

The Eastern Threat to Women's Enfranchisement in Nellie McClung's *Purple Springs*

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Introduction:

Nellie McClung (1873-1951) is considered the most influential Canadian feminist of the early twentieth century. As well as being a public figure fighting for women's right to vote, own property, run for office in parliament, and her role in the 1927 landmark case for women to be recognized under the Canadian Charter as persons, she is also remembered as a prolific writer of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Most celebrated for her writing about the suffrage cause, McClung also wrote extensively about temperance, birth control, immigration, domestic "missionary" work, war, and most problematic to her legacy, eugenics, which was still a popular social philosophy in the early twentieth century.

This paper explores McClung's 1921 work *Purple Springs*. Her most autobiographical work of fiction, *Purple Springs* acts as the third and final work in a trilogy following the life of the central character Pearlie, from her humble upbringing to her political battle for women's right to vote in Manitoba. *Purple Springs* retells the story of Nellie McClung's own dramatic performance of a mock women's parliament in 1914, which played a key role in defeating Premier of Manitoba Sir Rodmond Roblin's Conservative government in 1916, and bringing about the eventual victory for the liberals and women's right to vote. But *Purple Springs* also recounts a number of other concurrent stories in the history of Canada—the temperance battle and the connection

between racial purity and tuberculosis have been explored by Cecily Devereux in *Growing a Race: Nellie L. McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism* (2005) at length. However, this paper is interested in exploring another aspect of the text, one that is also related to the agenda of Western moral progress. McClung promotes the idea in her fiction that all things coming from the East¹ are a threat to the moral and racial purity of Canadians and the economic progress of Canada as a nation. Although McClung never clearly articulates a coherent understanding of Eastern philosophy, she nevertheless warns against the application of Eastern ideas as embodied by the “Oriental” contemplation of the old doctor and its application to medicine and community life.

This paper, then, is interested in how McClung engages with early twentieth-century ideas of and from the East. McClung figures the East as both closely tied to the feminist struggle for women’s freedom and as a threat. McClung’s portraits of the East in *Purple Springs* appear to threaten the possibility of women’s progress towards equality and freedom. Further, the application of Eastern thought to life and its possible curative properties are represented by McClung as threatening Western progress. Finally, McClung’s female characters are further enslaved symbolically by aspects of

¹ I use the term the “East” in an attempt to avoid repeating the racist terminology current in McClung’s day. McClung and other writers of her era employ the term the “Orient” and “Oriental” to denote the countries and all things associated with the cultures of China, Japan, and India. McClung’s ideas about the “Orient” would have come from both travel writing and missionary writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The racist ideology of the era focused its negative stereotyping on the Chinese and exoticized the Japanese. However, by the time of *Purple Springs* the Japanese were seen in similarly racist terms to the Chinese and the religion, philosophy, and culture had all been subsumed under the term “Oriental” and the earlier differences elided. Thus, McClung and others could use the term “Orient” or “Oriental” to signal the entirety of the underlying racist ideas of the day and assume that her reader would view all things of the “Orient” or “Oriental” as negative.

the East and it is only through Western and moral progress that the men and women of McClung's various fictional communities can be restored to harmony.

In the pre-Confederation and early post-Confederation period of Canada's past, the threat to the progress of civilization was always posed from the wilderness or from the Natives lurking in the wilderness. However, in the 1920s in both the Canadian urban and rural settings of McClung's stories, hard work and moral progress triumph over the wilderness and the threats posed to civil progress are almost entirely of Eastern origin. The exception is in the case of tuberculosis, which, according to McClung, can be overcome by temperance and hard work. This doctrine is expostulated through embedded moral vignettes, but also clearly tied to race and figured as a foreign invasion from outside the nation—the East. But while the scourge of alcohol and tuberculosis are removed through temperance, moral rigor and hard work, the threat of Eastern ideas of any kind, religious, medicinal, philosophical, or otherwise, seem much more difficult to eradicate in part because they have worked their way into the psyche of people in the community and to McClung masquerade as philosophical and meditative. McClung sees these Eastern ideas as being a threat to the moral and economic progress of the nation and as resulting in the racist characteristics associated with people from the East including laziness and lack of social consciousness. For McClung, the possibility of hope, restoration, and healing are represented as "Purple Springs"—springs that restore harmony, represent self-sacrifice, and can be discovered only when women are granted the necessary rights to self-governance. But clearly the hope for liberation of women and moral progress does not extend to the East and is in fact threatened by all ideas from the East. In both *Purple Springs* and *Painted Fires* the East is represented as a

threat and one that, while lurking at the margins of the texts and in the shadows of the story, is never able to be entirely overcome.

