The Metaphor of Syphilis in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Crux
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Citation
Poupart, J. (2022). *The Metaphor of Syphilis in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's The Crux*.

Version:	Not Applicable (or Unknown)
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Leiden University

The Metaphor of Syphilis in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Crux*

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MA Thesis Literary Studies (track English)

Literary Studies in English Literature and Culture

Submission Date: June 21, 2022

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> Girls aren't taught a word of what's before them till it's too late — not *then* sometimes! Women lose every joy in life, unambiguity every hope, every capacity for service or pleasure. They go down to their graves without anyone's telling them the cause of it all. (Gilman, *Crux* 238)[1]

Introduction

In *Illness as Metaphor* (1979), Susan Sontag writes that "illnesses have always been used as metaphors to enliven that a society was corrupt or unjust" (71-72). The diseases most often used as metaphors for evil, according to Sontag, are syphilis, tuberculosis, and cancer (58-59). Symptoms of syphilis, its transmission and effects on the body have been recognized for hundreds of years.[2] In the feminist discourse of the period in which Charlotte Perkins Gilman's novel, *The Crux* (1911), was published, syphilis, became a "scourge on the nation" and a "social evil" caused by the subjection of women. For example, in "A woman's question," published in *The Suffragette*, in 1913, Christabel Pankhurst wrote that, "[t]he cause of sexual disease is the subjection of women. Therefore, to destroy the one we must destroy the other" (219). The focus of this thesis is Gilman's *The Crux*, which was originally published serially, in the *Forerunner*, in 1911. This thesis combines the methodological tools of historiography and the theoretical framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, developed by Lakoff and Johnson, to examine the metaphor of syphilis in *The Crux*, and to critically explore the question: to what purpose does Gilman appropriate the metaphor of syphilis? This

[1] The *Forerunner* ran for seven volumes starting with the November 1909 issue and was discontinued after the December 1916 issue. In this paper, all the references cited for the *Forerunner* are taken from the 1968 Greenwood Reprint Corp publication in which the *Forerunner* was published in yearly volumes. All the volumes are available through HathiTrust.

[2] The literature on the history of syphilis is extensive. The topic has been approached by looking at social and cultural factors, representations and the discourses around the disease, as well as the actual pathology. See Monika Pietrzak-Franger, Syphilis in Victorian Literature and Culture: Medicine, Knowledge and the Spectacle of Victorian Invisibility. Springer, 2017; John Parascandola, Sex, Sin, and Science: A History of Syphilis in America. Praeger, 2008; Allan M. Brandt, No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880. Oxford University Press, 1985.

thesis argues that, in *The Crux,* syphilis is a potent metaphor for the subjection of women, emphasizes the inadequacies of the patriarchal medical practices and becomes an instrument for propagating Gilman's socioeconomic agenda and views on eugenics.

By the end of the Progressive Era, in America, the wealthier and better educated located the source of venereal disease in immigrants, non-whites, the "feeble-minded," and the lower classes (Schaefer 20). I will also argue that *The Crux* acts as a social document that reflects not only the fears of the syphilization of America, but also the growing marginalization of the social purity movement and the control over the social hygiene movement and eugenics, which stood at the intersection of many different movements during the Progressive Era. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the social hygiene movement eventually evolved into "public health." This intersection is exemplified in the social purist goal of ending the silence around sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases through sex education as part of a eugenic program (Pivar xvii). Gilman suggested the argument that syphilis could be eliminated through education and changes in social conditions and institutions. As such, she created texts that provided a template for women to move away from domestic service to what she termed world service, to participation in the wider economy, and to take on their role as mothers under the guise of eugenics.

In her biography of Gilman, Cynthia Davis states that Gilman was "a product of her times even as she helped to shape them" (xi). Gilman was a lecturer as well as a prolific writer and in addition to the novels, poems and short stories published in the *Forerunner*, she wrote eleven nonfiction works, an autobiography, and poetry. Gilman is the author of feminist texts which have been anthologized, such as "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), *Herland* (1915), and *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898). She wrote about syphilis in several different genres, among others, in *The Crux*, in the fable, "Wild Oats and Tame Wheat," the

short article “Some Sins are Worse than Others,” the short story “The Vintage,” and in reviews including Prince R. Morrow’s book, *Social Disease and Marriage* (1904).

According to Davis and Knight, despite the profusion of scholarship on Gilman’s work, Gilman was “misunderstood in her own day, [and is] also misunderstood in ours” (ix). Dock notes that the different criticisms over the past fifty years reflect the biases and values of the times in which they were produced. In *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (2000), Golden and Zangrando argue that “critics seem to have taken one of three stances toward Gilman’s writing, each mirroring their own social and critical period” (11-12). The early feminist critics in the 1970s treat Gilman’s work positively and praise Gilman’s vision of gender equality and universal suffrage. According to Dock, the arguments of the writers of this period were developed “to confirm their version of literary history as a patriarchal exclusion of women writers” (10). Critics in the 1990s did not steer away from problematic and contradictory elements in Gilman’s writing, such as her position on eugenics and “racism, anti-Semitism, and ethnocentricism” (Lane 2000 34). According to Tuttle and Kessler, more recent scholarship approaches Gilman’s work with a more balanced view and “more accurately historicized ways” in order to better understand Gilman and her writings (6).

In the “Introduction” to the 2003 Duke University Press edition of *The Crux*, Dana Seitler makes the argument for the critical examination of Gilman’s novel. Seitler categorizes the novel as “an important piece of work, for it complicates what we know about the feminist and eugenicist writings of the period and allows us to view Gilman’s body of work in a new fashion” (9). Seitler draws attention to the almost total absence of criticism and scholarly attention of *The Crux*. She cites the reasons for the neglect as the lack of availability of the novel, but perhaps also to an unwillingness to address some of the aspects that are troubling to the present-day reader in the works of a feminist foremother. Another reason for the lack

of scholarly interest in *The Crux* is expressed by Ann J. Lane. In Lane's evaluation, although Gilman was a prodigious writer, much of the writing lacked literary value and could have "benefited from editing and rewriting" (1990 5). Lane notes that although Gilman's influence persists today, with the exception of a few titles, much of her work and writings are largely unknown. Lane cautions that ignoring Gilman's *The Crux* also ignores "how it addresses, clearly and remarkably, the insecurities over contagion and disease that were rampant at the fin-de-siècle" (1990 3).

The aim of this thesis is to add to the scholarship of Gilman as a political activist, by focusing on *The Crux*, a novel that has not received as much scholarly attention compared to Gilman's other works. In the following chapters, I will discuss the metaphor of syphilis in a selection of Gilman's fiction, including those published in the *Forerunner* between 1909 and 1916. Syphilis and prostitution have been widely discussed by social and medical historians as well as art and literary critics. The focus of the discussion will concentrate on the novel *The Crux*.

This thesis is divided in three chapters. In Chapter I, "Gilman, a Reformer and a Product of the Progressive Era," the historical context of the Progressive Era is presented and places Gilman in her time. In Chapter II, "Gilman's Linguistic Madness with a Method: Allegories, Euphemisms, Dysphemisms, and Metaphors," the discussion identifies characteristics of allegories, euphemisms, dysphemisms, and metaphors that can be used to identify and analyze the metaphors in *The Crux*. Various models describing the nature of metaphor have been put forward and the definitions of metaphor are associated with a multitude of theories about how metaphors are used and understood. The discussion will be founded on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as developed by Lakoff and Johnson. In addition, the purpose, whether rhetorical or stylistic, and the functions will be discussed. There are many theoretical approaches to study metaphors. Most approaches view the

structure and nature of metaphors as being similar. Overall, metaphors are classified in three classes: structural, functional, and semantic. In *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Lakoff and Johnson propose a cognitive theory of metaphor and identify metaphors as not just a characteristic of language but of thought itself. As such, they propose that metaphors emerge from both physical and cultural experience; they act as tools to conceptualize reality; and metaphors influence behaviour. This thesis concentrates on the social function of metaphors, that is their rhetorical function or the ability to persuade. According to Trčková Dita, metaphors are an “effective ideological weapon” because of their mapping structure from one domain to another, which results in a focus or highlighting of some aspects while at the same time ignoring others (29). The final chapter, “What Every Girl Should Know,” offers a short history of the *Forerunner* as well as a close reading of the metaphor of syphilis in *The Crux*. The discussion is focused on syphilis, which Gilman presents as a metaphor for the subjection of women. The conclusions will offer a summary of and critical reflection on the arguments presented in the thesis and possible further research.

Chapter I: Gilman, a Reformer and a Product of the Progressive Era

Despite Gilman's views of radical social changes, her writings appear to be shaped both by the period in which she lived, as well as being rooted in her own racial and class biases and the "separate sphere" ideology of domestic virtue, understood as the angel in the house, based on female purity and moral supremacy (Walkowitz 135). The complex, mixed legacy of Gilman has left scholars portray a woman who was "both of her time and ahead of it" (Horowitz 10). This chapter discusses the conditions that characterize the Progressive Era, the period in which Gilman was writing. The objective is to discuss the social and economic conditions that possibly had an influence on her work, as well as to illustrate at the same time how she influenced change.

The Progressive Era, in American history, spanned from the 1890s to the 1920s. Researchers in different fields of study, such as sociology, political history, and literature break down this period according to their own perspectives and expertise. In political science, the period between the 1890s and the 1930s is identified as the "Fourth Party System." This period began with an economic depression in 1893 followed by a long period of prosperity. Social and economic historians define the era as the "Gilded Age" (1870-1900). The characterization of the period, by these historians, includes increased immigration and urbanization, followed by a period of rapid economic growth and industrialization. Along with these changes, came political polarization, along with poverty and an increase in racial, social and gender inequality. America also saw a lowering of the birth rate.

American literature of 1870 to 1945 is divided into two somewhat overlapping periods. Scholars identify the literature of the first period (1870 to 1910) as Realism and Naturalism. The literature of this period depicts real conditions. The second period (1910 to 1945) is identified as the Modernist period. Literary scholars describe the literature of this period as marked by an intentional break with tradition. Feminist scholars identify the period of the late

nineteenth and early twentieth century as "first wave feminism." During this period, feminists' activities were focused on access to education, property rights and suffrage which women obtained nationally in America in 1920.

With the growing social inequities of the reconstruction in the post-Civil War period and the suffering during the depression of the 1890's, social movements arose to counterbalance the injustices and economic inequities. Progressivism represented an increase of state intervention toward reaching common goals and in terms of collective destiny of America rather than the success of the individual. The movements of the period had their own agendas and goals. Overall, the different movements had a wide range of ideologies and frequently put forth the same reforms for different reasons. Their overall aim was to improve the social, moral and political situation in America. It was commonly believed that "Protestant moralism that could be justified through scientific disciplines such as statistics, sociology, and psychology" would secure not just a better future for themselves but a better future for America (Link & McCormick 21-24).

The Progressive Era is a period in American history characterized in part by the "movements" of the time which targeted social progress as well as demanding access to what was believed to be the American Dream of freedom and opportunity for all (Ekirch & Mazal Holocaust).[3] In her autobiography, Gilman lists some of the movements of the period in which she wrote:

> In my youth the world was full of "Movements", of an eager massing together to work for "causes". There was the Labour Movement, the Temperance Movement, the Woman's Suffrage Movement, the Dress Reform Movement, a general movement toward better methods of education, from the Kindergarten to

[3] In *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (Oxford University Press, 2004), Jim Cullen describes the American Dream as a "mythic power" (7), "an idea that seems to envelop us as unmistakably as the air we breathe" (10), and "closely bound up with freedom" (9). He identifies multiple dreams. What is called the "American Dream' is a theme in many works of American literature.

