

MEDIUMSHIP AND LITERARY STUDIES  
IN THE AGE OF JANE

by

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## ABSTRACT

Literary scholars like Helen Sword and Bette London have recently demonstrated the significance of channeled texts, works produced by spiritualist mediums who claim to channel messages from famous dead authors and different realities. Although literary criticism has recently expressed an interest in the history of channeled writing, especially in its Victorian and early modernist iterations, the field has rarely considered the fascinating channeled texts of the New Age movement. Therefore, I hope to show that New Age channeled texts are comparable to the channeled texts of earlier periods, particularly in the ways these works challenge our conventional understandings of authorship.

Writing from the 1960s through the early 1980s, Jane Roberts claimed to channel the teachings of a discarnate energy personality named Seth. My purpose in this project will be to show that the Seth material, even as a product of the New Age movement, can be read according to the same principles that scholars have developed for approaching the channeled texts of previous eras. Because the Seth material comprises dozens of works over thousands of pages, I have focused my investigation on a single text: *The God of Jane: A Psychic Manifesto*. Written by Roberts, the book is a memoir which describes her experiences as a medium. Through various close readings of the manifesto, and by situating the work in a historical and cultural context, I demonstrate that *The God of Jane* functions as an interpretive guide for reading New Age channeled texts. In addition, I find that Roberts is not only a literary medium, she is also a literary theorist, who translates the tradition of mediumship into the latter half of the twentieth century.

## INTRODUCTION

## MEDIUMSHIP IN THE AGE OF JANE

This state of perception has nothing to do with classical pathological dissociation; and its products—Seth’s five books—display a highly developed intellect at work and give evidence of a special kind of creativity. In those trance hours I “turn into someone else.” At least, I am not myself to myself; I become Seth, or a part of what Seth is. I don’t feel “possessed” or “invaded” during sessions. I don’t feel that some superspirit has “taken over” my body. Instead it’s as if I’m practicing some precise psychological art, one that is ancient and poorly understood in our culture; or as if I’m learning a psychological science that helps me map the contours of consciousness itself.

—Jane Roberts, *The God of Jane: A Psychic Manifesto* (4).

From the 1950s through the early 1980s, Jane Roberts wrote dozens of short stories, poems, and science fiction novels as a professional writer, but she is best known for those texts which she insisted she did *not* write: a fascinating collection of works known as the Seth material,<sup>1</sup> which Roberts maintained were actually the teachings of a discarnate energy personality named Seth, dictated through her in a state of unconscious trance. In the passage quoted above, Roberts explains that even as she seems to become “someone else” when she speaks for Seth, she does not, paradoxically, feel possessed or invaded by that other personality. Instead, she describes this curious collaboration as a “precise psychological art, one that is ancient and poorly understood in our culture.” Indeed, what Roberts is describing is certainly poorly understood, and, in fact, much of her own commentary in the Seth material indicates that she too is troubled by the implications of her mediumship.

In *The Seth Material*, Roberts outlines the genesis of the Seth sessions, explaining that on the evening of September 9, 1963, she sat down to write poetry and “between one normal minute and the next, a fantastic avalanche of radical, new ideas burst into [her] head with tremendous force, as if [her] skull were some sort of receiving station” (10). Even as her consciousness seemed to be traveling somewhere else, her “hands furiously scribbled down the words and ideas that flashed through [her] head” (10). The result was a manuscript titled “The Physical Universe as Idea Construction,” which outlined ideas that Roberts had apparently never consciously considered before and which would be developed further in the Seth sessions. Following this unexpected burst of inspiration, Roberts and her husband Robert Butts experimented with other forms of “automatic” writing. According to Roberts, they first came into contact with the Seth entity through the use of a Ouija board, and not long after that, Roberts apparently began speaking directly for Seth in a state of unconscious trance—her consciousness replacing the board as medium—while her husband took detailed transcription. Together, Roberts and Butts would hold and record regular “Seth sessions” in this fashion until she died in 1984.

Written in thousands of pages and published in dozens of volumes, the collected transcriptions of the Seth sessions—Seth’s teachings on consciousness, time, reality, and the psyche—comprise the Seth material, works that religious scholar Wouter Hanegraaff calls “undisputed ‘classics’ of modern channeling” (37). In fact, Hanegraaff suggests that “several of the metaphysical concepts which were to become normative in the New Age Movement were probably first introduced by Roberts/Seth” (37). Today, several organizations still hold regular conferences, workshops, and classes based on the Seth

material.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Yale University Library keeps 498 boxes of notes and manuscripts called “The Jane Roberts Papers” in their collected archives (“Yale Finding Aid Database”). However, even though the Seth books sold well in their time, proved influential in the creation and establishment of a cultural movement, and still draw popular interest today, scholars outside of the fields of religious history and fringe psychology have rarely recognized the significance of these fascinating works.

If they ever thought to consider it in the first place, literary scholars have largely dismissed the Seth material, even in spite of increasing interest in the study of authorship. Of course, Roberts’ suggestion that she “becomes” Seth or “a part of what Seth is”—that the texts are somehow Seth’s words and not hers—combined with her own admitted literary aspirations, certainly complicate any conventional notion of the “author.” Is Roberts *really* speaking for an entity named Seth? Does that make Seth the “author” of the material, or is Seth only Roberts’ invention, making Roberts the author of the author, as it were? Perhaps more than most texts, then, the Seth material seems to complicate our understanding of authorship and resist our expectations of an author. As Bette London suggests, other examples of channeled texts often “become a repeated demonstration of the ‘death of the author’ and the birth of the ‘author function’” (“Mediumship” 630), as mediums typically raise the specter of famous dead authors only to critique and revise their written legacies. That the Seth material functions similarly will be the premise of this thesis, as I explore the extent to which Roberts’ extravagant claims for the authorship of the material prompt us to reconsider our understanding of the traditional “author.”

History is full of channeled texts, automatic writings, and works of visionary literature that, like the Seth material, make extraordinary claims in regard to their production and authorship. In medieval literature, mystics like Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen,<sup>3</sup> for instance, said they received the word of God in the form of visions. In the sixteenth century, mystic Jakob Böhme maintained that many of his works were similarly inspired by divine visions. Just over a century later, Emmanuel Swedenborg declared that the Last Judgment was completed in the year 1757, and that his written works not only bore witness to this cosmic event, but even contributed directly to its fulfillment. More recently, literary scholars have been drawn to Victorian and modernist spiritualists who, like Roberts, claimed to channel messages from other realms and realities, and it is this tradition of mediumship that I will suggest is an especially productive point of comparison for considering the Seth material.

Writing in the 1920s through the 1940s, for instance, Hester Dowden—the daughter of prominent Shakespeare critic Edward Dowden—claimed to channel the spirits of famous deceased authors like Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde.<sup>4</sup> Intriguingly, scholar Helen Sword points out that while Dowden’s father devoted his career to “debunking alternate authorship theories” in regard to Shakespeare’s works (73), Dowden herself often employed her channeling abilities precisely in order to promote such authorial controversies, receiving from Francis Bacon’s ghost, for instance, confirmation of her client Alfred Dodd’s conviction that Bacon was the actual author of Shakespeare’s plays. Later, however, in a “new series of spirit communications”—commissioned this time by another client, Percy Allen—Dowden learns that

“Shakespeare’s works were composed instead by the Earl of Oxford” (73). Similarly, Geraldine Cummins—who was introduced to the practice of mediumship by Dowden herself—said she was in contact with an ancient scribe named Cleophas, a friend of the apostle Paul who presented her with a seemingly endless supply of information concerning early Christian history.<sup>5</sup> Pearl Curran might offer the closest parallel to Roberts.<sup>6</sup> From 1912 to 1937, Curran said that she channeled the words of a dead woman named Patience Worth, a spirit who claimed to have lived more than 200 years earlier. Curran’s husband, like Roberts’, kept a careful record of the “Patience Worth sessions.” In their investigation of modernist mediums like Dowden, Cummins, and Curran, scholars have focused on several characteristic features of channeled texts: a consistent preoccupation with the processes of literary and textual production (often tied to the emergence of new communication technologies), in addition to insights into the gendered implications of authorship.

In *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature*, Elizabeth Petroff suggests that “visions were a socially sanctioned activity that freed a woman from conventional female roles by identifying her as a genuine religious figure” (6), and this has come to represent a standard academic approach to purportedly channeled texts as well. For instance, Bette London points out that “scholarship since the 1980s has repeatedly linked mediumship to feminine empowerment, noting the agency it afforded marginalized women” (*Writing Double* 8). Helen Sword suggests a similar connection when she argues that mediumship has represented “one of the relatively few means by which women of virtually any social or educational background could earn money, engage in high-profile careers, lay claim to

otherworldly insight, and subvert male authority” (13). According to scholars, then, the practice of mediumship has afforded women access to positions of authority within alternative institutions as well as occasion to enter and criticize those establishments that have traditionally excluded them, including, of course, conventional literary institutions and the position of “author.”

Sword emphasizes that in many channeled texts, “male voices”—often the spirits of famous dead authors—“mouth a distinctively female agenda” (13). Mediums not only gain access to forms of patriarchal literary privilege and authority when they claim the signatures of famous dead authors; according to Sword, they also necessarily “rewrite[ ] traditional definitions of authorship, suggesting that a famous writer’s literary oeuvre... can be added to or subtracted from long after the writers’ death” (23). Sword demonstrates that, in doing so, mediums “simultaneously appropriate[ ] and undermine” (23) Foucault’s author-function. London argues similarly that texts which invoke famous dead authors in this manner “offer[ ] a compelling commentary on the history of authorship we have inherited” (*Writing Double* 149). For London, the fact that most channeled texts—whether they invoke deceased literary ancestors or not—“often address[ ] the conditions of their own construction,” suggests that these texts are particularly valuable to scholars because they “constitute a kind of metacommentary on authorship” (170).

Even if Seth is not one of the familiar or historical “‘dead white men’ whose works make up the bulk of the Western canon” (Sword, 42), he *is* a characteristically male “author,” and his teachings are channeled through a female medium who is

consistently depicted as the embodiment of various forms of communicative technologies in Seth's teachings. In addition, the Seth material is clearly preoccupied with the conditions of its own construction, consistently "exploring issues of origins, composition, transmission, production, [and] inspiration" (London, *Writing Double* 170). In fact, as is typical of automatic writing in general, the purportedly channeled material in the Seth books is constantly interrupted by Roberts' and her husband's editorial commentary, so that the texts seem more interested in documenting the processes and mechanics of their own production than in presenting Seth's stereotypical New Age teachings. Still, even though these texts—like the channeled works of earlier eras—seem fixated on the questions and problems of language, literary scholars have largely avoided these fascinating works. I would argue that this is because scholars, understandably, are hesitant to wrestle with the interpretive challenges posed by New Age texts, implicated as they are in thorny commercial and popular-cultural contexts, a reluctance indicated in both London and Sword's historicizations of mediumship.

London and Sword divide mediumship into strikingly similar historical phases. For her part, London posits two distinct phases of mediumship: the first in the late Victorian era—characterized by séances, table-turnings, and accusations of fraud—and the second in the early modernist—"spurred by the massive loss of life in World War I" and producing "a new, more self-conscious breed of automatist" ("Mediumship" 625). By associating automatic writing and mediumship with the influence of popular spiritualism, Sword traces a similar history of the practice of mediumship, suggesting that popular spiritualism offered even established, literary writers in the Victorian era "a

means of coming to grips with contemporary developments in communication technology [and] social theory” (162); modernist writers and mediums “fruitful ways of conceptualizing and representing literary production, gender transformations, and the stubborn materiality of language” (162); and postmodernists an “affirmation of the radical indeterminacy of the postmodern condition” (162). For both London and Sword, then, each “phase” of mediumship represents a unique opportunity for scholarly inquiry into the processes of literary production in a specific historical context.