Literature Review:

Randi R. Warne's *Literature as Pulpit: The Christian Social Activism of Nellie L. McClung* (1993) resists what he contends is the "single-minded attention to her famous 'feminist polemic'" and rather argues that McClung played a central role in making Canada a better place through her involvement in the social gospel movement supporting J.S. Woodsworth's All People's Mission in Winnipeg (2-3). While Warne is taking issue with earlier discussions of McClung which focus on her "feminist polemic," the scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s seems to be particularly characterized by scholars taking issue with the type of feminism McClung represents. As Miaso Dean argues in her 1998 *Practising Femininity: Domestic Realism and the Performance of Gender in Early Canadian Fiction*, the very theme of self expression as a form of liberation for women is problematic. According to Dean, "as the New Woman novels suggest; self-expression relies upon a concept of a natural self which reinstalls the stereotypes of the feminine" (77-78). Janice Fiamengo notes the following year in "A Legacy of Ambivalence: Responses to Nellie McClung" that "in the 1970s, McClung was squarely at the centre of the feminist revival in historical scholarship" (Fiamengo). Looking at the 1972 reissued *In Times Like These* to support her claim, Fiamengo cites Veronica Strong-Boag's introductory remark that *In Times Like These* is "the best feminist writing Canada has yet produced" (Strong-Boag xiv) while at the same time acknowledging the problems of the maternal feminist movement. Fiamengo continues

that sometime in the 1980s this celebration of the iconic status of Nellie McClung as an early feminist was overtaken by views such as Carol Lee Bacchi's *Liberation Deferred* (1983) which criticizes McClung and her compatriots as "conservatives terrified by the social implications of the emerging industrial order" (qtd. in Fiamengo) and Mariana Valverde who focuses on the problematic legacy of racism and eugenics in the history of the feminist movement. Through her survey of the critical history of McClung studies, Fiamengo appears to open the way for feminist critics in the twenty-first century to look more closely at Nellie McClung's literary works themselves in light of the existing balanced portrait and perspective on the debate regarding the centrality of McClung's involvement in the early eugenics movement in opposition to the legacy of McClung and other maternal feminists. Wendy Roy in the following year draws McClung into contemporary feminist discussions of autobiography questioning the lack of self-disclosure as well as the implications of McClung's work with regards to working-class feminisms. It would seem that with the publication of Roy's article the debate surrounding eugenics and racism had concluded and the discussion of feminist contribution and the actual practice of autobiography were at the foreground.

However, the same year, Cecily Devereux published her landmark work *Growing a Race: Nellie L. McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism* suggesting that McClung's work "[a]t the beginning of the twenty-first century," as Fiamengo has noted, "is characterized [...] by ambivalence" (5). And while I note the critical debates around race, eugenics and feminism, it is at this point of ambivalence noted by both Fiamengo and Devereux that I would like to take up my argument. I will be coming back to Devereux's central study of eugenics in my discussion of what I characterize as the

threat of the East in McClung's work. Devereux's study intersects with mine in her conclusion that both McClung and Murphy's "conception of 'Canadianness' was rooted in British imperial ideas of race and of natural racial hierarchies and in what Antoinette Burton has characterized for the first-wave white feminists in India and other imperial contexts as 'the white woman's burden' to 'raise up' the 'lower' races" (11). As noted earlier, according to McClung the intersections of "building a race" and the eradication of alcohol and tuberculosis have some application to the protecting of western and moral progress and what has been considered by her racist contemporaries such as Ralph Connor as the moral (and I would suggest, economic) threat posed by the East (*The Foreigner* 24).

