6-11-2012

"The Angel Said Unto Me 'Write!'": Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Ecofeminist Homiletics

David Paul von Schlichten
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

“THE ANGEL SAID UNTO ME ‘WRITE!’”: ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS AND ECOFEMINIST HOMILETICS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

David Paul von Schlichten

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

May 2012

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

David Paul von Schlichten

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

4/11/2012	Signature on file
_____	_____
	Todd N. Thompson, Ph.D. Assistant Professor of English, Advisor
4/11/2012	Signature on file
_____	_____
	James M. Cahalan, Ph.D. Professor of English
4/11/2012	Signature on file
_____	_____
	David B. Downing, Ph.D. Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Signature on file

_____ _____

Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: “The Angel Said Unto Me ‘Write!’”: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Ecofeminist Homiletics

Author: David Paul von Schlichten

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Todd N. Thompson

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. James M. Cahalan
Dr. David B. Downing

This dissertation demonstrates how many of the works of American author Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844-1911) can be interpreted as functioning in an ecofeminist-homiletic manner. This study has two main goals. One is to draw greater attention to the brilliance of Phelps’s work, which is often dismissed because of its didacticism and sentimentality. The second goal is to argue that ecofeminism and religion, especially homiletics, are highly relevant to postbellum literature. Therefore, applying an ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic to literary analysis reveals significant patterns in postbellum literature generally overlooked or minimized.

Chapter One first surveys postbellum preaching to identify its key characteristics and then provides an overview of ecofeminism, including its theological applications, to arrive at an ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic with which to analyze Phelps’s works.

Chapters Two through Four demonstrate how nine of Phelps’s works can be interpreted as functioning like ecofeminist sermons. Chapter Two applies this heuristic to Phelps’s *Gates* trilogy, which consists of *The Gates Ajar* (1868), *Beyond the Gates* (1883), and *The Gates Between* (1887). The novels of the trilogy function like ecofeminist sermons primarily by describing heaven as a realm that blurs the boundaries between the natural and the spiritual as well as between male and female. Chapter Three focuses on *Hedged In* (1870), *The Silent Partner* (1871), and *A Singular Life* (1895), in

which nature often reacts negatively to patriarchy, even functioning at times in lieu of the wrath of God. Chapter Four examines how Phelps addresses androcentric and anthropocentric biases in the scientific and medical community in *The Story of Avis* (1877), *Dr. Zay* (1882), and *Trixy* (1904).

To demonstrate the relevance of the ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic to postbellum fiction in general, Chapter Five applies the heuristic to three postbellum works outside of Phelps's oeuvre: Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron" (1886), Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899).

The conclusion suggests how this study would be useful for preachers who wish to improve their skills.

DEDICATION

My mother, Shari Paul Ruggiero (1945-2010), died suddenly from blood clots in her brain on December 21, a month before I took my comprehensive exams and three days before her sixty-fifth birthday. She knew I was going to write my dissertation on Phelps and would be delighted with it because it positively focuses on women's rights and Christianity. And heaven knows she would brag about the dissertation because one of *her* children wrote it.

Mom, you taught me to be a liberal Christian who cares for the neglected and oppressed, especially women and animals. You rescued us children from our biological father's abuse and married Alfred Ruggiero, our true daddy. We all are still heartbroken over your death. We look forward to hugging you beyond the gates and never letting go. This dissertation is dedicated to you. I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I thank God/dess for empowering me to complete this dissertation. Soli Dea Gloria.

Second, I am ever grateful to a mentor who died far too soon. Dr. Karen Dandurand introduced me to Phelps in the fall of 2009 and was ever supportive and instructive. She led me through an independent study of Phelps, was on my comprehensive exams committee, and was my initial dissertation director until her death from cancer in September, 2011. I am in your debt, Karen, and I look forward to meeting with you beyond the gates.

I am also indebted to Dr. Todd Thompson, who was brilliant and gracious as my dissertation director. Todd was endlessly patient with my silly errors and offered much wisdom regarding how to improve my dissertation. He is a masterful scholar.

In addition, I am grateful to my other dissertation committee members, Dr. Jim Cahalan and Dr. David Downing. Both have been generous and instructive, not only regarding the dissertation, but repeatedly throughout my three years at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Many other people have contributed to this dissertation, as well. I thank Michelle Gaffner Wood and Dr. Susan Comfort for teaching me about ecofeminism. Something like scales fell from my eyes when I learned about it. My colleague and friend Pastor Leah Schade introduced me to the term “ecofeminist homiletics.” Glenn Canner, my closest friend after my wife, repeatedly made me laugh, was a caring listener, and assisted me with research.

My father, Pastor Alfred Ruggiero, was not only infinitely loving and enthusiastic (as always) but also a helpful colleague both as a pastor and a literature scholar, providing me with valuable material about Phelps's appropriation of the Arthurian legend. More importantly, my father has also instilled in me a passion for helping to liberate the oppressed and has modeled for me a kind of masculinity that respects women as equals. I love you, Malfie. Mom would be proud of both of us.

Of course, I have golden gratitude in my deep heart for the support I received from my children, Michael and Katie Ribblet, our cats, and especially my wife, Kimberly von Schlichten. I love all of you. Kim, I thank you over and over for being my playful, empathetic, patient, wise, and supportive chee. I look forward to living in Cape May with you. We will feed sea gulls and continue our non-violent fight for the well-being of all, especially non-human nature, which is constantly being victimized by anthropocentric arrogance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

"Yet a novel, which cannot be a homily, may be an illumination."

--Elizabeth Stuart Phelps
Prefatory note to *Trixy* (vii)

Postbellum author and activist Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844-1911) is correct. A novel cannot be a sermon. Novels and sermons function differently. Nevertheless, much of her work functions homiletically. In her introduction to a volume published in 2000 containing all three books of Phelps's *Gates* trilogy (1868, 1883, 1887), Nina Baym writes that "Phelps's writing merged her mother's domestic fiction with her father's polemical sermonizing" (xiv). Baym adds, "Claiming the right to sermonize, to promulgate a countergospel to that enunciated by the conservative churches, Phelps continued to work at the boundaries of women's permissible speech" (xii). Other scholars have pointed out the sermonic nature of Phelps's work as well. For instance, Lori Duin Kelly contends that Phelps "became a self-appointed preacher of a different sort" (31). However, there has been no detailed analysis of precisely *how* Phelps's work is sermonic, especially vis-à-vis the homiletic practices of her day, including those of her renowned preacher-father, Austin Phelps (1820-1890). I will provide such an analysis, and in doing so will demonstrate that Phelps often functions like an ecofeminist preacher in her fiction. As we will see, ecofeminist themes figure prominently in her work, which is sermonic in several regards.

Again, there are marked differences between a sermon and a work of fiction. In general, sermons are discourses that state ideas outright, while works of fiction tell stories that embody ideas for the reader to discern on his or her own. Sermons generally tell

hearers what to believe and how to live, while works of fiction generally tell stories to lead readers to certain beliefs and lifestyles. Sermons are often delivered orally, while novels are generally read. However, at times, the boundary between sermons and works of fiction is blurry. For instance, many sermons tell stories, while many works of fiction didactically advocate for certain ethical behavior rooted in a particular theological position.

This study focuses on the latter and, in doing so, will accomplish the following. First, it will draw greater attention to the contribution of Phelps to American literature by highlighting generally overlooked complexity and subtlety in her work. Moreover, the study will add significantly to the body of critical work about Phelps by explicating the homiletic nature of her work that other Phelps scholars have noted but have not elaborated on. Second, this study will introduce a heuristic of ecofeminist homiletics applicable to literary texts in general, specifically those from postbellum America. Highlighting the existence of ecofeminist-homiletic themes and structures in postbellum literary texts reveals complexity in texts that have been often excluded from the canon or confined to its periphery due to alleged aesthetic inferiority. Such has certainly been the case with the works of Phelps, who is often omitted from anthologies and is not widely taught. Along these lines, this study is important because homiletic novels like those of Phelps helped to shape American realism, as Gregory S. Jackson argues in his 2009 book *The Word and Its Witness: The Spiritualization of American Realism* (6). Jackson contends that the vivid imagery (such as gruesome descriptions of hell) used in sermons to engage hearers and lead them to conversion influenced homiletic novels, which in turn influenced American realism. Third, the study hopes to contribute to an increased

awareness of ecofeminist themes in texts. These themes have often been overlooked to the detriment of nature and women. Greater attention to what we would call ecofeminist components increases the likelihood of societies moving toward an improvement of the conditions of women and nature.

Granted, the term "ecofeminism," born of the 1970s, is anachronistic vis-à-vis Phelps. The term "ecofeminist homiletics" is newer still.[1] However, much of what we now classify as ecofeminism is manifested in Phelps's work. Her writing is consistent enough with ecofeminism that it can be termed "precofeminist,"[2] that is, "proto-ecofeminist." Throughout this dissertation, when I write that Phelps's work can be interpreted as functioning in an "ecofeminist" manner, I have this "precofeminist" idea in mind. She was not an ecofeminist per se, but her work can often be regarded as containing elements that prefigure ecofeminism.

Moreover, considerable scholarship applies ecofeminism to texts written well before the term was coined. For instance, the March-April 2002 issue of *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* is devoted entirely to applying ecofeminism to eighteenth and nineteenth century texts, focusing especially on the concept of place and how one's relationship to one's surroundings is always mediated by social context. The articles illustrate well the applicability of ecofeminism to texts from literary periods predating the advent of the term "ecofeminism." For instance, Donna Coffey explains in

[1]I learned the term "ecofeminist homiletics" from my colleague the Reverend Leah Schade, a Ph.D. candidate in theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. She specializes in ecocritical theology and ecofeminism. I have not encountered the term elsewhere.

[2]Thank you to Dr. Todd Thompson for the term "precofeminist."

the introduction to the issue that the postbellum concept of the woman being the angel of the house has helped to shape women's relationships with nature. Coffey writes that both women and nature are valuable to patriarchal society inasmuch as they are useful and beautiful; Coffey also notes that some authors from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries challenge this association (132). Several articles in the issue explore how women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were frequently associated with flowers and gardens and that several women authors of those centuries, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Seward, and Lydia Maria Child, critiqued these associations. Clearly there is strong precedent for applying ecofeminism to Phelps, even though the term is anachronistic vis-à-vis the postbellum era.

Indeed, the application of ecofeminist homiletics to Phelps is ideal given her dedication to Christianity, writing, and activism. Born in 1844 to the renowned preacher and professor Austin Phelps (1820-1890) and the popular author Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1815-1852), young Mary Gray (she would later change her name to match her mother's) was exposed to theology and writing at an early age.[3] She grew up in Andover, Massachusetts, where her father taught at Andover Theological Seminary and was later its president (Privett 13-15). She writes in her memoir *Chapters from a Life* (1896) of the conservative, patriarchal[4] theology of the town and school, and her father epitomized that

[3] Both of her parents wrote books with religious themes and both had fathers who were pastors. Her mother's novels were often semi-autobiographical in their depictions of life as a minister's wife, and her mother's novel *The Angel over the Right Shoulder, or The Beginning of the New Year* (1852) portrays the frustrations that women experience as they struggle to keep up with their domestic responsibilities.

[4] In Christianity, for centuries the word "patriarch" was a respectful, collective term for early, male religious leaders such as Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. Since around 1970, the term has been used to refer negatively to the male oppression of others, especially

orientation. She expresses affection for that orthodox environment (26) but also rebels against it, such as when she writes, "There have been times when the inevitable limitations of [Andover's] horizon have seemed as familiar as the coffin-lid to the dead" (24-25). Phelps makes clear in *Chapters from a Life* that she idolized both of her parents (Privett 17). At the same time, she was at odds with her father on several theological and social issues. For instance, he wrote pieces in which he opposed women receiving the right to vote, while she was a dedicated advocate for women's rights. She also writes sympathetically about her mother's struggle to be wife, mother, and successful writer, contending that "[h]er last book and her last baby came together, and killed her" (Phelps 12). Indeed, her mother's death when Phelps was only eight had a deep impact on her. Phelps would grow up to write repeatedly about the unfair and restrictive nature of married life for women, especially those wishing to develop a career outside the home. Nevertheless, in 1888, at the age of forty-four, she married Herbert Dickinson Ward, who was seventeen years her junior. The two had no children, and the marriage was unhappy (Privett 201), in part because Ward was often away from home.

Throughout her life, Phelps wrote as a Christian about important social issues. She saw writing as a calling from God to produce "art for truth's sake" (Phelps 249) that helped to ameliorate social ills, especially those pertaining to women, although she was also concerned about alcohol abuse, vivisection, and the rights of the poor (250-251). She published her first work when she was thirteen (Privett iii) and would go on to publish fifty-seven books and about 200 short pieces in a variety of genres. Her earliest novels were didactic Christian works for children. Phelps's literary breakthrough came with the

---

women. I will use the term in this latter sense while being mindful of the fact that, for Phelps, the word had the older, positive connotation.

publication of *The Gates Ajar* in 1868, when she was twenty-four. The impetus for the novel, which she began in 1864, was her perception that countless women grieving the loss of their men from the Civil War were not receiving adequate consolation from their clergy. Perhaps Phelps had in mind her own grief; in 1862, her "first love," Lieutenant Samuel H. Thompson, was killed at the battle of Antietam (Privett iii). Regarding the inspiration of the novel, she writes that she "had no more to do with the writing of it than the bough through which the wind cries, or the wave by means of which the tide rises. The angel said unto me 'Write!' and I wrote" (Phelps 95). The novel's comforting description of a personalized and concretized heaven was enormously successful, becoming a bestseller in the United States and Great Britain and leading to two sequels. Phelps wrote the *Gates* trilogy primarily for women, and the books repeatedly suggest that heaven is a place of greater respect for women that people on Earth should try to emulate. The trilogy also presents nature positively, such as by showing it flourishing physically in heaven rather than presenting heaven as a purely spiritual realm. These concerns for women and nature recur throughout Phelps's work.

She went on to write numerous books, articles, poems, and stories in which she strives with didactic artfulness to correct social injustices, especially those pertaining to women. She explores the problems of urban poverty and teen pregnancy in *Hedged In* (1870). In *The Silent Partner* (1871), she provides an early critique of industrial mills, including the patriarchal leadership's tendency to exploit nature and ignore the needs and voices of women. In 1873, she published a collection of lectures on dress reform entitled *What to Wear?*, in which she argues that women's fashion, with its cumbersome dresses and tight corsets, was detrimental to women's health and that women should reject such

dress for more healthful and empowering clothing. Indeed, Phelps was often concerned about women's bodies and their health. In 1877, she published *The Story of Avis* (generally considered her best work), which tells of an artistic genius who ends up sacrificing her career on the altar of marriage and motherhood. In this novel, Phelps explores the difficulties women encountered in marriage, which often required women to sacrifice their private aspirations in the name of being a wife and mother. She also uses nature imagery to highlight how patriarchy imprisons women; for instance, the name of the heroine, Avis, means bird, and the novel explores how patriarchal expectations trap Avis like a caged bird. Phelps's novel *Doctor Zay* (1882) depicts a woman serving as a successful physician, despite the prevalent view at the time that women were incapable of filling such a role. In *Jack the Fisherman* (1882) and *A Singular Life* (1895), Phelps uses nature imagery to denounce alcoholism, such as by depicting nature as a threatening force against those who abuse alcohol (who, in these novels, are generally men). Phelps showed her advocacy of temperance through activist efforts, including the establishing of the Gloucester Temperance Reform Club in 1875 (Privett iv). She also wrote against vivisection, such as in her novella *Loveliness: A Story* (1899) and her novel *Trixy* (1904), and lectured several times against the practice, as well.

Throughout her work, Phelps's dedication to Christianity is ever-present, even when not explicit. Several of her works are overtly Christian, such as the *Gates* trilogy, or have Christian characters and themes, such as *The Silent Partner*, *A Singular Life*, and *The Story of Jesus Christ: An Interpretation* (1897). Works that do not have overtly Christian characters and themes still were shaped by Phelps's belief that her calling as a Christian was to create "art for truth's sake." For example, books such as *The Story of*

Avis, *What to Wear?*, *Trixy*, and the short-story collection *Sealed Orders* (1879) all have Christian themes and images woven into them even though the works themselves are not explicitly religious. Indeed, for Phelps writing morally was writing as a Christian. As she states in *Chapters from a Life*, "After all, the Great Artist [i.e., God] is not a poor master; all His foregrounds stand out against the perspective of the moral nature. Why go tiptoeing about the easel to avoid it?" (264). According to Phelps, if God is concerned about morality, then humans, including the artist, should be, as well.

Central to Phelps's identity as an agent for curing social ills was her lifelong struggle with poor health. Especially troublesome was her severe insomnia, a condition she inherited from her father. She was an ardent proponent of homeopathic medicine, which argues that certain substances can cure a person of a disease by mimicking the symptoms of the disease in a way that liberates the body's "life force" and thus stimulates healing. Regarding homeopathic medicine, she writes,

> I am often told by skeptical friends that I hold this belief [i.e., homeopathic medicine] on a par with the Christian religion; and am not altogether inclined to deny this sardonic impeachment! When our bodies cease to be drugged into disease and sin, it is my personal impression that our souls will begin to stand a fair chance; perhaps not much before. (252)

This interest in homeopathic medicine, which is generally regarded as a more "natural" approach to medicine in that it tends to avoid synthetic drugs and stresses empowering the body to heal itself, reveals yet another connection that Phelps had to nature. In addition, repeatedly in her fiction she shows sympathy for the sick, especially sick women who are victimized by their environment. For instance, in *The Silent Partner*

Sip's sister Catty is severely disabled because of harsh conditions at the mill where she and her family have worked, and the short story "The Lady of Shalott" (1879) features a young woman who is an invalid as a result of abuse and whose sister is debilitated by her work sewing.

Throughout her life, Phelps was like a preacher in that, as a Christian, she was dedicated to writing and activism in the name of improving social problems. She was like an ecofeminist preacher in that she was passionately concerned about the patriarchal subjugation of oppressed entities and groups, especially women and nature. In Chapter One I contextualize Phelps's writing by providing an overview of postbellum preaching before surveying ecofeminist homiletics in order to establish an ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic through which to read Phelps and other postbellum authors. In subsequent chapters I apply this heuristic to several of Phelps's works. I start with the *Gates* trilogy in Chapter Two because it was central to Phelps's fame and because it engages ecofeminist homiletics by critiquing patriarchal, Calvinist preaching and replacing it with Phelps's alternative, which elevates the value of women and nature. Chapter Three examines *Hedged In* (1870), *The Silent Partner* (1871), and *A Singular Life* (1895), each of which illustrates how nature is perverted by patriarchy and Christian hypocrisy. In fact, in these novels the wrath of nature sometimes stands in for the wrath of God. At the same time, the three works regard proper Christian behavior as essential for the amelioration of social injustice. In Chapter Four, I apply the lens of ecofeminist homiletics to *The Story of Avis* (1877), *Doctor Zay* (1882), and *Trixy* (1904) to highlight ways in which these pieces explore how male-dominated postbellum science and medicine could benefit from the influence of women. These three works differ from the

novels studied in Chapters Two and Three in that they are not explicitly religious. Nevertheless, Christianity is beneath the surface in these works, especially in their focus on social justice issues. Further, the issues that Phelps addresses are often related to ecofeminist ideals. For instance, *Trixy* is an anti-vivisection piece and makes connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. Chapter Five demonstrates the benefit of applying the ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic to other literary texts from the postbellum era by using the heuristic in brief analyses of Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron" (1886), Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899). These analyses suggest that postbellum literature often lends itself well to an ecofeminist-homiletic analysis and that religion plays a larger role in this literature, including in secular works, than has generally been thought.

CHAPTER ONE

POSTBELLUM PREACHING AND

ECOFEMINIST HOMILETICS

Essential to understanding Phelps as functioning like an ecofeminist preacher is studying her homiletic context. In the first half of this chapter, I will describe postbellum preaching. In the second half, I will formulate a definition of ecofeminist homiletics. Through the remainder of the dissertation, I will apply both of these understandings to Phelps's works and show how this application has implications for ecofeminism, homiletics, and postbellum literary studies.

Postbellum Preaching

One notable feature of postbellum preaching was that it often responded to Calvinism by reinforcing it, critiquing it, or both. As I noted in the preface, Phelps had frequent exposure to Calvinism through her father and Andover Theological Seminary.[5]

[5] Calvinism emphasized five key points, which people often remember with the help of the acronym TULIP: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Humans are completely evil, totally depraved, and, without God's intervention, doomed to damnation. Thus, one is elected for salvation unconditionally, that is, without earning salvation (since humans are too depraved to earn salvation). God is under no obligation to redeem sinful humanity, and God's choice to do so is independent of humanity's volition or merit. God is completely sovereign, and God, in his sovereignty, elects some people for salvation and some for damnation (limited atonement). Those elected cannot resist the grace of God. Moreover, the elect will persevere in their devotion to God, because God will enable them to do so (Bridgers 20). Calvinism also tended to be millenarian, preoccupied with the final judgment. Further, the Calvinists in America leaned toward reading the Bible typologically, that is, with the understanding that certain Biblical events, usually found in the Old Testament, prefigured later events. This hermeneutic was not unique to American Calvinists, but what was distinctive was the view that the Old Testament story of the Israelites settling in the Promised Land prefigured the setting of Calvinists, particularly

According to Lynn Bridgers, "Much of the subsequent development of American religious history . . . comes as a reaction to Calvinism" (20). As Ann Douglas argues in *The Feminization of American Culture* (1977), from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries Calvinism was diluted and lost its influence, although Calvinism remained influential well into the postbellum era. Austin Phelps was clearly influenced by a form of Calvinism, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps critiques Calvinism in several of her novels, such as *A Singular Life* (1895).

As Jackson explains, an important component of Calvinist preaching was the use of fear to compel hearers toward repentance. Drawing from the epistemology of John Locke, which emphasized the acquisition of knowledge and truth solely through sensory experience, Jonathan Edwards and other preachers of the First Great Awakening painted vivid, often terrifying, pictures of hell and judgment in their sermons in order to push Christians toward shedding complacency and embracing repentance and rededication to the Christian life (75-76). Jackson explains that part of the reason for this reliance on fear was the decline of the influence of the Calvinist doctrine of election, which asserted that God determines who will be saved and who will be condemned apart from any influence from the individual in question. This decline, coupled with the rise of Arminianism, which stressed the role of the individual in salvation, prompted preachers such as Edwards to use fear homiletically as a conversion tool (42). Jackson writes, "As a fast track to the passions, fear provided the best catalyst for this process" (76) of creating through the sermon a vivid experience for the hearer that would shove him or her toward

---

Puritans, in America. In addition, Calvinist preaching was often jeremiadic, that is, full of severe exhortation for reform with a threat of punishment for disobedience and a promise of blessing for obedience (Bercovitch xi). Finally, Calvinism tended to call for its adherents, the persevering saints, to shun earthly items and focus on spiritual ones.

repentance. This employment of fear is a homiletic feature that Phelps critiques in her novels, such as by essentially removing Calvnisist understandings of damnation from her *Gates* trilogy.

A child of Calvinism was Congregationalism, which arose from Puritanism and stressed the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, the idea that every person is a kind of minister and is thus not heavily dependent upon ordained clergy. Congregationalism also emphasized the autonomy of the congregation. In the eighteenth century, Congregationalism was influenced by Arminianism. Congregational churches also became more liberal theologically in the nineteenth century. Consequently, many Congregational churches defected to Unitarianism, and Congregationalists also frequently devalued the importance of conversion ("Congregationalism" 261). Phelps and her father were both Congregationalists, although it is clear from her more progressive works that Phelps was more liberal than her father. Her liberal views recur throughout her work, such as in her advocacy of women's rights and her critique of mill-conditions and vivisection.

Related to the postbellum sermon's engagement with Calvinism, a second feature of preaching from this era is a structure that draws in the hearer aesthetically and didactically. Jackson explains that sermons from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries engaged the hearer with an "aesthetics of immediacy" that artistically drew hearers into an intimate association with the sermon that led them didactically toward repentance, social reform, or both. Often through the employment of "allegorical frames," the sermon generated a "homiletic realism" that "denied readers the role of passive onlooker" (31), forcing them to take an active role as a listener and to continue living out the world of the

sermon long after the preacher has stopped (32). Jackson contends that part of achieving this goal of generating homiletic realism was adherence to a structure inherited from classical rhetoric. Preachers divided their sermons into five parts: invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory (191). These parts constituted a "linguistic algorithm" (191) that enabled preachers to awaken the hearts and minds of hearers. Moreover, by making hearers aware of these steps, preachers helped the hearers to be more active listeners. Aware of the homiletic steps, hearers were more active in that they were listening for the steps in the sermon. Preachers generally overtly laid out the argument in a sermon in a way that enabled hearers to be more involved in listening and so more likely to internalize the sermon (192).

Jackson goes on to propose that postbellum fiction writers often appropriated these homiletic moves in their writing. For instance, he explains that Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868-1869) begins with the March sisters reading John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and then, throughout the novel, depicts the girls as trying to emulate Christian the Pilgrim. The novel, Jackson contends, is "a template for reader identification and imitation, and a lesson of kinds of interpretive practices—applied at once to the literary text and to the text of one's life" (127). He goes on to argue that, in the late nineteenth century, *Little Women* functioned as "a bridge text in the transition between homiletic heuristic paradigms and popular literary forms for lay audiences whose tastes influenced the novelization, and, to an extent, the secularization, of homiletic literature" (128). Jackson contends that the sermon gave way to literature that functioned homiletically (and that, indeed, the sermon was a forebear of American realism).

Phelps, too, imitates the homiletic practice of employing allegorical frames and typologies with great effectiveness in her *Gates* trilogy. Her characters often have quasi-allegorical names reminiscent of the names in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. For instance, in *The Gates Ajar* (published the same year as *Little Women*), the protagonist, Mary, is mourning a dead brother. Thus, she brings to mind the Mary of John 11, who is mourning the death of her brother Lazarus. Mary from *The Gates Ajar* receives little comfort from the aptly named Deacon Quirk and Dr. Bland. However, she receives great comfort from Winifred Forceythe, whose name suggests winning and freedom (Winifred) and having special sight or foresight (Forceythe), as in the ability to see ahead to how heaven will be for us once we die. Moreover, she has a daughter named Faith. Thus, *The Gates Ajar* has a quasi-allegorical flavor, just as many sermons of Phelps's day did. Chapter Two addresses further this feature of the *Gates* books, especially *The Gates Ajar*.

Along the same lines as Jackson, Tamara S. Wagner argues that there was, in Victorian Britain, the development of the sermon novel, that, "on a general level . . . refers to any fictional narrative, of a certain length, that contains or centrally features sermons, their composition, delivery, or reception; more specifically, it operates as a fictionalized sermon itself" (312). She asserts that a sermon novel that "operates as a fictionalized sermon" is different from didactic fiction in that "it is concerned primarily with religious communities" but is not a work of "religious doubt" (312). She continues by claiming that such a novel "may tangentially address atheism, agnosticism, or the secularization of morality, yet the emphasis continues to rest on moral issues that simultaneously help to express a specific religious agenda" (312). In other words, the homiletic novel is not merely a work that is didactic or about religion. Rather, such a

novel is homiletic because it promotes a morality or theology in accord with a particular religious viewpoint. Thus, for example, the satiric anti-Christian pieces of Mark Twain would not be considered homiletic even though they deal with religion, since those texts are generally scathingly anti-religion. Likewise, a work, such as a temperance novel, is not homiletic simply because it is didactic. The didacticism of the homiletic novel promotes the morality of a "religious agenda." Such is repeatedly the case with the works of Phelps, which have a clearly Christian, albeit socially liberal, agenda.

A brief survey of three books about preaching published in Phelps's lifetime will help to develop a more specific understanding of the nature of preaching at the time. First, in his influential preaching book *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870), John A. Broadus (1827-1895) exemplifies the postbellum concern with structure and organization, which was essential to the preacher for engaging the hearer. Broadus identifies four types of sermonic subject matter: doctrinal, moral, historical (especially biblical history), and experimental (that which pertains to religious experience). For presenting subject matter there are three kinds of sermons: subject, or topical, sermons, which analyze a subject according to logic and not according to a biblical text; text sermons, which receive their structure from the biblical passage on which they are based; and expository sermons, which focus on the explanation of a biblical passage. He goes on to explain how to craft the elements of the sermon: introduction, plan and divisions, and conclusion. He lists the functional elements of the sermon as explanation, argument, illustration, and application (168-69). Broadus's meticulous attention to sermon sub-genres and homiletic structure are illustrative of the

"linguistic algorithm" that postbellum preachers frequently employed to increase the effectiveness of the proclamation.

In *The Theory of Preaching: Lectures on Homiletics* (1881), Austin Phelps likewise stresses the importance of a sermon having a clear structure of exposition (25) for engaging the hearer. He contends that there are four classes of sermons: topical, textual, expository, and inferential. The topical sermon deduces its subject from the text but then deviates from it. The textual sermon is more closely tied to the text, using the text for its theme and the structure of the text as a guide for the sermon's structure. An expository sermon is a detailed explanation of the text and so is the class that has the closest connection to the text. The inferential sermon has the text as its themes but then derives inferences from the text rather than providing an explication of it. Phelps places sermons in classes based on "method of discussion," which he sees as the most important feature of a sermon that differentiates one from another. The four classes of sermon are the explanatory, the illustrative, the argumentative, and the persuasive (37). As one might expect, explanatory sermons explain something, such as a text, doctrine, or ethical principle. Illustrative sermons serve to "intensify the vividness of truth" (37) and not to establish or explain a truth. Argumentative sermons, by contrast, focus on proving something to be true. Persuasive sermons compel hearers "to present action" (38).

Drawing from classical rhetoric, especially the work of Quintilian and Aristotle (as many postbellum preachers did), Phelps contends that sermons should contain the following parts: the text, the explanation, the introduction, the proposition, the division, the development, and the conclusion (40). He concedes that all of these parts may not always be necessary. The text is, of course, the biblical text on which the sermon is

based, however loosely. The explanation is a statement of how the text is going to be used homiletically (102). The introduction essentially helps to ease the hearer into the main body of the sermon. The proposition clearly defines the subject (194). The divisions refer to the ways that the sermon is broken into sections (247). The development is the body of the sermon. Finally, there is the conclusion, which generally should contain a recapitulation, some sort of concluding inference or remark, and often an appeal to a certain action, such as repentance. In stressing the importance of unity, he contends that there are four "radical varieties" of unity: logical, didactic, picturesque, and oratorical (210).

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's works follow some of these structures that her father and Broadus call for, even while writing in genres other than the sermon, such as fiction and essays. Her essays in *What to Wear?* (1873), which demand improvements to women's clothes to make them more healthful, are highly sermonic in their careful organization and presentation of ideas intended to persuade the reader toward a certain moral conclusion. Likewise, several of her novels are well-organized to proceed logically to advance an argument. *The Gates Ajar* (1868) provides an obvious example of this kind of homiletic organization with its introduction of the faulty theological positions that the male clergy represent followed by Aunt Winifred's presentation of her alternate theology supported by a careful explication of Scripture. *The Silent Partner* (1871), also, has a well-ordered, persuasive structure in its presentation of the injustices of the mills clearly intended to provoke readers to advocate for mill-reform. Just as a sermon often introduces a sin, explains the evils of the sin, and then offers a Christian solution, so also

do works of Phelps, such as *The Silent Partner*, follow such a pattern. Chapters Two, Three, and Four elaborate on these works.

Lectures on Preaching Delivered before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877 (1877) by Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) underlines the psychological dimension of preaching, which is essential to the preacher trying to be persuasive through argumentation, organization, and creating an immersive experience for hearers. These eight lectures explicate not only the definition and structure of the sermon, but also the character of the preacher and congregation, as well as the value of the human soul. Brooks defines preaching as "the communication of truth by man to men. It has in it two essential elements, truth and personality" (9). He adds, "Truth through Personality is our description of real preaching" (11). The preacher is always to remember that he—Brooks thinks of preachers as male—is a messenger (15). Brooks spends quite a bit of time on the importance of the preacher being unselfish and having a healthy body and soul. The preacher must also be a person of extraordinary character and training who truly respects and cares for his congregation (32-34). Brooks warns against personality flaws that can be deadly for a preacher's ministry, such as being conceited (38), and he contends that a congregation is responsible for having a proper respect for its preacher (41). Moreover, Brooks avers that the preacher's work as a pastor is integral to his work as a preacher (45) and devotes large attention to the preacher's activities as pastor and how those activities and the preacher's traits as pastor relate to preaching. Brooks stresses the relational nature of being a pastor, insisting that success as a preacher is dependent upon those relationships. What a preacher wishes to convey in a sermon—clarity, sound logic, liveliness, sincerity—must be in the preacher himself as well (63).

After spending all of lecture two on the character of the preacher, Brooks lectures on the nature of the sermon itself. He calls for sermons to be timely and encourages preachers not to shy away from political sermons, for politics relates to matters of the soul (80-81). Regarding the making of a sermon, Brooks stresses that the sermon's construction should be dependent upon the sermon's idea (81). Preachers should be flexible and versatile in the pulpit, and a preacher's style must be his own, not an imitation of another preacher (83). A preacher should select a topic for a sermon based on "the preacher's inclination," "the symmetry and 'scale' of all his preaching," and the needs of the congregation (86).

This psychological focus in Brooks's collection of lectures, which was widely read, exemplifies the concern of the postbellum preacher with crafting a sermon that would deeply engage hearers in a way that would compel them to live more faithfully as Christians. That deep engagement happens through connecting biblical stories and teachings to significant events and values in the lives of hearers. Moreover, the work of Phelps, who knew Brooks—she writes about him with admiration in *Chapters from a Life*—took seriously the psychology of both preacher and congregation. For example, in *A Singular Life* (1895), preacher Emanuel Bayard is denied ordination because his Calvinist seminary deems his theology unsound, but he ends up being a successful pastor in part because of his ability to relate well to his working class and hard-drinking parishioners. In fact, on his way to his ill-fated ordination examination, he breaks up a fight between two drunks, thereby winning the respect of some of the fight's onlookers and even of one of the drunks, Job Slip. By contrast, Deacon Quirk and Dr. Bland from *The Gates Ajar* prove remarkably ineffective at ministering to their bereaved Mary when

her brother is killed in the Civil War. Caught up in their Calvinist theology, they are unable to address Mary's psychological needs, while Mary's aunt Winifred, a homiletic foil to the male clergy, is far more successful. Chapters Two through Four explore further the psychological elements of these works.

Several topics recurred in postbellum preaching. One was the issue of science versus religion. In response to evolution and other scientific discoveries, as well as to pseudosciences such as phrenology, preachers addressed the topic of science regularly from the pulpit, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. Popular Congregationalist preacher Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), for example, spoke from the pulpit in support of evolution (Miller 218) while Charles Hodge (1797-1878) of Princeton Theological Seminary proclaimed that evolution and Christianity were incompatible (212). Another important topic was social issues, such as temperance and slavery. Beecher, for instance, advocated for women's rights, opposed slavery, and called for social reform ("Beecher, Henry Ward" 30).

Washington Gladden (1836-1918), a Congregationalist minister, was deeply concerned about the social issues of his time and believed that the Church could and should be a key institution for the addressing of social injustice. In his sermon "Spiritual Law in the Natural World," Gladden illustrates his passion for social justice issues. He begins with Matthew 14:15-21, which tells the story of Jesus feeding over five-thousand people. He extrapolates a spiritual message from the story, which is that, just as Jesus is able to produce abundance from a small amount without there being any offsetting loss, so also can people, by God's power, produce great spiritual results without any offsetting loss to the Church or society. The sermon draws from scientific logic, arguing that the

scientific law of the conservation of energy, which contends that there must be a loss to correspond with a gain of energy (so that the amount of energy ultimately remains constant), does not apply when it comes to religious matters. Gladden uses as an example Dorothy "Sister Dora" Pattison (1832-1878), a nun who Gladdens says was immature in her youth but then went on to become the portrait of selfless Christian giving. Her life led to great benefit for countless people without there being any corresponding loss to society or herself. Gladden goes on to declare that this principle can be applied beyond the spiritual realm to the material one. For instance, in business, if both employer and employee strive to be selfless, then everyone benefits. Contrary to the notion that each person in the business world should simply take care of him- or herself, it is actually more productive to have everyone think beyond the self to the good of others. This practice is not merely better morally; it also makes better business sense. Moreover, such thinking can produce an abundance of amelioration regarding social problems. The sermon progresses from the feeding miracle in Matthew to the idea that the increased abundance in the story points to a similar phenomenon in the spiritual world, which can lead to a corresponding increase in the number of people working to correct social injustice (299-307). Thus, Gladden's sermon presents a carefully developed argument derived from Scripture and so is reminiscent of the emphasis in Austin Phelps and Broadus on a structure that progresses from an introduction of a sin to its Christian solution or from the explication to the application of a biblical text.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's concern with social justice issues is similarly evident. Her writings in defense of women deal with issues such as the exploitation of women in the workplace (*The Silent Partner*, "The Lady of Shalott"), the validity of a woman being

a physician (*Doctor Zay*), the threat marriage and family-life posed to women who wished to pursue a career (*The Story of Avis*), and the negative impact women's clothing had on women's health (*What to Wear?*). She also writes sympathetically about teenage pregnancy (*Hedged In*), opposes vivisection (*Loveliness*, *Trixy*), and staunchly advocates for temperance (*A Singular Life*, *Jack the Fisherman*) as well as the rights of workers in factories (*The Silent Partner*, "The Tenth of January").

Another trend that influenced preaching of postbellum America was the Spiritualist movement, which originated in large part from the teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and which had a wide following in the nineteenth century. The movement taught that one could communicate with the spirits of the dead and thereby learn about the afterlife. The Fox sisters' supposed success with communicating with the dead starting on March 31, 1848 is often cited as the beginning of the movement's popularity in America. According to Spiritualist historian Emma Hardinge, there were eleven million Spiritualists in America in 1870 (Baym ix). Spiritualism surged in popularity partly in response to the Civil War. The movement comforted the bereaved not only by offering a way of communicating with the dead but also by offering "a vision of a friendly, familiar, material heaven populated by recognizable, embodied, sociable spirits busily perfecting themselves, on the one hand, and trying to communicate with those they had left behind, on the other" (ix). Preachers such as Thomas Whittemore denounced Spiritualism, while other preachers, such as John Murray Spear, endorsed the movement. Certainly Phelps's *Gates* trilogy, with its extensive attention to describing the afterlife in just such a manner, is heavily indebted to Spiritualism.

Several sermons illustrate well the key features of postbellum preaching that I have described and so help to establish firmly the homiletic context of Phelps's work. For example, in his textual sermon "A Sermon to Young Men" (1871), Beecher advises members of the Young Men's Christian Association in Brooklyn as they prepare to venture into the world. He proclaims that it would be ideal for young men to live in the country and not relocate to the city, because the city is full of temptations and because remaining home with one's family will help a young man to stay grounded morally. However, young men do indeed often set out for the city, so Beecher provides advice with that reality in mind. He stresses the importance of young men having considerable support, either from family members who live in the city or from others, such as employers or people with whom the young man boards. Beecher urges adults to take care of these young men. Beecher then warns young men of the dangers of both alcohol and tobacco. Next, he dispels with several illusions, which amount to the notion that one must compromise character and spirituality in the name of success. Beecher then praises the YMCA for providing moral guidance for young men in the city and concludes by encouraging hearers to persevere in their dedication to helping young men (304-316).

Beecher's sermon is reminiscent of Broadus's and Phelps's instruction books in that it is clear and carefully organized in a didactic way. Beecher moves from text to point to point in a straightforward manner. The sermon is also reminiscent of Brooks's book in that it is full of palpable concern for people in need. The sermon is occasional in that it is part of a series directed at the YMCA in Brooklyn, and textual in that it starts with a text but then quickly moves away from it to address a topic. Finally, the sermon, with its concern about the psychological well-being of young men, calls to mind Brooks's

advice in his book. Beecher's didactic attention to social issues, such as alcohol abuse and moral corruption in the city, is akin not just to other postbellum preaching but to Phelps's didactic attention to such issues in her novels.

A second sermon that illustrates well the key features of postbellum preaching is one by Dwight Lyman Moody (1837-1899), who was not ordained but was nevertheless one of the best known and most successful evangelists of his age. In "Evening Sermon," he starts with a question from Acts 16:30, "What must I do to be saved?", and uses it as a springboard into a lengthy exhortation for hearers to commit themselves to Christ. He essentially repeats in various ways that one cannot save oneself but must rely on Christ alone. Moody uses earthy and vivid illustrations to make his point. For instance, he recalls a time when a fly was struggling in his glass of water and he decided to rescue it. Likewise, on our own, we sinners are struggling and will perish without Christ saving us. The sermon does not have a tight structure but is simply a repetition of one key concept, the necessity of depending utterly on Christ for salvation (286-293). Like Brooks's book, Moody's sermon focuses on psychology and an emotional concern for the human soul.