Even though London and Sword both seem intent on the “recovery of mediumship as a site of literary production” (London, “Mediumship” 630), intriguingly, they are both quick to dismiss New Age versions of similar practices. For her part, London concludes that “automatic writing has not for the most part survived as a serious authorial practice in the late twentieth century” (*Writing Double* 211), labeling it “no more than a fringe phenomenon—the provenance of new age disciples and telemarketing operators” (210). After investigating the influence of popular spiritualism on literary modernism, Sword similarly concludes that “New Age mysticism has by now largely taken its place” (3). Yet, rather than trace the influence of New Age thought on literary practice or explore the ways the New Age might represent a continuation of popular spiritualism, Sword—like London—quickly rejects New Age mysticism as a topic of literary interest, observing that “literate mediums... have come close to disappearing from our cultural radar screen” (165). Even though she admits the existence of New Age mediums who “speak[ ] with the voices of long-dead past selves,” Sword immediately

dismisses their works as a gimmicky “version of mediumship particularly well suited to a self-absorbed, channel-surfing, video generation” (166).

Where Sword observes that “blinkers have long screened popular spiritualism, especially in its twentieth century forms, from academic scrutiny” (160), I would argue that similar “blinkers” have prevented literary scholars from investigating the significance and influence of New Age spiritualism as well. And in the same way that London points to channeled texts’ “uncompromising literalization” as an explanation for the “readiness with which mediumship has been marginalized as a cultural practice” in addition to “its virtual absence from the history of authorship in which it so clearly participated” (*Writing Double* 148), I would suggest that New Age versions of mediumship have been dismissed partly as a result of their similarly outlandish and fantastical claims. While Sword suggests that “perhaps well-educated, articulate writing mediums... are no longer necessary in a high-speed, globalized society” (166), I hope to explore the possibility that a new cultural context and changing understandings of authorship necessitate a different kind of medium, who would not only channel the words of dead authors into contemporary textual forms, but who would also channel the very tradition of mediumship into the latter half of the twentieth century. Finally, where Sword offers the possibility that “ghostwriting will take on... some new and different form that we cannot yet discern or anticipate” (166), I hope to show that ghostwriting has *already* taken on a different form in many respects: that New Age channels like Jane Roberts, in fact, practice a version of mediumship that represents a “site of literary production” which scholarship has so far been unable, or perhaps unwilling, to recognize.

Therefore, one of my tasks in this project will be to show that popular spiritualism's "lost" thread can be recovered in the late twentieth century phenomenon of New Age mysticism.

Gershom Scholem asserts that mystics arise at points of crisis and transition in order to translate religious tradition into contemporary language and experience (*On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*). In this thesis, I hope to show that Jane Roberts functions as something of a *literary* mystic, translating the tradition of mediumship—and its attendant criticism and reconsideration of conventional authorship—into the language and symbols of New Age spiritualism. Where Sword asserts that scholars would have difficulty finding a contemporary, "well-known spirit medium with the literary lineage of Rosamond Dale Oliphant, or the literary contacts of Hester Dowden, or the literary sensibilities of Geraldine Cummins, or the literary influence of Catherine Dawson Scott" (166), I am suggesting, on the contrary, that Roberts *channels* this very tradition and translates it into the latter half of the twentieth century through her New Age symbology.

If Roberts' explanation of trance mediumship quoted at the beginning of this introduction sounds especially strange or unsettling with its description of "turn[ing] into someone else" (*God of Jane* 4) and its emphasis on multiple spirits and consciousnesses, I would remind readers that literary criticism in this same period often describes the process of *reading* in similarly outlandish terms. For instance, writing in the early 1970s (almost a decade after the first published Seth sessions), George Poulet in "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority" asserts that the "extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of barriers between you and it. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is

no longer either outside or inside,” to the extent that the reader even becomes “aware of a rational being, of a consciousness; the consciousness of another” (42). Poulet continues:

When I am absorbed in reading, a second self takes over, a self which thinks and feels for me. Withdrawn in some recess of myself... someone else holds the center stage, and the question which imposes itself, which I am absolutely obliged to ask myself is this: “Who is the usurper who occupies the forefront? Who is this mind who alone all by himself fills my consciousness and who, when I say *I*, is indeed that *I*?” (45-46)

I contend that Roberts’ strikingly similar description of mediumship is also a description of the reading process, and that the Seth material consistently returns to questions of interpretation. In *The God of Jane*, for instance, Roberts wants to know “the private thoughts that each of [her] readers have as they read these lines” (122). She wonders aloud: “how do we read and decipher words? What connections are there between our individual nervous centers and the vast network of communication that unites civilization?” (122). In short, the Seth material seems to ask its readers to consider reading as a form of mediumship, a “precise psychological art... that is ancient and poorly understood in our culture” (4), by which readers channel the words of long dead authors, simultaneously accomplishing the “‘death of the author’ and the birth of the ‘author function’” (London, “Mediumship” 630).

Thus, my starting point for this thesis will be the assumption that the Seth material, even as a product of the New Age, can be read—as channeled texts from previous eras often are—as a form of meta-commentary on authorship and the processes of literary production and interpretation. Because I am convinced that the Seth material is not *merely* a continuation of the tradition of mediumship, but that it also transforms this tradition, I will not attempt to engage the labyrinth of authorial complications presented

by the Seth material directly. Rather, my purpose in this thesis will be to build an appropriate critical framework for approaching the unique interpretive challenges posed by the Seth material. Therefore, I will initially limit my investigation to a different text, which—at least on the surface—would appear to be less problematic. Written by Jane Roberts and published in 1981, *The God of Jane: A Psychic Manifesto* is something of a memoir, which Roberts describes as “the story of [her] efforts to put Seth’s latest material to work in daily life; to free [her]self from many hampering cultural beliefs; and, most of all, to encounter and understand the nature of impulses” (7-8). Although the manifesto does not purport to be a “channeled” text itself, significantly for the purposes of this project, it nevertheless includes and interrogates excerpts of purportedly channeled material within its pages, making it an ideal focus for my investigation, one that I will treat as a reading guide to the Seth material more generally.

Thus, in chapter one, I will demonstrate that Roberts’ manifesto—like the channeled texts scholars have already considered—functions as meta-literary commentary on authorship and literary production, telling the story of its own construction and positing Roberts’ paradoxical New Age framework as a means of conceptualizing both the creative process and the nature and function of language. In chapter two, I will analyze *The God of Jane* from another angle, considering the manifesto’s cultural and historical context in order to show that Roberts is herself a literary theorist and that the “New Age” she predicts in the manifesto is in many ways a new era of texts, the result of a radical change in the production, circulation, and interpretation of discourse. The manifesto, I will argue, describes and anticipates the

features of the new texts of a New Age, and functions as a guide for interpreting texts like the Seth material. Through the following analysis, I hope to arrive at something like a framework for approaching the interpretive challenges presented in the Seth material specifically, and perhaps New Age channeled texts more generally.

That Roberts claims to channel the words of a discarnate energy personality named Seth, and that traditional mediums purport to speak with the spirits of the dead might seem to represent hopeless absurdities to scholarly thinkers. Moreover, these concerns are only compounded by the fact that, as London points out, “what [these mediums] wrote, after all, [is] undeniably weird stuff” (*Writing Double* 29). At the same time, I would point out that mediumship and literary criticism are strikingly similar practices in many regards. I recognize, in other words, that for all its academic aspirations, my project is in some vital respects an act of mediumship, particularly as I claim to translate, or perhaps *channel*, the words of Jane Roberts (long after her death, I might add) into the context of contemporary literary criticism, connecting the texts that bear her signature to a host of works and ideas (including my own) that would have been unfamiliar to the historical Jane Roberts in her lifetime. Although I have tried to be responsible in the ways I employ Roberts’ words and in the connections I have suggested, nevertheless, I know that I have also inevitably appropriated Roberts’ voice for my own purposes in this project. I hope that my decisions in this regard will be read generously and in the spirit of mediumship, as attempts to seek new and unexpected connections, always with the objective that Roberts’ voice might be heard and appreciated from new contexts and from different angles.

Endnotes

1. I would like to note the distinction I am making between “the Seth material,” by which I mean the entire collection of Seth’s teachings, and the individual book titled *The Seth Material*, which I will also reference periodically throughout this thesis.
2. The New Awareness Network and the Seth Network International, for instance, both hold regular Seth conferences, workshops, and classes. See Lynda Dahl as well as “The Online Global Seth Conference 2015 On-Demand” in references.
3. In *Medieval Women’s Visionary Literature*, Elizabeth Petroff describes Hildegard as “a sort of Dear Abbey of the twelfth century” (139) because of the amount of “fan-mail” she received and responded to. Hildegard might represent an interesting precursor to Roberts in several respects, particularly since she was willing to “take requests.” That is to say, much like Roberts, Hildegard agreed to communicate with spirits on demand and to dedicate visionary experiences to her readers’ specific inquiries and requests.
4. Ironically, Roberts laments that “there exists unreadable gibberish—automatic scripts supposed to be the work of Plato or Socrates—or anyone, as long as they’re dead and famous... Most often, such manuscripts embarrass us with their obvious lacks, and are easy to dismiss” (*The World View of Paul Cezanne* 17). Of course, Roberts’ comments come in the pages of a book that she suggests was dictated to her from the consciousness of the long-dead painter Paul Cezanne. On other occasions, Roberts also claimed to have channeled Rembrandt and William James: see *The World View of Rembrandt* and *The Afterdeath Journal of an American Philosopher: The World View of William James*.
5. Incidentally, early Christian history is a topic that Seth regularly returns to as well. In *The God of Jane*, following an excerpted Seth session focused on the early Christians, Robert Butts suggests that one day he will piece together all of those individual Seth sessions focused especially on Christianity in order to create a single book.
6. Roberts refers to Pearl Curran specifically in *The Seth Material*: “we’d read about the Patience Worth case, where a Mrs. Curren produced novels and poetry through the Ouija board and automatic writing” (44). See also Daniel Shea’s study of Pearl Curran, *The Patience of Pearl: Spiritualism and Authorship in the Writings of Pearl Curran*.

## CHAPTER ONE

DOWN THE GARDEN PATH: A READER'S GUIDE TO *THE GOD OF JANE*

“I certainly didn’t just spring alive with the first Seth sessions. I had 34 years of other experiences behind me. Yet sometimes, people who wrote or visited seemed to think that Seth emerged into some hypothetical life that just happened to be mine... that psychic abilities somehow exist apart from the lives involved, while of course, the basic magic lies in that living context of consciousness that makes those abilities possible”

—Jane Roberts, *The God of Jane* (38).

