shaping the time-space axes of Industrial England (“Present”, “Past”, “Future”;
“Capital and Labour”), space markers such as “askew”, “dream-distorted” and “fatal
winds” mockingly convey the nightmarish dimension of the scene. With humour as a
weapon, Kendall enacts the anticlimactic ending of her poem through the introduction
of an extra-diegetic sphere of commentary, accessible to the readers and author only.

“The Conscientious Ghost” creates similar reversals between reality and fiction.
The poem tells the story of an overworked ghost, ironically haunted and forced to toil
by the Society for Psychical Research, eager to study his activity. Founded at the fin-
de-siècle, the SPR sought to establish a “science of spirits” and “reorient Victorian
understandings of the phantasmal” by shedding light on what Myers, one of the
founding fathers, coined as “supernormal” phenomena. Aiming to recast the ghost as
a “veridical hallucination”242 of the mind, members used scientific frameworks to
analyse the accounts of patients. In the “Fantastic Science of Spirits”, L. Anne Delgado
explains how male intellectuals such as Andrew Lang – the President of the SPR and
Kendall’s editor243 – focused on drawing clear lines of rupture between fictitious
ghosts, as found in folkloric tales, and psychical phantoms, to legitimise their activity
as evidence-based and truthful practice. In their effort to draw such distinction, the
Committee on Haunted Houses – of which Charles Darwin’s cousin, Hensleigh
Wedgwood, was an active member – issued the following statement in a report:

In the magazine ghost stories, which appear in such numbers every Christmas, the ghost
is a fearsome being, dressed in a sweeping sheet or shroud, carrying a lighted candle,
and squeaking dreadful words from fleshless lips. It enters at the stroke of midnight,
through the sliding panel, just by the blood stain on the floor, which no effort ever could
remove. Or it may be only a clinking of chains, a tread as of armed men, heard whilst
the candles burn blue, and the dogs howl. These are the ghosts of fiction, and we do not
deny that now and then we receive, apparently on good authority, accounts of
apparitions, which are stated to exhibit some features of a sensational type. Such cases,
however are very rare, and must for the present, be dismissed as exceptional.244

242 L. Anne Delgado, “Psychical Research and the Fantastic Science of Spirits,” in Strange Science:
Investigating the Limits of Knowledge in the Victorian Age, edited by Lara Karpenko and Shalyn
fin-de-siècle, see also: Jenny Taylor, “Psychology at the Fin-de-Siècle,” in The Cambridge Companion

243 Andrew Lang published all of May Kendall’s poems and co-wrote a book with her, That Very
Mab.

244 Delgado, “Psychical Research”, 241 (and footnote 16, 250).
As Delgado explains,245 Lang supported the committee’s definition of psychical ghosts, adding that they never speak and do not convey messages when they have any.

Despite tremendous efforts to keep science and fiction separate, SPR members were faced both by testimonies of ghost encounters that bore striking resemblance to folkloric tales, and by a public who ardently desired “the story of ghosts […], rather than the telepathic theory of ghosts”.246 Their pseudo-scientific movement thus ironically resulted in the revival of popular fiction and the ‘ghost story’ genre at the fin-de-siècle. Kendall’s poem plays with the SPR members’ attempt to distinguish between fictitious and scientific time-spaces, by showing how the chronotopes of science and progress negatively affect the otherworldly sphere of ghosts, rather than the opposite. She also confronts her editor’s characterisation of ‘psychical phantoms’ as mute, by endowing her ghost with a voice that condemns work-discipline and male intellectual tyranny:

[Psychical]

‘My duties,’ he remarked with tears,
‘I’ve never sought to shun;
Yet hard it is that at my years
They have again begun.

‘No one believed in me, or cared
If I my vigils kept;
My diligence the public spared,
And undisturbed I slept.

‘Yet now I never close my eyes
But in my dreams I see
These Psychical Societies
Descending upon me.

‘They ask me whether I forgot
To wander round the moat;
They wonder what I mean by not
Steering my phantom boat.

‘They would not think it such a joke
To rattle fetters through
The weary night till morning broke,
As Duty bids me do!

‘Alas,’ he groaned, ‘on blood-stained floors
Again to fight and fall!

245 Delgado, “Psychical Research”, 241
246 Delgado, “Psychical Research”, 245.
To shiver round the secret doors,
The draughty banquet hall.

[“The Conscientious Ghost”, stanzas 1-6247]

While the subtitle of the poem, “Psychical”, opens up the time-space matrixes of the ‘paranormal’ as conceptualised by late-Victorian intellectuals (as well as the chronotope of science that it implies), the motif of the Gothic ghost collides with such configurations by invoking the fictitious setting in which he traditionally evolves (“blood-stained floors”, stanza 6). At the threshold of the supernatural world and the tangible reality of work exploitation, the “conscientious ghost” serves Kendall’s dual agenda against capitalist and scientific masculine power structures. In stanza 1, the timeless figure of the ghost is ironically locked within the frame of human lifetime (“at my years”, l. 3) and depicted as an elderly man put back to work. The chronotopic tension between ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ time-space configurations creates humour as much as it allows Kendall to condemn the inhuman nature of capitalist societies.

Whilst the poem recasts the ghost as an exploited worker, the depiction of SPR members as monsters “descending upon” their victims operates a chronotopic reversal by displacing scientific authority figures into the sphere of Gothic fiction. Just as vampires feed upon their preys in folkloric narratives, the scientists drain the life out of the undead creature, forcing him to “rattle fetters” from night until dawn. Inversely, the ghost encroaches onto human time-space against his will. Despite references to his spatial ubiquity (“vanished into air”, stanza 11), the insistence on his “clanking fetter”, repeated three times, indicates that the ghost is literally chained to his duties. Ironically referring to the transient nature of the fin-de-siècle, the ghost claims he must give up on his inherent incompleteness to adapt to the new prerequisites of modern time-space: “In this world of change/ One can’t be too complete”, he murmurs whilst humorously adjusting his “winding sheet”. Just as his traditional attire becomes his work uniform and a symbol of his alienation within the chronotope of work-discipline, the “blood-stained” Gothic scenery turns into a workplace, where he must perform his role as a psychical phantom to meet male scientists’ imaginary construction of reality. As in “The Fatal Advertisements”, science becomes a mere creation of the mind, invoking

247 Kendall, Dreams to Sell, 17-19.
its own pyramidal and masculine chronotope (detrimental to those at the bottom of the hierarchical order that it creates) by modelling reality in a way that fits men’s agenda.

While in “The Fatal Advertisements” and “The Conscientious Ghost”, scientific and non-human (i.e. ‘supernatural’ or ‘alien’) time-spaces interact and merge in order to suggest the overlapping of scientific facts and fiction, the chronotopes are strictly distinct in most of Kendall’s satirical pieces. In “The Philanthropist and the Jellyfish” and “Lay of the Trilobite”, for instance, the figure of the knowledgeable, heroic man together with the grandiose chronotopes that he invokes, clash with the time-spaces of fantastic creatures, evolving in ‘deep time’ or ‘non-human’ settings. While the first poem recounts the vain attempt of a philanthropist to save a stranded female jellyfish, the second relates the adventure of a philosopher and his disheartening encounter with a voluble, “native” fossil. While both creatures pertain to, and participate in invoking evolutionary chronotopes by aligning with Darwin’s definition of ‘lower life forms’ (as primitive creatures which share the characteristics of women and ‘savages’),

they unfurl their own, in-subjective chronotopes within – and to the detriment of – the masculine time-spaces of science and evolution that shape and encompass them:

A mountain’s giddy height I sought,                      Her beauty, passive in despair,
Because I could not find                                      Through sand and seaweed shone,
Sufficient vague and mighty thought                       The fairest jelly-fish I e'er
To fill my mighty mind;                                          Had set mine eyes upon.
And as I wandered ill at ease,                              It would have made a stone abuse
There chanced upon my sight                                  The callousness of fate,
A native of Silurian seas,                                     This creature of prismatic hues,
An ancient Trilobite.                                            Stranded and desolate!

So calm, so peacefully he lay,                                 Musing I said: " My mind's unstrung,
I watched him even with tears:                                    Joy, hope, are in their grave:
I thought of Monads far away                                      Yet ere I perish all unsung
In the forgotten years.                                          One jelly-fish I'll save!
How wonderful it seemed and right,                            [“The Philanthropist and the Jellyfish”,
The providential plan,                                          stanzas 1-3]
That he should be a Trilobite,                                    
And I should be a Man!

[“Lay of the Trilobite”, stanzas 1-2]

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248 The trilobite, both because of its primitive nature as a fossil, and his character as a “native” stands for lower life forms and lower ‘races’ in Darwin’s The Descent of Man. On human ‘races’, see Part I, chapters 2-3 and 7. The jellyfish, both because of its primitive nature as a soft-bodied creature, and her characterization as female, stands for lower life forms and the weaker sex in Darwin’s book, equating women with children, ‘savages’ and dogs. On women’s inferiority, see Part III, chapters 19-20.
The openings of the poems generate essentialist portraits of male intellectuals as knowledgeable and courageous power figures. The chronotopes that they open up once again invoke the qualities of mock-heroic time-space within the lines. In “Lay of the Trilobite”, while the sublime landscape (reminiscent of Romantic paintings), the emphasis on heroic action and the regularity of the iambic rhythm convey a sense of grandeur, the poet’s signature alternation between tetrameters and trimeters suggests the inevitability of a fall at the micro-level of the lines’ rhythm. The poem’s opening stanzas play with the traditional codes of ancient epic narratives such as The Odyssey, by presenting its main character as a seeker of truth, on a quest for greater knowledge. As the philosopher scales the grandiose range of mountainous heights, he finds in the landscape’s “giddy height” the appropriately sized incubator for his “mighty mind” to hatch “sufficient vague and mighty thought” (I.3). The obvious humorous tone of the lines, however, serves to destabilise this epic account from the onset of the plot. The repetition of “mighty” (within the context of the intrasubjective chronotope, tied to the man’s consciousness) suggests to the reader the intended analogy between the height of the mountain and the oversized ego of the man. This sense of verticality also echoes the pyramidal and imperialistic (as suggested through the term “native” at the end of the first stanza) chronotope that the philosopher’s superiority complex implies. The poet’s characterisation of philosophical concepts as “vague”, i.e. challengeable and malleable at wish, further deride and discredit the pseudo-intellectual man as a fraud.

In “The Philanthropist and the Jellyfish”, the male protagonist, committing wholeheartedly to his mission as a saviour, invokes similar epic time-space within the lines. Just as the first poem opens up a back door into imperialistic discourses, this particular one invokes the cultural implications of Darwinism and the time-space that it creates through the motif of the rescue. This motif, or local chronotope, establishes an intertextual dialogue with the following extract from Chapter 4 of The Descent of Man, in which Darwin justifies the innate moral virtue (and superiority) of white men:

It is evident in the first place, that with mankind the instinctive impulses have different degrees of strength; a savage will risk his own life to save that of a member of the same community, but will be wholly indifferent about a stranger: a young and timid mother urged by the maternal instinct will, without a moment’s hesitation, run the greatest danger for her own infant, but not for a mere fellow creature. Nevertheless many a civilized man, or even boy, who never before risked his life for another, but full of courage and sympathy, has disregarded the instinct of self-preservation, and plunged at
once into a torrent to save a drowning man, though a stranger.  

Through this anecdote, Darwin posits masculine bravery as the highest moral virtue on the evolutionary scale – justifying, by extension, the inferiority of women and non-white people (i.e. “savages” in the quote). In the poem, the protagonist’s sympathy for “strangers” spans the entire spectrum of species and involves non-human creatures.

As in the first poem, the grotesque dimension of the scene opens up mock-epic time-space and suggests the deflationary purpose of the anticlimactic poem. The man’s use of chivalric (“fate”, “perish”, “save”) and lyrical terms to narrate his encounter with a mere jellyfish enhances the incongruity of the match. The romantic inter-species subtext that emerges through the philanthropist’s emotional reaction to the jellyfish’s providential beauty negates his status as a credible hero. His burlesque insistence on the animal’s incredible feminine beauty (“the fairest jellyfish”, “prismatic hues”) and submissive nature (“passive in despair”, “stranded and desolate”) humorously endows the invertebrate with the defining characteristics of the damsel in distress – indirectly commenting on women’s objectification in masculine discourses and vision of history as centred on men’s deeds and dismissive of women’s actions. The jellyfish merely exists in the form of the possessive pronoun “her” (line 1), metonymically reducing her to her physical attributes. Her reification through the gaze of the narrator who “set [his] eyes upon” her, parallels that of the trilobite, who merely “chance[s] upon” the man’s “sight”. The jellyfish’s relegation to the outskirt of the masculine ronotope finds a metaphor in the liminal space of the shore. While her nature as a primitive being deprived of a “Sensorium” is inherently liminal in itself (placed at the threshold between vegetal and animal life), the space that the creature occupies is situated at the very margins of power, where she has no control over her own movements and life.

The passivity of the female creature echoes the trilobite’s inactiveness in the first poem, as signified by his laying position (in stanza 2 as well as in the poem’s title), opposing the upright posture of the philosopher. This difference in spatial and physical power dynamics is evident in the caricature published in Punch magazine alongside Kendall’s “Lay of the Trilobite”, in which the fossil looks idle and peaceful, with its back set against a rock, and its eyes directed at the man’s face above his:

249 Darwin, The Descent of Man, 134.
In the illustration issued with “The Philanthropist and the Jellyfish”, the invertebrate has a small, atonic and flattened shape, mirroring her passive character:

The passiveness and marginalization of these characters point at the hegemonic and hierarchical attributes of the intrasubjective chronotopes emerging from the tales of male power figures. The narrators’ focus on predetermined temporality in the poems (e.g. “fate” in “The Philanthropist and the Jellyfish” and “providential plan” in “Lay of the Trilobite”) endows the main chronotopes with a sense of closure and purpose: history, from the philanthropist’s and the philosopher’s points of view, is male centred and driven by noble goals. Whilst the fate of these men espouses the ascending curve of evolution, placing them at the top of the hierarchical order, the jellyfish and trilobite do not pertain to such progressive forms of time-spaces. The local chronotopes that these motifs invoke, on the other hand, are open-ended and inherently purposeless. As a token of the past anchored in the present, the trilobite stands for ‘deep time’, i.e. a
far-reaching understanding of history from the origins of life. The jellyfish, similarly, is the perfect epitome of one of the most ancient and primitive creature (possessing no heart, brain, bones and blood, and being mostly made of water), almost unaltered by the timeframe of evolution. The presence of the two motifs, opening up wider (and non-human) timescales, challenges masculine and human-centred visions of history.

And then, quite natural and free
Out of his rocky bed,
That Trilobite he spoke to me
And this is what he said:
“I don’t know how the thing was done,
Although I cannot doubt it;
But Huxley – he if anyone
Can tell you all about it;

Yet this one jelly-fish,” I cried,
I’ll rescue if I may.
I’ll wade out with her through the tide
And leave her in the bay."

“I paused, my feelings to control,
To wipe away a tear —
It seemed to me a murmur stole
Out of the crystal sphere.

She said: "Your culture's incomplete,
Though your intention's kind;
The sand, the seaweed, and the heat
I do not really mind.

