"Love in the Clouds": Barbara Cartland's Religious Romances

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Abstract

Barbara Cartland has become a byword for pulp fiction, the epitome of popular culture lacking progressive purpose and deeper meaning. It is well known that Cartland wrote sentimental romances, but the extent to which these were written against the backdrop of a spiritual framework with the intent of propagating a "religion of love" is little realized. This article discusses how Cartland represents romantic love as a means to accessing an "absolute reality" transcending ordinary experience. Focusing on her novel *Love in the Clouds* as a case study, I will examine how Cartland used the popular romance genre as a platform for a spiritual awakening of her readers. Her ideas and influences will be contextualized within the tradition of religious romance writing.

[1] Barbara Cartland (1901–2000), Dame of Hatfield, sold over one billion copies worldwide of her 723 book titles, which have been translated into 36 languages. The "Queen of Romance," as she is still referred to, earned a place in the *Guinness Book of Records* as one of the top-selling authors of all time. In the years before her death, Cartland's output was regularly over twenty books a year. In addition to this, no less than 160 novels left unpublished are currently being made available to the public in a series entitled the Pink Collection.[1] The relatively sparse criticism available on Cartland's production has focussed mainly on the *political unconscious* it propagates. It has been argued, for example, that her novels prescribe traditional gender roles for successful matrimony and persuade women to strive for acceptance within the bounds of patriarchal society.[2] The present article does not set out to challenge this; instead it will shift the attention to what Cartland herself saw as "false consciousness" and the means to expunge it. When Cartland and religion are mentioned, it is usually with a focus on her outspokenness for abstinence before marriage (a totem in her writing). Certainly, Cartland's romances are pious and express a traditionalist version of Christianity. I will, however, introduce another perspective on the religious dimension in her books

by examining how they also speak with mystical and transcendental accents of romance as a means to spiritual enlightenment. To focus the analysis, her 239th novel, *Love in the Clouds* (1979), is chosen as a case-study. If this appears to be picked somewhat at random, it will soon become clear that it typifies Cartland's production in several respects. In the second part of the article, the findings of the analysis will be related to the literary history of religious romance, as well as to current trends in the book market. Cartland can be seen as the most successful example of how religious commitment adapts itself to the demands of popular culture.

[2] One of Cartland's biographers aptly described her as a "crusader in pink" (Cloud 1979), in reference to the marketing of herself, on the dust-jacket of her books, dressed in lavish pink chiffon ball gowns and her quest to win over the public to her message of love. In fact, Cartland aimed, at all times, to educate her readers into a better understanding of love as the ultimate realization of human existence. Based on the notion of *utile et dulce*, or what she called "entertainments with a message," she wanted to achieve this through the medium of affordable straight-to-paperback romances. In her many novels, Cartland promoted what she referred to as a "religion of love," a concept she explained as a theo-philosophical concept in her many non-fictional books. The myth that Cartland cultivated in her novels was that we are saved from our material-physical prison by love. If this purpose has generally been overlooked by critics, statements from her large fan base show that this was not ignored.[3]

[3] Cartland made her debut in 1923 with the novel *Jigsaw*, a society thriller with a moderate splash of naughtiness. By the 1930s, however, she began incorporating a spiritual dimension in her fiction. A key notion in Cartland's romantic universe is the idea of the "Life Force." This is described in her first book-length account of her philosophy, the psycho-religious study *Touch the Stars: A Clue to Happiness* (1935). Cartland here explains "Life Force" as that which upholds the human spirit and brings men and women to a realization of their inner selves. The "Life Force" infuses romantic love