As I attempt to develop a critical framework for reading New Age channeled texts, *The God of Jane* is especially useful for my purposes because it embodies and engages comparable interpretive challenges to those that purportedly channeled texts—like the Seth material—typically exaggerate. For instance, even if the manifesto<sup>1</sup> does not claim to be a channeled text in the same way that the Seth material might, the fact that it includes excerpts of supposedly channeled material—and even offers its own interpretations of those excerpts—necessarily draws readers’ attention to the same interpretive difficulties. And although the manifesto names Jane Roberts rather than Seth as its “author,” the speaker and the protagonist of *The God of Jane* are also named Jane Roberts, and their task throughout the manifesto is to understand the process of mediumship, an intricate premise that represents a comparable complication of “authorship” to those presented in the Seth material, demanding that readers reconsider the relationship between Roberts the “author” and Roberts the “narrator” and “protagonist.”

In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe that the autobiographical “I” “is not a flesh-and-blood author... but a speaker or narrator who refers to herself,” so that even when the “speaker has one name, the ‘I’ who seems to be speaking... is comprised of multiple ‘I’s” (58). Therefore, they distinguish between the “real” or “historical” “I,” the “narrating ‘I,’” the “narrated ‘I,’” and the “ideological ‘I’” (59). In the following analysis, I will be focused primarily on the manifesto’s textual features, so it seems appropriate that when I refer to “Jane” from this point forward, I mean—at least to the extent that such a distinction is possible—the narrating and the narrated “I’s” of *The God of Jane*: the speaker(s) and the character(s) described by those speakers—who all go by the name of Jane Roberts—as opposed to the “historical” and “authorial” Jane Roberts.<sup>2</sup> Although this approach is convenient for my purposes, it is also fairly inexact. Smith and Watson suggest that the narrating and narrated “I’s” are the subjects and objects that are most accessible to readers through a text, but they are also careful to point out that even “the narrating ‘I’ is neither unified nor stable” but is “split, fragmented, multiple, a subject always in the process of coming together and of dispersing” (60), and that there can also be “multiple narrated ‘I’s’” in a life narrative (61). Moreover, even Roberts the historical author and Jane the narrator and character are not, finally, fixed or stable “I’s” that can be concretely distinguished from each other in practice—one relegated strictly to the text and the other to the context—even if the attempt proves productive as an initial approach.

Intriguingly, the manifesto takes as its theme the inadequacy of such approaches, even as it acknowledges their necessity, reinforcing conventional conceptions of the

relationship between author and text, while simultaneously offering new configurations and alternate possibilities for multiple subjectivities. Thus, in the same way that Sword and London focus on the meta-literary aspects of channeled works, I will argue in this chapter that *The God of Jane* functions specifically as textual meta-commentary on the practice and interpretation of mediumship, with important implications for the concept of self, which also becomes multiple and fragmented in the processes of narration and interpretation. Through a close reading of the manifesto, and by paying particular attention to its obsession with the processes of its own creation and interpretation, I will demonstrate that *The God of Jane* both outlines and represents something of an alternative framework for readers to approach the interpretive challenges posed by channeled texts like the Seth material and even life narratives more generally—that the manifesto presents, in other words, a coherent yet flexible system of interpretive principles and guidelines for reading these unconventional works.

My objective is necessarily complicated by the fact that the manifesto—if it is something like an interpretive framework or a guide for reading channeled texts—is itself a text requiring interpretation at the same time. Therefore, my focus on the manifesto’s meta-commentary will be guided by a genre-analysis. In short, I will approach *The God of Jane* as an especially idiosyncratic example of both the modern spiritual autobiography and what Steven Kellman calls the “self-begetting novel.” In *Circuitous Journeys: Modern Spiritual Autobiography*, David Leigh describes the spiritual autobiography as “a narrative that embodies the story of an author as self-conscious subject present to itself but also exploring and affirming the interrelationship of his or her interior, interpersonal,

and social world” (26)—a partial description, I would argue, of the manifesto as well, which details Jane’s attempts to understand the relationship between her various “selves” and the texts she produces and interacts with.<sup>3</sup> Yet Jane’s journey in the manifesto is also consistently connected to the composition of the text itself, producing something approximating the self-begetting novel, in which “the development of the individual is inseparable from the novel in which [she] appears and which [she] is to write” (Kellman 1252). Although these genre frameworks might seem to contradict each other at times, I think the following analysis will show that, for the most part, their limitations and contradictions complement each other in this case, helpfully illuminating the manifesto’s own preoccupation with the contradictions, ambiguities, and difficulties inherent to the process of interpretation.

Similar to channeled texts, both genres characteristically point to the processes of their own creation and interpretation. For example, Larry Sisson observes that “spiritual autobiography typically sets the self off center and unsettles notions of individual, independent, or freely determined authorship” (98); highlights the “centrality of reading and interpreting life” (103); and is also, to some extent, about the reader’s “changed understanding” (103). Similarly, the self-begetting novel, according to Kellman, “is supremely reflexive” and “deliberately lays bare all its working parts” (1253), in a sense reading and interpreting its own textuality through the story of the author’s development. Thus, both genres consider the relationship between author, reader, and text, but each posits a somewhat different configuration of the same parts. Taken together, these genre approaches enable me to consider several possible relationships that connect these

components, so this chapter will begin by focusing primarily on Jane's spiritual journey, and then shift to the "self-begetting" characteristics of *The God of Jane*, emphasizing in both cases the ways typical genre features draw attention to the manifesto's repeated reconfigurations of the relationship between the authors, readers, and texts.

Leigh points out that modern spiritual autobiographies typically "play off a fundamental pattern in the history of narrative, the circular journey" (4). The autobiographer's path of spiritual development is frequently suggested by a "directional image," which is "often associated with the motif expressed in the title or subtitle of their story" (1). In fact, the manifesto's title and subtitle—"The God of Jane" and "A Psychic Manifesto"—remarkably correspond to what Leigh suggests are the two crucial challenges in the narrator's spiritual journey: first, "finding an adequate notion of God"—or "naming the whirlwind"—and, second, "affirming eternal life in the face of death" (9). Fittingly, "the God of Jane" is the name Jane gives to that part of herself which represents her contact with God, the universe, or All That Is (*God of Jane* 64), and the "Psychic Manifesto" is the name of a poem in which she declares her independence from limiting beliefs that dead-end in a kind of existential meaninglessness; thus, the poem marks Jane's affirmation, if not of "eternal life in the face of death," then of meaning—that is, ontological, epistemological, and metaphysical meaning—in the face of potential meaninglessness.

While both titles refer to significant events in Jane's spiritual journey, these events are also vital to the composition of the manifesto itself, so that the intricate oscillation between author and text approximately follows the form of the self-begetting

novel, which—not unlike the “circuitous” spiritual autobiography—often “begins again where it ends” (Kellman 1246). Accordingly, the culmination of Jane’s journey coincides, not only with her effective conversion to Seth’s teachings, but also with the completion of the manifesto itself, prompting an intricate “cycle of movement from life to literature [that] begins anew with each ending” and which “directs us back to the flux from which it arose” (Kellman 1254). Therefore, my path through the manifesto will generally follow Jane’s quest to, first, “name the whirlwind” and, second, affirm the possibility of meaning, demonstrating the ways her “circuitous” path coincides with the construction of the manifesto itself and thereby posits alternate conceptions of authorship.

To begin, Jane’s path clearly follows the three stages of the typical “spiral pilgrimage” (Leigh 5). According to Leigh, spiritual autobiographies often rely on the following trajectory: “childhood events (stage one) raise questions that drive the author on a negative journey of wandering in a desert of illusory answers (stage two) before... discover[ing] a transforming world in which the original questions can be resolved (stage three)” (5). Significantly in *The God of Jane*, the protagonist’s spiritual development is also consistently tied to her development as a poet. Thus, in chapter 5, Jane describes the “special circumstances” of her upbringing (stage one), explaining that when she was a child, writing poetry was her “direct connection with the universe,” as if she and the universe were speaking “at once” (41). However, in the previous chapter, a present-day Jane re-reads the poetry that she wrote as a misguided young adult (stage two), realizing in retrospect that her devastatingly pessimistic verses form a “concentrated picture of [her] own past beliefs” (27); at the time she wrote it, she thought her poetry was “highly

personal,” but looking back as a mature writer, she can see that her verses are merely “interpretations of Darwinian and Freudian concepts” (27). Jane then wishes that she “could visit that thirty-one-year-old self” and tell her “about the Seth sessions” (33), an “art of living [and] a new multidimensional art” (50) that “reaches into the most intimate aspects of life” (51). Thus, the practice of mediumship makes it possible for Jane to converse again with the universe through her writing, suggesting that the Seth sessions correspond approximately to Leigh’s third stage: the transforming world that resolves the seeker’s original questions.

Leigh also observes that the “portrait of the father and mother... provides the main clue to the psychological dimension of the circular journey” (7); however, Jane’s parental figures in *The God of Jane* are themselves, perhaps inevitably, *writers*. Jane’s mother, for instance, is “a bedridden arthritic invalid” (40) who would often “pretend[ ] that she was dead,” or “threaten suicide” to scare her young daughter (41); however, she also “took creative writing courses by proxy, sending [her daughter] to nighttime adult writing courses where [the young Jane] took notes” (41) so that her mother could complete the assignments, indicating, for one thing, that Jane has had experience as a “medium” even prior to her collaborations with Seth. Jane largely rejects her mother as a parent figure, however, and adopts, at least temporarily, her “mentor” Caroline Slade instead. Jane eventually abandons Slade too when she realizes that “Carrie wanted [her] to be a *lady* writer” (45). Of course, the suggestion that Jane has multiple mother figures contributes to the manifesto’s consistent emphasis on multiplicity, and readers are hard-pressed to locate a single origin or precedent for Jane or her writing.

Although Leigh points out that the narrator is often caught in a conflict between “the father-influence and the mother influence” (7), we learn next to nothing about Jane’s biological father in the manifesto; in fact, it is only at the end of the text that readers finally discover Jane has two significant father figures who, unsurprisingly, are also writers. There is not much of a suggestion that Jane feels caught between a competing mother and father influence, but she *does* describe feeling “caught between the philosophies of T.S. Eliot and ee cummings, as expressed in their poetry” (*God of Jane* 254), suggesting that the psychological dimension of Jane’s journey is predicated, not so much on a mother-father conflict, but rather on a more literary “anxiety of influence,” a tension between multiple fathers, mediated, significantly, through texts (“their poetry”).

Leigh also observes that most modern spiritual autobiographers “experience the loss or death of one of their parents in the first stage, which leads them to seek a new father or new mother” (6). Jane’s mother dies when she is a young woman, a loss that she attaches seeming little importance to. But the loss that is perhaps more visibly central to the manifesto is that of her literary forefather, ee cummings, whose “optimism went out of style” when “Eliot’s pessimism pervaded the arts and sciences” (*God of Jane* 254). According to Leigh, following the experience of loss, the narrator of the spiritual autobiography typically finds false mentors in the second stage before finally discovering better guides in the third. Indeed, near the end of the manifesto, Jane finally recognizes that as a young woman she aligned herself—and her poetry—with the wrong mentor (Eliot), producing the misguided poems she wrote in her early thirties. Jane’s realization prompts her to write the poem about ee cummings’ ghost “that appears in the frontmatter

of this book” (*God of Jane* 254), marking this authorial conflict as one of the primary tensions to be resolved in Jane’s circuitous journey.