His sermon is particularly reminiscent of the sermon of Sip Garth in *The Silent Partner*. Like Moody, Sip is not ordained, and, like Moody, Sip's sermon is looser in structure and earthier than that which, for instance, Austin Phelps might advocate. In her sermon, Sip responds to the popular view among the mill workers that their lives are too full of struggle for them to take time to devote to God. She spends the bulk of the sermon refuting that notion and exhorting people to return to Christ. Like Moody's sermon, Sip's does not progress logically from one idea to the next so much as it repeats the same idea. She declares that "[Christ] won't be hard on you. Don't you suppose he knows how the

lives you live are hard enough without that heaped against them?" (298) She goes on to proclaim, "Rich and poor, big or little, there's no way under heaven for us to get out of our twist, but Christ's way" (299). Sip's earthy approach and repetition, along with her concern for the underprivileged (the mill-workers) also call to mind "Ain't I a Woman?" (1851) by Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797-1883), which is likewise repetitive, earthy, and concerned for the underprivileged (in her case African Americans and women).

Another sermon that illustrates features of postbellum preaching is one by Henry Van Dyke (1852-1933), a Presbyterian preacher who was also a noted writer, teacher, editor, and "probably the most popular commencement speaker in the United States" (Bos and Faries 294). His sermon "Salt," which he preached at Harvard University's baccalaureate in 1898, begins with the text from Matthew 5:13, "Ye are the salt of the earth." After an introduction in which he reflects a bit on the nature of salt and why Christ chose the image, Van Dyke explains that his sermon will be on the idea of saltiness as symbolic of the "noble, powerful, truly religious life" (Van Dyke 295). He goes on to elaborate the idea that "men" (his term) of noble character are necessary to redeem the world from its fallen ways. These noble people can help to lead the rest of the world away from transgression. For example, the business world is full of corruption and is in dire need of salty people, i.e., people of great religious integrity, to lead other people away from such corruption. Moreover, religion in general should serve to bring out the best "flavor" in humankind. In his conclusion, Van Dyke urges religious people to be salt (298).

Van Dyke's sermon coincides with the instruction books of Broadus and Austin Phelps in that it adheres carefully to a structure of identifying a text, explicating it, and

then articulating ethical implications. He announces the text, provides a brief introduction, states his main purpose, develops his points clearly, and then offers a conclusion that exhorts people to proper conduct. The image of salt helps to unify the sermon. Further, like many preachers of postbellum America, Van Dyke was concerned about social issues and especially corruption in the burgeoning business world of the Industrial Age. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps shares these concerns in novels such as *The Silent Partner*, which criticizes the dishonesty and lack of concern for the workers on the part of the mill owners. Indeed, in a prefatory note to the novel, Phelps contends that she would not have to write it if "manufacturing corporations" adhered to Christian principles (v).

These examples help to highlight salient homiletic practices of postbellum America and establish a context in which to understand Phelps's works, which repeatedly imitate these homiletic practices, especially a didactic call for improvement of social problems in the name of Christ, and adherence to a structure that begins with the proclamation of the sin followed by a proclamation of the cure that God offers.

Ecofeminism

In defining "ecofeminist homiletics" there must first be a clear understanding of ecofeminism and how it differs from other ecocritical[6] ideologies. The term "ecofeminism" originated with the radical French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in her 1972 book *Le feminism ou la mort* (*Feminism or Death*), but there were important antecedent works such as Simone de Beauvoir's monumental *The Second Sex* (1949), in

[6] The term "ecocriticism" is first used in the 1970s and becomes more widespread in the 1990s. The initial usage may be by William Rueckert in "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978), which is reprinted in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm.

which she contends that male-dominated society, since antiquity, has insisted on "othering" women, regarding them as at least somewhat antagonistic, and tends to link women and nature in ways destructive toward both. Women have been tied to the natural world through pregnancy, menstruation, and childbirth, while men have been able to define themselves as distinct from the natural world (Kheel 129). D'Eaubonne articulates forcefully what would become the core message of ecofeminism: that the oppressions of women and nature are related and that the liberation of one must include the liberation of the other.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her foundational 1975 text *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, was a key early voice of ecofeminism, declaring that

> [w]omen must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this society. (204)

At the heart of ecofeminism is the firm belief that patriarchal society has oppressed both women and nature in interrelated ways. Ecofeminists have pointed out that patriarchal society often uses nature imagery to describe women disparagingly and vice versa. Karen J. Warren provides an eye-opening catalogue of examples:

> Women are routinely described in pejorative animal terms: Women are dogs, cats, catty, pussycats, pussies, pets, bunnies, dumb bunnies, cows,

> sows, foxes, chicks, bitches, beavers, old bats, old hens, old crows, queen bees, cheetahs, vixens, serpents, bird-brains, hare-brains, elephants, and whales. Women cackle, go to hen-parties, henpeck their husbands, become old biddies (old hens no longer sexually attractive or able to reproduce) and social butterflies . . . Similarly, language that feminizes nature *in a patriarchal culture* . . . reinforces and authorizes the domination of nature. Mother Nature (not Father Nature) is raped, mastered, controlled, conquered, mined. Her (not his) secrets are penetrated, and her womb (men don't have one) is put into the service of the man of science (not woman of science, or simply scientist). Virgin timber is felled, cut down. Fertile (not potent) soil is tilled, and land that lies fallow is useless or barren, like a woman unable to conceive a child. (27; italics are Warren's)

Warren does a brilliant job here of exposing how the numerous expressions people use have embedded in them a negative association of women and nature. Essential to applying ecofeminist homiletics to Phelps, then, will be scrutinizing how Phelps writes about nature and women, and especially relationships between the two.

Because of this dual focus on women and nature, ecofeminists frequently are animal-rights advocates. Marti Kheel, for instance, is a vegan and founded Feminists for Animal Rights in 1982, and Greta Gaard's collection of essays, *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (1993), focuses repeatedly on the mistreatment of animals. Likewise, Phelps exhibits concern for the welfare of animals, especially in her later writings against vivisection.

At the heart of ecofeminist thought is a critique of patriarchy's employment of hierarchical dualisms or binaries. As Carol J. Adams explains, patriarchal domination has relied on the assumption that diversity can be reduced to two categories: "A or Not A" (2). Such thinking minimizes or ignores outright any idea of there being a continuum of identities. One is either A, which is the ideal, or not-A, and therefore inferior. These dualisms have their roots in the classical schools of thought, including Judaism and Christianity; the emphasis on science and Enlightenment philosophy; and the "desacralization" of Earth in favor of a god who dwells in the heavens (2). According to such thinking, men are superior to women, and humans (especially male humans) are superior to nature (and seen as separate from nature). Reason, which, in patriarchy, is associated with men, is regarded as superior to emotions, which are associated with women. Men are the scientists and philosophers, that is, the serious, deep thinkers, while women engage in "softer," allegedly less intellectually rigorous activities, such as cooking, cleaning, and having babies. Patriarchy also views women as inherently closer to nature, while men are more inclined toward the laboratory and university. In fact, some ecofeminists, such as Vandana Shiva, argue that women need to lead the environmental movement because women, either because of their biological makeup or because of social constructs, are indeed inherently closer to nature than are men. Other ecofeminists, such as Cecile Jackson, contend that this essentialist view serves to keep women and men confined to certain gender roles that are not helpful for liberating men, women, and nature from patriarchally-based hierarchical binaries. Gayatri Chakravotry Spivak, however, has argued that it can be advantageous for a group to embrace "strategic

essentialism"[7] in the name of achieving certain political goals. Luce Irigaray has developed this idea with regard to feminism, suggesting that it is advantageous for women to imitate a gender stereotype in a distorted way so as to undermine the stereotype. For example, one stereotype is that women are illogical. To combat this stereotype, women could speak logically about being illogical ("Luce Irigaray").

Another component of ecofeminism's critique of patriarchal oppression is with respect to other historically oppressed people besides women. Shiva, for instance, has been a key voice in exposing how northern and western nations, such as the United States and western Europe, have frequently regarded themselves as superior to nations south and east (such as those in Africa, South America, and east Asia) and thus have seen themselves as justified in exploiting the people (and natural environment) of such nations. Ecofeminists contend that, when this exploitation happens, women and the natural world are frequently among the casualties in high numbers, since women and nature generally have fewer resources of resistance at their disposal. While Phelps's works do not focus on people of color or people from oppressed nations, her works do address the plight of oppressed groups and individuals of postbellum society; as such, ecofeminism's concern with the struggle of such figures is germane to her writing.

Shiva and other ecofeminists are also often critical of western notions of "development." She contends that the western model of progress, which includes the exploitation of allegedly unproductive nature so that men can build machines, factories, and the like that will be truly productive, has been long held up by the west as a model that all the world should emulate but that actually is unsustainable on such a wide scale.

[7]Spivak introduced this term in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987).

It is simply not the case that every nation in the world can—or should—achieve the "ideal" of the western, patriarchal model of progress (Shiva 189). The American way of life, with its excessive and wasteful materialistic consumerism, is not the ideal model for "less fortunate" nations to emulate. Rather, ecofeminism envisions a world in which people replace these oppressive, patriarchal, hierarchical binaries with a radically egalitarian heterarchy that includes, not just people, but the non-human natural world, as well. Given ecofeminism's criticism of patriarchy's exploitation of historically oppressed people and advocacy of egalitarian heterarchy, it makes sense to consider how Phelps's work addresses these issues.

What differentiates ecofeminism from ecocriticism in general is that the former contends that there is an inextricable connection between humanity's abuse of nature and of women. Ecocritics acknowledge the wrongness of humans exploiting nature, but generally do not connect that injustice to the subjugation of women.

An ecocritical position that scholars often compare and link to ecofeminism is deep ecology, a term coined by Arne Naess in a 1973 article. Warwick Fox also articulated a core tenet of deep ecology, which is that there is no genuine bifurcation between humans and nature (Warren 83-84), a point with which many ecofeminists would agree. Beate Littig explains that, for deep ecologists, nature has intrinsic worth; many humans have tended to have an anthropomorphic view of nature, regarding nature as valuable only inasmuch as it can benefit humanity. Deep ecologists reject such a view and claim that there must be dramatic social change so that humans minimize the disruption of nature. According to deep ecologists, societies must be "based on small, decentralized, autonomous and self-reliant regions or communities, which must not

exceed the carrying capacity of their region" (Littig 37); this vision is one that some ecofeminists share.

However, other environmentalists, including ecofeminists, have criticized deep ecology for a variety of reasons. First, deep ecology's emphasis on individual change tends to downplay the importance of change among power structures and other entities beyond the individual. Second, deep ecology sees humans as generally a disruption to nature rather than as a part of it. Ecofeminists criticize deep ecology for not addressing adequately how patriarchal power structures perpetuate oppression against, not only nature, but also women (38). As Kheel states, the fundamental difference between deep ecology and ecofeminism "lies in the different conceptions of self that both philosophies presuppose" (129). Deep ecologists argue that humans tend to view nature anthropocentrically, but ecofeminists counter that what deep ecologists have diagnosed as anthropocentrism is actually androcentrism (129). Kheel also criticizes deep ecology for at times endorsing an attitude toward nature that claims not to be anthropocentric but that really is. For example, some deep ecologists, such as Aldo Leopold, encouraged hunting, believing that such an activity helped people (men, mainly) to commune with nature.

Phelps is likewise critical of what would come to be known as the deep ecological approach, even though the term did not exist in her day. Repeatedly she portrays men as having an androcentric view of nature. For example, as he rides through the forests of Maine, Waldo Yorke in *Dr. Zay* views nature in terms of how it relates to his emotions and thoughts. In *Trixy*, Olin Steele has a dog for a pet but also performs vivisection on dogs for scientific purposes and thus regards dogs in terms of his pleasure or their practical usefulness. By contrast, the heroines of these two works are more sympathetic

toward and supportive of nature. In such depictions, Phelps aligns with ecofeminism and not deep ecology.

Environmental justice/activism is another ecocritical approach that has important points of contact with ecofeminism and Phelps. Environmental justice/activism stresses making concrete changes against oppressive power structures in order to improve conditions for human and non-human alike. American writer and activist Terry Tempest Williams (born 1955) exemplifies how environmental justice/activism and ecofeminism can merge fruitfully. In her memoir *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* (1991), Williams writes with poignancy about the close relationship between her mother's struggle with cancer and the environmental patterns and struggles of the Great Salt Lake region (where Williams lives). In her essay, "The Clan of the One-Breasted Women" (included in *Refuge*), Williams argues that nuclear testing in Utah played a role in the high incidence of breast cancer in her family. Further, throughout her life, Williams has repeatedly taken part in activism for the sake of improving conditions both for women and nature. Likewise, Phelps was an activist of sorts, having worked through her writing and community involvement to address social problems such as alcoholism, women's issues, conditions in mills, and vivisection. Phelps repeatedly strives for the liberation of women and animals both in her writing and in her social activism and so is like Williams.

Another prominent ecocritical approach related to ecofeminism is bioregionalism, which stresses the importance of place in considering environmental issues. Here, "place" means not just geography but also cultural and historical contexts for both humans and nature (Warren 84). In bioregionalism, humans learn to be "dwellers in the land" (84) in a

respectful, non-exploitative manner. Moreover, bioregionalists insist that regions be defined by natural entities such as mountains and rivers and not by human designations such as state borders. Again, Williams, with her reverence for the Great Salk Lake region, as well as Edward Abbey, with his reverence for Appalachia and the American Southwest, exemplify a focus on bioregionalism. In addition, a key tenet of bioregionalism is the "decentralization of power" (160), moving farther away from traditional loci of power and closer toward the home, which has traditionally been the domain of women's authority. Thus, bioregionalism can be compatible with ecofeminism (160). Bioregionalism is also relevant to literary regionalism/local color in its fixation on place, and Phelps, while not a local colorist per se, often does write about New England, especially Massachusetts and its natural features, such as the sea in *A Singular Life*.

Littig mentions four categories of ecocritical approaches that relate to ecofeminism. First is traditional nature conservation, which tends to focus on protecting a species or establishing a nature reserve and uses conventional methods such as lobbying and information campaigns (125). Second is political ecology, which aims for farther-reaching social change and is "guided by the vision of a decentralized, egalitarian and democratic society that will develop in harmony with nature" (126). Third is environmental protection, in which people use political campaigning to address specific environmental causes, such as water pollution (126). Fourth is global ecology, which concentrates on the global nature of environmental issues (126). Ecofeminism is broader in its goals than traditional nature conservation and environmental protection and has a sharper focus on the patriarchal oppression of nature and woman than do any of these four approaches.

Finally, ecofeminism is significantly different from these other environmental ideologies in its emphasis on spirituality. While ecofeminism need not have a spiritual component, it often does, as Adams illustrates in her collection of essays, *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (1993). However, this spiritual component is frequently not Christian but draws from other traditions, such as Eastern religions or religions from antiquity. At the same time, scholars such as Ruether have developed an ecofeminist spirituality with Christian roots. My study contributes to that development.

To summarize, like deep ecology, ecofeminism is critical of anthropocentrism. However, ecofeminists accuse deep ecologists of also being androcentric. Ecofeminists are often related to environmental activists in that both ideologies call for a move beyond books and discussion to improvements that reduce exploitation of nature. Like bioregionalists, ecofeminists are acutely aware of the importance of place in environmental issues. Thus, while ecofeminism has as its center the critique of patriarchy's oppression of both women and nature, the ideology also frequently has an activist component and is ever attentive to the anthropocentric and androcentric view of place. Finally, ecofeminism has often emphasized spirituality.

Preaching Ecofeminism

Establishing a definition of "ecofeminist homiletics," however, requires not only an understanding of ecofeminism but also an understanding of how one might *preach* ecofeminism. This understanding is challenging from the standpoint of Christianity (Phelps's religion, and so my focus in this dissertation). In *The Greening of Protestant Thought* (1995), Robert Booth Fowler provides an excellent summary of the key issues

between Christianity and ecofeminism. Fowler points out that many ecofeminists recognize the value of spirituality to the cause, but there is considerable disagreement over whether one can be an ecofeminist and a Christian. Ecofeminists such as Charlene Spretnak and Susan Griffin regard Christianity as having been oppressive toward nature and women and so should be abandoned (129). Starhawk, a self-proclaimed witch, also opposes Christianity. She believes in a spirituality that is more reverent toward women and that does not demand adherence to it but allows for a multiplicity of spiritual approaches. In addition, even ecofeminists, such as Ruether, who identify themselves as Christians (Ruether is Roman Catholic), insist that there needs to be a considerable overhaul of Christianity for it to be viable for ecofeminists. At the heart of the critique is the contention that Christianity, including the Christian Scriptures, has leaned overwhelmingly toward being hierarchical, anthropocentric, and androcentric. Christianity tends to teach that humans are distinct from and superior to the rest of creation, that God is male, and that men are superior to women. Thus, for Christianity to be compatible with ecofeminism, there must be a considerable renovation of Christianity, and some ecofeminists simply believe that Christianity is beyond renovation.

Ruether has been a leader in this project of revising Christianity in accord with ecofeminism. She retains aspects of Christianity but is quick to jettison others, arguing that "we must see Christology . . . as paradigmatic. We must accept its relativity to a particular people . . . The Cross and the Resurrection are contextual to a particular historical community" (72-73). She avers that Christianity has much of value if it is understood properly or reconstructed (Fowler 133). She contends that the Bible contains an "ecological theology" and that the Christian God has many feminine features, such as

advocating equality (at least among people who are not antagonistic toward Christianity), community, and wisdom (133). Further, Ruether considers the concept of covenant, which is prevalent in Christianity, as amenable to ecofeminism given that covenant is relational (133).

In her influential work *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (1987), Sallie McFague provides another example of how one might engage in revising Christianity so as to be compatible with ecofeminist ideals. She avers that Christianity has contributed a number of destructive images that should be identified and replaced with more constructive images. As an example, she explains that the prevailing view in Christianity regarding humanity and creation is that humans are superior to non-humans and that men are superior to women. God created humans in his (note the pronoun) image and gave them dominion over all creation. God's kingdom (again, note the maleness of the noun) contains humans and humans alone. Thus, Christianity often presents a view of God and creation that is both androcentric and anthropocentric. McFague proposes alternative views that do not reject God or religion but that understand both in different terms. For example, she proposes replacing the paradigm of God as king of creation with the model of the universe as God's body. God is still the creator, the source of all, but God is now more closely tied to creation in a way that is much less hierarchical than the understanding of God as monarch. McFague contends that the universe is the body of God (McFague 84-98).

Other Christians have argued that figures such as Ruether and McFague are simply straying too far from orthodox Christianity to be considered soundly Christian. Loren Wilkinson, for instance, insists that at least some of the dualisms of Christianity,

which figures such as Ruether seek to eliminate because they tend to promote inequities, cannot be eliminated. God may be close to us humans but God is still other and above us. Elizabeth Achtemeier has criticized ecofeminism by noting that the Christian Scriptures consistently refer to God with male language. She contends that, while sometimes God is said to be like a feminine entity (such as a woman in labor or mother hen), on the whole God has chosen to present Godself as male, including through Christ, who was male. Thus, pushing aside patriarchal language for God is untenable (Fowler 135).

Despite the persistent difficulties in reconciling Christianity and ecofeminism, the following statements can be made. First, the Bible, while containing many anthropocentric, androcentric, and hierarchical teachings, does contain teachings compatible with ecofeminism, as Ruether and McFague point out. The Bible does use feminine imagery for God, such as in Isaiah 66:13,[8] and gives God certain traditionally feminine attributes, such as compassion. The Bible repeatedly stresses that nature, not just humans, experiences a relationship with God and will be redeemed by Christ (e.g., Romans 8:20-22).[9] The Bible does call for the liberation of the poor and oppressed. While the Bible does view God as transcendent and spiritual, it also presents God as descending to Earth and being enfleshed in Christ. In other words, God is not simply a detached spiritual being reigning over creation as a monarch but becomes human. This action softens the hierarchy between God and humanity, a move that ecofeminism, which

[8]Isaiah 66:13 reads, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

[9]Romans 8:20-22 reads, "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of [God] who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."

is anti-hierarchical, agrees with. The Bible also presents Jesus as repeatedly valuing women. For instance, he allows women to serve as disciples.

These points of compatibility between ecofeminism and Christianity are reflected in Phelps's writings. For example, she uses feminine imagery for God in *Trixy* by depicting a dog as Christ-like. In *The Story of Jesus Christ: An Interpretation* (1897), Phelps describes Jesus as having "exquisite compassion, tenderer than woman's, stronger than man's" (197). In *Beyond the Gates*, she depicts God as more feminine by presenting God as compassionate and approachable toward Mary. Phelps repeatedly emphasizes that God values nature, such as by having nature in heaven. In *The Silent Partner*, Phelps calls for improved conditions for the poor and oppressed mill-workers. Phelps also regards God as, not remaining detached from creation, but becoming involved in it, especially through the incarnation as Jesus Christ. Indeed, in *The Story of Jesus Christ*, Phelps reverently describes Jesus' many miracles and teachings. She makes clear that she regards God as interacting with creation through Jesus Christ. She also describes Jesus as deeply respectful toward women, such as in Chapter VIII, which tells of Jesus caring for a prostitute.

In studying Phelps, I will use the following understanding of ecofeminist homiletics. First, Christian ecofeminist preaching must be harmonious with at least the central tenet of ecofeminism, which is that the patriarchal oppressions of women and nature are interrelated and that the liberation of one must include the liberation of the other. If a sermon does not address significantly this tenet, then the sermon is not ecofeminist. Likewise, if one of Phelps's works does not address this issue, then it is inconsistent with ecofeminism.

Second, Christian ecofeminist preaching should be based on the Gospel, that is, the teaching that salvation comes through the death and resurrection of Christ. Some ecofeminists would reject this view given that it is based on salvation being achieved through Jesus, who, at least on Earth, was male. I counter by contending that Christ, like God in general, transcends gender and that Christian ecofeminist preaching can downplay the maleness of the earthly Jesus and focus instead on the gender-transcending Christ. Indeed, Phelps tends to downplay Jesus' maleness in some of her works, such as in *The Silent Partner*, in which the death of Catty, a woman, is associated with the death of Christ.[10] In fact, several times in her work Phelps makes a woman Christ-like.

Third, Christian ecofeminist preaching should be based on the Christian Scriptures. While they contain many anthropocentric and androcentric images and messages, the Scriptures also contain images and messages that are not particularly anthropocentric or androcentric and that hold many rich possibilities for proclamation. The Old Testament book Song of Solomon, for instance, presents fascinating and subversive messages with regard to gender roles and nature. Further, a preacher could often reinterpret a biblical passage in a way that is faithful to the spirit of the passage while rejecting the patriarchally oppressive elements in the passage. For instance, Ezekiel 16 describes Israel as being like a whore who has betrayed God with infidelity. The passage declares that Israel is thus to be stripped naked and assaulted in front of all the other nations. Given that Israel is described in feminine terms and God in masculine, and given that God is essentially stripping and abusing Israel, the passage is disturbing at

[10] When Catty dies due to logs floating down a flooded river destroying the bridge she is standing on, the logs get lodged together to form a cross.

best. One could critique the misogynist nature of the passage while also noting that its point is to exhort the people to fidelity to God. A preacher could reject the misogynist component while still proclaiming the faithfulness message. These two traits, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and being based on the Christian Scriptures, are not necessary components of ecofeminism but are necessary for ecofeminist preaching. That is, the concern here is not with identifying whether a text of Phelps's is ecofeminist but whether it addresses ecofeminist concerns through homiletic fiction.

Fourth, Christian ecofeminist preaching should move hearers away from hierarchical binaries and toward egalitarianism, since ecofeminists contend that such binaries arise from patriarchal oppression. Along these lines, ecofeminist preaching should reject language, metaphors, and symbols that reinforce patriarchy by connecting women and nature in deleterious ways. Instead, this preaching should use language, metaphors, and symbols that undergird respect and care for all life, human and nonhuman, as well as the interrelatedness of all creation. In various ways, Phelps does move away from such binaries, such as in her understanding in the *Gates* trilogy of heaven as, not vastly superior to Earth, but closely resembling it. This association of heaven and Earth downplays the binary that regards heaven as dramatically different from Earth.

Fifth, ecofeminist preaching should be concerned about the liberation of oppressed entities, especially those closely associated with nature and Earth. To that end, ecofeminist preaching should be open to multiple voices and stories without insisting on one voice or story being superior to another. This feature, also, recurs in Phelps, who was repeatedly concerned about oppressed entities, from mill-workers to women to animals.

There are two problematic features to ecofeminist preaching as I have described it. First, the male voice may be excluded or severely muted. In emphasizing women, men may become the victim of oppression. The true goal of ecofeminism, including ecofeminist preaching, is holistic inclusivity that ensures equality for all, not just for women. A second problematic feature is that, with the denunciation and rejection of the traditionally male images, preachers easily fall into rejecting Scripture. Christian preaching is to be rooted in Scripture, yet a rejection of patriarchal language means a rejection of much of the language and imagery of Scripture. How a preacher manages to be ecofeminist while also being faithful to Scripture is a central question for such a preacher. McFague is quick to reject patriarchal language that does not fit her ecofeminist agenda, but an ecofeminist preacher trying to remain faithful to Scripture has a much more challenging task. Granted, there are images, metaphors, and the like in Scripture that undergird ecofeminism, but making effective use of them while also somehow being respectful of patriarchal biblical passages requires adroit creativity. Phelps repeatedly is both ecofeminist and Christian through her creative yet sound preaching of the Bible and Christian principles. For instance, she draws extensively from biblical passages to justify her understanding of heaven as being like a perfect version of Earth, as I show in Chapter Two.

To summarize, this chapter has explicated both postbellum preaching and ecofeminist homiletics. Postbellum preaching draws from the Bible to proclaim sermons that move hearers through a progression from sin and ignorance to a greater understanding of biblical truth and recognition of their sins, and then finally to reform of their lives. It often achieves this progression by vividly using images and concepts that

enable the hearer to identify closely with the message of the sermon. Sermons from this era frequently respond to Calvinism, either positively or negatively, and critique theologies that the preacher has deemed heretical. Preaching from postbellum America also often addresses important social justice issues, such as women's suffrage and temperance. Science and Spiritualism are recurring topics from this period. A homiletic novel tends to contain the above features and is didactic in the name of advancing morality in accord with a particular religious agenda. Ecofeminist Christian preaching endeavors to be based on the Bible while advancing the cause of liberating women and nature from patriarchal oppression, replacing hierarchies with heterarchies, and ultimately calling for the liberation of all oppressed entities. The ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic in this dissertation is a synthesis of the features of both postbellum preaching and ecofeminist homiletics and is being applied to works of fiction.

In the next three chapters, I apply this heuristic to Phelps's work. In her ecofeminist preaching, Phelps makes use of the Bible and Christian principles to write against the sharp, hierarchical distinction between heaven and Earth and spirit and body often found in Christianity. Her work didactically calls for moral reform in accord with her liberal Congregationalism. Phelps proclaims that women, with their emphasis on compassion, frequently make more effective preachers and physicians than men and that the sciences can become more humane toward other people and animals through a woman's intervention. She illustrates how women and nature often are exploited both by patriarchal industry and urbanization. Phelps repeatedly uses imagery that underscores the connection between the victimization of women and the victimization of nature. She defies patriarchy by daring to have female characters, including a non-human one, serve

as Christ figures. She criticizes the hypocritical and judgmental nature of many Christians while championing Christians who truly follow the religion by helping people in need in the name of Christ. Her novels often proceed with a sermonic progression of exposing and lamenting sin and then guiding the reader to a conversion that leads to a more morally sound life vis-à-vis Christian ecofeminism. Through her homiletic fiction, then, Phelps draws from conventions of postbellum preaching while also prefiguring ecofeminist ideals.

CHAPTER TWO

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH:

AN ECOFEMINIST-HOMILETIC READING OF THE *GATES* TRILOGY

The Gates Ajar launched Elizabeth Stuart Phelps into literary fame. The novel was not her first, but it was an enormous commercial success. Baym notes that it "sold at least eighty thousand copies in the United States before the end of the century, sold more than that number in England, was translated into at least four languages, and remained constantly in print in the United States until early in the twentieth century" (x). The novel's success was so great that it spawned two sequels (and a play adaptation of the third book of the trilogy) and an array of *Gates Ajar* memorabilia, from parasols to cigars to sheet music. Despite this success, as the twentieth century progressed, the *Gates* trilogy receded from popularity and, like the rest of Phelps's work, is almost never included in anthologies. The *Gates* trilogy deserves to be recovered from obscurity because of its unique and remarkable contribution to American literature. I will show that the trilogy uses homiletic fiction to argue that heaven is a realm in which patriarchal paradigms are inverted as well as to argue that those paradigms should be inverted here on Earth as well. Thus, Phelps's trilogy does not just hold up heaven as a source of hope and comfort for the bereaved; its narratives about heaven are also intended to inspire readers toward correcting social injustices on Earth.

The Superiority of the Woman Preacher in *The Gates Ajar* (1868)

In *The Gates Ajar*, Phelps critiques patriarchal Christianity, including its arid and abstract view of heaven. She replaces it with a woman preacher who offers an enfleshed,

concretized view of heaven that is a comfort to other women and offers a more exalted view of nature.

In her early twenties, Phelps wrote the book in response to the brutal loss of life of the Civil War, which she felt directly when a close male friend, Samuel Hopkins Thompson, died at the Battle of Antietam on October 22, 1862 (Bennett 43). Her primary goal was to console the tens of thousands of women and girls whom the war left similarly grief-stricken. In *Chapters from a Life*, she explains,

> I do not think I thought so much about the suffering of men—the fathers, the brothers, the sons—bereft; but the women,—the helpless, outnumbering, unconsoled women; they whom war trampled down, without a choice or protest; the patient, limited, domestic women, who thought little but loved much, and, loving, had lost all,—to them I would have spoken. (98)

Phelps spent two years writing the book and another two editing it. The novel tells of a young woman named Mary Cabot; in fact, Mary's diary entries constitute the novel's structure. Mary's brother Royal has died in the Civil War, and she is inconsolable. Neither the theology of her clergy nor the good-intentions of her neighbors can lift her out of her Slough of Despond. Then her Aunt Winifred Forceythe and daughter Faith arrive to visit, and matters change. Drawing extensively from the Bible, Winifred teaches Mary an alternate understanding of the afterlife that is far more comforting than the dry, abstract theology she has been receiving at church. According to Winifred, heaven is not some vague netherworld in which spirits simply praise God; rather, it is essentially like Earth, except perfect. There are houses, musical instruments, fields, and animals, for

example. Also, those who have died and gone to heaven are still aware of the people on Earth; thus, Mary could rest assured that, contrary to what one of her clergy, Deacon Quirk, had told her, Roy had not ceased to think of her. Winifred also teaches that heaven is where one can achieve the fulfillment that one was unable to achieve while on Earth. Mary delights in this metaphysics. Soon Winifred is instructing other townspeople and even the clergy about her theology, which is essentially Bible-based Spiritualism. When Winifred dies at the end of the novel, Mary has grown to have greater joy for the afterlife. Rather than seeing it as something to fear, she regards it as something to look forward to with joy. Further, as Rory Dicker points out, Mary matures from being rather absorbed with her grief at the beginning of the novel to being more concerned about others, especially Winifred's daughter Faith, who is left in Mary's care after Winifred dies (149).

The Gates Ajar can be interpreted as resembling aspects of ecofeminist preaching. First, Phelps makes clear that she wrote the novel in direct response to the sermons she was hearing and as an alternative to those sermons. In *Chapters from a Life,* Phelps, in writing about the genesis of *The Gates Ajar*, criticizes the preaching of her day. She writes that men, who were the chief preachers, were responsible for the creeds, commentaries, and sermons and then asks rhetorically what man knows how to comfort his broken-hearted daughter, implying that the answer is "no man." She also asks, "What can the doctrines do for those desolated by death? They were chains of rusty iron, eating into raw hearts" (98). She adds that the prayers of male preachers are not much better and that the hymn "falls like icicles on the snow" (98). Hymns that did express true grief would be too difficult to bear, because, Phelps contends, such anguish set to music would be overwhelming emotionally (98). Throughout the novel, Phelps critiques the prevailing

male preaching and offers homiletic alternatives. To illustrate how, I will analyze key scenes featuring the central "preachers" of the novel: Deacon Quirk, Dr. Bland, and Winifred.

The first of these preachers to appear is Deacon Quirk, who pays Mary a pastoral call to try to help her cope with her grief. Deacon Quirk expresses concern for Mary's "spiritooal condition" (10). He notes that Mary had not attended holy communion the previous Sunday, and Mary admits that she had absented herself from the communion table because she was angry with the negative way God has dealt with her but, given that she was not in the proper state of mind to receive holy communion, did not want to disrespect God by coming forward to receive it. Rather than commending Mary for her reverence toward God, Deacon Quirk scolds her for being rebellious and states that no feelings could justify staying away from holy communion. He goes on to say that "[a]fflictions comes from God" (11) and that it is a person's duty to submit to them and "glory in triboolation" (11). This theology is consistent with Calvinism in its insistence on viewing God as the source of hardship and on humans being obligated to accept whatever God sends. God in his sovereignty is free to do whatever he wishes, and humans are so depraved and inferior to God that the only appropriate response is to submit to his will, regardless of how upsetting it may be. While this theology may be theologically correct vis-à-vis Calvinism, it provides no comfort for Mary.

Deacon Quirk continues along these lines. He does express a modicum of support when he says, "I sympathize with you in this sad disposition" (11), but he quickly goes on to reiterate that it is a Christian's duty to "be resigned" (11). Mary declares that she is not resigned, although she prays that God will make her so. She adds that she just cannot

accept God's will at this point. Deacon Quirk responds with mute shock that he eventually follows with saying that he will pray for Mary. He provides little pastoral support. To make matters worse, Deacon Quirk expresses doubt as to whether Roy is even in heaven since the deacon had never heard Roy profess a belief in God. However, the deacon concedes that God is merciful so that it is reasonable at least to hope that Roy is in heaven. Mary writes that Roy had told her in a letter that he did indeed believe in God as a Christian, even though he had never made any official profession of faith. She does not bother sharing any of this with Deacon Quirk, but, before leaving, he says to her that, if Roy is in fact in heaven, he is unaware of anything occurring on Earth and is thinking, not of Mary, but only of God. Once again, Deacon Quirk is too deeply mired in Calvinist orthodoxy to provide comfort and support for Mary. She concedes that Deacon Quirk is a good man but expresses deep pain over the conversation she had with him. She mourns the thought that this "Jealous God" (14) now consumes Roy's complete attention in this distant and coldly spiritual heaven. Deacon Quirk is a man who clearly embodies a Calvinist, patriarchal orientation that is insensitive to the pastoral needs of the grieving Mary. While Deacon Quirk is not giving a sermon in this section, he is nevertheless a preacher espousing orally (through a conversation) a didactic theology that Phelps found to be inadequate for consoling many a woman.

The second significant preaching scene in the novel is that of Dr. Bland giving a sermon. Both Mary and Aunt Winifred are present for the sermon, which happens early in the novel. Mary summarizes the sermon with an outline and numerous quotes. Thus, the reader gets to "hear" the sermon via Mary's account. Mary is at first open to his sermon, which is going to be on what life is like in heaven. She even concedes that Dr.

Bland, being scholarly, may know more about the topic than Aunt Winifred and so may be helpful (40). After a short introduction, Dr. Bland proceeds through his sermon by answering a series of rhetorical questions. His first question is "What is heaven?" (40) His answer is that heaven is an eternal state of holiness and happiness (40). He does not elaborate on this point. That is, he provides no concrete description of heaven that might comfort Mary with some assurance of the state of her brother. Dr. Bland then asks, "What will be the employments of heaven?" (40) His answer is that, in heaven, souls spend all their time studying the character of God (and thus think of no one or nothing else), glorifying God, and all shall love each other "with a universal and unselflish love" (41). We might recognize our friends in heaven, but we will show no favoritism. We will simply love everyone equally (41). This description is consistent with Calvinism and is lacking in consolatory warmth. Dr. Bland's third question is "How shall we fit for heaven?" (42). His answer is that we "must subdue our earthly affections to God" (42). In other words, we must focus on loving God and not on loving anyone or thing of this world.

Mary expresses pained dissatisfaction with the sermon. She acknowledges that Dr. Bland is "a good man" and that the sermon was eloquent. However, despite its eloquence, Mary found the sermon painfully lacking. She writes that Dr. Bland "gave me glittering generalities, cold commonplace, vagueness, unreality, a God and future at which I sat and shivered" (42). She adds, "He had, I know, written that sermon with prayer. I only wish that he could be made to *see* how it glides over and sails splendidly away from wants like mine" (43). As with Deacon Quirk, Phelps critiques the male, Calvinist clergy as failing to meet the pastoral needs of a woman.

Phelps is careful not to present Deacon Quirk or Dr. Bland as caricatures, and, by avoiding caricature, she makes her critique of the men all the more persuasive. Mary makes positive comments about both men. Further, later in the novel Phelps humanizes the men. In one scene, for instance, Winifred and Mary find Deacon Quirk tending to potatoes in his garden. He is dressed in farming clothes and is engaged in an earthy activity and so seems to have another dimension to him beyond being the insensitive church leader who was "comforting" Mary at the beginning of the novel. Even more humanizing are the scenes pertaining to the death of Dr. Bland's wife. Dr. Bland is clearly grief-stricken and in need of comfort, some of which he receives from Winifred. Thus, Phelps presents religious leaders who are flawed but still people the reader is to care about. These are not caricatures but misguided Christians in need of correction. As a result, Phelps's critique is all the more tenable.

Deacon Quirk and Dr. Bland are reminiscent of Phelps's own father Austin, who was of a more traditional, Calvinist orientation than his daughter. At the time of Phelps's writing of *The Gates Ajar*, "Andover Seminary was still a stronghold of Calvinist thought" (Kelly 27) with Austin as its president. Actually, Helen Sootin Smith suggests that Professor Edwards A. Park, a typically Calvinist professor of theology at Andover, may have been the model for Dr. Bland. Phelps refers in *Chapters from a Life* to Professor Park's severe theology about "infinite punishment." Smith also suggests that Austin himself may have been an inspiration for Dr. Bland (27). Granted, as Kelly points out, Austin did try to moderate his theology somewhat, such as by conceding that individuals have a right to their own beliefs, at least to a point. He also acknowledged that the images of fiery damnation were disconcerting to him. Nevertheless, he largely

adhered to orthodox Calvinism (28). Given that Phelps is criticizing in the novel this orthodox Calvinism that her father represented, it is intriguing that she dedicated the novel to him. Such a dynamic, however, is typical of Phelps's conflicted view of her father.

While Deacon Quirk and Dr. Bland are examples of flawed preachers, Aunt Winifred is the corrective ideal preacher. In scene after scene, Winifred draws from Scripture and common sense in a pastorally sensitive way to "preach" comforting news to Mary and others, including the church leaders themselves. For example, Winifred emerges as the better preacher when she and Deacon Quirk engage in a theological discussion at his potato field. She has been teaching Sunday school at the church, and he has heard that she has been imparting some unorthodox ideas to the children. He holds up as an example that Winifred told one of the children that she would have a "pianna" (85) in heaven, meaning a piano. Winifred argues that the child wants to play the piano but has not gotten to in this life, so she will get the opportunity in heaven. Winifred asks Deacon Quirk to show her how it is "unscriptural" or "irreverent" to say that there will be instrumental music in heaven (85). Deacon Quirk replies that there will be harps in heaven but that it is too "material" (85) to say that there will be pianos in heaven. Winifred says that she cannot see how a harp is less material than a piano. She goes on to speak of how the book of Revelation says that there will be a new heaven and a new Earth and that God's people will dwell with God in the new Jerusalem on the new Earth. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that that realm will have "material" qualities like those of the present world, but better. Deacon Quirk, however, is unwilling to think along those lines. He argues that heaven and the new Jerusalem will be spiritual. He also argues

that it is not our place to speculate on such matters. His argument is irrational and a bit of a cop-out. Winifred emerges as the more convincing theologian.

Another scene in which Winifred emerges as the superior preacher to the official preachers is in her visitation with Dr. Bland (at the bidding of Deacon Quirk's wife) in order to console him regarding his wife's sudden death due to a fire. He is clearly vulnerable and despondent when Winifred calls upon him. Mary writes what she knows of the visit from Winifred. She states that "No Greek and Hebrew 'original,' no polished dogma, no link in his stereotyped logic, not one of his eloquent sermons on the future state, came to his relief . . . They rang cold as steel upon the warm needs of the afflicted man" (121). In his conversation with Winifred, he admits that her description of heaven is comforting and that he would reconsider it. He confesses, "We are never too old to learn. Some passages may be capable of other interpretations than I had formerly given them" (122). He adds, though, that he wants always to be sure that he is following correctly the Word of God.