Purple Springs

Chapter II of *Purple Springs* is titled "The Day!" and to the first-time reader of McClung or the veteran reader who is coming to *Purple Springs* as the third and final installment of the trilogy about Pearlie Watson, we know that March 1 is the day that Pearl has been eagerly awaiting for three years. On this day, Pearl Watson's eighteenth birthday, Doctor Clay has promised a formal proposal. Pearl had promised that today would be a beautiful day and when she rises early she notes that "[t]he sun was throwing long blue shadows over the fields, brightening the trees on the river bank, with a thin rinse of pale gold. Down in the ravine, the purple blue of the morning twilight was still hanging on the trees" (15). The description of the "purple blue of the morning

twilight,” while draping the day in romantic hues, should not be mistaken as the dawning of a beautiful day. *Purple Springs*, as the title itself signals, takes extensive figural interest in the colour purple. In a text that champions hard work and moral progress over inherited wealth and the snobbery of the rich, it is not surprising that McClung should reclaim the colour purple from its long association with royalty and wealth. McClung’s invocation of purple is decidedly ambivalent. The colour purple is used in the context of beauty and hardship and suffering and sacrifice, but it is also used to signal people of pomp and circumstance who misuse wealth and are selfish and proud in their use of purple in their personal adornment.

The end of that day comes in Chapter III “The House of Clay” where “the two doctors drove home in the purple-blue twilight, seated side by side, but with minds far removed from each other” (29). Again, there is the comfortable companionship of the doctors, a successful surgery, and the beauty of the “purple-blue twilight.” However, the doctors’ minds “far removed from each other” signal that ambivalence is a part of the beauty of the “purple-blue twilight” and that all might not be well. It is in this chapter that we learn Clay is suffering from an unnamed disease that will keep him from the beautiful aspect promised in the purple dawn and dusk. He will ultimately decide that as a result of this disease he cannot propose to Pearl and the day will end without the promise of marriage—which to McClung and other maternal feminists of this period is central to the maternal role of women in building the nation.

In the latter part of Chapter III the old doctor and the young doctor, Clay, discuss his unnamed condition. This conversation is central to the polemics of the text, and the three hundred pages that follow this discussion are the working out and dismissal of the

old doctor's Eastern approach to medicine. The discussion between the old and young doctor opens as follows: "There is no immediate cause for alarm,' he said, speaking slowly, 'people live for years with it, as you know—a cracked plate sometimes outlasts the good one—and as a matter of fact none of us are entirely free from it'" (34). While "it" is never named, "it" by the tell-tale symptoms refers to tuberculosis. The doctor concludes that "none of us are entirely free from it," suggesting that the seeds of contamination are among everyone and shared by all humanity. In fact, it would seem to suggest that if this is a racial scourge, as Devereux suggests, then according to the old doctor, all humanity are carriers of "it". However, this opinion comes from the old doctor—the old doctor being the former drunkard of the earlier two works in this trilogy and thus as tuberculosis and liquor are clearly linked as contaminants and associated with racial and moral impurity, he is not free of these implications. However, it seems strange that the young and upright Clay of the first two books of the Pearlie Watson trilogy should in fact be contaminated. Clay is hard working and does not drink. And while McClung uses Clay as an extended example of the healing powers of hard work and morality, over the Eastern indolence suggested by the old doctor, the fact that Clay is tubercular at all is a decided rupture in the text and may be intended to make the reader uneasy about the possibility of contamination. The disease of tuberculosis, like the immigrants from the East and their philosophies cannot be contained or eradicated and can destroy even the most upright. The call for the utter eradication of these elements thus becomes even stronger. The old doctor continues his discussion with Clay to suggest how Clay should respond to the unspoken diagnosis. The doctor says:

You will have to be more careful, though, Clay, you will have to call a halt on your activities—there must be no more of the all night sessions of yours—and those fifty mile drives—it is just like this—you are carrying a mortgage on your business—a heavy mortgage—and yet one that the business can carry—with care, great care. Many a good business man carries a heavy mortgage and pays well too, but of course it cannot stand financial strain or stress like the business which is clear of debt. With great care, you should be good for many years—but you must not draw on your reserves—you must never spend your capital—you must never be tired, or excited, or hurried, or worried. (34)