According to Leigh, the writer’s spiritual journey usually takes the form “of an inner dialogue, sometimes with a mentor, sometimes with an author, but ultimately within the tangle of one’s mind” (10). Of course, Jane’s mentors *are* famous authors, making *The God of Jane*, at least in one sense, an attempt to navigate a decidedly literary conflict, and her psychic manifesto a final emancipation from false mentors: specifically Eliot, Darwin, and Freud—authors and thinkers whose theoretical constructs seem, according to Jane, to dead-end in meaninglessness. As a negotiation between spiritual journey and composition process, famous dead authors and dead mothers, inner dialogue and intertextuality, the text itself becomes an intricate conglomeration of life and literature, something like the “multidimensional art” that requires Jane’s poetic skills in addition to “a practical expertise in all of life’s other areas” (50), so that circuitous journeys are necessary on multiple levels in order to resolve the complex tensions “within the tangle” of Jane’s mind.

Obviously, Jane’s mind becomes an interpretive challenge for readers too: comparable, I would argue, to the interpretive challenges posed by the practice of mediumship, which also draws readers’ attention to unknowable processes within the medium’s psyche. Up to this point, my analysis has applied numerous binary frameworks in order to make sense of Jane’s multidimensional journey in the manifesto. Indeed, the following list of binaries might represent an approximate outline of this chapter so far: (text / context), (author / character), (Jane / Roberts), (modern spiritual

autobiography / self-begetting novel), (author / text), (author / reader), (author's journey / composition of text), (mother / father), (Jane's mother / Caroline Slade), (cumplings / Eliot), and (false mentor / true mentor). Arranged in this precise sequence and carefully bracketed into distinct pairings, however, this list seem helpless to describe the intricate processes described in the manifesto, where all these pairings overlap, mix and bleed into each other; following these complicated interactions and sorting through the complexities of Jane's mind requires a comparably multidimensional interpretation.

Though Seth's presence in the manifesto only seems to complicate this psychomachia further, his teachings on Frameworks 1 and 2 finally help Jane to resolve these multidimensional tensions. According to Seth, "Framework 1 is the usual reality we're used to, and Framework 2 is the creative framework from which the ordinary world emerges" (7).<sup>4</sup> Even while Seth differentiates reality from creativity in what seems to be yet another binary construction (1 and 2), he also suggests a complicated interaction between these Frameworks, as one somehow "emerges" from the other. The result, I would argue, is a different kind of binary, one that, paradoxically, rearranges familiar contraries into alternate configurations, creating new relationships and possibilities. Although readers might be used to envisioning the author and the text in only one conventional alignment, Seth's teachings encourage us to imagine other possibilities, so that where readers might typically attribute the oddities of Jane's art to the circumstances of her difficult childhood, according to Seth's Frameworks, on the other hand, art is not influenced by life so much as life is influenced by art. That is, if the self-begetting novel portrays the development of the novelist "to the point at which [she] is able to take up

[her] pen and compose the novel” (Kellman 1245), Seth’s teachings seem to propose the inverse relationship—that the text’s development perhaps precedes and facilitates the development of the author. In that case, Jane is not only channeling her tumultuous childhood in order to create her art, but the art—often existing independent from Jane’s conscious effort—is also creating *her* at the same time.<sup>5</sup>

This reconfiguration of the relationship between author and text is a distinctive feature of “automatic” writing in general and a significant aspect of the manifesto’s form. In this alignment, rather than the text(s) being inspired by the events of Jane’s life—as we might typically expect—instead, already written texts (often included as excerpts in *The God of Jane*) inspire Jane to align her life accordingly, creating a kind of intertextual, hall of mirrors time-line. Because many of the texts included in the pages of the manifesto are examples of “automatic” writing—presumably written prior to Jane’s conscious thought—she is constantly trying to catch up, paradoxically, with her *past* selves and texts. For instance, in chapter 10, Jane is inspired to re-read her own previous automatic writings, a manuscript titled “Psychic Structures” written three years earlier and stored away in a psychological dimension she calls “The Library.” When she received “Psychic Structures” in the first place, Jane wrote “as quickly as [she] could to keep up” (*God of Jane* 96), but reading the text shortly afterwards, she finds “no emotional contact with the material” (100). Three years later, however, when she *re-reads* the same passage with Seth’s newest teachings in mind, “emotional acknowledgment was instant, and [she] knew that [she’d] finally caught up with [her]self” (100), bringing pairings like past and

present, author and text, conscious and unconscious, into a new and inverse alignment, and creating a recursive loop in the process.

Similar loops crisscross throughout the manifesto, connecting multiple levels of consciousness and reality, and producing a network of alternate configurations between author and text. As just one additional example, where the loop described above seems to bring Jane's present-day, "normal consciousness" into alignment with a past version of her "trance state" consciousness through the medium of a previously written text ("Psychic Structures"), at the end of chapter 6, Jane imagines another possible configuration of the same constituent parts:

I almost felt as if that thirty-two-year-old self, writing that poetry about life's meaninglessness, also sent me out on this subjective journey. In my mind she still sits in front of those bay windows, and I keep bringing her back tidbits of truth for her to nibble on. I give her the strength to continue; and she *did*, so that now I can write about her. (54)

Here, Jane imagines an alternate configuration in which one version of her consciousness (present-day Jane) nurses a past version back to health. In this case, the interaction between past and present is partly inverted, but it is also reciprocal, since the past version sends its present-day counterpart on a circuitous journey of self-discovery that produces, paradoxically, the manifesto.

In "The Fiction of Self-Begetting," Kellman imagines comparable loops, describing the manner in which the completion of the author's journey in the self-begetting novel returns the reader to the beginning of the text, a process that produces "an infinite recession of Chinese boxes" (1245). One difference in *The God of Jane* is that the process also prompts the author—not just the reader—to begin the process of

*interpretation* again, a process described within the very text itself, as Jane repeatedly returns to and re-interprets previously written texts. For instance, the very document that she re-reads three years after its composition explains that psychic structures—mirroring Kellman’s imagery—are “fitted one within the other like Chinese boxes” (97). Moreover, they can apparently “turn themselves inside out,” and “one can travel through another” (97). Because they posit somewhat definite boundaries, these psychic structures resemble conventional binaries, but—like Seth’s Frameworks 1 and 2—they are paradoxical forms that can also merge and reverse their positions, aligning themselves in new sequences and positions in order to produce multiple possible relationships and alternate associations.

Given that this explanation of psychic structures comes in a text within a text—that is, in an excerpt from “Psychic Structures” included within the pages of *The God of Jane*—these structures seem strikingly *textual*. While Jane’s journey doubles back on itself in countless iterations and re-interpretations, so the manifesto—made up of the pieces of other texts—turns itself inside out and travels through excerpts of those other texts (and consequently through Jane’s past as well). That is, the manifesto moves from passages of the Seth material, to examples of Jane’s automatic writing, to conventional poetry, to Jane’s everyday diary, and even to fan-mail from Jane’s readers. In addition to creating a multidimensional text, this textual layering is also one of the manifesto’s primary methods of *interpretation*. In other words, the manifesto is, in a sense, interpreting itself as it places the various passages and excerpts—as well as Jane’s commentary on those same passages—into a specific sequence. As readers, we

encounter each text through the lens of the previously mentioned texts, so that the arrangement of the material forms elaborate chains of association that also imply alternate relationships between various versions and iterations of “Jane” as well.

While “Psychic Structures” seems to describe the complex interaction of texts within the manifesto, the document might also be a description of the practice of mediumship, recalling earlier explanations of the “precise psychological art” that Jane practices when she “turn[s] into someone else” and “become[s] Seth, or a part of what Seth is” (4). Echoing the phrasing in “Psychic Structures,” Jane calls the mode of consciousness she enters as a medium an “alternate *framework* of perception” (italics mine), distinct though connected to her “normal state of consciousness” (3). Indeed, just as psychic structures apparently move through themselves and one another, Jane explains that, as a medium, her own “normal” state of consciousness “mix[es] with, collid[es] with, and glid[es] through psychological events” (5) when she channels Seth’s words in trance. And in the same way that psychic structures blend together even while, paradoxically, maintaining their individuality—each “a self with its own unique tone” (97)—so Jane does not feel that her normal consciousness is “possessed,” or “invaded,” or “taken over” (4) when it merges with Seth’s. In this context, mediumship represents *one* of many possible configurations of Jane’s psyche, a “precise” calibration between Jane and various levels of her consciousness that produces a specific kind of text (in this case, the Seth material). The manifesto, then, is in one sense a record—and in another an interpretation—of the various possible configurations of Jane’s psyche, in which each alternate alignment of consciousness corresponds to distinct modes of literary production,

also allowing for new and alternate interpretations of those same texts. Due to the complicated interaction of these countless frameworks, the infinite recession of Chinese boxes in *The God of Jane* happens on multiple levels—reader, author and text—all at the same time.

In *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh points out that “modernism and post-modernism begin with the view that both the historical world and works of art are organized and perceived through structures or ‘frames’” (28). Waugh suggests that “contemporary metafiction, in particular, foregrounds ‘framing’ as a problem, examining frame procedures in the construction of the real world and of novels” (28). The manifesto similarly concerns itself with the possibility of using frames as a means of interpreting both reality and art—and of distinguishing the two.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Waugh also suggests that in metafiction, reality and fiction are “constructed through frames, and that it is finally impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins” (29); as I have shown, the manifesto also considers the ways seemingly distinct frameworks like text and author, or Framework 1 and Framework 2, inevitably meld and combine into each other, so that in its content the text is about the same interpretive difficulties and quandaries that it also embodies in its form, making the two inseparable in practice.

For instance, although readers might attempt to “frame” the various psychic structures in the manifesto by dividing them according to Seth’s Frameworks 1 and 2, separating the frameworks into two categories is, ultimately, to collapse the multidimensional configuration of the manifesto, particularly since Frameworks 1 and 2

are not necessarily distinct categories in the first place, but intimately intertwined. To this point, Waugh observes that framing devices in metafiction often “involve a confusion of ontological levels through the incorporation of visions, dreams, [and] hallucinatory states... which are finally indistinct from the apparently ‘real’” (31)—an adequate description, I would argue, of the texture of the manifesto and of the complex interaction between states of consciousness throughout the text. For instance, the manifesto stitches together Jane’s “real” life experiences with what she sometimes calls “alternate” frameworks of perception: excerpts of purportedly channeled material, examples of automatic writing, descriptions of her dreams, ESP episodes, and visions. Here again, however, attempting to distinguish the portions of the text that Jane “authors” from those Seth “authors” by separating “normal” from “alternate” modes of production, proves an uncertain endeavor, since each configuration of consciousness and each resultant text is embedded in metonymic chains that continually associate *and* differentiate various frameworks at once, making it extremely difficult to distinguish where “normal” ends and “alternate” begins, and suggesting that readers need a different kind of framework if they hope to make sense of the text.

In the manifesto, Jane shares readers’ tendency to try to separate “Jane texts” from “Seth texts”; in fact, she admits that she likes to “think of Seth’s books as his... and [her] books [as hers],” even though she “realize[s] that [her] own creativity is involved” in Seth’s books too (*God of Jane* 21). And just as readers find themselves trying to sort out the distinctions and associations between various configurations of consciousness and the texts they produce, so the manifesto describes Jane’s analogous attempts to “put it all

together” (48) herself. For instance, after reading her “Library” material again, Jane begins to understand that “without realizing it, [she had] been getting the same information from different levels of consciousness” (100). In other words—and as readers have likely already suspected—Jane is receiving and producing the same kinds of messages from the Seth sessions, from her own poetry, from her ESP episodes, and from the “ordinary” events in her life; however, she is still missing the interpretive key that would help her “to put it all together” (100). Like readers, Jane requires a new framework with which to organize all the pieces, an interpretive structure flexible enough to contain multiple frames and ontological levels all at once.