Finally, and most significantly, he picks up the manuscript of the sermon that he had preached earlier in the novel about heaven, the one Mary had found so objectionable. He says to Winifred, "At least I shall never preach *this* again. It seems to me that life is always undoing for us something that we have just laboriously done" (123). He then tosses the sermon into the fire. Further, in a later journal entry, Mary indicates that Dr. Bland's sermons, as well as his whole demeanor, has "[a] certain indefinable *humanness* [that] softens his eyes and tones, and seems to be creeping into everything that he says" (124). In addition, Mary reports that parishioners are saying that his sermons are more

"pleasant" and "helpful" (124) than before. Again, in this novel, Phelps critiques the preaching of her day by juxtaposing it with that of Winifred.

In her critique of contemporary preaching, Phelps highlights patriarchy's tendency to group women and nature together in ways subjugating to both. *The Gates Ajar* clearly shows how women have been oppressed by patriarchy through its depiction of Mary finding comfort for her grief, not from the male church leaders, but from her aunt. Throughout the novel, men are either absent, as in the case with Mary's brother Roy, or are ineffective, as in the case with Deacon Quirk and Dr. Bland. It is the woman Winifred who is the true preacher of the novel. The alliance of Winifred, her daughter Faith, and Mary is a female triumvirate of strength and healing. Even secondary women, such as Deacon Quirk's wife and Mrs. Bland, are more positive figures than their male counterparts. Granted, there are minor female characters who are not always positive. Meta Tripp, for instance, is a bit meddlesome in her concern for Mary. On the whole, however, the novel features the support that women give each other as an antidote to the insensitivity of men.

Further, through her description of heaven in earthly terms, Phelps elevates the status of nature while simultaneously elevating the status of women. The male church leaders, Deacon Quirk and Dr. Bland, largely reject Winifred's proposal that heaven contains trees, fields, mountains and other such natural items like one finds on Earth. While the male church leaders insist that such items from nature would not be found in the exalted, ethereal realm of heaven, Winifred insists that it is reasonable and biblical to think that such items would be in heaven. By regarding nature as worthy of heaven, Winifred is raising the status of nature and the status of the material world in general.

Indeed, Winifred goes on to describe non-natural material objects in heaven, such as buildings. However, her descriptions of heaven emphasize the natural world and so give special importance to nature. By presenting a woman describing nature in positive terms and men describing nature in demeaning terms while also being dismissive of her, Phelps suggests a link between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature by men on the one hand and the elevation of both on the other.[11]

Ecofeminist preaching aims to undermine hierarchical binaries and should endeavor to replace such an orientation with one that stresses heterarchical egalitarianism, and *The Gates Ajar* does indeed lean in that direction. Granted, hierarchies and hierarchical binaries do remain in place. Heaven is still above Earth and is regarded as superior to it. However, Phelps shrinks the gap between heaven and Earth through Winifred's description of heaven as being much like Earth but perfect. Heaven is not this distant, wispy, spiritual realm but is like Earth. Thus, Phelps minimizes the heaven-Earth binary, as well as the spiritual-material binary. According to Winifred's metaphysics, the spiritual realm is not superior to the material realm. Instead, the spiritual and material realms resemble each other. The material is found among the spiritual. Of course one can have pianos in heaven, because pianos, a material object, are not anti-

[11] This reverent view of nature is reminiscent of Transcendentalism. Emerson's *Nature* stresses the immanence of the divine within nature and calls the human to connect with it so as to develop his or her spirituality. Such a view runs counter to Calvinism, which stresses the alterity and superiority of God over nature. While Phelps is no Transcendentalist, she met Emerson, and her exaltation of nature suggests that spiritual philosophy.

spiritual. On the contrary, their presence in heaven will help a girl fulfill her longing to play the piano. Material and spiritual are complementary, not in hierarchical opposition.[12]

Phelps does maintain the binary of male church leaders and women, but it is the women who emerge as superior. While the superiority of women is a position some feminists embrace, ecofeminism generally discourages any such hierarchies in favor of an egalitarian heterarchy. However, at least the men are depicted somewhat sympathetically. Moreover, Phelps depicts Dr. Bland as also in need of liberation from hierarchical-thinking. As he grieves the death of his wife and receives comfort from Winifred, Dr. Bland starts to recognize the faultiness of his hierarchical and spiritual theology about the afterlife. He has moved a step away from his imprisoning spiritual-material hierarchical binary. Such a move echoes the ecofeminist ideal that both female and male are to break free from hierarchical binary thinking.

From an ecofeminist-homiletic standpoint, part of the innovation of the novel is its appropriation of the genre of utopian fiction. Granted, a woman using utopian fiction to advance feminist ideals is not unique to Phelps. For example, Margaret Cavendish's 1666 work *The Blazing World* tells of a woman ruling an entire world, although she receives her power from her emperor husband and her authority is over, not full-fledged people, but creatures who are a combination of human and animal. In early America the genre recurs, such as in Sarah Scott's *Millenium* [sic] *Hall* (1762) and Frances Wright's *A Few Days in Athens* (1822), both of which feature women able to escape from the realm of men (Lewes 43). Darby Lewes contends that, "[p]rior to 1869, women's utopian writing was rather scarce and, at least by current feminist standards, somewhat tame"

[12]Again, this metaphysics calls to mind Emerson's *Nature*, in which the material and, especially, the natural can lead one to heightened spirituality.

(43). Lewes considers Elizabeth Corbett's "My Visit to Utopia" (1869) to be a more innovative work in its challenging of male dominance. Corbett's story tells of a woman who visits a utopia in which there is complete equality between men and women. For Lewes, women's utopian fiction effloresces starting in 1869. Lewes makes little mention of Phelps and says nothing about *The Gates Ajar*, which was published in 1868.

However, the novel is not only an example of utopian fiction; it is an innovative example of the genre precisely because it is a hybrid utopian novel. Sally Anne Groomes argues that Phelps's novel is utopian in that it describes an ideal place. However, it is also an example of the heavenly genre, a literary work about heaven, which was popular in the postbellum era (13). Phelps joins these two strains with a strong critique of patriarchy, using a utopian portrait of heaven to inspire improvements in postbellum society. Of course, utopian fiction in general tries to foment change in the present society. Utopian writers create their stories in the hopes of pushing society toward improvement. As Privett notes, while *The Gates Ajar* "primarily seeks to teach people about better ways of imagining heaven, in so doing it also seeks to reform society by imagining a better world" (32). Central to the innovation of *The Gates Ajar* is its lifting up of heaven as a utopia, not only for people to look forward to living in some day, but also for people to aspire to model on Earth by correcting social ills such as the mistreatment of women.

Lisa A. Long also helps to highlight striking dynamics in *The Gates Ajar* that support interpreting the novel as resembling an ecofeminist sermon in some ways. Long writes that, in comforting America's grieving women and girls, Phelps depicts the body of the dead soldier in a way that is a stunning departure from the prevailing depictions of the time. During the war and afterward, gruesome photographs of decaying corpses on

battlefields were circulating. At the same time, there were also speeches that avoided references to the painful and gruesome realities of war. Of special note is Lincoln's revered "Gettysburg Address," which, Gary Wills points out in *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, sidesteps references to the carnage or bereavement of the war. The cemetery Lincoln dedicates is the "final resting place" (a euphemism for a place of the dead) for the "brave men" who fought for the sake of democracy. There is no mention of the grief of mothers or wives. There is only the exaltation of the men as having engaged in a noble struggle for democracy (Wills 37). Long writes that, by contrast, Phelps presents in *The Gates Ajar* a heaven in which the dead have new, spiritual bodies. Mary's dead brother Roy is not a decaying corpse on a field, but rather a newly embodied person in heaven, enjoying a physical heaven. Phelps's novel features "spiritual embodiment" (781) (that is, a soul with corporeality), which not only addresses death hopefully but also undermines the Calvinist body/soul dualism in favor of one that sees the body, an entity from nature, as joined with the spiritual realm. *The Gates Ajar* is consistent with ecofeminism in its concern for grieving women and its elevation of the physical/natural realm through the joining of the physical and spiritual.

Although *The Gates Ajar* is innovative in aspects of its theology, the novel is not always in opposition to the theology of its day and is, in fact, sometimes in accord with it. For instance, Sean A. Scott explains that, contrary to the contention of scholars such as James J. Farrell, the rise of Darwinism and liberal Christianity did not result in Americans regarding death in secular terms. On the contrary, "scientific naturalism" described death as simply being a natural part of life, and "theological liberalism" removed eternal damnation from some Christians' thinking about the afterlife. Further,

during this period was a rise in depictions of heaven, especially in fiction, "as a place that preserved the best aspects of earthly life [which] led to widespread acceptance that heaven resembled the Victorian home" (844). Indeed, Scott writes, the Second Great Awakening was effective at undercutting the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and stressed instead the Arminian view of humans playing a role in attaining their salvation. Scott focuses in his essay on northern Christians (of which Phelps was one) and contends that they had a largely positive view of the afterlife (845). Many Christians believed in a personal, concrete heaven as a place where they would enjoy a reunion with loved ones who had died ahead of them (854). Heaven was a realm in which one would be free from war and sorrow and in which there would be mansions for people to live in (855). In addition, according to the Swedenborgian Spiritualism prevalent at the time, spirits could move back and forth between heaven and Earth (858). Indeed, as I indicated in Chapter One, the influence of Swedenborgian Spiritualism was significant in nineteenth century America and clearly helped to shape *The Gates Ajar*, although Phelps makes a point in the novel of distancing herself from Swedenborg. For instance, in Chapter Twelve, Deacon Quirk asks Winifred if she is a Swedenborgian, and she says no. She declares, "I believe, with all my heart, in the same Bible and the same creed that you believe in, Deacon Quirk" (95). The concretized and personalized understanding of heaven may be Swedenborgian, but Winifred is not embracing all of Swedenborg, some of whose teachings departed from mainline Christianity, such as his rejection of the Trinity and salvation by faith alone. Phelps is indicating to the reader that resemblance of aspects of Swedenborg does not mean acceptance of all of his ideas.

Privett further helps to elucidate how *The Gates Ajar* is in harmony with at least some of the theology of its day when she points out similarities between *The Gates Ajar* and the work of German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Privett acknowledges that there is no evidence that Phelps read Schleiermacher, although she certainly could have, given that students at Andover were studying him. Helen Sootin Smith, who edited the 1964 edition of *The Gates Ajar*, points out parallels with Schleiermacher (Privett 30). Schleiermacher stresses the importance of an inner "religious feeling," an internal awareness of God, as a more persuasive bit of evidence for the existence of God than sacred texts. Schleiermacher also stresses the importance and sacredness of the individual, including the individual's call toward self-fulfillment.[13] Similarly, Phelps's characters tend to reject the congregation and orthodox theology for following their inner sense of God for guidance (30-31). At the same time, Phelps still relies heavily on Scripture and some of her day's orthodoxy; after all, the novel does not reject more conventional figures such as Quirk and Bland so much as it tries to reform or correct them. Indeed, we can see in Phelps's works in general and in *The Gates Ajar* especially a rejection of some of the orthodox theology of her day combined with an acceptance of other aspects of that theology. It is no wonder that Privett says that Phelps "may seem to be a writer with divided loyalties" (31). Ultimately, though, her loyalties are not divided, for she is unwavering in her commitment to Christianity.

Ecofeminist sermons, to be Christian, should be rooted in the Bible, as postbellum sermons almost always were, and such is clearly the case with *The Gates Ajar*. In fact, more than in any other novel, Phelps is here painstaking in her use of Scripture. Indeed,

[13] The Society of Friends, which was prominent in the time of Phelps, also has emphasized the "inner light" of the individual.

as Baym points out, what makes Phelps's theology in the *Gates* novels unique is that she carefully supports this Spiritualist vision of heaven with Scripture. The novel's ideas of thinking of heaven in materialist terms are not unique to Phelps but part of Spiritualism; what is unique is that Phelps goes to the trouble of supporting her materialist claims with passages from the Bible (ix). Examples abound throughout the novel. For instance, Winifred quotes John 14, in which Jesus says that in his "Father's house are many mansions" (v. 2) and wonders if readers are to take this statement literally. She then considers the value of having homes and concludes that it is likely that there are indeed physically many mansions, many homes, in heaven. Regarding her understanding of heaven, Winifred insists that her theology is in accord with the Bible. She declares, "I conjecture nothing that the Bible contradicts. I do not believe as truth indisputable anything that the Bible does not give me. But I reason from analogy about this, as we all do about other matters" (79). That said, it is also clear that, while the novel may be biblical, there is nevertheless a Schleiermachian, subjective component to its theology. Mary and Winifred may be drawing from the Bible, but they are also drawing from their own inner convictions to the point of deviating from the androcentric Calvinism that surrounds them.

The Gates Ajar is not only like an ecofeminist sermon in its use of Scripture but also in its structure. As I established in Chapter One, classical rhetoric led postbellum preachers to organize their sermons, generally speaking, to have an introduction, a statement of the main argument, a development of the argument, and then exhortations. In a sense, *The Gates Ajar* follows this pattern in that it is a didactic novel that has a clearly defined main argument that it seeks to persuade the reader to accept. This is not a

novel with ambiguous characters and themes that are evocative but not directive. No, Phelps's novel identifies a problem—the grief-stricken Mary and the failure of her church leaders to provide her with adequate consolation—and then moves on to offer an alternative view of heaven through Winifred. Through the careful application of Scripture and reason, the novel continues to develop its picture of heaven. Thus, while *The Gates Ajar* may not follow rigidly the outline that arises from classical rhetoric, the novel nevertheless proceeds like a sermon in its establishment of an argument intended to lead readers toward a new theological understanding. Regarding the type of sermon, *The Gates Ajar* is like a topical sermon, with the topic being heaven. The novel presents itself as an alternative to Dr. Bland's topical sermon on the afterlife.

The Gates Ajar is also quasi-allegorical, and, as Jackson points out, postbellum sermons often employed allegorical patterns and strategies (231-249). This allegorical quality is evident in *The Gates Ajar*'s character names. The name "Mary" has been long associated with Christianity, especially with the spiritually pure Virgin Mary. The name also calls to mind the story of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-46), in which Lazarus is, of course, dead and one of his grieving sisters is named Mary (Groomes 16). In *The Gates Ajar*, Mary's brother's name is "Royal," which underscores that he is a revered figure in Mary's eyes. The insensitive preachers are appropriately named "Quirk" and "Bland." The novel's heroine's name, Winifred Forceythe, calls to mind winning and freedom (Winifred) and special vision (Forceythe sounds like "foresight'), as well as "force" (Privett 20). Granted, these names do not have the same unambiguous association that one finds in, for instance, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), but the novel nevertheless has elements of allegory. As Jackson explains, sermons employed

such a structure to engage readers and propel them to action. The allegorical structure would pull readers into the narrative of the sermon and thus lead the reader toward self-improvement (201-214). *The Gates Ajar* functions in a similar way. By creating characters with clear, allegorical associations, Phelps makes it easy for the reader to insert herself into the narrative and so, like Mary Cabot, be transformed by it.

Moreover, Jackson explains that several postbellum novels, including those by Phelps (158), function homiletically in that they create a narrative that the reader can participate in and apply to her or his life in a transforming way. Jackson uses as an example Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps*: *What Would Jesus Do?* (1897), a bestselling novel in which Reverend Henry Maxwell challenges his parishioners not to do anything for the next year without first asking "What would Jesus do?" The rest of the novel tells stories of how people's lives change because of following this advice. The novel is intended to transform the reader so that she or he will actually live out the novel by doing as it instructs. In this way, the novel functions like a sermon, which also strives to engage the hearer to become a better Christian (157-214). As I have shown, *The Gates Ajar* operates in the same way but with ecofeminist themes. The novel uses characters with quasi-allegorical names to lead the reader to the problematics of Calvinist preaching and then beyond to an alternative theology that is more respectful toward women and nature.

Ambivalence in *Beyond the Gates* (1883)

While Phelps was a committed advocate for improving the conditions of women in the postbellum era, she also at times shows ambivalence toward social reform for women, and that ambivalence is evident in *Beyond the Gates*, the sequel to *The Gates*

Ajar. Nevertheless, *Beyond the Gates* uses homiletic fiction to undermine the concept of the wrath of God and depict heaven as a place that exalts the domestic woman.

In 1883, partly in response to her brother Stuart's death, Phelps wrote *Beyond the Gates*. While *The Gates Ajar* contains speculations about heaven, *Beyond the Gates* actually shows the reader what heaven is like, albeit through a dream. Mary (not the Mary of *The Gates Ajar*), a middle-aged, unmarried woman, becomes severely ill. She slips into unconsciousness and has an extensive dream of journeying to heaven. She thinks she is dead (so does the reader until the revelation at the end of the novel that the entire experience was a dream), and her deceased father is her escort and primary relationship in heaven. She describes heaven as an elaborate utopia complete with schools, museums, and concert halls. Scientists, writers, scholars, and artists of all sorts continue to work on projects, and Mary partakes of some of these accomplishments. For instance, she attends a concert in which Beethoven conducts the performance of one of his pieces that he has composed in heaven. She also experiences wonders such as a rainbow symphony, in which colors are somehow far more than simply colors and overwhelm the observer with delight. Mary also travels to Earth to see her brother and other loved ones mourning her death. Further, in heaven she meets a man with whom she is to have the romantic relationship that she was not able to pursue to fulfillment on Earth. At the end of the novel she wakes up and realizes, much to her disappointment, that the whole experience had been a dream.

As with *The Gates Ajar*, we can interpret *Beyond the Gates* as functioning in an ecofeminist-homiletic manner in a variety of ways. First, the novel is didactically religious. It openly explores issues such as, of course, the afterlife, as well as God, the

soul, and redemption. The novel is didactic in that it clearly teaches that one is to grow in one's relationship with God. This message is most evident in Mary's spiritual journey. At the beginning of the novel, she indicates that she is not particularly religious (142), and part of her mission in heaven is to grow spiritually. In one scene, for instance, when she hears spirits singing about achieving victory over death, she joins in. Through joining in the singing, she starts to grow in her understanding of the afterlife. She recalls, "I lifted all my soul and sense into the immortal words, now for the first time comprehensible to me: *'I believe, I believe in the resurrection of the dead'*" (184). Like *The Gates Ajar*, *In His Steps* and other "homiletic novels" (as Jackson calls them) of the postbellum era, Mary's journey of spiritual growth serves as a narrative that presents Mary's growth as a type for readers to apply to themselves. The clear religious didacticism of the novel's story of religious growth serves, like a sermon, to call the reader to religious reform.

In its religious didacticism, *Beyond the Gates*, like *The Gates Ajar*, accepts some religious views of postbellum society while rejecting others. Once again, Phelps offers an understanding of God and the afterlife strikingly different from that of Calvinism and somewhat in line with Swedenborgian Spiritualism. While Calvinism teaches that only the elect few will enter heaven and the majority of humanity will spend eternity in hell, Phelps teaches that heaven is available to all and that whether one ends up in heaven is up to the will of the person. This position is more in line with Arminianism. God is gracious and opens the gates to anyone who responds affirmatively to God's mercy. In Phelps's metaphysics, no one writhes in torment in the unquenchable flames beneath the righteous frown of the Sovereign. Privett comments that, in *Beyond the Gates*, "Hell is not a place—it is a state of mind" (45). Wayward souls fail to find their way to heaven until

they are ready to do so. Their torment comes from their wandering lost until they are finally able to receive heaven. Once in heaven, souls go through a process of spiritual maturation. Heaven is its own purgatory in that it is the realm of increasing sanctification. A striking illustration of this idea is the hospital in heaven, which is there to heal the spiritually ill. A fellow inhabit of heaven explains to Mary, "They are the sick of heart . . . who are healed there. And they are the sick of soul; those who were most unready for the new life; they whose spiritual being was diseased through inaction, *they* are the invalids of Heaven. They are put under treatment, and slowly cured" (197). Heaven is a place where one gets a second chance to receive the spiritual healing that one did not receive on Earth. This concept of heaven being a realm in which one can grow spiritually and receive opportunities to realize what one could not realize on Earth softens the heaven/Earth binary and thus moves in the direction of ecofeminism by endeavoring to eliminate hierarchical binaries.

Chapter Seven contains a stunning illustration of the novel's didactically religious and anti-Calvinist Spiritualist focus with a decidedly ecofeminist slant. In the previous chapter, Mary had traveled to Earth to witness her family grieving her death and holding her funeral. In this chapter, she has returned to heaven. While the mainstream Christian teaching was (and is) that heaven is a place where one feels nothing but joy, in this chapter Mary reports that she feels "weary." She also indicates that she feels "rather homeless in this new country" (184). That Mary can feel emotions other than utter joy in heaven illustrates Phelps's concept of heaven being a place where one grows in holiness rather than being a place where one is already at full spiritual maturity. The joy of heaven is something one may have to grow into. This idea of heaven not being a realm of pure

joy reduces the gap between heaven and Earth by making them more similar. This idea that a person would not feel complete joy in heaven would have been offensively heretical to Calvinists.

A stranger approaches to help Mary find spiritual peace and growth. He offers to help Mary, and she explains that she seeks rest. She expresses comfort in knowing that, in heaven, she will feel better soon. The stranger asks her how she knows that, and she says that she was raised with such a view. She then explains her view of religion and the Bible, saying, "The Bible was a hard book to accept . . . I would not have you overestimate my faith. I tried to believe that it was God's message. I think I *did* believe it. But the reason was clear to me. I could not get past that if I wished to" (185). The stranger asks her why she trusted "the message called the Word of God" (185). She says she believed it because of the historicity of Jesus. She declares that, on Earth, she was indeed a Christian, albeit a flawed one. The stranger next asks if she loved Christ. She starts to suspect that this stranger is an angel. He asks her again if she truly staked her eternal life on belief in Jesus, and she answers that yes, she did. However, she sees herself as inadequate as a Christian. She longs to be in the presence of God (whom she believes she has not encountered yet in heaven) but she feels unworthy. She spends quite a bit of time with the stranger, finding his presence refreshing. She says, "I felt as if I conversed with him by radiance, and the living light had become a vocabulary between us" (187). She describes the encounter as profoundly rejuvenating. She writes, "'Here,' I thought, 'here, at last, I find reproof as gentle as sympathy, and sympathy as invigorating as reproof. Now, for the first time in all my life, I find myself truly understood'" (188).

She finds that, in this stranger, is complete love and fulfillment. Finally, he departs. Then a girl approaches and explains to Mary that that was, not an angel, but God (190).

This scene is pivotal in Mary's spiritual pilgrim's progress and exemplifies well how the novel is like an ecofeminist sermon. The scene is pivotal, because in it Mary encounters God directly and emerges from the encounter considerably more mature spiritually. The scene is didactically Christian in its unambiguous presentation of communion with God as desirable and conducive to considerable spiritual growth. Part of this message is that God is gentle and loving. Communion with this loving God will result in one feeling greater love and acceptance. The passage makes turning to God an ideal toward which all should aspire in this world and the next. The passage is biblical not only in its theocentrism but also in that it contains a central biblical concept, that believing in Jesus Christ leads to eternal life. The passage relates to the theologies of its day in that it reflects the teachings of Spiritualism and Phelps's Congregationalism, which regards God as compassionate, and rejects more conservative Calvinism, which depicts God as much more stern, unapproachable, and wrathful than merciful. This scene captures in miniature the novel as a whole in that it repeatedly regards God as compassionate, heaven as available to all, Christ as the means to eternal life, and wrath and damnation in the Calvinistic sense as non-existent. In depicting God as intimate and accessible, the novel undermines the idea of a male God situated above humanity. On the contrary, a female human and God, who is depicted here as male, are on almost equal terms in this conversation. The chapter also echoes ecofeminist concerns in its attention to nature. This roughly egalitarian conversation between woman and God happens on the shore of a sea in heaven. Once again, the presence of physical nature imagery in heaven

elevates the status of nature as not being something merely confined to the physical world of Earth but also being part of the "higher" realm of heaven. Moreover, that a natural setting is the sight of Mary's encounter with God elevates nature all the more.

At the same time, viewing *Beyond the Gates* through an ecofeminist lens is problematic. The protagonist is an intelligent, capable woman who tells the reader at the novel's beginning that she is content despite the fact that she is unmarried. She is strong and smart. However, the novel deviates from the ideals of feminism and ecofeminism by depicting Mary as needing male figures to achieve spiritual growth. Mary's guide in heaven is her father, for whom she has deep affection. When she travels to Earth to witness her own funeral, she shows her brother Tom the greatest affection. God is described as male, albeit as gentle and accessible. Finally, toward the end of the novel, she finds joy and fulfillment when she is joined with a man romantically in heaven. Of course, most women in postbellum society were forced to depend upon a husband for financial and social support, and sentimental fiction featuring a woman protagonist often ended with her marriage. Phelps herself would marry five years after the publication of *Beyond the Gates*.

One scene especially challenging from a feminist and ecofeminist perspective is the one in Chapter Ten in which a domestic woman is exalted in heaven. Mary learns that, in heaven, rank is not based on wealth, fame, or power in an Earthly sense but is based on one's spiritual and ethical uprightness. A woman who had toiled to care for her loved ones at home is held in high regard precisely because she made so many sacrifices for the sake of others without demanding reward. So then, on the one hand, this passage champions the poor woman who often worked long, thankless hours for the sake of

others. However, that this woman's sacrifice is rewarded in heaven sends the message to readers that women should suffer in this manner so as to obtain a reward. (Sentimental fiction of the postbellum era frequently celebrated such dutifulness.) In other words, while the scene may be feminist in its championing of the woman in the domestic sphere, it also reinforces that role precisely by holding up such women as worthy of reward (208). However, despite this problematic depiction, the novel is noteworthy in its championing of a domestic woman as morally superior to Earth's male intellectual and professional elite. Phelps takes a strong feminist step that, for its time, was progressive.

Beyond the Gates continues along the same lines as *The Gates Ajar* in that it elevates nature (and the material realm in general) by presenting heaven as looking much like Earth. However, the novel does not make any strong connection between patriarchy's oppression of women and oppression of nature. Mary, a woman, does achieve spiritual growth in a heaven in which nature plays a prominent role, but her salvation ultimately comes through the guidance of male figures. Nevertheless, the novel is at least concerned with a woman's empowerment and features the elevation of nature by focusing on natural imagery such as rainbows, fields, and bodies of water.

Replacing hierarchical binaries with heterarchical egalitarianism is at the core of ecofeminism and is present to a degree in *Beyond the Gates*. As with *The Gates Ajar*, in *Beyond the Gates* the hierarchical binaries of heaven/Earth and spiritual/physical are challenged through Phelps's understanding of heaven as a utopian version of Earth. Also, the abundance of physical entities that appeal to the senses undercuts the conventional Christian binary that insists that the spiritual is superior to the physical. Phelps is not devaluing the spiritual but is elevating the physical. Here, the boundaries between heaven

and Earth as well as spiritual and physical are blurred in that Mary is easily able to move from one to the other. Granted, the novel does not eliminate all hierarchies. God is still depicted as sovereign. Clearly, Earthly hierarchical binaries, such as ones that assert that having great material wealth makes one greater than those lacking such wealth, are being challenged, but hierarchy in general and hierarchical binaries in particular are not eliminated. Even so, the novel takes a significant step toward heterarchy.

Beyond the Gates is the most problematic novel of the trilogy from an ecofeminist-homiletic standpoint. Although she espouses what we would call feminist principles, Phelps tended to idealize the home and the woman's domestic role, and she does so in this novel. Nevertheless, *Beyond the Gates* still exemplifies key features of ecofeminist preaching, such as movement away from hierarchy and a reverence for women and nature. Moreover, the novel advances the understanding of heaven proposed in *The Gates Ajar* by allowing the reader to experience heaven, albeit through a dream. Thus, just as sermons tend to establish an argument and then illustrations of that argument, *The Gates Ajar* essentially presents an argument for a view of heaven different from that preached by Calvinist, male ministers, and *Beyond the Gates* provides an illustrative elaboration on that view.

Heaven as the Realm for Male Reform in *The Gates Between* (1887)

One key idea in the *Gates* trilogy is that a person can continue to develop spiritually, behaviorally, and intellectually in heaven. This idea is at the heart of *The Gates Between* in its story of a man who needs to learn to be more respectful toward his wife.

The Gates Between tells of Dr. Esmerald Thorne (the narrator as well as the protagonist), a reputable physician who comes to take his beautiful wife Helen for granted. He is somewhat short-tempered, and, after the novelty of his marriage wears off, he aims that temper towards his wife. One evening, after being exceptionally demeaning toward her, he is killed in a horse and wagon accident. He finds himself walking about the city as a disembodied spirit, and he quickly regrets how he treated his wife. He also becomes aware of his woeful lack of spirituality. Because of that lack, entry to heaven is difficult for him, and he must spend time wandering Earth. Eventually, he makes his way to heaven, but it is challenging for him to adjust to life there. He finds embarrassing his ignorance about spiritual matters. Thus, although many people in his Earthly community regarded him as knowledgeable, in heaven he is at the bottom of the intellectual hierarchy precisely because of his lack of knowledge about God and spirituality.

In heaven, he is reunited with his young son, who recently died. Indeed, in an earlier scene, Helen urges Esmerald to attend to their sick son, but the doctor dismisses her concern, arguing that he is more knowledgeable about their son's condition than she is. Now the son is dead, and it falls upon Esmerald to take care of him in heaven. Esmerald soon has a new sense of purpose and works to make sure that his son has a home and other necessities in heaven. The son asks his father questions about God and spirituality, but Esmerald is unable to answer them. Finally, he is humbled and broken. He falls before God, who shows him mercy. Esmerald learns to be a more caring father and a more devout Christian. He also grows in his appreciation of Helen. The novel closes with Helen joining him and their son in heaven. While one might think that it would not exactly be "heavenly" for Helen to have to spend eternity with her husband,

who had been so unkind on Earth, her union with him will indeed prove heavenly for her precisely because he has been reformed.

The Gates Between is sermonic in several respects. First, the novel is didactically Christian and rooted in biblical concepts. Like its two predecessors, this novel grapples with Christian understandings of concepts such as heaven, God, salvation, forgiveness, and mercy. Several times the novel refers to Christ and alludes to or quotes Scripture or hymns. *The Gates Between* also responds to theological concepts of the time, such as Calvinism and Spiritualism. Like the other two novels in the trilogy, this novel rejects the rigidity of Calvinism for the warm inclusivity and earthiness of Spiritualism, as well as the liberal social agenda of Phelps's reinterpretation of Congregationalism (such as her concern with improving the rights of women). As with the rest of the trilogy, this third installment rejects eternal damnation and presents a heaven that anyone can live in provided that one is willing to do the work of acclimation to the values of heaven. At the heart of those values is the belief that the worth of a person lies, not in his or her professional, social, or monetary status, but in how she or he treats others. Most importantly, as with the other books, heaven is like Earth but perfect. The novel describes heaven as having houses, streets, buildings, animals, and plants. Such concretism is quintessentially Spiritualist and antithetical to the arid, abstract spirituality that Phelps believed was prevalent in much of Calvinism.

The Gates Between, through its story of the relationship between Esmerald and his wife, forms an important component of the novel's resemblance to ecofeminist homiletics by depicting a kinship between a woman and nature. Esmerald explains that he did not meet Helen until he was forty-five and had become skeptical about the possibility

of finding love. He recalls that he and his colleagues had rejected the "dear, old-fashioned delirium called loving at first sight" (241). That attitude changes when he meets Helen, who tends to him when he trips over a root and injures his patella. Although he stumbles in a natural setting, she moves about in it easily. She wades across a stream to get to him and then helps him to safety. Afterwards, she nurses him to health. Esmerald indicates that he loved her "from the moment that my unworthy eyes first looked into her own, as she knelt before me on the moss beside the mountain brook,—from that moment to this present hour" (242). This scene is especially important from an ecofeminist standpoint because of its sustained and evocative pairing of a woman with nature. She is associated with the woods, the brook, and the moss. However, in that scene, neither she nor nature is presented as a victim of patriarchal oppression. On the contrary, Helen is the rescuer of Esmerald. The man is victimized by nature—Esmerald injures himself by tripping over a root—and is saved by Helen. The man meets the woman of his dreams in nature, and the woman rescues the man from being a victim by and in nature. Thus, the woman is depicted as comfortable in nature and able to remove herself from it without destroying or damaging it (238-242).

This opening scene presents Helen as having a strong character, and that strength continues to be evident throughout the novel. Esmerald explains that she did not "need him" the way his women patients have needed him (243). He asserts, "This woman truly needed nothing of me" (243). Later, when he asks her why she has never married (she is thirty-three), she explains, "I have never seen any man whom I wished to marry. I have no other reason" (244). He falls deeply for her, likening her to an "Eden" (245) that he is unable to enter. Once again, Helen is compared to a natural scene—Eden is a garden,

after all—not in a way related to showing patriarchal oppression of women and nature but in a way that asserts a woman's superiority over a man. By comparing her to Eden, Esmerald suggests that she has a kind of moral or spiritual superiority over him, given that Eden was a place of moral and spiritual perfection (at least until the Fall).

Esmerald and Helen wed about a year after meeting and spend their first week together in a mountain village that he says was "as near to Eden as we could find" (247). In those early days, Esmerald vows always to treat his wife kindly, even going so far as to declare, "If ever I make you sad, if I am untender to you,—may God strike me" (247). This statement proves to be foreshadowing in that he does make her sad and he does end up struck down. He acknowledges that, in general, he was not an evil man but that he was an "irritable" (248) one and that he soon wielded that irritability against his wife. He becomes consumed with his work as a physician. In one scene, he comes home from working late, demands his dinner, and then states that he has to leave in ten minutes and that it was a waste of time for him to come home at all (253-4). He complains about her cooking not being very good and the poor quality of the coffee (255). Their child is sick, but Esmerald just gives him a cursory look and concludes that there is nothing substantial wrong with him (As I mention above, he ends up dying.). Esmerald also criticizes Helen for coddling the boy too much (256). He complains that Helen does not trust his judgment, whining, "It is a pity you can't trust me, like other men's wives. I wish I'd married a woman with a little wifely spirit!—or else not married at all" (257).

In the next scene, Esmerald is killed in a horse and buggy accident that is brought on by his harsh treatment of his mare, Donna. This scene has intriguing ecofeminist overtones. Esmerald begins to drive away from his home but then contemplates turning

back. The irritated horse pulls onward. When Esmerald hits her, she becomes enraged and begins running. Esmerald loses control of her, and she runs into traffic and eventually crashes. The horse breaks free and runs way. Esmerald dies instantly, although at first he does not realize that he's dead. Since the horse is female, we have nature and femininity associated with each other. However, once more we have the feminine and natural not being dominated by patriarchy but, instead, the feminine and natural having control over and killing a man. Esmerald thinks he can subdue his mare, but the animal has a will of her own and needs to be treated with respect (257-9).

As Esmerald continues in his afterlife, he also grows remorseful about how he treated his wife on Earth and, in general, humbler. After living for a while in heaven, he confesses to his son, who is in heaven with him, "Your father is not a learned man" (329). The moral and spiritual superiority of women over Esmerald continues in the character of Mrs. Faith—this allegorical name is reminiscent of *The Gates Ajar*—a woman who was killed in Esmerald's accident. For a time, Esmerald wanders Earth as a ghost, unable to make his way to heaven because he is not very spiritual. During that time, he meets up with the ghost of Mrs. Faith. Neither one had known about the death of the other. Her son was also in the accident. He survived but is in poor health, and Mrs. Faith, not realizing that Esmerald is dead, begs him to go to her home to try to save her son. He does so, but he quickly learns that he lacks his abilities as a physician that he had while alive. He is able to help the doctors tending to the boy to use the proper medicine but only through the assistance of Mrs. Faith. Esmerald is considerably less effective than he was in life. By contrast, Mrs. Faith, being a woman of, well, faith, is very comfortable in the afterlife. When the two advance to heaven, Mrs. Faith describes being there as coming home,

while Esmerald repeatedly indicates that he feels like a stranger in heaven and that he is, initially, miserable there. Esmerald has always been a worldly man for whom his "success had been [his] religion" (293), so finding joy in heaven is a struggle for him. Mrs. Faith helps Esmerald to recognize his own son when he meets him in heaven, and she assures Esmerald that Helen loves him (311). Mrs. Faith repeatedly emerges as more knowledgeable, wiser, and more spiritually connected than Esmerald. Granted, the belief that women were spiritually superior to men was widespread in postbellum society, but spirituality was also frequently regarded by learned men (who were not clergy) as of secondary importance to science, medicine, and other "manly" intellectual pursuits. In *The Gates Between*, Esmerald realizes that spirituality is of greater importance.

This subversion continues through Esmerald becoming more "domestic" in heaven. His son, whose death he helped bring about through arrogant neglect, arrives in heaven, and Esmerald soon realizes that it is his responsibility to care for him. He starts replacing his depression with determination to take care of the child he had neglected in life. He becomes, in a sense, more maternal in that he takes on the tasks of childrearing and taking care of their home in heaven. Esmerald becomes a better man to his wife, who joins him in heaven at the end of the novel, by putting aside traditional male roles of being career-minded and focusing instead on his home and parenting. Over and over, Esmerad is depicted on Earth as victimized by nature and as inferior to his wife. In the afterlife, his relationship with (heavenly) nature becomes friendlier, and his attitude toward women, as well as his own domesticity, improves. In this way, Phelps joins patriarchy's relationship to nature and view of women in a way that inverts the traditional hierarchy by presenting a man as a victim to nature (and not the other way around, as is

often the case historically) but who ceases to be victimized by nature in heaven, where he learns to be humbler and more respectful toward women.

Phelps's connecting of women to nature, such as in the rebellious mare Donna or in the early scene in which Helen rescues Esmerald after he trips in the woods, could be criticized from an ecofeminist standpoint as reinforcing the paradigm that women are more closely allied to nature. On the other hand, this alliance is not necessarily bad as long as it does not arise from and/or reinforce the patriarchal oppression of women. In *The Gates Between*, Phelps's connecting of women to nature subverts patriarchy in that the alliance of the two leads to the subduing and humbling of Esmerald. When Esmerald enters the afterlife and starts to learn greater humility and respect for his wife, nature ceases to be adversarial toward him, and women such as Mrs. Faith continue to be instructive and spiritually superior. In the novel's climactic final scene, we see once again this pairing of nature and women in a way that shows that they have power over Esmerald. He finds himself in a dark, hilly setting. It is difficult to see, and the way is slippery. Out there, in the dark hills, he is reunited with Helen, who has arrived in heaven after her death. He begs for her forgiveness and joins hands with her. Then the light reappears. Thus, in the final scene a man who is vulnerable yet again in a natural setting submits to a woman, and it is in the submission that he is absolved of his sin and then brought into light (337-39).

There are men in the novel more respectable than Esmerald who have rejected conventional patriarchy. Two males are noteworthy in this regard. One is the more eminent physician Esmerald meets in heaven. While the physician was a greater man of science on Earth than Esmerald was, this man was also more religious. In heaven, he

enjoys the kind of status he had on Earth, but he has high status in heaven, not because of his medical expertise, but because of his spirituality. Esmerald learns from him that true greatness lies in devotion to God, not skill in medicine or any other secular domain. Esmerald learns from his colleague that there is a hospital in heaven, but it is for the spiritually ill. Therefore, Esmerald is unable to be helpful there. The greater physician helps Esmerald toward spiritual healing. Thus, even though Esmerald is finding guidance from a man, the man is one who has rejected the traditional male values of focusing on science and earthly success and has embraced the more "feminine" value of focusing on spiritual growth (315-18).

The second noteworthy male is Esmerald's son. The boy's presence compels Esmerald to cultivate his own "feminine," domestic side in the name of caring for the boy. He also challenges his father spiritually by asking him questions about God that Esmerald is unable to answer. For instance, the boy asks, "What is Christ, papa? Is it people's Mother? What is it for?" (323). Esmerald laments that he is unable to answer the boy and is unable to teach the boy how to sing to God. Esmerald's question about Christ is especially intriguing from a feminist standpoint because it intimates a link between Christ and motherhood. The question is never answered, but its very presence hints at a connection between Christ and motherhood. In any case, once again Esmerald's son, though male, is associated with femininity.

The repeated positioning throughout the novel of the feminine as ideal and superior spiritually and morally to the masculine is, in a sense, in opposition to ecofeminism, which champions women but which ultimately calls for equality for all entities, including men. Ecofeminism eschews hierarchies in general in favor of radical

egalitarianism, but Phelps holds on to hierarchies by placing women as superior to men. We see this superiority also in *The Gates Ajar*, in which Winifred is obviously the superior clergyperson to the ordained men, Dr. Bland and Deacon Quirk. In both *The Gates Ajar* and *The Gates Between* Phelps lifts women up as spiritually and morally wiser. Phelps also retains hierarchies in that she depicts God as the ruler over all, although she softens that hierarchy by consistently presenting God as approachable and nonjudgmental. For Phelps, then, hierarchies are downplayed or inverted but not eliminated. As a Congregationalist she retains the Christian hierarchy of God as superior to humans, but as a proto-feminist she inverts the hierarchy to place women as morally and spiritually superior to men.