with divinity and brings the individual into unity with a higher principle. She expanded and elaborated her ideas in a number of mind-body-and-spirit books and “inspirational” autobiographies, such as *Love, Life and Sex* (1957), *I Search for Rainbows* (1969), *I Seek the Miraculous* (1977), *Book of Love and Lovers* (1978) and *Etiquette for Love and Romance* (1984). The contents of these books are evidence of Cartland’s interest in religious exploration, ranging from yogic philosophy, “focussed energy,” transcendentalism, paranormal phenomena and the occult. In the autobiographical *I Seek the Miraculous*, she clarified that her aim was to describe an experience of love spiritually more powerful than physical desire. With the notion of “Life Force” as her bedrock, Cartland claimed to write spiritualized romances which provided a sense of order and destiny to chaotic existence. She believed that those who “give out love become one with the whole living, breathing force of the universe and God” (qtd. in Eckstein-Soule 1997, 77). But, despite her flirtations with this variety of religious and spiritual traditions, including the supernatural, Cartland’s romances are firmly placed within a religious framework, to which she believed the other philosophies were compatible. For Cartland, the Christian values and romantic love were intrinsically connected. For example, the heroines in her books are often found taking time out for prayer when faced with events of great importance to their personal lives. This connection also found its way into in her book of prayer *The Light of Love: A Thought for Every Day* (1979).

[4] The titles of many Cartland books vividly portray the idea of love as part of an ascendance to a divine realm of consciousness. Examples are legion and include *Lovers in Paradise* (1978), *Journey to Paradise* (1979) and *Riding to the Moon* (1983). Ascendance was also the foundation stone in Cartland’s discussions of romance as a phenomenon. In *Towards the Stars* (Cartland 1975, 239), love is described as “an ecstasy so wonderful, so glorious and so spiritual that it was not of this world.” Another such example is *Love in the Clouds*. On the very last page of this novel, the heroine has discovered a love that is “both human and divine”; it is “the celestial love that both men and the

gods themselves sought" (Cartland 1979, 160; henceforth, *LC*). Cartland's novels consistently represent love as transcending historical selfhood and acting as a catalyst for the emergence into a state of pure consciousness. We find the lovers' raptures described as transcendent states of being. At the end of one novel, they are described as having "touched the divine" (Cartland 1978, 187), or we may find the heroine speaking to her lover: "I love … you and everything you do … will be perfect and … also divine" (Cartland 1982, 135). In these raptures, the heroine is suspended from the world of temporality and becomes attuned to the eternal rhythms of the cosmos. Again, in the conclusion to *Love and Linda*, love is figured as a mystical unification with the cosmos: "it was as if he gave me all the most wonderful, beautiful things in the world—the sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, the flowers. They were all there and I was part of them" (Cartland 1976, 211). The lovers are divested of their temporal bodies and assume the roles of the universal male and female. For example, in *Dollars for the Duke*, the lovers are carried "on the waves of ecstasy into the starlit sky, and they knew that nothing mattered except that as man and woman they were one now and through all eternity" (Cartland 1982, 1:127).

[5] An important plank in Cartland's romances is the idea that men and women will be spiritually reborn to a more authentic self through love. For the heroines, finding love is a momentous, life-changing event. At the end of Cartland's *Love and Linda*, for example, the eponymous heroine acknowledges: "I know now that love is divine and comes from God and while it's the most thrilling, rapturous sensation one could ever imagine, it also makes me want to be good" (Cartland 1976, 220). The hero's change is an even more essential requirement for the plot. The male characters (often womanizers) undergo a moral reformation of their former wicked ways, as they are saved by love. Without the light of true, divine and holy love, the male is prey to the workings of Satan. The conversion that the male protagonist must go through is couched in a language rich with religious symbolism. This is reflected in the titles of several novels: *A Halo for the Devil* (1974),

Devil in Love (1975), *Lucifer and the Angel* (1980), *The Devil Defeated* (1986), *Love Strikes a Devil* (1992) etc. In these cased, there is a play on the common use of the word "devil" for a rascal, but the allegory of love as a casting out demons and abandoning a life of temptation is never lost out of sight.

[6] In an interview with The *Guardian* newspaper's "Women's Page" in 1977, Cartland expounded the personal view that men not only have superior bodies but that they are also intellectually superior. Even more significantly, the lifestyles of men inevitably give them more "experience." In comparison, woman is guided by emotion; her instincts remaining dormant until awakened by the man's "experience." In courtship, the balance is redressed, because there the male is inferior in matters of the heart. He is controlled by the physical and driven by lust: "all men are cavemen and philanderers at heart" (qtd. in Brunt 1984, 140–1). Only the mysterious purity of woman can transform him into adopting a better life, which is in harmony with the Life Force.