I would argue that Jane’s dilemma is also the reader’s, and that this need for an alternate interpretive framework corresponds to the first crucial obstacle in the spiritual autobiographer’s journey: “finding an adequate notion of God” and “naming the whirlwind” (Leigh 9). Once again, Jane depends on already written texts to help her complete this task. Chapter 7 of the manifesto collects Seth’s teachings on God, a being he refers to as “All That Is” that “becomes the universe and is personified in all of Its parts” (*God of Jane* 59). Resembling yet another psychic structure, All That Is, according to Seth, “is more than the sum of Its parts; all of Its parts are separate, and yet united in the vaster gestalt” (60). In Seth’s teachings, then, All That Is is something like another recursive, perhaps self-begetting, loop that posits a new relationship between part and whole. While Seth provides a multidimensional framework for interpreting the universe, it also requires its own interpretation. In her attempts to understand All That Is, Jane frames this divine superstructure in terms of language, speculating on the nature of

God's voice, which she suspects "is the combination of all the voices of the earth," made up of "living molecules" that form "divine vowels and syllables whose 'soundings' form the living sentences of life" (62), a framework that paradoxically doubles back on itself as both the result and the source of life.

Jane's notes conclude by expressing a need for even "greater visions of divinity" (62). Although the Seth sessions have produced what might be an adequate notion of the divine, Jane is convinced that it is "only by utilizing, understanding, and organizing data from all possible states of consciousness" that she can "assess [her] present position within the universe" (96). In other words, she needs to name the "whirlwind" in every possible configuration of her consciousness, not just that alignment which corresponds with the production of the Seth sessions. Early the next morning, unable to sleep, Jane follows an impulse to get out of bed, and the moment she steps outside, she is "instantly enchanted," feeling "as if [she] were being privileged to view a beginning of the world" (64). Right then, Jane's "normal" consciousness catches up with the Seth sessions, producing a new alignment between her everyday "self" and "that part of [her]self that [she is] always pursuing, the part that is as clear-eyed as a child... at one with its own knowing," that part that represents her "direct connection with the universe" (64). Jane names this unexpected connection with the universe "the God of Jane" (64), marking her entrance—one of several—into the third stage of Leigh's "spiral pilgrimage" as well as a pivotal moment in the construction of the manifesto.<sup>7</sup>

"The God of Jane" idea functions as something of a superstructure for Jane, a grand framework enabling her to conceptualize the interaction between God, the

universe, and various iterations of her “self.” Because she also imagines “the God of Joe, the God of Lester, the God of Sarah...” (65),<sup>8</sup> Jane believes that this framework can accommodate paradoxes and ambiguities like personal and universal. The framework “suggests an intensely personal connection between each individual and the universe” in addition to maintaining “important distinctions between the private ‘God’ and the universal All That Is” (65). Jane has discovered an interpretive structure that allows seeming contradictions to be equally and simultaneously true, an approach that enables her to make sense of a multidimensional phenomenon like God without flattening the concept into fixed binaries.

Of course, “the God of Jane,” in addition to being an interpretive framework, is also the title of the manifesto itself: fitting, since the text also functions as a kind of superstructure, holding together various levels of ambiguity and paradox in a kind of “multidimensional art.” Further, “the God of Jane” framework also relies on the kind of synecdoche and metonymy that the manifesto employs throughout, the notion that “any portion of All That Is contains the knowledge of all of its other parts” (66), or, in the case of the manifesto, that every individual passage and excerpt of the text is in conversation with every other piece of the text, forming a coherent whole that itself shapes, arranges and comments on all of the pieces. This is, of course, a version of the hermeneutic circle: the idea that readers only understand the whole from the parts and, conversely, the parts from the whole, so that meaning necessarily comes from the context and the interaction between these. The manifesto seems to suggest the possibility that, given the proper *kind* of framework—that is, a reflexive, self-conscious, framework—structuring devices might

adequately communicate or interpret the paradoxical nature of reality, accommodating—in Seth’s terms—“All That Is.”

This possibility is obviously questioned by postmodern, post-structuralist ideologies. Waugh, for instance, observes that while contradictions in modernist texts “are always finally resolved”—at least “at the level of point of view or ‘consciousness’” (which seems to be the manifesto’s solution, at least in part)—in a postmodern, post-structuralist text, on the other hand, “there can be no final certainty... only a reworking of the Liar Paradox” (137). Similarly, Leigh suggests that for deconstructionists, “autobiography is necessarily incoherent because of unbridgeable gaps between the inner concept and the outer image, between the present writer and the past life story” (23). These gaps and contradictions could seem to render Jane’s attempts to build a framework capable of representing reality nothing more than “linguistic, philosophical, or psychic game[s] that cannot be won” (23). Perhaps Jane is trapped, not in the hermeneutic *circle*, but in the hermeneutic *dilemma*: she cannot finally know the whole through the parts or vice versa, because she cannot know either the part or the whole in the first place. I propose Jane’s crisis of meaning in this case corresponds to the second struggle faced by the modern spiritual autobiographer: “that of affirming eternal life in the face of death” (Leigh 9), which for Jane becomes a need to affirm the possibility of a meaningful universe in the face of potential meaninglessness.<sup>9</sup>

Jane’s completion of Leigh’s second task depends, again, on already written texts. In fact, she finds that the Seth material has already affirmed the possibility of meaning *for* her. Looking back on her previous poetry—those pessimistic verses inspired by the ideas

of Eliot, Darwin, and Freud—Jane concludes that the Seth sessions began as a result of her need “to find a new thematic world to live in” (*God of Jane* 35) in 1963. Influenced at the time by fatalistic ideologies claiming that “the universe is running down” and that “extinction is the natural conclusion to consciousness” (27), Jane recognizes that her “restless creative energy... had gone as far as it could in that old framework... in which no meaning could be found anywhere” (35). Because “life had seemed dead-ended,” she imagines that the Seth material might have been created by her creativity’s search for “new syntheses” (35). According to Jane, the small part of her that insisted life was still meaningful prompted her “to discover a framework in which the *possibility* of life’s meaning could be sanely considered” (35). In this case, mediumship—both its practice and its products—comes to represent, for Jane, a “greater framework from which to understand a world that seemed to glory in chaos” (6). However, just as she must discover “the God of Jane” framework in her “normal” consciousness—even though it mirrors several of Seth’s ideas about All That Is and reincarnation, for instance—she will also have to affirm Seth’s picture of a meaningful cosmos for herself.

Although Seth’s teachings “present a picture of the universe” which “includes both order and spontaneity” (57), Jane is hesitant to offer this picture “wholeheartedly,” because she is concerned that Seth’s teachings might take “[her]self or others down some hypothetical *garden path*” (57 italics mine). In other words, Jane worries that the Seth material will somehow mislead or deceive her readers, that she is trapped in a hermeneutic dilemma, engaging in something like the Liar’s Paradox. Jane fears that she might be merely “spinning desperate yarns” (52) and producing “futile fantasies leading

nowhere” (53). Is the Seth material merely her version of the unwinnable “linguistic, philosophical, or psychic game” (Leigh 23) posited by post-structuralism, a pleasant garden path promising, but finally unable, to deliver any conclusive interpretation of reality? For Jane, discovering meaning will depend on her ability to hold multiple, sometimes contradictory and paradoxical meanings together at the same time; in other words, she must change the rules of the “game,” from accomplishing a single objective to juggling multiple, indeterminate possibilities.

Contemporaneous with the publication of the Seth material, scholars in the field of psycho-linguistics are also interested in what happens when interpretive frameworks fail, specifically those frameworks readers apply in the interpretation of sentences. In fact, in the 1970s and 1980s, the field becomes obsessed with puzzling constructions they refer to, remarkably, as *garden path* sentences. Thomas Bever’s influential article “The Cognitive Basis for Linguistic Structures” published in 1970 includes what would become the most influential example of a garden path sentence—“*the horse raced past the barn fell.*” At first, readers will almost invariably attempt to interpret the sentence based on the assumption that “raced” is the predicate,<sup>10</sup> an interpretation revealed to be a garden path once readers reach the word “fell.” In order to recover the meaning of the sentence, readers must imagine new frameworks, trying other possible grammatical configurations before recognizing that “raced past the barn” functions as an adjectival phrase, indicating that “the horse... fell” constitutes the main construction of the sentence. Once the new framework is applied, logical relationships between the words in the sentence become clear.

Forty years after the publication of Bever's article, linguists Sanz, Laka, and Tanenhaus explain in *Language Down the Garden Path: The Cognitive and Biological Basis for Linguistic Structures* that the challenges posed by garden path sentences "helped spawn [the] entire subfield [of] sentence processing," and "played a central role in motivating and testing alternative theories of language processing" (85). Garden path sentences, then, are not valuable to linguists because of what they say about horses, but for what they illuminate about the process of interpretation at the level of sentences. In "‘Speak, Friend, and Enter’: Garden Paths, Artificial Intelligence, and Cognitive Narratology," Manfred Jahn explains that narratologists have established that "the garden-path phenomenon can also be found in certain kinds of jokes, riddles, and stories," too, constructions that "involv[e] similar error-recovery and reanalysis routines" (167). Jahn demonstrates that garden path constructions are the "the crucial linguistic test case elucidating ‘discourse-as-process’ as opposed to ‘text-as-product’" (169). In other words, just as the garden path phenomenon inspires linguists to consider the mechanics of sentence-processing, so in literary studies, garden path effects point to the mechanics of the interpretive process at the level of narrative.

While garden path constructions often necessitate that readers abandon certain interpretive frameworks (or garden paths) in order to recover meaning, according to Jahn, "processural analysis suggests not only that a garden path can be functional but that it actually leads somewhere" (187). For instance, "in a second reading, a story only unfolds its full luster when the readings rejected in earlier readings are at least partially resurrected" (187). Stories, then, can require a precise configuration of interpretive

frameworks, sometimes *necessitating* that readers take false turns in order to arrive at a resolution. Moreover, Jahn also argues that garden paths in literature demonstrate the possibility that readers “can use process models... without losing the heuristics of structuralism; specifically, an enriched and flexible structuralism of this kind allows Narratology to escape from its atomistic-holistic double-bind” (190-191). I would argue that the “flexible structuralism” Jahn proposes is strikingly similar to the manifesto’s “psychic structures,” which turn themselves inside out and travel through one another in multiple re-imaginings of the relationship between whole and part.

In *The God of Jane*, Jane employs the garden path in order to escape a strikingly similar “double-bind.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, she concludes dramatically—“(half tearfully, half triumphantly)” —that if the Seth material “was a garden path... then it was the best one [she’d] seen so far!” (57). Just as Jahn suggests that garden path effects in literature can “actually lead[ ] somewhere” (187) under certain conditions, Jane insists that even if the Seth material is a garden path, nevertheless, Seth’s “ideas *were* as factual in many respects as any other system of thought” (*God of Jane* 58). In short, Jane re-defines the garden path, rejecting connotations of deception and manipulation, and she positions the concept instead as a potentially valuable interpretive framework for readers, a kind of psychic structure capable of including “both order and spontaneity” (57), and a paradoxical affirmation of meaning in the face of contradiction and plurality.