This positioning of women as superior to men could even be seen as somewhat sexist in that it holds women up as an ideal rather than as multidimensional. She is the figure on the pedestal, the angelic figure closer to God than is the worldly man. Such an understanding is complimentary toward women but in a way that presents women as conforming to the patriarchal view of women as two-dimensional spiritual ideals rather than as multi-dimensional human beings. Helen (as her name suggests) is an ideal, and she is barely developed as a character. Mrs. Faith also (as her name suggests) embodies a religious ideal rather than having depth or complexity as a character. Thus, *The Gates Between* is proto-feminist in its championing of women over men but is sexist in its heavy reliance upon the convention of depicting women as flat, spiritual ideals on the pedestal. Even so, this depiction does not negate the novel's feminism. *The Gates Ajar* has a similar dynamic. *Beyond the Gates*, by contrast, presents a woman in need of

spiritual growth. So then, the trilogy as a whole offers a nuanced portrait of women that sometimes presents women as a spiritual ideal and sometimes as flawed.

Returning to hierarchies in *The Gates Between*, one that is downplayed almost to the point of elimination is Esmerald's hierarchical binary of science over faith. Throughout the novel, he speaks of his earthly identity as one who embraced science and logic and had little time for faith. Thanks in part to his more famous medical colleague, who is also a man of faith, Esmerald gradually comes to understand that science is not intellectually superior to faith but is interrelated with it. He declares, "The natural step to knowledge is through faith. Even human science teaches as much as this. The faith of the scholar in theoretic value of his facts precedes his intelligent use of them" (333). Esmerald grows to understand that knowledge, including scientific knowledge, depends on faith and is not in opposition to it, let alone above it. In this realization, Phelps strikes a blow to a fundamental hierarchical binary born out of the male-dominated Enlightenment: that scientific inquiry is superior to ones related to faith-based matters.

I have shown in this chapter that each book of the *Gates* trilogy illustrates how Phelps's work contains key features from both postbellum and ecofeminist preaching. The second of the trilogy, *Beyond the Gates*, is the weakest instance of such preaching, but even it contains several important homiletic features. Taken all together, the three works resemble one long ecofeminist sermon that proclaims the superiority of women over men while also undermining the hierarchies of science over faith (by showing the dependency of science on faith), heaven over Earth (by showing heaven as being like Earth), and the spiritual over the physical (by showing the spiritual having physical qualities). These works also elevate nature by placing it in heaven and by presenting

nature as superior to men (in *The Gates Between*). In several instances, nature and women are paired in a way that presents both being elevated, such as by being depicted as dominant over men. As one long sermonic series of novels, the trilogy leads to increasingly intimate experiences of heaven. In *The Gates Ajar* is a description of heaven; in *Beyond the Gates* is a dream in which the protagonist experiences heaven; and in *The Gates Between* the protagonist actually enters heaven. This progression helps to make Phelps's understanding of heaven more persuasive to the reader by first establishing the basis for the understanding in Scripture and reason (*The Gates Ajar*) and then showing the reader what such a heaven would look like and how it would function. Just as a sermon often begins with the logical and Scriptural basis for an argument and then illustrates the conclusions of the argument, so also does the trilogy.

Most of Phelps's work does not focus on heaven, but on conditions on Earth and how to improve them. In the next chapter is a sampling of works that are explicitly religious, but devoted primarily to ameliorating social ills.

CHAPTER THREE

NATURAL WRATH:

HOW NATURE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES

HARMONIZE IN

HEDGED IN, THE SILENT PARTNER, AND *A SINGULAR LIFE*

The *Gates* trilogy focuses on heaven and does not give much attention to social problems of Phelps's day, even though Phelps herself was mindful of such problems and, as part of her calling as a Christian, strove to ameliorate them. In this chapter, I will apply features of postbellum preaching and ecofeminist homiletics to works of Phelps that *are* explicitly religious and attentive to social justice issues. These works focus on fixing the problems of this world rather than envisioning the utopian nature of the next. Of course, the *Gates* trilogy does address issues of this world, but the emphasis is on the hereafter. The works in this chapter are this-worldly. Specifically, each work functions like an ecofeminist sermon to proclaim that patriarchy corrupts nature in a way that leads to destructive consequences for women and even for men. In these novels, men and women both suffer at the hands of nature when men abuse their power and/or misuse their resources.

Perversion of Nature and Christianity in *Hedged In* (1870)

Hedged In resembles an ecofeminist sermon as it addresses the problems of urban poverty and teenage pregnancy, and how to ameliorate them. The novel tells of Nixy Trent, a fifteen-year-old, unmarried girl who has had a baby and has no means of supporting him. Nixy lives in a squalid urban tenement building on Thicket Street, from

which she knows she must escape if she and her child are ever to have a chance at a respectable life. She travels about homeless for a time with her baby in search of a job. However, she quickly discovers that no one will employ her because of her scandalous circumstances. Eventually, Nixy decides to leave her baby on the doorstep of a wealthy home. Later, Nixy herself is taken in by Margaret Purcell and her daughter Christina. Margaret and Christina are middle class and Christian and proceed to reform Nixy. Five years later, Nixy is a culturally refined lady and a teacher. She is also reunited with her son. When the community finds out about Nixy's past, she is fired from her position, but as a result of community support, she gets her position back. After her son dies suddenly from illness, Nixy returns to Thicket Street, where she is able to rehabilitate another woman. The novel ends with Nixy dying suddenly and mysteriously at the foot of a cross and dressed in white while a thunderstorm rages outside.

The novel is homiletic in its didactic, Christian call for addressing a social injustice. Like many sermons, the novel begins by introducing a problem rooted in sin. However, the problem is not primarily that a teenage girl had a child out of wedlock. Phelps's focus is not on what Nixy has done wrong but on what society, particularly financially well-off Christians, has done against her. As Ronna Coffey Privett points out, in the chapters in which Nixy is living on Thicket Street, "Nixy is not criticized by Phelps or anyone else for her sexual activity" (74). Indeed, for Phelps, the primary sin that she is preaching against in this homiletic novel is the failure on the part of much of Christian society to care for Nixy. To illustrate this failure, Phelps presents several scenes in which Christians make excuses not to help Nixy once she has left Thicket Street and is searching for work. At this point, characters (not Phelps) do criticize Nixy for having a

child out of wedlock. For instance, one woman offers her food but then attempts to scold Nixy into reform by saying to her, “I suppose you know how wicked you’ve been” (25). Nixy replies, “Yes.” The woman goes on to say again what a terrible sin it is to have a baby at such a young age and asks Nixy if she means to change her ways. Nixy says that she does, and the woman responds by saying, “I doubt if she understands a thing I say” (25). This condescending attitude toward Nixy does nothing to help her. Bergman explains, “Like the other women Nixy has met in her quest for work, this woman speaks only reform rhetoric without giving Nixy the practical, material help she needs” (201). Bergman adds that Phelps is arguing that trying to improve Nixy’s morality will be unsuccessful if Nixy’s material needs remain unmet. Bergman writes that Nixy needs employment and lodging; only then will she be able to focus on improving herself morally (201). Nixy does receive help from various characters, but over and over she is denied any long-term, substantial assistance, such as a job or permanent housing. It is no wonder that Nixy comes to the conclusion that she needs to abandon her baby in order to secure a job. As long as people know that she is a teenage mother with an illegitimate child, they will keep denying her help. Because of this ongoing rejection that Nixy receives due to her child, “by degrees, the baby became horrible” (25). Thus, Phelps is preaching that the greater sin is not that teenage Nixy had the illegitimate child in the first place but the self-righteous cold-heartedness of the Christian community, which has failed to provide meaningful help. This message is similar to that of the *Gates* trilogy, in which Phelps presents the male preachers as failing to provide meaningful assistance. In both cases, a mainstream religious presence fails to fulfill one of Christianity’s most basic callings, helping a person in need.

Phelps's homiletic critique of prosperous Christians continues in her introduction of Mrs. Zerviah Myrtle to the story. Mrs. Myrtle hires Nixy to be a servant girl but then fires her upon learning that Nixy has recently abandoned her child. Mrs. Myrtle's fear is that her children will be contaminated by Nixy, a young woman of bad reputation. Mrs. Myrtle says, "With my family of innocent children I cannot feel as I ought to keep you under my roof . . . We could not, you see, sacrifice our own offspring to your reformation, though it would be very Christian and beautiful" (32). Mrs. Myrtle adds that she forgives Nixy for lying to her about having a child and that, because of God, there is hope for all to receive salvation (32). Mrs. Myrtle also expresses that "nothing could give me more pleasure in my circumscribed field of usefulness . . . than to help such girls . . . but . . .I feel there are domestic duties which have sacred prior claims" (32). Thus, Phelps makes it clear that Mrs. Myrtle is a devout Christian who even acknowledges that helping Nixy to reform would be a Christian act but who decides to fire Nixy anyway. In a way, she is a failed preacher in that she proclaims a message of Christian ideals that she then fails to live by. Through this character, Phelps accentuates her criticism of the hypocrisy of financially prosperous Christians. Of course, being critical of Christian hypocrisy is not exclusive to sermons, but Phelps's criticism is part of a sermonic proclamation by being part of a larger, pro-Christian message.

Sermons often start by explicating the sin and then providing an antidote to it, and *Hedged In* likewise goes beyond identifying the sin to presenting a Christian solution, which is a Christian mother and daughter, Margaret and Christina Purcell, taking Nixy into their home and rehabilitating her as an act of Christian love. Christina, who wears all white and is sweet and kind, finds the homeless Nixy and takes her in. Through her

whiteness, purity, and rescuing of Nixy, Christina is a Christ-figure. Similarly, Christina's mother Margaret, who is a close friend of the narrator, is Christ-like in her care for Nixy. Granted, she is flawed. She never "headed a 'cause,' delivered a lecture, wrote a book, had a 'mission'" (37). When Nixy collapses onto her carpet, nearly fainting, Margaret's initial response expresses disgust by thinking "Right on my parlor carpet!" (40). Nevertheless, Margaret does take Nixy in and essentially treats her as a daughter, and it is evident that Margaret and Christina both care for Nixy because they are Christians. The narrator indicates that "Margaret Purcell [is] a Christian" (48) and that if God "had called her, like Abraham of old, to cut Christina's throat, I believe she would have done it" (49). Margaret and Christina's care of Nixy is in piercing contrast to the conduct of the novel's other Christian women, a point Phelps makes clear when she writes, "But had [Margaret] not done already more than what half the Christian women of her acquaintance would have done for that wretched girl?" (48). As Carol Farley Kessler contends, "In Margaret, Phelps offers a new type—a model earthly parent whose loving support and nonjudgmental forgiveness would, according to Nixy, 'save the world'—in effect, a female Christ" (48). Christina also, through her Christ-like gentleness and her acceptance of Nixy—even kissing her with sisterly affection—is obviously a corrective to the lack of care that other Christians in the novel have shown. Phelps is proclaiming a solution to the sin of Christian neglect of the poor, which is that Christians need to be more Christ-like.

Nixy experiences a religious conversion, and through her description of it, Phelps continues this homiletic proclamation against society's failure to care for Nixy. Earlier in her life, Nixy expresses no shame for her illegitimate pregnancy, but, after Margaret and

Christina have rehabilitated her, she is able to declare, “I sinned . . . and I am ashamed!” (72). Margaret prays for her to receive forgiveness from God (72-73). Margaret also replaces “Nixy,” which connotes negation, with her christened name, “Eunice,” which means “victory” and which also calls to mind the mother of early Christian leader Timothy from the New Testament, whom Paul praises in 2 Timothy 1:5. In the Bible, name changes sometimes accompany the spiritual transformation of a person. In fact, Margaret mentions Jacob being renamed Israel (Genesis 32:22-32). As Jill Bergman writes, Nixy being called her christened name, Eunice, indicates that she has been redeemed for her failings as a mother. The name also calls Eunice to reject her old, sinful self and to become a refined (and middle class) Christian lady like Margaret and Christina (203-04).

Central to Phelps’s proclamation is her endorsement of at least some middle-class values, despite her sympathy toward the poor. Granted, Phelps is critical of middle-class people who do not live according to Christian principles, but she does not reject the middle class per se. On the contrary, through Nixy’s redemption, Phelps affirms the superiority of the middle class over lower economic classes. As Privett notes, this affirmation is especially obvious in the scene between Eunice, who has now become a middle-class lady, and her child’s father Dick, who is still of the lower class (85-86). Dick meets up with Eunice with the intention of marrying her, but he quickly rejects that plan when he sees that she is a refined lady while he has remained “ragged and dirty” (103). He says that he has as much of a chance of marrying Eunice as he has of marrying the moon (104). He says that he is “not fit to stand talking here to a lady like you’ve grown to be” (105). Moreover, Eunice talks down to him, saying, for instance, “I know

you don't mean to be a bad boy, Dick" (105). The scene makes clear that Eunice is now of a higher position socially than Dick and so reveals Phelps's belief in the superiority over her own class over lower classes. Angela Bennett, incidentally, criticizes Phelps for not giving Dick the same opportunity for redemption as Eunice (58). This message of privilege and superiority is at odds with ecofeminist ideals, which call for an end to hierarchy and a shift to egalitarian thinking. Phelps is sympathetic toward the poor, but she is not quite willing to give them equal status to the genuinely Christian middle class. In fact, as Bergman argues, Eunice's sudden death at the end of the novel is Phelps's way of denying full middle-class status to Eunice. She may not remain of the middle class but must die, albeit nobly through her wearing of white and her clinging to the cross (208-10). Nevertheless, Phelps still is clearly sympathetic toward the poor; after all, Eunice's death is not shameful but noble in its rich Christian imagery.

This proclamation of a solution to societal sin has a decidedly feminist slant. With a pitiable teenage mother as the protagonist, Phelps comes to the defense of the girls of her day who were in a similar plight, in part as a result of male-driven industrialization and urbanization. Phelps does present women characters negatively through her depiction of self-righteous Christian women who keep turning Nixy away, but the proto-feminist tint of the novel comes through in the overwhelmingly positive portrayal of Margaret and Christina Purcell. It is two women, and no men, who save Nixy. Granted, there are positive male figures in the novel, such as Monsieur Jacques on Thicket Street. Nevertheless, the strongest characters, Nixy, Margaret, and Christina, are female. In this regard, *Hedged In* is reminiscent of *The Gates Ajar*, which also has at its core a trio of strong, Christian females (Mary, Winifred Forceythe, and Faith). At the same time, as

Bergman writes, the focus among the women in *Hedged In* is on motherhood. Nixy fails to be a good mother until Margaret mothers her toward redemption and refinement. Then, Nixy seeks her son and cares for him until he dies. Motherhood is at the novel's center, and this centrality is problematic vis-à-vis feminism because it fixates on a traditional role that has often been limiting for women. Even so, the novel still manages to be feminist in its sympathy toward a girl victimized by patriarchal institutions and in its making heroic Nixy, Margaret, and Christina.

From the very beginning Phelps uses nature-imagery to show how patriarchy has created a reality that is a perversion of nature. The novel's title, *Hedged In*, immediately points to the nature imagery and theme of imprisonment that Phelps repeatedly unites throughout the novel. Over and over, Nixy is in a prison of a socio-economic structure that men have created and that resembles nature, albeit a perverse, industrialized version of nature. To begin with, the urban filth that Nixy and her baby live in at the opening of the novel is clearly a product of industrialization and urbanization, both of which were male-dominated. Men ran the factories, designed and built the buildings, and tended to be the landlords, and Phelps repeatedly connects this product of patriarchy to nature. The name of the street that Nixy and her baby live on, Thicket Street, calls to mind the thickets of nature and is indeed a kind of urban thicket, a gnarled trap.

Moreover, Phelps's magnificently vivid description of Thicket Street abounds with imagery suggesting a perversion of nature. She describes Thicket Street as a "slimy hill"—that is, as a grotesque version of the hills of nature. Thicket Street is also "imperfectly guttered" and is prone, during a storm, to becoming a "miniature torrent." Wharves at the street's mouth, where "soft, green wood was constantly falling," were

filled with “codfish and whale-oil.” There are also two dead trees “boxed in by rails” (5). Phelps presents a perversion of nature also through her description of unnatural human bodies. She writes, “The alley, long and narrow, sloped over a slimy hill to the water. The sidewalk being a single foot-path only, there was generally a child under a wheel or a hoof; this may have accounted for the number of dwarfs, and gashed, twisted, ‘unpleasant bodies’ which struck the stranger’s eye” (2). Thicket Street is full of unnatural bodies. The human-made urban scene is responsible for the perversion of the human body.

Nixy’s tenement building at 19 Thicket Street is also a kind of corruption of nature. The narrator reports that “[t]he tenement, low and dark, commanded, through dingy and broken windows, a muddy line of harbor, wharves, and a muddy sky.” The tenement has elements of nature in it, but the elements are not romantic or idyllic but corrupt and crude. Likewise, the house is near the water and is “much discolored,” either, the narrator speculates, because of the salt in the air or because of the “impurity of the harbor mists,” a phrase that suggests pollution from industrialization. The wood of the building is deteriorating, and “rank moss notched the roof.” Children “swarm” on the steps, and a haggard young woman suns herself “like an animal” (6). The house is full of crying babies and drunken women and so is redolent with a perversion of motherhood, since mothers are supposed to be caring for their children but instead are neglecting them to pursue drunkenness.

A complicating feature of Thicket Street, including number 19, is that the deterioration of the street is due in part to exposure to nature. The street floods because of storms, and number 19 is discolored because of exposure to the salty harbor air. Therefore, it may seem that the people of Thicket Street are not victims of patriarchy’s

corruption of nature but are simply victims of nature itself. However, while nature is a persistent, destructive force on Thicket Street, the greater problem is that people have not designed the street to withstand the elements well. Because of poor design, for instance, Thicket Street, is susceptible to flooding when it rains. Because of human neglect, the buildings become discolored. Thus, while the people of Thicket Street are, in part, victims of nature, they are primarily victims of a socio-economic construct that denies them proper living conditions. Phelps underscores this reality when, later in the novel, she describes the homes of the wealthy as being in far better condition, despite the fact that they, too, are exposed to the relentless forces of nature. In this way, then, at least this part of *Hedged In* is akin to literary naturalism, in which people are depicted as victims of external forces, including nature, although the novel as a whole becomes far too sentimental to be considered a work of literary naturalism.

This opening scene continues the idea of an urban setting as a kind of human-made perversion of nature. Thicket Street is dilapidated, rotting, and foul-smelling, a place of neglectful mothers and deformed people, ultimately because of human exploitation. Humans and nature are not depicted as living harmoniously. Instead, humans are depicted as building an environment that is clearly toxic to its inhabitants and is clearly at odds with nature, including by being a corruption of it. Thicket Street is far filthier and more destructive than a thicket found in nature, and the low-income people who dwell there are the chief victims.

This opening scene is reminiscent of ecofeminism in its fixation on mothers and babies, specifically in its connection of mothering to nature imagery. As Bergman has noted, motherhood is ever-present throughout the novel (190-212), and many

ecofeminists have pointed out that the woman's capacity to have babies has contributed to women being regarded as closer to nature than men. Over and over, Phelps notes that crying babies and mothers neglecting their babies are ubiquitous. The mothers' neglect of their babies is not due to empowerment or liberation of the women from a traditional gender role. Instead, the mothers neglect their children because of drunkenness and poverty. From an ecofeminist standpoint, an especially important image along these lines is the spider web-shaped stain on the wall of the room in which Nixy and her baby live. The story Nixy hears is that the red stain was created when a mother who had lived there previously dashed her baby against the wall to kill him or her. The association of infanticide with a spider web, an entity from nature representing entrapment, underscores how severe of a plight mothering can be, depending on the circumstances. There is no reassuring or empowering association between women and nature; here, the association serves to highlight the oppression of women.

This theme of nature being at odds with Nixy due to the corrupting influence of patriarchal society continues throughout the book. One especially significant scene comes after Mrs. Myrtle fires Nixy. The girl wanders away from the city into the country, which, at first, she perceives to be "purity, rest, renovation" and a realm where she has "chances." She encounters "wonderful weather. All the golden air melted about her. All the trees hung out, so she thought, Chinese lanterns for her. A few brown butterflies lingered languidly in the sun. A few bright birds twittered on warm fences" (33). The setting seems ideal for hope, reformation, and mercy. While taking in the beautiful, idyllic scene, Nixy recalls women who had been helpful to her, especially Marthy Ann, a low-income woman who, along with her husband, had taken Nixy in briefly earlier in the

novel. Phelps connects women to nature in a way that suggests harmony between the two. Ecofeminists have often critiqued such an association as reinforcing a gender stereotype, that of women being closer to nature than men. However, this scene is short-lived, for soon Nixy, after being questioned suspiciously by a stranger who thinks she might be a tramp, "forgot about Marthy" and "fell to wondering why the world should be full of butterflies and yellow leaves, and no place in it for a girl who never saw either before. Generally, then, she was reminded that she had eaten no dinner, and both leaves and butterflies were forgotten" (34). Nature quickly changes in Nixy's mind from being a place of beautiful hope to being a sharp reminder to her of what she does not have. At this point, any positive association of women with nature disappears. The harshness of Nixy's plight, which was created largely by a male-dominated, urbanized society, drowns out harmony with nature.

Privett points out that this scene of harsh reality eclipsing the beauty of nature is somewhat of a critique of American romanticism. She cites the novel:

> Nothing romantic happened to Nixy; nobody offered to adopt or endow her, educate or marry her. People looked curiously into her colorless face, considered her young to be travelling alone, gave her food or advice, as the case might be, and went about their business; men and women who would have wept over her at a prayer-meeting sent her on her lonely, tempted way without a thought. (34)

American romanticism idealized nature, and Nixy, at first, sees hope in nature. However, before long the brutality of her reality deletes romanticism. Privett states, "The reality of Nixy's situation is too painful to be romantic" (80). At a time when American

romanticism was falling away to American realism, Phelps writes a scene—indeed, a book—in which, at least to a point, there is a questioning of the idealization of nature. Of course, there is more to American romanticism than this reverence for nature, and, in some ways, *Hedged In* has features of American romanticism (such as its rather melodramatic ending). However, at least in this and many other scenes, Phelps is moving toward American realism and away from American romanticism, and one of the ways she does that is by challenging the romantic idealization of nature. The consequences of urbanization and industrialization have deflated such idealization.

While throughout the novel Eunice's relationship to nature is also polluted by the negative influence of patriarchy, the novel's ending presents a slightly different relationship. The thunderstorm raging outside while Eunice dies inside the house from some unknown cause seems to veer from the pattern through much of the novel of nature having been corrupted by patriarchy. The thunderstorm does not cause Eunice's death but just coincides with it, as if nature is lamenting Eunice's death. Indeed, the storm has a wrathful quality in that it brings down "fire" upon the town and causes widespread destruction, including the felling of a steeple (293). The imagery suggests God pouring wrath upon the Church and the town for failing to treat Nixy with sustained compassion. Thus, in that final scene, nature is sympathetic toward Eunice rather than at odds with her. This sympathy suggests that, while patriarchy may create an industrialized, urbanized world in which humans and nature are frequently at odds with each other in a way that contributes to the victimization of women, the woman-nature connection will still prevail. This connection is problematic for many ecofeminists because it reinforces a traditional association of women and nature. On the other hand, in this case, at least, the

connection of Eunice to nature suggests a triumph of both nature and a woman over patriarchy. Men may pollute nature with urbanization and industrialization, but nature will still ultimately connect with Eunice enough to mourn her death.

This thunderstorm prefigures a development in *The Silent Partner* and *A Singular Life*, as well as other works of Phelps: the wrath of nature serving in lieu of the wrath of God. While in Calvinist theology an angry God is quick to visit wrath upon human beings, Phelps, who tends to eschew the idea of a wrathful God (recall that, in the *Gates* trilogy, there is no hell per se and God is depicted as approachable and forgiving), sometimes has nature fill in for such a God. Just as the thunderstorm is nature's enraged response to the demise of Eunice, so also does nature function in a more comprehensive way in protest against patriarchy in these other two novels.

The Wrath of Nature in *The Silent Partner* (1871)

The Silent Partner functions like an ecofeminist sermon to offer a specific message in defense of women and mill workers. In this novel, nature is not merely perverted by patriarchy but ends up wreaking destruction upon human beings, almost as if it were functioning in lieu of the wrath of God. The mill of the town of Five Falls is run by men and is exploitative of its workers, has male leaders who are dismissive of the female partner Kelsey, and exploits natural resources for the sake of productivity. Nature responds with destruction that damages the town and the mill and kills Catty, a disabled, mentally challenged woman who received her disabilities because of poor mill conditions. In short, in *The Silent Partner*, the fury of nature is wrathful in response to patriarchy with destructive results for men and, especially, women. However, nature

unleashing its wrath on a victimized woman, Catty, instead of on the men responsible for her victimization is due to nature having been corrupted by humans and so, unlike God, being flawed in its wielding of its wrath in the name of justice. Thus, nature functions in lieu of God but in an imperfect way to due to it having been perverted by human influence.

In this novel, Phelps tells the story of Perley Kelso, a young woman whose father has died, making her the heir of his partnership in a mill. The other two partners, both men (her fiancé and his father), condescendingly assure her that she can be a silent partner, that she need not be involved in decision-making. She can leave such work to the men, but she refuses to do so. Instead, Perley becomes acquainted with the mill workers and learns that they struggle under unfair working and living conditions. Indeed, *The Silent Partner* is, among other things, an exposé of poor working conditions in industrialized America. Perley becomes acquainted with Sip Garth, a working class woman who struggles to make a living and who has a sister, Catty, who has been severely disabled because of mill-life. She was born deaf, Sip believes, because their mother had been overworked in the mill and so could not take proper care of herself during the pregnancy (52). Then Catty's eyes deteriorate as a result of poor working conditions. In addition, Catty is mentally challenged, an alcoholic, and promiscuous. Eventually, Catty is killed by a flood. Perley also gets to know Bub Mell, a boy who works at the mill and who ends up being killed as a result of an accident on the job. Perley continues to defy her partners and endeavors to improve conditions for the workers, such as by providing them with more refined, cultural events that help to give the workers greater dignity.

The Silent Partner is homiletic in several ways. First, it proclaims a didactically religious message that calls for reform as part of living the Christian life. Phelps makes that connection in her introductory note, in which she declares "[h]ad Christian ingenuity been generally synonymous with the conduct of manufacturing corporations, I should have found no occasion for the writing of this book" (i). Given Phelps's general commitment to Christianity and given this introductory note, it is safe to conclude that this novel is motivated at least in part by her Christian values. The novel's Christian focus becomes especially obvious in the final chapter, in which Sip Garth emerges as a preacher. Sip preaches on the importance of the mill-workers turning to Christ despite the prevalent notion among working class people that they are too busy struggling to make a living to have time for religion. Sip's stress on the relevance of Christianity for the working class, coupled with Phelps's dedication to social reform in the name of Christianity, makes the novel homiletic. Further, as I said in Chapter One, Sip Garth's earthy, loosely structured, and highly repetitive homiletic style is reminiscent of the style of both Dwight Moody and Sojourner Truth, whom I analyzed in Chapter One.

It is significant that Perley herself is not particularly religious at the beginning of the novel. The narrator indicates that Perley "was nothing of a philanthropist, not much of a Christian" (22). While she never attains the level of piety that Sip has, Perley does mature as a Christian. Once Perley has become aware of the suffering of the mill-workers, she tells Maverick that they are obligated to help the workers because they are Christians. Perley stresses, "I am a member of a Christian church" (132), meaning that she sees herself as having a Christian responsibility to help others. Indeed, throughout her

life and writings, Phelps contends that correcting social injustice is at the heart of being a Christian, a position consistent with the Social Gospel movement of the period.

At the center of this homiletic novel's message are two social justice issues aligned with ecofeminism. One is the oppression of women. Because Perley is a woman, the male partners of the mill, including her fiancé Maverick, condescendingly label her a silent partner, telling her that she need not bother expressing her opinion when the three partners meet. Perley thinks such a relegation is nonsense and proceeds to rebel against it. Eventually, she breaks off her engagement with Maverick. She also rejects marriage when another man, Mr. Garrick, proposes to her, saying, "The fact is . . . I have no time to think of love and marriage" (260). At a time when it was customary for novels written for women to end with the female protagonist getting married (or dying), Perley's rejection of marriage is surprising. Sip Garth also rejects a marriage proposal, choosing instead to focus on her work as a preacher. Thus, Phelps presents characters who reject patriarchy in favor of concern for the underprivileged. Phelps defies the classic male/female hierarchical binary that feminism also defies.

The Silent Partner is not just akin to feminism but also ecofeminism in that it explores how patriarchy oppresses both women and nature. Water-imagery is prominent in *The Silent Partner* and repeatedly highlights how industrialization, represented by the mill, is at odds with nature. The town is called Five Falls, and the river in the town is mentioned repeatedly. For instance, the narrator reports that

> [t]he pulse of the water was sluggish, half choked by swathing of beautiful ice; the falls, caught in their tiny leap, hung, frozen to the heart, in mid-air; the open dam, swift, relentless, and free, mocked at them with peals of

> hollow laughter; and great puffs and palls of smoke, which overhung the distant hum of the little town, made mouths, one fancied, at the shining whiteness of the fields and river bank. (43)

This description makes palpable the powerful presence of the water in the town, as well as the rivalry between the water and human civilization, represented by the puffs and palls of smoke which make mouths at nature, especially the river bank. This rivalry persists throughout the novel, culminating in the flood scene in which human civilization, represented by the town, will prove no match for the overpowering waters from the flooded river and falls. Also mentioned repeatedly is rain. The novel's first sentence is "The rainiest nights, like the rainiest lives, are by no means the saddest" (1). Rain and the river both are continually present. The rain foreshadows (and helps to bring about) the flood, and both the rain and the river are a threatening presence to the people of the town and to the mill. The novel is naturalistic in that nature appears as an ominous force that ultimately overpowers humanity. The novel also embodies ecocritical themes in that it depicts people exploiting nature, such as by felling trees for timber, damming the river, and puffing pollutants into the air. Further, the novel prefigures ecofeminist ideals in that it depicts the mill, which is exploitative of both nature and women, as male-dominated. While there are male characters, such as Bub Mell, who are exploited, Phelps, through her focus on Sip, Catty, and, of course, Perley, highlights the exploitation of women by the mill, which is run by men, Maverick and his father. Perley struggles to be a partner with a voice, and Sip labors to make a decent living and better her life while also struggling to care for her sister, who has been disabled as a result of the harsh conditions of the mill.

Catty's death due to the flood provides a striking example of how the novel resembles an ecofeminist sermon. Leading up to the flood scene Phelps uses biblical creation language from Genesis 1, such as when she writes, "The evening and the morning were the fifth day" (266). In Genesis, the reference to the passing of the evenings and mornings of days refers to the six days of creation, but here, the passing of the days refers to the flood that overruns Five Falls and kills Catty. Further, in Genesis, the Earth is described as a watery "formless void" (1:2) that God makes into a well-ordered creation. In the flood scene of *The Silent Partner* the progression is the opposite in that the order of the town deteriorates into the watery void of the flood. Moreover, the flood is reminiscent of the Noah flood narrative in Genesis 6-9. Water destroys sinful humans, and while Phelps is reluctant to describe God as wrathful, she does not hesitate to depict nature as wrathful. Thus, Phelps is preaching that the flood is a wrathful tool that undoes the human-made creation of Five Falls. The chief victim is Catty, a woman who has been victimized by a mill run by men and so is too disabled to know that she is on a bridge where she is about to be killed. Felled timber has broken loose and is being carried down the flooded river. Onlookers know that the logs are approaching, and they see Catty standing on the bridge, which the logs will soon hit. The people cry up to her and motion at her, but she cannot hear or see. Phelps's description of Catty's imminent demise becomes pointedly homiletic:

> Type of the world from which [Catty] sprang,—the world of exhausted and corrupted body, of exhausted and corrupted brain, of exhausted and corrupted soul; the world of the labouring poor as man had made it, and as

> Christ had died for it; of a world deaf, dumb, blind, doomed, stepping confidently to its own destruction before our eyes . . . . (278-279)

Catty, as this victim on the bridge about to be swept away by runaway logs, is "exhausted and corrupted" by the "world of labouring poor as man had made it." The repetition of "exhausted and corrupted" is reminiscent of the anaphora that preachers frequently employ. The mention of Christ dying for the world and the biblical echoes in the phrase "world deaf, dumb, blind, doomed" also give the passage a homiletic sound. The message is that Catty's demise is the result of human sin, especially male human sin, given that men have the power in the mill and in postbellum society in general. Moreover, it is through Christ, ultimately, that this anthropocentric and androcentric destruction gives way to hope. Phelps is here emphasizing hope through Christ, just as she will have Sip Garth preach that same message in the novel's last chapter. In fact, in Catty's death, Phelps takes this Christian message a step further. After logs racing downstream crash through the bridge, thereby killing Catty, Phelps describes an important feature of the aftermath: "On the empty ruin of the sliced bridge, two logs had caught and hung, black against the colour of the water and the colour of the sky. They had caught transversely, and hung like a cross" (280). Christ does not just save Catty, but, through this image, her death becomes associated with his. Catty becomes a Christ figure in that she is victimized and sacrificed by the sin of patriarchy, just as Christ is victimized and sacrificed by the sin of humanity. In this climax, Phelps bemoans patriarchal exploitation of nature and people, especially women, presents nature as responding destructively, and proclaims that through Christ alone is hope for redemption.

As we have seen in Phelps's other novels, especially the *Gates* trilogy, Phelps eschews the Calvinist understanding of God as wrathful. Instead, she focuses on the human potential for redemption and on God's mercy, especially as revealed through Christ. In *The Silent Partner*, nature brings destruction upon transgressing patriarchy in a way reminiscent of God's wrath, while Phelps presents Christ as merciful. Phelps puts sinful society in the hands not of an angry God but of angry nature and a merciful God, Jesus Christ. Part of Phelps's depiction of nature's wrath, however, is that victims of patriarchy, such as Catty, get caught in the crossfire of nature's fury. Christ, who himself was victimized on the cross, identifies with such victims and, through his compassion, promises them a place in heaven. Granted, in Phelps's soteriology, there is the potential for all to be redeemed and enter heaven. Esmerald Thorne's reform in *The Gates Between* is illustrative of that soteriology. However, the Cattys of the world have a special place in heaven, just as the domestic servant of *The Gates Between* has such a place, while Thorne has an inferior status precisely because of his sinful nature. In short, in *The Silent Partner*, at the heart of the ecofeminist-homiletic message is that nature may be wrathful in response to patriarchy in ways that further victimize the victims, including women, but Christ provides redemption for such victims.

The novel also addresses another common ecofeminist theme: care for the oppressed. Ecofeminism consistently calls for the liberation of oppressed entities and for the replacement of hierarchical thinking with heterarchical egalitarianism. Perley is deeply concerned about the oppressed mill workers, both male and female. Further, these workers are more closely tied to the earth in that they are dealing with the muck of making things, while the partners, except for Perley, are farther removed, enjoying

prosperity in their clean offices. As an especially pointed example of mill-worker oppression (in addition to Catty), Phelps tells the story of Bub Mell, an eight-year-old boy who has been pulled out of school to work at the mill in order to help support his family. Bub is darkly humorous in that he engages in behavior, such as chewing tobacco, that is inappropriate for a child. Bub's family is full of illness, poverty, and dysfunction, so he must work. He then ends up dying in a machine accident at the mill. On the morning of his death, before he arrives at work, Bub plays outside "about the slopes of buttercups and clover which kneel to the water's edge with a reverent look, as if they knelt for baptism" (204). In this scene, he chases after rats for fun. The scene suggests Bub's innocence and also a communing with nature that is not perfect but is certainly closer to harmonious than is the constantly antagonistic relationship that the mill has with nature. This scene is ephemeral, however, for Bub, although a child, must go to work, and it is at work that he dies.

Although the novel is sympathetic toward the working class, it still harbors a middle-class bias, as Phelps's work often does (despite her good intentions). William Lynn Watson praises the novel but goes on to argue persuasively that "Phelps chronicles what is done *for* workers and what is done *to* workers" (14) but never tells what workers do for themselves (14). Watson adds that Phelps reveals a middle-class bias in that the "*Silent Partner*'s groundbreaking literary figurations of the working class, paradoxically enough, also represent the class interests of a genteel Bostonian audience" (20). Watson explains that Perley attempts to make the workers more respectable by introducing them to the "sophisticated" culture of the middle class. She exposes them to Beethoven, Dickens, and ice cream socials, rather than experiencing their culture and seeing the

value in it (14). Margaret Purcell takes a similar approach in her reform of the lower class Nixy in *Hedged In*. For Phelps, at least in these two novels, part of helping working class people is teaching them to be like middle-class people.

Watson goes on to show how *The Silent Partner* expresses, not only a superior view of the middle class vis-à-vis the working class, but also fear of the power of the working class. Central to Watson's thesis is Chapter XII, in which Perley defuses a mob of mill-workers angry over a reduction of wages. Demanding improvements to their conditions, the workers threaten a strike. Watson points out that Phelps uses sea imagery to describe how threatening the crowd is. With regard to the growing unrest of the workers, Phelps writes, "The sea-swell murmured," then "The sea-swell growled," and then "The sea-swell splashed out" (244). The angry sea conceit continues throughout the description of the angry workers. Moreover, the male partners are ineffective at calming the "sea" of workers, who call out for "the young leddy" (250) to talk to them. Perley does indeed talk to them, and because she has built a relationship with the workers through her ice cream socials and the like, the workers back down in response to her. Shortly after Perley has addressed the crowd, the narrator indicates that there is an "ebb" (253). The mob disperses, the strike is averted. Watson argues that the scene shows the middle class dominating the working class. The working class is not to be allowed to have great power and is to be domesticated by the middle class (20). The sea imagery foreshadows the flood scene and suggests a link between the oppressed working class and nature. However, although Phelps depicts nature as overpowering patriarchal, industrialized society through the flood that ravages the mill town, she opts not to depict

the working class as having such power but instead as being subdued by Perley, who is of a higher socio-economic class.

Nevertheless, despite Phelps's middle-class bias, the novel still manages to proclaim a message of concern for the working class. Further, the strike scene shows the power of a woman, Perley, to defuse a mob, something that her male counterparts are unable to do. She is able to do so because she knows the people better than the men running the mill do (247). Maverick Hayle, one of the business owners (and Perley's ex-fiancé), contends that these disgruntled workers need to be reined in (247), that they lack "trust and honor" (247), and says to Perley that, despite her kind efforts toward them, "when you are in a genuine difficulty, they will turn against you just as they are doing now" (247). Perley, however, insists on respecting the workers and reasoning with them. She suggests explaining to the workers why their wages must be reduced, but Maverick's father, another of the mill owners, snidely replies that her idea is "[t]ruly a young lady's suggestion" (248). Perley insists that Stephen Garrick, who used to be poor, reason with the crowd, and eventually he agrees to do so. However, the crowd calls for Perley (250). She explains that their wages have been reduced due to financial problems in the mill. She essentially repeats what Garrick had told the crowd of workers, "but when *she* said she couldn't afford to pay 'em, they believed *that*" (252). One of the workers says that he does not understand the company's finances but that he will "take the young leddy's word for it, this time, for one" (253). The novel's homiletic message of respect for working class people is still clear, even if muted by Phelps's biases. Further, Phelps is critical of patriarchy by showing the men who run the company insensitive toward the

workers and Perley, a woman, being successful because of her respect and sensitivity toward them.

The novel is also homiletic in that it contains parts of a sermon. After Catty's death, Sip becomes a preacher, believing that Catty is inspiring her from beyond the grave to do so (292). The final chapter is devoted entirely to Sip's preaching and even includes excerpts from one of her sermons. Just as a woman, Winifred Forceythe, is an effective preacher in *The Gates Ajar*, so also is Sip. Her sermon can be classified as topical in that it is not based on a biblical passage but is based on a topic, which is the tendency among the working poor to reject religion because they are too busy struggling to make ends meet to "waste" time on religion. Again, the sermon is reminiscent of the somewhat folksy sermons of Moody or Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?". Moody's sermons would tend to be repetitive and not containing an orderly, logical sequence that developed an argument. Sip's sermon is along the same lines. She makes her central point, that Christianity is for the poor and not just the rich, several times in different ways. She begins by stating that she used to think that Christianity was just for the rich. She then voices some of the objections the poor have made against Christianity. For some examples, she says, "And you say, 'I'm at work all day and nights, I'm tired'; or, 'I'm at work all the week, and of a Sunday I must sleep; I can't be praying'; and so you say, 'I pray thee, Lord, have me excused!' and so you go your wicked ways" (297).