[7] A spiritual awakening for both the male and the female protagonist is also the *dénouement* in Cartland's *Love in the Clouds*. Since this novel will serve as a case study, a brief summary may be in order. The novel begins in late Victorian England of 1895. The distinguished Sanskrit professor Bernard Wardell suffers a heart attack and is prevented from travelling to Nepal to search for an ancient Sanskrit text. This is the *Lotus Manuscript*, said to be "full of beautiful, inspiring thoughts, which could stimulate and raise the minds of those who understood them towards the stars" (*LC* 22). This manuscript was reputedly written by one of Buddha's disciples, containing undisclosed material on the Buddha. The professor is in financial straits and desperately needs the money that the acquisition of the sacred manuscript will earn him. Therefore, he reluctantly sends his daughter, Chandra, in his place. In India, Chandra meets up with her father's old connection Lord Frome, a notorious woman hater. Although Lord Frome is initially sceptical of Chandra's abilities as a scholar, he nevertheless agrees to accompany her. Their travels lead them to a monastery in the

Nepalese mountains. While they are searching through the library there, a lama interrupts them and leads them to a secret room, where they are given permission to see the *Lotus Manuscript*. Unfortunately, they are not allowed to read it nor take it with them, since—the lama explains to them—the world is not ready yet to receive the divine truths it contains. However, they do discover another, albeit minor, manuscript, entitled *The Song of the Celestial Soul*. This manuscript also promises financial gain to Chandra’s father. Even so, the arduous journey and its ultimate failure help bring Chandra and Lord Frome closer together; as in all of Cartland’s novels, the plot gradually builds to its predetermined resolution: Lord Frome proposing marriage.

[8] Cartland’s research into Oriental spirituality is apparent in the plot of *Love in the Clouds*. The fictional *Lotus Manuscript* calls to mind the *Lotus Sutra*, one of the most influential Buddhist texts from East Asia. The extensive Mahayana scripture, written in Sanskrit, was recognized for centuries as containing the summit of the Buddha Shakyamuni’s teaching about supreme enlightenment and the universal salvation of all living beings. The equally fictional *Song of the Celestial Soul* recalls Sir Edwin Arnold’s English translation of the much admired Hindu spiritual text the *Bhagavad Gita*, which was published as *The Song Celestial* in 1895—the year in which *Love in the Clouds* takes place.

[9] A salient feature of *Love in the Clouds* is the convergence of its two main narrative lines: the search for the sacred *Lotus Manuscript* and the protagonist’s discovery of love. Should the reader miss the connection, it is bluntly pointed out that Chandra’s romance is “directly linked to the wonder of the Lotus Manuscript” (*LC* 143). The inability to finally procure the manuscript is compensated for by the spiritual love that she finds with Lord Frome. Towards the end of the novel, Chandra gasps in celebration of a completed quest: “This is love … love as I always knew it would be if I could ever find it” (*LC* 143). For Lord Frome, the similarity between the sacred Sanskrit texts and the mystery of love is made even more explicit. A Lama tells him that, though he cannot take

home the *Lotus Manuscript*, he has, nonetheless, "found the treasure that all men seek" (*LC* 159)—the transcendental happiness of spiritual love. Several times throughout the novel, Chandra is metaphorically associated with the beauty of the *Lotus Manuscript*. She is described with the vocabulary otherwise reserved for the *Lotus Manuscript*: she is "a unique beauty that arouses spiritually" (*LC* 150). Lord Frome tells us that he was "used to looking for something different and unique in manuscripts, and therefore I have always found the so-called pretty or beautiful women of Society ordinary and somehow uninspiring" (*LC* 150). When Lord Frome's eyes are finally opened to Chandra's beauty, we learn that he "treated her with a reverence that made her feel … she was one of the fragile manuscripts" (*LC* 153).