I would argue that existence itself becomes something of a garden path sentence in *The God of Jane*, a paradox demanding that interpreters abandon inflexible, rigid frameworks that inevitably dead-end when they encounter ambiguities. In fact, just as

garden paths require readers to abandon faulty frameworks of interpretation in order to make sense of a sentence, Jane finally affirms the possibility of a meaningful cosmos—completing Leigh’s second obstacle—when she “state[s her] own psychic declaration of independence” from conventional frameworks of interpretation. In her poem “A Psychic Manifesto,” Jane rejects all of the “versions of reality that strike [her] as limiting and senseless” (132). Specifically, she wants to free herself from religious, Freudian, and Darwinian frameworks that seem to posit a “meaningless universe” (58). Unlike flexible psychic structures that can move within and through each other, Jane is convinced that religious, Freudian, and Darwinian frameworks are limiting and destructive primarily because they see themselves as *exclusive* paths to a single, stable “meaning.”

Jahn points out that readers “only get *garden-pathed*” when they “follow[ ] a cognitive preference for a *specific reading*” (171 italics mine). Further, he also suggests that holistic-heuristic models are only problematic when they forget or repress “the (garden) paths [they] had to traverse in order to arrive at [a] final synthesis” (186), yet interpretation that encounters “garden-path conditions” but still seeks “maximum cognitive payoff” can, according to Jahn, sometimes “maintain or even generate polyvalent readings” (178). Jorge Luis Borges’ short story, “The Garden of the Forking Paths,” offers a similar possibility, explaining that when an interpreter “is confronted with several alternatives, he [normally] chooses one and eliminates the others,” but that “in the fiction of the almost inextricable Ts’ui Pên, he chooses—simultaneously—all of them” (26). In the same way, Jane redefines garden paths (and by extension, Seth’s teachings), not as dead-ends, but as “avenues of fruitful speculation and intuitive

possibilities” (*God of Jane* 58), a flexible framework capable of accommodating multiple interpretations simultaneously.

Fittingly, the manifesto concludes with Jane’s vision of a New Age, a radical “democracy of spirit” (255) in which multiple interpretations of existence are held together in a framework Jane calls the “mass psyche.” According to Jane, this “mass psyche” is “ready to form a more comprehensive vision” of reality, and it speaks—not exclusively through her or through the Seth material—but also and simultaneously “through the spacemen and saints and psychic heroes of automatic writings and Ouija board messages; [and] even in the cults and frenzied activities of the fundamentalists” (256). This move indicates what Leigh suggests distinguishes the modern from the traditional spiritual autobiography: an explicit “social dimension,” so that “the final twist” in the spiral pilgrimage is “a turn to the least of [the writer’s] brothers and sisters” (17)—in this case, Jane turns to the prophets of the New Age. In her concluding vision, then, autobiography turns inside out into something like a cultural ethnography, as each individual “interpret[s] reality through [their] unique experiences and abilities” (254), producing a proliferation and diversity of both visionaries and visions, all existing together within a flexible superstructure. In *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*, Paul John Eakin, similar to Leigh, suggests that the “pursuit of the origin of the self” leads life-writers “not inward, as one might expect, into some cul-de-sac of solipsism, but always outward into a social dimension, to others, to culture, to language and literature” (209). *The God of Jane* concludes similarly, as Jane notes: “how strange that my private impulses led to a kind of public vision in which we all uphold a

democracy of spirit and insist upon interpreting... the nature of reality for ourselves” (257). Thus, the manifesto is not only about the interconnections between Jane and her various selves, but also the relationship between “our individual nervous centers and the vast network of communication that unites civilization” (122), indicating not only a social awareness, but an interpretive dimension as well.

Right before her vision of the mass psyche, Jane feels like she is still “missing an important point that would pull all of [her] ideas together” (250); however, when she is visited at her home by three of her more enthusiastic readers, she “feel[s] certain ideas being moved around in [her] mind, rearranged, as if an entirely new sorting out process were occurring” (252). The tangle in Jane’s mind is finally resolved and rearranged, appropriately, with the help of her *readers’* ideas. Once her mind is reorganized into this new configuration, she not only anticipates the future—in her vision of the New Age—but she also sees her past from a new perspective, enabling her, in other words, to *read* her own spiritual journey. It is as if she were finally able to see the garden path sentence in its proper context, reorganizing the words into a logical sequence. It is at this point that Jane can finally interpret her journey through the manifesto, seeing that she was “led... from the God of Jane idea, through to [her] ‘Psychic Manifesto,’ to the realization that what was needed was a decentralized God” (254), and now she knows “that [her] work for this particular book [is] finished” (254).

Where the self-begetting novel ends with the development of the protagonist “to the point at which [she] is able to take up [her] pen and compose the novel we have just finished reading” (Kellman 1245), *The God of Jane* ends, on the other hand, with Jane’s

development to the point at which she is able to *read* the text we have just finished reading ourselves, so that her spiritual journey, in other words, also describes her development as a reader who is now able to interpret her own autobiography. In this light, we can see that Leigh's three stages in the development of the modern spiritual autobiographer might also describe the "spiral pilgrimage" of the modern reader or interpreter. In stage one, the child develops interpretive frameworks for reading; in stage two, she encounters an ambiguity or paradox (a garden path construction) that frustrates those interpretive strategies, and in stage three, she finds a new transforming framework which enables her to make sense of the paradox by rearranging the parts, so that, under the new framework, all of the pieces fall into an alternate, meaningful configuration. The genre of autobiography is turned inside out, in effect, and we read it, not only as the story of the narrator, but as a story of the reader as well.

Spiritual autobiographies and self-begetting novels both prompt readers to consider the process, rather than the end product. But where the self-begetting novel leads readers to consider the process of *composition*—"the writing process" in London's terms—Sisson argues that the spiritual autobiography's "subject," on the other hand, "is always *interpretation*" (105 italics mine). Similarly, Leigh observes that "the act of writing and the act of reading an autobiography... are to be called to explore the spiral of one's own exploring" (28). Following this tradition (and similar to a garden path sentence), *The God of Jane* teaches readers to look for the source or the cause of the gaps and contradictions that they encounter as readers, not in the composition of the text or in the construction of a sentence, but in their own interpretative strategies, in the

frameworks they apply *to* the text. So while Sword and London emphasize that channeled works draw attention to the processes of their own construction, to the inconceivable mechanics of *composition*, as it were, *The God of Jane*, on the other hand, demonstrates that channeled texts also point to the inverse process, to the process of interpretation, sending readers on their own “spiritual journey” to discover the origins, not of the text necessarily, but of their own habitual approaches to that text.

The manifesto posits mediumship as a kind of alternate, self-reflexive framework which enables us to imagine authors, texts, and readers in new configurations. Where readers might typically envision these constituent parts to follow *one* conventional sequence (composition, publication, interpretation), the practice of mediumship upsets this inflexible framework, positing alternate relationships between author and text, as well as author and reader, formulations that require new interpretive approaches. Where post-structuralists and deconstructionists might envision unbridgeable gaps between author and reader, mediumship offers an alternative version, suggesting that “the two states are complimentary and that each state is ‘folded’ in the other, immersed in the other, actually without separation, though even to speak of these states *as* separate causes us to artificially divide their unity” (*God of Jane* 104). While dividing author from reader might prove productive initially, imagining that either the reader or the author negates the other necessarily collapses the multidimensional texture of their interaction.

In the context of mediumship, then, perhaps it is not the case that “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (Barthes, “The Death of the Author” 130), for instance. Rather, channeled texts imagine the possibility of an alternate

configuration, in which author and reader might resemble “psychic structures [that] coexist simultaneously,” so that their interaction, according to Jane’s New Age symbology, would represent a kind of “psychological or psychic motion... relative to the perceiver: i.e., to the particular attention-point each of us accepts as our platform of action” (*God of Jane* 97). While these psychic structures—author, text, and reader—are individual and distinct, they can also “travel through [one] another,” and even “turn themselves inside out” (97), so that the author becomes the reader becomes the author becomes the reader. In other words, mediumship necessarily scrambles authors, readers, and texts into new garden path-inducing constructions, frustrating conventional frameworks and challenging interpreters to imagine new possibilities and connections.

Moreover, my round-about path through *The God of Jane* also demonstrates that the manifesto is itself something like a garden path construction, necessitating multiple and simultaneous approaches. Of course, one of the challenges of interpreting the manifesto is that it paradoxically resists frameworks, even as it takes as its own framework the very concept of frameworks. This is a common feature of meta-literature; as Waugh suggests, metafictional texts often “refus[e] to allow the reader the role of passive consumer or any means of arriving at a ‘total interpretation of the text’” (13). Indeed, the manifesto—as a multidimensional work which describes multiple ontological levels and states of consciousness, various texts and genres, countless tensions and ambiguities, and even multiple “authors” and collaborators—necessitates that readers imagine alternate frameworks of interpretation, flexible and self-reflexive enough to hold contradictions and ambiguities simultaneously.

Therefore, this thesis can only hope to represent *my* path—one of many possible routes—through this fascinating text. Ideally, the following analysis of *The God of Jane* will represent a further investigation of my own interpretive frameworks and meaning-making strategies. Understanding my subsequent attempt at meaning-making as something like a garden path through the text provides me a structuring principle that acknowledges its own necessity as well as its inevitable limitations. Finally, this approach gives me space to consider the text from multiple angles and pathways, not necessarily privileging—or limiting myself to—one theoretical or interpretive framework, but justifying several. Just as the manifesto’s various frameworks allow the possibility that contraries might remain equally true, so my garden path approach ought to allow multiple—and perhaps even contradictory—interpretive approaches to the text to exist simultaneously, employing various methods in order to reach sometimes different conclusions about the same text—and even different readings of the same passages—bringing me, hopefully, to dead-ends that will in turn necessitate new and alternate pathways.

#### Endnotes

1. I will be using the term “manifesto” interchangeably with *The God of Jane* to refer to the text throughout this thesis.
2. I am using the first name “Jane,” not to denigrate Roberts as an author, but to emphasize that my focus is on the narrator and protagonist Jane Roberts, in so far as *that* Jane Roberts is separable from the historical author Jane Roberts. When I refer to just the surname “Roberts” or “Jane Roberts” all together, I mean to indicate the historical author.
3. David Leigh compares ten modern spiritual autobiographies to Augustine’s *Confessions*. He finds that they all follow similar patterns of conversion, and he suggests

that “what makes the conversion sequence of most modern autobiographers notably different from that of Augustine is that they explicitly include a societal dimension to their moral and religious conversions” (17). I would argue that this is true of the manifesto as well, and I hope this is clear by the end of the chapter.

Certainly the spiritual autobiography plays a central role in the history of American literature. In *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature*, Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury trace the form back to the journals and diaries of the Puritan tradition, suggesting that “such works created a legacy of self-scrutiny that was to shape later secular statements of individualism” including the *Autobiography* by Benjamin Franklin (18). Moreover, they suggest that the *Autobiography* and Jonathan Edward’s *Personal Narrative* are “two of the most important prose documents of the American eighteenth century” (45). Intriguingly, they observe a revival of the form in the 1960s and 1970s as writers like “Ginsberg, Berryman, and Lowell”—Roberts’ contemporaries, I would point out—produce some of “the most explicit autobiographical revelation to be found in American poetry” (399). According to Ruland and Bradbury, “autobiography of one kind or another has again become legitimate in poetry, has in fact become as dominant as it was in the nineteenth century” (411). It might also be productive, then, to consider *The God of Jane* in the context of the history of American literature and the “legacy of self-scrutiny” (18). It should also be noted that spiritualist mediums from the Victorian and early modernist periods also published autobiographical accounts of their channeling experiences.