The old doctor employs the extended metaphor of a business, suggesting that the body like the business can carry a heavy affliction or disease just as the business can carry a heavy mortgage, but that because of this Clay must, like the business, be careful of his expenditures. Again, it is important to recall who is giving this message—the old doctor. In the previous two works of the trilogy we have seen the Watson family triumph over debt and hardship through backbreaking work. Pearl leaves her family at a young age to work as a servant in order to pay off the family debt. McClung, through the portrait of the Watson family, suggests the Christian triumph of being debt free—debt almost figures as sin or scourge. In Chapter I, when Pearl picks up the phone to overhear gossips calling her family common, she states in her long and proud response about her family's hard work "John Watson did work on the section, and they'd be fine and glad to get him back. He owes no man a dollar, and bears no man a grudge" (11). The portrait of the honest, hardworking, and godly family is compared to the back-stabbing rich

gossips who they have worked for in the past, and the proud conclusion is that regardless of humble origins or working on the section, Pearl's father "owes no man a dollar" (11). Clearly to McClung, a debt free life is a godly and hard working life, and thus for the old doctor to employ the metaphor of the heavily indebted business as one that can be successful is an unlikely and unwelcome situation in the McClung cosmology. There is nothing good about debt or about not working hard. In fact lack of hard work, even when accompanied by wealth, is seen to breed idle gossip and wrongful pride. The rightful pride Pearl takes is in the hard work her family has done, which is later equated with nation building.

The old doctor's speech to Clay continues to denounce the climate of Canada and any western nation and to suggest again that putting off work is a boon. He remarks as follows:

And this climate is a bit strenuous in winter—you must get out before another one comes, and live some place that is easier. This country keeps a man on his toes all the time, with its brilliant sunshine, its strong winds, its bracing air. You need a softer air, a duller atmosphere, a sleepier environment that will make you never do today what you can put off till tomorrow, and never put off till tomorrow what you might as well put off till the day after tomorrow. (34-35)

McClung never clearly states where the old doctor believes Clay should go, but the warm and temperate climate describes nowhere in Canada and could quite possibly be a place in the East and thus according to McClung a site of further degeneration and

threat. Moreover, the old doctor's championing of idleness as curative goes against the entire gospel of moral progress—brought about by hard work. It would appear that tuberculosis in the previous books of the trilogy was in fact to be conquered with dedicated hard work and with the denouncing of the demon liquor. At Pearl's earlier place of employment, the greatest threat to the hired hand comes when the drunkard son by idle drinking fails to summon the doctor and it is through Pearl's hard work that the life of hired hand is saved. The monetary reward that Pearl receives gives her family the start that they need to buy a farm and through hard work become prosperous. Further, the young girl, Lily is saved by the dedicated hard work of the community and by the shutting down of the bar and the repentance of the bar owner in shunning evil and instead working hard to bring the doctor to Lily's aid in her greatest hour of need. Nowhere in the Watson trilogy is idleness, rest, or a different climate suggested to be the cure except by the old doctor—a proponent of Eastern ways. The brisk air and hard work and the scourging of the demon liquor are everywhere the cure to tuberculosis and other social evils. Any time when help is summoned and there is a delay, the delay, whatever the cause, seems to signal distress and possibly death. Even in this case, the delay afforded by the old doctor's diagnosis and discussion with Clay bodes poorly for Pearl. The delay of Clay's proposal by a day leads to a longer and indefinite delay or termination in the days that follow. And since the creation of families and the moral upbringing of these families, is central to the progress of the nation—that is, nation building—the decay of this plan for marriage and family is a signal of death and disease for the nation.