Sip moves on to stress how merciful Christ is, especially to the poor. She indicates that following Christ is not easy but that it is beneficial. She says, "Christ's way is a patient way, it is a pure way . . . It's a long way and a winding way, but it's a good way and a true way, and there's comfort in it, and joy at the end of it" (300). She

concludes with a prayer asking Christ to be with them, the working poor. In the process she states that she believes that they, the working poor, do indeed belong to Christ, that they have a special bond with Christ (300). This elevation of the poor is a theme in ecofeminism, which argues that patriarchy denies many people adequate income, good working conditions, and, in general, respect. Sip defies such disrespect by proclaiming that the working poor have a special connection to Christ. That connection is not intended to give the poor a sense of elitism but to bring them to Christ. Thus, the sermon is Christian in its resemblance to ecofeminist homiletics.

Sip's sermon is also similar to ecofeminist preaching in that it challenges hierarchical binaries. Sip defies socio-economic hierarchies when she insists that "[r]ich and poor, big or little, there's no way under heaven for us to get out of our twist, but Christ's way" (299). In Christ, hierarchical binaries that divide people recede into the background. There is still the hierarchy of God above humanity, but, in general, the sermon strives to move the hearer away from hierarchical thinking. The sermon is also ecofeminist in that a woman, Sip, is a powerful preacher. The sermon does not focus on nature, but it nevertheless contains these ideals that are often associated with ecofeminism.

Throughout *The Silent Partner*, Phelps, albeit imperfectly, exposes how patriarchy exploits nature and women and how nature responds wrathfully. The same dynamic appears in *A Singular Life*, although with important differences.

Nature's Wrath and a Christ-like Hero in *A Singular Life* (1895)

Written about a quarter of a century later, *A Singular Life*, like *Hedged In* and *The Silent Partner*, is explicitly religious and concerned with addressing social problems as part of living the Christian life. Further, in *A Singular Life*, Phelps makes important connections between nature and women and how patriarchy relates to both. Specifically, in *A Singular Life*, nature functions as the wrath of God in that people, especially men, suffer at the hands of nature when they commit certain sins. *A Singular Life* departs from the other two novels in that it does not come to the defense of women to the same degree that the other novels do.

A Singular Life tells the story of a minister, Emanuel Bayard. The novel begins with him as a seminarian hoping to receive a fulltime call as a pastor. When he is evaluated by religious experts, however, he is denied ordination because his beliefs are too heretical vis-à-vis the conservative Congregationalism that the experts represent. Despite his unorthodoxy, Bayard is obviously dedicated to serving God as a minister and clearly has good rapport with the people. For instance, on his way to his examination before the religious experts, he encounters a drunk named Job Slip, whom Bayard manages to subdue physically. Bayard shows himself to be tough yet compassionate with Job and so demonstrates that he has remarkable talent as a pastor to the degenerate. After being denied ordination, Bayard goes on to establish his own church in a rough neighborhood in the fishing town of Windover. There, he focuses especially on urging people to reject alcohol and embrace temperance. Many parishioners applaud his efforts at reform and his palpable concern for both the Gospel and the welfare of his parishioners. He wins the conversion of several alcoholics, including Job. Resistance

comes from business owners, since Bayard's preaching against alcohol abuse has resulted in several bars closing. Bar-owner Ben Trawl is especially angry with Bayard, in part because of the financial trouble Bayard has caused him but also in part because Trawl has romantic feelings for Jane Granite, a working-class woman who likewise is drawn romantically to Bayard (although Bayard is oblivious to her feelings for him). Meanwhile, throughout the course of the novel, Bayard has a long courtship with Helen Carruth, the daughter of one of his former professors. Finally, he and Helen are married, and she becomes a dutiful, selfless supporter of his cause. However, Ben Trawl throws a sharp stone at Bayard that hits his lung and eventually kills him. Lena, a prostitute Bayard reformed, captures Ben. The townspeople mourn Bayard's death.

The novel is homiletic in several regards, and the most obvious is in its didactic story about Bayard, who is both a minister and an obvious Christ-figure. He is Christ-like in his personality and in the way his life mirrors Christ's. Bayard's first name is Emanuel, which is a title that Christ receives in Matthew 1:23. He is born in a town called Bethlehem to parents named Mary and Joseph. He attends seminary in the town of Cesarea, which is the name of the town in the gospels in which Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah (or Son of God, depending on which gospel is referred to. In either case, Jesus' special identity is affirmed.). Further, just as the religious leaders rejected Jesus' teachings, so also do the conservative Congregational religious leaders reject Bayard at his examination to be approved for ordination. In his ministering to the working-class people of Windover, Bayard adopts their meager lifestyle, just as the Son of God left heaven and adopted the meager lifestyle of poverty-stricken humans on Earth by becoming incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. Bayard makes sacrifices to save the people

from alcohol abuse, such as enduring poverty and abuse from bar-owners, just as Jesus makes sacrifices to save people from damnation. Bayard reforms the prostitute Lena, just as Jesus saves Mary Magdalene, who, tradition says, was a prostitute (Clearly "Lena" is derived from "Magdalene."). At several points in the novel, the narrator uses images pertaining to light to describe Bayard in a way that is reminiscent of Christ. For example, when Bayard comes across the drunken Job Slip fighting in the street and then turning on his own child, his face becomes "as white as a star" as he "quiver[s] with holy rage" (59). Toward the end of the novel, moments before Ben Trawl casts the fatal stone at Bayard, Bayard is described as "transfigured" (409) as he stands before his newly dedicated chapel. Finally, Bayard is like Christ in that he is martyred.

Bayard has his flaws, such as his initial dislike of adapting to a low-income lifestyle, but, for the most part, Phelps paints him as an admirable figure who serves as a kind of sermonic illustration for readers to emulate, especially with regard to his passionate fight against alcoholism. Like a sermon, the novel didactically calls for a renunciation of sinful behavior, alcohol abuse, in accord with the will of Jesus Christ, embodied in Emanuel Bayard.

This novel is squarely part of the temperance literature tradition, based in part on Phelps's observation of the deleterious effects of drinking on the fishing community of Gloucester, where she had a cottage.

As in many of her other works, such as the *Gates* trilogy, in *A Singular Life* Phelps criticizes conservative clergy in a manner bordering on the satirical and thereby makes clear her homiletic novel's theological position. Bayard has already established himself as noble and heroic through his confrontation with Job Slip, so when the clerical

examiners find fault after fault with his theology, the reader is sympathetic toward him. Phelps tells the reader that "the inventions of theology were flung hissing upon him" (68). The questions come fast and piercing:

> State explicitly his conception of the Trinity. Had none? Ah—ah!
>
> Were the three Persons in the Trinity separate as qualities or as natures?
>
> Did not *know?* Ah—ah.
>
> State the precise nature, province, and character of each Person. Did not feel qualified to do so? Ha—hum. (69)

Phelps underscores the impersonal and severe nature of the examination by presenting many of the questions without any dialog tags, as she does in the above passage. This approach strips away faces and names of questioners and Bayard himself, reducing the exchange to a cold, inhuman barrage of questions and judgmental responses, such as "Ah—ah," to insufficient answers. Bayard's unwillingness to answer questions about the Trinity reflects Unitarianism and other more liberal theologies of the time that tended either to reject the Trinity or to be less dogmatic about it. Just as Christ rejects the rigid dogmatism of the Pharisees (such as by breaking Sabbath rules in order to help a person in need), Bayard rejects the rigid dogmatism of his examiners.

The scene becomes more personal when Professor Carruth, who is fond of Bayard (and who eventually becomes his father-in-law), tries to help Bayard fare a bit better by asking him questions gently and with follow-up questions that are to help Bayard toward a satisfactory answer:

> "But," [Carruth] asked gently, "is not one act of sin an infinite wrong?"
>
> "I believe it is; or it may reasonably become so."

> "Is it not a wrong committed against an Infinite Being?"
>
> "Yes, sir, it is."
>
> "Does not an infinite wrong committed against an Infinite Being deserve an infinite punishment?" pleaded the Professor of Theology.
>
> "You have taught me so, sir." (70)

Bayard then derails Professor Carruth's efforts a few lines later when Professor Carruth asks, "Do you not believe what you have been taught?" and, with a smile, Bayard replies, "Professor . . . do you?" (70). Carruth then declares that Bayard will eventually "grow into" the doctrine (71). This exchange with Professor Carruth shows Bayard's almost smug refusal to acquiesce to conservative, Calvinist theology, which emphasized God's sovereignty and eternal damnation for all but an elect few.

At the conclusion of the examination, Bayard expresses his creed. He declares that he believes in: "God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth" (73), Jesus Christ, the "sacredness and authority" of the Bible (73), sin, eternal life, and that eternal life is a gift that sinners receive through Christ. He goes on to declare that he cannot explain these doctrines but that he wants simply to care for his parishioners, who have called him to fulltime ministry. He concludes by saying, "I expect to teach them many truths which I do not understand. I shall teach them none which I do not believe. Fathers and brothers, I show you my soul! Deal with me as you will!" (73) Phelps then tells the reader that, as Bayard stands there at the end of his speech, he looks "half angel, half human" (73). In short, Bayard rejects academic theological disputes for a confession of his acceptance of Christianity's core tenets coupled with a commitment to serve people in need. His half-angelic appearance, coupled with his victory over Job Slip, serve to present him as heroic

and his conservative inquisitors as villainous when the deny him ordination. Phelps's homiletic message, then, is that adherence to basic Christianity theology and caring for people in need outweigh precision on erudite theological matters. Moreover, this proclamation has an implicitly anti-patriarchal tone in that the examiners are espousing a theology traditionally associated with men, such as Calvin and Edwards. Indeed, in Phelps's hometown of Andover, this conservative theological position was largely the property of male preachers and professors, such as her father. Recall that, in *The Gates Ajar*, which critiques essentially the same conservative theological tradition through its criticism of Deacon Quirk and Dr. Bland, Phelps aligned this tradition with male figures.

Privett indicates that Bayard's theology, which, throughout the novel, emphasizes social reform, is aligned with the Social Gospel movement of the late nineteenth century. At one point, Bayard proclaims, "Oh, when I think about it!—Predestination, foreordination, sanctification, election, and botheration,—and never a lesson on the Christian socialism of our day, not a lecture on how to save the poor, lost woman, how to reform a drunkard . . . how to apply what we believe to common life and common sense" (153). Such a sentiment calls to mind the Social Gospel movement, which emphasized the amelioration of social ills over doctrinal orthodoxy. Bayard is far more interested in helping people give up drinking and providing financial assistance to the poor than in correctly articulating Calvinist doctrine.

Indeed, in its focus on social reform, the novel becomes more pointedly feminist, even if not to the degree found in *Hedged In* and *The Silent Partner*. Although men were involved, women dominated the temperance movement. After all, men were more likely to drink excessively than women, and women then suffered at the hands of men who,

because of their addiction, were abusive, neglectful, and/or wasteful of their income. Janet Zollinger Giele explains, "In their understanding of the connections between violence, sexual abuse, and drunkenness, the WCTU [Women's Christian Temperance Union] presaged modern feminist discoveries that alcohol abuse, prostitution, cruelty, pornography, and delinquency of women are often linked" (100). Privett adds, "By arguing to stop the sale of alcohol, Phelps was also supporting the cause of women, not only working-class women whose abusive drunken husbands left the family destitute, but also middle- and upper-class women whose lives had been affected by this problem" (153). Therefore, even though Bayard is male, the novel's call for temperance, in the context of postbellum America, has feminist overtones.

This feminist-tinted call for temperance becomes even sharper and brighter and takes on an ecofeminist hue in the connection that the novel makes between drunkenness and the dangers of the sea. A pivotal scene involves one of the ships, the Clara Em, foundering on the rocks near the shore. Bayard leads the community in rescuing the sailors and discovers that the sailors wrecked because they were all drunk. Bayard swims out to the wreckage to save lives, battling the stormy waves. The scene describes the dangers of the sea: "So! This is the 'terrible sea!' This is what drowning means; this mortal chill, this crashing weight upon the lungs, the heart, this fighting for a man's breath . . . this conflict with wind and water, night and might . . . this struggling on again, and sweeping back, and battling out!" (121-122) The scene is naturalistic in its description of humanity's helplessness against nature, except for the fact that, in this scene, humans are not merely victims of nature but are victims of their own stupid drunkenness. Further, Bayard will make clear that men are not helpless victims of alcohol

but have the power to give up drinking. This point is one of the key themes of the novel and is made pungently evident in a key exchange at the end of the rescue. One of the drunken men on the ship was Job Slip, whose life Bayard saves. Job says that his life is not worth saving, and Bayard retorts, "Then *be* worth it!" (124).

In a couple ways, this scene can be read as having ecofeminist overtones. First, the name of the ship is the Clara Em, a woman's name, and it is wrecked because of the drunken foolishness of the men on board. The symbolism points to a recurring motif in the novel, which is that the sailors' wives (and widows) have suffered much because of their men's hard living and hard drinking. Privett writes, "For the women of the town, the sea is the enemy even more than it is the source of livelihood" (109). Phelps describes an old woman, who symbolizes many of the women of the town: "The old woman's bare hands were clenched together, and her lips shut like iron hinges . . . She seemed a spirit of the wind and wet, a solemn figure-head, an anathema, or a prayer; symbol of a thousand watchers frozen on a thousand shores:—woman as the sea has made her" (110, 118). The sea is an antagonistic force made more so by the excessive drinking of the men. In this scene and throughout the novel, then, the central image from nature is that of the hostile sea, and what makes the sea especially destructive is not the sea itself but the careless ways that men interact with it. Consequently, women, like the Clara Em, are often casualties.

Note that, as in *Hedged In* and *The Silent Partner*, women are not associated with nature in a way that helps to perpetuate the patriarchal oppression of both. Rather, nature, especially when men exploit it or defy it, becomes a monstrous juggernaut, with women being the primary victims. Women suffer, not because of nature itself, but because their

men insist on making a living defying nature by sailing on the rough seas and exploiting nature by killing fish. Nature is severe, and humans are no match against its forces. Men make matters worse by trying to defy and exploit nature while drunk. Men are foolish to think that they can navigate the violent waters while intoxicated. Nature then responds with a God-like wrath, just as nature responds in *The Silent Partner* with the destructive deluge that kills Catty and in *Hedged In* with the thunderstorm that laments Eunice's death. Phelps's ecofeminist-homiletic message is that, when men try to defy and manipulate nature, they often do so at the expense of women.

Despite this message that resonates well with ecofeminist homiletics, *A Singular Life* also falters in its proto-feminist message. As Kessler explains, the three central women in Bayard's life, his eventual wife Helen Carruth, the reformed prostitute Lena, and his ingratiating admirer Jane Granite, all suffer because of their devotion to Bayard. Jane repeatedly waits on Bayard and is obviously enamored with him, but Bayard pays her little attention, although he does give her a copy of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." Bayard does help to reform Lena from prostitution, but he tells her, in her pursuit of respectable work, not to become a domestic servant lest she contaminate "pure" women. Instead, he encourages her to take the more dangerous job of working at a gunpowder factory. Finally, Bayard, in a way, is the least considerate toward his wife. Before they are married, Helen is somewhat irreverent. Once they marry, Bayard expects her full cooperation and obedience, and she gladly obliges. Helen is a willing self-sacrificing servant of her husband.

Granted, perhaps Phelps is presenting these women as victims of Bayard in order to highlight how men exploit women. However, as Kessler points out, Phelps never

makes any statement against such exploitation. Kessler writes, "The women surrounding Emanuel Bayard reveal, however, the price they pay for his Christ-like martyrdom, an issue not recognized as such by Phelps, who presents Emanuel favorably" (97). Phelps continually lionizes Bayard while never noting that his treatment of these women is problematic. Given that she tends to be didactic and explicit when it comes to her messages, especially those pertaining to women, it is unlikely that Phelps means for the reader to see Bayard's treatment of these women as problematic. On the contrary, she is likely extolling the selflessness of these women while overlooking the sexist implications of that selflessness.

How could Phelps write such characters given that, elsewhere in her work, she presents strong women who refuse to allow a man to suppress them? Perley Kelso and Sip Garth in *The Silent Partner* both turn down marriage proposals, content to pursue their work without male companionship. The *Gates* trilogy, also, features women such as Winifred Forceythe, who liberate themselves from men. As we will see in Chapter Four, *The Story of Avis* (1877) tells of the brilliant Avis Dobell tragically giving up her career as an artist so that she can be married and have children. The message of that novel is obviously that marriage is deadly for women's careers outside the home. Why, then, would Phelps tell a story that seems to extol women sacrificing themselves for the sake of a man?

Phelps's life may hold the answer. She married in 1888, and her father, whom she idolized, died in 1890. Further, Phelps, who never had strong health, was often frail by 1895. Perhaps her more acquiescent women reflect her own modification of her stance in light of life events. Now married (the marriage was unhappy, although Phelps never left

her husband), mourning her father's death, and physically more vulnerable, Phelps feels inclined to be gentler with men and to present women as a bit more submissive, thereby conceding to the Cult of True Womanhood prevalent in postbellum America. It is noteworthy that Bayard is by far Phelps's most positive male protagonist and, as she admitted, her favorite (*Chapters from a Life* 157).

While this theory is plausible, it belies the complexity of Phelps's later works. As Jennifer A. Gehrman argues convincingly in her dissertation on Phelps at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (1996), proto-feminist themes recur throughout all of her work, including her later pieces. A notable example is *Confessions of a Wife* (1902), which Phelps published under a pseudonym and which tells the story of Marna Trent, who is in an unhappy marriage to a husband addicted to drugs. The novel provides one of Phelps's most negative depictions of marriage yet was published later in Phelps's life. The assertion that Phelps softened her position on women's issues later in life has some truth but is simplistic.

In any case, despite its flaws, *A Singular Life*, like *Hedged In* and *The Silent Partner*, proceeds like an ecofeminist sermon that calls for the correction of social injustices. Central to these novels' homiletic agenda is the repeated depiction of nature reacting to patriarchal oppression wrathfully or in some other negative fashion. In a sense, then, these novels are akin to literary naturalism in depicting the brutal strength of nature against humanity. At the same time, the novels depart from literary naturalism by presenting Christianity as a source of hope and redemption. Phelps thus makes a distinctive contribution to literary naturalism through the amelioration that she depicts God and Christianity providing.

CHAPTER FOUR

SCIENTIFIC SEXISM AND ARRESTING "CURES": HOMILETICS, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND SCIENCE IN *THE STORY OF AVIS*, *DR. ZAY*, AND *TRIXY*

The previous two chapters examined novels by Phelps that were explicitly religious. The *Gates* trilogy explores the Christian understanding of the afterlife, while *Hedged In*, *The Silent Partner*, and *A Singular Life* are overtly religious in their consideration of the problems in this life, but many of Phelps's other works were not overtly religious. However, Phelps saw her writing as a Christian ministry, so even in her "secular" works Christianity is never far below the surface. This chapter will consider ecofeminist homiletics in three such works: *The Story of Avis* (1877), *Dr. Zay* (1882), and *Trixy* (1904). An important component of these novels is Phelps's exploration of the relationship between science and social problems. She argues that science is invaluable, but that it needs to be stripped of its patriarchal orientation.

Given the intellectual climate of postbellum America, it is unsurprising that Phelps would spend considerable time on scientific issues. As Baym notes, "Over the course of the nineteenth century, the content and institutions of science in the United States altered dramatically" (1). For example, at the beginning of the century, the word "scientist" had not come into general use yet (1). As the century progressed, important developments, such as industrialization and Darwin's publications, began to alter the scientific and medical community. Starting around 1880, the number of scientists increased considerably. In addition, scientific thought and technological advances born

from science came to be seen as the highest form of progress that would contribute to America fulfilling its self-perceived mission of being the great nation of freedom in which a people (i.e., white Protestant males) would rise to superiority over all others (2-3).

With the advancement of science and medicine came the use of both to justify oppression, including sexism, a usage Phelps opposed. While women were striving for suffrage and speaking out on a variety of gender-related issues, the male-dominated scientific and medical community was arguing that women simply could not succeed in that community. Some thinkers insisted that women simply were not intelligent enough to understand scientific advances (Baym 4). Others argued that women were too focused on the concrete details of life to be able to engage effectively in scientific abstraction. The belief was that, as Baym describes it, "women were too earthy to do science" (4). At the same time, many intellectuals held the belief that women were too fanciful to get involved in the dirty details of scientific investigation, such as chipping at rocks, studying insects, or mixing chemicals. In other words, "women were not earthy enough to do science" (4).

Although it may not seem so at first glance, both parts of this paradoxical contention reflect the core tenet of ecofeminism: that patriarchal society often pairs women and nature in ways oppressive to both. In both cases, whether women are regarded as too earthy or not earthy enough for science, patriarchal society is keeping women away from the male-dominated sphere of the intellectual and abstract that was supposedly too sophisticated for women. In other words, in postbellum America (and beyond), women were allowed to associate with nature when it came to the domestic

arena but not when it came to the male-dominated intellectual arena. Women were perceived as inherently closer to nature when it came to growing flowers or having babies but not when it involved botany or obstetrics. Phelps addresses this double standard in *Dr. Zay*, in which she depicts a woman as an excellent doctor in spite of the prevailing view that women could not be capable in that profession.

Indeed, Phelps was not alone in her opinion regarding science and women, although her contribution is uniquely beneficial to the cause. Women's schools often contained science classes, although it is not clear what the quality of these classes was. For instance, in 1833, Catherine Beecher's Hartford seminary taught several science classes, including ones on astronomy, chemistry, and geology (Baym 5). In *Ladies' Magazine*, Sarah Hale, in the same year, reported that women could study an array of sciences, including astronomy, botany, meteorology, and zoology, at Ipswich Female Academy (Baym 5). Numerous books and articles on science were made available to women, although they were often inferior to those offered to men. Illustrations from the nineteenth century, especially after the 1870s, regularly show women in the audiences of scientific lectures (10). Nevertheless, overall, men dominated medicine and science in the nineteenth century.

Moreover, men used science to justify sexism. In *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* (1973), Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English write that the period between 1865 and 1920 saw a decided shift "from a religious to a biomedical rationale for sexism, as well as the formation of the medical profession as we know it—a male elite with a legal monopoly over medical practice" (8). Gehrman cites this quote and goes on to explain that, in earlier periods, the Church often dictated to women that it

was God's will for them to stay at home and submit to their husbands. When women demonstrated their competence through social reform movements and their assistance with charities and businesses during the Civil War, the Church revised its theology in order to justify the oppression of women. Since God was not stopping women from entering the public sphere, especially to do charitable work (which would be in accord with the Christian concern with helping the needy), men had to construct another justification for the suppression of women (102-103). Therefore, Gehrman writes, "[t]here existed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, [sic] a complex set of economic, social, psychological, even spiritual circumstances that contributed to the belief that women were inherently sick" (103). As Ehrenreich and English contend, "Affluent women were seen as inherently sick, too weak and delicate for anything but the mildest pastimes" (12). Indeed, invalidism was in vogue among affluent women (17). Because such a woman's husband was able to provide for her, she could afford to be leisurely, idle, and ill. She was regarded as delicate, frail, someone who had the luxury of helplessness because her husband had wealth (14). Conversely, society regarded the working-class woman as healthy and robust for doing work but also as dirty and carrying disease (13). Moreover, she was seen as a threat to society by being able to have children, which would be inferior because she was considered inferior (14). Ehrenreich and English conclude, "Beneath all this ran two ancient strands of sexist ideology: contempt for women as weak and defective, and fear of women as dangerous and polluting . . . Upper- and upper-middle-class women were 'sick'; working-class women were 'sickening'" (14). Women were simply inferior and so needed to be kept at home, away from the domains of men.

Prominent, respected men of science wrote books and articles that allegedly proved that women were biologically frailer than men. Edward H. Clarke's notorious *Sex in Education; or, A Fair Chance for Girls* (1873) has as its central thesis that women should not receive the same education that men receive because women's bodies and constitutions are more fragile than men's, and those differences made them ill-suited to be educated in the same manner that men were. He writes, "Man is not superior to woman, nor woman to man" (13) and contends that he is simply proposing that women and men need to learn differently. However, he believes that women need to learn differently because they are biologically unable to be exposed to the same educational system as men without putting themselves at great risk for developing "neuralgia, uterine disease, hysteria, and other derangements of the nervous system" (18). Similarly, John and Robin Haller have shown in their research that nineteenth century physicians often "used analyses of skull capacities, facial angles, body dimensions, and complicated phreonological charts to support their claims not only about the inferiority of non-whites, but of women as well" (Kelly 54-55). Graeme M. Hammond, a nineteenth century professor of mental and nervous diseases, argued that women were unable to endure steady "misfortune, care or overwork!" (55). Medical journals of the period often warned women against engaging in intellectual endeavors beyond their natural roles, which were also their traditional roles. The claim was that working outside the home would cause women great anxiety, stress, and illness (55).

Phelps herself had poor health, most notably chronic insomnia, but she nevertheless repeatedly challenged medical and scientific prejudices against women. She responded to Clarke's *Sex in Education* in an essay included in the 1874 book *Sex and*

Education: A Reply to Dr. E. H. Clarke's "Sex in Education," a collection of essays by various authors and edited by Julia Ward Howe. In her essay, Phelps argues that her experience has been that many young women become sickly after their education and not during their education, so maybe the real problem is not that school makes them sick but that the lack of intellectual stimulation after school makes them sick (134-35). She contends that the women who work endless hours in mills without becoming hysterical or sick or who have labored successfully in intellectual pursuits know that Dr. Clarke is simply wrong (130). For Phelps, the real problem is that young women become disillusioned and crestfallen when they leave school to discover that they must now settle down to the relatively unstimulating (according to Phelps) life of wife and mother. The young woman is "[m]ade an invalid by the change from doing something to doing nothing . . . Made an invalid, in short, for *just the reasons . . . why a man would be made an invalid* if subjected to the woman's life when the woman's education is over" (136). Women, Phelps argues here, are not inherently inferior but are made weaker by patriarchy, and men, if subjected to the same restrictions, would be the same way.

Another physician Phelps took issue with was S. Weir Mitchell, whose infamous rest cure, introduced in 1875, prescribed extreme bed rest for treating certain conditions, especially hysteria in women. While some women did appear to benefit from the treatment (Walter 139-40), it was also heavily criticized as a punitive strategy men used for controlling women. As Colette Dowling writes in *The Frailty Myth: Women Approaching Physical Equality* (2000), the rest cure was "characteristic of the way physicians were 'treating' the liberated 'new woman'" (19) Phelps wrote several letters to Mitchell (nine are extant) in which she politely but adamantly challenges Mitchell's

conclusions. She contends that she has been a "'professional invalid' in 'good and regular standing' for almost half my life" and so knows much about doctors, both male and female, and illnesses. Therefore, her experience qualifies her to critique Mitchell's medical expertise (qtd. in Tuttle 1-2). In fact, throughout her letters to Mitchell, she acknowledges her frailty but also positions herself as superior to Mitchell in terms of medical knowledge, as well as literarily (Mitchell had written some fiction) (Tuttle). Phelps's correspondence with Mitchell illustrates yet again her unflinching willingness to confront male scientists and physicians about sexist practices.

In addition to challenging individual physicians, Phelps also criticized societal conventions that she believed adversely affected women's health. Of special note is *What to Wear?*, her collection of essays, many of which originally appeared as columns in *The Independent*, in which she argues that the restrictive nature of women's clothing was deleterious to women's health. In the essay "Dressed to Kill," Phelps contends that women are stronger than men in that they are able to endure their restrictive clothing. "Could your father or husband live in your clothes?" she asks, with her answering being a solid "No" (19). She goes on at length about the absurd restrictions women's clothing put upon the wearer. The dresses are so long and cumbersome that women often avoid engaging in sports and other outdoor activities. The corsets are so tight as to restrict a woman's breathing and to exacerbate any health problems she may have. The long hours spent making and repairing these clothes could be better spent learning a language, being active outside, and so on. This critique fits well with ecofeminism's critique of ways that society punishes, defines, and restricts the woman's body ("Dressed to Kill," 16-23).

Thus, while much of the scientific community of Phelps's day argued for the biological inferiority of women, Phelps offered counter-arguments derived from logic and observation to preach against such arguments. She was not a scientist or physician and never claimed to be, but, in her letters and essays, she repeatedly regards herself as having knowledge superior to at least some men of science and medicine. Her experience as a woman gives her a knowledge of the restrictiveness of women's fashion that men do not have, and her experience as an invalid gives her an understanding of illness that empowers her to critique male physicians such as Mitchell.

Phelps excoriates the male-dominated medical and scientific community in *The Story of Avis, Dr. Zay*, and *Trixy* by showing that that community is oppressing both women and nature. She also draws from Christianity to help proclaim liberation for both.

The Clipped Wings of the Woman Artist in *The Story of Avis* (1877)

Kelly claims that "*The Story of Avis* is indeed the central book of Phelps' canon, and Avis, the main character in the novel, is the most detailed and carefully executed portrait of long-suffering womanhood in Phelps' extensive picture gallery of female characters" (99). Generally regarded as Phelps's best novel, *The Story of Avis* tells of a woman, Avis Dobell (whom Phelps calls her "favorite heroine" in *Chapters from a Life* [115]), who wishes to be a great painter but who ends up putting that dream on permanent deferral when she gets married and becomes a mother. As a young woman, she travels to Europe, where she studies painting for six years and, at twenty-six, has already begun to make a name for herself as an artist. Then, Philip Ostrander, a professor and colleague of her father's, pursues her romantically. He wants to marry her, but she is

reluctant, because she fears that marriage will destroy her artistic career. Eventually, though, she gives in to Philip, in part because she believes his promises that she will not have to surrender her career. For instance, he promises her a studio, declaring early in their marriage, "Oh the studio!—yes. We must attend to that tomorrow, immediately" (138). Avis detests domestic work, but she does her best to do it faithfully, believing, at least initially, that she will have time for her art and that Philip will support her. However, as the marriage progresses, Philip becomes increasingly selfish and demanding. He begins to treat Avis the way he treated his own mother, by neglecting her needs while fixating on his own. He loses his teaching position at the university and becomes ill. Later, when Avis becomes ill, Philip flirts with the nurse caring for her. When Avis tries to escape for an hour or two to work in her studio, the children pound on the door. Eventually, Philip travels to Europe for a year, leaving Avis behind to contend with debt-collectors. Many years pass, and, after a long illness, Philip dies. By that time, Avis is too worn-out and arthritic to pursue her artistic career, although she is able to teach art. As Linda Huf explains, the novel is a *Kuenstlerroman* that paints a portrait of a young woman whose dreams of becoming an artist die because of the excessive demands of domesticity (36-57).

Important to *The Story of Avis* is Phelps's mixed assessment of science. Philip Ostrander is a scientific polymath who, for a time, has a job as a geology professor. Thus, Phelps presents a heroine who is an artist being suppressed by a man of science (Baym 166). Actually, the problem is not that Philip is a man of science but that he is an inept, insensitive man of science who has little respect for his wife and her aesthetic aspirations. While initially Philip displays brilliance as a scholar, he ends up losing his position at a

university and becomes increasingly burdensome to Avis. That Phelps makes Philip a man of science suggests that she is being critical of at least some men in the scientific community, implying that such men are part of the problem for women who desire to have successful careers while also caring for families. Phelps even goes so far as to satirize the male scientific community. For instance, when Philip loses his job as a professor at Harmouth, he is replaced by a scientist "who had recently detected the precise difference between the frontal sinuses in the white and grisly [sic] bears. A brilliant career was predicted for him" (198). This statement is mocking the scientific community's fixation on inconsequential discoveries. Baym insists that science is "satirized in the novel" (170) and that the novel "is a conflicted antiscience salvo" (169) in which feminine aesthetics are championed as superior to masculine science. While Baym's statement is a bit of an exaggeration, given that science is largely a secondary (albeit important) issue in the novel, it is nevertheless true that the novel takes satirical jabs at the patriarchal scientific community.

This criticism of the sexism of the medical and scientific communities continues in the character of Avis's Aunt Chloe, who is her stepmother. For most of the novel, Aunt Chloe epitomizes the postbellum ideal of the subservient wife who surrenders her own wishes and dreams for the sake of serving her husband. She criticizes Avis repeatedly for not being ladylike and domestic enough. For example, in response to Avis painting feathers on her china, Chloe says, "Now, while she was painting all this china, she might have learned to set white-bread, at least with milk" (131). For Chloe, Avis's art is a waste of time when there is housework to be done. However, Chloe reveals that even she yearns to be free of domesticity and to pursue a career, and the career she longs for is scientific.

She says,

> "My dear Avis . . . I suppose all of us have times of thinking strange thoughts, and wishing impossible things. I *have* thought sometimes—if I could begin life over, and choose for my own selfish pleasure, that I would like to give myself to the culture and study of plants. I should be—a florist, perhaps, my dear; or a botanist." (114)

That someone as dedicated to domesticity as Chloe would express such a wish sharpens Phelps's criticism of the oppressive nature of postbellum marriage for women and of the hegemony of men in the scientific/medical community by showing discontent even within such a submissive, compliant woman. If the Chloes of postbellum America are expressing discontent with domesticity, then the oppressive nature of that domesticity must be great indeed.

While the novel paints a man of science negatively, it does not reject science in general. Baym lists several examples of the novel's third-person narrator repeatedly employing scientific language in telling *The Story of Avis*. For example, the narrator explains that "[a] harmonious home, like a star in orbit, should move of itself. The service of such a home should be a kind of blind intelligence, like a natural law, set in motion, to be sure, by a designer, but competent to its own final cause" (140). The narrator says that "saving souls" is "indestructible as an atom, and poetic as a fossil" (122). The narrator also describes Avis's frustration with domesticity in scientific terms, such as by saying that unbleached cotton, to Avis, "like x in the algebra, represented an unknown quantity of oppressive but extremely distant facts" (123) and that Avis's baby boy, to her, seems at first to be "a mere little ganglion of quivering nerves" (150). According to Baym, there

are seventy scientific references in the novel, which reflect a spectrum of scientific disciplines (168). Phelps's recurring use of such language indicates that she believes that science has value for her as a literary artist. Scientific language can be used to advance art, rather than being in opposition to it.

Phelps underscores in a key passage the point that science can be constructive. Avis's father Hegel, who is also a professor, criticizes Philip's approach to science, saying, "He bends himself to too many things. Now it is electricity; now it is magnetism; then it is a process for utilizing coal-gas. Just now it is a new method for blowing up caterpillars—blowing up fiddlesticks! . . . There is a soul in science: he should have handled her body reverently for her soul's sake" (173). This last statement feminizes science. For Hegel, the proper attitude toward science is one that thinks of science as feminine. Through Hegel, Phelps is implying that science needs to become less masculine and more feminine to be true science.

This conspicuous scientific motif in *The Story of Avis* contributes to the novel functioning as an ecofeminist sermon, even though, at first glance, *The Story of Avis* does not seem homiletic given that it does not didactically preach an explicitly Christian message. While the *Gates* trilogy, *The Silent Partner*, and *A Singular Life* all contain overtly religious imagery and characters who are preachers or at least devout Christians (and sometimes Christ figures), *The Story of Avis* does not. However, the novel does contain several significant Christian references that help to make the novel homiletic. For example, the narrator indicates that Avis's artistic ability is from God by indicating that "God gave her the power to make a picture before he gave her the power to love a man" (69). Avis herself articulates a similar view when she avers,

> [God] has set two natures in me, warring against each other. He has made me a law unto myself—*He* made me so. How can I help that? I do not say, Heaven knows! that I am better, or greater, or truer than other women, when I say it is quite right for other women to become wives, and not for me. I only say, If that is what a woman is made for, I am not like that: I am different. And God did it. (107)

Her initial rejection of marriage, then, is, according to Avis, aligned with God's will, and so the religious dimension of her struggle with marriage is at the core of the novel's message. Moreover, the snuffing out of her artistic career goes against the will of God. Granted, merely mentioning God does not make the novel homiletic, but Phelps being so critical of patriarchy, which violates God's will by denying Avis the opportunity to fulfill her calling to be an artist, makes the novel homiletic. Phelps is denouncing patriarchy, which she sees as violating God's will by suppressing Avis's artistic genius. It is not surprising, then, that one reviewer of the novel in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* writes in the October 31, 1877 issue that Phelps's message that women should remain single if they want to pursue a career is "a dangerous lesson to preach" ("New Books" 273). The novel is clearly proclaiming the hazards of marriage for women who wish to be more than a wife and mother.

Regarding homiletic structure, the novel is much like a jeremiad. A jeremiad usually laments the current state of sinners, warns of the destruction that will befall those sinners if they do not repent, and promises a better future for those who repent. *The Story of Avis* follows a similar pattern. The novel laments the current state of women who wish to pursue a career but who end up finding marriage and family-life incompatible with

such a wish. Phelps depicts vividly the tragic demise of Avis's dreams of being an artist due to the demands that her husband and children place on her. Like the preacher who paints a dismal picture of the fate of the unregenerate, Phelps creates a bleak portrait of the woman who never gets to realize her genius. Nevertheless, the novel ends with a hint of hope by suggesting that Avis's daughter Waitstill (who is named after Philip's mother, whom Philip neglected to care for even when she was fatally ill) may have the opportunities that Avis lost. Regarding this hope for future generations of women, the narrator recalls, "We have been told that it takes three generations to make a gentleman: we may believe that it will take as much, or more, to make A WOMAN" (246), meaning a woman who is able to pursue successfully her professional ambitions while also being a mother and wife (if she chooses). The narrator goes on to say that, for Avis's daughter, "[i]t would be easier . . . to be alive, and be a woman" than it had been for Avis. The narrator emphasizes the hope by saying that Avis "had the child, she had the child!" (247). Just as a jeremiad often offers hope for the repentant Christian, so does *The Story of Avis* offer hope for women who are willing to advance beyond the gender restrictions of their time.

The scientific language of the novel harmonizes with its Christian focus in that Phelps does not denounce science per se, but the patriarchal scientific community. Again, her abundance of scientific language suggests that science can be appropriated toward positive ends. In fact, Phelps uses terminology from the sciences to further her homiletic novel that denounces, among other things, the male hegemony of science. Indeed, as Baym points out, Phelps's artistic use of scientific language suggests a superiority of feminine aesthetics (given that Phelps is herself a female artist, albeit a writer) over

masculine science (170). Baym goes on to say that the novel undercuts itself by being critical of science while also championing it (169-170), but what Baym seems to miss is that the novel is not satirizing science in general, but specifically patriarchal science. For Phelps, science itself is not problematic. Her epistolary exchange with S. Weir Mitchell, for instance, reveals that she values science and medicine but protests against male scientists and physicians who use their disciplines to suppress women, as Mitchell often did through his rest cure. Thus, in her writing, she is able to use scientific language to advance her preaching against the patriarchal misuse of science.

Phelps underscores further the Christian message of the novel through her use of Christian elements of the Arthurian legend. On the cover page of *The Story of Avis* is a quotation from Bulfinch's *The Age of Chivalry*: "Now, all the meaning of the King was to see Sir Galahad proved." As Alan Lupack and Barbara Tepa Lupack explain, the significance of this epigraph becomes obvious at the end of the novel when Avis, whose dreams of being a great artist have died, reads the Grail story to her daughter Waitstill. Avis first reads of Sir Lancelot's failure to obtain the Grail and then reads of the hope that Sir Galahad will be able to realize the quest (Phelps 249-250). Lupack and Lupack write, "The implication is that though Avis has been unable to pursue a fulfilling career, her daughter will, just as Lancelot failed in the quest that was to be achieved by his son Galahad" (30). While there are non-Christian elements to the Arthurian legend, there are also Christian elements. The Grail, a chalice or bowl that Christ used at the Last Supper, has obvious Christian connotations. By using the Grail as a metaphor for the fulfilled professional career of women, Phelps highlights the novel's connection to Christianity. Further, the novel proclaims a pro-Christian, didactic message that laments the current

patriarchal state and exhorts hearers toward a better reality for women, a reality in accord with Christian ideals. Thus, the novel is homiletic.

At the same time, Phelps complicates the religious language of the novel by also using language at odds with Christianity. The Grail image has non-Christian roots, such as in Celtic religion. Even more striking is that repeatedly Phelps describes Avis as a "goddess." For instance, early in their marriage, when they are still happy together, Avis glides toward her husband "like a goddess" (128) to kiss him. Later the narrator indicates that Avis's face is "flushed with a divine light" (138) and that, in those beginning months of marriage, for Philip "[Avis] was as sacred a marvel to him as on the day when he first touched her reluctant hand" (138). This goddess imagery fades as Avis's marriage deteriorates, as if the marriage drains Avis of her divinity. That Phelps would use such language to speak of a human being is problematic vis-à-vis Christianity, which generally considers calling a human being a god or goddess idolatrous. Even if Phelps is being metaphorical, the metaphor is dangerous for a devout Christian.