[“Lay of the Trilobite” stanza 3]

[“The Philanthropist & the Jelly-Fish”, 7-9]

The disruptive effect of this chronotopic clash between ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ time-spaces stands out in the stanzas above. In the poems, this disruption takes the form of a metrical inversion, placing an extra beat on the space marker “out” (“Out of his rocky bed”, in stanza 3 of “Lay of the Trilobite”; “Out of the crystal sphere”, in stanza 8 of “The Philanthropist and the Jellyfish”). These changes in meter suggest the function of the oppressed figures as disruptive agents, effecting the micro-temporality of the poems at the level of the lines. The preposition ‘out’ echoes the characters’ movement out of the repressive masculine chronotopes subjecting them to a predetermined and submissive fate. The “rocky bed” and the “crystal sphere” carry notions of domesticity, enclosure, idleness and sclerosis or frozen time, and to a certain extent align with the concepts of “Routine” and “Decorum” discredited in “Women’s

250 The jellyfish is one of the simplest and most ancient animal form that exists. A report published this year (2019) studies the fossilisation of Cambian medusozoans (soft-bodied creatures, quite similar to the modern jellyfish, on a site as old as 500 million years: Fu, Dongjing, Guanghui Tong, Tao Dai, Wei Liu, Yuning Yang, Yuan Zhang, Linhao Cui, et al. “The Qingjiang Biota—A Burgess Shale-Type Fossil Lagerstätte from the Early Cambrian of South China.” Science 363, no. 6433 (March 22, 2019): 1338–42.

251 The word “sphere” was politically connoted in Victorian discourses. It often referred to the dichotomy between the domestic (feminine) sphere and the public (masculine) sphere.
Future”. In that respect, the characters’ crawling out of these comfortable and belittling environments already challenges the time-space matrixes of the science chronotopes.

Interestingly, this chronotopic disruption also coincides with the moment when the oppressed figures make their voices heard for the first time (“he said”, introducing the trilobite’s voice; and “she said”, the jellyfish’s). As explored in the first chapter of my thesis, hybrid female voice in Marriott Watson’s poetry resorts to the use of an otherworldly language (e.g. an unarticulated “shrill” cry or “hollow and murmuring hoarse” noise) or uncanny silence to enhance the chronotopic rupture between the intersubjective chronotopes of the masculine protagonists and the spectral chronotopes that the ‘wild women’ unfurl. In Kendall’s poetry, on the other hand, the oppressed figures daringly take the floor to confront male time-space configurations.

The trilobite’s and jellyfish’s articulate – although somewhat less elaborate – language mimics scientific speech to bridge the gap that supposedly separated them from civilized men on the evolutionary scale and shaped the pyramidal configurations of the masculine chronotopes. As Moine contends, the trilobite’s and jellyfish’s roles as poetic doubles aim less to “disprove the alleged inferiority of non-human species” than to deny the alleged superiority of the scientists, in a deflationary manner rendered by the poems’ anticlimactic endings. In “Lay of the Trilobite”, the vocalization of the fossil (occurring as a “natural and free” process) introduces a confident diatribe against imperialist discourses justifying masculine superiority. In “The Philanthropist and the Jelly-Fish”, on the contrary, the voicing of the animal occurs rather late (stanza 8) and results from of a seemingly unnatural process. Two thirds of the poem unfurl the mock epic chronotope of the philanthropist, whose narrative only stops when, moved by his own speech, he pauses (stanza 7), allowing the jellyfish to intervene. Its voice, stealing out of its spherical body as a shy “murmur”, appears to work almost independently from the mouth of its speaker. The disembodiment of the female voice enhances the ventriloquist role of the poetic double, as well as the universal quality of her discourse, aimed at challenging male paternalistic and oppressive discourses.

The power reversal that occurs at the voicing of the oppressed figures affects the micro-temporality of the text through further metrical disruptions. In “Lay of the

Trilobite”, metrical changes occur throughout the trilobite’s speech – opening up on a spondee that immediately provokes a rupture with the chronotope of science, through the insistence on the fossil’s lack of knowledge (I don’t know). In stanza 3, the trilobite’s speech furthers this chronotopic rupture by enforcing the introduction of the first feminine rhymes, at odds with the masculine endings marking the intrasubjective time-space of the philosopher’s narration (“doubt it”; “about it”). Similarly, in stanza 4, these feminine endings both deconstruct and highjack the notions of “perfection” and “selection”. Stanza 5, centering on imperialism – the emblem of male superiority in Darwinian discourses – reaches a climax in the use of these rhymes, by alternating between masculine and feminine endings throughout, thus establishing an equalizing confrontation between the liminal discourse of the trilobite (speaking on behalf of all lower life forms) and the hegemonic and imperialistic discourse of the philosopher:

‘You’ve Kant to make your brains go round,
Hegel you have to clear them,
You’ve Mr Browning to confound,
And Mr Punch to cheer them!
The native of an alien land
You call a man and brother,
And greet with hymn-book in one hand
And pistol in the other!
[“Lay of the Trilobite”, stanza 5]

This conflict at the micro-level of the meter, opposing masculine and disruptive feminine (lower) forces, is all the more important in this stanza because of its multiple intra-references to famous masculine figures: Emmanuel Kant, Robert Browning and the editor of Punch. The trilobite’s speech (and the intrasubjective chronotope that it opens up) pushes alone against these canonical figures, and manages to maintain the balance of power, as evidenced by Kendall’s handling of the text’s micro-temporality.

The climax in the use of feminine endings also marks the starting point of the man’s gradual downfall in the anticlimactic second half. Stanza 6 opens up the time-space of war, depicted from the candid eyes of the trilobite255 (e.g. “You’ve canon and you’ve dynamite/To give the nations rest”), whose optimistic views enforce the introduction of a second layer of meaning, or transsubjective chronotope, decoded by

255 As in Voltaire’s novel Candide, the depiction of martial time-space through the eyes of a naïve character enables the author to enhance the atrocities of war as well as the incongruity of the political discourses that legitimise violence.
the reader. In the next stanza, the regularity of the opening line anchors the description of the trilobite as “gentle”, “stupid” and “free from woe” within the chronotope of evolution; these characteristics being traditionally attributed to women in Darwin’s discourses. Yet, as Moine argues, the “extinct [creature’s] self-deprecation is naïve” as it is “precisely because [it] remained in a primitive state that [it was] not corrupted by lies, murders, vain speculation, contradictory opinions and false certainties”.257

He was not a Crustacean. He has since discovered he was an Arachnid, or something similar. But he says it does not matter. He says they told him wrong once, and they may again. [“Lay of the Trilobite”, endnote]258

Such “false certainties” occupy the forefront of Kendall’s deflationary poetics, through her curious addition of an extra-diegetic note to her poem, directly referring to, and deriding Ray Lankester’s Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism. In his book (1880) Lankester argues that crustaceans among other species had been classified under the wrong categories and were actually degenerate versions of more complex life forms.259 Once again, Kendall’s chronotopic clash between ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ chronotopes illuminates the biased and constructed (if not fictitious) nature of science, at the source of unequal societies. By positioning himself at the margins of evolution time-spaces, the fossil manages to retain his moral integrity and to rise above the man whom he ironically praises. His claim at the end of stanza 7 that he “never took to rhyme” (a line uttered in perfect iambic rhythm) contests his inferiority, while conceding it as a way of extracting himself from the amoral timeframe of evolution.

The poem concludes on an anticlimactic stanza, wherein the philosopher accepts his defeat and admits that he would like to be freed from the restraints of the Darwinist chronotope himself (“I wish that Evolution could/Have stopped a little quicker”). The presence of feminine rhymes on “thicker” and “quicker” suggests the victory of the trilobite in the game of power that the poem stages: the chronotope of evolution has

256 Darwin, The Descent of Man, esp. chapter 19 (e.g.: “Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness” / “in the formation of her skull, [the female] is said to be intermediate between the child and the man.”)


258 As J. R. Holmes remarks in “The Lay of the Trilobite: Rereading May Kendall”, this endnote “at once displays the poet’s detailed biological knowledge by correcting an error in the original poem and repudiates that same knowledge as impermanent and so ultimately trivial”. This perspective on science is echoed by the caricature of Punch, in which the creature, represented with “antennae”, “is not a trilobite at all but a eurypterid or sea-scorpion, an entirely different form of extinct marine arthropod”.

been contaminated by non-human time-space and the marginal speech that it unfurls. Tellingly, the last lines (“To be a simple Trilobite/In the Silurian seas”) tying the poem into a loop, deconstruct the linearity of evolution, and embrace degenerative time.

‘To wander through the briny deep
I own I do not care;
I somehow seem to go to sleep
Here, there, or anywhere.

"When wild waves tossed me to and fro,
I never felt put out;
I never got depressed and low,
Or paralysed by doubt.

[“The Philanthropist and the Jellyfish”, stanzas 10-11]

In “The Philanthropist and the Jellyfish”, the animal’s female voice equally disrupts the masculine chronotope of power embodied by the philanthropist. The first line of stanza 9 (“She said: Your culture’s incomplete”) metrically enhances the first occurrence of the jellyfish as a grammatical subject whilst enhancing the effect of non-human time-spaces onto hegemonic structures. The final line of stanza 10 (encoded above), opening on a spondee, impedes the iambic flow of the poem by enhancing the importance of every spatial marker – “here”, “there” and “anywhere”. The jellyfish, previously limited to the “crystal sphere” of her body (i.e. by biological restraints as conceived by masculine scientific discourses) suddenly becomes ubiquitous and free to roam wherever the waves bring her. On the opening line of stanza 11 (above), the rhythmical insistence on the “wild waves”, reinforced by the alliteration in “w”, allows the jellyfish to adopt the epic dimension of the man’s chronotope for her own tale.

"It does not matter what may come,
I'm dead to woe or bliss:
I haven't a Sensorium,
And that is how it is."

[“The Philanthropist and the Jellyfish”]

The speech of the jellyfish expands to the end of the poem, endowing her with a status as a new narrator. The reversal in power dynamics is such that the animal has already integrated the jargon of scientists, and declares with confidence that she has no “Sensorium”. The assertive final line (“And that is how it is”) entrusts her with the final act of narration, as well as with the power to shed light on the objective truth.
4. Conclusion of Chapter 2

Chapter 2 has identified and mapped the interactions between three categories of chronotopes in May Kendall’s poetry. First, she invokes the time-spaces of evolution and progress, together with the ‘inhuman’ chronotopic configurations that they imply – either in terms of work discipline and its tyrannical clock counteracting lifetime, or pyramidal power structures relegating the marginal other to the outskirt. Second, she opens up ‘human’ chronotopes of dreams, holiday, leisure and poetic creation, undermined by the time-spaces that the industrial city (progress) opens up. Third, she conjures up ‘non-human’ chronotopes invoked by fantastic creatures matching Darwin’s definition of lower life forms, and the alienated or deep time that they invoke to disrupt masculine time-spaces (evolution). My chapter has shown how chronotopic clashes between inhuman time-spaces on the one hand and non-human/human on the other, resulting in final anticlimaxes (or punchlines), typify the author’s reaction to hegemonic masculine discourses and power structures.

Chapters 1-2 looked at the chronotopic logics inherent to each single-authored collection and the internal dialogues with masculine tradition that they opened up. Chapter 3 capitalizes on the generic nature of Bakhtin’s tool to map chronotopes in fin-de-siècle women’s poems at a cross-authorial level, seeking to highlight common time-space patterns and strategies against essentialist discourses.
CHAPTER 3: COMMON CHRONOTOPIE PATTERNS IN NEW WOMEN'S POETRY

1. Introduction: Building a New Woman Mythos

Chapter 1 and 2 have used the chronotope as a conceptual framework to close-read and map, at internal (prosody) and intertextual levels, the intersections of time-space, gender and genre in the works of Rosamund Marriott Watson and May Kendall. They have demonstrated the ways in which the poets appropriated hegemonic (or masculine) spatial-temporal configurations as an internal way of deconstructing such matrixes and introducing their own disruptive chronotopic aesthetics. In other words, the chronotope has enabled me to shed light on the writers’ poetical reactions to the wider literary, ideological and cultural context within which they were operating, as well as to the normative, masculine power structures that it implied. The focus of these experimental chronotopic case studies relied on the microanalysis of each poem and of the overarching time-space logics inherent to each single-authored collection.

Chapter 3 seeks to weave connections at a cross-authorial level. It capitalises on Bakhtin’s conceptualisation of the chronotope as a tool for establishing distinctions and categories in literature, and for determining the image of (wo)men in textual productions, as related to the historical stages that have marked their historical development. This section is therefore of generic and ideological nature. Essentially, it approaches fin-de-siècle women’s poems as dialogic spaces of cross-references and shared motifs, typifying the nature of the New Woman as collectively imagined. It regards poetic production as a literary practice, in Moine’s words, which elucidates the social identity of the fin-de-siècle woman poet who took part in wider artistic female communities. The chapter explores common patterns in the many chronotopes opened up by these women writers’ poems and the ways in which they opposed, as a group, essentialist masculine constructions of the feminine. It highlights New Women poets’ roles in generating multi-vocal, yet synchronised discourses against cultural domination, and in constructing a ‘New Woman’ mythos in their works.

To avoid the risk of clouding the diversity of chronotopes that co-exist, oppose and complement one another, both within each poet’s work as a whole and each poem, Chapter 3 compares fin-de-siècle men’s and women’s poetry through the focused lens of a variety of motifs – labyrinths, clocks, hour-glasses, cigarettes and the moon.

Moine, Women Poets in the Victorian Era, 2.
aim of this fragmentary approach is two-fold. Firstly, it allows me to highlight and celebrate the rich diversity of women’s poetical answers to their male counterparts, and to avoid the trap of essentialist considerations that would cast ‘feminine writing’ as a monolithic category. Secondly, it enables me to emphasize women writers’ desire to be recognized as equal and legitimate participants in the cultural, ideological and literary debates of their times. My study explores women’s treatments of culturally loaded motifs, empowering them both to assert their statuses as the friends and rivals of key figures such as Wilde and Symons (with whom they were almost all personally acquainted) and to challenge cultural domination through their revisions of these local chronotopes. Their refreshing remodelling of hackneyed, often misogynist motifs allows them to weave a chronotopic network of intra-references – finding its most telling metaphor in the women-only, non-binary, or lesbian communities promoted in the poems. This study elucidates the ways in which their revisions of masculine local chronotopes loaded with essentialist meaning underpin a liberating movement away from “patrilineal kinship” towards “female-centred” systems (e.g. matriarchy).