> University Extension, and a broad, deep, liberalizing of religion. There was the Society of Cruelty to Animals, and another to protect children–the state reaching out at last to recognize children, not as property of the parents. There was the Organization of Charities, steps in prison reform and in the care of the Insane; a demand for right teaching of children as to sex, and for an equal standard of chastity, equalized up, not down; there was that wide-spread educator, the Woman's Club. (*Living* 234-235)[4]

According to Davis, one reason why Gilman did not identify herself with the different movements led by more affluent college-educated women was that she never felt at home with them because of her lack of formal education (44). Gilman attended school for only four years, in seven different schools. It is also possible that her never feeling at home was due to her chronic lack of money and not actually ever having a real home herself, of being "at large" for years. According to Davis's calculations, taken from the information in Gilman's autobiography, during her childhood Gilman moved almost yearly, for a total of nineteen times, often changing town and state (21). From the time she left California until she settled in New York, Gilman described herself as being "at large" because she had no fixed address (*Living* 181).

Although Gilman shared and preached the ideals of various movements of her time, especially nationalism, she always retained a distance from them. Gilman expressed concerns about "suffrage's narrow focus, socialism's revolutionary ideology, progressivism's practical agenda, and feminism's self-absorption" (Davis xix). According to Davis, Gilman joined the Purity Movement in part to join in the criticize of women's economic dependence in marriage

[4] Gilman's concerns with child welfare and the child saving movement are somewhat neglected in the criticism of her works. In 1900, 18 percent of all American workers were under the age of 16. The first US federal child labor law was in 1916. The age of consent in 1880, were set at 10 or 12 in most states, (Delaware was 7). According to Thornton Grimm's article "Forerunners for a Domestic Revolution: Jane Addams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and the Ideology of Childhood, 1900-1916," the age of consent was raised during the late 19th century and the early 20th century as well as the age at which children could work (57).

but also to "forage a niche for herself" (219). The Social Purity Movement, which supported the campaigns to eliminate venereal disease and other "social evils" such as drunkenness and prostitution, peaked between 1905 and 1917 and left a lasting imprint on the feminist movement (Walkowitz 130). The movement was first formed in opposition to the legislation enacted to force the regulation of prostitution. It eventually transcended the legal and moral issues related to prostitution and sexually transmitted disease, such as syphilis. The movement also fought for justice for women (Pivar). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Burnham explains, discussion of sex-related topics was socially prohibited and often met with "silence" (886). References to "sex-related matters," such as pregnancy, prostitution and social diseases were blanked in figurative speech such as "euphemism" and metaphor (Burnham 886). In America, this period was under the legislation of what became known as the Comstock Laws.[5] These laws were passed to stop the production and distribution of literature and objects that were considered immoral and degenerate. Pamphlets and papers, including personal letters, that were produced and distributed with information or references to abortion, birth control and contraceptives, as well as venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea, were included in the list of banned obscene material.[6]

In the "Forward" to Gilman's autobiography, Zona Gale states that Gilman "never thought of suffrage for women as anything more than one iron in the fire" (xxxvii). By keeping "many irons in the fire," Gilman not only widened her audience and appeal but also managed to keep afloat financially. Gilman preached to earn a living. During the period she lived in California, lecturing was Gilman's principal livelihood. Gilman's autobiography sometimes reads more like an account book of payments made and not made for speeches and publications. After the success of *Women and Economics,* which Gilman says launched

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[5] The first law, titled Act for the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use, was passed in 1873 and overturned in 1938.
[6] For an extensive discussion of this law see: "Comstock Act: United States [1873]"; https://www.britannica.com/science/abortion-pregnancy; accessed 20 June 2022.

her career, she reports her profits: “For two in Boston I got $87.00, for another $25.00, and from the *Saturday Evening Post*, for several editorials, $48.00; from the *Puritan*, $25.00. By October, a grand total of $231.56” (271). Gilman even provides an accountancy of her life in terms of a spreadsheet of productivity and losses. In writing her autobiography, she accounts for fifteen years of productivity and the loss of forty-two years due to mental illness (103).

That Gilman kept many irons in the fire is exemplified by the groups she addressed. She preached suffrage to women’s groups, the Principal of Socialism to socialists, she preached to Girl Clubs, she preached the Social Gospel in Presbyterian, Baptist, and sometimes Unitarian churches in the morning and Congregational churches in the evening, in Methodist churches, and to coloured Woman’s Clubs. Later in her career, she lectured and preached to various groups and audiences across the United States, Europe, England and Scotland. According to Gale, Gilman “preached all her life the unity of man and the need for human growth” (xlv). Gilman proposed that human growth would improve society.

In her autobiography, Gilman states that she “never accepted the narrow and rigid ‘economic’ determinism of Marx” and that “the basic need of economic independence seemed to me far more important than the ballot” (131). Gilman identified herself not as a reformer but as a philosopher (182). Her social philosophy was grounded in Reform Darwinism and her greatest affinities were with nationalism and eugenics. According to Davis, Gilman believed that chastity is a natural state and with a resetting of the sexuo-economic situation, society could evolve towards “true freedom and collective growth” (219). Davis summarizes Gilman’s position and is worthy of quoting:

> Instead of sexual indulgence, Charlotte yearned during the 1920s for an “equal standard of chastity” for both men and women. She proposed a standard set in her own youth, one that required men to come up to women’s level for a change. She believed that men’s sexual dominance and aggressiveness needed to be checked,

> not indulged, if "the sexuo-economic relation" was ever to be corrected and if men and women ever wanted to experience true freedom, mutual fulfilment, and individual and collective growth. (219)

Gilman was strongly influenced by Lester Ward and his theory of gynaecocracy in which it is proposed that the female was the primary species and the male secondary (in contrast with androcentrism that proposes male superiority from the beginning).[7]

Gilman was well-read and was versed in the contemporary literature of the period. In her autobiography, she writes of visiting and lecturing at Stanford University and "how delightful it was to be among educated people again, bookish people, and to be treated with respect and friendliness" (176). For Gilman, Darwinism provided a template in order to questions the naturalism of patriarchy and female subjection. Gilman turned to Darwinism to illustrate the different domestic and sexual arrangements in nature that resulted from evolution. Gilman theorized that the sexuo-economic relationship that had developed between men and women with the resulting gender inequity resulted because of excessive sex differentiation. Women were not considered human, but rather as women, as Davis also emphasises in her biography. Gilman wrote that "social evolution is as natural as any other kind. It is promoted by individuals. If I am one of them, and needed at this time, I shall be enabled to function. That means living, and that means money-enough to live on" (185). Gilman did not ground her ideas of social change in feminism and maintained that her humanitarian socialism was the basis of her philosophy. She maintained that this philosophy would serve society better and "was of the early humanitarian kind" (131). In her autobiography, she describes her purpose:

[7] See Ward's place in sociology and his theory of the emergency of androcracy in James Chriss, "The Place of Lester Ward among the Sociological Classics." *Journal of Classical Sociology*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2006, pp. 5–21.

> Full of passion for world improvement and seeing the position of women as responsible for much, very much, of our evil position, I had been studying it for years as a problem of instant importance. The political equality demanded by the suffragists was not enough to give real freedom. Women whose industrial position is that of house-servant, or who do no work at all, who are fed, clothed, and given pocket-money by men, do not reach freedom and equality by the use of the ballot. (235)

Gilman argued that women, whose "industrial position is that of house-servant," would remain in a position of economic dependence despite suffrage. She proposed women's education, full participation in the economy and economic independence for women.

The period between 1890 and 1920 also saw the emergence of the "New Woman." The New Woman was not a movement per se but rather both a cultural phenomenon and a literary figure.[8] It was an idealization of women and beauty in part through cultural representations, such as fashion and activities such as cycling, and in literature of what woman could be. Winnifred Cooley, writing in 1904, described the New Woman, who had come of age between 1890 and 1920:

> The new woman, in the sense of the best woman, the flower of all the womanhood of past ages, has come to stay — if civilization is to endure. The sufferings of the past have but strengthened her, maternity has deepened her, education is broadening her — and she now knows that she must perfect herself if she would perfect the race, and leave her imprint upon immortality, through her offspring or her works. (Cooley, Catt, & NAWSA 32)

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[8] For a discussion on New Woman writings see Ann Heilmann's *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism*. Macmillan, 2000. For a definition of New Woman see Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*. Manchester University Press, 1997.

The New Woman novel developed from the early feminists' demands for reforms of the marital relationship and women's role in the professional and social world among others.[9] In present day terms, "New Woman" would be considered as "branding": American native, young, white, middle or upper class, autonomous, educated, independent, physical fit and sexually autonomous. With increasing freedom, the "New Woman" persona saw herself mirroring the social and cultural changes of women's conditions, but also as a driving force and guarantee for its continuance. In this sense, the cultural and social movements not only reflect, but in part also shape the literary landscape of the period. The term "New Woman" is used to categorize the novels of many female (and some male) writers of the period who wrote not only of their own aspirations but also reflected the attitudes and ideals of the New Woman. The majority questioned society's prescribed norms for women which included marriage and motherhood and argued for political rights within eugenics, civic motherhood, and questioned the public and private sphere ideology. The New Woman novels addressed the marriage question, the female body and sexuality, motherhood and education for women at the same time as taking part in changing their meanings

Three influential New Women authors were Olive Schreiner, Sarah Grand, and Mona Caird.[10] Heilmann argues that Kate Chopin, who wrote *The Awakening* (1899), "captured a moment of transition in the cultural and medical conceptualisation of female sexuality" (90). In addition, Heilmann argues that Sarah Grand, who wrote *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), and

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[9] The origin of the term New Woman originates in feminist literature from the 1880s and 1890s. Grand offers the "cow-woman" (subservient), "scum woman" (sexually exploited), and "new woman" (freedom emerging women) to classify women's conditions (271). See Sarah Grand, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question." *The North American Review*, vol. 158, no. 448, 1894, pp. 270–76.

[10] Gilman, after separation from her first husband, moved to California, and began her career by writing poetry. During these years of "drifting" in California, Gilman carried two books, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Olive Schreiner's *Dreams.* Gilman based the design of the cover of her 1893 poetry book *In This Our World,* on Shreiner's *Three Dreams in a Desert* (*Our World* 168). Gilman was an admirer of Schreiner and wrote a review of Schreiner's *Women and Labour* in the July 1911 edition of *The Forerunner* in which she describes Schreiner a having a great mind and the ability to "clarify and rearrange the world's thoughts" (197). Gilman wrote in a 1930 letter that Schreiner was "one of the greatest women of her age, far greater than I in literary power" (Gilman, Knight, & Tuttle 275).

Gilman, who wrote and published "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), used fiction to explore female sexuality, subjectivity, and repressive social practices. The female characters in Gilman's novels epitomize the New Woman. The characters in her fiction are white, and usually middle class, and reflect the aspiration of this class of women who had increasing choice and economic and racial privilege. However, as Rich comments, throughout the course of her career the characters in Gilman's fiction, "also increasingly revealed nativist or racist sentiments by today's standards that indicate how enmeshed she was in the social thought of her era" (22).

Disregarding warnings of having "thoughts" and "unnatural sensations," or worse, losing virginity, the New Woman took to the newly designed and engineered bicycle and gained mobility and a new freedom of dress. The New Woman gained movement. Other advances in technology at the turn of the century and the early twentieth century brought mass-production by assembly lines, the automobile, the airplane, and the radio. With the use of dark-field microscopy during the first decade of the twentieth century, medical research identified the cause of syphilis as the bacteria *Treponema pallidum*. Following shortly after, the Wassermann test was developed for serologic diagnosis, and salvarsan was prescribed as an effective treatment of syphilis. Did these medical discoveries leave the proponents of the argument that syphilis was the cause of women's subjugation without an argument? According to Burnham, for the social purist, the new scientific discoveries about the cause and treatment of syphilis, "suggested that it might be eradicated if control and social conditions permitted" (907). Control and changed social conditions, for Gilman, meant eugenics and women's economic freedom. Gilman preached that a redefinition of women's roles were central to social progress.

During the Progressive Era, growing urbanization, increase in immigration, and changing work conditions resulted in a lack of housing and as many as a half of all

nineteenth-century urbanites lived in boarding houses, which appeared to be the antithesis of home and the American Dream (Gamber 1). In *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America* (2007), Wendy Gamber recalls that social commentators of the period "imbued material structures with moral meanings" and "papered over class inequalities by turning economic categories into moral ones" (7). Boarding houses were often coloured by reformers with immorality, vice, prostitution, promiscuity and, as for syphilis and gonorrhea, as a site of contamination. Gamber argues that, "Relocated to the marketplace, housewifery underwent a kind of magical, albeit malevolent, transformation" by performing work that usually done unpaid in the home became a marketplace commodity in the boarding house (8). For Gamber, if prostitution placed women on the marketplace, boarding houses did the same but in more subtle ways. Boarding houses were small businesses. Paying for domestic services in a boarding house, usually delivered by the unpaid wife in a home, contrasted with the ideal of the angel in the home; the woman was an angel because she was in a home, not a boarding house.