Phelps's non-Christian religious language is still more conspicuous in the novel's Sphinx-motif. Early in the novel, Avis has a dream-vision in which she beholds a procession of an array of women: "Instantly the room seemed to become full of women. Cleopatra was there, and Godiva, Aphrodite and St. Elizabeth, Helen and Jeanne d'Arc, and the Magdalene, Sappho, and Cornelia,—a motley company. They moved on solemnly, and gave way to a silent army of the unknown" (82). This silent army of unknown women

> blushed at altars; they knelt in convents; they leered in the streets; they sang to their babes; they stooped and stitched in black attics; they trembled

> beneath summer moons; they starved in cellars; they fell by the blow of a man's hand; they sold their souls for bread; they dashed their lives out in swift streams; they wrung their hands in prayers. (82-83)

The vision contains an extraordinary spectrum of women who have suffered and triumphed in a myriad of ways across the ages. The vision then changes to a desert scene which features the Sphinx of Egypt. The vision reaches its climax by drawing from the Greek concept of the Riddle of the Sphinx when the narrator explains, "The riddle of ages whispered to her. The mystery of womanhood stood before her, and said, 'Speak for me'" (83). The Sphinx is complex and multivalent in that it calls to mind an ancient, admired culture while also suggesting the danger of feminine power, given that the Greek Sphinx is female and destructive. The Riddle of the Sphinx, in *The Story of Avis*, is "How do women achieve their professional goals and raise a family in a society that demands that they chose one or the other?"

The Sphinx-image is intriguing from an ecofeminist standpoint, given that the Sphinx, who is associated with femininity, is a hybrid of animals (albeit a mythological one). The link between women and the Sphinx highlights the connection between women and nature but in a way that exoticizes women. The Sphinx is mysterious, mythical, and powerful, and the link between the two suggests that women are the same. Like the Sphinx, women have great power but are also otherworldly, not quite human. Fortunately, the Sphinx-image does not stand alone in the novel. Through much of *The Story of Avis*, the reader gets to know Avis in all her multidimensional humanity.

While these non-Christian images, such as the Sphinx and the reference to Avis as a goddess, are inconsistent with what one would expect to hear in a Christian sermon,

ultimately they do not undermine the Christian center of this homiletic novel. All of the non-Christian imagery serves to highlight the novel's central conflict, which is that Avis is doomed to fail as an artist because of patriarchal social constructs. Calling her a goddess emphasizes her greatness and thus makes her lack of fulfillment all the more tragic. The Grail quest imagery imbues Avis's quest with epic grandeur and so, again, makes the failure of her quest all the more lamentable. Finally, the Sphinx imagery also helps to endow Avis's struggle with great importance and shows that her struggle is the struggle of women throughout the ages. None of this imagery implies any effort on Phelps's part to push aside Christianity. Avis is still a woman whom God designed to be an artist and who, by not being artist, falls short of God's will.

Moreover, preachers and other religious writers have often made use of non-Christian imagery and language to help proclaim their message. Again, the Arthurian legends frequently combine non-Christian and Christian concepts to advance Christian values (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* comes to mind.). In the Middle Ages and beyond, preachers have drawn from pre-Christian antiquity, especially from the ancient Greeks and Egyptians, believing that the best concepts of those civilizations prefigured the teachings of Christianity and so harmonized with them. Therefore, Phelps's employment of non-Christian images in *The Story of Avis* is not as strange as it may seem at first, given Phelps's Christian agenda.

Phelps's homiletic fiction in *The Story of Avis* is not just Christian but also ecofeminist, as is especially apparent in the novel's abundant bird imagery. The name "Avis" is Latin for "bird," and repeatedly Avis is associated with birds. Her mother, who dies when Avis is very young and who also gave up an acting career in order to be a wife

and mother (24), names her "Avis" and is somewhat bird-like herself (23). As Huf writes, "Symbolically, the book is a veritable aviary, in which everywhere one steps there is a fowl underfoot, for the birds are more often crashing than soaring" (51). Especially significant are those birds "which beat themselves to death against the Harmouth harbor lighthouse window on dark stormy nights" (51). After storms, Avis often goes to pick up the birds' battered bodies along the shore (13). The connection of Avis to birds is ecofeminist in that Phelps uses the image to highlight Avis's imprisoned state.

The first meaningful encounter between Philip Ostrander and Avis appears in Chapter Five when Avis is engaged in just such a bird-rescue, and the scene has strong ecofeminist overtones. Philip sees Avis out on the reef in the midst of a storm. At first, she is making her way "valiantly" (43) and with "a certain grandeur in her motions" (43). Philip fears for her safety, however, and finds the idea of nature killing her "revolting to [his] manhood" (44). Thus, he has firmly in place the idea that he is a man who must rescue the vulnerable woman, even though, at this point, she is faring well in the storm. She does then slip and finds herself hanging from the edge of a boulder, and Philip steps in to help pull her to safety. However, even when she is in peril, she is never a terrified damsel in distress. In fact, while he is rescuing her, she is repeatedly instructing him on how he should rescue her. For example, she says to him, "Only one foot, please, and only one hand. Do not try to get upon the bowlder [sic], and do not step between the bowlder and the reef. Do you understand?" (45) She even goes so far as to say, "Promise me that, if I slip, you will let go" (45). Philip may regard Avis as a helpless woman in need of rescue, but Avis is calm, brave, and in control of the situation. Phelps makes clear that Avis is not a weak, frail woman but one who is strong, level-headed, and brave. Here,

nature is dangerous, but Avis does not find it threatening. Philip, on the other hand, describes the storm as “satanic” and “devilish” (44). For Philip, a man, nature is a dangerous, brutal force, while, for Avis, a woman, nature is dangerous but still a realm in which she feels no great fear. The narrator underlines this equanimity on Avis’s part by indicating Avis is out in the storm “perhaps without any more than a vague and not unpleasant consciousness of possible peril” (43). In this scene, at least, a woman is aligned with nature, while a man is in opposition to it.

The relationship between gender and nature changes when the focus shifts to a bird that Avis is trying to save. She was out on the reef in the first place to rescue birds, and, before she slipped, she found a blue-jay. She worries that, by slipping, she has killed the bird that she has wrapped in her cloak pocket, but then she realizes that it is still alive. Philip tells her to give the bird to him for safe-keeping. He wraps it near his breast inside his coat. He says, “The poor thing flutters against my heart” (46). A little while later, after the two have walked along and talked, Avis asks how her bird is, and the reader learns that “the bird upon his heart lay dead” (49). The scene clearly foreshadows what Philip will do to Avis. The ecofeminist message is that Avis will perish when she draws close to Philip’s heart just as the bird did. Phelps uses nature imagery to amplify her message that men in postbellum America tend to suppress women from realizing their potential as professionals.

Phelps’s use of the bird conceit is one of several ways that she connects her work to Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856), a novel-length poem that also uses bird-imagery in telling the story of a young woman who struggles to be an artist, in this case a writer. In fact, in the scene in which the young Avis decides that she wants to

become an artist, she is reading *Aurora Leigh*. She reads the book while sitting on a branch in an apple tree, which she has climbed precisely because her Aunt Chloe had told her that it is unladylike to climb trees (30). While sitting bird-like on a branch, Avis reads about Aurora's determination to be a writer despite the many obstacles that rise against her aspirations. Aurora ends up successful at writing, and Avis is inspired. Her time in the apple tree is epiphanic, even spiritual. She expresses for the first time in her life awareness of the fact that she is alive when she declares, "I am alive. What did God mean by that?" (32). After making that statement, she is "frightened, lest the very orioles should understand her" (32). Shortly thereafter, as she climbs down the tree, she understands what her purpose is. The narrator explains,

> Avis climbed down from the apple-tree by and by, with eyes in which a proud young purpose hid. It had come to her now—it had all come to her plainly—why she was alive; what God meant by making her; what he meant by her being Avis Dobell, and reading just that thing that morning in the apple-boughs, with the breath of June upon her . . . . (32)

She rushes to her father and says, "Papa, I should like to be an artist, if you please" (33), a statement that he dismisses as "Nonsense!" (33). Like Aurora Leigh, Avis Dobell is determined to realize her dream as an artist. Like Aurora, Avis runs into many obstacles. Unlike Aurora, Avis never manages to realize her dream, for postbellum society is too restrictive for women.

Avis's epiphany in the apple tree is full of ecofeminist shades. Her sitting in a tree and observing the birds clearly suggests Avis's close tie to nature. It is while she is out in nature that she comes to realize her calling. When Avis's father dismisses her aspiration

to be an artist, the narrator writes, “Ah, well! We must forgive him. What should he know of apple-trees and the orioles, the daisies, and the blue-and-gold poem, and the way of a June morning with a young girl’s heart?” (33) The father is incapable of understanding Avis’s aspirations in part because he fails to understand nature and how it can affect a woman. This connection reinforces the essentialist argument that women are inherently closer to nature than are men, and ecofeminists have been quick to criticize such an argument as reinforcing traditional gender roles. However, to borrow from Spivak and Irigaray, this essentialism that Phelps uses is strategic in that she employs nature imagery to show that women are prisoners of patriarchy, such as through the novel’s bird conceit. Another instance of nature-imagery revealing patriarchal oppression of women comes in Avis’s father’s statement: “I can’t have you filling your head with any of these womanish apings of a man’s affairs, like a monkey playing tunes on a hand-organ” (33). The connection of Avis to a monkey or an ape underscores how, in the hands of patriarchy, Avis is demeaned in part by being associated with the non-human animal world. At the same time, this association relegates at least non-human primates to an inferior status vis-à-vis humans, a hierarchical understanding that ecofeminists are quick to criticize and that Phelps is depicting negatively here. Through her repeated depiction of men oppressing and belittling women and animals, Phelps preaches in accord with ecofeminism.

In conclusion, throughout *The Story of Avis*, Phelps writes against the oppression of women, arguing that the postbellum conception of marriage prevents women from pursuing interests outside of domesticity. Because of a patriarchal construct of marriage, represented most painfully by Philip, Avis is unable to answer the calling from God to be

a painter. In the course of her proclamation, Phelps also critiques the male domination of the scientific community, which contributes to Avis's oppression. At the same time, in her homiletic novel, Phelps employs scientific language in her proclamation. Thus, Phelps implies that science, rightly used, such as in the hands of a woman writer, can contribute to the liberation of women, such as by contributing to a homiletic novel against the oppression of women. The novel prefigures ecofeminism in its repeated pairings of women with nature in a way that often underscores how women (and, to a lesser extent, nature) are victimized by men. The blue-jay dying while next to Philip's heart illustrates a male scientist's negative impact on a creature of nature while foreshadowing the negative impact that same man of science will have on Avis's artistic genius.

Gender Role-Reversal in the Wilderness in *Dr. Zay* (1882)

Published in 1882, Phelps's *Dr. Zay* explores the then-controversial issue of women serving as physicians. The novel tells of a young man named Waldo Yorke who is seriously injured while traveling in the Maine wilderness on his way to the small town of Sherman to attend to the estate of his late uncle. The physician who tends to him is Dr. Zaidee Atalanta Lloyd, a professional and highly capable homeopathic doctor. The novel features a gender-role reversal in that Dr. Zay is in the traditionally male role of physician while Waldo is the weak, helpless invalid, a role that was regarded in postbellum America as feminine. Waldo falls in love with Dr. Zay and wants her to marry him. She resists at first but eventually gives in, although not without first making clear to Waldo that she was a different kind of woman, one who does not conform to many conventional

genders roles, and that he would need to be a different kind of man in order to be happy with her. Indeed, Dr. Zay is emblematic of the New Woman Ideology popular of the late 1800s. By the end of the novel, Waldo has jettisoned some of his earlier notions about gender roles, and the implication is that he and Dr. Zay will have an egalitarian relationship. Thus, the novel's feminist theme that challenges postbellum gender roles is obvious early on and throughout the novel. Phelps was not the first American author to depict a female doctor in fiction, but she is one of the earliest and is prescient in her positive depiction.[14]

The issue of whether women could be capable physicians was controversial in postbellum America. Women made considerable advances as doctors after the Civil War. As Catherine Clinton notes, by 1890 three medical colleges had produced nearly 800 female doctors (142-143). In fact, it was widely held that, for reasons pertaining to modesty, it would be better for a woman patient to have a woman doctor (Jones 166). At the same time, as I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, many people, mostly men, insisted that women simply lacked the intellectual capacity and emotional strength needed to be equal to men in medicine. Phelps clearly believes that a woman can be at least as capable a doctor as a man.

As Baym argues, Dr. Zay embodies a new kind of doctor who is superior to male doctors because she is decidedly masculine while still retaining key components of femininity in a way that advances the profession. Her embracing both the masculine and

[14] William Dean Howell's novel *Dr. Breen's Practice* (1881) portrays a female doctor, but she does not enjoy the same professional success Phelps's Dr. Zay enjoys. Further, Phelps writes of successful women doctors in three short stories from the 1870s. Sarah Orne Jewett's *A Country Doctor* (1884), which also depicts positively a woman physician, was published several years after those stories and two years after *Dr. Zay*.

the feminine is reminiscent of Margaret Fuller's claim in *The Great Lawsuit* (1843) that "[m]ale and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another . . . There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman" (1528), although Fuller is being descriptive while Phelps is prescribing an ideal. Dr. Zay exhibits the scientific detachment that has often been associated with men. The narrator states, "She came out presently, with that cool, scientific eye which stimulated more than it defied him" (133). At one point, when caring for Waldo, "[s]he took his wrist in a business-like way" (51). Her engagement in the task at hand, such as caring for a patient, is described as "far more masculine than feminine" (133). She is frequently impersonal and authoritative with Waldo. For instance, he starts to come up with excuses for her to call on him as much as possible, but she makes clear that he does not need so much care and that she has other patients to tend to. Dr. Zay clearly shows herself to be as able as any male doctor, in large part because she exhibits many of the personality traits traditionally seen as belonging to men. At the same time, "[d]espite all the rhetoric of cool masculine scientism, at the core Dr. Zay is feminine in her desire to sacrifice herself for others, and in particular for other women" (186). When Yorke asks Dr. Zay why she has chosen to be a physician in such a remote wilderness area, she replies, "I had learned how terrible is the need of a woman by women, in country towns . . . No one knows, Mr. Yorke, but the woman healer" (75). Dr. Zay is also feminine in that she is repeatedly described as wearing feminine clothing that makes her attractive. For example, Waldo appreciates in an early scene her black dress of "almost extravagantly fine cashmere" and "[a] carmine ribbon around her high, close collar of immaculate linen" (73). In general, Baym contends, Dr. Zay brings a feminine sensibility to the male-

dominated medical profession that infuses it with sensitivity and compassion that men generally have neglected to bring to the profession, at least according to Phelps (185).

Dr. Zay is unequivocally homiletic in its Christianity-rooted didactic proclamation in favor of women physicians and of the New Woman in general. Although not prominent in the novel to the degree that it is in some other works by Phelps, Christianity is nevertheless at the novel's center. Groomes insists that, "[w]hile the novel is not as overtly Christian as Phelps' other works may be, she still maintains and affirms a spiritual discourse in the novel" (73). An important instance of this discourse comes when Waldo and Dr. Zay discuss Christianity. Waldo indicates that he is a Christian, while Dr. Zay indicates "gravely," "I do know know—yet" (169). When Waldo asks her if she is an atheist, she replies, "God forbid! . . . I am a seeker, still. That is all I mean to say" (170). Dr. Zay is devout in her quest and means no disrespect to religion. Actually, as Groomes points out, Waldo appears to be the less devout of the two people, even though he is the one who professes to be a Christian. For instance, he says, "I should like to hold on to my faith, if I can,—if I had no other reason, just as I should wish to keep my paintings or bronzes" (170). This statement suggests a lack of dedication on Waldo's part, given that he does not declare, for example, that he "will" hold onto his faith but that he "should like to." His statement also reduces the significance of his faith by likening it to his paintings and bronzes in importance. Zay may not be a Winifred Forceythe, but she is a more admirable spiritual figure than is Waldo, who is a lifelong Christian but is lacking in depth and dedication.

In fact, Dr. Zay exhibits knowledge of the Bible and uses that knowledge to justify her work as a woman physician. Groomes indicates that an important example of

this usage comes when she invokes Paul's letter to the Romans to justify her vocation (73). She explains, "There are new questions constantly arising . . . for a woman in my position. One ceases to be an individual. One acts for the whole,—for the sex, for a cause, for the future. We are not quite free, like other people, in little perplexities. It is what Paul said about no man's living to himself" (122). Dr. Zay regards her work as a woman physician to be a vocation that serves the greater good, including by helping to advance the cause of her "sex." Just as Paul explains that none of us lives to him- or herself but belongs to God (Romans 14:7-8),[15] so also Dr. Zay explains that she does not live for herself but for a higher cause. Such a dedication to helping others and advancing the situation of women was at the heart of Phelps's mission as a writer and activist and was rooted in her religion.

Her spiritual selflessness, coupled with several other traits, makes Dr. Zay a kind of Christ figure. She is a remarkable, selfless healer whose abilities border on the mystical and super-human. Yorke describes her as having "the mysterious odic force of the healer, which is above science, and beyond experience" (99). Her extraordinary abilities are nowhere more evident than when she, like Christ, essentially brings back to life a man who has drowned in an accident. While she is working on him, some of the onlookers say, "You can't resusentite [sic] a dead man, Doctor" (142). Eventually, though, she is able to revive him, and then she compels him to marry a woman he had seduced. Thus, she brings the man back to life and leads him on the road to moral reform. Further, as Groomes notes, the narrator likens Dr. Zay to Christ by asserting, "She gave

[15]Romans 14:7-8 reads, "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

of herself, as if she possessed the life everlasting before her time. She had bread to eat that he knew not of" (110). The reference to life everlasting and bread connotes Christ (Groomes 84). Finally, Dr. Zay serving as a teacher to Yorke to reform him into a new kind of person is akin to Christ being the rabbi (teacher) who leads his disciples to a new kind of life. Of course, Dr. Zay as a Christ figure is complicated by the fact that she is somewhat spiritual but not particularly religious. Then again, she can be seen as having a spirituality that does not conform readily to the religion of her day, just as Christ's spirituality, as portrayed in the Gospels, does not readily conform to the religion of his day, which is often embodied by the antagonistic Pharisees and other religious leaders. Dr. Zay challenges the prevailing views of her day just as Christ challenges the prevailing views of his. Moreover, by having a woman as a Christ figure, Phelps is putting a proto-feminist spin on Christianity. In any case, the numerous positive connections to Christ contribute to the novel being homiletic by proclaiming the selfless healing power and teachings of Christ through the character of Dr. Zay.

The structure of *Dr. Zay* is also reminiscent of a sermon in that it holds up a model of the sinner and then shows how the sinner can be redeemed. In this case, the sinner is Waldo Yorke, whose sin is his restrictive view of women. Through his relationship with Dr. Zay, he has a conversion experience that reforms him into a new man who is worthy of the New Woman whom Dr. Zay embodies. Moreover, part of the novel's homiletic structure is that it holds up this conversion as something for the reader to emulate. As I explained in Chapter One, according to Jackson, sermons and homiletic novels often function to establish a narrative that hearers/readers are to apply themselves. The sermon or novel becomes a template for one to use in one's own life in a way that

leads the individual toward Christian reform. Such is the case with *Dr. Zay*. Waldo Yorke is converted from a restrictive view of women as inferior to men to an orientation that regards women as equal. Given the unapologetically didactic nature of the novel and given Phelps's well-known feminist agenda, it is obvious that she is preaching for men to convert to a new way of being men, a way that respects women as equal.

As in *The Story of Avis*, in *Dr. Zay* Phelps employs mythology to help preach her ultimately Christian message. Dr. Zay's full name includes "Atalanta," a reference to mythology. In the myth of Atalanta, she will only marry a man who can beat her in a foot race. Hippomenes beats her by throwing into her path three golden apples that she cannot resist stopping to pick up. Just as Hippomenes resorts to trickery to rob Atalanta of her independence from men, so also does Waldo resort to persistence to win the hand of Dr. Zay. Near the novel's end, after Waldo and Dr. Zay have extensive conversations about their relationship in which Dr. Zay has repeatedly expressed that she is not like other women and so may not make a good wife, Waldo says to her, "I have overtaken Atalanta this time . . . Do you think you are going to send me off again, after all we have gone through?" (254) Finally, she no longer resists him, for she is "worn out" (254). Thus, she is beaten just as the mythic Atalanta is, although, unlike Atalanta, Dr. Zay is not entirely beaten given that Waldo has had to change his thinking about gender roles in order to be worthy of her.

The ecofeminist issues of the novel are evident early on. When Waldo Yorke is traveling by pony on business, he ventures through the wilderness of Maine. He has a mixed response to nature. The narrator explains, "He leaned to the splendor through which he journeyed, enthusiastically, but criticized Nature, like an amateur, while he

drank" (7). As he travels along the Maine coast, he associates nature with femininity. The beauties of his surroundings "were finely contrasted, like the moods of a woman as strong as she is sweet, and as sincere as she is either. Forest and sea vied to win his fancy" (9). Waldo's joining of women and nature is a typical male response to nature, and prefigures the struggle that Waldo has with gender roles throughout the novel. Repeatedly Waldo regards Dr. Zay with romantic longing and must learn to see past her gender to her professional expertise. In general, this scene that reflects Waldo's attitude toward both nature and women reveals a man who thinks of nature in anthropocentric terms. Sometimes he appreciates nature, sometimes not, depending on whether he is drinking, and he personifies nature as being like a woman who is trying to woo him.

His mixed attitude toward nature also takes on a spiritual dimension. As he journeys, he becomes "a worshiper in Nature's cathedrals" (9). The experience becomes biblical when

> [h]is thoughts, still busy with the forest, receive from all these things little else than a vague consciousness of the presence of life and light.
>
> Life and light! The words have a familiar and solemn sound.
>
> Are they snatches from some forgotten sentiment of Holy Writ? John, perhaps? John, the golden-lipped, happy-hearted young enthusiast? . . . In all the universe, those only were the two words that could interpret the summer-noon meaning of the virgin State of Maine. (11)

Thus, in this scene in the Maine forest, Phelps joins nature, religion, and gender. Nature is the realm of the sacred that points Waldo in the direction of Christian truth as represented in the Bible and brings to the surface his feminizing and romanticizing of

nature. The scene also reveals how quickly Waldo can go from sacred to profane in his thinking. Just as he is having this sublime spiritual experience that calls to mind the religious words "light and life," Waldo abruptly shifts his thinking to how hungry he is. The narrator indicates that

> Yorke remembered that he was hungry, and would have his dinner. In all the universe,—what then? Heaven knows! It was some mad fancy about womanhood, or youth,—love, perhaps, if the truth must out; how a woman sometimes came to a man's life . . . Meanwhile, a man must have his dinner; a matter not ignored in dealing with ideal wilderness of ideal woman. (12)

Waldo's response to nature reveals his own good-hearted but flawed character. He is capable of having lofty spiritual responses to nature, and he is capable of great reverence for women. However, he is also readily distracted from both. Moreover, he tends to regard both women and nature in terms of himself. As the novel progresses, he becomes more respectful toward women, and he becomes less androcentric toward nature, although, as I will show, he never fully becomes comfortable with the natural world in which Dr. Zay always is comfortable.

His romanticized and androcentric view of women continues when he gets lost in the wilderness and is trying to find his way to his destination, the town of Sherman. A young, professional woman who "spoke simply as one gentleman might have spoken to another" (20) (and turns out to be Dr. Zay) guides him to his destination driving a phaeton. The woman who leads him "was a little intoxicated with Nature's grand unconventionality; had no more fear, it seemed, than a butterfly released from a

chrysalis" (23). Once again, nature and women are intimately associated with each other. Waldo then starts to describe the woman as a "blue caryatid" (24), thus mythologizing her and, in the process, dehumanizing her. She becomes a mystical being, "a dream, a delusion, a slender and obliging deceiver" (25). Waldo regards the woman as having great power and mystery and as being something other than human. He wonders, "Blue caryatides indeed! In what hues less intellectually respectable was the young woman perhaps portraying him by this time to the summer people at Sherman, a party of gay girls like herself?" (25) He finally arrives at Sherman, and the caryatid seems to disappear (26). Given that a caryatid is a type of sculpture (resembling a woman) used to hold up a structure, Waldo's use of the image to describe Dr. Zay suggests his reification of her. He regards her as an object or non-human creature rather than as a person. Of course, he quickly learns that such reification does not work with the likes of Dr. Zay. In the wilderness town of Sherman, where Dr. Zay lives and works, he is converted to a more enlightened view of women. Thus, nature, represented by the wilderness town of Sherman, is linked to a woman, Dr. Zay, but neither is subjugated by Waldo, a man. On the contrary, his time there and with her leads him to a more egalitarian orientation.

The novel's final chapter illustrates vividly Waldo's evolution. Earlier, Waldo leaves Sherman after Dr. Zay rejects him because she believes that she would not make a good wife for him due to her dedication to her profession. She says, "I will never marry a man unless I can make him divinely happy!" (248). Months later, in the spring, he returns to Sherman to tend again to his uncle's estate. He comes across a horse and buggy that he knows is Dr. Zay's, so he climbs inside and waits for her. In this way, he imposes his will on Dr. Zay, despite her rejection of him because of her own sense of inadequacy. He is

also holding the reins of the horse, Old Oak, and says, “I have them. I shall keep them, by your leave” (252). He has control, but he is also willing to defer to her. Dr. Zay replies, “You will upset us in the quagmire . . . I know every stone and hole. Give me the reins” (252). The reins are symbolic of control, and Waldo passes them to Dr. Zay. Moreover, she has control because she knows “every stone and hole”; in other words, she has greater familiarity with the natural environment than does Waldo. Dr. Zay is also connected to nature in this scene through what she is wearing. The hat she dons is brown, a color that brings soil to mind, and has a feather in it, an adornment from an animal (251). This is the first and only time in the novel that she is wearing this hat. In several ways, then, Phelps connects Dr. Zay to nature while showing that Waldo is still somewhat uncomfortable with it. She is in the superior position, and his handing the reins over to her shows his willingness to submit.

As the scene continues, the power dynamics between the two people ultimately underscore Dr. Zay’s superiority. Waldo continues to show his submission when he says remorsefully, “I have done wrong!” (252) As the two ride along, Dr. Zay is weak and vulnerable. She is recovering from diphtheria, and she just spent all night with a patient, a man with delirium tremens who had been shooting a revolver in his house. Even so, it is clear that “she would not faint” (253) at a time when women were widely believed to be frail and prone to fainting. Despite the hardships she has endured, she is still strong. He says that he needs to help her sit up, but she assures him that she does not (253). Waldo indicates that he has an advantage when he declares, “I have overtaken Atalanta this time! She stopped for a leaden apple,—for a revolver ball,—and I got the start” (254), meaning that her stopping to care for the man with delirium tremens gave him the

opportunity to get into her buggy. He insists that he is not leaving Maine without her, that he will not be turned away this time. She does not resist him because she is "worn out" (254). She does not turn him away, but she does ask him if he is sure that he wants "a strong-minded doctor" (254) for a wife. She then does suggest that he go back to Boston because, again, she does not believe that she will be a good wife. Meanwhile, he tries to take the reins, but after a bit she says, "I don't believe in your driving . . . There is a ditch four feet and a half deep, with a well in it, off the right, here. You are making straight for it! Give me the reins! If you don't mind—please" (257). She once again takes control, although she is respectful and deferential toward Waldo, suggesting that, despite her strength as a doctor and woman, she will not be domineering. Waldo replies, "I don't care who has the reins . . . as long as I have the driver!" (257) Waldo accepts Dr. Zay having the power.

Then the buggy ride ends, and the two enter Dr. Zay's office. She gives him one final chance to back out of the relationship, but he says that he is committed and that he wants her to move toward him as a show of her devotion to him. The novel ends with her doing just that, moving toward him (258). He requests such a gesture, but she does so voluntarily. The novel suggests that the two will have an egalitarian relationship. The imagery and dialogue of the last chapter underscore that Dr. Zay, despite her weakened state, is still strong and will not compromise her work as a physician. Waldo understands and accepts her as she is. She also has a superior connection to nature that Waldo lacks. Thus, the novel shows a man not dominating nature and women but being unable to dominate nature and willing to become a new man to accommodate a new kind of woman.

In conclusion, *Dr. Zay* is like an ecofeminist sermon in that it didactically preaches a Christianity-based message that calls for a conversion to the New Woman Ideology that replaces traditional postbellum gender roles with a more egalitarian orientation. From Phelps's perspective, Waldo, who claims to be a Christian, will become more Christian in his actions by embracing this egalitarian orientation, which Phelps regarded as central to the Christian life. Further, Waldo's transformative relationship with the Christ-like Dr. Zay is closely connected to nature represented by the Maine wilderness. Initially, in his encounter with the wilderness, Waldo objectifies it androcentrically, but he ceases to do so as he becomes more enlightened in his understanding of women. However, he never becomes fully comfortable with nature. Finally, through this story of a woman physician, Phelps challenges postbellum beliefs that women cannot be physicians to the same degree that men can. Phelps argues that women physicians actually enhance the discipline by incorporating their feminine sensibilities with it.

The Desensitization of Vivisection in *Trixy* (1904)

Written toward the end of Phelps's life and two decades after *Dr. Zay*, *Trixy* reflects Phelps's vocal, sustained campaign against vivisection, the practice of cutting open living animals in the name of research and education. Vivisection was prominent and controversial in postbellum America. In a dissertation on vivisection in that era, Lynn Crockett recalls how controversial the practice was. There was widespread belief in the medical community that vivisection was essential for medicine so that, for instance, doctors could observe the effects of medication on living organisms (3). The

development of anesthesia increased the frequency of vivisection by enabling scientists to observe the activity of the animal's body without the complication of the animal responding to pain (4). While vivisection became a growing practice among scientists, it also met with growing opposition, such as in people lobbying for legislation against vivisection (5). Organizations rallied to the defense of animal rights. For example, the American Anti-Vivisection Society, the oldest non-profit animal advocacy and education organization in the United States, was established in 1883 in Philadelphia.

Phelps was a passionate opponent of vivisection, especially during the last decades of her life. As Kelly notes in her essay "Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Trixy*, and the Vivisection Question," In the 1890s, Phelps and her husband became involved with the Massachusetts antivivisection movement, a national leader in the animal rights cause (62). Between 1896 and 1902, Phelps and her husband were "instrumental in promoting legislation to regulate this practice, which involved conducting experiments on live animals" (62). She gave three addresses against vivisection to the Massachusetts State Legislature (Kessler 111). She published several pamphlets against vivisection: *A Plea for the Helpless* (1901), *Vivisection and Legislation in Massachusetts* (1902), and *Vivisection Denounced* (1902). Phelps also wrote several letters to William W. Keen, a prominent physician, who replied that he was adamant about the use of vivisection, arguing that "[t]hose who would abolish or even restrict the progress of knowledge of vivisection, kind as they may believe their motives to be, are to my mind guilty of the most horrible cruelty to animals and to man" (qtd. in Kelly 62). In addition, she was unsuccessful in her efforts to get legislation passed in Massachusetts against vivisection. It is unsurprising, then, that she would resort to fighting against vivisection through

writing a novel (62). She had addressed vivisection before in a novella entitled *Loveliness* (1899), but *Trixy* is a more extensive treatment of the issue. Unlike in her non-fiction, through fiction Phelps creates characters that can touch the hearts of readers and so perhaps can be more persuasive regarding antivivisectionism. *Trixy* is homiletic while using characters and plot to advance a moral argument rooted in Phelps's Christian values.

The novel tells the story of Miriam Lauriat, her concern over two dogs who are abducted for vivisection, and how two men vying for her affection respond to the abductions. Miriam has a spaniel named Caro who goes missing. The second dog is a poodle named Trixy who belongs to Dan Badger, a crippled man who lives in one of Miriam's tenement buildings. Dan has trained Trixy to do tricks and relies on her for income. Both dogs are eventually found at the laboratory of Galen Medical School, where they are rescued. Dr. Olin Steele conducts research at the laboratory and is romantically interested in Miriam. Although, early in his career, he found vivisection abhorrent, he has become desensitized to it. When Miriam discovers his complicity in using the dogs for vivisection, she breaks off their relationship. Miriam forms a relationship with her attorney Philip, who is supportive of her concern for animal rights. Steele then becomes ill. The physician caring for him is Charles Bernard, who also works at the laboratory and who is cold-hearted toward the animals. He extends that cold-heartedness toward his care for Steele, regarding him with a detached, unfeeling approach. Steele, who himself has a loyal pet dog, comes to realize how wrong he was to participate in vivisection. He learns the value of non-human animal life.

Trixy is indeed homiletic, even though Phelps rightly points out that the novel cannot be a sermon per se. In a brief introduction to the novel, she explains,

> If *Trixy* were a polemic, there might be presented a variety of authentic physiological diversions as sad as they would seem to be incredible. Such being the material of the apostle rather than of the artist, these pages have been closed to scenes too painful for admission to them.
>
> Yet a novel, which cannot be a homily, may be an illumination. (vii)

For Phelps, then, a sermon can be even more brutal than a novel in its realism.

Despite Phelps's statement, however, the novel does indeed have homiletic elements. Like a sermon, it is didactic and meant to persuade readers away from moral evil and toward more good. Like a sermon, the novel points out sin by showing vividly the enormity of vivisection. In Chapter One, the young Olin Steele is appalled when Dr. Bernard is about to vivisect a kitten as part of a lecture. Steele leaves the room and flees home (12). To make clear the unjustness of the vivisection, in an earlier scene Phelps shows Steele playing with the kitten before he realizes that it will be used for experimentation. Steele also notices that the kitten is wearing a pink ribbon and therefore is someone's pet (11). As the kitten lies strapped on the operating board, the creature seems to Steele's "horrified eyes the smallest kitten he had ever seen" (11). Despite Steele's protests against using that kitten, Dr. Bernard is unmoved and continues. The atrocity of the kitten's victimization is palpable.

Years later, Steele, now desensitized to such victimization, intends to use the abducted poodle Trixy for research that will make him famous. In Chapter Eight, Phelps

describes at length Trixy's imprisonment in the laboratory from the dog's point of view, thereby helping the reader to empathize with the animal. The narrator reports that, for two weeks, Trixy has been "bewildered by the agony of homesickness" (162). Trixy then comes to the realization that she does not have to accept being a prisoner, and she begins to work at escaping (163). She breaks free from her collar and then looks around the laboratory in search of an escape from the building. In the process, she takes compassion on a fellow dog and tries to help her escape, as well. Phelps's recounting of Trixy's thoughts and feelings bolsters one of the novel's central points: non-human animals are sentient, thinking and feeling creatures who therefore should not be experimented upon. Through her depiction of Trixy, Phelps is arguing by example that the insensitivity of male scientists (represented by Steele and Bernard) is immoral in part because animals have emotions and thoughts and therefore deserve greater reverence.

Also like a sermon, *Trixy* contains a notable Christian center. As an epigram at the beginning of the novel is a quote from Psalm 85:10, "Mercy and truth are met together" (ix). A biblical verse often serves as a springboard into a related topical sermon, and such is the case here. As she indicates in her introductory note, Phelps believes that her novel presents the truth about vivisection, albeit in a softened tone so as not to be too shocking. Further, the novel preaches responding to the truth by showing mercy toward animals. Thus, *Trixy* preaches an enactment of Psalm 85:10.

Christian references run throughout the novel. The heroine's name is Miriam, which is also the name of Moses' sister. The biblical Miriam is a prophetess who is instrumental in saving her brother Moses from being killed by the Egyptians when he is a baby. She also is credited with a victory song about God rescuing the Hebrews from the

Egyptians. Although God temporarily afflicts her with leprosy for her speaking against Moses, overall the Bible depicts her as heroic. Likewise, Miriam Lauriat is a heroic rescuer of distressed animals. Further, while the biblical Miriam is punished for not showing proper respect to Moses, a man, the Miriam of *Trixy* never suffers for her rejection of Olin Steele or any other man.

Several times, Phelps identifies women with spirituality and Olin Steele, a man, with the failure to understand that spirituality. In one early scene, for instance, Steele is working when he has a vision:

> [A] gentle stage gave up a woman's figure . . . She moved in a glimmering, yellow light . . . Against [a setting of snow and twilight] she stood, fair and indignant as a priestess disturbed at some altar whose worship was inexplicable to himself . . . her whole beautiful being on fire with a divine self-oblivion,—she, pity personified, mercy made magic. (57)

Miriam is the inspiration for the vision, and in it she is associated with religion, which Steele does not understand. Steele then dismisses the vision and women in general, proud of his detachment from women. Shortly thereafter, he finds himself rereading parts of Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1849), in particular these lines from the prelude:

> Strong Son of God, immortal Love;
>
> Whom we, that have not seen Thy face,
>
> By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
>
> Believing where we cannot prove. (qtd. in *Trixy* 59)

He closes the book and finds himself conflicted. On the one hand, as a man of science, "He did not believe in immortality. He did not believe in love. On the other hand, there was the girl" (60). His thoughts and feelings for Miriam challenge his cold, detached, scientific side. He finds himself considering anew spiritual and romantic thoughts. He has experienced the "miracle" of love at first sight. For years "[a]t this, as at other miracles he had sneered . . . Now what was he doing? Worshipping" (60-61)? The narrator, reflecting Steele's perspective, asks, "How was a physiologist who in one day had begun with poetry, fallen upon love, and ended with God, to reckon with himself" (61)? He declares that he loves Miriam. Thus, Miriam is connected to the miraculous and brings Steele in touch anew with his spiritual side, with which he had lost contact over the course of becoming a scientist. The narrator indicates that, over the years, Steele "had become accustomed to such a transposition of the moral claims, and to such a disagreement of spiritual values, that he had lost the delicate micrometer by which he was used to measure the meaning of things" (118). His fixation on science has desensitized him to spirituality.

Moreover, the link between vivisection and the lack of spirituality is underscored, such as in a key scene in which Miriam is gazing upon a painting of Christ at the art school when she hears the cries of a dog being vivisected at the nearby medical school. Upon hearing the dog's cries, "[s]he went as white as the frightened pigeon [from an earlier scene]. She stood as still as the statue of Pity beside her. Her eyes sought the face of the Christ blindly" (89). The Christ imagery is associated with compassion for the tortured animal, a compassion that the largely secular and scientific Olin Steele lacks. Phelps is preaching a connection between religious devotion and concern for animals.

The Christian imagery and language of the homiletic novel are also evident in that Trixy is somewhat of a Christ figure. She is white, a color often associated with Christ and spiritual purity. She is miraculous in her ability to do amazing tricks that earn money for her crippled human guardian Dan. While imprisoned at the laboratory, one night she meets Miriam's dog Caro and tries to rescue him. Trixy breaks him free from his cage and thus is a kind of savior for the dog (168). When Trixy realizes that Caro is wounded, she pulls off the bandage on his head and licks the wound (169). The effort is reminiscent of Christ functioning as a healer. Then Trixy leads Caro to freedom from the laboratory out into the hall as daylight is breaking. Trixy could escape more easily if she did not worry about the wounded Caro, but she refuses to leave him behind. Like Christ, she sacrifices her own well-being for the sake of another. The narrator reports, "Hers was the saving mission, and it had, as all salvation, whether of the higher or the lower being, must have, its element of potential sacrifice" (174). As Trixy figures out her way around the building, she finds an exit and is just about to lead herself and Caro to freedom when the wind slams the open door shut in her face (175). Her escape from the tomb that is the laboratory into the light of the dawn and her leading Caro to liberation are thwarted. Trixy is not the savior that Christ is, but her intelligence, compassion, whiteness, and powers of almost-liberation suggest Christ. If an animal can be Christ-like, then a Christian must take seriously proper care of the non-human world. While many Christians of Phelps's day, including the conservative Calvinists she was so critical of, would have found it sacrilegious of Phelps to make a dog a Christ figure, for Phelps there is no sacrilege. In her view, animals are an important part of God's creation and deserve the utmost care. For Christ and a dog to be similar is not demeaning to Christ but

underscores the importance of non-human animals and Christ's solidarity with the oppressed, even when the oppressed are non-human.

Trixy is indeed at the novel's heart, and it is in her that what we would call the novel's ecofeminism is the most obvious. Not only is she female, but she is feminine. Dan dresses her in a fluffy skirt. She performs for people, including by "singing soprano" and dancing, two activities generally associated with women. There is no mistaking the conventional femininity of the dog. Through Trixy, the feminine and canine are joined, and the plights of both animals and women continue to be interrelated throughout the novel.

For instance, Miriam consistently aligns herself with the welfare of animals. She also is connected to animals in the way that Olin Steele thinks about his relationship to her. Several times he uses language that describes her as being like an animal he is trying to capture. Reflecting Steele's perspective, the narrator writes, "The world is divided into the reigning and the subject races; man, clearly, belongs to one of these; woman, plainly, to the other. A man who loves a woman not easily to be won must gain her by some species of force—what, will depend upon the specimen of her race with whom he has to deal" (118-19). Steele regards himself as superior to Miriam and thinks about her the way a man might think of an animal he is hunting or trying to tame. In one scene, when she is standing on a piazza that has netting to keep out insects, she comments, "I feel as if I were in a cage," and Steele replies, "And so you are" (149). The animal/woman connection justifies domination in Steele's mind. Miriam, however, does not allow Steele to dominate her. Just as she endeavors to liberate animals, so also does she liberate

herself from Steele. The ecofeminist-homiletic message is that women and animals both need to be liberated from patriarchy.