The chapter is divided into three sections, each of which is devoted to one local chronotope. The first section studies the motif of the city as a maze-like branching of streets in women’s poems and its function in feminising urban time-space. While the chronotopes of the pavement, the one-way street and the gaslight in male Decadent poetry reduced the ‘public woman’ to a sexual object locked within chronotopes of male desire, the maze or labyrinth motif enables female poets to cast ‘New (public) Women’ figures as independent desiring subjects and members of a wider poetic network. The second section focuses on the chronotope of the moon characterised by mythical, matriarchal, and at times cosmogonic time-spaces, wherein the lunar is synonymous with female poetic creation, lesbian desire and women-only societies. Their revisions oppose traditional poetic treatments of the moon in fin-de-siècle poems by Decadent men, wherein the essentialist feminine motif is a symbol of death or artistic sterility. The third section is devoted to the motifs of the clock, the hourglass and the cigarette as different types of chronotopic timers or ‘countdowns’ in New

261 Reminder: as in Bakhtin’s essay, the terms “motif” and “local chronotope” are used interchangeably.

262 S. Brooke Cameron and Danielle Bird, “Sisterly Bonds and Rewriting Urban Gendered Spheres in Amy Levy’s ‘The Romance of a Shop,’” Victorian Review 40, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 83. Their essay studies the ways in which sisterly bonds in Levy’s work create alternative structures of power in the novel, allowing women to access urban space while avoiding sexual objectification.
Women’s poetry, typifying their hopes and expectations. The chronotope of the future opened up in their poems contrasts with motifs of degeneration and entropy in poems by men, and sheds light on different gendered approaches to transitional time at the fin-de-siècle. It also places the New Woman – as opposed to the lonely city observer e.g. the Dandy or flâneur – at the centre of a wider chronotope of female solidarity.

2. Decadent Ariadne: Chronotopes of the Labyrinth

This section focuses on a recurring motif in late-Victorian women’s poetry: that of the city as a complex branching of streets in the form of a maze, a labyrinth, a patchwork, a sphinx-like puzzle or a riddle; and the ways in which it upholds and promotes a conception of the city as social, artistic and community space for women. It mostly concentrates on the poetry of Amy Levy with cross-references to Katharine de Mattos, Michael Field and Rosamund Marriott Watson, and explores the ways in which their mappings of the city as multidirectional time-spaces unfurl transgressive discourses on feminine identity, artistic networks and homoerotic desire. This section notably studies the ways in which the mythological figure of Ariadne enables Levy to cast the gender-free (thus potentially female) city stroller as one in sufficient control of her surroundings, aware of the multiple promises that the city has to offer, and determined to explore her sexual and social identity. To establish the wider field within which women poets were operating, this section contrasts their chronotopic depictions of the metropolis with those of men writers. I focus on the poems of Baudelaire, Wilde and Symons, showing how these canonical Decadent writers reduce the urban time-spaces inhabited by the ‘public woman’ to the metonymy of the street, gas-lamp or pavement and the forms of temporality that they entail.

Over the last decades, numerous academics have written on the trope of the city stroller or ‘eye consumer’ in fin-de-siècle male poetry, and considered whether female equivalents of the flâneur (i.e. flâneuse) or other urban icons (e.g. the passante returning the gaze of the male artist) could be conceptualised without difficulties. Janet Wolff famously stated in her book *Feminine Sentences* that such parallels were simply “rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century”, enhancing the

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263 For discussion around the different types of urban observers in fin-de-siècle literature, see: Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City, and Modernity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 19-20.

importance of gender for understanding literary depictions of the city. In her recent monograph entitled Flâneuse, Lauren Elkin reminds us that Amy Levy herself cast the “flâneuse” figure as a “creature of the imagination”; one she explored and contrived in her own poems. For Elkin, however, rejecting the term altogether (as Wolff advocates) would “limit the ways women interacted with the city to the ways men have”, and fail to deconstruct the rupture between “the man of the crowd” and “the woman of the street” (sex worker) posited in essentialist writings. Elkin offers to redefine the term “flâneuse”, not merely as a female flâneur, but as a “resourceful woman keenly attuned to the creative potential of the city”. She explains that “flâneuserie” (women walking the city) does not merely “changes the way [women] move through space”, but “intervenes in the organisation of space itself”, remodelled in women’s own terms.

The ways in which gendered differences in experiencing, conceiving and remodelling the metropolis underpin the very structures of urban time-space in literature have been explored in numerous works (such as Vadillo’s book on women poets’ usage of modern public transports in London and how it shaped their artistic visions of the city). In a recent essay, Kate Flint, for instance, explores the motifs of the street and the twilight in the short stories, paintings and poems of women such as Charlotte Mew as arenas for staging women’s same-sex encounters and lesbian desire within the city. Analysing the chronotopes of the labyrinth in women’s poetry allows me to shed new light on conceptualisations of the urban New Woman (or flâneuse, in line with Elkin’s definition), and the ways in which she took part in


267 Vadillo, Women Poets and Urban Aesthetics.

alternative female-centred chronotopes forcing essentialist definitions of the ‘public woman’ (conflated with the prostitute), based on sexual objectification, to collapse.

2.1 Chronotopes of the ‘Public Woman’: Baudelaire, Symons and Wilde

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d’une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l’ourlet;

Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son œil, ciel livide où germe l’ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Un éclair… puis la nuit! – Fugitive beauté
Dont le regard m’a fait soudainement renaitre,
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l’éternité?

Ailleurs, bien loin d’ici! trop tard! jamais peut-être!
Car j’ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais.
Ô toi que j’eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!

[Charles Baudelaire, “À une Passante”]

The deafening road around me roared.
Tall, slim, in deep mourning, making majestic grief,
A woman passed, lifting and swinging
With a pompous gesture the ornamental hem of her garment,

Swift and noble, with statuesque limb.
As for me, I drank, twitching like an old roué,
From her eye, livid sky where the hurricane is born,
The softness that fascinates and the pleasure that kills,

A gleam… then night! O fleeting beauty,
Your glance has given me sudden rebirth,
Shall I see you again only in eternity?

Somewhere else, very far from here! Too late! Perhaps never!
For I do not know where you flee, nor you where I am going.
O you whom I would have loved, O you who knew it!

[Charles Baudelaire, “To a Passerby”]

Baudelaire’s poem “À une Passante” perfectly epitomises the ways in which chronotopic configurations in the city directly inform, and are underpinned by, male characterisations of the ‘public woman’ in Decadent poetry. In the lines quoted above, the urban observer identifies a woman in the crowd walking down the street. The long perspective offered by the road exactly corresponds to the speaker’s field of vision, i.e. the intrasubjective chronotope circumscribed by his gaze. Within such masculine time-space, the close-knit, even symbiotic relationship between the ‘public woman’ and the city is established through deliberate semantic blurring on line 2; a grammatical ambivalence that has often been poorly conveyed, if not overlooked, by English translators. The adjectival sequence in the line (literally “long/slender, thin, mourning, majestic pain”) can equally qualify the woman (l.3) who follows the description, or the street that precedes it (l.1). The lyric voice’s gaze thus conflates the two motifs as one inseparable entity. Within the intrasubjective time-space tied to his consciousness, the female passer-by does not solely situate herself within the time-space of the city: commodified, she becomes the long, thin street, echoed in the line of her slender leg, and comes to embody fleeting time (“Un éclair… puis la nuit”). Unlike Marriott Watson’s poetry wherein the identification of wild, monstrous women with the spectral chronotope of the metropolis fosters notions of female emancipation, freed from the masculine, normative restraints imposed on the feminine, this poem’s association of the two locks the ‘public woman’ within the chronotope of male desire.

The brevity of the scene and the shock that it produces corroborate Parsons’ definition of the ‘passante’ as a metaphor for a specific modern experience, i.e. that of the “sudden collision with the unknown, a transient moment of communication, and then move away back into anonymity”. This climax/anti-climax sequence echoes the temporality of male desire (pre- and post-scopic consumption), culminating at the exact moment when the woman returns the glance of the flâneur and gives him a pleasant feeling of rebirth. At this particular instant of scopic reciprocity, time-space matrixes change to embrace new mirror-like configurations (as suggested by the chiasm of the penultimate line), in which the passante becomes the man’s double.

272 My translation.
273 Parsons, Streetwalking the Metropolis, 72.
Despite the equalising effect of the visual exchange, the intrasubjective nature of the overarching chronotope testifies to the imbalance of gendered power in the city, where women’s presence remains determined by the male gaze and patriarchal norms. Her role in the metropolis is both timed by masculine desire (restricted to an instant), and limited to his field of vision (the street). In that respect, the chronotope of the city as construed from the flâneur’s eyes is inseparable from the chronotope of his desire, underpinning the city’s spatial-temporal configurations. The final opposition between the verbs ‘to go’ (“je vais”, for the man) and ‘to flee’ (“tu fuis”, for the woman) typifies different modalities of movement in the city and casts the ‘public woman’ as a prey. While her escape from his field of vision could endow her with a certain degree of freedom, its being romanticised by the speaker confines, and by logical extension negates, this freedom by locking the woman within the man’s chronotope of desire.

The conflation of the ‘public woman’ with the street in Baudelaire’s poem finds echoes in poetic treatments of the pavement and gas-lamp (or streetlight) motifs in other Decadent poems. In Symons’ “Nora”,274 for instance, the female dancer is associated with the “grey hour” of night (l.2) and tied to the long stretch of ground that the “midnight pavement” (l.5) constitutes – a chronotopic motif that suggests public women’s stasis both in time and space. In Wilde’s “Impression du Matin”275 and Symons’ “Impression”,276 the street lamp opens up similar notions of spatial-temporal immobility. Wilde’s poem, as explored in Chapter 1, opposes a “pale woman all alone” (l.13) to the bustling “waking life” of the city (l.10); and the artificial light in which she stands, to the rising sun and the intersubjective chronotope that it entails (from which she is excluded). In Symons’ work, the street lamp sheds light onto the woman’s “lifted face” (l.3), putting the spotlight on her stasis and relegation to the margins.

Two types of chronotopes appear to emerge from these characterisations of the ‘public woman’, whether in the form of a sexualised muse or fallen woman. The motif of the long, one-way street delimited by the man’s field of vision in Baudelaire’s poem works as an open-ended axis, determining the public woman’s presence in the city in terms of one-directional space and fleeting time. The sexualised muse passes by and disappears, temporally bound to an ephemerality reflecting her role as a sexual trigger

for the flâneur within the intrasubjective chronotope of his desire. In Symons’ and Wilde’s urban chronotopes, on the other hand, the street (of which the motifs of the pavement and the gaslight are defining elements) takes the form of an independent segment, almost detached from the rest of the metropolis, and binding the sexually deviant woman to the margins of the city (space) and night hours (time).

In Symons’ “Renée”\(^\text{277}\), the poet juxtaposes these types of chronotopes and complicates or blurs spatial-temporal distinctions between the two:

Rain, and the night, and the old familiar door,
And the archway dim, and the roadway desolate;
Faces that pass, and faces, and more, yet more:
Renée! come, for I wait.

Pallid out of the darkness, adorably white,
Pale as the spirit of rain, with the night in her hair,
Renée undulates, shadow-like, under the light,
Into the outer air. […]

Renée comes to me, she the sorceress, Fate,
Subtly insensible, softly invincible, she:
Renée, who waits for another, for whom I wait,
To linger a moment with me.

[Arthur Symons, “Renée”, extract]

On the second line of the text, the coexistence of the “archway dim” through which Renée is bound to appear, with the “roadway desolate” where she will be stationed at night, waiting for “another”, conflates the two previously distinct characterisations of the urban woman as a passer-by and a sex-worker. Here, the street is both an axis and a segment, and encapsulates the female figure within both fleeting (“pass”; “undulates, shadow-like”) and static time (“waits”; “linger”). By giving a panorama of the (lack of) possibilities that women are given within the masculine city chronotope, the poet’s two-fold perspective on Renée strengthens the pre-determined reading of women’s roles (further enhanced through the mention of the sorcerous “Fate” at the end) to arouse male sexual desire in the time-space of the metropolis. While her waiting for “another” complicates notions of desire, her imprisonment within the chronotope of the street (or male desire) precludes her freedom in, and appropriation of the city.

\(^{277}\) Symons, London Nights, 6.
2.2 Chronotopes of the Labyrinth: Levy, de Mattos and Marriott Watson

What ails my senses thus to cheat?
What is it ails the place,
That all the people in the street
Should wear one woman's face?

The London trees are dusty-brown
Beneath the summer sky;
My love, she dwells in London town,
Nor leaves it in July.

O various and intricate maze,
Wide waste of square and street;
Where, missing through unnumbered days,
We twain at last may meet!

And who cries out on crowd and mart?
Who prates of stream and sea?
The summer in the city's heart--
That is enough for me.


Fin-de-siècle women’s poetry runs counter to the essentialist predetermination of the New Woman and of her function within urban time-spaces. In Levy’s city songs, for instance, the street motif in which the ‘New (public) Woman’ evolves becomes plural, multidirectional and mysterious; affecting the motif’s characterisation as an independent subject. While Levy’s gender-free speakers and recurring references, or addresses, to female lovers invite contemporary readers to experience the scene from the perspective of the flâneur (and his chronotope of desire), the poet opens up alternative readings, wherein the city takes the form of a non-binary or homoerotic chronotope. While desire remains a structuring force in the depiction of the streets, Levy’s movement away from heteronormative structures invokes diverging modalities of desire in her poems, informed by new chronotopic configurations in the metropolis. Her lesbian poetics and depiction of the city as a complex branching of streets, echoing the multiple promises that it has to offer, is explored in her urban collection A London Plane-Tree (1889), and especially in her poem “London in July” – quoted above.

Despite her use of the words “street” and “square” in the singular, adjectives such as “intricate” (l.9) and “wide” (l.10) convey a sense of multitude and expansion

in urban space. On line 9, “various” (used to denote plurality) qualifies the singular “maze”, and by metaphorical expansion, the myriad of possibilities and identities that the metropolis encompasses. This depiction of the city as a multicursal space echoes the chronotope that Levy opens up in her famous elegiac work “London Poets”:

(In Memoriam.)

They trod the streets and squares where now I tread,
With weary hearts, a little while ago;
When, thin and grey, the melancholy snow
Clung to the leafless branches overhead;
Or when the smoke-veiled sky grew stormy-red
In autumn; with a re-arisen woe
Wrestled, what time the passionate spring winds blow;
And paced scorched stones in summer:- they are dead.

The sorrow of their souls to them did seem
As real as mine to me, as permanent.
To-day, it is the shadow of a dream,
The half-forgotten breath of breezes spent.
So shall another soothe his woe supreme-
'No more he comes, who this way came and went.'


In the lines above, the labyrinthine chronotope that shapes the capital is a particularly surprising one. As Levy accepts the legacy of her literary grandmothers and identifies herself as part of their wider feminine network, she expands the limits of her poem’s intersubjective chronotope to encompass a diachronic reading of the city. Placed at the centre of a maze of historical references, the poet as a late-Victorian Ariadne²⁸⁰ treads or ‘threads’ the city streets at an intergenerational level. While labyrinthine structures are usually defined by spatial complexity (e.g. “the streets and squares” in the poem’s opening line), this particular occurrence of a maze-like chronotope mostly relies on its temporal layers, turning London into a feminine palimpsest.²⁸¹

In Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism, Vadillo discusses Levy’s “London Poets” as a “manifesto for London-based women [who] understood the key role of the

²⁸⁰ In Greek mythology, Ariadne falls in love with Theseus and gives him a red thread to allow him to find his way through her father’s labyrinth and defeat the woman-eating Minotaur at its centre.
²⁸¹ Interestingly, Virginia Blain explores the lesbian text as a palimpsest in “Michael Field, the Two-Headed Nightingale: Lesbian Text as Palimpsest.” Women’s History Review 5, no. 2 (June 1, 1996): 239–57. She argues that the lesbian poets combined “earlier meanings with later ones” (p. 241) allowing future generations to read their queer poetry with a different meaning, freed from the constraints of present times. While Levy’s own palimpsest merges past and present, it may include future times as an additional layer, and hint at the ever-expanding network of women writers that her poem creates.
city as both a poetic archive and a place for signification and being”. She also notes that in Levy’s original manuscript, the last line of the poem read “She comes no more …” (instead of “He”) and was altered before publication (most probably for censorship reasons). This anecdote sheds significant light on the intention of the writer to promote the city as shared space for female artistic (and erotic) interaction. Her conception and aesthetization of the urban, promoting the cultural richness of the city as a feminized chronotope and a catalyst for the blooming of women’s communities, found a concrete echo in the flourishing numbers of literary networks that enabled female meetings in the 1880-90s. While Vadillo brilliantly maps the nomadic districts at the core of Levy’s urban aestheticism, which facilitated women’s encounters (in Bloomsbury, Kensington and St John’s Wood), the key function that fin-de-siècle women’s poetic productions themselves played in advocating such communities remains to be studied.