[10] Chandra (who we may take to be representative of Cartland's women generally) is metaphorized as a sacred text that needs to be interpreted in order to illuminate the reader. Chandra admonishes Lord Frome that he has "a lot of translating to do to make me as I ought to be." Until then, Chandra explains, she will remain "very nondescript" (*LC* 150). In conspicuously religious terms, Cartland's female protagonists are typically described as an "angel haloed by light," "pure" and "sacred," as a reflection of their spirituality fundamentally above (and unfit for) mundane reality. Given Cartland's mystical leanings, we may not be surprised to find a representation of the mystery of love as an exegetical process, in which the exegete does not as much objectify the text as makes it part of a self-development. Cartland here seems to use the same metaphors that can sometimes be found in connection with the description of mystical exegesis: there is an erotic relationship between exegete and the object of interpretation, which will gradually change both text and reader.[4] The passage can be seen as a literary representation of Cartland's dogmatic beliefs concerning the roles of males and females in love relationships. As it was discussed above, she held that the male's reason and intellectual properties were needed to transfigure the woman, opening her up to a higher self-realization.

[11] It has already been noted that many of Cartland's plots were cast in the mold of Christian conversion narratives. The heroine's foremost quest is to win over the hero from a state of corruption to a life of love. The male who refuses to see the mystical truth of love is negating the divine. Often the male protagonist in Cartland's fiction has formerly been a predator in relationships devoid of any spiritual dimension. Lord Frome is no exception. He is the typology of a lost soul, brought to enlightenment by the heroine's spiritual qualities. For example, he tells Chandra that he used to write love letters in "the Byronistic vein … that were immaturely passionate" (*LC* 148). The definition of a *bad* and essentially immoral hero is important for the plot. Roger Sales has argued that all Cartland's suburban aristocrats are modelled on the Byronic myth, and that it is a condition of the novels that they must reject their predatory and unspirited amorousness (Sales 1999, 166–83). In *Love in the Clouds*, Lord Frome's "conversion" is analogized with the discovery of religious truth. Once romantically involved with Chandra, he is able to speak in a voice akin to the beautiful verse of the Sanskrit manuscript. In the final resolution of the novel, we are told that "everything that was poetic and idealistic in his nature had come to the surface, and he expressed himself in words that at times seemed like The Song of the Celestial Soul" (*LC* 154). The lovers' final unification is illustrated in the metaphor of the poet playing his lyre: Chandra "had only to look at him [Lord Frome] to feel that every nerve in her body vibrated to him like a musical instrument (*LC* 152). Cartland often used music as the authentic means of communication of a love sublime, for example: "Then there was only the music of the angels and the blinding light of eternal love" (Cartland 1994, 469).

[12] Since Cartland consistently allocates a specialized category of language to express love, it is useful to briefly focus on the stylistic properties of her texts. Cartland signals to her readers that the climax of romance is reached through switching from novelistic prose style to a figural mode of language. In describing heightened moments of love, often triggered by a kiss, a profoundly

metaphoric language replaces straightforward signification. We find a language brimming with similes and metaphoric comparisons ("like," "as if" and "as though"), making it possible to compare the worldly realm with one believed to exist beyond material and temporal boundaries. A related characteristic of Cartland's writing is the recurrent description of an upward movement indicating spiritual transcendence. For instance, a kiss carries Chandra "to the top of the snow-covered mountains and we … left the world … behind" (*LC* 153). In *Love for Sale*, the female protagonist receives a kiss that "carried her up into the stars that were now shining in the sky outside" (Cartland 1980, 161). In the last lines of *Towards the Stars*, the heroine: "surrendered herself to the ecstasy and rapture of love and he carried her toward the stars" (Cartland 1975, 167). This is often related to an experience of cosmic unity; in *Music from the Heart*, the heroine feels as if the hero is "carrying her up to the starlit sky … where there was only the love which came from the life pulsating within them" (1982:2, 155). Typographically, Cartland's ecstatic love scenes are marked by an extensive use of dots punctuating the lines, as it can be seen from these examples. This indicates that human language can no longer suffice. The love Chandra feels in *Love in the Clouds* is described as a "wild rapture that was inexpressible" (*LC* 143), and she can only speak "incoherently," because "happiness made it hard to speak" (*LC* 160). This representation of love resonates with the notion of religious "transport" as characterized by "incommunicableness," a phenomenon which William James defined as "the keynote of all mysticism" (James 1902).