While Clay denounces the life of ease that the old doctor proposes with a cry of “What a life!” (35), the old doctor responds at length by picturing the life of ease as a grand alternative to the one of hard work and moral progress championed by proponents of western capitalist economies such as Canada. The old doctor, described as “intoning his words like a very young clergyman,” states:

... a fascinating life, and one that I would enjoy. Here we hurry up in the morning and hurry to bed at night so we can hurry to get up again in the morning—we chase ourselves around like a cat in the ancient pursuit of its own tail, and with about the same results. The Western mind is in a panic all the time—losing time by the fear of losing time. The delights of meditation are not ours—we are pursued, even as we pursue; we are the chasers and the chased; the hunter and the hunted; we are spending and are spent; we are borrowed and lent—and what is the good of it all? I have always wanted to be an Oriental, dreaming in the shade of a palm tree, letting the sun and the wind ripen my fruits and my brain, while I sat—with never a care—king of the earth—and the air—O, take it from me, young fellow, there are wonderful delights in contemplation, delights of which we are as ignorant as the color blind are of the changing hues of the Autumn woods, or the deaf man is of music. We are deaf, blind and dumb about the things of the Soul! We think activity is the only form of growth. (35)

The old doctor here articulates the amorphous “Oriental” philosophy McClung is denouncing as a threat to the progress of the nation. The “western mind” as pictured by the doctor is continually obsessed with progress and movement as if constantly being

“hunted”. The “Oriental” or Eastern alternative offered here by the doctor as curative for body and soul involves his personal dream of being like the “Oriental” and includes palm trees, leisure, sun, ripening fruit, and time for contemplation of nature. While this is hardly a rigorous description of Eastern philosophical practice it is posed as the alternative to the Western model of progress. The doctor goes on to say that “We are cursed, you and I, and all of us. [...] with too much activity. We are obsessed with a passion for material achievement. [...] We mistake activity for progress” (36). Clay’s response is immediate and impassioned that “it is progress” and “activity does bring achievement—development” (36). Clay uses as an example the young fellows he has organized into sports teams and how the activity of the sports had saved them from “loafing and idling, reveling in crazy, foolish degrading stories—absolute degeneration” and that “[a]ctivity had saved them—activity is growth, it is life—it is everything” (36-37). And this discussion, while limited to this opening chapter, lays the foundation for what *Purple Springs* fights for and proves—activity and hard work is the answer—it leads to moral and material progress and hard work can and will conquer social evil. The old doctor, McClung’s conceptualization of a person who has been influenced by Eastern thought, includes of course his earlier embodiments in the trilogy as a lazy drunkard. The old doctor continues to argue in this chapter that no one is saved by activity and that no one who depends on “outward things for [their] happiness” can be saved, as “[o]utward things change—vanish” (37) and further appeals to things of the heart—to meditation—“the Kingdom of Heaven is within you” (37). For the old doctor, the Kingdom of Heaven within is not governed by a specifically Christian ethos. Instead, it employs the Christian terminology seductively and is rather referring to the Eastern

ideas about meditation and a focus on spiritual and inner peace over outward progress and accumulation of wealth. Following this discussion of the Western versus the Eastern approach to life, the old doctor launches into what seems to be his other pet topic—women. The old doctor goes from a discussion of Eastern thought and the way to health and happiness through Eastern meditation to a denouncing of marriage and women—here attacking the very bulwarks of morality and nation building. The doctor is portrayed as not believing in love and as being positively nasty towards all women kind. That the Eastern influenced doctor should be particularly threatening to the enfranchisement of women is hardly surprising. The racist beliefs about the abuse of women in the East were bolstered by the missionary literature in particular which discussed the barbaric practice of foot binding in China, as well as polygamy and harems. While the doctor in fact discusses marriage in the Canadian and western context, his Eastern philosophical leanings would have been easily extended to the Eastern beliefs and practices with regards to women. Thus when he congratulates Clay for not being married and then says that “[t]here is no love strong enough to stand the grind of domestic life” and pictures it as a “fearful bore” (43) the Eastern alternative of even more extreme servitude and sexual slavery for women would have been invoked. The old doctor concludes that women are meant to adorn and be beautiful but that “[w]omen, the best of them, grow tiresome and double-chinned in time” (43). Clay counters these portraits of both marriage and women by stating that “[m]arriage is a mutual agreement, for mutual benefit and comfort, for sympathy and companionship. Family life develops the better side of human nature, and casts out selfishness. [...] People only live when they can forget themselves, for selfishness is death” (43-44).