The Progressives "made the first efforts to grapple with the ills of a modern urban-industrial society" including boarding houses, diseases such as syphilis, and prostitution (Link & McCormick 3). Boarding houses appear frequently in Gilman's novels and short stories. She appears optimistically to transform the space into one of economic freedom for women. In "Living and the Social Leader," Gilman offers a template for communal living (46-49). She also advocated apartment hotels, especially for professional women who were not interested in keeping house.

In the United States, during the Progressive Era, Gilman is cited as the foremost white feminist theorist of her generation (Ammons 193). Link and McCormick argue that progressives sought both social justice and social control (69). In *The Crux*, Gilman espoused both aims. *The Crux* represents one of Gilman's literary "contribution" to the Social Purity

movement which sought justice for women (Davis 304). Gilman advertised *The Crux* as “a novel along eugenic lines” suggesting a call for control (Davis 303).

Conclusions

This chapter discussed the different movements of the Progressive Era. During the Progressive Era, the concerns were over national degeneration and contagion by prostitution, sexual disease and women’s newfound liberation. Gilman identified herself not as a reformer but as a philosopher and as such preached on the importance of reform to improve on human growth which would lead America to a better and healthier future. Her social philosophy was grounded in Reform Darwinism and her greatest affinities were with nationalism and eugenics. Gilman’s belief in eugenics supported some of the feminist thoughts of the period. Gilman subscribed to the progressive principal that advancement would be made through popular science, specifically eugenics. Gilman’s premise was that women could be liberated through a eugenics discipline. Her writings, specifically *The Crux*, do not only reflect the ideas of progress and gender but actively participate in the development of their meanings. Gilman’s model of social progress was that of a white, middle-class motherhood, based on eugenic principles. In the next chapter, I will discuss the tools Gilman used to put forth her arguments for both control and justice.

> Ideas make words, but words remake ideas. A word is an outward and visible, or audible, form of an inward and spiritual thought or feeling, and, like other forms, steadily reacts on the spirit within it. (Gilman, "Fighting" 16)

Chapter II: Gilman's Linguistic Madness with a Method: Allegory, Euphemism, Dysphemism, and Metaphor

In "Rhetoric and Reform in the Progressive Era," J. Michael Hogan argues that the reforms of the Progressive Era were grounded in an "implicit faith in the power of words to change the world for the better" (xiii). The many novels that were published by novelist-reformers during this era support the contention that reformists created fiction as an agent of social change. Gilman does not appear naïve, however, as to the limitation of words to change social practices and institutions. According to Gilman:

> It is natural for the brain to receive and hold any impression presented to it, if not flatly contradicted by previous knowledge; and if impressions be long entertained is not easy to change it. Furthermore, by the law of association of ideas, when one has been held a long time, it becomes so mixed and mingled with many others that to remove one pulls on long roots, as it were, and shakes them all. ("Some Results" 271)

Although Gilman does not discuss what she considers the law of association of ideas, she targets beliefs, custom and dogmatism as putting the brakes on human development. In her autobiography, Gilman admits that although she was surprised by the positive reception of so many of her works: "One cannot undertake to alter the ideas, feelings and habits of the people and expect them to like it" (308). She admits her intention to "alter" ideas, and uses the tools available to any author: words and literary devices such as metaphors. According to Rorty, metaphor could be considered a "linguistic" tool that could be used either to tear down or to build up and support certain beliefs and values. As such, according to Rorty, the metaphor:

> allows the user to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby, causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behavior for example, the adoption of … new social institutions. (9)

This Chapter will discuss the figurative devises Gilman employed to develop her themes and to create an effect on her readers, that is to say, to persuade or to offer new insight. The focus of this chapter is on Gilman's use of metaphors, however, allegories, euphemisms and dysphemisms are also discussed to support the argument of this thesis. The following sections will provide a definition of allegory, euphemism, dysphemism and metaphor. Examples of these are taken from various texts by Gilman, including poems and epigraphs, short articles, suffrage songs, and short novels such as "The Yellow Wallpaper," perhaps the best-known of Gilman's stories by contemporary readers.

2.1 Allegory

In *Allegory*, Jeremy Tambling, underscores the broad understanding of allegory and concludes that, "perhaps there is no definite thing called 'allegory', only forms of writing more or less 'allegorical'" (2). Tambling writes that allegory can be considered both "a mode of writing or speaking rhetoric, and as a form of interpretation" (2).[11] Deborah Madsen in "American Allegory to 1900" reiterates Tambling's view that allegory functions in two dominant forms: "as a style of writing or rhetoric but also as a way of reading" (229). The style of *The Crux* can be considered highly rhetorical, and not only allows for an allegorical reading, as Seitler argues in the introduction to the text. Seitler maintains that "*The Crux* can be read as an allegory of the changing political and social anxieties of the early twentieth century" ("Introduction" 4). Allegories can be considered extended metaphors and

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[11] Tambling also conclude that "there is now no consensus on how to approach it" (2).

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposes that common conceptual metaphors can create the base of allegory, "when applied to the structure of the plot" (Turner n.p.). In *The Crux,* the metaphor of syphilis becomes the story's main focus.[12] According to many critics, the sexual double standard and syphilis are the most powerful reiterations and themes that pervades Gilman's canon of work (Beer & Heilmann, 2002; Davis & Knight, 2004; Showalter, 1986).

According to Seitler, Gilman played with generic literary conventions "as a means to grapple with ideological ones" (3). In the *Forerunner,* Gilman subverted a wide range of genres, such as sermons, mystery stories, book reviews, commentaries, utopian novels, romance, and fantasy novels, and parable, as well as allegories to construct a "feminist polemic" (Cranny-Francis 163). Allegory is a mode of expression that relies on metaphor and is an ideal vehicle for articulating ideas and arguments presenting complex moral and political issues. Allegory can perform a function of disambiguation as well. According to Harris and Tolmie, allegories are "prototypically a didactic narrative in which abstractions are realized concretely, through topification and/or personification" (111).[13] Gilman uses the allegorical technique of personification, in the *The Crux*, with two of the characters, Vivian and Morton. Vivian, represents a concept or a type, that is to say the New Woman. Vivian, the "heroine" of the story, personifies the situation of women under patriarchy and the path she takes and the eugenic choice she makes stands for the choice all women must make to ensure a progressive American state. Morton, the infected man Vivian eventually rejects, personifies syphilis.

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[12] It is important to differentiate allegory and symbol which is a literary device used in the creation of the allegorical text.

[13] Harris and Tolmie loosely describe personification as "concepts that walk and talk" (for example anthropomorphized animals in fables), and topifictation as "conceptually laden landscapes" (for example, a garden) and that both devices are used mostly "within the frame of a journey or quest" (112).

In referring to Gilman's fictional writing, Gough and Rudd offer the following observation: "Metaphors of infection and sickness permeate these texts and others, conveying Gilman's message that conventional marriage debilitates women and that a body politic that is sick produces physically and psychologically diseased and disabled individuals" ("Introduction" 4).[14] Gilman's fiction is faulted by several critics for being overly didactic, that is to say, moralizing and perhaps even hectoring (Fisher; Knight; Lane and Pantheon; Núñez Puente; Rudd and Gough; Thrailkill). In *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1997) Denise Knight criticizes Gilman's writings in that "artistry was always subordinated to message" (4). Knight states that other criticism of Gilman's fiction is that it is "uneven in quality and defies easy classification within the arbitrary categories by which American literature is currently [1997] defined" (3). Gilman alone is not singled out for the lack of literary quality. Wadsworth underlines that "many critics over the years have faulted reform fiction, 'problem novels', and protest literature for their privileging of didacticism over aesthetics" (5). Gilman turned to allegory as a tool to hide and simultaneously reveal a message concerning the pressing social issue, or the "open secret" of syphilis.

2.2 Euphemisms

The Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory defines euphemism as the "substitution of an offensive or disagreeable term by one considered more acceptable" (257). Moritz elaborates on the usage of euphemisms as "words or expressions used instead of concepts belonging to taboo, concepts that are too direct, too embarrassing, or

[14] Gilman's fictional writing such as "The Vintage," the story of a syphilitic man, marrying despite medical advice and the resulting consequences of stillbirth, miscarriage, and deformed children and eventually the death of his infected wife, and *The Crux*, a story of a young woman's decision not to marry a man infected with syphilis.

communicatively, contextually or situationally inadequate for different reasons" (55).[15] Gilman, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, writes in the poem "Unmentionable" that:

> There is a thing of which I fain would speak,
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> Yet shun the deed;
>
> Lest hot disgust flush the averted cheek
>
> Of those who read. (Gilman, "Unmentionable" 69)

"Unmentionable" is a poem written by Gilman, in 1894. The "unmentionable" act is the unsanitary habit of spitting! Euphemisms for sex, considered a taboo, as well as venereal diseases considered an embarrassing topic, are abundant. Through the ages, and in different countries, syphilis has been euphemistically described as the "French Disease," the "Spanish Disease," the "Polish Disease," the "Turkish Disease," the "British Disease," and even in Japan as the "Chinese pox."[16] The euphemisms for syphilis cited display verbal evasion and the intention of the speaker to blame or to avoid responsibility by projecting the blame on a foreign nation or group. Euphemisms are used to disguise unpleasant truths, veil offences, and to avoid offence and indecency. Syphilis is euphemistically described as a venereal disease and social disease.[17]

The reader of "The Yellow Wallpaper" would be hard pressed to find direct euphemisms for syphilis. The word syphilis is never written or spoken of directly in "The Yellow Wallpaper". Women of the Victorian and Progressive Era had learned repression, not

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[15] Menstruation is taboo and rarely mentioned in fiction. Gilman, in the short article "His Share" uses the euphemism of "disability": "You know what women have to bear. You know the regular recurrence of annoyance and distress, greater or less, almost one week out of four—a quarter of the time—for the whole "bearing period" of women, amounting to some eight years—eight years of life spent bearing that disability, which is also excessive and unnatural, owing to our ancestor' misdeeds" (Gilman, "His Share" 294-295).

[16] In the literature the fact that syphilis has been a stigmatized, disgraceful disease and has been described using various euphemisms is noted. For example, see M. Tampa et al., "Brief history of syphilis." *Journal of Medicine and Life,* vol. 7, no. 1, 2014 pp 4-10.

[17] In 2022, syphilis is recognized as a "sexually transmitted disease" (STD), a medical category that now contains many other diseases. As an acronym STD acts as a euphemism. STD is thought of as a "medical" problem rather than a grave "moral" problem. In contemporary literature a STD is acquired not through "moral depravity" but by "unprotected sex." The outdated euphemism "social disease" is used sometimes humorously.

expression and perhaps the "ultimate euphemism" is silence (Epstein 56). In recounting the story and the woman's experiences in "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman is "saying the unsayable" by using euphemisms. Consider for example the text: "And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed [that was nailed to the floor] and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head" (12). After being "gathered … up in his arms, and just carried … upstairs and laid … on the bed" is the reader to understand that "read to me till it tired my head" is a euphemism for sex? Understanding euphemisms (and dysphemisms) depend on the consideration of the context in which a word is used, and the recognition of the intention of the speaker (Denis n.p.). I would argue that the euphemism in the passage cited above is "and sat by me." The understanding of "and sat by me," is a euphemism for sexual continence. Social purity demanded the sexual continence of both sexes and demanded the same standards of purity for men as had been demanded for women and the ending of the double moral standard (Gilman, *Our World* 75).[18] The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" also says that "John is away all day and even some nights when his cases are serious" and "John is kept in town very often by serious cases." What were John's serious cases and what was John doing in town? Was he a "John" of one of the brothels or prostitutes? John imposes sexual continence on his wife illustrated by the words "and sat by me," but his own sexual continence is questionable.