Comparing the city with a maze or labyrinth at the fin-de-siècle was rather common. Recent academic works have shown how Gothic perceptions of the city as a threatening and mysterious place inspired depictions of the squalid streets of East End at the turn of the century. As Minna Vuohelainen states, the “trope of Darkest London” as a gloomy but “powerful, and seductive labyrinth” became “central in literature and social thought”, inciting the upper classes to experience the lugubrious atmosphere of the poorest streets – a voyeuristic practice known as ‘slumming’. The image of the Cretan labyrinth, home of the Minotaur, had recently been mobilised by W. T. Stead to fit the agenda of his sensational campaign against child prostitution. Published in 1885 (i.e. four years ahead of Levy’s A London Plane Tree) as a series of controversial articles in The Pall Mall Gazette, Stead’s “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” denounced the sexual exploitation of young girls by rich aristocrats within the capital. Despite Stead’s criticism of such gendered power dynamics in the city, his revision of the Cretan labyrinth (in the extract quoted below) casts women in the city as victims, “flung” into the “maw of the London Minotaur” and disorientating “maze” of its “brotheldom”, from which they cannot find their way out. In Stead’s mind, women do

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282 Vadillo, Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism, 57.
283 For discussion around emerging women’s literary networks at the fin-de-siècle, see: Linda Hughes, A Club of Their Own, 233-60.
284 Vadillo, Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism, 37.
not willingly enter the labyrinthine metropolis and their presence in the public time-space of the city is a life-threatening aberration:

[In ancient times, Athens] was compelled by her conqueror to send once every nine years a tribute to Crete of seven youths and seven maidens. […] On arrival her passengers were flung into the famous Labyrinth of Daedalus, there to wander about blindly until [they] were devoured by the Minotaur, a frightful monster, half man, half bull, the foul product of an unnatural lust. […] This very night in London, and every night, year in and year out, not seven maidens only, but many times seven, [will] be flung into the Cretan labyrinth [and] offered up as the Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon. Maidens they were when this morning dawned, but [tomorrow] they will find themselves within the portals of the maze of London brotheldom. Within that labyrinth wander, like lost souls, the vast host of London prostitutes, whose numbers no man can compute, but who are probably not much below 50,000 strong. […] The maw of the London Minotaur is insatiable, and none that go into the secret recesses of his lair return again. […] London’s lust annually uses up many thousands of women, [slain] in the service of vice.


In the poems quoted above, Levy reverses the chronotopic dynamic created by Stead by recasting women as independent subjects, navigating the intricate nexus of streets in London with ease. Her depiction of the capital as a maze (multicursal) rather than a disorientating labyrinth (unicursal) suppresses claustrophobic connotations and fosters freedom of movement for her emancipated streetwalker. In the same way that Ariadne was able to appropriate the labyrinth that Daedalus had built for her as a dancing ground, Levy’s New Women freely evolve within the Londonian maze.

While the figure of Ariadne as a forsaken lover in the second part of the myth appealed to various male and female artists across the long nineteenth-century,287 fin-de-siècle women writers rather displayed a penchant for the third part of the plot when Ariadne becomes the wife of Bacchus – and by extension one of his Decadent dancers. Michael Field, for instance, revise the trope of Ariadne’s meeting with the god of wine

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287 In the second part of the myth, Theseus abandons Ariadne in spite of her help in the labyrinth. For discussions on Ariadne as a deserted woman in Victorian literature, see: Glennis Stephenson, “Forsaken Women: The Voice of Frustrated Female Desire.” Victorian Review 15, no. 1 (1989): 1–8. Among the authors that Stephenson lists features Felicia Hemans and her poem “Properzia Rossi”.

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in their Tintoretto-inspired ekphrastic poem\textsuperscript{288} (see painting in Annexe 4) and “impart agency” to the woman “by rendering Bacchus as her patient supplicant”.\textsuperscript{289} Levy’s selective reading of the first part of the myth is rather singular, but undeniably serves her urban aesthetics by enabling her to subvert reductive masculine representations of the ‘public woman’. By depicting the city as multi-directional, in both time and space, she enriches poetic characterizations of the New Woman.

Despite her main focus on space, Levy also enhances the potential of London as an intricate maze through her use of temporal modality. In their poems, Symons, Wilde and Baudelaire maintain the upper hand on their encounters with the other sex by reducing (both in terms of space and time) the size of the stage on which it occurs. Levy, on the other hand, finds greater interest in what \textit{may} happen, in the potentiality of an encounter between the speaker and lover (“Where, missing through unnumbered days/We twain at last may meet”, ll.11-12) than in its actualisation. The expansion of her chronotope merely answers the need for large amounts of space in this particular modal scenario. It is interestingly through the deferral of this potential love encounter – that is, through Levy’s aesthetization of the city as a waiting space – that the speaker’s repressed desires acquire transformative powers and endow each pedestrian with the face of her beloved (l.4). The sustained illusion that it creates in the mind of the speaker ironically upholds the role of the modern city as a potential women-only chronotope for artistic interaction and for the expression of homoerotic desire.

Levy’s depiction of her labyrinthine chronotope in such contingent terms (i.e. a form of temporality expressing what may not necessarily happen) empowers her to deconstruct masculine determinist readings of the roles of women in the metropolis. In his article on “The Chronotope of Humanness”, Gary Morson reminds us that for Bakhtin, the prerequisite for disruptive liberty lies in a conception of time as “open”, i.e. running counter to determinist settings.\textsuperscript{290} Levy’s poetics of contingency in the city incidentally shares its chronotopic pattern with several poems by fin-de-siècle women. As Emily Harrington states in her chapter on Dollie Radford’s work, the expression

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{288} Michael Field, \textit{Sight and Song} (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1892), 82. Poem entitled “Marriage of Bacchus and Ariadne” and inspired by: Tintoretto, \textit{Bacchus, Venus and Ariadne}, oil on canvas, Venice: Palazzo Ducale, 1576-77 (Annexe 4).


\textsuperscript{290} Morson, “The Chronotope of Humanness”, 95.
\end{flushright}
of “active anticipation and desire” in 1880-90s women’s poetry radically opposes the disempowering conception of expectation as “absence of action”. By endowing the New Woman with the virtue of patience, women poets thus elevate waiting “to an important ethical and aesthetic status”. In contrast, Harrington argues, poems by fin-de-siècle men on the issue of waiting either manifest strong confidence in obtaining the object of their desire, or a deep sense of emasculation.\textsuperscript{291} Levy’s projection of her speaker’s desire into the future sphere (as opposed to the male chronotope of desire, inscribed in present and fleeting time) typifies her own modality of eroticism – i.e. one that does not define itself through scopic consumption, objectification and possession.

Katharine de Mattos’ urban poem “By the Embankment” both corroborates this analysis of modal temporality in the maze-like metropolis and challenges Levy’s optimism. Her work, which has been overlooked by critics, was personally selected by Marriott Watson for her periodical \textit{Sylvia’s Journal},\textsuperscript{292} and deemed by Hughes to be the poem that struck “the most modern note”\textsuperscript{293} among the ones the issue featured:

\begin{quote}
When Thames betwixt its prison walls.
Brims strong and high,
Then the current of its song
Up Hope doth fly
Bursting her bonds.
Who may say why?

Grey mud-flats often span the course,
A thin dull thread,
And thought crawls on its level way,
Bitter yet dead:
That moves like lead.

[Katharine de Mattos, “By the Embankment”\textsuperscript{294}]
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{292} Rosamund Marriott Watson assumed the editorship of the periodical \textit{Sylvia’s Journal} – previously known as \textit{Sylvia’s Home Journal} – from 1893 to 1894, in which she published numerous talented women poets such as May Kendall and Nora Hopper. While the journal was formally associated with domesticity, Marriott Watson placed the “unmistakable stamp of the aesthete on the magazine” through her emphasis on poetry, the visual arts and artistic illustration (Hughes: 1996, 175).

\textsuperscript{293} Hughes, Graham R., 179-180.

It is interesting to analyse the poem’s chronotopic approach to the city in the light of Ariadne’s myth, with the Thames’ “prison walls” (l.1) as those of the Cretan labyrinth, and the “thin dull thread” (l.8) as the one that the Greek heroine gave her lover to guide him through Daedalus’ labyrinth. Even the “lead” (l.12) colour of the thread invokes its verbal equivalent (to lead) and may support this figurative reading. Despite the use of the pronoun “its” in the early lines of the poem, the river of “thought” (l.9) is feminized at the end of the first stanza, when notions of emancipation pervade the lines (“Bursting her bonds”, l.5). In the labyrinthine chronotope of the city, the speaker is both led and embodied by the Thames, her poetic double. Unlike the disempowering conflation of the ‘public woman’ with the motif of the street in Baudelaire’s poem, the identification of the woman and the river in De Mattos’ piece conveys a sense of liberation. The serpentine shape of the Thames suggests both the thread of a supportive Ariadne, and the wandering mind of the lyric voice, attempting to come to terms with her identity, hopes and desires. The “sluggish” flow (l.11) of the stream of mud in the river carries connotations of paralysis, which may suggest the speaker’s difficulty to navigate between moments of stasis and emancipating moments of flying hope (l.4).

While Marriott Watson’s treatment of the metropolis as labyrinthine time-space is generally more optimistic than De Mattos’ and espouses the emancipatory lines of Levy’s temporal modality, it shares with “By the Embankment” connections between the city and the serpentine streams of the mind. The words ‘maze’ and ‘thread’ (as both a noun and a verb) are omnipresent in her poems on dreams, death and the city. In “Chimaera” (quoted in Chapter 1, section 2), the shining “golden eyes” (l.4) of the streetlamps endow the sphinx-like “roadway” (l.3) with maze-like characteristics, by unfurling the enigmatic unknown and construing the city as multi-directional time-space. The motif of the gaslight in this opening breaks with male

295 In “Epitaph”, the lyric voice prays for his/her deceased lover to explore the time-space of afterlife by threading through the “measureless mazes” of slumber. In “The Master-Singer”, the soft song of the “golden falls” seems to “thread the dim maze of some distant dreams”. In “To a Child” dealing with much darker topics, the mother’s imagination plunges her into the chronotope of death, in which she threads dreams “peopled with changeful shapes of doubt and dread”, and finds a “prison” in the “weary maze” of the “darkling street”. The “golden head” of her child works as a thread that brings her back into the time-space of reality, symbolized by the hearth. See also: “Hesternae Rosae” (“And who are they whose happy feet/ May thread that petal-clustered maze”), “The House of Dreams (“the shadowy maze of corridors and walls”) and “The Bourne” (Ah, Princess! Grasp the golden threads/Rise up and follow fearlessly”). For the depiction of Ariadne as a forsaken lover, see “Vespertilia” in which the golden-laced (or threaded) sandals of the undead vampire-woman open up the chronotope of a past in which she followed her lover (as Ariadne tied her fate with Theseus) and casts her as a victim in search of new amorous experiences.
poets’ treatments of the motif by turning into a symbol of freedom. The enticing call of the mysterious city leads the speaker to daydream about a lover whose gender-free identity opens up homoerotic interpretations (or autoerotic, as Hughes points out296). The city’s beat echoed in the quickened pulse of the speaker invokes possibilities of same-sex desire and women’s interaction within the promising and distant city.

“O the long, long street and the sweet
Sense of the night, of the Spring!
Lamps in a glittering string,
Pointing a path for our feet.

Pointing and beckoning – where?
Far out of thought, out of view,
Deep through the dusk and the dew:
What but seems possible there?

O the dark Spring night and the bright
Glint of the lamps in the street!
Strange is their summons, and sweet,
O my beloved, to-night!”

[Marriott Watson, “Nocturn”]

In another poem by Marriott Watson (above) entitled “Nocturn”, the “long, long street” in the first line overcomes barriers and opens up the perspective offered by the one-directional street in poems by men, by endowing it with seemingly infinite length (furthered by the blurring darkness of the night). The “glittering string” of the lamps (l.3, my emphasis) illuminating the path, similarly runs counter to the sense of stasis that was associated with the motif in poems by Symons and Wilde, and invokes, once again, the chronotope of Ariadne, freely ‘threading’ the labyrinthine chronotope. The spatial expansion of the roadway allows open time to pervade the second stanza through a series of questions (“Pointing and beckoning – where?”, l.5; “What but seems possible there?”, 8) which, as in Levy’s poem, work against the determinist reading of the city as practised by the ‘public woman’ in poems by men. The imagery to which Marriott Watson resorts is incidentally reminiscent of that used in Amy Levy’s earlier piece “A March Day in London”, wherein “the gas-lamps gleam in a golden line” (l.18) as the time-space coordinates of the poem become liberatingly

blurry. Marriott Watson’s tribute to her friend (who took her own life shortly after the publication of her collection) may encourage us to read “Nocturn” as another form of maze, weaving the poem’s lines into a network of feminine intra-references (just as “London Poets” promotes a women’s tradition) in the chronotope of the modern city.

3. **Sisters of Artemis: Chronotopes of the Moon**

This section studies chronotopes of the moon in fin-de-siècle women’s poetry and evidences the ways in which writers such as Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, A. Mary F. Robinson, Mathilde Blind, Michael Field and Rosamund Marriott Watson thwarted hegemonic discourses that posited the lunar feminine as sterile, derivative and self-reflective – that is, as the antithesis of the creative. In their answers to male Decadents, these women poets capitalised on ancient tales and pagan traditions (e.g. the cult of Artemis) to posit the moon as a feminised chronotope characterised by artistic fertility, same-sex desire and matriarchal power structures, breaking with masculine tradition.

I would not be the Moon, the sickly thing,
To summon owls and bats upon the wing;
For when the noble Sun is gone away,
She turns his night into a pallid day.

She hath no air, no radiance of her own,
That world unmusical of earth and stone.
She wakes her dim, uncoloured, voiceless hosts,
Ghost of the Sun, herself the sun of ghosts.

The mortal eyes that gaze too long on her
Of Reason’s piercing ray defrauded are.
Light in itself doth feed the living brain;
That light, reflected, but makes darkness plain.