[14] The intense moments of romantic transport transcend temporal and spatial order. Hence, these passages often fail to integrate with the novelistic prose. The way in which they may simultaneously break with the otherwise narrative form of the novel and stand out against the world of physical laws and mortality can be seen in the following example:

> Then he was kissing her again … until she felt as though they were … high in the sky enveloped with the light of love …

> . . . . . .
>
> It was a very long day's journey when Lord Frome and Chandra rode through the valley where malaria was prevalent (*LC* 151; dots and paragraph break in the original).

This is a jarring transition. The suspension of the physical laws governing humans contrasts starkly with the Nepalese valley filled with ailing mortal bodies, signalling the fundamental difference between two modes of existence. It may remind us of the account in Matthew 17 where Jesus and three disciples come off the Mountain of Transfiguration and straight down to the valley where they are met with all sorts of diseases. To further highlight this, Cartland reverses the metaphorical geography, from upwards to downwards movement. Nonetheless, the integration of the divine in the physical world is the foregone conclusion in Cartland's books. The discovery of transcendental love is meant to open up the doors of perception to a new dimension of the mundane world. Hence, towards the end of *Love in the Clouds*, Chandra can celebrate that "the flowers [are now] more beautiful, the orchids more profuse," a supersensibilty she "had been lacking yesterday" (*LC* 155).

[15] On the background of the above analysis, I am now able to discuss how links between romance and mysticism have been explored in a broader context. One obvious place to start is with George Bataille, who often focussed on extreme states of consciousness in his writing. Pertinent to the present discussion, Bataille pointed to "staggering similarities" between the rhetoric of higher love and mysticism (1977, 246–9). He emphasized the sensual rhetoric of a female mystic such as Teresa of Avila, but other examples can be found in the writings of Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Margery Kempe and the long line of women mystics to which they belong. In Cartland's novels, the revelation of a higher existence through love can, at times, be seen to model itself on the rhetoric used by female mystics, who describe God's love penetrating the heart. To take an example from *Love in the Clouds*: Chandra feels "the sensations he [Lord Frome] aroused in her running

though her like shafts of sunlight" (*LC* 150). Cartland may intend no direct reference, but her metaphor is rhetorically very close to Teresa of Avila's famous vision of a male angel with a fire-tipped lance piercing her heart.[5]

[16] Cartland's rhetoric need not, however, rely on scholarly reading to work for her readers (rather one would expect it to be detrimental). The reason why Cartland's scenes of mystical unity can find a place within the popular romance genre is that they can be seen to tap a fount of common experience. In an empirical study, Ralph W. Hood and James R. Hall examined "the consistent utilization of erotic and sexual phrases in both Western and Eastern traditions to characterize the mystical experience." Interviewees revealed that mystical experiences were frequently elicited in connection with intense amorous and/or erotic feelings (Hood and Hall 1980). In fact, it has been duly noted by several critics that representations of the mystical are often incorporated into popular romance novels. Rosalynn Voaden, for instance, convincingly compared modern romance fiction with the erotic visions of medieval women mystics (1995, 78). Jay Dixon, in a book on Mills & Boon (the long-standing market leader in romance publishing), examines how romantic love is "often described using language evocative of the Christian ideology of divine love." She furnishes her analysis with examples from earlier, as well as more recent romances (1998, 182). In general, the cosmic oneness of man and woman, as perceived by the mystic, is now "a familiar concept that has wound its way into popular romance" (Zetter 1999, 116). In *Love in the Clouds*, Chandra declares to Lord Frome: "you are the other part of me, the part which has always been missing" (*LC* 150). Her novels enact a re-symbolisation of the unification theme often found in spiritual literature.