It is somewhat ironic that the Social Purity movement, dedicated not only to the eradication of venereal diseases and the double standard, but education on sex would be named "social purity", a euphemism for sexual chastity. The Social Purity Movement took advantage of the progressivist inclination towards social change in order to legislate morality and promote eugenic practice. What does social purity mean besides chastity? Does it also mean socially pure understood as white, middle to upper class, and able-bodied?

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[18] See Gilman's poem "To Man," for the advice of continence to men.

In the next section, dysphemisms, the opposites of euphemisms will be discussed.

2.3 Dysphemisms

A dysphemism is an "expression with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum or to the audience, or both, and it is substituted for a neutral or euphemistic expression for just that reason" (Denis 6).[19] Gilman uses the term housewife in the poem "The Housewife":

> My mind is trodden in circles, tiresome, narrow and hard,
> Useful, commonplace, private—simply a small back-yard;
> And I the Mother of Nations!—Blind their struggle and vain!—
> I cover the earth with my children—each with a housewife's brain.
> (Gilman, "The Housewife" 12)

Is "housewife" in Gilman's suffrage song a dysphemism? In the poem "The Housewife," having the world covered with children who have the brain of a housewife does not appear to be a desirable objective for a society that was patriarchal and misogynistic, if one accepts this description of society during the late Victorian and Progressive Era.

A dysphemism is not just calling "a spade a spade." The intention of the speaker is to make things sound worse than they are (Enright 3). The word "housewife" is a dysphemism in that it is a betrayal and denial of humanity and personhood.[20] As Gilman writes in *The Home*: "[a] house does not need a wife any more than it needs a husband" (100). Gilman argued that women were humans not just "house servants," which she uses as a dysphemism. In her autobiography, she states that her seeing that "the position of women as responsible for

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[19] Although Gilman wanted to convince, she adapted her language to her audience. In *The Man-Made World,* she begins her book with "Let us begin, inoffensively, with sheep" (9). Also, she never aborded the subject of lesbianism, although Gilman was bisexual. The women in *Herland* do not have sex.

[20] Words such as "worm food" (for a dead person), "fag" (homosexual), "cunt," and "bitch" (for women) are dysphemisms that deny humanness as well.

much, very much, of our evil position" encouraged her to write *Women and Economics*. But what exactly is "our evil position" of which she writes? In the January 1910 edition of the *Forerunner*, she elaborates:

> …we may distinguish the diseases due to bad air, to bad food, and that cruel mischief we are now only beginning to discuss—the diseases directly due to the relations between men and women. We are the only race where the female depends on the male for a livelihood. We are the only race that practices prostitution. From the first harmless-looking but abnormal general relation, follows the well-recognized evil of the second, so long called "a social necessity" and from it, in deadly sequence, comes the "wages of sin;" death not only of the guilty, but of the innocent. (*Man-Made World* 24)

In her song "Reassurance," she reiterates the "women as evil" dysphemism:

> Eve and Pandora!–always you begin it–
> The ancients called her Sin and Shame and Death.
> "There is no evil without woman in it,"
> The modern proverb saith. (15)

Gilman turned "There is no evil without woman in it," into "There is no evil without woman's subjection in it" and the "evil" of syphilis becomes a compelling part of reframing the argument. Susan Sontag explains that "throughout the nineteenth century, disease metaphors became more virulent, preposterous, demagogic. And there is an increasing tendency to call any situation one disapproves of a disease" (74). According to her, feelings about evil are projected onto a disease and "the disease (so enriched with meanings) is projected onto the world" (58). The next section of this chapter will discuss the metaphor.

2.4 Metaphors

In terms of cognitive processes, metaphors are understood as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 5).[21] According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphors, rather than thought of as language, should be considered as a manner in which thought and reason occur. The critical and theoretical literature on metaphor is extensive and crosses many disciplines and approaches. The classification of metaphors has been made using various perspectives. Cognitive linguists Lakoff and Johnson identify three categories of conceptual metaphors: "orientational" (spatial relations such as up/down, on/off, for example "he is on his game today"), "ontological" (treats an abstract object as a physical object, for example "it takes a heap of praise"), and "structural" (more complex experiences use terms of more simple experience, the example used by Lakoff and Johnson is "argument is war," in which argument is discussed in terms of war) (5). In *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag identifies and describes three categories of metaphor: personality, punishment, and warfare. In this chapter, taking the inspiration from Lakoff and Johnson and Sontag, three analytic strands for analysing metaphors in Gilman's writings are delineated: (1) spatialities, (2) temporalities, and (3), practices.

Language theorists also have provided a variety of functions for metaphors, including, "explaining, clarifying (or obscuring), describing, expressing, evaluating and entertaining" (Knowles and Moon 4). Metaphor is a characteristic of persuasive discourse. Gilman's fiction was written with the intent of persuasion (Davis and Knight; Rudd and Gough). This section of the thesis will argue that the metaphor of syphilis in Gilman's work, and specifically as will be detailed in Chapter III, performs a function of disambiguation. In Gilman's fiction the metaphor of syphilis brings together the various facets of a complex notion, that is to say, the

[21] Zoltán Kövecses, in *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation,* reiterates much of Lakoff and Johnson's idea. He presents metaphors as consisting of a source (more physical, for example a journey) and a target (more abstract, for example love) domain. This gives the metaphor that "love is a journey."

subjection of women. I would agree with Thrailkill, that "effects, in other words, trump meanings" (525). However a text like "The Yellow Wallpaper" is understood, it has an effect in that it challenges the "traditional ways of seeing the world and woman's place in it" (Shumaker 598). The "woman's place" that Shumaker refers to has a large range of metaphorical meanings. In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss the metaphor of "place" or what I categorize as spatialities.

2.4.1 Spatialities

Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate that "most of our fundamental concepts are organized in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors" (17). The authors argue that these metaphors "are not arbitrary and have a basis in physical and cultural experiences (14).[22] In order to accommodate the audience of women, Gilman used the house as metaphor, not only of women's subjection but also as a site of contamination of syphilis. In *The Man-Made World*; *or our Androcentric Culture,* Gilman writes:

> The house is the physical expression of the limitations of women; and as such it fills the world with a small drab ugliness. A dwelling house is rarely a beautiful object. In order to be such, it should truly express simple and natural relations; or grow in larger beauty as our lives develop. (22)

Gilman argues that the home should reflect and "truly express simple and natural relations" between men and women.

Although Gilman creates an effect with the description of the barred windows, and the gate at the head of the stairs of the house in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the description of the housewife's place in the poem "To the Young Wife*"* as "that narrow place," and

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[22] Lakoff and Johnson also state that "[w]e do not know very much about the experiential basis of metaphors. However, we feel that no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis" (20).

"restricted palace," her main argument is that "the home need be neither a prison, a workhouse, nor a consuming fire" ("Young Wife" 13). In *The Home, its Work and Influence* (1903), Gilman argues,

> The home, which is so far from beautiful, so wearing on the nerves and dulling to the heart, the home life that means care and labour and disappointment, the quiet, unnoticed whirlpool that sucks down youth and beauty and enthusiasm, man's long labour and woman's longer love—this we may gladly change and safely lose. (12)

Gilman argues that only in breaking down the walls that separate the spatialities of private and public, domestic and civic, can society advance. In *The Home*, she states that "it is not that women are really smaller-minded, weaker-minded, more timid and vacillating; but that whoever, man or woman, lives always in a small dark place, is always guarded, protected, directed, and restrained, will become inevitably narrowed and weakened by it" (277). Women's evil condition is created by the antiquated spatial arrangements of the "public sphere" and the "private sphere," and is metaphorically represented as the home, especially the kitchen and nursery.

The house, used as a metaphor, reveals certain truths about the thoughts and actions of the individuals living in the time and culture that created the metaphor.[23] For the reformers of the Progressive Era, human nature could be improved. However, social evolution "was too slow, and man therefore must try to speed progress by turning to the collective agency of government" (Ekirch and Mazal Holocaust 23). The plight of women and children, poverty, unemployment, disease, and drunkenness, that had been considered private now became "pressing social issues" (Ekirch and Mazal Holocaust 51). And for the progressive reformers,

[23] Other groups are metaphorically spatialized. An example of a spatialized metaphor for queers is a "closet" and "coming out of the closet"; mentally ill women as "the madwomen in the attic"; masters and servants as "upstairs/downstairs."

no social issue was more pressing than prostitution and syphilis and the contamination and infection of innocent wives and children in the home.[24] Progressive reformers, such as Gilman, did not see syphilis as a "sin" of the individual but as a concern of society and community and a threat to the advancement and evolutionary growth of American culture ("The Fly" 8).

Until the late 1860s and 1870s, the humoral theory of disease was still accepted, and sickness was still viewed in largely individual terms. The theory proposed that an unbalanced state of the humors of the body of the individual was the cause of disease, thus the treatment was rest, diet, bloodletting and purging in order to stabilize and harmonize the bodily state. Overall sickness was viewed metaphorically in the locality or physical boundaries of the individual and viewed in individual terms. The germ theory of disease moved the boundaries of disease outside the individual to biological processes. As a result of this shift venereal diseases were seen as the result of infection by a microorganism, not as the result of lax morality or individual deregulation.

As for the home, that place where innocent women and children were infected by the syphilitic husband, Gilman argues, "we may gladly change and safely lose" (Home 12). In the 1914 November edition of the Forerunner article, "Why 'Worse'?", Gilman puts forward her argument about the evil of the double standard: "the woman does not, like the man, marry and bring contamination on the innocent and the unborn" (290). Gilman continues this argument in her poem "To Man": "And women? He will hold her—he will have her when he pleases—" ("To Man" 75). This line in the poem has a troubling effect. "He will hold her" is a metaphor of an embrace, but it could also be understood as being held or captive in the home. In addition, "he will have her when he pleases" can be interpreted as a metaphor for

[24] An example of venereal disease of the innocent or, "venereal insontium," is ophthalmia neonatorum, (blindness of the newborn caused by gonorrhea). Silver nitrate solution drops in the eyes of newborn could prevent infection.

rape. Gilman's description of rape in the home, due to the subjection of women, denies the mythology that makes rape a sin of the individual and makes the violent and traumatic sequels that follow it, including infection with syphilis, a societal problem. Rape in literature is often presented metaphorically as something else; however, Gilman is unambiguous as to her meaning of rape and the subjection of women as a social evil. Gilman does not trivialize rape and women's subjection by reducing it to just a metaphor. According to Bourke, rape is the embodied violation of another person (6). Rape, the subjection of women, and the spread of syphilis are evil not just to the individual but to the entirety of a society. In the next section, I will discuss what I categorize as metaphors of temporalities.

2.4.2 Temporalities

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) identifies time as metaphorically structured in terms of space and motion (Kövecses; Lakoff and Johnson; Núñez and Sweetser). The theoretical framework of CMT as outlined by Lakoff and Johnson understands time as a subjective experience. The associated metaphors not only organize and mediate reality, but these "metaphors create realities for us, especially social realities" (Lakoff and Johnson 156). Two "subcases" of the time metaphors proposed by CMT are understood as "Moving-Ego" and "Moving-Time" (Lakoff and Johnson 44). In the first, the individual experiences movement and time stands still (for example, "we are approaching the new school year"); in the second, the individual is standing still, and time is moving (for example, "the new school year is approaching us"). An example of the Moving-Time metaphor can be found in *The Home*: "Life is an unbroken line, a ceaseless stream that pours steadily on" (13). The idea is

that time is linear and life moves on sometimes carrying people forward, sometimes leaving people behind.