[Mary E. Coleridge, “In Dispraise of the Moon”]^{297}

In her poem “In Dispraise of the Moon”, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge takes a rather unusual stance against one of the most hackneyed motifs at the end of the century: the lunar.^{298} Academics have recently defined her place within the broader canon of late-Victorian women’s poetry as marginal and somehow puzzling. Emily Harrington goes as far as to exclude her from the “literary conversation” in which most fin-de-siècle women were engaged (through meetings, exchanges of letters, reviews, and gift

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Three books. For Alison Chapman, Coleridge sought to embrace the status of external commentator of her days and deliberately strived for poetic contextlessness. While her choice to position herself at the peripheries of the influential literary circles of the capital (where she lived) sheds light on the singularity of her approach to the motif, her poem is neither contextless nor isolated from the wider framework of fin-de-siècle women’s poetry. For what Coleridge finds unworthy of her poetics is not the motif itself, but its long-standing associations with misogynistic conceptions of the feminine (“I would not be the Moon”) – i.e. the cultural implications that this local chronotope carried at the turn of the century. The poet here challenges the derivative and imitative qualities of the lunar time-space (as metaphorically represented by reflective light) and its association with devouring temptresses draining the sun’s creative energy (l.2).

The chronotope on which the poet turns her back is omnipresent in Decadent works by men. Their conception of the moon-woman as a “pallid” (l.4) reproduction of the solar masculine (“Ghost of the Sun”, l.8) was part of a wider ideological framework, and echoed the arguments of the press against the ‘manly’ New Woman. In her book Sexual Anarchy, Elaine Showalter comments on the war that was waged against this emerging female figure at the fin-de-siècle in the pages of Punch and The Yellow Book. Among the countless alarming stories that were released on the topic in the 1880-90s, an anonymous novel entitled The Revolt of the Man, later attributed to Walter Besant, capitalised on the fear of a female insurrection to denigrate women’s cultural and historical significance. His intention is evident in chapter 6 of the book, when a female character contrasts men’s creative genius with women’s imitative bent in the exact terms that Coleridge’s poem deplores: “The sun is masculine – he creates. The moon is feminine – she only reflects”. As elucidated by Showalter in Daughters of Decadence, the aesthete was “invariably male”; and decadence defined itself against

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299 Harrington, Second Person Singular, 178.
301 Harrington for instance compares Coleridge’s poem “Gone” with the works of Alice Meynell and Michael Field. Harrington, Second Person Singular, 178-182.
304 Besant, The Revolt of Man, 161.
the “biological creativity of women”.\textsuperscript{305} Chained to nature, women had no sense of art: they procreated, reproduced perishable beings, but did not create \textit{ex-nihilo}.

This denial of women’s ability for creative genius finds an echo in Coleridge’s depiction of the ‘moon-woman chronotope’ as a failed artistic work: “unmusical” (I.6) to the ears, and dull to the eyes (“having no air, no radiance of her own”, 1.5; “dim, uncoloured”, 1.7). The writer thus characterises the time-space of the lunar in terms of \textit{dispossession} as evidenced by her use of negations, depriving prefixes and suffixes, and \textit{derivation}, both in terms of time (the moon comes after the sun) and of space (refracted light). The absence of visual and vocal artistic stimuli in this chronotope, coupled with the presence of markers such as “earth” and “stone” (I.6) that convey a sense of sclerosis, coincide with the temporal stillness invoked by the moon in the final stanza – when her Medusa-like gaze catches the eyes of her admirers for “too long” (I.9). In this respect, the moon chronotope both stands for and engenders death.

In “Invocations”, re-worked and published in the 1901 edition of her \textit{Collected Poems}, A. Mary F. Robinson challenges this portrayal of the moon as a sickly pale orb of reflected light, making the night look plainer than the day. The chronotope of the moon in her poem invokes a sense of vitality that diffuses creative energies:

\begin{quote}
O space of the moon in the starless heaven,
Raining a whiteness on moorland and sea, –
Falling as lightly and purely as dew,
All of the shadow thou filterest through;
O space of the moon in the starless heaven,
Surely the night is the shadow of thee!
\end{quote}

[\textit{A. Mary F. Robinson, “Invocations”, stanza 2}]\textsuperscript{106}

Capitalising on long-standing, essentialist connections between the moon-woman and the world of shadows, nature, and virginity (or sterility), Robinson subverts masculine tradition to convey notions of female power. In her revised chronotope, the moon emits her own light, powerful enough to filter through darkness – thus allowing the poet to embrace the motif as her creative double. In her bright almightiness, the moon-woman overshadows the sky in the final twist of the stanza, shifting her cultural relation to

\textsuperscript{305} Elaine Showalter, ed. \textit{Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle} (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1993), x.

\textsuperscript{106} A. Mary F. Robinson, \textit{The Collected Poems Lyrical and Narrative of A. Mary F. Robinson} (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901), 7. Here “sickly” plays on “sickle” and “sick”, casting the moon as both ill and incomplete.
shades – from what she is and what she produces, to what she casts, in the same way the sun does. The repetition of the “space of the moon” (my italics) emphasizes her power over the celestial realm, and hints at the chronotopic potential of the motif for late-Victorian women’s poetry. Unlike Coleridge, most women poets at the fin-de-siècle revised the moon motif to open up feminised chronotopes of poetic creation. While the ways in which Decadent men described the lunar feminine in their poems have received much attention over the last decades, women poets’ answers to their peers’ misogynistic aesthetics through their revisions of the motif remain unexplored.

3.1 Lunar Chronotopes of Death: Laforgue, Wilde and Symons

As Dijkstra notes in his book *Idols of Perversity*, male poets at the fin-de-siècle “came to see something lunar in all of woman’s attributes”. In their Decadent poetry especially, this resulted in intensely sexualised aesthetics or chronotopes of the lunar. The connections – either intrinsic to their original myths, or invoked – that these poets drew between the moon and fictitious figures such as Diana (standing for virginity and wilderness), Hecate (ghosts and witchcraft) or the biblical figure of Salome (seduction and treachery) typified their multifaceted, and often contradictory conceptions of the feminine as pure, untamed, threatening, deceitful, deadly and distant. Whether as a femme fatale, or a vain woman, the moon served to open up time-spaces of death and sterility, endowing lunar chronotopes with the same qualities that justified Coleridge’s rejection of the trope. In the Decadent poetry of French poet Jules Laforgue, the moon-woman takes the form of a “dead mirror” and “a fatal lighthouse” in “Climat, Faune et Flore de la Lune”; and “a blind star” washed off by “deluges”, an “eye as sterile as suicide” and a “raft of the Nihil” in “Clair de Lune”. In these instances, the feminine is both deceased, undead, generates death, and imitates lifeless objects. Laforgue’s characterisation of the moon as a symbol of apocalyptic, devouring nothingness finds multiple echoes in poems by fin-de-siècle English male writers:

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The sea is flecked with bars of grey,
The dull dead wind is out of tune,
And like a withered leaf the moon
Is blown across the stormy bay.


In Wilde’s “Les Silhouettes”, the chronotope of decay in the opening stanza invokes a shrivelled moon, “blown across the stormy bay” like a “withered leaf”. Its presence, as in Coleridge’s poem, drains the world of its creative energies. Within its associated chronotope, the music of the “dull, dead” wind is made “out of tune” and corroborates ideas of the feminine as synonymous with artistic sterility. In Symons’ poetry, wherein the lunar woman is a deceiving femme fatale, death is brought to the forefront. In his series of ekphrastic poems “Studies in Strange Sins”, commenting on Beardsley’s drawings for Wilde’s play Salome, the moon is not only associated with barrenness: it becomes a harbinger of men’s self-destruction. The first poem of this series, entitled “The Woman in the Moon”, starts where Mary E. Coleridge concludes her poem: at a moment of time suspension and admiration for the moon-woman, as conveyed by the aphoristic (and ekphrastic) dimension of its opening line.

A naked youth adores the mocking Sun,
With a woman’s side long eyes and lips,
Before unto the stormless Sea he dips.
The dark girl has the weariness of one
Who, after being statiated, is not won;
He, with some fever in his finger-tips,
Urges the fever in the girl who strips
Her body naked. Sinister, alone,
The dishevelled seaweed shifts under their feet;
Upon the margin of the moonless sea
What shall the end be of their agony?
He to Salome: It is the moon we see,
And not the Sun. O moon’s maiden, O cheat,
The globe of the Earth, fruit from a fruitless Tree!”

[Arthur Symons, “The Woman in the Moon”]311

As Snodgrass notes, Symons knew that the gender-fluid sun in Beardsley’s frontispiece was a reference to Wilde’s homosexuality, but chose to read the “mocking sun” as the

310 Wilde, The Poems of, 3.

deceitful moon in disguise to fit his own agenda. In the chronotope of the poem, the lunar once again dispossesses and kills (e.g. “stormless” l.3, “strips” l.7, “agony” l.11). The perfidious moon-woman, sharing her attributes with Salome, is a “cheat” (l.13) and a “fruit from a fruitless Tree” (l.14) – signifying her barrenness, as opposed to the the life-bearing qualities of the sun (the “globe of the earth”). The chronotope that she unfurls robs the young man of truth and reason: “removed from the gestatory influence of the sun” within the time-space of the moon, he becomes ill with diseased, insatiable desires (“fever”, l.6). The spatial marker of the “dishevelled seaweed” (l.9), which conveys this sense of illness and folly, echoes both the untidy hair of Maenads and the wild, snaky head of Medusa – hinting at the feminisation of the chronotope, wherein the feminine and the scenery merge as one inseparable entity. Throughout the rest of the poem, the lunar characterises entropic chaos and creative sterility, hinging on a binary between the masculine and the feminine, in a battle of the sexes.

3.2 Chronotopes of the Creative Moon: Marriott Watson, Blind and Field

In response to these misogynistic poems, fin-de-siècle women revised the motif of the moon to fit their own intents. In “Walpurgis” for instance, published in her 1895 collection *Vespertilia*, Marriott Watson appropriates and deliberately exacerbates the passion of Decadent male poets for the figures of the sorcerous, insane woman and the castrating femme fatale, to enact her own feminized poetics, subverting misogynistic readings of the chronotope. The title of her poem refers to the ancestral celebration of the *Walpurgisnacht* in Germany, a tradition that reached England in the nineteenth-century alongside translations of Goethe and Mendelssohn’s works. Marriott Watson’s use of this folkloric event (during which fires were lit by the local population to honour witches), highlights her poem’s intentions to promote female alterity, hegemony and, by mythical extension at least, community.

ALONG the valley to the sea
The steel-grey river glimmers wan.
Oh, what shall this night bring to be?
And what may come when light be gone?

[Marriott Watson, “Walpurgis”, stanza 1]

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312 Chris Snodgrass, “Decadent Mythmaking”, 74.
While the Walpurgisnacht occurred in Central Germany on the highest wooded hill between the rivers Weser and Elbe (as echoed in the poet’s allusion to the “black trees”, specific to the German hinterland), the opening lines of the poem invoke a different kind of chronotope; one that embraces openness over closure. This spatial displacement of the setting towards the littoral, where the river plunges into the sea, participates in blurring frontiers and creating a sense of liberating indistinctness. The alliterations and palette of greyish shades (“steel-grey” l.2, “dark Downs” l.5, “dull dun” l.10 and “black trees” l.14) in the poem reinforce this aesthetic of blur. In terms of time, the poet’s use of modality (“shall”, “may”, ll.4-5) and rhetorical questions at the end of the opening stanza, unfurls notions of contingency and freedom.

Across the dark Downs, face to face,
Two sullen fires flame east and west –
The blood-red sunset’s lurid space,
The blood-red moon’s uprearing crest.
A weary Maenad, flushed with wine,
Between the dull dun drift she peers,
Heavy with lewd old rites malign,
Lusting for human blood and tears.

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The sea-wind holds its breath for fear,
The black trees cringe upon the height;
Still, with her wicked, wanton leer,
The red moon menaces the night.

[Marriott Watson, “Walpurgis”, stanza 2-end]

The second stanza of the poem concentrates on staging a Symons-like battle of the sexes. Chronotopic expansion allows for the colossal “face to face” between the moon and the sun to happen. As in Decadent poems by men, this confrontation carries a gendered dimension, evidenced by the feminine pronouns on lines 10 and 15. The motif of the Maenad (l.9) and “old rites” (l.11) deploy the time-space implications of mythology and witchcraft within this ‘wild woman’s chronotope’. Unlike Symons’ poems, however, the lines do not rely as much on a polar dichotomy between the solar masculine and the lunar feminine. The poem’s micro-temporality and textual space carry out equalizing functions, allowing for a fair battle to occur – as highlighted by the structural parallelism on lines 8-10, the metrical insistence on repetitions (“face to face”, 5; “blood-red”, 7-8), and the chiasm on lines 6-8. The “two sullen fires” (l.6) burn as brightly, and produce their own light – opposing chronotopic constructions of the moon-woman as imitative and derivative. Interestingly, the poet chooses to retain
the qualities of dispossession of the lunar, enhanced in the text through Decadent imagery (“Lusting for human blood and tears”, l.8), to disrupt masculine time-space configurations using their own tools. The metaphor of the cringing trees (l.13) hints at the emasculating characteristics of this monstrous chronotope of the lunar feminine.

At the beginning of stanza 3, the identification of the moon with the “weary Maenad, flushed with wine” (l.9) is neither made evident by the poem’s syntax nor by the sudden change of narrative focus. It is suggested, however, by the succession of their occurrences, and the poet’s palette of colours (“flushed” echoing “blood-red”). While stanza 3 upholds this ambiguity, allowing the feminine figures to co-exist in the wild woman chronotope of the lunar, the final two lines of the text force ontological boundaries to collapse, and seal the motifs into one inseparable entity – as the witch-life “wicked, wanton leer” is projected onto the moon. As T. D. Olverson explains in *Women Writers & the Dark Side of Late-Victorian Hellenism*, the trope of the Maenad (dancer of Dionysus) in fin-de-siècle female poetry often stood for the fight against patriarchal oppression. In “Walpurgis”, the motif participates in operating a shift from “pathological femininity” to women’s empowerment. The metamorphic feminine in the poem (taking in turn the appearance of a moon, a witch, an inebriated Maenad and a blood-thirsty vampire), characterised by cruelty (l.15) and unbridled sexuality (l.11), thus appropriate and revise masculine conceptions of the femme fatale to enact a movement away from patriarchal structures towards a women-only realm.

At the end of the poem, the dead-still temporality that defines male poems on the moon finds a subverted double in “Walpurgis”. When the moon reaches the climax of her ascent, the typographical rupture separating the final two stanzas introduces a shift in the timeframe of the poem, as symbolized by the sea-wind holding its breath (l.13). At this point of frightened immobility, the moon imposes itself as the legitimate ruler of the sky. The time rupture suggests the defeat of the sun (which has disappeared by the start of the last stanza) and the irreversibility of its chronotopic outcomes. In this newly feminised order witnessing the genesis of the moon-goddess (theogony), the cyclic alternation of days and nights is negated, as time is irremediably suspended. Whilst appropriating and revising the disempowering, castrating abilities of the lunar

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feminine in the chronotopes of male authors, Marriott Watson endows “Walpurgis” with feminised, originative and cosmogonic attributes, allowing her to weave new links between creative fertility and the trope of the moon-woman.