4. Seth also mentions the possibility of Frameworks 3 and 4, but these will not figure into my analysis of the manifesto in this project. See page 139 of *The God of Jane*.

5. Of course, this is necessarily true if we consider “Jane” in the sense that I have, as a character in the text. In that context, Jane can *only* be created by her art. This is one of the ways in which my method of distinguishing the narrating and narrated Jane from the historical author is perhaps breaking down, or at least seeing its own reflection.

6. By my count, the word “framework” and its variations appear 45 times just in chapter 2 of *The God of Jane*.

7. It is significant that Jane’s mystical encounter with the God of Jane and that part of herself “that is as clear-eyed as a child” (64) occurs in a garden setting, mirroring, of course, Augustine’s conversion in Book VIII of *Confessions*, when, in a garden, Augustine hears “the sing-song voice of a child” telling him to “Take it and read, take it and read” (177). Jane’s experience, on the other hand, prompts her to *write* the manifesto and specifically to title it *The God of Jane*.

8. It seems significant that the construction of this phrase could imply something like begetting. In other words, we could also imagine that Joe is the God of Lester, Lester is

the God of Sarah, etc... creating a chain rather than a boundary between individual versions of divinity.

9. Leigh suggests that the narrator of a spiritual autobiography must affirm the possibility of life in the face of death, and it seems significant that the manifesto spends quite a bit of time discussing the death of Jane's cat, Billy. While she feels "sheepish to even consider the immortality of a cat," Jane insists that "if a cat's life and death had no meaning, then nothing else did either" (*The God of Jane* 19).

10. Subject / predicate functions as a binary (and an extremely productive one), but it is precisely our habitual configurations of subject / predicate distinctions that create garden path effects. One key to interpreting garden path sentences is to consider alternate configurations, creating new relationships between the words and the parts of a sentence.

11. Although it is certainly possible that Roberts knew about garden-path sentences—Bever's article was published in 1970 and the term garden-path is used to refer to sentences in this context at least as early as 1973 in William Woods' article "An Experimental Parsing System for Transition Network Grammars"—for the purposes of this project, I am more interested in the ways the term is helpful to me as a reader.

## CHAPTER TWO

## UNIDENTIFIED MEDIATING OBJECTS AND THE REINCARNATION OF PRINT

Granted we survive death, what part of us survives? As Seth gave us more material on reincarnation and the inner self, we naturally wondered. Having a whole self may be great, but if my Jane Roberts self is engulfed by it after death, then to me that's not much of a survival. It's like saying that the little fish survives when it's eaten by a bigger one because it becomes part of it.

—Jane Roberts, *The Seth Material* (212).

I become more and more convinced that the mass psyche is preparing for another intuitive upthrust, and that within its vast ranges it does possess the solutions, visions, and wisdom that we need. That power is making itself felt in the private arena. It's expressed and personified in the psychic experience of large numbers of people. It speaks through the spacemen and saints and psychic heroes of automatic writings and Ouija board messages; even in the cults and the frenzied activities of the fundamentalists. The mass psyche is looking for a way out of official beliefs. It's ready to form a more comprehensive vision.

—Jane Roberts, *The God of Jane* (256).

To this point, my garden path through *The God of Jane* has only given brief indications of the historical and cultural context of the manifesto. By presenting Jane Roberts' textual theories alongside those of concurrent theorists, I will demonstrate in this chapter that Roberts is not only a literary medium, she is also a literary theorist of sorts, that her ways of thinking about texts are comparable to those of her contemporaries, and that *The God of Jane* is in several important respects, a book of its time, even as it attempts to describe the new texts of a New Age. In addition, I will also place Roberts alongside several more recent literary scholars in order to suggest that many of her ideas about texts have a renewed relevance today, particularly as scholarship

finds itself concerned with the emergence of “new media.” My goal in this chapter is to show that Roberts’ methods of interpretation and her theoretical approaches—though framed in the eccentric symbolism of New Age mysticism—are nevertheless engaging the decidedly literary concerns about the circulation of discourse that were relevant in her time and are still significant in ours.

In the manifesto, Jane’s concluding vision of the “mass psyche” predicts the advent of a “New Age” in human history, an era characterized by the emergence of new forms of “psychic communication.” She sees a time in the near future when we will have “learn[ed] to read the language of the psyche,” enabling us “to distinguish between, say, psychic newscasts, documentaries, dramas, fantasies, and educational programs” (256). According to Jane, however, this mass psyche will speak through new and unconventional channels: specifically “the spacemen and saints and psychic heroes of automatic writings and Ouija board messages” (255): in other words, those easily dismissed harbingers and technologies of the “Age of Aquarius.”

Millenarianism of this kind is, of course, a familiar feature of the New Age movement, and New Age writers typically claim that humanity is nearing the end of one cycle and entering the beginning stages of another in the evolution of human civilization and consciousness. In *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, Wouter Hanegraaff traces these theories back to “the so-called UFO cults which flourished in the late 1950s” (95). Specifically, he cites David Spangler’s account of ufology’s basic principles as a representative example and precursor for New Age tenets:

The earth was entering a new cycle of evolution, which would be marked by the appearance of a new consciousness within humanity... they would

then enter a new age... the Age of Aquarius... in which, guided by advanced beings, perhaps angels or spiritual masters or perhaps emissaries from an extraterrestrial civilization whose spacecraft were the UFO's, they would help to create a new civilization. (95)

Both in Jane's New Age vision of the mass psyche and in ufology's prophecy of a changed civilization, the emergence of new and unfamiliar technologies (Ouija boards and UFOs) signals radical transformations and upheavals in society. Certainly, New Agers are not the only ones predicting radical cultural shifts in the 1960s and 1970s. And although Roberts' contemporaries in the field of literary criticism are less likely to cite flying saucers, they too are interested in the ways emerging technologies effect change in society. Specifically, the rapid development of computer technologies at this time prompts many scholars to consider the fate of the printed text in the digital age, and I will argue that Roberts' vision of the mass psyche represents her foray into the debate over whether print can survive in this new digital landscape and what that survival might entail.

I contend that Roberts' optimistic vision of a New Age of psychic communication is strikingly similar to those textual utopias prophesied by her most prominent, post-structuralist contemporaries. In fact, while their differences are more immediate, post-structuralists and New Age thinkers share an interest in transitional moments in history, even as the terms "post-structuralism" and "New Age" are themselves employed by scholars and historians to mark relatively imprecise transitions in the late twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Where New Age thinkers posit radical shifts in the evolution of human civilization and consciousness, post-structuralists also consider transitional moments, but more specifically in regard to the history of literary production and its reception.

The most prominent example might be Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author," where he suggests that the "removal of the Author" in modern times makes possible the "birth of the reader" (130). In this case, Barthes proposes an historic shift in the relation between authors, readers, and texts. He describes a related transition in *S/Z*, this time from the classical, "readerly" text to the modern "writerly." He argues that the readerly text should be understood to be singular, linear, and fixed in meaning, a manufactured product implying that its reader is merely a passive "consumer" (4), whereas the writerly is plural, open, and endlessly re-writable, inviting readers to become the active "producer[s] of the text" (4). According to Barthes:

In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*, they are indeterminable. (*S/Z* 5-6)

Certainly, Barthes' ideal text, with its interacting networks, its infinity of codes, and its multiple pathways, sounds remarkably similar to the "psychic structures" described in *The God of Jane*—which I have suggested are also descriptions of textual structures. In addition, and as Graham Allen points out, "for Barthes, a pure text, in the sense of a completely writerly text, is a utopian notion" (79), so that this endlessly multiple, reversible, and writerly work is as much a vision of a fantastical future as it is a straightforward or critical description of the modern text as it exists in print.

In the same way that Barthes suggests "the author is a modern figure [and] a product of our society" ("The Death of the Author" 124)—and thus subject to change—so Foucault argues that the author-function is "characteristic of the mode of existence,

circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society” (211). According to Foucault, the “author is... the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning” (222)—a figure, in other words, through whom we “impede[ ] the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction” (221). Although he acknowledges that “it would be romanticism... to imagine a society in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state... without passing through something like a necessary constraining figure” (222), Foucault, nevertheless, goes on to make what I would propose is a characteristically “New Age” prediction:

As our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author-function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint—one that will no longer be the author but will have to be determined, or perhaps, experienced. (222)

So just as Barthes’ “reign of the reader” is heralded by “the death of the author,” the sign that Foucault’s New Age of discourse has arrived will be the dramatic disappearance of the author-function, an authorial rapture, leaving a void to be filled by some new and as-of-yet unknown “system of constraint.” Intriguingly, many contemporary scholars have argued that Barthes’ and Foucault’s predictions of radical reorientations in the production and circulation of texts have already come to pass in the “digital age,” prompted, they suggest, by the emergence of digital writing technologies and practices.

In *What’s the Matter with the Internet*, for example, Mark Poster points out that “Foucault sets forth an alternative, future, utopian nonauthor whose position, presciently, bears remarkable resemblance to the position of authors in cyberspace” (66). In fact,

Poster argues that “the practice of digital writing,” because it so dramatically reconfigures the relation between authors and texts, might represent the very “mediation Foucault anticipated but did not recognize,” even to the extent that “digital writing may produce the indifference to the question ‘Who speaks?’ that Foucault dreamed of,” substituting authorial concerns for a “preoccupation with links, associations, and dispersions of meaning throughout the Web of discourse” (68). Poster goes so far as to announce the appearance of the digital author as the sign of “a new historical constellation of authorship,” arguing that while “the author in the modern period [was] bound to print technology, ... the more recent, perhaps postmodern, perhaps future, computer-mediated, even networked form of writing produces,” on the other hand, “a digital author” (69), a writer freed, ostensibly, from the material constraints of print thanks to the liberating features of the new digital medium.

Similarly, scholars have also connected the emergence of digital technologies and writing practices with Barthes’ notion of the ideal, writerly text. Specifically, many have pointed to “electronic hypertexts,” a genre characterized by non-linearity and the use of connecting links, most often in the form of digital hyperlinks. Writing in 2002, N. Katherine Hayles observes that “Barthes uncannily anticipated electronic hypertext by associating text with dispersion, multiple authorship, and RHIZOMATIC structure” (30). Similarly, George P. Landow and Paul Delaney propose that “hypertext creates an almost embarrassingly literal embodiment” and convergence of multiple poststructuralist ideas, intersecting with “Derrida’s emphasis on decentering, with Barthes’ conception of the readerly versus the writerly text, with post-modernism’s rejection of sequential narratives

and unitary perspectives, and with the issue of ‘intertextuality’” (*Hypermedia and Literary Studies* 6-7). Michel Chaouli—even as he takes issue with the nearly unquestioned identification of hypertext with Barthes’ writerly text—nevertheless acknowledges that “in *S/Z*, twenty years before the invention of the World Wide Web, the crucial outlines of hypertext seem to be prophesied with eerie precision. It’s all there: the plurality of codes, even the principle of randomization” (603). Whether digital forms of writing actually constitute or produce the discursive futures predicted by Barthes, Foucault, and others, or whether these predictions themselves have largely determined our understanding and our theoretical constructions of digital genres, are matters of speculation. What is clear, however, is that new technologies of communication hold a special fascination for scholars and New Age prophets alike, to the extent that the emergence of new technology is often ascribed even eschatological significance. If New Agers and ufologists often point to alien spacecraft as heralds of imminent change, then many scholars are just as apt to point to the advent of digital information processors and the World Wide Web with the same utopic and apocalyptic prospects. That all roads, in these accounts, seem to lead to and finally pass through new forms of technology is particularly interesting when considered alongside the tradition of channeled writing, since in all of these cases emphasis falls on the transformations and reconfigurations that inevitably attend processes of mediation.