This section of the chapter will identify these two subclasses of time metaphors in Gilman's texts. The argument made is that the appetite for feminist stories of women stuck in time, such as portrayed in Gilman's many works, is linked to the anxieties and the fears of the Progressive Era trying to convince itself that it was progressive and advancing in time. Gilman confronts readers with the contradiction of women stuck in time with the Progressivists belief of American history as a linear, progressive entity. Gilman represents women's life of subjugation and lack of agency as a function of their experience of being stuck in time and argues that freeing women from static time was a means of future progression for society at large. Examples of the Ego-Movement subclass of metaphors are abundant in Gilman's texts, especially in her call for women's action and as a vehicle for change. The term "Progressive Era" and the terms "development" and "movements" associated with the Progressive Era are examples of the subclass of Moving-Ego metaphors. The three terms are embedded metaphorically with the ideology of the period, that is to say racial purity and superiority, social order, and economic growth. In her poem "She Walketh Veiled and Sleeping," examples of Moving-Ego can be found: "Slow advancing, halting, creeping, Comes the Woman to the hour" (3), and in the poem, "We as Women": "Hats off! for, 'We, as women', Are coming to save the world" (11).

On the other hand, "Moving-Time" metaphors, give voice to women's experience of being trapped in the home, being passed by time and excluded from society and the economy. One metaphor that is frequently reiterated is "The time is coming." Examples of these are: "The time is coming very near when we shall see the meaning of The Child more fully" (Gilman, "Comments and Review", vol. 1, no. 2, 27), "The time is coming when the human

mother will recognize the education possibilities of early childhood" ("Man-Made World" 23), and, in the poem "The Slow People":

> But the time is coming, coming fast
>
> When the People shall awake at last
>
> And speak. (84)

Women's "evil condition" is represented in the metaphors of temporalities as well as spatialities. The separation of the public and private spheres and women's entrapment in the home can be understood both spatially, as woman's place is in the home, and temporally, that is to say that the spatial arrangement of the home is anachronistic, a throw back in time, or "ossified by time," as Gilman writes in *The Man-Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture*. (22). Time is passing women by. Gilman uses a Moving-Ego metaphor to illustrate her argument that the home and the women entrapped in it are left behind: "The home is too important a factor in human life to be thus left behind in the march of events" (*Home* 4).

The Gothic home in "The Yellow Wallpaper," with its description as a "colonial mansion, a hereditary estate," and its "secure ancestral halls," appears somewhat as a remanent of the past, if not time warped.[25] In *The Home, Its Work and Influence* (2002), Gilman writes that the marital relationship with the woman working in the home is "the lowest stage of industrial exchange," (291) that housekeeping is an "antiquated, mischievous system," (286) and, the home itself is a "little ganglion of aborted economic progress (318). She argues that the results of the antiquated system has dire consequences: "the home has not developed in proportion to our other institution, and by its rudimentary condition it arrests development in other lines" (10). She summarizes her argument: "the kind of home that was wholly beneficial in one century may be largely evil in another" (8). And why was it evil?

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[25] For an extensive discussion of the Gothic home, see Marina Sena's "No Horror Like Home: Women and Domestic Space in New England Gothic Literature," https://www.scribd.com/document/333908367/No-Horror-Like-Home; accessed 20 June 2016.

For Gilman, the anachronistic, pathological sexuo-economic relation that still existed during the Progressive Era between men and women and the organization of labour in the home, as exemplified in the subjection of women and their confinement to their "place" resulted in a break in the evolutionary growth of American culture. Gilman is unequivocal in her argument that "social progress, attained wholly by the male, gives to the unprogressivist woman unrest, discontent, disease" (312). This break in evolutionary growth gave ground to the spread of diseases such as syphilis, which could be eradicated if social practices changed. In speaking of "certain evils," Gilman says that "we endure them—have endured them for ages, and live enfeebled, poisoned, because we have not the social strength enough to throw them off" ("Studies" 119). For Gilman, "the social strength enough to throw them ["certain evils"] off," meant changing practices. In the next section I will discuss metaphors of practice, namely medical and eugenic.

2.4.3 Practices

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), "the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor" (Lakoff and Johnson 3). What we do every day can be considered as practices.[26] Medical practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reflected larger cultural and social ideologies.[27] Morantz and Zschoche allege that physicians of the period "practiced a form of medicine that attempted to reinforce childlike dependency in women, defined females as inherently weak and sickly, and discouraged excessive mental or physical exertion which might have turned a woman's

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[26] Metaphorical practice is found in the naming device in medicine. Ascribing appearances from a non-medical discipline to findings is commonplace. For example, there are many examples of food related metaphors, "cheesy exudate," "grape," "pea soup" stools of typhoid.

[27] Victorians and Progressives disapproved of sex for any reason other than reproduction. Physicians defined masturbation as a "disease" and provided "scientific" causes and treatment (Englehardt 234). Physicians also opposed the higher education of women on the grounds that it "threatened female health" and that women were "innately weak and sickly" (Morantz and Zschoche 569).

attention to pursuits beyond her sphere" (568). Gilman reflects this practice in *Studies in Social Pathology:*

> She did not know what was the matter with her, or with her children. She never had known that there was such a danger before, though aware of some dark horror connected with 'sin', impossible even to mention. Her old family physician told her nothing – that was not his place. (119)

The medical practice, of which a "physician must not betray his patient," and remain silent about the syphilitic husband's disease, that Gilman describes in the story, "The Vintage," is a metaphorical practice of patriarchal ideology that is intertwined in the domestic ideology of the late nineteenth century in which women were kept ignorant about both sex and transmissible diseases, such a syphilis. An unambiguous expression of horror at this silence is given in Gilman's story "The Vintage." Previously, I argued that silence could be considered a euphemism, but I would also argue that it is a practice. This medical practice described by Gilman symbolized normative gender categories and the idea of women as chattel and the source of the very evil of which men suffered. In other words, it was a practical manifestation of the very idea that "There is no evil without woman in it" ("Reassurance" 15).

In late nineteenth-century medical practices, the emphasis was on regulating the female body through control and restrictions. In "The Yellow Wallpaper", the narrator, on the advice of her physician-husband takes phosphates, and tonics, and airs, and journeys, and cod liver oil, and ale and wine and rare meat, and does no exercise, and has a schedule prescription for each hour of the day and is threatened with a rest cure: "John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell in the fall." The narrator admits that, "It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way" (52). Does this include her "marital duty," which is controlled and restricted by her husband as well?

Gilman and other social purists had advocated that virtue, or sexual continence, was the best means for controlling the spread of syphilis and gonorrhea since control and restriction of prostitution, seen as the source of the evil, and which had been argued as a "necessary evil," did not control the spread. The belief in the "medically curative powers of morality and natural living" was abandoned by the pragmatic social hygienist who sought more control (Mortanz and Zschoche 576). Dr. Prince A. Morrow worked to educate not only the public but physicians as well of the dangers of syphilis (see Burnham 895-900).[28] He proposed an ending of the silence around sexual matters and the double standard of morality as a means to reduce infections (see Burnham 896). In Gilman's review of Morrow's book, *Social Disease and Marriage* (1904), this shift is reflected: "Modern bacteriology has shown the danger of the most common of the venereal infections … This [Morrow's book] is not a treatise on morality; the subject is discussed from a wholly pathological standpoint" ("Comments and Review" vol. 1, no. 6 22). According to Gilman, the biggest obstacle for ending the silence on syphilis was the tradition known as the "medical secret" ("Comments and Review" vol. 1, no. 6 22). The male physician in *The Crux* is determined to keep Morton's syphilis and gonorrhea a secret from Vivian. It is the female doctor, Dr. Belair who informs Vivian about Morton and the dangers of sexual contact with him (even in kissing).

According to Andrew Ortony, "something new is created when a metaphor is understood," and that "metaphors afford different ways of viewing the world" (5). During the Progressive Era, it was believed that society was advancing and evolving, and its development could be better managed by human intervention, rather than by natural selection, a belief shared by Gilman. Social hygienists believed that prostitution (and the subsequent spread of syphilis) that had been seen as a "necessary evil," and then a "social

[28] In 1905, Morrow organized the American Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis and the American Federation for Sex Hygiene, in 1910.

evil," caused by poverty and the subjection of women, was caused by feeblemindedness and this was the major cause of prostitution.[29] The rationale was that in order to rid society of diseases such as syphilis, "feeblemindedness" could be eliminated by the elimination of the feebleminded through the practice of eugenics.[30] Gilman was optimistic in her belief in the elimination of syphilis as reflected in her eugenics-influenced utopian novel *Herland* and the society created by eugenic principles depicted in the novel *Moving the Mountain*. In the *Forerunner*, she writes "[a] constant free responsible motherhood can cleanse the world of its worst disease in three generations: by exercising its natural right of choice among fathers for the coming race" (*Mountain* 290).[31] Gilman recommended not just choice: "If we had a proper regard for human life, we should take instant measures to check the supply of feeble-minded and defective persons, and further measures to prevent the reproduction of such unfortunates" ("Sanctity" 128). Gilman couched her arguments in social and economic development and according to her argument the evil of the subjection of women is an "evil" because of its evil effects on society and the spread of diseases such as syphilis that causes degeneration. She enumerates her points:

> first, because a dependent and servile womanhood is an immovable obstacle to race development; second because the major defects of our civilization are clearly traceable to the degradation of the female and the unbalanced predominance of the male, which unnatural relation is responsible for the social evil, for the predatory and combative elements in our economic processes, and for that colossal mingling of folly, waste and horror, that masculine phenomenon—war. ("Suffrage" 24)

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[29] I would argue that this is a shift from the earlier social justice movements to the doctrines of the eugenics movement which sought social control.

[30] "Feebleminded" was a category that was socially constructed and often racialized or targeted the poor.

[31] Gilman was strongly influenced by Professor Lester F. Ward, who she describes in *Living* as "quite the greatest man I have ever known" (*Living* 144).

Gilman's point that "dependent and servile womanhood is an immovable obstacle to development" reflected the reality that existed for many women. She does not elaborate on what she considers the "major defects of our civilization" but appears to place the blame of most of the world's troubles on gender inequality.

In *Illness as Metaphor*, Sontag notes that metaphors of disease are often negative in their suggestions and are used without considering the consequences. They can end up being harmful either to the individual or society. In this discussion of practices, I have presented some of the negative consequences of both medical and eugenic practices.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have argued that Gilman used metaphors, notably, the metaphor of syphilis, in order to put her ideas forth and to create an effect, that is to say, convince. The metaphor of syphilis brings together the various facets of the complex notion of the subjection of women. Three analytic strands for analyzing metaphors in Gilman's writings are delineated: (1) spatialities, (2) temporalities, and (3) practices. In the following chapter, building on this framework, I will discuss the serialized novel *The Crux* (1911).

> Beware of a biological sin, my dear; for it there is no forgiveness.
>
> (Gilman, *Crux* 240)

Chapter III: *The Crux*: What Every Girl Should Know

Madeleine B. Stern writes in the Introduction of the first volume of the compiled *Forerunner* that "it is in the *Forerunner* that her [Gilman's] voice carries farthest, for—her greatest single achievement" (9). Stern also argues that the *Forerunner* has "an added historical significance as a documentary panorama of the socio-economic philosophy of the early twentieth century" (16). In the first volume of the *Forerunner* Gilman placed the poem, "Then This," on the back of the front cover. The lines clearly state her intended purpose: "To tell the things we ought to know, To point the way we ought to go" (n.p.). *The Crux* was published serially in the magazine in 1911 and exemplifies Gilman's didacticism and intention of telling what women ought to know and the way women ought to go.[32] Despite its availability, the novel has not attracted much critical attention. This chapter will first provide a brief history of the magazine the *Forerunner*. The Introduction of this thesis cited Cynthia Davis, who in her biography of Gilman, states that Gilman was "a product of her times even as she helped to shape them" (xxi). I present the *Forerunner,* as a product of its times, and its beginning and final folding dictated as much by social changes as by the changing and declining career of its author. Second, I will offer a reading of *The Crux*, focusing on the metaphor of syphilis. I will offer examples to support my thesis that Gilman instrumentalizes the metaphor of syphilis to subvert the assumptions about women's economic dependency on men, what Gilman calls the sexuo-economic relationship, in marriage and the practices and the socio-political institutions that support these assumptions. As well, I will present examples from the

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[32] *The Crux* was subsequently published as a book in the same year by Gilman's publishing group the Charlton Company. In *2002,* the novel was republished with an introduction by Jennifer S. Tuttle and a year later republished again with an introduction by Dana Seitler.

text that the metaphor of syphilis unifies Gilman's discourse of women's subjection and oppression in the novel.