[17] In the above discussion, I have emphasized the mystical elements in Cartland's religious novels, but it should not be ignored that they at all times fall back on traditional Christian values. There is no sex before marriage and physical eroticism is shunned. In this respect, they share an ideology in common with what has been termed "evangelical" or "inspirational" romance. This

segment of the market is growing. One example is the Toronto-based Harlequin Enterprises, a market leader in romance publishing and women's fiction, which has published a series of paperbacks, entitled *Love Inspired.* These are billed as "heartwarming novels," which "feature inspirational stories with a commitment to strong family values and high moral standards."[6] Zondervan, a subsidiary of HarperCollins Publishers and one of the largest Christian publishing companies in the world, has had great success with its evangelical romances in the Serenade Saga series. Deseret Book (a Utah corporation owned by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) and Covenant Communications (an independent Mormon publisher) are examples of publishing houses catering for specific denominational readerships with their series of romantic novels. Cartland's novels may present heroines who are explicitly Christian, and may be given to praying, but the Christianity she presents in her novels is ecumenical and primarily intuitive, never alienating "freethinking" audiences.

[18] In a recent study, Lynn S. Neal examined the market for "evangelical" romances. Her research revealed that the authors of these books explicitly spoke of their representations of male-female relationships as analogous to the "romance" between believer and God (2006, 172). This is an approach also discernable in Cartland's books, and one that is reflected in *Love in the Clouds* through the key metaphor of love as an exegesis of a sacred text. Neal's study also showed that readers prized inspirational romances for confirming a religious way of life against the general corruption and promiscuity of modern society (Lynn 2006, 76; cf. Barret 2003). Cartland spoke of her mission as the "restoration of men's and women's more authentic selves, undistorted by the currents of the present (qtd. in Brunt 1984, 143). But whereas many of the new breed of Christian romance writers deal specifically with problems of becoming a Christian and observing formalized religion, such themes are not central to Cartland's novels. She remained sceptical of institutionalized religion, believing formal worship had lost its message in empty ritual (Cloud

1979, 66). Faith was always a deeper commitment untroubled by doctrinal concerns. As in the more recent "evangelical" novel, Cartland's novels contain an implicit critique of modern society. Many of the Christian traditionalist values propounded in the new evangelical romances tally with Cartland's promotion of Victorian- or Edwardian-period ideology in her novels.[7]

[19] Cartland's inspiration from novelists such as Jane Austen, the Brontës, George Eliot and other older writers is evident. These authors, each in their own way, showed signs of the development described by Robert M. Polhemus, who studied how romance novels created a new site for re-constituting community and moral values, along with modes of psychological gratification. This had once been the exclusive domain of religious sensibility but was compromised by an increasingly rational modernity. Put more simply, traditional religion came to be substituted by a gospel of romantic love. The romance novel made headway in popular culture by becoming "a means for imagining forms of faith that would augment or substitute for orthodox religious visions" (Polhemus 1990, 4). Cartland took a specific interest in novels, published in the late Victorian period and the early twentieth century, which had a specific mystical-religious dimension. In the remainder of this article, I will discuss a number of these authors in a comparative perspective.

[19] *Love in the Clouds*, a story of a search for Eastern wisdom in the mountainous regions of Nepal, was published the year after Cartland started her Library of Ancient Wisdom series in 1978. In her capacity as editor, Cartland sought to establish a canon of older romantic novels, which spoke with a religious and moral purpose. The Ancient Wisdom series brought out other authors' stories of love in antiquity, or the East. The series included a number of older works by Talbort Mundy (1879–1940) and Lily Adams Beck (d. 1931), to which Cartland wrote forewords. Both these writers are today associated with the rise of theosophy. Among Beck's titles in the series was *The Garden of Vision* (orig. publ. 1933), which is about an Englishwoman who forsakes the materialism of her home country to seek the path to wisdom and spiritual enlightenment in Japan. Another book

was her romance *The House of Fulfilment: The Romance of a Soul* (orig. 1927), which deals with the speculative Hindu mysticism of the Upanishads and the unveiling of the secrets of immortality in a secluded sanctuary in Kashmir. This setting and theme bring us close to *Love in the Clouds*. Indian myth and religion have an obvious attraction for the romance writer. The emphasis on cosmic unity between male and female principles and placing *Kama* (desire, affection, love) as one of the four *purusarthas*, or goals of life have made the juxtaposition of religion and love less dramatic (see Sternberger 1998, 90–1).