Marriott Watson’s revisionist take on the ‘moon poem’ as a theogonic myth finds echoes in Mathilde Blind’s collection Birds of Passage, published in the same year as Vespertilia. While her poem “Nuit” does not openly mention the motif of the moon, it indirectly participates in its revision by appropriating Egyptian mythology to posit the solar (and the religions that ensued) as a product of the creative Mother Night – thus reversing the originative-derivative power relationship opposing the sun to the moon in male Decadent works. In another poem of the collection entitled “White Night”, Blind similarly overturns views on the lunar feminine as entropic and sterile:

THE land lay deluged by the Moon;
The molten silver of the lake
Shimmered in many a broad lagoon
Between grey isles, whose copse and brake
Lay folded on the water's breast
Like halcyons in a floating nest.

And like a child who trusts in God
When in the dark it lies alone,
Stretched on the aromatic sod
My heart was laid against your own,
Against your heart, which seemed to be
Mine own to all Eternity.

Lapped in illimitable light,
The woods and waters seemed to swoon,
And clouds like angels-winged the night
And slipped away into the Moon,
Lost in that radiant flame above
As we were lapped and lost in love.

[Mathilde Blind, “A White Night”]

Like Robinson and Marriott Watson, Blind wipes out all derivative qualities from her lunar chronotope, which instead empowers the moon as the source of her own beams. Depicted as a “radiant flame” (l.17) that whitens the night, her “illimitable” light (l.13)


317 As Robert Fletcher points out, Mathilde Blind responded to Max Muller’s Comparative Mythology which “linked Greek/Roman and Egyptian mythologies by tracing the origin of the gods back to sun worship”. See: Robert Fletcher, “‘Heir of All the Universe’: Evolutionary Epistemology in Mathilde Blind’s Birds of Passage: Songs of the Orient and Occident” in Victorian Poetry 43, no. 4 (2005), 437.
overflows the scenery, and counteracts male apocalyptic readings of the trope. While Laforgue’s “Clair de Lune” describes the dead moon (herself a harbinger of death) as washed off by deluges “unheard of”, the motif acquires fertile, diluvial properties in “A White Night”, appearing to sustain and generate life more than to destroy it. In this poem, Blind negates pessimistic readings of the trope, and revises it in a poem about the genesis of love. The unifying light that the moon casts onto the enamoured couple, sheltered within the highly feminised chronotope (as signified by water images and their anthropomorphic attributes: “the water’s breast”, l.5) erases boundaries between the lovers, and unfurls homoerotic readings of the poem. As James Diedrick explains in his article “The Hectic Beauty of Decay”, Blind dissolves the specific ways in which “the sexual subject is envisioned within patriarchy” by “stressing similarities over differences” between the two lovers, and the lovers and nature, “refusing to distinguish gendered subject positions”.

This connection between the moon chronotope as an intensely feminized time-space and the abolition of heterosexual norms is patent in Michael Field’s collection Long Ago. While homoerotism in Blind’s “White Night” limits itself to undertones, it is central to the work of Field and their women-only chronotopes. Among several poems on the topic, “The Moon Rose Full” best illustrates their authorial intention to centre their Sapphic poetics onto the chronotope of the lunar and the female artistic communities that it implies:

THE moon rose full: the women stood
As though within a sacred wood
Around an altar—thus with awe
The perfect, virgin orb they saw
Supreme above them; and its light
Fell on their limbs and garments white.
Then with pale, lifted brows they stirred
Their fearful steps at Sappho’s word,
And in a circle moved around,
Responsive to her music’s sound,
That through the silent air stole on,
Until their breathless dread was gone,
And they could dance with lightsome feet,
And lift the song with voices sweet.
Then once again the silence came:
Their lips were blanchèd as if with shame

319 Michael Field, Sight and Song (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1892).
That they in maidenhood were bold
Its sacred worship to unfold;
And Sappho touched the lyre alone,
Until she made the bright strings moan.
She called to Artemis aloud—

[Michael Field, “The Moon Rose Full”, first half]

The semi-colon in the opening line clearly introduces a synchronic and causal relation between the moon and the women-only artistic community at the heart of the plot. The intentional blurring of the distinctions between the figures of Sappho and Artemis (the moon goddess) further strengthens this close-knit relationship between the lunar and the artistic feminine. The religious allusions pervading the first half of the text (“sacred”, “altar”, “supreme” and “light”) typify the cult of the moon as much as the women’s admiration for the lesbian poet. The “circle” (l.9) that they form in front of Sappho mimics the shape of the “perfect, virgin orb” in the sky, l.4. The emphasis on chastity does not corroborate essentialist discourses on the moon-woman, but instead underpins the process of feminisation of the chronotope as one literally untouched by men (as evidenced in the second half of the poem).

Within this exclusively female chronotope, the women dance in the moonlight – a trope that recurs in fin-de-siècle poetry by women writers. In Marriott Watson’s “Walpurgis”, moon-dancing rituals are invoked by the inebriated Maenad motif, which Yopie Prins regards as an alternative to the Victorian spinster; one conveniently operating outside of masculine conventions. In a poem by A. Mary F. Robinson, it is the figure of the dryad – a tree-nymph known for living in female-only communities and for her good relation with the moon-goddess Artemis – which substitutes that of the Maenad. Lying in “languid locks” during the day and striking blind any man who meets their gaze, Robinson’s dryads mischievously exacerbate fears of New Women and uses the moon chronotope as a catalyst for female community and creation.

In the first half of Field’s poem, women’s networks and poetic creation are hindered by the insistence on fear (“awe”, “pale”, “fearful”, “dread”) that plagues the

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320 The women stood as and because the moon rose full, l.1.
encounter, as well as the silence that is twice enhanced between Sappho’s songs. The reason for this tempered harmony is clarified in the second half of the poem:

Alas, the moon was wrapt in cloud!—
"Oh, whither art thou gone from me?
Come back again, virginity!
For maidenhood still do I long,
The freedom and the joyance strong
Of that most blessed, secret state
That makes the tenderest maiden great.
O moon, be fair to me as these,
And my regretful passion ease;
Restore to me my only good,
My maidenhood, my maidenhood!"
She sang: and through the clouded night
An answer came of cruel might—
"To thee I never come again."
O Sappho, bitter was thy pain!
Then did thy heavy steps retire,
And leave, moon-bathed, the virgin quire.

[Michael Field, “The Moon Rose Full”, second half]

The multiple references to the colour white in the poem’s opening, further enhanced by the blanks and pauses that silence imposes on Sappho’s music, are clarified in the light of its reference to the moon-bathed “virgin quire”. The women-only chronotope of the moon, posited as the very condition for creation in the first half of the poem, is corrupt by the clouds signifying the end of maidenhood. The virginity that Sappho has lost is reproduced onto her manuscript, symbolizing the death of inspiration within the tainted feminine space. By casting the moon as a betrayed lover, Field subvert the depriving characteristics of the lunar chronotope to remap muse-poet relations (usually presented as heterosexual) in their own terms.

4. Count-Down to the Promised Epoch: Timers and Chronotopes of the Future

In her book chapter “Counting at Dusk (Why Poetry Matters When the Century Ends)”, Elaine Scarry explores the catalytic function of history’s successive fins-de-siècle cultures in renewing poetic forms. Focusing on matters of versification and metrical innovations, she points out “the etymological identity of meter with measure, the intimacy between poetry and the act of counting” and weaves causal links between the “heightened poetic attention to numbers” and the “moment when the calendar turns
“over” at the end of the century. As Prins remarks in her chapter on Alice Meynell’s rhythms, Scarry’s speculations find compelling evidence in the heated late-Victorian debates on quantitative prosody, as well as in the polymetric character of the 1890s during which many poets experimented with meter.

This section explores counting motifs in Decadent poetry as epitomized by the chronotopes of the clock, the hourglass and other metaphorical forms of timers (music beats, water drops, dance and cigarettes). I contend that poems by men revolve around fears of degeneration and entropic dissipation, and use metaphors such as that of the clock and the hourglass to create the mythos of the 1890s artist as an intoxicated man with loose morals, impotently witnessing his decay. Fin-de-siècle women approach counting from a different bias: one that promotes pauses, patience and waiting, and uses their poems’ chronotopes as back doors into the imagined time-space of improved futures, where interaction between New Women is facilitated. Building on the findings of chapter 1 (time-bomb temporality) and chapter 2 (degeneration and entropy), this section explores counting motifs in poems by Mary E. Coleridge, Amy Levy, Mathilde Blind and Dollie Radford and compares them with the poems of male Decadents.

4.1 Lifetime, Clocks and Hourglasses: Symons and Henley

The myths that defined and dramatically reduced the 1890s poet as male, self-destructive and tragic have received sustained attention over the last decades. In The Forgotten Female Aesthetes, Talia Schaffer posits the early-twentieth-century critic at the origins of this mythologizing process. She argues that the first historians of the fin-de-siècle culture were men who had participated in aesthetic literary circles and hence offered a skewed image of the movement. Several academics have cited the example of W. B. Yeats’ famous autobiography, which “memorialized (and mythologized)” the life and downfall of his Decadent friends at the Rhymers’ Club as the – exclusively masculine – “tragic generation”. For McCormack, this critical reception of fin-de-


siècle literary productions does not suffice to explain the permanent inscription of the “poet who lived hard and died young” within the myth of the decade. He argues that the 1890s poem itself participated in “generating a seminal (i.e., indisputably male) mythos” which collided the artists’ lifestyle with their art. McCormack’s claims corroborate Holly Laird’s in “The Death of the Author by Suicide”, who asserts that excluding suicidal fin-de-siècle women (Amy Levy, Charlotte Mew and Laurence Hope) from the tragic canon of the late century resulted from a double marginalisation of the feminine. First, “through their displacement as poets” by their male peers, and second, through “the displacement of their literal suicides” by male figurative ones.

The trope of the “embattled elite male” who “fetishized [his] own decay” – informing chronotopic configurations in their poems – explains the omnipresence of the motifs of the clock, the hourglass and other counting devices in the masculine canon. This chronotopic approach to the fin-de-siècle endows most poems by men with a sense of imminent resolution. This aesthetic finds its best illustration in the work of Arthur Symons, wherein time measurements (clocks and hourglasses) abound.

Your kisses, and the way you curl,  
Delicious and distracting girl,  
Into one's arms, and round about,  
Luxuriously in and out  
Twining inextricably, as twine  
The clasping tangles of the vine;  
Strong to embrace and long to kiss,  
And strenuous for the sharper bliss,  
Insatiably enamoured of  
The ultimate ecstasy of love.  
So loving to be loved, so gay  
And greedy for our holiday;  
And then how prettily you sleep!  
You nestle close, and let me keep  
My straying fingers in the nest  
Of your warm comfortable breast;  
And as I lie and dream awake,  
Unsleeping for your sleeping sake,  
I feel the very pulse and heat  
Of your young life-blood beat, and beat  
With mine; and you are mine, my sweet!

329 Schaffer, The Forgotten Female Aesthetes, 6.
In “Leves Amores”, the tranquil iambic regularity and smooth alternation of couplets throughout the poem’s first half (1-2: “Your kisses, and the way you curl. / Delicious and distracting girl!”) echoes the bliss of the speaker, sharing an intimate moment with a woman. The male speaker, entwined in an amorous embrace, and nestled in the comfort of the maternal female body (“warm comfortable breast”, l.16), experiences a sense of comfort. His tranquillity, however, runs against the clock. On lines 9-10, the anti-climax of the poem is foreshadowed as the lyric voice realises that he is enamoured with the “ultimate ecstasy of love” (i.e. sexual climax) rather than with the woman figure – binding him to experience the emotional void following this climax of bliss. The timer is set at the end of the stanza, when the woman’s heartbeat (I feel the very pulse and heat/ Of your young life-blood beat, and beat) disrupts the poem’s micro-temporality. The sudden rhythmical change triggers further chronotopic transformations in the second half of the text:

The little bedroom papered red,
The gas's faint malodorous light,
And one beside me in the bed,
Who chatters, chatters, half the night.

I drowse and listen, drowse again,
And still, although I would not hear,
Her stream of chatter, like the rain,
Is falling, falling on my ear.

The bed-clothes stifle me, I ache
With weariness, my eyelids prick;
I hate, until I long to break,
That clock for its tyrannic tick.

And still beside me, through the heat
Of this September night, I feel
Her body's warmth upon the sheet
Burn through my limbs from head to heel.

And still I see her profile lift
Its tiresome line above the hair,
That streams, a dark and tumbled drift,
Across the pillow that I share.

[Arthur Symons, “Leves Amores”, stanza 2 of 2]
As the meter becomes growingly unstable and the soft couplets turn into neat, analytical quatrains, the lassitude and claustrophobic anguish of the man seep through the lines. The entangling female body is now as stifling as the constricting embrace of a snake. As Jan Gordon argues in his study of the “Danse Macabre” motif in Symons’ poetry, the physical proximity of the woman contributes to the speaker’s feeling of “oppressing mortality”, just as the bedclothes bring him to experience “an overbearing awareness of his unbearable corporality”.331 His heightened attention to bodily decay directly affects the poem’s overarching chronotope, defined by double repetitiveness – both in terms of the numbers of words actually recurring in the text, and of their semantic nature as repetitive sounds. The woman “chatters, chatters, half the night” in a “stream of chatter […] falling, falling” like the rain; and the man, now aching “with weariness”, longs to “break/ That clock for its tyrannic tick”.332 As the ontological boundaries between the sounds that the minutes produce and the woman’s metronomic chatter are blurred, the objectified lover herself turns into a time device.

In “Nerves”, the speaker, victim of the “modern malady of love”, expresses his pain in similar terms as he prays for the “ticking” in his ear to cease for an hour:

The modern malady of love is nerves.
Love, once a simple madness, now observes
The stages of his passionate disease,
And is twice sorrowful because he sees,
Inch by inch entering, the fatal knife.
O health of simple minds, give me your life,
And let me, for one midnight, cease to hear
The clock for ever ticking in my ear,
The clock that tells the minutes in my brain.
It is not love, nor love's despair, this pain
That shoots a witless, keener pang across
The simple agony of love and loss.
Nerves, nerves! O folly of a child who dreams
Of heaven, and, waking in the darkness, screams.

[Arthur Symons, “Nerves”]

The pathological dimension pervading the poem’s chronotope of madness focuses on the speaker’s slow but irremediable progress towards psychotic breakdown.333 This is metaphorically rendered through two counting motifs: the blade of the “fatal” knife

332 Here, tyrannical becomes “tyrannie” to echo the ticking sound of the minutes passing by.
333 The word “disease” is incidentally highlighted by the off-rhyme on line 3.
penetrating the flesh “inch by inch” (spatial measurement) and the regular ticking of the minutes on lines 8-10 (temporal measurement). The multiple breaks in the text (e.g. the sudden caesuras on lines 4-6, and the full stops on lines 5 and 9, which disrupt a couplet and the octave division of the sonnet) do not echo this strict repetitiveness. Instead, they convey the growing instability of the speaker’s mind which as a self-destructive ticking device is about to implode. The motif of the tormented neurasthenic poet – indulging in unhealthy, amoral and self-destructing activities, which force him to keep experiencing the emotional downfall that follows the satisfaction of his desires – finds its best metaphorical expression in this ticking clock motif.