Clay denounces the old doctor as a poor philosopher and little wonder. The entire Pearlle Watson trilogy is an extended exultation of hard work leading to moral virtue and the goodness and sanctity of family life. The old doctor, as a vanquished prophet of Eastern philosophy, exits the scene barely to be heard from again.

The day when love was to have been promised is deferred and instead ends with the young doctor Clay in contemplation of the fire, “which glowed with blue and purple lights behind the windows of glass” (47). Again, the purple flame signals ambiguity about the doctor’s situation, the promised union with Pearl, and the complexity of the Western versus Eastern answer to disease and life itself. But the rest of the text is the working out and overcoming of the obstacles to love, marriage, and family, and the liberation of women, which leads to the repentance of the old boys and with it the restoration of family and community. While the old doctor is never brought to repentance, he is seen to be a proponent of Eastern ways—ways that dishonoured and excluded women and led to widespread unhappiness and immorality.

Clay does not tell Pearl about his disease, but ends their promised engagement. Pearl does not understand why, but amidst the shattering of her dream she emerges stronger and more radiant and ready to fight. In the chapter that follows, she looks back on past struggles with poverty and praises her parents and others for “many a thrill of pride had she experienced in thinking of her parents and their days of struggling. They had been and were, the real Empire-builders who subdued the soil and made it serve human needs, enduring hardships and hunger and cold and bitter discouragements, always with heroism and patience” (72). Out of the bitter disappointment and the nasty gossip because her family “worked at poorly paid, hard jobs, thereby giving evidence

that they were not capable of getting easier ones” (73), Pearl realizes that this is a “mistaken way of looking at life” (73). Pearl goes on to denounce the “hoggish ones” for being “the exalted ones” and she throws “back her head and looked with rapture into the limitless blue above her, with something of the vision which came to Elisha’s servant at Dothan when he saw the mountains were filled with the horses and chariots of the Lord” (74). The “baptism of joy” that Pearl experiences comes out of the suffering caused by the “hoggish ones” and the “falling of her house of dreams” and with it comes “[a] sudden feeling of haste—[...] a new sense of responsibility—there were so many things to be done” (74-75). Notice, there is no purple haze in the sky, but rather “limitless blue” and a sense of clear purpose and direction and responsibility because “there were so many things to be done” (75). Clearly, this is not the contemplative, East-inflected position of the old doctor, or even a giving in to earlier thoughts of escaping to a teaching position in the north; rather it is a position that indicates Pearl knows her past and has a sense of purpose and urgency for the future.

In addition to Pearl’s story of rejection, *Purple Springs* also emphasizes the stories of two women, Mrs. Paine and Mrs. Grey, who are oppressed by the laws that disadvantage women. Pearl is instrumental in both stories by befriending the women and restoring their relationships with their families. Mrs. Paine has slaved on her farm for ten years, but reaped none of the rewards for her work. Her husband has saved all the money, a sum exceeding fifteen hundred dollars, but none of this money has gone to making the home comfortable or clothing Mrs. Paine or the children. Now Mr. Paine has decided to sell the farm and start a hotel. Mrs. Paine has no legal right to either the farm or her children and she will be forced to work in the hotel business (selling liquor)

rather than desert her children. This in-laid story helps to convince a young lawyer Mr. Neeland to join the women's cause. The other in-laid story is related to the central plot of the story and in fact to the title. Mrs. Grey is a woman rejected by her community because she has a child and will not explain the circumstances to the community. This woman's history is eventually told to Pearl. The child's father is dead and the grandfather has threatened to send his grandson to England—the widow and mother having no legal right to the child unless she was unmarried. And so, rather than lose her child, she takes on the unmarried status, changes her name, and moves to a place she has inherited which she calls Purple Springs. In both cases, the family and the community are deprived of hard working, intelligent, moral women who become outcasts because of the laws that give married women no rights over their property or children. It is the laws that are immoral and make outcasts of the women rather than the women themselves. The women labour under these conditions caring for their children and leading upright lives. Eventually the Premier, Mrs. Grey's father-in-law, loses the election largely because of the staged women's parliament in which Pearl takes a leading role—in order to defend the cause of women such as Mrs. Paine and Mrs. Grey. Although Nellie McClung is careful to emphasize that people's hearts change and that it is not the laws alone that need to change, the change in government and the resulting vote for women means protection for women such as Mrs. Paine and Mrs. Grey. The ex-premier, now a humbled and broken man, is reintroduced to his estranged daughter-in-law, grandchild and into the community of Purple Springs. The promise and hope of the Purple Springs is realized in this restoration opening up the way for other and more physical manifestations of restoration.