[20] Other prominent influences on Cartland were Marie Corelli (1855–1924), Florence Barclay (1862–1920), Elinor Glyn (1864–1943), and, most significantly, Ethel M. Dell (1881–1939). Despite the success of these writers in their time, they are only cursorily mentioned in Pamela Regis's (2003) useful study of the history of the romance genre**.**[8] The central female quest in Corelli's supernatural romances *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886), *Ardath* (1889), *The Soul of Lilith* (1892), *Ziska: The Problem of the Wicked Soul* (1896), and *The Life Everlasting* (1911) centre on the spiritual union with a masculine counterpart through a sort of mystical recognition. There is a constant tension between independent female self-discovery and spiritual union with the male (Federico 2000, 132). As in Cartland's novels, formal marriage may be a logical and important conclusion, but the spiritual experience of love is foregrounded. Corelli's ideal, according to her 1901 essay "Sovran Woman," is that man and woman are "two halves of a perfect whole". The appeal to the Platonic idea of soul mates, explored in the *Symposium*, is obvious here (Kuehn 2006, 228). As we have seen, Cartland entertains similar ideas of divine unity of man and woman as sundered halves.

[21] In biographies and interviews, Cartland specifically pointed to Ethel M. Dell as a main influence on her writing. Although Dell never visited India, many of her novels take place there (Dell 1977). Dell similarly wrote highly dramatic love-stories underpinned by a religious sensibility.

As we see in *Love in the Clouds*, the journey towards finding happiness in marriage is simultaneously a journey towards the discovery of spiritual truth. Dell's books follow the formula that God always answers the heroine's prayers for the ideal husband. This notion Cartland claimed to have copied all her life (Cloud 1979, 23). Dell's work is saturated with Christian rhetoric and references, and religious metaphors are used to frame the romantic narratives. As we saw it in relation to Cartland's metaphors for transcendence, Dell's fiction used similar strategies. The upward movement towards of flight is often a guiding metaphor, as in Dell's enormously popular *The Way of an Eagle* (1911), a title referring to Proverbs 30:19. In this novel, which also takes place in India, the soaring, diving and flight of an eagle is a combined symbol of masculine strength, as well as religious emotion. The Christian metaphor is frequently explicit, such as in Dell's *The Keeper of the Door* (1915), where romantic love is explicitly compared to the redemptive release of Peter in Acts 12:6. Dell cites this verse as an epigraph to the book: "And the keepers before the door kept the prison." The reference is to the story of Peter, who was released from prison by "the angel of the Lord." Similarly, Cartland writes salvation narratives, in which the last shall be the first. She often draws explicit religious analogies to sin and salvation in the titles of her novels, for example *The Shadow of Sin* (1975), *The Saint and the Sinner* (1978), *A Serpent of Satan* (1979), and several more. These metaphors, always handled without recourse to heavy-handed didacticism, establish a framework for reading the romantic relationships as something essentially miraculous and sacred. Cartland was not afraid to draw religious parallels when it came to describing her own life, as it is indicated by the title of her autobiography *Miracle for a Madonna* from 1985.

[22] Dell's romances were structured as quest narratives. One example is *Greatheart* (1918), which was republished in 1978 in Cartland's *Library of Love* series. The novel takes its name from the second part of John Bunyan's Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which is about a female pilgrimage, namely that of Christian's wife, Christiana. Chapter one in Dell's novel is entitled "The

Wanderer." Here, the heroine must pass through the "The Valley of Humiliation" (chap. 21) and climb "The Mountain Side" (chap. 24) to reach "The Mountain Top" (chap. 27), leading to "The Seventh Heaven" (chap. 29), Dell's romantic translation of Christian Paradise. Without quite the same allegorical heavy-handedness, Cartland often recast the narrative of the Christian quest as a romantic journey in both geographical and spiritual space, which would test the hero and heroine.