A second trope that is omnipresent in male Decadent chronotopes, and is equally anticlimactic in nature, is that of the hourglass, and the sense of entropic dissipation that it generates. In “The Absinthe Drinker”, the hours “[l]inked in a dance of mere forgetfulness” that move along with the “dreamy and indifferent tide” of time, suggest both a total disconnection from the world, and a certain degree of control over it – dancing and tides being two predictable forms of temporality. The motif of the gliding sand encapsulated between the two images, however, counteracts these feelings by suggesting the man’s awareness of time irremediably passing by, and his ensuing sense of impotence. In “The Opium Smoker”, the poem’s drug chronotope (in which “Time is no more”) also erodes spatial-temporal coordinates. The speaker, both motionless and pulled away from reality (“I pause and yet I flee”), is projected forward in time whilst embracing future experiences from the perspective of the past (“I hold the future in my memory”). The visible decay of the objects that surround his “worn-out” body eaten up by time, however, act as a reminder of his own upcoming end.

Another striking example of hour-glass-like entropy is Henley’s “Nocturn”:

At the barren heart of midnight,
When the shadow shuts and opens
As the loud flames pulse and flutter,
I can hear a cistern leaking.

Dripping, dropping, in a rhythm,
Rough, unequal, half-melodious,
Like the measures aped from nature
In the infancy of music;

Like the buzzing of an insect,

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335 Symons, Silhouettes, 34.
Still, irrational, persistent . . .
I must listen, listen, listen
In a passion of attention;

Till it taps upon my heartstrings,
And my very life goes dripping,
Dropping, dripping, drip-drip-dropping,
In the drip-drop of the cistern.
[W. E. Henley, “Nocturn”][336]

While the title alludes to visual art – supposedly to Whistler’s impressionist paintings –, the attention of the poem is devoted to the realm of sounds: the flames are “loud”, the insects are “buzzing” and the cistern produces a “drip-drop” noise. These sounds once more participate in unfurling a counting chronotope, signified by the use of words such as “pulse”, “rhythm”, “measures” and the overwhelming presence of repetitions. Line 7 (“I must listen, listen, listen”) for instance, recreates at the micro-level of a line the pace of the drops punctuating the poet’s speech. While the “passion of attention” in which the speaker is caught might have worked as a way out of lifetime awareness, the noise of the drops tapping onto his “heartstrings” end up echoing his own pulse. At this specific instant, the lyric voice envisions the dissipation of his vital energy. In this poem as in the previous ones, the artist – even when oblivious of (or attentive to) present time – cannot help but notice the movement of his lifetime leaking out.

4.2 Counting Tropes in Women’s Poetry: Coleridge, Levy and Blind
While women writers did respond to and revise masculine approaches to time, the tropes of the hourglass and the clock do not appear per se in their poetry. Mary E. Coleridge’s “Sounds” constitutes one of the rare examples of fin-de-siècle women’s poems that explicitly mention the motif of the clock. Her text appropriates the topics that her uncle Samuel Taylor Coleridge uses in the opening stanza of his long narrative poem “Christabel”. At the beginning of his work, building on medieval superstitions, the intriguing chain of night time clocks betraying the presence of Lady Leoline (the deceased daughter of the speaker) upholds the uncanniness and tension of the plot. As the old castle’s clock strikes midnight (l.1), the hooting of the owls (l.3) awakens the crowing cock (l.2) which in its turn triggers the howling of the Baron’s dog (l.9). Time devices have a strictly narrative role in his poem. In Mary E. Coleridge’s revision, this narrative purpose disappears as the lines focus on conveying sounds over meaning.

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The clock!
A crowing cock!
And under these
The murmur of the wind among the trees,
The hum of bees.

[Mary E. Coleridge, “Sounds”, stanza 1]337

Through its irregular meter and emphasis on final rhymes, the poem aims to mimic a sequence of sounds. In Bakhtinian terms, the micro-temporality of these sounds – and the intervals of silence (varying in length) between them – “thickens”, “takes on flesh” and “becomes artistically visible” through textual space, as illustrated by the poem’s singular layout, its exclamations and the changing length of its lines and beats.338 As Adela Pinch points out in her recent article “Rhyme’s End”, fin-de-siècle poets were “experts at measuring short lines against long” and did so to meditate on scale and perspectives of time as the end of the century “seemed to loom both near and far”.339

The second half of the text openly reflects on time as it weaves connections between the immediate reception of sounds and human relations to temporality:

The clock is busy Man with Time at strife,
Wasting brief hours to measure out his life!
The cock vainglorious Man chanting his praise,
Forgetful of the time – how short the day!

The Wind is Man, dreaming and dreaming sill,
Silence with music evermore to fill.
The bee is Man that neither hastes nor shirks,
Not happy and unhappy as he works.

[Mary Coleridge, “Sounds”, stanza 2 of 2]

As Pinch summarizes, the motifs of the clock, the cock, the wind and the bees symbolise a range of approaches to time: “obsessing about time, and thus wasting it; heedless of time, and hence also wasting it; filling up time; and lastly, finding some […] unconscious, in-between, adequate relation to time”.340 The first two examples appear to synthetize male Decadents’ attitudes to time, either desperately attempting

337 Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, Poems (London: Elkin Mathews, 1907), 127. Original layout. The text was first published in 1892.
338 Bakhtin, Forms, 54.
340 Pinch, “Rhyme’s End”, 486.
to silence the ticking of the clock by indulging in alcohol, sex and drugs, or obsessing over it as they visualise lifetime as grains of sand in an hour-glass.

The rarity of these chronotopes in fin-de-siècle women’s poetry testifies to the differences in their perspectives on time-space. The impending sense of doom that pervades the works of men is absent from feminine poetics, which instead aestheticizes prospects of openness in a decade of closure. As Harrington speculates, New Women viewed and used poetry as a waiting space.\textsuperscript{341} She distinguishes between male writers who felt emasculated by the lack of control that waiting (or desiring without being certain of obtaining satisfaction) implied, and their female counterparts who embraced it as an act of “defiance” and “active anticipation”. While some of their poems convey “attentiveness” and “acceptance of mere sufficiency”, others open up chronotopes of the future, in which the speaker envisions herself in better time-spaces. Their revisions of men’s counting chronotopes (defined by timed implosions or entropic dissipation) subvert hegemonic traditions and gendered power structures from within. In “Song of the Willi” for instance, Blind revises the motifs of dancing and of the hourglass in her Decadent adaptation of folkloric Hungarian material:

According to a widespread Hungarian superstition – showing the ingrained national passion for dancing – the Willi or Willis were the spirits of young affianced girls who, dying before marriage, could not rest in their graves. It was popularly believed that these phantoms would nightly haunt lonely heaths in the neighbourhood of their native villages till the disconsolate lovers came as if drawn by a magnetic charm. On their appearance the Willi would dance with them without intermission till they dropped dead from exhaustion.

[Mathilde Blind, headnote to “Song of the Willi”]\textsuperscript{342}

As explained in the headnote quoted above, Blind’s ballad uses a popular legend and displaces its action into the non-referential time-space of the supernatural to free its female lyric voice from late-Victorian conventions. In the poem, the undead woman awakens and recalls the pledge that her lover made before their wedding, shortly before she died: “I’d dance into death with thee, death would be brighter”. Coming back to life to obtain satisfaction, she meets with her fiancé for a final dance. The supernatural chronotope modifies both Victorian dancing conventions, together with the hierarchy of gender that it implied in the context of the traditional ballroom (the undead woman is in charge of leading her partner), and time. The growingly pale

\textsuperscript{341} Harrington, Emily. \textit{Second Person Singular}, 140-7.
\textsuperscript{342} Mathilde Blind, \textit{Dramas in Miniature} (London: Chattos and Windus, 1891), 71-82.
couple dance “the fleet-footed hours” down – a form of reversed temporality, counting down to the man’s death, which ironically echoes masculine hourglass chronotopes. As the ballad closes and the undead woman returns to her grave, her lover dies with her. By appropriating the Decadent motifs of the femme fatale, the revenant and the time bomb or hourglass, and shifting the balance of power in favour of the monstrous feminine, Blind challenges power structures using the codes of masculine tradition.

In “A Wall Flower” by Amy Levy, dance and music beats open up a counting chronotope, serving as a back door onto improved future times:

I lounge in the doorway and languish in vain
While Tom, Dick and Harry are dancing with Jane

My spirit rises to the music's beat;
There is a leaden fiend lurks in my feet!
To move unto your motion, Love, were sweet.

Somewhere, I think, some other where, not here,
In other ages, on another sphere,
I danced with you, and you with me, my dear.

In perfect motion did our bodies sway,
To perfect music that was heard alway;
Woe's me, that am so dull of foot to-day!

To move unto your motion, Love, were sweet;
My spirit rises to the music's beat--
But, ah, the leaden demon in my feet!

[Amy Levy, “A Wall Flower”, 1889]

The image of the leaden fiend weighing the feet of the speaker conveys a sense of paralysis and alienation from the intersubjective chronotope of the poem. By omitting to assign a gender to her lyric voice, Levy opens up homoerotic readings of the scene wherein the female speaker is unable to dance with her lesbian lover. The beat of the music however, succeeds in elevating her mind and opening a second (intrasubjective) chronotope: “some other where, not here” in “another ages, on another sphere”. While she is forced to “languish in vain” like a wallflower in the ballroom, the pace of the dance acts as a countdown to future times in which same-sex romance is possible.

4.3 Future and the Chronotope of the Cigarette: Dollie Radford

Levy’s poetic depiction of a bettered future through temporal suspension and inversion (countdown) is characteristic of fin-de-siècle women’s poems. Excluded from the timeframe of evolution, progress and literary history, women poets dared to
imagine prospects of openness in a decade of closure. Certain tropes helped them count to these moments of reform and/or revolution in which female communities and homoerotic desire would have a central role. In her poem “A Novice”, Dollie Radford uses a singular form of timer, and a very Decadent metaphor for waiting: the cigarette. As a symbol of idleness, pleasure, creativity and freedom, smoking as a chronotope enables Radford to subvert a symbol of virility and turn it into an emblem of New Women’s patience and resistance against masculine power structures.

They, daring greatly, met to dine. 
These Ladies, writing thrilling fiction; 
And o’er the olives and the wine 
Were doubtless “Ouidalisques” in diction. 
Some twenty Ladies went one Friday night, and 
Much enjoyed their dinner; 
A smart symposium at the “Cri,” 
And, save the waiters, no male sinner.

“A young Greek goddess,” too, was there, 
Escaped from high Olympian duty, 
Another, with Junionian air, 
A delicate dark-featured beauty. 
A poetess, in gold brocade, 
Who murmured triolets and sonnets; 
And many spinsters, every maid 
Was quite above the thought of bonnets.

[“The Literary Ladies’ Dinner”, *Punch*, opening two stanzas]³⁴³

The incongruence of the *smoking poetess* in late-Victorian minds finds one of its most striking illustrations in a poem published by the editors of *Punch* in 1889 as a reaction to the first Literary Ladies’ dinner at the Criterion restaurant (or “Cri”) in London. While the author identifies the specificities of the social chronotope within which New Women had daringly chosen to inscribe their exclusively female literary activities (in the space of the city, at night), he challenges their legitimacy in this particular setting through the chronotopic displacements enacted in his own poem. In the opening two stanzas of his mocking piece, the transposition of the network of female intellectuals into the specific time-space of the Roman Empire and Ancient Greece denounces the presumptuous daringness of its members in the eyes of their contemporaries. As Hughes remarks in her bibliography, Marriott Watson is singled out in the second stanza of the poem, and depicted as a “delicate dark-featured beauty

³⁴³ Reference found in Hughes, “A Club of Their Own”, 241.
[...] in gold brocade” – a portrait aiming to scoff at the shallowness of the women’s evening. The fraudulent nature of their “smart symposium” (l.7) is exposed in the poem’s second half, enhancing the affectedness of the scene. The false-heartedness of their “sweetest looks” (l.19), “silver laughter” (l.21) and compliments (“puffed”, l.20) turns an intellectual exchange into a theatrical performance, in which the actresses play at – and produce a low-grade imitation of – the artistic clubs of their male peers.

They talked of pictures and of books,
And subjects argument inviting;
They interchanged the sweetest looks,
And each one puffed the other’s writing.
And silver laughter filled the room,
At jokes, the subjects are not stated;
But publishers were left to doom,
And Paternoster Row was “slated”.

[“The Literary Ladies’ Dinner”: Punch, 1889, stanza 3]

The double meaning of the verb “puffed” is revealed in the fourth stanza of the poem, when one of the ladies “produces a case of cigarettes” (l.29). As the women step down their “Olympian” heights (l.10) to take the “Nicotian path” (l.27), the decor of their ancient scenery collapses (at the same time as the author’s sarcasm) and leaves place to the realistic setting of the “railway bookstalls” which, in the eyes of an openly disdainful author, reflects the female writers’ true artistic worth. Each of the settings into which the Literary Ladies evolve in the poem (Ancient Greece-Rome, a theatre stage, railway bookstalls) corresponds to one form of time, shrinking in importance as the poem goes on. The antique chronotope in which they are first located unfolds ideas of immortal fame for the authors. The theatrical stage suggests an analogy between the duration of a play and that of the writers’ legacy; and the “railway bookstalls” casts their works as mediocre, to be read (and forgotten) within the time of a train journey.

At last, O tell it not in Gath!
A lady, held as benefactress,
Did not disdain Nicotian path
Of dalliance with the weed: an actress
Produces a case of cigarettes,
And then, O theme for scurrile joking!
These attitudinising pets
Of railway bookstalls, took to smoking.

344 Hughes, Graham R., 90.
Despite his contumacious tone, the writer hints at the potential of cigarettes as a fin-de-siècle chronotope in New Women’s literature. His reference to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in the metaphor of the “Nicotian path/Of dalliance” anchors smoking within an (amoral) experience of time-space, by opening up latent notions of ephemerality, pleasure and defamation, all characteristic of 1890s Decadent poetry. The expression “took to smoking” insists on the novelty of the activity in women circles and typifies its rebellious nature. As much as the author denies the legitimacy of the Literary Ladies to step onto male territory, his text acknowledges this moment as a turning point.

Radford’s “A Novice”, constitutes a powerful answer to *Punch’s* incessant and disdainful attacks against New Women, female literary networks and their members’ tobacco consumption. Archival research has led me to believe that her poem is the only one that deals with the trope of the cigarette in fin-de-siècle women’s poetry. The quasi-absence of this trope in female poems betrays its long-standing associations with masculinity. The canon of the poète fumeur (iconized by Baudelaire), by comparison, is sizeable. The absence of a women’s smoking poetry tradition, however, remains surprising given the emergence of the activity in radical female networks, the many reactions of *Punch* to this new trend, the growing presence of advertising posters for women’s cigarettes and the use of the motif in other forms of literature by New Women. While Radford’s cigarette chronotope borrows some of its features from fin-
de-siècle poems by men – and, by extension, engages in a dialogue with this canon –, it also conjures up brighter future time-spaces for New Women as a group:

WHAT is it, in these latter days,  
Transfigures my domestic ways,  
And round me, as a halo, plays?  
My cigarette.