3.1 The *Forerunner*: "Don't you think it is worth a dollar?"[33]

The *Forerunner* could justifiably be called "A Monthly Magazine by Charlotte Perkins Gilman" because Gilman not only ran it single-handedly for the seven years of its publication but wrote most of the contents.[34] During the 1890s, Gilman emerged as a national figure in America and her treatise *Women and Economics* (1898) placed her on the international stage. However, by 1909, as she writes in *The Living*:

> as time passed there was less and less market for what I had to say, more and more of my stuff was declined. Think I must write and write I must, the manuscripts accumulated faster than I could sell them, some of the best, almost all—and finally I announced: If the editors and publishers will not bring out my work, I will! And I did. In November 1909, I started the *Forerunner.* (304)

Gilman published the *Forerunner* with the understanding, like other women reform writers of the late Victorian period and the Progressive Era, that "the periodical was 'the only efficient instrument' to make themselves and their ideas known" if publishers refused to publish the literature (Cane and Alves 1).[35] Cynthia Davis is more cynical, however, in her evaluation of Gilman's motivation in creating the *Forerunner* and cites Gilman's fluctuating reputation in the early 1900s and the public defeats and crticism of Gilman's *Women and Economics*.[36] It is perhaps ageism that makes critics question why, at nearly fifty years-old, Gilman would

[33] "Don't you think it is worth a dollar?" is part on a subscription advertisement. (Gilman, "Subscribe for" 30)
[34] The first page of the magazine shows the title as *The Forerunner A Monthly Magazine by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.*
[35] The reason Gilman provides for the magazine publication outside the mainstream press was explained in the article "A Summary of Purpose of *The Forerunner*," as in line with the question "Why did not John Wesley preach in the established church?" ("Purpose" 286*).*
[36] Davis notes that Gilman glossed over these defeats in her autobiography. Davis discusses one of Gilmans public defeats that she calls the "Shaw debacle." For the history of this defeat, see Cynthia J, Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Biography,* pp. 282-284.

take on a project that proved a drain on her resources both financial and mental, only to publish the rejected manuscripts that had accumulated on her desk.[37] One would not necessarily suspect hubris, as Davis appears to suggest.[38] Gilman earned her living as a lecturer and she continued to lecture successfully well into the second decade of the twentieth century. Gilman's motivation appears to be survival, not only her own personal survival in her battle with depression but the survival of her ideas that she had preached for over thirty years. Gilman truly believed in her "vocation." Gilman wrote to her husband Houghton, in a letter dated 22 May 1898:

> I think that the thing I am here to do is a big thing—the truths I see are deep basic truths, and I have been given unusual power of expression and I truly hope that my life will count for much good in the world as Darwin's did and Galileo's and many other blessed souls who were given high places in the world. (Hill 144)

In "A Summary of Purpose," written in the 1916 November edition of the *Forerunner*, announcing the folding of the magazine, Gilman writes that the *Forerunner* had allowed her "the serene freedom of expression indispensable to right work" (287).[39] Although, to "set forth" her ideas, she wrote poems, short fiction, sermons, allegories, humour and nonsense, book reviews, comments on current events, serialized novels, as well as an advice column among other genres, Gilman warns that "the subject matter, for the most part, is not to be regarded as "literature" but as an attempt to set forth certain views of life which seemed to the author of real importance to human welfare" ("Purpose" 286).

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[37] The *Forerunner* never made a profit and Gilman supported the publication through income she earned through lectures. For more details, read page 304 of *The Living* for the costs. Gilman also reprinted some texts that had been published previously. Three such "recycling" include republication from the *Woman's Journal* of "Girl's Wild Oats," "The Model Home," and "Why This Insistence?"

[38] See Gilman's article "A Woman of Fifty" (97) in which she describes a woman of fifty as "a social asset of enormous importance."

[39] The final issue of the *Forerunner* was December 2016. In the *Forerunner* of November 1909, the contents of the magazine were outlined: "*The Forerunner* carries Mrs. Gilman's best and newest works her social philosophy, her verse, satire, fiction, ethical teaching, humor, and comment. It stands for Humanness in Women, and in Men: for better methods in Child Culture: for the Home that is no Workshop: for the New Ethics, the New Economics, the New World we are to make—are making" (34).

In her autobiography, Gilman describes the magazine as:

> a small monthly magazine, written entirely by myself, … not very big, but its ten-by-seven pages, twenty-eight of them, seven hundred and fifty words to a page, made some twenty-one thousand to the issue. It equaled four books a year, books of thirty-six thousand words. (304)[40]

One of the characteristics that best describes the *Forerunner* is its unity, that is to say that all the text were written by Gilman and there appears to be one overriding theme, women's subjection as a barrier to evolution and the spread of diseases such as syphilis. A review of the material published in the *Forerunner* is challenging in that how to proceed poses a dilemma of choice. Each monthly magazine contained reviews and comments, allegories, short fiction and over the years of its printing one hundred and seventy-five poems. As well, eight serialized novels were published in the *Forerunner*: *What Diantha Did* (1910), *The Crux* (1911), *Moving the Mountain* (1911), *Mag-Margorie* (1912), *Won Over* (1913), *Begnina Machiavelli* (1914), *Herland* (1915), and *With Her in Ourland* (1916). The novel, *The Crux* (1911), each chapter about four or six pages long, fits into Gilman's magazine template, and as such should be considered in the context of the magazine as a whole, as the next section explores.

3.2 Reading *The Crux*

Gilman's eight novels were originally published in monthly instalments in the *Forerunner* and read in parts by subscribers over twelve months. The serialization is usually mentioned as being merely incidental. Today, most readers would probably read the 2002 or 2003 republication of the novel and would not be exposed to the neatly-filled two-column

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[40] In the first 16 months of publication the *Forerunner* varied from twenty-six to thirty-four pages. Thereafter, it was 28 pages in length.

layout, or the little bracketed "to be continued" at the end of the chapters. Gilman wrote in an age in which magazine serialization of novels was a common and standard practice and provided a means of reaching a larger audience. Serials were not a "whole" product, such as a published novel, but a process of writing and reading parts of a whole that would appear over a year. Reading *The Crux* in its original serialized format, including taking breaks between chapters, creates a sense of author-reader intimacy, or what Catherine Delafield describes as "a sense of shared time and shared experience" (10). Gilman recognizes this sharing of experience when she wrote in the *Forerunner* of January 1911: "The need the *Forerunner* seeks to meet is not of a general and popular sort but is no less real for all that; being the demand of a rather special group of people for clear expression of their rather special views" ("For 1911" 28). It appears Gilman was "preaching to the choir". The serialization helped create a community of like-minded activists and reformers who were mid-to-upper-class white women.[41] Stern in the "Introduction" of the compiled Forerunner 1909-1910 volume says that the magazine was designed "to appeal 'much to the few', not 'a little to the many'" (n.p.).

The 1911 readers of the *The Crux* were also presented with a second novel to read in the same monthly installment format. *Moving the Mountain*, which is a utopian novel that presents a society thirty years in the future, where androcentrism is replaced by gynaecocentrism and reproduction is structured along eugenic lines. Although *The Crux* and *Moving the Mountain* appear to challenge the assigned roles of women, at the same time the novels appear to reinforce others. Gilman assigned women to the role of "Mothers of the Race" and believed that women could improve on this role with the help of science, eugenics specifically. The Progressive Era's ideology that education was a tool for social progress, and

[41] Gilman's readers were not the immigrant, racialized girls who worked in sweatshops like the Triangle Shirtwaist Company factory. On March 25, 1911, 146 young women and girls, mostly Jewish immigrants, were killed in a fire. The outrage at the poor working conditions and fire resulted in some labor reforms.

that public health and hygiene could be managed through science, is reflected in *The Crux*. Syphilis was a useful rhetorical tool in the social purity and eugenic movement agenda. The eradication of venereal diseases through education and eugenic practices is presented as improving women's situation as well as bettering society overall.

3.3 Gilman's "Preface" to *The Crux*

The single-volume edition of *The Crux* published in 1911 by the Charlton Company included a Preface, Table of Contents and a prefatory poem that had not been included in the *Forerunner*. In the "Preface," Gilman writes that "Anyone who doubts its [*The Crux*] facts and figures is referred to *Social Diseases and Marriage*, by Dr. Prince Morrow, or to *Hygiene and Morality*, by Miss Lavinia Dock, a trained nurse of long experience" (n.p.). Both Morrow and Dock pessimistically predicted the syphilization of America.

Gilman wrote a review of Morrow's 1904 book, in the "Comments and Reviews" section of the April 1910 edition of the *Forerunner* and describes the book as "the best I know" (23).[42] In the January 1911 *Forerunner* "Comments and Reviews," she writes of the book again: "a great book has been written by a great man, … This is not a treatise on morality; the subject is discussed from a wholly pathological standpoint … To any wishing full and authoritative information on the subject this volume is of extreme value" (27). Dr. Morrow's book is certainly full of "authoritative information" and the descriptions of the pathologies and lesions of gonorrhoea, syphilis and chancroid are graphic, written in a style to frighten and horrify, not only the public but physicians as well. To a horrible disease, the descriptions add horror.

[42] Dr. Morrow, a eugenicist, is the founder of the American Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis in New York City. For a history of Morrow's work, see John C. Burnham's 1973 article, "The Progressive Era Revolution in American Attitudes Toward Sex."

Prince Morrow writes authoritatively in *Social Diseases and Marriage: Social Prophylaxis* that: “Since the welfare of the human race is largely bound up in the health and productive capacity of the wife and mother, the sanitation of the marriage relation becomes the most essential condition of social preservation” (20). Morrow underscores the consequences of the infection of what he calls the “helpless and unresisting victims”; and writes that “they are the women endowed by nature with all those physical attributes of health and vigor which fit them to become the mothers of the race” (22). The consequences of the infection were not only maternal morbidity and mortality but the degeneration of the offspring and race.

Reformers of the social hygiene reform movement, such as Morrow, took aim at two specific targets of nineteenth-century morality: the silence surrounding sexual matters and the double standard. According to John Burnham, even though the status of women did not change extensively, “the so-called revolution in morals became one of the lasting legacies of progressivism in American life” (885). Physicians such as Morrow associated syphilis with the health and progress of the nation: “Since the welfare of the human race is largely bound up in the health and productive capacity of the wife and mother, the sanitation of the marriage relation becomes the most essential condition of social preservation” (Morrow 20). Morrow argues that the marriage relationship turns the wife into an innocent victim, and to add to the indignation, often is infected with syphilis on her wedding night (22).[43] In Morrow’s description of syphilis, men were associated with the disease as “active” sufferers as opposed to women and children who are presented as passive sufferers. Morrow positions medicine as the saviour from the evil of syphilis: “In safeguarding marriage from the dangers of venereal

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[43] Liggins suggests that there was a “power struggle between doctors and husbands for the control of the wife’s body and sexual health, reflecting the contemporary debates about sexual infection and the deaths of syphilitic children. Syphilis” (175). In addition, she argues that “introducing the taboo issue of syphilis into the marriage plot encouraged an uneasy struggle for power between doctors and husbands, as both seek to undermine the New Woman’s desire to exist outside a conventionalized, marital union” (176).

diseases the physician becomes the protector of the wife and the mother and the preserver of future citizens of the state" (v). Morrow's writing reflects the Progressive Era theories of scientific management, including managing reproduction through eugenics, which would enable broad social progress. The medical response to syphilis during the Progressive Era also is indicative of the changes in the professionalization of medicine along with the growing social values and beliefs that medicine could conquer the disease of syphilis by new scientific discoveries. The physicians increasingly spoke of syphilis of the innocent and argued for women's education of the dangers of syphilis and maintained that "innocence is not ignorance," a slogan often repeated by Gilman.