Doctor Clay is approached to run for parliament—exactly the sort of work the old doctor has advised against. The old doctor when he sees Clay again notices that he is looking better and comments, “You are going easier, and sleeping out—that’s right. And you see you can save yourself in lots of ways—don’t you? Good! I’m pleased with you. I hear they are after you to run against the Government. You won’t touch it of course” (209). However, Clay decides to run because of his love for Pearl, belief in the women’s cause and because in spite of the personal cost he believes that “it is not individuals who count—it is the race” (218). According to the old doctor’s Eastern approach to medicine and life, relaxation and taking it easy should be the cure. However, Clay does not appear to be greatly weakened by the political campaign. And, intersecting with the story of Mrs. Grey, and as a direct result of the election, the Premier is restored to his family and the woman of Purple Springs is able to tell Clay and the community of the fabled Purple Springs. Mrs. Grey describes it as follows:

Set in the mountains, which arched around it, was this wonderful square of fertile land, about six miles one way and seven the other. The foliage is like the tropics, for the hot springs keep off frost. The creeks which run through it come out of the rocks boiling hot—but cool enough to bathe in as they run on through the meadows. Their waters have a peculiar purplish tinge, which passes away after it stands a while, and a delicate aroma like a fragrant toilet water. I called it the ‘valley of purple springs.’ (255)

The mysterious Mrs. Grey and her husband only left the original Purple Springs because “[w]e couldn’t keep it all to ourselves and be happy over it. We couldn’t forget all the sick people to whom our purple springs would bring healing” (259). The healing powers of the water are described as follows:

We found out that the water in the streams had healing power, and made one’s skin feel soft as velvet, especially one stream which had the deepest color. One old squaw, whose eyes had been sore for years, was healed in three weeks and went back to her people with her wonderful tales of the valley. After that we had Indians with us all the time. They brought their sick children and their old people, and the results were marvelous. I never knew the stream to fail. Even the tubercular people soon began to grow rosy and well. The food seemed to have healing power, too, and some who came hollow-cheeked, feverish, choking with their cruel paroxysms of coughing, soon began to grow fat and healthy. (258)

But Purple Springs is also a state of mind and healing for the race and nation. Mrs. Grey’s son, James, repeats his mother’s belief about Purple Springs: “Mother says that what kills people’s souls is when they have no purple springs in their lives. She says she’s sorry for lots of people. They live and walk around, but their souls are dead, because their springs have dried up” (235). Clearly, the healing Purple Springs is not simply a physical healing, but one that signals a spiritual cleansing as well and particularly for women. It is through hope and belief in the Purple Springs that women like Mrs. Grey keep working to make their homes beautiful and their children moral—

when the hope in healing the family, community, and nation fail then the purple “springs have dried up” (235). And the hope for Pearl, and McClung, is for women to gain the vote and with it the right to property and to raise their children. And it is because of this hope and belief that Pearl and Clay work hard for the future rather than giving in to what McClung views as the Eastern way—meditation and the quiet life. The Purple Springs can only be realized through personal sacrifice—like Mrs. Grey’s and Clay’s—and through the hard work of individuals like these there can and will come healing for the nation. As a result of Clay and Pearl’s hard work, women win the vote and Mrs. Grey is liberated from her silence, allowing Clay to learn of the Purple Springs that can heal tuberculosis—a mental and geographical place that can only be realized through hard work.