Along these lines, Kessler contends that Phelps's concern about vivisection "appears to be an indirect expression of her feminist interests" (111). Kessler draws from a novel Phelps wrote in 1908 entitled *Though Life Us Do Part*, in which a pastor says, "I know something what the risks of marriage are. A man may vivisect a woman, nerve by nerve, anguish by anguish, as truly as if he put the scalpel to the tissue" (56). Kessler notes that the name of the novel's heroine is Cara, which is similar to the name of Miriam's dog Caro. Kessler insists that "Phelps suggests that women were treated by men as pets, vivisected as experimental subjects" (111). Such a connection certainly is apparent in *Trixy* in the way Steele repeatedly regards Trixy and Miriam as beings he can dominate, as he demonstrates in his cold-hearted attitude toward vivisection and in his belief that he must win Miriam's heart by force (119).

A key idea in ecofeminism is that the liberation of nature and women is ultimately beneficial for men, as well, because patriarchy is deleterious, not just for the oppressed, but the oppressors. Phelps explores this idea in that she shows how vivisection hurts, not just animals, but also the men who are performing the vivisection. Kelly argues that what makes *Trixy* noteworthy, even "innovative" (65), is not that it is against vivisection, for anti-vivisection literature was abundant in postbellum America. Rather, *Trixy* is innovative because, in it, "Phelps argues that the widespread practice of training physicians in vivisection laboratories actually contributed to making them bad doctors" (62). Steele's decade-long exposure to vivisection makes him less compassionate as a physician. Even worse, his mentor Charles Bernard proves to be a cold and detached

physician to Steele when he becomes ill, so much so that Steele longs for a "plain doctor," one who is not mired in inhumane experimentation but truly heals the sick (222). Steele comes to see the errors of vivisection and vows to be a plain doctor as well as to be a better man toward Miriam (although she refuses to give him another chance romantically). His rejection of a patriarchal paradigm that justifies the oppression of both women and nature is liberating for him, as well, by re-humanizing him and rekindling in him his spirituality. Phelps is preaching for patriarchal science to learn from Steele's story and move toward a model for science that is more compassionate toward human and non-human animals alike.

All three of the novels examined in this chapter ultimately call for the male-dominated scientific community of postbellum America to break free from its patriarchy and become more respectful toward women and nature, even to the point of learning from both about how to be more humane scientists. Phelps homiletically calls for revisions to gender roles and the treatment of nature that will enable men and women alike to live more in accord with Christian morality. *The Story of Avis* presents a male scientist snuffing out the artistic genius of his wife and suggests that scientific language and concepts can be used to present a message that can lead to the liberation of women and nature. *Dr. Zay* calls for greater fluidity between men and women regarding gender roles and champions the woman physician, who is also more closely connected to nature than is Waldo Yorke. *Trixy* depicts animals as having feelings and thoughts and even as being connected to the divine, while critiquing patriarchal medicine as creating less compassionate physicians through the use of vivisection in medical school. All three of these works unite Phelps's Christian concern for social justice with a call for the

liberation of women and nature from patriarchy, particularly patriarchal science and medicine. Male scientists and doctors would be better at their practices if they became more feminine and more sensitive toward non-humans.

While these ecofeminist-homiletic dynamics recur throughout Phelps's work, they are not limited to her work. The next chapter explores how an ecofeminist-homiletic perspective can be fruitfully applied to the works of other writers.

CHAPTER FIVE

APPLYING THE ECOFEMINIST-HOMILETIC HEURISTIC TO THREE POSTBELLUM AUTHORS

While one goal of this dissertation is to increase appreciation in the literary community for Phelps's work, another goal is to demonstrate the benefits of analyzing literary works through an ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic, a contemporary method of interpreting texts that involves reading them as sermons that preach the tenets of ecofeminism. Chapters Two through Four demonstrate how to apply this approach to the work of Phelps. This chapter shows how one can apply this approach productively to the works of other postbellum authors. Specifically, this chapter applies the heuristic to the following: Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron" (1886) and then compares it to *Trixy*; Stephen Crane's *Maggie* (1893) and then compares it to Phelps's *Hedged In* and *The Silent Partner*; and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and then compares it to Phelps's *The Story of Avis*. I selected these works because they have been widely studied. Interpretations abound regarding these three texts, yet, as we will see, reading them through the lens of ecofeminist homiletics provides important new insights into these works. Moreover, the application of the heuristic can draw valuable connections between these works and the more obscure works of Phelps, thereby softening the sharp distinction often made in academe between "sentimental" and "non-sentimental" fiction.

This methodology is especially relevant to postbellum literature for at least two reasons. First, as Jackson has argued, the influence of homiletics on literature from this period is significant. Further, the influence of religion on postbellum literature is notable and has been given relatively little attention. For instance, *The Awakening* has numerous

obvious references to Roman Catholicism and other religions, yet there are few articles addressing those references. Scholars such as Bert Bender have made much of the impact of Darwinism on postbellum literature, but, as we will see, tend to exaggerate the secularizing effect of Darwin on literary texts and postbellum society. The echoes of sermons from the postbellum era are evident in *Maggie*, yet, once again, scholars tend not to study them. Another significant religious influence on postbellum literature was the Social Gospel movement. Religion and homiletics both play a more significant role in postbellum literature than has been thought. The ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic highlights that role.

Second, this methodology is germane to postbellum literature because it effectively contextualizes cultural and intellectual developments of the period. The women's rights movement was gaining considerable momentum, as was a growing concern for conservation. At the same time, patriarchal hierarchical thinking appeared in new and prominent ways during the postbellum era. The growth of industrialization was producing a hierarchy of factory owners, usually men, oppressing their workers. Significant advances in medicine, science, and technology (again, often made by men) contributed to the development of oppressive paradigms such as scientific racism and sexism, which claimed that regarding women and people of color as inferior to white men was based in scientific fact but which actually was based on research biased by the prejudice of the researchers. Given these trends of postbellum America, viewing texts from the period through the lens of ecofeminist homiletics highlights how postbellum literature reflects ecofeminist-homiletic themes and structures that grew directly from cultural trends but that scholars of the period have generally overlooked.

The Invasion of Eden in "A White Heron" (1886)

"A White Heron" draws from Christian images and themes in its denunciation of the androcentric reification of women and animals. Jewett's oft-anthologized short story tells of a nine-year-old girl, Sylvia, who lives in a simple home with her grandmother in the woods of Maine. She has an intimate knowledge of and love for the woods. A young man who is an ornithologist arrives and asks if he can stay with Sylvia and her grandmother while he searches the area for a white heron he has been following. He wants to kill the heron to add to his collection of birds. Realizing that Sylvia is knowledgeable about the woods, the ornithologist offers her ten dollars if she can lead him to the bird. Ten dollars sounds like a fortune to the young Sylvia. In addition, she is attracted to the man, so she has strong motivations for helping him to locate the heron. Indeed, Sylvia knows of the bird, and, early one morning, she comes across the location of the heron's nest. However, she also knows that leading the ornithologist to the heron will mean death for the bird. Moreover, although she is too young to be able to process fully the significance of the situation, Sylvia understands on some level that betraying the bird to the ornithologist would be symbolic of betraying the woods in general to the man. She resolves to remain silent about the bird's location, thus foiling the man's attempt to acquire the creature.

Immediately obvious are what we could interpret as the short story's ecofeminist characteristics. Sylvia is connected clearly to nature. Her name means "belonging to the forest," and belong she does. She deeply loves living on the farm surrounded by the woods. She spent the first eight years of her life living "in a crowded manufacturing town, but . . . it seemed as if she never had been alive at all before she came to the farm"

(484). She walks freely about the woods. As her grandmother tells the ornithologist, "There ain't a foot o' ground she don't know her way over, and the wild creatur's counts her as one o' themselves" (486). Her closeness to nature is underlined by her familiarity with the cow from their farm, Mistress Moolly, with whom she walks with ease and respect. The ornithologist, by contrast, is a man who manipulates Sylvia and objectifies nature. The narrator calls him "the enemy" and with good reason. His handsomeness and politeness belie a manipulator. For instance, he practically invites himself to spend the night at Sylvia's house when he says to the grandmother, without her extending an invitation first, "Put me anywhere you like . . . I must be off early in the morning before day; but I am very hungry, indeed. You can give me some milk at any rate, that's plain" (485-86). He demands, not only lodging, but also something to satisfy his hunger. As Rob Brault notes, "The man clearly assumes their hospitality will support him, and his own interests are all that concern him" (78). He is androcentric in that he expects the grandmother and girl to wait on him without giving them anything substantial in return (except the promise of ten dollars if Sylvia leads him to the heron), and he is anthropocentric in that he regards the white heron primarily as a prized addition to his "collection of [stuffed] birds" (486). He has "dozens and dozens" of birds that he has killed and stuffed (487).

Sylvia is clearly torn between her affection for the man and her desire for the ten dollars on the one hand, and her desire to protect the white heron on the other. She "could not understand why he killed the very birds he seemed to like so much. But as the day waned, Sylvia still watched the man with loving adoration" (487). She is "vaguely thrilled by a dream of love" (487). However, it is evident that the ornithologist does not

feel the same way toward her. He is a good bit older and is on vacation (and so his real life is elsewhere), focused on killing the white heron. When he gets his prize, he will leave Sylvia behind. Brault rightly states that the ornithologist, once he gets his dead heron, "certainly isn't going to take a nine-year-old girl away from her grandmother" (84). Sylvia's dream of love is really a naïve fantasy of a young girl and is not grounded in a realistic appraisal of the man's intentions. At the same time, she continues to feel close to nature and does not betray the white heron, even though she knows where the bird's nest is. The narrator reports, "The murmur of the pine's green branches is in her ears, she remembers how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together, and Sylvia cannot speak; she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away" (490). Through her silence about the bird's whereabouts, she protects the bird and also keeps herself from being fully exploited by the ornithologist (74-87). At the end of the story, the narrator calls Sylvia "lonely" (490), indicating that she is heart-broken over disappointing the ornithologist. Again, the loneliness and disappointment reveal the girl's perspective. The reader sees that the girl has done the right thing by protecting the heron from a man who would have killed it and who was only concerned about the girl inasmuch as she could lead him to the heron.

Less obvious than what can be interpreted as the story's ecofeminist traits is its homiletic quality, but that quality is indeed present. The short story is homiletic in that, like a sermon, it has a clear, unambiguous message, which, in this case, is against patriarchy and its exploitation of both women/girls and nature. Moreover, like a sermon, the short story contains numerous Christian images. Victoria Freivogel points out the story's Christian imagery when she contends that "[a]lthough many critics claim the

ornithologist, the pine tree, and the white heron are symbolic of Sylvia's burgeoning sexuality, they are, in fact, significant symbols of Christianity" (136). Freivogel explains that the term "the enemy" used for ornithologist has also been used repeatedly in Christianity as a title for Satan (138). The forest is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden with Sylvia representing Eve (138). The ornithologist is the tempter trying to seduce her to sin. Freivogel also recalls that "[t]he heron is a bird strongly associated with early Christian beliefs. Wading birds are symbolic of Christ and of Christian values" (140). Indeed, the heron, with its whiteness and its association with Christianity, represents communing with God. Just as Ahab wants to kill the white whale (which scholars have often seen as representing God), so also does the ornithologist wants to capture the divine, the holy, which the heron represents. Sylvia's climbing high in a tree to see the heron reflects the ancient idea of climbing to a high place in nature to be closer to God. Sylvia's refusal to allow that capture to occur enables her to maintain a proper, holy relationship with the sacredness that the bird represents. The short story preaches against the androcentrism and anthropocentrism of patriarchy in favor of spiritual ecofeminism, which calls for respect for nature and women and reverence for God. The reader is to emulate Sylvia's heroism. She functions as a homiletic illustration of ideal behavior.

"A White Heron" bears some striking similarities to Phelps's *Trixy*, although the latter is the bolder of the two from an ecofeminist standpoint. Both works feature religious imagery and language, both unambiguously denounce patriarchy and reveal how women and nature are often linked, and both preach that there should be greater reverence for animals and women alike. Each work also highlights a woman who is attracted to a man but who refuses to sacrifice her principles in the name of pleasing him.

Trixy, however, makes what we can interpret as the bolder ecofeminist-sermonic statement by making a female dog Christ-like. Such an association radically subverts androcentric fixations on the maleness of the historical Jesus and anthropocentric fixations on humans, not animals, as potential imitators Christ. In *Trixy*, the one who comes closest to imitating Christ is not even human. Granted, the heron could also be regarded as Christ-like, but the association of a dog with Christ is more unusual, more radical, given that birds (such as doves) have long been associated with God.

Taken together, *Trixy* and "A White Heron" demonstrate how men of science justify the abuse or killing of animals in the name of science and how women/girls can empower themselves and, in the process, liberate animals from such scientific endeavors. Both works argue that patriarchal scientific practices that exploit animals actually are counterproductive. In the case of *Trixy*, using vivisection for the training of medical students leads to physicians who are less effective because they are desensitized by vivisection toward the needs of their patients. Similarly, "A White Heron" suggests that Sylvia is a better ornithologist than the man pursuing the heron because she studies the bird without killing it.

Christian Inversions in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893)[16]

Maggie uses inversions of Christian narratives and images, including numerous ones drawn from nature, to decry the demise of a young woman and the savagery of the city. Stephen Crane began writing *Maggie* when he was nineteen and, at twenty-one,

[16]Cunliffe and Stein reveal the homiletic and religious elements of the novella. Clerkin provides a feminist reading. Bloom and Minks draw attention to natural imagery. Synthesizing these analyses has led to my ecofeminist-homiletic reading. In fact, in general, in this chapter only Rob Brault is a self-proclaimed ecofeminist critic.

published it (under the name Johnston Smith) at his own expense because publishers found it too racy. The novella tells the story of a girl Maggie and her family and their brutal life in Rum Alley and Devil's Row in New York City. Maggie's mother is a bellowing, self-righteous alcoholic, and her brother Jimmie is deeply cynical and downright enjoys getting into brawls. Maggie tries to escape the slums by dating Pete, whom she perceives to be of a higher class but who is really of a baser character than she. Indeed, Maggie is the most virtuous character in the story, although she does not seem to be aware of that fact. When Pete abandons her for another woman, the manipulative and disdainful Nellie, Maggie devolves into prostitution and eventually kills herself. Replete with foul language, violence, and urban grittiness, the novella was shocking for its time and sold poorly. Because of the success of *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), an edited, "cleaned-up" version of *Maggie* was published in 1896. It has come to be regarded as a flawed but pioneering work in literary naturalism that helped to prepare the way for Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) and the works of authors such as Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway in the 1920s (Gullason xi).

Crane was critical of religion, but in *Maggie* he is homiletic in spite of himself. Like Phelps, his father was a minister, and his mother was the daughter of a minister and was active in the temperance movement. Although Crane allegedly experimented with opium and socialized with prostitutes, and although he said that "preaching is fatal to art in literature" (qtd. in Gullason xii), preaching nevertheless finds its way into *Maggie* (xii). Crane presents Rum Alley as abysmal, sick with alcoholism, violence, and foul language, and his father likewise preached and wrote against such social ills (Gullason, "[A Minister, a Social Reformer, and *Maggie*]," 104). Further, Marcus Cunliffe points

out numerous similarities between *Maggie* and the sermons of Thomas De Witt Talmage, a famous preacher in New York City when *Maggie* was first published. It is thus highly likely that Crane was familiar with Talmage's sermons. Cunliffe identifies several passages in Talmage that bear an uncanny resemblance to passages in *Maggie*. For example, Talmage preaches that one escape for the prostitute from her sinful, destructive lifestyle "is the street that leads to East river, at midnight, the end of the city dock, the moon shining down on the water making it look so smooth she wonders if it is deep enough. It is. No boatman near enough to hear the plunge" (qtd. in Cunliffe 98). This scene is reminiscent of the scene in Chapter XVII in which Maggie, now a prostitute, makes her way to the river at night (53). Later the reader learns that Maggie is dead, presumably from suicide by drowning. An even more striking similarity between Talmage and Crane lies in the fact that the prostitute Talmage is describing in this sermon is named "Maggie" (98). Talmage also preaches against the horrible conditions in mills where women worked long hours sewing; Crane presents negatively such conditions as he describes where Maggie works (99). Repeatedly, Crane, in his jeremiadic denunciation of the social ills that choke the denizens of the city, sounds like his father, Talmage, and other preachers of the postbellum era.

Christian imagery and themes are abundant in *Maggie* and thus contribute significantly to its homiletic structure and content. Although not writing about the novella's homiletic nature, William Bysshe Stein does write extensively about the numerous Christian references in the text. He notes that *Maggie* contains "a recurrent pattern of symbolic moral situations which is inspired by the New Testament" (170). Repeatedly, Crane uses Christian imagery and themes in an inverted way, which

underscores how fallen and perverse Maggie's world is and how ineffective the Church is at saving Maggie. The name Maggie calls to mind "Mary Magdalene" (171), who, according to tradition, was a prostitute reformed by Christ. Maggie is the opposite in that she is an upright young woman whom humanity, especially men and her drunken mother, drags into prostitution. Moreover, while Christ saves Mary Magdalene from eternal damnation, Maggie is in a living hell, her life in New York City, and eventually receives, not salvation, but death. Her mother Mary is the painful opposite of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The latter is virtuous and traditionally viewed as the greatest of mothers, while Maggie's mother Mary is a bellowing, self-pitying alcoholic who cares little for her daughter.

The Christian inversion continues in Pete, whose name calls to mind the biblical Peter. In the Gospels, Peter is the head apostle whom Christ declares to be the rock upon which he will build the Church. Maggie regards Pete as far more sophisticated than she and her family, and she sees him as her chance to rise out of the squalor of her life. However, the reader readily sees that Pete is not socially or morally better than Maggie and her family. He repeatedly speaks in foul, coarse language and drinks heavily. In addition, while he claims that he does not want to fight anyone (unlike Jimmie, who is always ready to fight), he also often brags about his prowess as a fighter. Finally, Pete shows that he is a far cry from the biblical Peter when he rejects Mary for Nellie, an allegedly higher class woman who has disdain for Pete and is merely using him for his money. Peter may be the rock upon which Jesus builds the Church, but when Mary tries to build a new life upon Pete, everything quickly crumbles. Pete, like most of the

characters in *Maggie*, fails abysmally to live up to the ideals of Christianity. The world Crane depicts here is tragically fallen, an inversion of Christianity.

The inversion is also evident in Jimmie. His name calls to mind James, which refers to several members of the Christian community. One is James the brother of Jesus, who is instrumental in helping to establish the Church. Jimmie, by contrast, is the pugilistic and nihilistic brother of Maggie who has cynically rejected religion. Harold Bloom explains that Jimmie "shuns all religion and faith" (21). He is "spiritually lost" (21), believing that "Providence had caused it clearly to be written" (Crane, 15). Jimmie also "despised obvious Christians" (14). Jimmie is opposite James the brother of Jesus (or James the apostle, for that matter) in that he has no regard for the Church or Christ. Again, Crane depicts the enormity of this fallen world by showing how far it falls short from Christianity.

As Stein suggests, Maggie is even a kind of Christ-figure, albeit without being salvific. Stein writes that Maggie is "crucified by the same forces of hate in human nature that destroyed Christ" (172). She is a pure woman destroyed by her society's sin, just as Christ is a pure man/God destroyed by his society's sin. With Maggie, though, there is no resurrection, no salvation. Christ's death leads to life. Maggie's death saves no one. This idea of Maggie as a Christ-figure continues with Maggie's mother Mary mourning over her daughter's death at the end of the novel. As in the Pieta, the artistic depiction of Mary mourning over the body of the dead Jesus, Mary mourns over Maggie (172). However, Maggie's mother's mourning is a perverse Pieta because Maggie is dead in part because of her drunken mother's cruelty. The idea of Maggie as a Christ-figure is also apparent in that Pete denies Maggie, just as Peter denies Christ. Further, Jimmie is the failed brother

of Maggie, in contrast to James, the devoted brother of Christ. Repeatedly Maggie is likened to Christ, but she is a failed, doomed Christ-figure, destroyed by the depravity of the slums.

Stein also points out that *Maggie* contains variations on biblical parables. When Maggie has left home to be with Pete and her mother is wondering how Maggie could "go teh deh devil" even though she "is bringed up deh way [her mother] bringed up Maggie" (40), Jimmie suggests that Maggie should be allowed to return home. He makes a reference to the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), and his mother replies, "It wasn't no prod'gal daughter, yeh damn fool . . . It was prod'gal son, anyhow" (41). Moreover, while, in the parable, the father welcomes with loving arms the prodigal son when he returns home, Mary welcomes Maggie home only to humiliate her in front of the neighbors. In the original parable, the father represents God and thus illustrates God's magnanimity. Mary, by contrast, embodies the antithesis of such magnanimity.

Another variation on a parable comes when Maggie has been rejected by Pete and has been belittled by her mother. Maggie wanders the streets, desperate for compassion. She comes across "a stout gentleman in a silk hat and a chaste black coat" (51); the man is a clergyman. Maggie, recalling the "Grace of God" (51), decides to approach the clergyman. While he seems kind at first, the situation darkens quickly: "But as the girl timidly accosted him, he gave a convulsive movement and saved his respectability by a vigorous side-step. He did not risk it to save a soul. For how was he to know that there was a soul before him that needed saving?" (51) This scene calls to mind the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), in which a priest sees a severely beaten man lying in the road but passes by him. Crane thus shows the failure of the religious establishment

to provide adequate care for Maggie. As Stein notes, the scene exemplifies "the betrayal of Christ by his ministry" (172).

The extensive use of Christian imagery, figures, and stories throughout *Maggie* contributes to the novella being like a sermon that is sharply critical, not of God or Christ per se, but of the hypocrisy of both the Church and much of humanity. The people of Rum Alley and Devil's Row are ever a parody of Christianity, and the Church fails horribly at trying to help those people. Because of the deplorability of human depravity, Maggie never receives the redemption that Mary Magdalene receives and never can be a savior like Christ. Crane amplifies the volume of his denunciatory sermon through this often inverted use of Christianity.

In his severe criticism of the failings of the Church, Crane's *Maggie* is reminiscent of some of Mark Twain's satirical, scalding criticism of religion. However, while Crane largely criticizes humans for failing to live up to the teachings of Christianity, Twain is often critical of Christianity itself. "Letters from the Earth," for instance, is a collection of letters ostensibly written by Satan, although Satan is simply acting as a mouthpiece for Twain. The letters dismantle many basic biblical teachings. For example, Satan points out that, in the Old Testament, God is predominantly wrathful, while in the New Testament God in the form of Christ is gentle and merciful. Yet it is in the New Testament that the concept of hell, or eternal damnation, is introduced (46). Satan concludes that God, "as the meek and gentle Savior . . . was a thousand billion times crueler than ever he was in the Old Testament . . . Meek and gentle? By and by we will examine this popular sarcasm by the light of the hell which he invented" (46). In "Letters from the Earth," Twain's harsh deconstruction, while fascinating, is not

homiletic. Crane, on the other hand, has not rejected Christianity per se and in fact, through numerous allusions, embraces biblical narratives and principles in his preaching against social injustice.[17]

In the telling of the fall of Maggie, Crane's homiletic novel has proto-feminist overtones. Maggie is clearly the victim of men, from an abusive father to an alcoholic brother to a betraying boyfriend. Over and over, men fail Maggie. Pete plays an especially significant role in contributing to Maggie's destruction by rejecting her for another woman, Nellie. Pete exhibits traditionally male behavior in that he readily discards one woman for another according to his whim. Women are disposable to him. Mary Jane Clerkin, employing feminist (although not ecofeminist) criticism, highlights how Maggie is victimized by men when she writes, "Maggie is . . . destroyed by the men in her life" (40) and "Maggie's meager potential is smothered; her growth is stunted. Maggie does not mature because the men in her life will not permit her maturation. She is never allowed to make decisions for herself. Instead, Jimmie and Pete make her decisions for her. As such, she is prevented from becoming a fully functioning adult" (108). Maggie is a victim in a gritty urban society that was built largely by patriarchy, that encourages men to be violent, and that drives Maggie to prostitution and suicide. Such a society in the postbellum era allowed women little opportunity in terms of careers and education. A girl like Maggie has few choices. She pursues Pete in the hopes of securing

[17]Although it is clear that Twain was severely critical of religion, it would be incorrect to say that his writings never function homiletically. He often professes a belief in some sort of God, and Twain was deeply concerned about morality. For example, in "The Intelligence of God," Twain does not deny the existence of a "Supreme Intelligence" but chastises people for praising God's creation with words but then abusing creation with actions. Twain exhorts people to be more honest in their praise (174-5). This passage is homiletic in that it calls people to religious reform and does not simply discard religion.

a husband who will improve her socioeconomic situation, since a husband was the primary means by which a woman in the postbellum era could hope to improve her lot. When this plan fails, she is doomed. Further, her move toward prostitution makes her a social outcast because of the double-standard that allowed men to be sexually promiscuous but not women.

Granted, Maggie is not only victimized by men; her mother, for instance, is vicious toward her. Feminists may also argue that the novella would make a more positive feminist statement if it depicted Maggie as able to overcome the obstacles that oppress her. For instance, the novella would be more in line with feminism if Maggie were not forced into prostitution but instead managed to recover from her relationship with Pete and to attain employment doing something nobler and more empowering. Indeed, to contend that *Maggie* can be seen as feminist, even proto-feminist, is a bit of an exaggeration. Nevertheless, Crane's novella has proto-feminist overtones in its portrayal of a virtuous woman being destroyed by a corrupt, male-dominated society, and that portrayal is at the center of the novella's homiletic proclamation.

Maggie does depict women exercising strength over men, but their efforts to do so are always combined with sinful behavior. Mary is vicious toward Maggie. On the other hand, a strength of Mary's is her ability to stand up to her drunken, short-tempered husband; when he rages at her, she fights back (Clerkin 33). Further, Nellie manages to triumph over a man, Pete, although she has to do that through duplicity. Thus, these women are able to exercise power, but, because of the corrupt world in which they live, that power comes at the price of morality. Part of the proto-feminism of *Maggie* is that it shows women resorting to violence, deception, or some other morally problematic

behavior for survival. Mary must fight back at her husband, Nellie resorts to deception, and Maggie resorts to prostitution. Similarly, the men of the novella resort to morally problematic behavior. Thus, the ugly, brutal world of the city, which was designed and overseen by men, is a hell for both genders, and, indeed, feminism contends that patriarchy is destructive for both men and women.

Several scholars, such as Clerkin, argue that Crane depicts women rather negatively. Indeed, Clerkin calls Crane "chauvinistic" and says that he "blamed many of the evils of his day on women" (208). For instance, Clerkin contends that Crane portrays Maggie and her mother as lacking loyalty in that Maggie is able to leave her mother for Pete while her mother is able to be vicious toward Maggie (27). However, such an analysis overlooks the fact that Maggie can leave her mother in part because her mother has been so cruel to her. Likewise, her mother, callous as she is, is still able to show some love for her daughter when she mourns her death. In general, while Crane depicts the women negatively, his depiction of Maggie, especially, is largely sympathetic. He presents her as pure, then tainted by her relationship with Pete, and then driven first to prostitution and finally suicide by a patriarchal society that gives her few alternatives. Crane may have been chauvinistic, but his portrait of Maggie is sympathetic and, at least to a point, an indictment of patriarchy.

This homiletic novella also addresses ecocritical and even ecofeminist themes. Animal imagery abounds in *Maggie* and functions ecocritically by showing the close connection between humans and animals. Although not an ecocritic, Bloom nevertheless describes in his plot summary of the novella that Crane is "implying that that the reality of the slums resembles a life in a jungle in that the abject fright in which the children are

forced to live makes them akin to animals who must hide in fear of those who seek to devour them" (20). Bloom points out some of the numerous animal references in the book: "In the mother's presence, Maggie is seen eating 'like a small pursued tigress,' and both she and her brother are huddled in fright, 'crouched until the ghost-mists of dawn appeared at the window'" (20). Indeed, animal imagery is prevalent from the beginning of the novella. For instance, the children who are fighting with Jimmie in the opening scene are described as "howling urchins" (3), and Jimmie is described as "roaring" (4). These animal images underscore the plight of the urban poor by depicting them as behaving as less than human because they are in a dehumanizing context. Literary naturalism tends to emphasize that humans are indeed animals, and this animalistic behavior emerges when humans are subjected to such abysmal living conditions. The animal imagery does not devalue animals by associating them with poverty and reckless human behavior; rather, the imagery shows the close connection between human and animal and how society can often lead to bringing out the animalistic behavior of humans.

On a related note, Tamara Minks suggests that Maggie's urban setting is a kind of "fallen Eden." While Eden is a paradise created by God, Rum Alley and Devil's Row are an urban hell. Demonic language is repeatedly used to describe these neighborhoods and the people who live in them. For example, in the novella's opening scene, Jimmie's "wan features wore a look of a tiny, insane demon" (3), and, of course, there is the name "Devil's Row." Describing the people as like animals calls to mind the creatures of Eden, but here, the animals are people behaving like animals. Thus, Maggie's neighborhood is like a corruption or perversion of Eden, where there is urban squalor instead of natural

paradise, the demonic instead of the divine, and animalistic humans rather than actual animals. In addition, while Eden has Eve, Crane's urban anti-Eden contains Maggie, who, like Eve, is pure and who, like Eve, ends up fallen.

In this perverse Eden, the animal imagery functions to show how human sin and corruption have perverted nature from what it is supposed to be. Human beings, largely men (who had the power in urban postbellum society), have constructed a sordid urban setting that is a corruption of Eden, which, according to Genesis, is the ideal for nature, including humans, that God created. God created a realm in which a man and woman live in harmony with each other and with animals in a gorgeous natural setting. Because of human sin, man and woman now hurt each other. Maggie, who "blossomed in a mud puddle" (16), is driven to death, and humans are forced to behave like animals. The point of the animal imagery is not that animals are inferior to humans but that humans are defying God's ideal for nature. Thus, *Maggie* can be described as ecofeminist in that it presents an urban setting, which was created largely by men (who had the power in the construction and maintenance of urban settings in postbellum society), being deleterious for a woman, Maggie, as well as for nature by creating a perversion of it. Nature is turned upside-down, with the natural environment being replaced by an urban one and humans behaving like non-human animals. The pure Maggie is destroyed by that environment and with at least one man, Pete, playing a significant role. It is no wonder that the fallen, ruined Maggie dies by drowning. Water, a natural substance and often a symbol of life, becomes, in this perverse world, an instrument of death.

Another key objective for ecofeminists is critiquing hierarchies, which arise from patriarchy, and replacing them with a more egalitarian, heterarchical paradigm. *Maggie* is

deeply critical of hierarchy. Social stratification is in the novella's foreground. Jimmie has disdain for anyone of higher social status. Maggie believes that Pete can rescue her from her squalid life because he, according to her, is of a higher social class. Nellie, through her more proper speech, reveals that she is of a higher social class. The clergyman Maggie encounters is also of a higher social class. However, repeatedly people of higher classes fail to provide meaningful help for people of lower classes. Pete does Maggie more harm than good. Nellie is of benefit to no one. The clergyman avoids Maggie rather than assisting her. Clearly, Crane is sharply critical of the higher social classes failing to provide relief for people of the lower classes. This critique is consistent with ecofeminism, which often challenges people of higher social classes to put aside elitism and care for people of lower classes. Indeed, ecofeminism, like some branches of Marxism, ultimately calls for an elimination of class.

Numerous similarities exist between *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* and Phelps's *Hedged In* and *The Silent Partner*. *Maggie* and *Hedged In* both depict the desperate situation of the urban poor, as well as how a young woman can be abandoned and mistreated by patriarchal society. Both works are also critical of the Church. *Maggie* depicts the Church's failure to provide meaningful relief for Maggie, and *Hedged In* depicts Christians being judgmental toward Nixy. Both works also juxtapose the beauty and idealism of nature with the brutality of the city. Further, each work is homiletic in its didacticism and employment of homiletic images and strategies. *The Silent Partner* resembles *Maggie* in its critical exposure of the unfair treatment of workers in mills. Like Sip Garth and Bub Mell, Maggie also works in a mill, where conditions are harsh and unfair. Both *Hedged In* and *The Silent Partner* are ultimately more hopeful than *Maggie*,

however. While *Maggie* epitomizes literary naturalism through its depiction of hopelessness and doom for Maggie and, to a lesser extent, the other characters, Phelps has Perley Kelso achieving liberation and empowerment for herself and relief for the workers in *The Silent Partner*. Similarly, Nixy Trent is redeemed by the devoutly Christian Purcell women, although, like Maggie, Nixy dies suddenly, a victim of patriarchy. Overall, Phelps presents more hope than does Crane, and part of that hope is that Phelps writes of women overcoming patriarchal restrictions. Moreover, Phelps's brand of literary naturalism presents redemption through Christianity.

Preaching that New-Time Religion in *The Awakening* (1899)

Kate Chopin (1850-1904) was a popular writer of local color short fiction in the 1890s, but her second novel, *The Awakening*, received severe criticism. Critics, many of whom were men, saw protagonist Edna Pontellier as too overt in her sexuality and too selfish (Huf 59-60). Numerous critics found it offensive that Edna would reject husband and children for a life of artistic and sexual independence. In addition to receiving condemnation from critics, Chopin also was socially ostracized. Deeply hurt, she wrote little else for the rest of her life (60). *The Awakening* was forgotten for thirty years, was criticized and rejected again in the 1930s, and then forgotten again until scholars rediscovered it in the 1950s and 1960s (Koloski 161). Second-wave feminists soon embraced the novel, and now it is solidly canonical, celebrated as a beautifully written feminist piece that was decades ahead of its time.

Like *Maggie*, *The Awakening* tells of a woman, in this case Edna Pontellier, seeking liberation but failing, victimized by a patriarchal society. Chopin, like Crane,

proclaims unambiguously against the oppressiveness of postbellum society, especially against women. Edna is a wife and mother who does not want to be either. Her husband Leonce provides financially for the family but is often away either on business or out socializing and regards his wife as a possession. For example, when Edna returns from the beach sunburned, Leonce criticizes her for allowing the sunburn to happen, "looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of property which has suffered some damage" (3). Edna is also the mother of two boys, whom she cares for but spends little time with. The Pontelliers are spending the summer at Grand Isle, which is near New Orleans, and during this time Edna begins a process of self-discovery. Through key friendships, especially a romantic one with Robert Lebrun, Edna begins to extricate herself from the monotony and restraint of her life as a wife and mother. She rediscovers painting, which she had done as a child, and she learns to swim, an act that is obviously symbolic of her rebirth. Then Robert abandons her to go to Mexico, leaving her heartbroken. When, at the end of the summer, Edna and her family move back to their home in New Orleans, Edna is a different person. Eventually, she moves out of her house and into a place of her own that she calls the pigeon house. She takes another lover and paints with greater determination. Robert returns and professes his love for her but also his unwillingness to enter into an adulterous relationship. He leaves her again. More and more, Edna finds herself alone and with a growing sense that she will never attain fulfillment. She returns to the Grand Isle and swims out into the Gulf of Mexico to her death.

Despite its remarkable literary subtlety and complexity, the novel is homiletic. It is a jeremiad in that it follows the jeremiad's structure of denunciation, threat of punishment, and promise of reward if hearers repent. *The Awakening* condemns the sins

of patriarchal postbellum society, shows the destructive outcome of those sins through the unhappiness and death of Edna, and offers hope in a new kind of spirituality that deviates from much of Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism and Presbyterianism (a form of Calvinism). The novel can be read as ecofeminist in its focus on how patriarchy suppresses both women and nature and on how nature is closely tied to the empowerment of women.

Scholars have generally ignored religion in Chopin's work, as David Z. Wehner reveals: "A search for Kate Chopin's name in the online *MLA Bibliography* turns up 652 articles over the past forty years, but only one . . . mentions Catholicism in its title" (154), even though Chopin was raised as a Catholic. Moreover, Christian language and imagery are throughout her work, including in *The Awakening*. Wehner indicates that "[b]y the time Chopin began her writing career . . . her religious faith had faded, but her religious temperament remained" (155). Indeed, this temperament manifests itself homiletically throughout *The Awakening*.

To begin with, Edna rebels against denominational Christianity. She rejects her Presbyterian upbringing in her negative recollections of the church. Since Presbyterianism is part of the Calvinist tradition, Edna's rebellion is somewhat of a rejection of Calvinism. Indeed, her persistent childhood memory of her father and his gloomy Presbyterianism (which she rejects) calls to mind the dour Calvinist preacher. Even more prominent among the Christian images and Edna's negative response to them are the numerous references to Roman Catholicism. For instance, the Farival twins, who are girls of fourteen, are always "clad in the Virgin's colors, blue and white, having been dedicated to the Blessed Virgin at their baptism" (23). The twins repeatedly are

performing music and are often regarded with disdain. In addition to the parrot squawking at them, at one point Mademoiselle Reisz says that the summer was rather pleasant, except for "the mosquitoes and the Farival twins" (47). The twins are benign, if not a bit annoying with their continual performing, and Reisz, by contrast, is the more daring artist and the more socially rebellious. The twins exemplify feminine conformity. They are tied to the purity and appropriateness of Mary and the social gender role of performing music for audiences (upper class postbellum women were often taught to play an instrument or to sing), and they are the opposite of Reisz, the consummate artist who is not afraid to flout conventions about gender roles.

This association of Mary with the Farival twins suggests a negative appraisal of aspects of religion, and that negative appraisal continues throughout the novel. In Chapter XIII, Edna attends worship at Our Lady of Lourdes (the name of the church is another reference to Mary), but "[a] feeling of oppression and drowsiness overcame Edna during the service . . . her one thought was to quit the stifling atmosphere of the church and reach the open air" (34). The lady in black, a minor character often in the background of the action, is almost always carrying a prayer book, rosary beads, or both. She is silent and not an admirable figure. The narrator describes her in Chapter VIII as looking "a trifle paler and more jaded than usual" (21), suggesting that she normally looks pale and jaded to begin with. Given her dark, pale, jaded nature and given that she is repeatedly focused on her beads and prayer book, the lady in black represents another negative depiction of religiosity. She is the devout Catholic woman who is perpetually mourning (as the black clothes suggest) and fixated on religious ritual but divorced from the world. With all of these references, Chopin joins a certain type of femininity with Roman

Catholicism. Women in the Roman Catholic Church are expected to be virginal and innocuous like the Farival twins, or in the background like the lady in black, and the Church is oppressive and stifling, especially for Edna. Such a critique of the Church is actually a common feature of postbellum preaching (as well as secular literature); preachers often railed against rival Christian theologies deemed heretical, as well as against the hypocrisy and laxity of Christians.

Further, while critical of religion, *The Awakening* also embraces aspects of spirituality. For instance, it is noteworthy that the night of Edna's epiphanic experience of listening to Mademoiselle Reisz play and then going swimming in the gulf occurs on August 28, which is the Feast of Saint Augustine. Saint Augustine, one of the great architects of Christian theology, is revered by the Roman Catholic Church while also being a key theologian among Protestants for his emphasis on human depravity and the necessity of God's grace for salvation (central teachings of Calvinism). That Edna is twenty-eight on the night of the swim reinforces the connection between her and Augustine. Listening to Reisz play leaves her profoundly moved in a way reminiscent of a conversion experience: "She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her" (25). Her swimming experience is also profound. "She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before . . . As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself" (27). She clearly finds her swimming to be empowering. That all of this happens on the Feast of Saint Augustine ties the experience to mainstream Christianity, and, of course, the water imagery suggests baptism, although a baptism that helps to transform Edna into, not a Christian, but a new kind of woman.

At the same time, the connection to Saint Augustine suggests a reversal of spirituality through the contrasting of Augustine with Edna. As a young man, Saint Augustine rejected Christianity and embraced a hedonistic lifestyle that included having an illegitimate child. Eventually, he returned to Christianity and went on to become one of its greatest theologians; as such, he renounced the fleshly and favored the spiritual. Edna Pontellier is also raised a Christian, rejects it, but never returns. Instead, she moves farther away from Christianity as she awakens. She embraces a lifestyle that many of her day considered hedonistic; she indulges in the fleshly and sensual realms that Augustine came to reject. The intriguing similarities and differences between Edna and Saint Augustine underscore Edna's rejection of Christianity. At the same time, the spiritual nature of her awakening—indeed, the term "awakening" calls to mind the Great Awakening—indicates that, like Augustine, she grows spiritually as she matures, although her spirituality embraces sensuality that Augustine's spirituality eschewed.

Indeed, Wehner, examining Chopin's work as a whole, contends that "Chopin's fiction continually combines the sensuous and sexual with the spiritual" (163). For instance, in her short story "Her Letters" (1895), a married woman reflects on how her lover "changed the water in her veins to wine" (399, qtd. in Wehner 163), a line that alludes to Christ changing water to wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12). In "Love on the Bon-Dieu" (1892), two people who are romantically attracted to each other dip their fingers in holy water at mass and then touch each other (163). Wehner adds that "Chopin's writing . . . not only conflates sex and religion, nature and religion, but much of it conflates all three—religion, nature, and sex" (165). Such is clearly the case in *The Awakening*, in which Edna is reborn through swimming in the gulf, has sexual affairs,

and, as we shall see, becomes Venus, who herself was born out of the sea-foam (nature) and is the goddess (religion) of sexuality and love.