For me so daintily prepared,  
No modern skill, or perfume, spared,  
What would have happened had I dared  
To pass it yet?

[“A Novice”, Dollie Radford, stanzas 1-2]

Radford’s “A Novice” capitalizes on Punch’s definition of the poète fumeuse as an incongruent figure through her use of triplets, often used as a comic marker, and the title’s characterisation of the speaker (a middle-class mother and housewife) as a Decadent neophyte. The chronotopic clash that it produces between two incompatible time-spaces (domesticity/Decadence) creates humour as much as it subverts gendered power structures. The religious undertones of the word (“novice”) open up notions of sinful pleasure and transcendental smoking experience, elevating the speaker above material concerns and projecting her into the future. It also serves to subvert the trope of the “Angel in the House” and the domestic chronotope that it implies (l.2), as the “halo” of the cigarette smoke crowns the head of the resigning housewife.

The poem opens on a fin-de-siècle chronotope (“these latter days”, l.1; a phrase loaded with meaning at the turn of the century), shaped around a time-space paradigm which, as Emily Harrington suggests, “casts the present [of the poem] as a transitional moment” between “endurance and rest, lassitude and effort, pause and preparation, procrastination and anticipation”. The poem negotiates a liminal space (within the domestic walls, but slightly outside of its intersubjective chronotope) for the speaker to appreciate momentary freedom. While the mentions of her children and servants literalise the short geographical distance between the woman and her social circle, poetic space creates a spatial retreat (or waiting room) in which the woman can devote herself to the furtive pleasure of smoking. Chronotopic tension typifies the conflict running throughout the poem, which stages two opposite time-spaces of the feminine

352 Harrington, Second Person Singular, 142-144.
– domestic and modern. The perfumed cigarette motif,\textsuperscript{353} opening up the chronotopes of the transitional fin-de-siècle and of the New Woman, concretizes this threshold moment as a token of progress, present pleasure and back door into the future.

In his poem “Pastel”, Symons does not cast his speaker as a beginner, nor does he use the cigarette motif as a transitional chronotope. His lyrics actualize a moment of immediate fulfilment, at a present instant, and testify to the expertise of the male poet in handling his cigarette the way an impressionistic painter would use his brush. In Whistler’s ‘Nocturnes’\textsuperscript{354} as in Symons’ work, dawn/cigarette light faintly piercing through the smoke and obscurity of the chosen settings supplies the artists with the “primary conditions for aesthetic perception”\textsuperscript{355}

The light of our cigarettes
Went and came in the gloom:
It was dark in the little room.

Dark, and then, in the dark,
Sudden, a flash, a glow,
And a hand and a ring I know.

And then, through the dark, a flush
Ruddy and vague, the grace
(A rose!) of her lyric face.

[“Pastel”, Arthur Symons, 1895]

In this impressionistic poem, time-space markers do not merely function as the painted backdrop against which the story is told: they shape the narrative. While the first stanza contains two independent clauses ("went and came" and "was", ll.1-2), the rest of the poem is stripped off any conjugated verbs and the narrative effects that grammatical constructions automatically generate. The repetition of "and then" (ll.4; 7) or "and" maintain on their own the idea of a chronological unfurling of impressions throughout the last two-thirds of the poem. These impressions prove far more evocative than the

\textsuperscript{353} In his book on the history of smoking, Matthew Hilton mentions the emergence of a tobacco market aimed at women. In 1892 (three years before the publication of Radford’s poem), a “Manchester entrepreneur [...] formed a ‘Cigar for Ladies Society’ to try and sell his Milly brand” which was “small and ‘delicately perfumed’”. In 1893, efforts were then “made to make small, dainty expensive cigarettes which were frequently scented and gold tipped”. Source: Matthew Hilton, \textit{Smoking in British Popular Culture, 1800-2000: Perfect Pleasures} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 142.

\textsuperscript{354} See for instance: \textit{Nocturne in Black and Gold – The Falling Rocket} (1877); \textit{Nocturne: Blue and Gold – Old Battersea Bridge} (1875); or \textit{Nocturne: Blue and Silver – Chelsea} (1871).

simplistic observations ("it was dark in the little room", l.2) made in the opening lines. The poem consists of a succession of loosely connected monosyllabic words ("Dark, and then, in the dark, sudden, a flash, a glow", 3-4), and a staccato rhythm reinforced by onomatopoeic iterations ("flash" and "flush", 5-7). This stripped-down display of chronotopic interrelations, typifying the paratactic structure of the poem, testifies to the intrasubjective nature of the time-space, which renders evanescent impressions as perceived by the male speaker. In this intrasubjective chronotope, the man experiences a moment of self-detachment and re-discovery of his own body and environment – the “hand” and “ring” that he knows being de/re-constructed as his own as opposed to the unidentified face (that of the sex worker) distinguished through the dark.

In Radford’s “A Novice”, the chronotope that she unfurls not only aestheticizes prospects of open time (future) as opposed to Symons’ focus on immediacy, but also participates in replacing the protagonist within a wider network, at odds with the male poet’s focus on his own corporality.

And while the house is slumbering,
Go over them like anything,
And find them ever varying,
In their amounts!

Ah yes, the cook may spoil the broth,
The cream of life resolve to froth,
I cannot now, though very wroth,
Distracted be;

For as the smoke curls blue and thin
From my own lips, I first begin
To bathe my tired spirit in
Philosophy.

And sweetest healing on her pours,
Once more into the world she soars,
And sees it full of open doors,
And helping hands.356

In spite of those who, knocking, stay
At sullen portals day by day,
And weary at the long delay
To their demands.

The promised epoch, like a star,
Shines very bright and very far,
But nothing shall its lustre mar,
Though distant yet.

356 Dollie Radford’s “A Novice”: extract.
If I, in vain, must sit and wait,
To realize our future state,
I shall not be disconsolate,
My cigarette!

[“A Novice”, Dollie Radford, stanzas 6-12]

In the chronotope of the cigarette, the metaphor and metonymy of the house slumber as the time-space coordinates of the poem expand to encompass the sphere of imagined future. When the curly blue smoke rising into the sky motivates a moment of transcendental reflection, a new time-space arises: one that is both tightly connected with the mind of the lyric voice (i.e. intrasubjective) and essentially intersubjective. As the motif of the cigarette is feminised (“her pours”; “she soars”), the ontological boundaries between the woman and the object collapse, hinting at their semantic identification: the smoke becomes a metaphor for the emancipated spirit of the speaker daydreaming of better days, and enables the woman to escape the chronotope of the house. While the time-space unfurled by the cigarette is a product of the speaker’s fantasies, it inscribes the woman within a larger (intersubjective) community of New Women, presented through the metonymy of the many “helping hands” reaching out to help her. In this feminised chronotope, homoerotic overtones are present (“pours”, “open doors”) and cast the future time-space as a same-sex arena, operating a shift away from patriarchal to women-dominated communities. Although the final stanza evokes feelings of impotence (“I, in vain, must sit and wait”), it also conveys a sense of immediate satisfaction and of hopes – the star of the future shining far but bright. In this regard, the poem is by nature anti-apocalyptic and opposes conceptions of the fin-de-siècle in Decadent poems by men.

5. Conclusion of Chapter 3

Chapter 3 has explored the ways in which fin-de-siècle women poets revised culturally loaded motifs (or local chronotopes) to fit their own agendas against male power structures and to promote women’s artistic communities. The first section has studied the city as a labyrinthine, multicursal and mysterious time-space fostering same-sex encounters in women’s poems. It has contrasted their approaches to the city with that of male Decadents, whose chronotopes of the pavement, the street and the gaslamp locked the public woman within essentialist conceptions of the feminine. The second section has explored women’s revisions of the chronotope of the moon,
challenging its long-standing misogynistic connections with artistic sterility and the perfidious, deceitful feminine. Their chronotopic approaches highlight intersections between the feminine, the lunar and the creative, and enable a shift away from patriarchal kinship to highly feminised, cosmogonic, matriarchal and women-dominated societies. The final section has compared counting chronotopes in the poetry of Decadent men and that of their female counterparts. It has highlighted men’s passion for clocks and hourglasses (opening anticlimactic and entropic chronotopes) to create their own myth. Women, by comparison, conceived the fin-de-siècle as open and revised their peers’ understandings of transitional time-space in their empowering aesthetics of expectation, opening chronotopes of improved futures.

**AFTERWORD**

The main contribution of my thesis lies in its use of the chronotope to underpin an *organic* approach to genre, the canon and women’s poetry at the end of the century. The flexibility of the chronotope as a classification tool that allows overlappings and contradictions to exist has enabled me to celebrate the rich diversity of women poets’ aesthetics as well as their engagements in contemporary debates – both within their own collections and at a cross-authorial level via the creation of a collective mythos. Additionally, the dual nature of the chronotope as a literary and cognitive tool has allowed me to highlight the ways in which fin-de-siècle poems by women encode gendered worldviews, which oppose normative, masculine time-space configurations. Connecting motifs and rhythms with the wider political agendas of my chosen authors, has allowed me to offer a more complete overview of the specificities of women’s poetry. In this way, my work synthesizes the segmented approach to literature that continues to shape central studies on Victorian women’s poetry, as evidenced in Linda Hughes’ new *Cambridge Companion* (2019), with its opening section on “Form” (including different chapters on genres and prosody) and its second section on women’s worldviews and influences (including reception, publishing, class or dialect).

This textual and cognitive approach to poetic creation disrupts the lines of influence and genealogies imposed by both the immediate and subsequent reception

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of these poets. Bakhtin’s theoretical frame has allowed me to highlight relationships of influence between mid-Victorian male poets and fin-de-siècle female poets (such as Browning and Kendall) which scholars have so far overlooked. Similarly, my thesis studies the important, but ignored tribute that Marriott Watson’s border-ballads pay to Swinburne’s revival of the genre. My reading challenges the sole alignment of Kendall’s poetry with that of Constance Naden and Mathilde Blind (in the works of Catherine E. Birch, Wolfgang Funk, Gemma King or Fabienne Moine)358, and also situates Kendall in relation to socialist and New Woman writings.359

By concentrating on the gendered nature of motifs or local chronotopes, my thesis also interrogates the extent to which masculine time-space configurations have shaped (or mis-shaped) the reception of fin-de-siècle poetry. In The Fin-de-Siècle Poem, for instance, Bristow argues that disproportionate scholarly emphasis on 1880-90s poems by men discussing themes of degeneration, loose morals or entropy, springs from the immediate reception of the literary era by Decadent male circles. My analysis of women poets’ appropriations of culturally loaded motifs such as the cigarette and future times (as well as their use of ‘time-bomb’ temporalities) demonstrates women’s conceptions of the era in terms of ‘open time’. This is in stark contrast to the emphasis on closure in the poetry of their male peers. In Kendall’s work, concepts of entropy and degeneration underpin her political agenda to challenge male power structures. Analysing these motifs is key to invoking alternative views of the fin-de-siècle literary period and reconfiguring our own claims, based on these new time-space matrixes.

Self-consciousness of these organising paradigms may also allow us to remap conceptions of fin-de-siècle women’s poetry. My study of women poets’ worldviews, ingrained at the micro-level of the texts, and the counter-chronotopes that they create, for instance challenges the distinction between ‘minor’ and ‘major’ or ‘popular’ poetry (creating a gendered hierarchy) by restoring women poets to the centre of fin-de-siècle debates and treating their works as dialogic spaces, which encourage discussion. My thesis also challenges the rationale behind using categories conceptualised by men to map women’s contributions to fin-de-siècle literature. The question that opened the


359 While Birch insists on the rarity of direct references to gender in Kendall’s poetry – and reminds us that her verses appeared under the name of a man in Punch, “unsympathetic to the New Woman’s agenda”–, my analysis of the ways in which Kendall challenges masculine power structures allows me to place her within a wider New Woman tradition. Birch, “Evolutionary Feminism”, 28.
“Women Writing Decadence” 2018 conference in Oxford, (i.e. what roles did women play in decadent movements and is there such a thing as a female decadent poet?), is inscribed within masculine time-space matrixes (or chronotopes) asserting masculine circles as normative. My analysis of centrifugal energies and chronotopic clashes in women’s poems has shown how these writers both participated in, and challenged such trends by revising the time-spaces underpinning masculine power structures.

By showing how different chronotopes in 1880-90s poems by women interact, complement and oppose one another and thus typify their authors’ reactions to cultural domination at the micro-level of the line my thesis helps resolve tensions around studying women’s poetry as women’s poetry. In the afterword of Hughes’ new Companion, Isobel Armstrong asks: “Should there be a kind of separatist criticism that treats of women’s poetry on its own in spite of the danger of consolidating the separate spheres to which the woman poet was often doomed, or should women’s and men’s poetry be discussed together through inter-twined thematic readings?” 360 In the new preface to her book Victorian Poetry, she notes that these inter-gender studies are rare, as evidenced by the recent call of the journal Victorian Poetry for such studies for their special issue ‘Gender and Genre’ (2019). 361 Bakhtin’s chronotope has allowed me to answer this tension by negating the need for an “or” in Armstrong’s question. My thesis considers the many ways in which women’s poetry is necessarily distinct from men’s, because their worldviews were. The chronotopes of the labyrinth, the fossil or the wild woman, among others, result from women poets’ understandings of the normative, masculine and tyrannical time-space configurations that shaped literary and cultural discourses at the fin-de-siècle, as well as the counter-cultures that their works invoked. At the same time, my thesis shows how women’ engagements with normative male tradition shape the time-space matrixes of their poems and underpin the chronotopic clashes at stake in their wider aesthetics. In other words, exploring their poems with a theoretical frame that bridges dichotomies between the formal and ideological necessarily involves discussing men and women’s works together.


Finally, my thesis participates in redefining the fin-de-siècle literary era as a whole. In the introduction of my thesis, I have contended that the tension that Bristow points out between conceptions of the era as liminal in the minds of its poets, and studies of the fin-de-siècle as an independent era that fostered poetic innovation is not necessary. When approaching poems through Bakhtin’s theory, the very fact that poets conceived their era as transitional justifies regarding the fin-de-siècle as a chronotope of its own, unfurling original time-space matrixes tied to these emerging worldviews. My studies of motifs in Chapter 3, however, has highlighted different modalities of the liminal, as perceived by men and women poets. While the first emphasised ideas of closure and decline – justifying delimitations of the era from the death of Tennyson to that of male Decadent writers, recorded by immediate reception –, the second sought to propel themselves into better future times, exploring poetics of expectation. This vision may disrupt clear lines of demarcation between women’s poetry at the fin-de-siècle and in the modernist era. The chronotope may serve as a conceptual framework for future studies seeking to analyse genealogies or similarities between the two periods, as informed by women poets’ worldviews.

362 Bristow, *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem*, 1.
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Annexes

Annexe 1:

Figure 4: Claude Monet, Boulevard des Capucines, oil on canvas (Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, USA), 1873-1874.
Annexe 2:

Figure 5: James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket, oil on panel (Detroit Institute of the Arts), 1875.
Annexe 3:

*Figure 6: Franz von Stuck, The Kiss of the Sphinx, Found in the Victorian Web, c. 1895.*
Annexe 4:

Figure 7: Tintoretto, Bacchus, Venus and Ariadne, oil on canvas (Venice: Palazzo Ducale), 1576-77