Dr. Morrow is also mentioned in *The Crux* when Vivian, distraught at discovering that her fiancé Morton has not only contracted gonorrhea but is infected with syphilis as well, speaks with her grandmother: "But, Grandma—is it as bad as she [Dr. Belair, her friend, a woman doctor who discloses Morton's infection] said, seventy-five percent! Three-quarters of—of everybody?" (267). Vivian's grandmother optimistically tells Vivian that conditions are improving to protect women and children: "Dr. Prince Morrow in New York, with that society of his … has done much … You must have seen some of those articles, Vivian?" Vivian responds by saying. "I have … but I couldn't bear to read them—ever" (267). Gilman addresses the issue of young women being exposed to the realities of syphilis and writes in the Preface:

> Some will hold that the painful facts disclosed are unfit for young girls to know. Young girls are precisely the ones who must know them, in order that they may protect themselves and their children to come. The time to know of danger is before it is too late to avoid it. If some say ‘‘Innocence is the greatest charm of young girls,’’ the answer is, ‘‘What good does it do them? (*Crux* n.p.)

Gilman's question, "What good does it do them?" is rhetorical and is not a question but rather an answer: ignorance harms women, and to go farther, the infection of women and innocent children with the disease of syphilis is emblematic of the subjection of women.

Gilman promoted Lavina L. Dock's *Hygiene and Morality* in the *Forerunner* as well. Although Dock's book was written for nurses, Gilman promoted the book to the women reading the magazine. Dock cites Morrow's statistics that one in ten women were infected by their husbands. Dock also cites the statistic that seventy percent of women attending a clinic in a large hospital were respectful married women infected by their husbands. According to the author between two and four million men in America had syphilis (31).

In *Breeding and Eugenics in the American Literary Imagination: Heredity Rules in the Twentieth Century* (2015), Ewa Luczak devotes two chapters to the topic of the novel *The Crux* and the short story "The Vintage", published in the *Forerunner* in 1916. Luczak's focus in the book is the history of eugenics and in the two chapters specifically discuss Gilman's "entanglement in eugenics" (101).[44] Luczak also argues that eugenic discourse shaped the American literary imagination during the Progressive Era:

> From the turn of the twentieth century, American literary language was infested with eugenic terminology, some of it new, some inherited but invested with new meanings after the triumph of the science of heredity. Literary works abound with references to feeblemindedness, heredity, ancestry, racial and national blood, degeneration, regression, regeneration, race, breed, nordicism, racial fitness, moronism, intelligence testing and sterilization. (6)

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[44] Kuczak writes that the two chapters in her book "center on Gilman's theories of "androcentric" culture as filtered through the scholarship of two American sociologists: Lester F. Ward and Edward A. Ross" (10). These chapters examine how Gilman's short story "The Vintage," the novel *The Crux* and her utopian novels *Moving the Mountain, Herland* and *With Her in Our Land* were composed as a follow-up to eugenic ideas as outlined by Ross and Ward. According to Kuczak, Gilman's eugenic literature falls into two categories: "fiction promoting a eugenic agenda among women with the purpose of saving them from dysgenic marriages and future-oriented and utopian fiction painting the perfect American eugenic society" (10).

From the words Luczak uses, such as "infested", the author does not appear to consider the influence positive. Despite the negative evaluation, Luczak argues that eugenics was "a reservoir of imagery, metaphors and plots and, as such, a motor propelling numerous literary works" (5-6). In a similar vein, according to Seitler, eugenic and feminist discourse of the Progressive Era were "mutually constitutive" (64). In addition to the "Introduction" to the 2003 republication of *The Crux*, Seitler published "Unnatural Selection: Mothers, Eugenic Feminism, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Regeneration Narratives" (2003), in which she argues that eugenics helped "constitute a particular brand of feminisms" during the Progressive Era, including Gilman's works (63).

Gilman's Preface also includes a poem. The last four lines of the poem are:

> Who should know but the woman?—The girl in her youth?
> The hour of the warning is then,
> That, strong in her knowledge and free in her truth,
> She may build a new race of new men. (n.p.)

In the poem, Gilman asks a rhetorical question: "Who should know but the woman?" Gilman believed that education and knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases could give women the power to make choices for themselves to improve society. The last two lines "That, strong in her knowledge and free in her truth, She may build a new race of new men" refers to eugenic practice that would improve the American race. Eugenics had widespread support in medical and scientific circles in the United States at the time. Gilman utilized eugenics discourse to promote both reproductive choice and social freedom for women.

3.4 Epigraphs: the poems and their function

Gilman has a propensity for the use of the epigraph, which is a literary devise in the form of short poems or quotes at the beginning of texts and chapters.[45] The abundance of epigraphs in Gilman's writing suggests that she regarded them as important functional stylistic devices. Epigraphs preface each of the main chapter divisions in *The Crux*. The epigraphs are an excellent point of entry for analysis of the novel itself.

Gilman conjoins all the epigraphs by drawing on a controlling metaphor: that of confinement, both in place and time, and infection with syphilis. In this sense, the poems form part of the allegorical style of the novel. The poems themselves are an "expression of the inexpressible" in verse: the restriction of the domestic sphere, the effects of the double standard and the fear of infection. The poems also call for change in adopting new ways, specifically eugenics. I will not discuss all the poems but offer a selection of three of the poems which I consider representative to demonstrate what I have called didactic meta-commentary. What I mean by this is that the epigraphs perform a function of disambiguation in that they help the reader constructs the author's intentions or meaning.

In Chapter I of *The Crux*, Gilman presents the poem "The Back Way":

Along the same old garden path,

Sweet with the same old flowers;

Under the lilacs, darkly dense,

The easy gate in the backyard fence—

Those unforgotten hours! (10)

The first chapter introduces the protagonist, the innocent Vivian Lane, who falls for Morton Elder, who is dysphemistically called a "scamp," and whose actions are euphemistically

[45] The poems fall under the category of what Gérard Genette has labeled paratexts. For more information, see Genette, Gérard. *Paratext: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

described as “some piece of mischief” (11). After meeting with Morton and being kissed by him, Vivian goes to bed feeling “almost as if she were married,” (15) and appears to be going “along the same old garden path” of marriage, confinement, and contagion. Morton’s kiss, a metaphor for contamination, would be fatal for Vivian and her children.[46] The reader later learns that Morton “has lived the bad life … and … has had the sickness,” a euphemism for venereal disease, gonorrhea and syphilis (171).

The poem in Chapter IV, titled “Transplanted,” offers Gilman’s optimistic view that women who were “transplanted” out of the domestic sphere could “bloom”.

> Sometimes a plant in its own habitat
> Is overcrowded, starved, oppressed and
> daunted;
> A pale feeble thing, yet rises quickly,
> Growing in height and vigor, blooming
> thickly.
> When far transplanted. (99)

Besides being “overcrowded, starved, oppressed” the woman is also “daunted” by the prospect of infection with syphilis and becoming “a pale feeble thing.” Gilman offers an optimistic view that if transplanted, women can grow “in height and vigor, blooming thickly.” Being able to move, and being constrained from moving from the home, are important spatial metaphors in Gilman’s work. Gilman believed that women must be free to move and her criticism of women’s restrictive dress as well as their confinement to the home represented restricted choices, including the choice of a healthy partner in marriage and the avoidance of being infected with diseases such as syphilis. Gilman argues that women should have autonomy over their own bodies, which could be considered a space as well.

[46] In *Hygiene and Morality,* Lavina L. Dock warns that even kissing was a source of infection.

In the poem "Consequences," in Chapter IX, Gilman makes the argument for the consideration of innocent children born with congenital syphilis:

You may have a fondness for grapes that are

green,

And the sourness that greenness beneath'

You may have a right

To a colic at night—

But consider your children's teeth! (234)

Congenital syphilis was known to result in disfigurement, which Dr. Morrow calls stigmata, including recognizable deformity of teeth and dental problems, called Hutchinson teeth (named after the British pathologist, who first described it). There is no ambiguity in Gilman's argument that women must consider the health of their children in choosing a marriage partner that would produce healthy children. The sin was not contracting syphilis but the biological sin of producing syphilitic children which was believed to be hereditary.

3.5 What is the crux of the "marriage problem"?

The Crux, in the December 1910 edition of the *Forerunner*, is announced as a story touching "upon one of the most vivid and vital of our marriage problems, and has more than one kind of love story in it" ("Advertisement" 34). So, what are the "marriage problems"? The problem as presented in *The Crux* is about choice: the choice between marrying for love, or by convention, or convenience and the choice of marrying for love directed by science and reason, that is to say that the right decisions are eugenically sound.

In the first chapter, Mrs. Williams, the minister's wife asks the town gossips "Who is Morton Elder, and what has he done?" (10). Apparently, Morton has been an "awful cross" to his aunt who is raising him, has grown from mischievous to the "black and scarlet of hinted

sin," been expelled from school, and is leaving the town to go West (11). Vivian meets the sulky Morton to say goodbye. The front of the Lane home had only two trees planted along "each side of the straight and narrow path" metaphorically reflecting Vivian's father's views (10), and Morton and Vivian meet in a hidden corner of the fragrant garden at the back of her home. The garden has large old lilacs, with honey-suckle spreading over a pear tree. Vivian comes down the garden path that is bordered with sweet alyssum and mignonette to meet Morton. She picks off a dew-wet rose, and metaphorically foreshadowing her fate if she marries Morton, pricks her finger (13).

A powerful spatial metaphor in the novel is the space of the garden and the paths that Vivian takes. Vivian appears to be going "[a]long the same old garden path" mentioned in the poem "The Back Way."[47] The garden and the pear tree symbolizes Vivian's innocence and virginity. As well, it is in this garden that Vivian experiences feelings of sexual love and desire that she does not understand and as "to the certain small cuddlings not in themselves terrifying, nor even unpleasant, but which she obscurely feels to be wrong," she feels confusion (14). Morton symbolises the snake in the garden representing sin. Morton quickly disappears on Vivian's father's arrival. Vivian on leaving Morton goes into the house and upstairs to her bedroom. She shuts the door, and because she has no key, puts a chair up against the door. In the Victorian period, and well into the Progressive Era, female sexual desire was taboo and would not be referred to either in euphemism or dysphemism but was treated with silence as if it did not exist. John Burham calls the situation a "conspiracy of silence" and notes that, "on the whole, social prohibitions against any open discussion of sex-related matters were surprisingly well observed" (886).[48] The chair against the door is a

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[47] The path is a metaphor that is repeated in several of Gilman's texts. In "Past, Present and Future" she describes "our long upward path of social development" (16).

[48] Burham explains the origin of the expression:
"The term conspiracy of silence originally came into existence in a special context. When English reformers started to agitate for the repeal of sanitary laws regulating and sanctioning prostitution in port cities, the English press, beginning in 1870, refused to give the agitators publicity. The actual term was popularized in a pamphlet

metaphor for the unmentionable practice of the desexualized virtuous women of self-pleasure, thought to be only a man's vice.

In Chapter II, the reader learns that nine years have passed since Morton's disappearance. Vivian is told by her father that "it is woman's place to wait" (41). She comforts herself with cuddling babies and cats and dogs "when no babies were to be had" (45). She appears resigned to a life of stagnation and returning home one evening she again "slowly followed the long garden path; paused lingeringly, by that rough garden seat [where she had sat with Morton], went through and closed the gate" (46). The closing of the gate represents resignation and stagnation.

In Chapter III and IV, Dr. Belair, a woman physician convinces a group of women, Morton's aunt, Miss Elder, Morton's sister, Suzie, and Vivian, who objects to be shown "the path of duty" (70), to leave Blainville and go to Colorado to open a boarding house. As a place, Blainville is suffering from what Dr. Belair describes as "Arthritis Deformans of the soul" (68). As an old New England town, the place represents patriarchy, stagnation and lack of change, a town that is a "social cemetery," a dead-end past (99). Vivian's grandmother Mrs. Pettigrew shows up unannounced and leaves with the group. For Vivian, the journey was a "daily and nightly revelation" (101). After arriving in the new town in Colorado, Miss Elder opens her boarding house, the Cottonwoods.