But the purple of the Purple Springs is not unambiguously healing and cleansing for the scourges of the nation. Purple also seems to signal false pride and the pretense and show that often accompanies politics. Certainly the “purple past” of *Painted Fires* signals immorality—harlotry and involvement in the opium trade—although in this case wrongly and the reputation of the Finnish woman with the “purple past” is restored through hard work, perseverance, and morality in the face of prejudice and injustice perpetrated by people of wealth and immorality—this time unambiguously tied to the Chinese trade of opium. The virtuous restoration of the reputation of the moral and hardworking heroine comes again through and in a utopian-type community—like Purple Springs—left to the heroine as a reward for her morality, compassion and hard work. Purple also seems to be connected to the political satire of *Purple Springs*, as it is in the work of other contemporary political satirists such as Madge Macbeth. At Pearl’s

first public speaking engagement she employs both humour and story-telling to humiliate the corrupt Member of Parliament who supports the consumption of alcohol and the exclusion of women from the political life of the nation. Parody and satire become Pearl's trademarks in the later political campaigns. Interestingly, in this first instance while Mr. Steadman, the Member of Parliament, prepares his speech, "Mrs. Steadman had decided that she would wear her purple silk with the gold embroidery" (81). This choice of colour for the event is later emphasized following one of Mr. Steadman's remarks regarding women, "I am old fashioned enough to want my wife to stay at home. I like to find her there when I come home. I don't want her to sit in Parliament" (95). Mrs. Steadman is pictured as "in front, with the purple plume in her hat nodding its approval" (95). Later, in a private home performance and parody of the Premier for the visiting Peter Neeland, a purple gown is employed in the tableaux, which gives way to what later becomes a central political parody of the text, responsible for winning the election. Madge Macbeth, writing under the pseudonym of Gilbert Knox in *The Land of the Afternoon*, a political satire of Ottawa, also uses purple in a similarly ambiguous ways. Lady Denby is known for her purple garments, the purple in this case seems to signal right proportions and the right relationship to the royal purple—she is a truthful and kind woman. However, the upstart Mrs. Pratt wears purple in a way that highlights her inappropriate, self seeking and false political action. The purple she is wearing calls attention to her attendance at events she has not been invited to and on the occasion of a wedding during war times, "Mrs. Pratt's idea of economy was expressed by a royal purple chiffon velvet, trimmed with ornaments of amethyst and pearl" (316). For both McClung and Macbeth, the ostentation and vacuity of the women

is signaled by purple—both women are wives of rather stupid and lazy politicians. However, both McClung and Macbeth signal the absurdity of these characters by setting them apart as inappropriately dressed with ostentatious feathers and chiffon on occasions when this kind of showiness is particularly out of proportion with the event or times. McClung and Macbeth both give a great deal of attention to the ways in which their characters' comportment and dress signal aspects of character—modesty, thrift, hard work, poverty, as well as strength and certainty. Pearl is a model of right dress—choosing suits that set off her strength and purpose and using her attractions to strengthen the cause of women's liberation.

Madge Macbeth seems to share Nellie McClung's belief in the threat to women from contact with any embodiment of the East, in this case India. A secondary character in *Shackles* (1926) is a young missionary woman returned from India to raise money for her mission. While *Shackles* is primarily the story of a woman writer who is entrapped by male expectations of domestic duty, the missionary women's relationship with the central character Naomi's husband actually acts to further enslave Naomi. The missionary woman is a threat to the moral order of the text and the Eastern missionaries' presence results in the re-enslavement of the almost liberated Naomi. More generally the underlying racist ideologies embodied by the East and anything related to the East is figured as a threat to nation building and more particularly, to the concerns of this paper, to the liberation of women. The racist ideas about the morally inferior position of women in the East and by extension anything to do with Eastern culture or thought is thus figured as a threat to early twentieth century women's feminism.

The purple past and purple future—related at once to harlotry and opium use and healing and community—is an ambiguous colour symbolically related to discussions of the East. However, while purple seems connected to wrong dress and attitude as well as to misjudgment of character and past, it also signals in both *Purple Springs* and *Painted Fires* the possibility of healing—both mental and physical—in the geographical and psychological Purple Springs that can be discovered through the liberation of women, the eschewing of all things from the East and the resulting healing of women in a utopian-type community such as Purple Springs.

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