Indeed, proposing that *The Awakening* preaches an alternate spirituality to Christianity is Sandra M. Gilbert, who argues that the novel proclaims "a feminist and matriarchal myth of Aphrodite/Venus as an alternative to the masculinist and patriarchal myth of Jesus" (44). Gilbert focuses on the dinner party that Edna holds at her pigeon house, which forms one of the novel's longest scenes. At the party, according to one guest, "Venus rising from the foam could have presented no more entrancing a spectacle than Mrs. Pontellier, blazing with beauty and diamonds at the head of the board, while the other women were all of them youthful houris, possessed of incomparable charms" (107). "Houris" are pure maidens who inhabit heaven, according to Islam. Thus, this scene presents a syncretistic apotheosis of Edna at the dinner party. The party represents Edna's liberation from her life as wife and mother, and through it she is elevated, even if only briefly, to the level of the divine. Of course, she does not literally become Venus, but the bold, vivid language suggests, according to Gilbert, that the novel is a fantasy of the coming of Venus through Edna. The connection of Venus to Edna is also made through water-imagery. Just as Venus was born from sea-foam, so is Edna reborn from the gulf (51). Of course, while Venus is immortal, Edna dies in the same water that has caused her rebirth.

It is unsurprising, then, that Gilbert calls *The Awakening* the story of an Aphrodite/Venus figure who is a Creole Bovary (44). Indeed, many scholars have pointed out the similarities between *The Awakening* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857). Just as Emma Bovary tries to escape an unfulfilling marriage but ends up

committing suicide, so also does Edna. However, she achieves this Venus-status, even if only poetically and briefly. In any case, the religious language of ancient Greek religion, coupled with the Islamic reference to houris, suggests that Edna embodies a new religion that replaces patriarchal Christianity.

The Awakening, then, can be seen as homiletic in its clear denunciation of patriarchal Christianity and in its preaching a sensual, woman-centered, non-Christian spirituality as an alternative. The novel is not merely a rejection of Christianity but also offers an alternative theology. Thus, *The Awakening* has a homiletic component in that it calls for readers to move toward this alternative theology. Indeed, postbellum sermons frequently denounced a rival theology and then asserted the superiority of another theology. Chopin does likewise in *The Awakening*.

The novel may not present easy answers to the problem of patriarchal oppression, but it unambiguously preaches against it. This message is especially obvious in Chopin's depiction of Edna's husband Leonce. Although capable of kindness and never physically or verbally abusive, Leonce nevertheless stifles Edna and is often selfishly manipulative toward her. For example, on the night of the novel's opening day, Leonce returns late from playing billiards and socializing at a nearby hotel to find that his wife is too sleepy to engage in meaningful conversation. He is discouraged that his wife takes so little interest in what he has to say. He then gets her to be more alert by telling her that the oldest son, Raoul, has a fever, and he scolds her for "her habitual neglect of the children" (6). Edna, however, is confident that Raoul has no fever, since she just put him to bed a few hours earlier and had seen then that he was fine. Leonce continues to criticize her, saying that it is her responsibility to care for the children, since he has "his hands full

with his brokerage business" (6). Edna gets up, checks on her son, confirms that he does not have a fever, and returns to bed. Now Leonce is asleep, and she is wide awake. Leonce has manipulated the situation to his advantage. Edna begins to cry and soon finds herself sobbing, "although she could not have told why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life" (6). A few days later, Leonce, away on business, sends Edna a box of treats, including candy, and the other women declare that he is "the best husband in the world." Edna finds herself agreeing (8). As Huf explains, these scenes reveal Leonce's selfishness (64-65). Indeed, they expose the insidious way Leonce dominates his wife. He is ostensibly kind but actually domineering. Leonce is oppressive throughout the novel, being "a rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife" (54). He clearly embodies patriarchal oppression, despite his superficial gentlemanliness.

In general, the men in *The Awakening* are domineering toward Edna, failures in their relationship with her, or both. Edna's father, for instance, oppressed her when she was a girl, and still does. Edna is a maternal orphan raised by an older sister under the supervision of a father who had been a colonel in the Confederate army and who raises the children in a strict, Presbyterian household. She recalls repeatedly a scene from her childhood in Kentucky in which she was "walking through the grass" (16). She remembers, "Likely as not it was Sunday . . . and I was running away from prayers, from Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of" (16). Granted, now that she is an adult, she finds that her relationship with her father is tolerable, but it still lacks warmth. During one of their visits, "[s]he had not much of anything to say to her father . . . but he did not antagonize her. She discovered that he

interested her, though she realized that he might not interest her long" (66). He advises Leonce regarding controlling Edna, "Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it" (68). The narrator then indicates that "[t]he Colonel was perhaps unaware that he had coerced his own wife into her grave" (68). In addition, M. Susan Elizabeth Bonifer notes that "[t]he Colonel himself is depicted as self-important and rigid; he wears padded suits 'which gave a fictitious breadth and depth to his shoulders and chest'" (Chopin 64; qtd. in Bonifer 145). Like Leonce, then, Edna's father has a distinguished, gentlemanly air, beneath which lies an overbearing force against Edna and women in general.

The other men close to Edna also fail her. Robert is young, handsome, and charming. She falls in love with him, but eventually he runs away to Mexico. When he returns, he quickly rejects her again. Her relationship with Alcee ends in failure largely because of his flaws. He is charming and handsome, but he is also an opportunist, as critics such as Rosemary F. Franklin have indicated (Camp 235). He is "[k]nown in the Creole community as a charlatan" (236). He is fond of seducing married women. However, Alcee is ultimately of no consequence to Edna, since he "was absolutely nothing to her" (Chopin 74).

Edna's children are male, as well, and she has mixed feelings for them. As the narrator puts it, "She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them" (18). She asserts, "I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself" (45), meaning the essence of who she is. Late in the novel, after she has moved into the pigeon house, she misses her boys and visits them, although upon returning the city she quickly

forgets them. After Edna watches Adele go through the agony of childbirth, Adele exhorts her to "think of the children" (104), and, in a way, Edna does. The children "[appear] before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered her and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days" (108). While drowning, she "thought of Leonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not thought that they could possess her, body and soul" (109). Obviously, Edna associates her children with her oppression. That they are both boys suggests that they are linked to the male oppression of women.

Readers have often been especially critical of Edna's neglect of her children. She does indeed spend little time with them. However, when she is with them, she is frequently attentive. Further, as feminist critics, including Adrienne Rich, have often noted, the children appear to be doing well and are very independent (Bonifer 146). Along these lines, the narrator indicates that "[i]f one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of his eyes and the sand out of his mouth, and go on playing" (8). One could interpret this behavior as a coping skill the boys have developed because their mother is neglectful, and it may be. However, Chopin presents the behavior as largely positive, such as when she has the narrator explain, "Tots as [the Pontellier children] were, they pulled together and stood their ground in childish battles with doubled fists and uplifted voices, which usually prevailed against the other mother-tots" (8).

The boys, then, are oppressive toward Edna because of what they represent and not how they actually are. They represent the burden of parenting and the burden of male

figures. Edna finds oppressive the paradigm that dictates that she is to be content with serving as wife and mother. Like Betty Friedan over sixty years later in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Edna is not content with patriarchal society's dictate that she, along with all other women, is to find being a mother and wife completely fulfilling. She does not, and, fair or not, she associates her boys with that oppressive paradigm. Moreover, ecofeminists often point out that, because women have babies, patriarchy often regards women as closer to nature. Ecofeminists also contend that, just as patriarchy tends to view nature as an exploitable resource, so does patriarchy view women as an exploitable resource through which men can acquire children.

Adding to the complexity of the novel's feminist proclamation is that none of the women offer a satisfactory alternate lifestyle for the awakening Edna to emulate. The two central women characters who function as foils to Edna are Adele Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz. Adele is, at least on the surface, the model wife and mother, "the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm" (8). The narrator states, "If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving a slow death by torture" (8). She is beautiful. She is constantly sewing, a stereotypically domestic duty for women, and she is ever devoted to her children (104). Earlier, when Edna says that she could sacrifice her life but never herself, the essential self, for her children, Adele is clearly bewildered, replying by saying, "I don't know what you would call the essential, or what you mean by the unessential . . . but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that—your Bible tells you so. I'm sure I couldn't do more than that" (45). For Adele, being a mother is so integral to her identity that she fails to understand that Edna could

have any essential self outside of being a mother. Adele represents what Edna is rebelling against, the role of postbellum wife and mother.

Nevertheless, beneath Adele's surface conformity to that role is a kind of feminist subversion, as Kathleen M. Streater explains in "Adele Ratignolle: Kate Chopin's Feminist at Home in *The Awakening*." While Adele is, on the whole, an obedient and adoring wife and mother, she has subtle moments of rebellion. For example, when Edna is living in the pigeon house and having a sexual affair with Alcee Arobin, a man whose "attentions alone are considered enough to ruin a woman's name" (91), Adele, obeying her husband's orders, warns Edna that such a lifestyle could be deleterious for Edna's reputation. However, as Streater indicates (411), a few lines later, Adele says, "Don't mind what I said about Arobin, or having someone to stay with you" (91). Adele also shows a subtle rebellion when she is in labor and rants against her husband and the doctor (Streater 413), yelling, "This is too much! . . . Mandelet [her doctor] ought to be killed! Where is Alphonse [her husband]? It is possible I am to be abandoned like this—neglected by everyone?" (104) While, through much of the novel, she is the quintessential angel of the house, occasionally another side of her emerges. Streater suggests, then, that, through Adele, "Chopin offers an affirmation of feminist possibility" (406) by presenting a character who can work within patriarchy to advance a feminist agenda. Tragically, Streater explains, Edna is "blind to Adele's authentic feminist potential" (412), only regarding Adele as a confined postbellum wife and mother. Edna goes into the gulf believing that there is no workable model of feminism that she can embrace.

Chopin continues her feminist exploration of roles for women through Mademoiselle Reisz, who is not married, is devoted to her music, and does not exhibit the social graces expected of postbellum women. Reisz is older and unattractive. She is frequently rude and distant toward others, although the people of Grand Isle often ask her, a brilliant pianist, to perform. She embodies for Edna the woman who is completely free from postbellum expectations for women and who is devoted to her art. Part of Edna's awakening is that she takes up painting again, and she longs to have the same kind of dedication to painting that Reisz has to music. On the night of August 28, Edna hears for the first time Reisz play, and finds the experience epiphanic. As she listens to Reisz play, Edna feels a "keen tremor down [her] spinal column" (25), and "the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her" (25). Later that evening, Edna swims farther out in the gulf than she has ever gone before, an act that symbolizes her growth as a woman. Mademoiselle Reisz's playing inspires Edna to push herself in this manner. Indeed, throughout the novel, Reisz functions as a muse for Edna, although, at the same time, the aging pianist is antagonistic. For example, when Edna declares, "I am becoming an artist" (60), Reisz punctures Edna's statement by saying, "You have pretensions" (60). Reisz goes on to explain that being an artist requires having "many gifts" and that "moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul" (60). In this statement, Reisz implies that Edna lacks such a soul.

In short, neither Reisz nor Adele offers Edna an effective alternative to the patriarchally oppressive lifestyle Edna longs to be free from. Adele exercises moments of

feminist subversion (that Edna overlooks) but largely conforms to patriarchy, and Mademoiselle Reisz represents rebellion that requires more than Edna is able to sacrifice. In fact, no woman in the novel presents for Edna an alternative to the patriarchal domesticity that she wishes to be free from. Edna knows that she does not want to be confined to the role of postbellum wife and mother, and she tries to find an alternative lifestyle by moving into the pigeon house, pursuing painting, and having affairs. In the end, she is unable to find the fulfillment she seeks. She is unable or unwilling to be like Mademoiselle Reisz. Chopin, then, is preaching a jeremiad that laments the lack of options for Edna without offering much hope for the future for women. Like Crane's *Maggie*, Chopin denounces society but offers little in the way of a constructive alternative.

In a way, in its addressing of feminism *The Awakening* is reminiscent of Beecher's sermon addressed to young men mentioned in Chapter One. Much as Beecher offers advice and warning to young men to help them live morally sound and productive lives, Chopin guides women of the postbellum era through depicting the plight of Edna Pontellier. Chopin depicts brilliantly how men, such as Leonce and the Colonel, can be reputable gentlemen while also being oppressive of women. Chopin warns women against men such as Robert, who fails to be emotionally available to Edna, and Alcee, who preys upon women. Chopin warns against the restrictive nature of parenting. She also warns women that liberating oneself from patriarchal oppression comes at a very high price, but remaining oppressed does, as well. Clearly society needs to change so that women have better options, and Chopin, through her sad story, is challenging people, especially women, to work toward those better options.

While much has been made of the novel's feminism, scholars have said little about its ecofeminism, but a strong ecofeminist component runs throughout the novel's preaching against patriarchal oppression. In addition to the child-rearing motif already mentioned, nature imagery is prevalent throughout the novel. I have already considered the importance of the Gulf of Mexico to the novel as a place of rebirth and death for Edna. Chopin connects women to nature by having the gulf be a source of empowerment for Edna, but Chopin complicates the nature/women pairing (which patriarchy frequently perpetuates) by having Edna die in the gulf. While there has been speculation that her death is a kind of liberation, it is still a death. Edna is unable to achieve fulfillment in this life. The gulf, then, both revives and destroys Edna, and so Chopin defies any simplistic patriarchal essentialist association of women being inherently harmonious with nature.

At the same time, Chopin uses bird imagery to underscore how patriarchy imprisons both women and nature. The novel's first line of dialogue is spoken by a caged parrot: "Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi! That's all right!" (2), which means "Go away! Go away, for God's sake! That's all right!" The parrot shrieks these lines in Chapter XI when the Farival twins, dressed in the "Virgin's colors, blue and white" (23), play on the piano for a group's entertainment. The narrator indicates that the parrot "was the only being present who possessed sufficient candor to admit that he was not listening to these gracious performances" (23). The parrot is then quiet for the rest of the evening, "the whole venom of his nature apparently having been cherished up and hurled against the twins in that one impetuous outburst" (23). In fact, the parrot is largely absent from the rest of the novel and only speaks in these two early scenes. The protesting caged parrot is connected to women, especially Edna, through the bird imagery associated with

them. For example, “mother-women” are described as “fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood” (8). A few lines later, such women are described as “ministering angels,” but here the imagery, especially the word “brood,” suggests birds. In Chapter XXVII, Edna recalls that Mademoiselle Reisz put her arms around Edna and felt her shoulder blades, “to see if my wings were strong” (79). Edna quotes Reisz as having said that “the bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings” (79). Finally, as Edna is making her way into the gulf for the last time, she sees “[a] bird with a broken wing . . . beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water” (109). The meaning of the imagery is clear. Edna, and postbellum women in general, are like caged or wounded birds, and Edna, like the parrot, is protesting. For Edna not merely to flutter over her children but to soar she must have strong wings, but, sadly, she does not and ends up “circling disabled down” to her death in the gulf.

Ecofeminists are apt to critique the bird imagery in *The Awakening* as largely anthropocentric; the birds are important because of what they symbolize in the story about humans and not because of their intrinsic value as living creatures. However, at the same time, the parrot defies anthropocentrism. The parrot is caged but also loudly protests, especially when the twins play the piano. The parrot is indeed a symbol that enlightens Edna’s struggle for independence, but part of that symbolism is that the parrot rebels against the humans. Thus, the parrot defies anthropocentrism just as Edna defies patriarchy. This parallelism of parrot and Edna is ecofeminist in that Chopin presents both a being from nature and a woman defying a confining paradigm.

An essential component of Chopin's spirituality is Darwinism, and her response to Darwin constitutes an important piece of the ecofeminism of *The Awakening*. Chopin read Darwin avidly, and many scholars (e.g., Bert Bender) have expounded upon the impact of Darwinism on *The Awakening*. Wehner argues that, while Darwin is often associated with replacing religion with science, in reality Darwin expresses more doubt about religion than a rejection of it and that this doubting, ambivalent Darwin shapes Chopin more than does a scientific rejection of religion (160). Moreover, Chopin is selective in what she uses from Darwin. Thus, while *The Awakening* has a naturalistic tone in that it suggests that at least some humans are victims of society and nature, a tone that calls to mind the competitive brutality of nature as described in Darwin, Chopin also revels in a sensual spirituality absent in Darwin. Further, while Darwin describes at length the life and behavior of animals and other organisms in nature, in *The Awakening* Chopin not only highlights the beauty (as well as the danger) of nature but also connects Edna to the non-human animal world by showing her rejecting societal dictates and drawing increasingly from her instincts. She turns away from postbellum society and toward her sensual side through her affairs, painting, and appreciation of nature. Chopin reflects Darwin's insistence on regarding humans as part of the animal kingdom.

The Awakening is a complex novel that defies distillation. It is certainly not homiletic the way many of Phelps's novels are. Phelps tends to be more didactic and less ambiguous than Chopin is in *The Awakening*, and, of course, Phelps is overtly pro-Christian. Nevertheless, Chopin's famous novel functions in what we might describe as an ecofeminist-homiletic fashion by clearly proclaiming a spiritual message that critiques

patriarchal Christianity and proposes an alternative feminine spirituality that is intimately connected to nature.

The Awakening bears notable similarities to *The Story of Avis*. As Huf points out, each novel is a *Kuenstlerroman* about a woman striving to be an artist but being impeded by patriarchy (36-79). Both novels feature women not finding fulfillment in being a mother and wife. Both use bird-imagery to underscore how patriarchy imprisons women. Each novel also ends tragically, suggesting that, at present at least, there is little hope for women to achieve fulfillment. Both novels also draw from images from antiquity—Venus in the case of Chopin and the Sphinx in the case of Phelps—as part of proclaiming their spiritual message. *The Story of Avis* is more conventional in that it does not reject Christianity. Phelps is also more optimistic in that Avis does not commit suicide, and there is an intimation of hope for women through Avis's daughter Waitstill.

In general, juxtaposing Phelps's works with the works of these three canonical authors underscores the continuity between "sentimental" authors such as Phelps and "non-sentimental" authors, such as Jewett, Crane, and Chopin. Phelps addresses many of the same issues, and all four authors present works that can be read to function as ecofeminist sermons. Awareness of these similarities can contribute to the erosion of the divide that persists in academe between sentimental and non-sentimental fiction.

CONCLUSION

ECOFEMINIST HOMILETICS' DISTINCT RELEVANCE TO THE POSTBELLUM ERA AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PULPITS

In this dissertation, I have had two main objectives. One has been to draw greater attention to the complexity and importance of an often-neglected figure, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, a best-selling author who wrote numerous innovative and entertaining works. Phelps was a pioneer in American realism and an early literary voice advocating for change regarding marriage, mill conditions, teenage pregnancy, women in the work place, and the treatment of animals. She is the forerunner of such writers as Flannery O'Connor and Terry Tempest Williams, both of whom address significantly in their works religion, the treatment of women, and humanity's relationship with nature. Further, many of Phelps's novels, despite their flaws, are engaging, vivid, and thought-provoking. They provide a uniquely insightful window into postbellum America while also resonating with twenty-first century readers. For example, the woman's struggle to balance career and family life that Avis struggles with in *The Story of Avis* is still one that many women in America deal with.

Part of Phelps's significance lies in her Christian version of literary naturalism. Like literary naturalists such as Crane, Phelps depicts bleak conditions for humans. For instance, Nixy Trent is a pitiful victim of urban poverty and judgmental middle-class Christians. In *A Singular Life*, Phelps tells of people being victimized by poverty and alcoholism. Phelps also often presents nature as a brutal force that overpowers humans. In *The Silent Partner*, a flood ravages the mill town of Five Falls and kills the disabled

Catty. In *A Singular Life*, the relentless sea kills fishermen. However, Phelps's naturalism is ameliorated by her faith in God and Christianity. The *Gates* trilogy promises a better life for those oppressed in this life. Catty dies in the flood in *The Silent Partner*, but she is redeemed by Christ and becomes a source of inspiration for Sip's preaching. Nixy Trent is shunned by Christians and dies at the end of *Hedged In*, but she is also socially and morally rehabilitated by devout Christians, the Purcell women. Emanuel Bayard is killed at the end of *A Singular Life*, but he is a Christ-figure whose commitment to the Social Gospel brings significant improvement to the lives of his parishioners. For Phelps, the injustice of society and the brutality of nature are undeniable realities that can, nevertheless, be mitigated by a loving God and dedicated Christians. Phelps's combining of literary naturalism and Christian idealism contributes to her distinctiveness as an American author.

Focusing on Phelps as a remarkable and important voice in American literature is not to imply that she is without shortcomings. Her dialogue is sometimes stilted. Her plots often dip into the maudlin. For example, Nixy's sudden, mysterious death at the foot of a cross at the end of *Hedged In* is cloyingly gothic in a novel that mainly tries to be realistic. Phelps's defense of women frequently leads to a disparagement of men, although she does tend to depict even her villainous men with a touch of sympathy. Further, her feminism sometimes gives way to a rather conventional domesticity and, of course, in general, is tame by the standards of today's feminist movements. Further, as many critics have noticed, Phelps has a palpably middle-class bias, such as in Perley Kelso's "refining" of the mill workers by exposing them to high-brow culture in *The Silent Partner*. She also is often rather heavy-handed, although the heavy-handedness is

part of her homiletic strategy of creating "art for truth's sake." Despite all of these flaws, Phelps's work still possesses enough force and innovation to warrant more seriously attention in anthologies, journals, conferences, and classrooms.

My second objective in this dissertation has been to introduce the heuristic of ecofeminist homiletics. I have proposed that many literary works, particularly those of Phelps, function in an ecofeminist-homiletic manner. This understanding is important because it reveals a literary connection between the sermon and other literary texts. Building off the work of Jackson, I have shown the kinship between sermons and an array of literary works.

Highlighting the ecofeminist component that runs through some homiletic works is important for at least two reasons. First, underscoring the presence of ecofeminist themes brings to the foreground crucial environmental and feminist issues. While ecofeminist studies have become more prominent since the 1990s, ecofeminism is still a new voice that, frankly, is sometimes simply given perfunctory attention (or no attention) in academe and is often overlooked or met with disdain in larger society. Granted, there is widespread acknowledgement that women should be treated with respect and that humans need to take better care of the planet's resources, but the discrimination against both women and nature is still pervasive and deleterious, even if subtler than in decades past. Violations of nature, such as mountaintop removal mining and fracking, are widespread. While women have attained greater power and autonomy than they had in decades past, at the same time America's obsessive, judgmental gaze upon the feminine body is rampant. Indeed, entire TV shows, such as The Learning Channel's *What Not to*

Wear, are devoted to what women look like and how to make them look prettier and sexier by standards that mainstream culture has determined.

Further, prevalent as ever is the disparagement of women by identifying them with the natural world. One does not have to watch TV for more than a couple hours to hear a woman being called a bitch, a fox, a sex kitten, or a vixen. Such a persistent pairing of women with nature tends to objectify and demean women while doing the same to nature by implying that being tied to nature is demeaning. Criticism of this pairing is often readily dismissed as "p. c." and hyper-sensitive, but with environmental problems reaching crisis levels and with women still repeatedly being denied equal pay, respect, and opportunities, ecofeminism has an urgent message.

This concern with women and nature is not meant to negate or minimize other important issues of discrimination and subjugation. There is no doubt that men are also victimized, as are people of color, and non-heterosexual people. Indeed, the core ideal of ecofeminism is to liberate all entities, not just women and nature. In fact, when women and nature are more highly valued, other entities will be as well. Ecofeminism is not beneficial just to women and nature. At its best, ecofeminism is beneficial to all.

Given the importance of ecofeminism and given the recurring homiletic features of many literary works, the ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic is valuable to literary studies, especially pedagogically. After all, both homiletics and ecofeminism are concerned with persuading hearers/readers toward changing their lives according to certain articulated ideals. Ecofeminism, for instance, is ultimately of no value if it does not result in guiding people toward improving society. The same is true for sermons.

While the heuristic of ecofeminst homiletics may be applicable to many contexts, it is especially germane to the postbellum era for at least four reasons. First, as Jackson argues, American realism is directly related to homiletics. Second, this period saw both the rise of the women's movement and the rise of developments in medicine, science, and environmental issues. Thus, ecofeminism is particularly relevant to studying the literature of this period. Third, the growth of industrialization in the nineteenth century brought to the foreground issues of class hierarchies (such as the factory owner exploiting the worker). Ecofeminists are critical of such hierarchies and strive to replace them with heterarchy. Fourth, the application of this heuristic is exceptionally valuable for postbellum literary studies because it reveals the often overlooked pervasiveness of religion in texts of the period. Much as *The Awakening* contains extensive Christian references that scholars have frequently not attended to, so also are other texts from the period replete with religious valences generally overlooked. The application of this lens of ecofeminist homiletics challenges scholars to reconsider the role of religion in postbellum literature. Therefore, it would be valuable to apply this approach to other postbellum texts.

The ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic is not applicable just to literary studies, but also to homiletic studies, including training seminarians in the art of preaching. There is virtually no literature on ecofeminist homiletics, so this dissertation could help preaching-students to consider how to employ ecofeminist strategies in preaching. Moreover, the works of Phelps could serve as models for preachers to emulate, even though her works are not sermons per se. The similarities between sermons and works of fiction, especially those of Phelps, are enough that students could learn from her how to focus sermons on

proclamation that addresses ecofeminist issues and pushes hearers toward social reform. To paraphrase Phelps, while it may be true that a sermon cannot be a novel, it is also true that preachers can learn from works of fiction, including novels, how to make more effective sermons.

For example, Phelps's *The Gates Ajar* would make for excellent reading in a preaching class. The novel illustrates the importance of being attentive to the psychological and theological needs of the congregation. The novel also offers examples of ineffective preaching that are relevant to preaching in the twenty-first century. For instance, many preachers, like Dr. Bland, tend to be guilty of vague, general, abstract language that simply does not resonate with hearers. Aunt Winifred offers a more constructive preaching paradigm through her use of concrete imagery that engages the senses, intellect, and heart. While preaching students are told to use such language and imagery in sermons, it is sadly remarkable how many preachers sound more like Dr. Bland than like Aunt Winifred. *The Gates Ajar* also brings to the attention of preaching students the problems of the hierarchical dualism between spirit and the material/natural world as well as the dualism of men over women. Preachers still are guilty of these hierarchies, although not to the degree that Deacon Quirk and Dr. Bland are. Phelps's novel offers an alternative metaphysics that can help preachers to break from such hierarchies to produce sermons that are more empowering and liberating.

A challenge for ecofeminist Christian preachers is remaining faithful to Christianity while preaching tenets of ecofeminism, which are often at odds with Christianity. After all, many teachings in Christianity, including numerous biblical ones, arise from and reinforce patriarchy and anthropocentrism. For instance, Christianity tends

to describe God as male and tends to view creation as a hierarchy in which humans are superior to animals. Granted, many Christian pastors have stressed that God is not literally male (except for the historical Jesus of Nazareth) and that God can be described in feminine terms. Likewise, Christians often emphasize the importance of humans being good stewards of creation. Nevertheless, male-metaphors for God tend to dominate preaching, and the concept of humans as stewards of creation still implies that humans are separate from and superior to the rest of creation. Such hermeneutical and theological issues abound for the Christian ecofeminist preacher.

Phelps's ecofeminist-homiletic fiction offers guidance for preachers striving to be both Christian and ecofeminist. Her novel *Trixy* provides a striking example through Phelps's making a female dog Christ-like. Phelps does not challenge the historical maleness of Jesus or reject outright male images for God, but she demonstrates how being Christ-like transcends gender and even species. Pastors could learn from Phelps's example how to advance the ideals of ecofeminism while remaining faithful to Christianity.

In the process, however, each ecofeminist Christian preacher will need to decide what principles of both Christianity and ecofeminism to adhere to and what to reject, because there are irreconcilable points between the two belief systems. For example, Christianity insists on viewing God as transcendent and as superior to creation. Ecofeminists who embrace an alternate view, such as pantheism, are rejecting a core Christian teaching. Nevertheless, ecofeminism and Christianity can complement each other.

The application of the ecofeminist-homiletic heuristic can be fruitful, then, for literary scholars and preachers. Such analysis can help teacher, student, and preacher alike to understand the connections between the sermon and other literary genres. More importantly, this heuristic can guide us humans to treat with greater dignity women, nature, and, ultimately, all of us. To that, Phelps would say, “Amen.”

Works Cited

Adams, Carol J. Introduction. *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. Ed. Carol J. Adams. New York: Continuum, 1993. 1-9. Print.

Baym, Nina. *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation*. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2002. Print.

---. Introduction. *Three Spiritualist Novels by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps:* The Gates Ajar *(1868),* Beyond the Gates *(1883), and* The Gates Between *(1887)*. Ed. Nina Baym. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2000. Vii-xxiii. Print.

"Beecher, Henry Ward." *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*. Ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox. 1995. 30-33. Print.

Beecher, Henry Ward. "A Sermon to Young Men." *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*. Ed. Clyde E. Fant Jr., et al. Vol. 4. Waco, TX: Word, 1971. 304-316. Print.

Bennett, Angela. *Elizabeth Stuart Phelps*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1939. Print.

Bercovitch. Sacvan. *The American Jeremiad*. Madison, U of Wisconsin P, 1978. Print.

Bergman, Jill. "'Oh the Poor Women!': Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's Motherly Benevolence." *Our Sisters' Keepers: Nineteenth-Century Benevolence Literature by American Women*. Ed. Jill Bergman and Debra Bernardi. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2005. 190-212. Print.

The Bible. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998. Oxford World's Classics. Authorized King James Version. Print.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Stephen Crane*. Broomall, PA: Chelsea House, 2002. *Google Book Search*. Web. 20 Jan. 2012.

Bonifer, M. Susan Elizabeth. *Like a Motherless Child: The Orphan Figure in the Novels of Ninteenth-Century American Women Writers, 1850-1899.* Diss. Indiana U of Pennsylvania. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1995. Print.

Bos, William and Clyde Faries. "The Social Gospel: Preaching Reform 1875-1915." *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit 1630-1967*. Ed. DeWitte Holland. Nashville: Abingdon, 1971. 282-307. Print.

Brault, Rob. "Silence as Resistance: An Ecofeminist Reading of Sarah Orne Jewett's 'A White Heron.'" *New Directions in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*. Ed. Andrea Campbell. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2008. 74-89. Print.

Bridgers, Lynn. *The American Religious Experience: A Concise History*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006. Print.

Broadus, John. *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. 17th ed. New York, 1891. Print.

Brooks, Phillips. *Lectures on Preaching Delivered before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877*. New York, 1877. Print.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. New York, 1899. *Nook Color*. Web. 31 January 2012.

Clarke, Edward Hammond. *Sex in Education; or, A Fair Chance for Girls*. 2nd ed. Boston, 1874. *Google Book Search*. Web. 20 Dec. 2011.

Clerkin, Mary Jane. *A Feminist Interpretation of Three Nineteenth Century Literary Heroines: Hardy's Tess, Crane's Maggie, and Ibsen's Nora.* Diss. St. John's U. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1993. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. Web. 24 Jan. 2012.

Clinton, Catherine. *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1984. Print.

Coffey, Donna. "Introduction: A Sense of Place." *Women's Studies*. 31.2 (March/April 2002): 131-140. Web. *EBSCOhost*. 15 July 2011.

"Congregationalism." *Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of World Religions*. Consulting Ed. Wendy Doniger. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1999. 260-261. Print.

Crane, Stephen. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.* Norton crit. ed. Ed. Thomas A. Gullason. New York: Norton, 1979. Print.

Crockett, Lynne. *Victorians and Vivisection: Fictions of Pain from Fin de Siecle.* Diss. NYU. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2004. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. Web. 16 Jan. 2012.

Cunliffe, Marcus. "Stephen Crane and the American Background of *Maggie*." Gullason 94-103. Print.

Dicker, Rory. "The Mirroring of Heaven and Earth: Female Spirituality in Elizabeth Prentiss's *Stepping Heavenward* and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Gates Ajar*." *Things of the Spirit: Women Writers Constructing Spirituality*. Ed. Kristina K. Groover. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2004. Print.

Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977. Print.

Dowling, Colette. *The Frailty Myth: Women Approaching Physical Equality.* New York: Random House, 2000. Print.

Ehrenreich, Barbara and Deidre English. *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness*. Old Westbury: Feminist, 1973. Print.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 3rd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Norton, 1989. 903-931. Print.

Fowler, Robert Booth. *The Greening of Protestant Thought*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1995. Print.

Fuller, Margaret. [The Great Radical Dualism.] *The Great Lawsuit. The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 3rd ed. Vol. 1. New York: Norton, 1989. 1528-1531. Print.

Gaard, Greta, ed. *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Philadelphia: Temple, 1993. Print.

Gehrman, Jennifer A. *"Where Lies Her Margin, Where Her Text?": Configurations Womanhood in the Works of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.* Diss. Indiana U of Pennsylvania. Ann Arbor: UMI, 1996. Print.

Giele, Janet Zollinger. *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism*. New York: Twayne, 1995. Print.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin's Fantasy of Desire." *Kenyon Review*. 5.3 (Summer 1983): 42-66. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 10 Feb. 2012.

Gladden, Washington. "Spiritual Law in the Natural World." *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit 1630-1967*. Ed. DeWitte Holland. Nashville: Abingdon, 1971. 299-307. Print.

Groomes, Sally Anne. *Collapsing the Binary: Reconsidering Faith, Feminism, and Convention in the Works of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.* Thesis. Villanova U. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2009. Print.

Gullason, Thomas A. "[A Minister, a Social Reformer, and *Maggie*]." Gullason 103-108. Print.

---."Preface." *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.* Stephen Crane. Norton crit. ed. New York: Norton, 1979. xi-xiii. Print.

Huf, Linda. *A Portrait of the Artists as a Young Woman: The Writer as Heroine in American Literature*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1983. Print.

Jackson, Gregory S. *The Word and Its Witness: The Spiritualization of American Realism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009. Print.

Jewett, Sarah Orne. "A White Heron." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. 3rd ed. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 1989. 484-490. Print.

Jones, Margaret Faye. *Worker Angels: Ambivalences toward Women's Work in Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.* Diss. UIP. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2003. Print.

Kelly, Lori Duin. "Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Trixy*, and the Vivisection Question." *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 27.1 (2010): 61-82. *ProjectMuse. MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 14 Jan. 2012.

---. *The Life and Works of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Victorian Feminist Writer*. Troy, NY: Whitston, 1983. Print.

Kessler, Carol Farley. *Elizabeth Stuart Phelps*. Boston: Twayne, 1982. Print.

Kheel, Marti. "The Protection of Nature: The Damsel is Redressed." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism.* Ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1990. 128-137. Print.

King, Ynestra. “The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology.” *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, Ed. Judith Plant. Philadelphia: New Society, 1989. 18-28. Print.

Koloski, Bernard. “*The Awakening*: The First 100 Years.” *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. 161-173. Print.

Lewes, Darby. *Dream Revisionaries: Gender and Genre in Women’s Utopian Fiction, 1870-1920*. Tuscaloosa, AL: U of Alabama P, 1995. Print.

Littig, Beate. *Feminist Perspectives on Environment and Society*. Feminist Perspectives Series. New York: Prentice Hall, 2001. Print.

Long, Lisa. “‘The Corporeity of Heaven’: Rehabilitating the Civil War Body in *The Gates Ajar*.” *American Literature* 69:4 (Dec., 1997): 781-811. Print.

“Luce Irigaray (1932-present).” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Web. 4 March 2012. www.iep.utm.edu.

Lupack, Alan and Barbara Tepa Lupack. *King Arthur in America*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999. Print.

McFague, Sallie. “An Earthly Theological Agenda.” *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*. Ed. Carol J. Adams. New York: Continuum, 1993. 84-98. Print.

Miller, Harold. “The Voice of God: Natural or Supernatural.” *Preaching in American History: Selected Issues in the Pulpit, 1630-1967*. Ed., DeWitte Holland. Nashville: Abindgon, 1971. 206-222. Print.

Minks, Tamara. “Maggie Johnson: An American in a Fallen Eden.” *Recovering Literature: A Journal of Contextual Criticism*. 16 (1988): 23-35. *ProQuest*. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 27 Jan. 2012.

Moody, Dwight Lyman. “Evening Sermon.” *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit 1630-1967*. Ed. DeWitte Holland. Nashville: Abingdon, 1971. 286-293. Print.

“New Books.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. October 31, 1877. Rpt. in *The Story of Avis*. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. Ed. Carol Farley Kessler. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1985. 273-274. Print.

Phelps, Austin. *The Theory of Preaching: Lectures on Homiletics*. New York, 1881. Print.

Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. *Chapters from a Life*. Boston, 1896. Print.

---*Beyond the Gates*. 1883. *Three Spiritualist Novels.* Ed. Nina Baym. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2000. 139-232. Print.

---.“Dressed to Kill.” *What to Wear?* Boston, 1873. 16-23. *Google Book Search*. Web. 31 Dec. 2011.

---. *The Gates Ajar.* 1868. *Three Spiritualist Novels.* Ed. Nina Baym. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2000. 1-138. Print.

---. *The Gates Between*. 1887. *Three Spiritualist Novels.* Ed. Nina Baym. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2000. 233-339. Print.

---. *Hedged In*. Boston, 1870. Print.

---. *The Silent Partner*. 1871. New York: Feminist, 1983. Print.

---. *A Singular Life*. Boston, 1895. Print.

---. *The Story of Avis*. Ed. Carol Farley Kessler. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1985. Print.

---. *The Story of Jesus Christ: An Interpretation*. New York, 1897. Print.

---. *Dr. Zay*. New York, 1882. *Google Book Search*. Web. 15 Nov. 2011.

---. *Though Life Us Do Part*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1908. *Google Book Search*. Web. 17 Jan. 2012.

---. *Trixy*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1904. *Google Book Search*. Web. 10 Nov. 2011.

Privett, Ronna Coffey. *A Comprehensive Study of American Writer Elzabeth Stuart Phelps,1844-1911: Art for Truth's Sake*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003. Print.

Rueckert, William. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1996. 105-123. Print.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. 1975. New York: Seabury, 1983. Print.

Scott, Sean A. "'Earth Has No Sorrow that Heaven Cannot Cure': Northern Civilian Perspectives on Death and Eternity During the Civil War." *Journal of Social History* 41.4 (Summer2008): 843-866. Print.

Shiva, Vandana. *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace.* Cambridge, MA: South End, 2005. Print.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York, Methuen, 1987. Print.

Stein, William Bysshe. "New Testament Inversions in Crane's *Maggie*. *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets.* Stephen Crane. Norton crit. ed. New York: Norton, 1979. 170-173. Print.

Streater, Kathleen M. “Adele Ratignolle: Kate Chopin’s Feminist at Home in *The Awakening*.” *Midwest Quarterly* 48.3 (Spring 2007): 406-416. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 10 Feb. 2012.

Tuttle, Jennifer S. “Letters from Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (Ward) to S. Weir Mitchell, M.D., 1884-1897.” *Legacy* 17.1 (2000): 83-94. *HighBeam Research*. Web. 2 Nov. 2011.

Twain, Mark. “Letters from Heaven.” *Letters from Heaven*. Ed. Bernard DeVoto. New York: Harper and Row, 1962. 11-55. Print.

---. “The Intelligence of God.” “The Damned Human Race.” *Letters from Heaven*. Ed. Bernard DeVoto. New York: Harper and Row, 1962. 174-175. Print.

Van Dyke, Henry. “Salt.” *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit 1630-1967*. Ed. DeWitte Holland. Nashville: Abingdon, 1971. 294-298. Print.

Wagner, Tamara S. “The Victorian Sermon Novel: Domesticated Spirituality and the Sermon’s Sensationalization.” *A New History of the Sermon: The Nineteenth* Century. Ed. Robert Ellison. Leiden, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2010. 309-340. *Google Book Search*. Web. 2 March 2012.

Walter, Richard D. *S. Weir Mitchell, M.D., Neurologist: A Medical Biography*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1970. Print.

Warren, Karen. *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000. Print.

Watson, William Lynn. "'The Facts Which Go to Form this Fiction': Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Silent Partner* and the *Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics Reports*." *College Literature* 29.4 (Fall 2002): 6-25. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 10 Oct. 2011.

Wehner, David Z. "'A Lot Up for Grabs': The Idiosyncratic, Syncretic Religious Temperament of Kate Chopin." *American Literary Realism* 43.2 (Winter 2011): 154-168. *ProQuest*. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 10 Feb. 2012.

Williams, Terry Tempest. *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. New York: Pantheon, 1991. Print.

Wills, Gary. *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992. Print.