The old New England town of Blainville, the West, as well as the boarding house are metaphors of space: Blainville as stagnation and being passed by time; the West, seen in Blainville as a "blank space on the map" (127), as adventure and new beginnings, and the boarding house as a "mini-utopia" of female economic independence. Gilman appears to appropriate and subvert the space of the boarding house, corresponding to her concept of

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by Harriet Martineau and Josephine Butler, "Remonstrance Against the Conspiracy of Silence." See Josephine E. Butler, *Personal Reminiscence of a Great Crusade* (London, 1896) 96" (885).

apartment house/hotel. As Gamber asserts, “homes could turn into metaphorical boardinghouses, and boarding houses could turn into not-so-metaphorical homes” (60). The boarding house that Miss Elder runs, according to Sue’s description on arrival was that it was “just like a real house”. The house was “a big, rambling thing, at home they would have called it a hotel, with its neat little sign, ‘The Cottonwoods’” (102). Within a month there were twenty-five people living in the house. Vivian and Dr. Belair, who had her office in the front, appear free to pursue their own professional goals and Suzie who had “plenty of room for amusement” (127) appears to spend a lot of time with men and soon marries and has a child.

Although Gilman preached socialized housekeeping, it is not clear in *The Crux* who is doing all the work. The reformation of domestic service is not given a concrete example. The only staff helping to run the boarding house was the shadowy figure of Jeanne Jaune, a woman of French origin who euphemistically is described as having “a past” and had kept a “place of entertainment,” her syphlitic son, Theophile, and two elderly waitresses who were hired when needed. Seitler states that “the specter of sexual disease haunts *The Crux*” and if anything made boardinghouses suspect, it was the specter of illicit sexuality (72). Following Seitler’s evaluation, the boarding house, metaphorically seen as a site of economic independence for the women, is certainly haunted by the syphilitic Jeanne, who watches through a peephole, and her son, who suffers from congenital syphilis. Another person from the past, Morton Elder, who I would describe as a “specter of sexual disease,” haunts the boarding house, as well. Morton, of seemingly no redeeming qualities, is out of work, suffers from a “cold sore” and sore throat that is probably an acute clinical sign of chancre and syphilis infection, is constantly watched by the other women. Morton comes and goes to the boarding house and illicitly meets Vivian alone. Gilman does not hide Morton’s syphilis with euphemisms or metaphors, instead offers the telling sore on his mouth as well as his sore

throat. In *Syphilis in Victorian Literature and Culture: Medicine, Knowledge and the Spectacle of Victorian Invisibility* (2017), Monika Pietrzak-Franger provides the premise that the potency of syphilis "lay in the tensions between visibility and invisibility that it produced" (1). Gilman inverses this tension in that syphilis is made visible. Morton's syphilis and gonorrhoea appear to be the worst kept secret. The town gossips appear to know of the infection as do Jeanne Jaune, the two doctors and everyone else in town.

According to Elaine Showalter, by the 1890s the syphilitic male had become "an arch-villain of feminist protest fiction, a carrier of contamination and madness, and a threat to the spiritual evolution of the human race" (166-167). For Showalter, syphilis becomes emblematic of the corrupting influence of male dominance. Is Morton Elder, indeed, the "arch-villain" in *The Crux*? Is Morton the personification of syphilis? In referring to young men who contract venereal diseases, Dr. Belair tells Vivian that "All they have in their scatter-brained head is: it's naughty but it's nice: And so they rush off and ruin their whole lives—and their wives—and their children's … Just one mis-step may be enough for infection" (240). Syphilis is personified in Morton.

Vivian, who has agreed to marry Morton, speaks with her grandmother after learning of Morton's history of infection with gonorrhea and syphilis. Her grandmother advices: "You mustn't feel as if all men were Unspeakable Villains. They are just ignorant boys— and nobody ever tells 'em the truth" (267). Mrs. St. Cloud tries to convince Vivian of the "glorious work" of "making a new man out of Morton" and appears to suggest that women are self-sacrificing saviors (213). Mrs. St. Cloud epitomizes the double standard and personifies women's passivity. From Mrs. St Cloud Vivian was taught "to face a life of utter renunciation … to be patient … and to wait" (46).

A compelling argument against Vivian and Morton's marriage is made by the cook, Jeanne Jaune, who is reformed and has become a religious devotee. Jeanne's son, Theophile described by Dr. Hale as "not overly bright but a willing worker," has congenital syphilis (102).[49] Jeanne begs Dr. Belair not to let Vivian marry Morton: "Tell her doctor—if you must; tell her about my boy" (189). Dr. Belair is unambiguous in her arguments to Vivian: "Do you want a son like Theophile?" (239). Syphilitic children like Theophile are iconic of contamination, contagion and degeneration. Theophile is a potent space for the expression of the dread and horror of syphilis. He is described in animalistic terms, a "hurt monkey," and the two waitresses confess not going near him and being terrorized (185).

According to Vivian's grandmother the solution to the "Morton problem" is "in the hands of women" (268). According to her, "as soon as we know enough … When we all know about this we can stop it? … We can religiously rid the world of all these—'undesirable citizens' … By not marrying them" (268). The sin is not marrying Morton but having syphilis-infected children with him. Vivian realizes that "wickedness was one thing, disease was another. Forgiveness was no cure" and backs out of her engagement to Morton (267). Vivian, however, seems to recover from her disappointment and "[t]he sense of a final closing down of life, of a dull, long, narrow path between her and the grave … changed rapidly" (295). She opens a kindergarten and becomes engaged to Dr. Hale. The story ends with Suzie married, both Vivian and her grandmother engaged, and Dr. Belair, the epitomy of the New Woman, dedicates her life to service and community.

What is Gilman's solution to the marriage problem? On the one hand, Gilman's portrayal of Morton is problematic in that he is made just to disappear into the army of the four million syphilitics that Dock claims there are in America.[50] On the other hand, Gilman's

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[49] Sometimes spelled Jeaune.

[50] The short story, "Cleaning up Elita," does not offer a solution to the syphilitic man either. In Gilman's utopian novel *Moving the Mountain*, serialized in the *Forerunner* in 1911, men who are infected with venereal disease

argument is that it is women who will choose, and the crux of the matter is that in the end Morton's fate is moot. Morton and men like him are no longer the center of the story and as such, women have finally moved to centre stage and the history of woman's subjection itself will come to an end. For Gilman eugenics meant making women the sexual selectors and removing the double standard. The metaphor of syphilis takes its force from the irony that Vivian, the virtuous desexualized woman (or, what was called the angel of the house) could suffer the same fate as Jeanne Jaune, a former prostitute.

Conclusions

Gilman supported eugenics and the ideal that women should control their own reproductive processes. In *The Crux*, there is no decorous silence around syphilis and Gilman exposes the serious problems of marriage to a man infected with syphilis. Dr. Belair and Vivian are not hysterics and provide a rationale solution to the marriage problem which can be understood as the very real risk of infection of innocent women and children by a syphilitic husband like the undisciplined Morton. Gilman challenges the ideology that the home, metaphorically represented as a moralizing space, insulated from the public sphere and contamination from venereal diseases such as syphilis, by introducing the syphilitic man and children into this very space.

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are prohibited from marriage and their fate is to die alone. See also: "'If I Were a Man': Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sarah Grand and the Sexual Education of Girls" by Janet Beer and Ann Heilmann, in *Special Relationships: Anglo-American Antagonisms and Affinities 1854–1936* (Manchester UP, 2002), 178-201.

> This is the woman's century, the first chance for the mother of the world to rise to her full place. (Gilman, *Living* 331)

Conclusion

Gilman, titled the "optimistic reformer," called the twentieth century the "woman's century" (*Living* 331).[51] In spite of her optimism, after preaching and writing for over forty-five years about women's role in American society, Gilman's evaluation of the progress in the improvement of the status of women is somewhat ambivalent and tinges on disappointment:

> This new century, now past its first quarter, has seen the achievement of many of the things so ardently striven for in the last, but it is like climbing a mountain range, each surmounted peak only shows more and higher ones. For instance, we have attained full suffrage for women. This was never to me the summum bonum it was to many of its advocates, but I did expect better things of women than they have shown. (*Living* 318)[52]

Her disappointment perhaps stems from her belief that if women fully used their human powers, they could achieve freedom and gender equality.[53] Gilman had always refused to call herself a feminist and instead characterized herself as a humanist, believing that the nature of both men and women was essentially human. She theorized that four factors had created an artificial difference between men and women: economic dependence, sexual oppression, unprofessional and unspecialized domestic labour, and psychological dependence. Gilman advocated that as humans, women's role should extend outside the home to economics, politics, and science among others and that the sexuo-economic relationship found in the home blocked the progress of social growth of America in that it stunted the advancement of

[51] Titled the "optimistic reformer" by William Dean Howells.
[52] Gilman wrote 20 of the 21 chapters of her autobiography in 1926. She wrote the final chapter just before her death on August 17, 1935.
[53] Gilman listed the powers in four areas: intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual.

women, half of the human population. Gilman proposed rational reproduction, that is to say eugenics, to stake out a claim for woman's agency in the political, social, and economic arena. She offered eugenics as a path to women's freedom.

In order to put forth her ideas, Gilman lectured extensively and published a supporting body of fictional work mainly in the magazine the *Forerunner,* one of which was the novel *The Crux.* Contrary to other criticisms, I propose that the title of the novel, *The Crux*, refers to the crux of the "Woman Question," that is to say the role of women in marriage and motherhood.[54] For Gilman, the solution was not in the rejection of the roles of wife and mother but rather a reformation of the roles by offering women the opportunity, through education and eugenic choices, to become fully human thus ensuring evolutionary progress.

I have presented the argument that Gilman instrumentalizes the metaphor of syphilis to subvert the assumptions about women's economic dependency on men, what Gilman calls the sexuo-economic relationship, in marriage and the practices and the socio-political institutions, including the institution of marriage, that support these assumptions. As well, I have presented an argument with examples from Gilman's writings that the metaphor of syphilis unifies Gilman's discourse of women's subjection and oppression. Spatialities, which can be examined by looking at the metaphors dealing with locations, places and boundaries,

[54] According to Tuttle, written in her "Introduction" of the 2002 publication of the novel, "the 'crux' of the matter is indeed the fact that women must reject cultural imperatives that objectify them through their silence, ignorance, and inaction, claiming instead the knowledge and authority needed for bodily self-determination" (57).
Davis, in her biography of Gilman, argues that *The Crux* focuses on the prevalence of venereal disease and "the crux of *The Crux* was Charlotte's outrage over the knowing transmission of venereal disease to unknowing women" (303). Davis, in a somewhat contradictory argument goes on to state that, read today *The Crux* is:
"a vexed commentary on racial purification through marriage and as a polemical woman's western promoting the reestablishment of white supremacy on the frontier, *The Crux* reveals the extent to which Charlotte's utopian longings deepened with her growing alienation from a city and a country she considered too heterogeneous for its own good" (303).
Jill Bergman, in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and a Woman's Place in America*, summarizes *The Crux*: "white New England women in the West achieve Gilman's ideal of civilization through sexual and reproductive self-determination—exercising the prerogative of sexual selection to choose as mates those men best suited to yield superior, 'clean offspring'" (24).
Seitler in her "Introduction" of the 2003 publication of the novel reads *The Crux* "as an allegory of the changing political and social anxieties of the early twentieth century" (3-4).

are presented as social constructs produced by socio-cultural, political and economic systems. Gilman writes in *The Man-Made World*: "The house is the physical expression of the limitations of women," and in *The Crux,* the house becomes the site of syphilitic contamination (22). In the mid-nineteenth century as physicians warned of congenital syphilis and its role in national degeneration, the space of syphilitic contact shifted to the private space of the marriage bed and the male body.

I have also underscored the importance of *The Crux* to understandings of Gilman's other fictions written primarily between 1910 and 1916 and published in the *Forerunner* and early feminism more generally. The fiction published in the Forerunner can be considered an agent of social change and reflects examples of women improving their lives through changing opportunities, economic freedom and reproductive choices. The *Forerunner* itself is a significant text for the studies of the New Woman literature which developed during the Progressive Era. The texts published in the *Forerunner* remain to a large extent, an unexamined source of material for additional research.

In *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag noted that syphilis is limited as a metaphor because "the disease itself was not regarded as mysterious; only awful" (58-59). Perhaps, Gilman would have written the same of the subjection of women, that is to say, not mysterious, only awful.

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