[23] Cartland published a condensed version of Dell's *Bars of Iron* (1916) in 1978. The title of this book is explained to the reader by the citation Dell places before the text: "He hath broken the gates of brass: And smitten the bars of iron in sunder" (Psalm 107, King James Version). In the last chapter of the book, the hero, Piers (Plowman?), and the heroine, Jeannie, find themselves "upon holy ground." This is a heightened state of consciousness, from which Jeannie "gazed out as one rapt in delight, gazing from a mountain-peak upon a wider view than earthly eyes could compass." She turns to Piers and utters in a low voice in which "throbbed a rapture that could not be uttered in words": "I saw Heaven opened ..." This leads us back to the second citation with which Dell had introduced the book: "I saw heaven opened" (Revelation 19:11). As we have seen in our analysis of Cartland's fiction, her romances were also explicitly metaphorized as discoveries of a spiritual paradise. In the intensity of the transcendent moments of unity, the lovers can be remade as the prelapsarian Adam and Eve. For example, in *Love in the Clouds*, the two lovers can feel as if "they ate ambrosia and drank nectar and the world in which they sat near each other was a golden, dreamlike place of unbelievable beauty" (*LC* 153).

[24] Cartland's novels promoted conservative Christian values. In this respect, they chime with more recent developments in the market for "evangelical romances". However, Cartland differs from many of the "evangelical" offerings on the market today in her consistent representation of romance as a mystical ecstasy. For this, she drew inspiration from a number of Oriental, theosophical and occult traditions, which she explained in several non-fictional books. In her fiction,

the higher ecstatic love is characterized by stylized passages, which rupture and stand out from the steady progress of the prose narrative. Cartland novels used the same template as "secular" romances, emphasizing the moral conversion of the characters; but this was within a religious framework, the result being a new spirituality. There is a tradition of using the romance novel as a vehicle for preaching religious sentiment, which Cartland revived as an editor republishing "classic" examples from around the turn of the century—her own influences. Cartland expanded and re-developed this form, effectively down-marketing it for an even wider audience, to finally settle on a formula that came to form the basis of her writing.

[25] Despite her enormous popularity worldwide, Cartland has been left out of surveys and discussions of religious romance. It is possible that her nearly iconic status as the epitome of clichéd banality has got in the way of critics taking seriously the spiritual-religious dimension of her work. Umberto Eco, in his discussion of postmodernism's threat to the original self, summarizes a common conception: "I think of the postmodern attitude as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, 'I love you madly' because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland" (Eco 1993, 227). However, Cartland never thought it idle to reiterate her message that love was a unique and original experience. She herself would see the sentence "I love you madly" as a means to escape the worldly banality which Eco believed threatened life in the postmodern condition. Lord Frome finds an escape from clichéd Byronic imitation, as we have seen, to find a love which expresses itself as a repetition of what is ancient, eternal and authentically divine.

Notes

[1] These are distributed via a website (www.barbaracartland.com), which operates as a book club.

[2] For such an analysis, see, for instance, M.V. Doyle's study of Cartland's novels, based on Ernest G. Bormann's fantasy theme analysis (Doyle 1985).

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[3] In response to the news of her death, Cartland's romances were praised by her readers, who expressed their appreciation of the "spiritual aspects of love—the aspects that sustain us when our bodies begin to fail" (Testimony from an American woman reader, posted on the BBC *Talking Point* website, "Your Memories of Barbara": <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/758082.stm>, May 26, 2000). To study romances in terms of readers' response is a traditional approach to the genre, and the statements here suggest that there is much to be done on readers' response to the religious aspect of Cartland's novels.

[4] For a discussion of mystical exegesis and its gendered metaphors, see Wolfson 2005.

[5] Cartland uses a similar formulation on p. 152. She uses the metaphor again in the title of her 1981 novel *A Shaft of Sunlight*.

[6] See <http://www.eharlequin.com>.

[7] Judging from her choice of settings, the 1920s seem to be the last historical period in which her avowedly conservative outlook on love, sex and matrimony could pass as realistic.

[8] Somewhat fuller treatment is given in Cadogan, 1994, see esp. 52–4, 77–81.

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