In *Writing Double*, Bette London indicates the extent to which notions of utopia and apocalypse follow technological innovations when she observes how scholars have long predicted “that in a postmodern age defined by new electronic technology, all

authorship will soon be recognized as collaborative... an outcome celebrated by some for its utopian possibilities” and “derided by others as the end of authorship as we know it” (210). According to London, however, “what new technologies... render most visible is the impossibility of fixing authorship to some single, stable act or image,” an effect that emphasizes that “authorship has always had its multiple histories” (210), including, specifically, the tradition of mediumship. However, where London suggests that “mediumship has not for the most part survived as a serious authorial practice in the late twentieth century” (211) and that the practice “would seem today no more than a fringe phenomenon—the provenance of new age disciples and telemarketing operators” (210)—I contend, on the contrary, that this alternate history of authorship continues precisely in those “new age disciples” London dismisses outright. More specifically, I am suggesting that mediumship has its multiple histories as well, and that Jane Roberts continues this tradition even as she reconfigures the practice of channeled writing into the millenarian symbology of New Age mysticism.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the manifesto—as a text pieced together out of other texts through the collaboration of multiple authors and selves—constitutes something like a field of interrelated “psychic structures” which are “superimposed one over the other, even one within the other,” so that these structures are capable of “turn[ing] themselves inside out” and “travel[ing] through [one] another” (*God of Jane* 97). I demonstrated that these complex interactions produce a constant reconfiguration of the relationship between authors, readers, and texts—similar to those produced by channeled texts more generally—an effect that necessitates multiple and simultaneous

interpretations of the manifesto. In the rest of this chapter, I hope to show that *The God of Jane's* vision—and embodiment—of a “universe [that] has as many ‘centers’ as it has ‘points’ within it” (100), serves as a description and a prototype of the new texts of a New Age, not only mirroring Barthes’ notion of the writerly text and continuing the tradition of mediumship into the twentieth century, but also drawing from, and even anticipating in some ways, the emergence of new technologies and networks of communication, which serve as reminders of the channeled, or mediated, nature of *all* forms of communication.

Scholars have often connected previous eras of mediumship with concurrent advances in technologies of communication. For example, Jill Galvan in *The Sympathetic Medium* and Andrew McCann in *Popular Literature, Authorship and the Occult in Late Victorian Britain* agree that understanding the rise of the late Victorian medium “requires appreciating the birth during the nineteenth century of a complex new world of technological and occult communications” (Galvan 2). Both scholars note the parallel emergence of, on the one hand, new technologies of communication in the telephone and the telegraph, and on the other, spiritualist methods of communication in the form of channeled texts and séances. According to McCann, “what mediumship and [these] technologies ... have in common is that they displace the idea of the author as the sole entity responsible for the production of a text and that they point instead” to elaborate and “decentered network[s] of information transfer and storage” (9). Further, this intersection of technology and mediumship has also proven a productive site for inquiry into the gendered implications of mediumship in this period. For instance,

Galvan observes that these technological and spiritual forms of communication both required “mediums” or go-betweens, and that as the work of telephone operators and typists became associated with women early on, so “on both sides of the Atlantic, Spirit channeling quickly became marked as feminine” (4). Ultimately for Galvan, the convergence of mediumship, spiritualism, and technological innovation creates an ideal site for investigating the “place women could occupy within knowledge networks” (137) and the ways that spiritualist mediumship offered alternative networks and opportunities.

Certainly, the connection between technological and spiritual networks of communication has been productive, both for practicing mediums and for scholars, and yet this thread has been largely abandoned when it comes to mediumship in the late twentieth century—this even in spite of the emergence of television and the Internet in the same period. As she laments the seeming disappearance of those “literate mediums who were such a real presence throughout the modernist era” (165), Helen Sword, for instance, is hesitant to acknowledge that we can still turn to television “for electronically transmitted demonstrations of mediumship in action” (165), or else “we can read books by New Age ‘channelers’ such as Shirley MacLaine, who, speaking with the voices of long-dead past selves, offer a version of mediumship particularly well suited to a self-absorbed, channel-surfing video generation” (166). Given the connections scholars like Galvan and McCann have already suggested, I propose that what Sword offers in jest—a meaningful correlation between mediumship and those much maligned technologies of telecommunication appearing in the latter part of the twentieth century—is in fact a promising avenue of inquiry. Perhaps mediumship has already—precisely as Sword

suggests—taken on a “new and different form” (166), translated through those same “new age disciples” who London dismisses (*Writing Double* 210), and channeled by those very personages and technologies—the “spacemen and saints and psychic heroes of automatic writings and Ouija board messages” (*God of Jane* 255)—described in the manifesto. In short, perhaps New Age channels like Jane Roberts represent a new kind of medium for an age of new media, in which the figure by which we defend against the proliferation of meaning is no longer that of the author, but rather that of the medium—those mediating technologies of inscription and the networks that connect them now functioning as an alternative “system of constraint” in a discursive era in which the question, “who speaks” has metamorphosed into the question, “what apparatus(es) is the voice channeled through?”

If the nineteenth century “witnessed remarkable feats of transmission” that made possible “previously inconceivable forms of interpersonal connections” (Galvan 2), then surely the twentieth century saw a continuation of this upheaval with the emergence of television and the Internet; and in the same way that humanity finds itself, according to New Age prophets, in an in-between stage in the evolution of human consciousness, so the Seth material—published from the 1960s through the early 1980s—might be productively located between these significant developments in the history of telecommunication. Like the telegram, both television and the Internet rely on and produce their own “decentered network[s] of information transfer and storage” (McCann 9), and in *Re-Viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture*, Lynne Joyrich argues that television in particular, as a form of technology that delivers mass

culture to individual living rooms, both “abolishes notions of authenticity,” and “blurs the boundaries separating science and art and man and machine,” so that the medium in some respects threatens conventional “distinctions between true and false, reality and fabrication, fiction and nonfiction” (35): effects, in other words, that scholars have also attributed to the practice of mediumship. Moreover, television, according to Joyrich, also “celebrat[es] the reversibility of positions” like active and passive, subject and object, effectively foregrounding the flexibility of “visual, epistemological, and even ontological categories” (34). And just as Galvan suggests that the medium, both in spiritualism and telegraphy, was “in its ideal form... an inherently *feminine* thing—unobtrusive, non-interfering, effectively nonexistent for the purposes of intellectual exchange” (64-65 italics mine), so Joyrich argues that television, by casting its audience primarily as passive recipients and consumers, “seems to place all viewers in a position that has been culturally coded as ‘feminine’” (165). Given the medium’s reliance on gender assumptions and its use of flexible networks, television would seem to represent an ideal context for a twentieth century resurgence of mediumship.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, television is one of Seth’s consistent preoccupations throughout the Seth material. In the same way that spiritualist mediums in the late Victorian era take on the mechanical functions of typists and switchboard operators as they channel ghostly transmissions from other dimensions, so Seth suggests that we can think of Jane “as [his] television screen” (*The Seth Material* 271).<sup>2</sup> Although this analogy suggests that Jane takes on a merely passive role, Jane insists that the process involves more than the “relatively simple matter of a medium just blacking out and acting

like a telephone connection” (272)—that she participates in a kind of two-way, psychic collaboration. If she is Seth’s “window into physical life,” then, the reverse is also and simultaneously true, so that Seth “is [her] window into other realities” (272) in turn. Moreover, Jane speculates that Seth himself might be a kind of channel, one of “a series of translators” (272) connecting a vast network of alternate realities and selves and forming, in Seth’s terms, a kind of “psychological bridge” (270). As Jane and Seth switch roles back and forth, and through the collaboration and combination of their multiple selves, this psychological network necessarily destabilizes<sup>3</sup> the notion of a single author or a passive recipient, emphasizing—like television in Joyrich’s terms—“the reversibility of positions” like active and passive, subject and object (34).<sup>4</sup> As a brief example of this reversibility, Seth refers to Jane throughout the Seth material exclusively by the name of Ruburt, which he explains is the name of one of her past, notably *male*, selves. This suggests that Jane too is merely one incarnation of a host of channels and selves, and implies the additional possibility that male and female are reversible subject positions in this psychic network. Clearly, the destabilization of subjectivities and the oscillation between genders suggested in Seth’s “psychological” bridge-work parallel those very “channel-surfing” tendencies that are central to the television medium and which Sword criticizes as especially un-literary.

In the manifesto, however, Jane unashamedly reiterates the comparison between herself and television, explaining, for example, that “Seth’s personality is projected onto the screen of [her] mind as surely as any image is projected on a television screen” (*God of Jane* 230).<sup>5</sup> At the same time, she also imagines an additional network that connects,

not just herself and Seth, but every entity in the universe to “some immensely complicated psychological computer” which “contains all possible information, and all probable versions of any given private or mass reality (182). Although everyone would have access to this super-network of psychic information, as a medium, Jane sees herself functioning in this analogy as a kind of “terminal... ask[ing] questions not only for [herself] but for many others as well” (183). If Jane once again takes on the role of a passive machine in this illustration, it is notable that Seth, on the other hand, is “some higher-up psychological computer expert” who “rummag[es] through realms of magically stored knowledge... gathering information from the computer’s most secret systems, processing it, and delivering the material... in a session” (183).

Later in the manifesto, these positions are reversed, however, when Jane explains that *her* function in the Seth sessions “hark[ens] back to the poet’s original role,” and she describes mediumship as a return to “some ancient time when we received much of our pertinent information about ourselves in [a similar] fashion—one of us journeying for the others into the ‘mass unconsciousness’... and then communicating our findings as best we could” (218). In the analogy of the psychological computer, it is Seth who travels “through realms of magically stored knowledge” (183) and then shares his findings through Jane in the Seth sessions; conversely, Jane later describes mediumship as *her* journey into “the psyche of the people, of the species itself,” *her* mission to discover a “vision of inner reality” that she can then “communicate[ ] to the people” (218) in the manner of the ancient poet. Paradoxically, then, Jane is simultaneously the embodiment of futuristic, translation machines, even as she also takes on the mediating role of “the

earliest poets,” the “half shaman, half prophet[s]” who “voic[ed] their visions of man’s unity with the universe” (218). In fact, throughout the Seth material, Jane *becomes* a kind of overview of the history of telecommunication, since her body is figured variously as “a vitalized telegram” (*The Seth Material* 270), as Seth’s “television screen” (271), as an “input station” or “terminal” connected to a psychological computer-network (*God of Jane* 183), and even as the voice of the ancient poet (218).

Jane’s observation that these earliest poets “spoke their messages, sang their songs, [and] chanted their sagas aloud” is especially significant in this context, partly because it connects her version of mediumship to a more ancient practice, but also because “Seth *speaks*—communicating first through spoken words rather than, say, through automatic writing” (218). Thus, Jane explains that the Seth sessions “are first of all spoken productions” (218) and only afterwards translated and transcribed into printed texts in the Seth material. Jane is at pains to point out, in other words, that the Seth sessions are transposed from one medium (speech) into another (print text). In fact, editorial commentary throughout the material consistently draws attention to the multiple levels of mediation (both human and technological) that work in combination to transform Seth’s teachings and convert them into printed texts, reminding readers that writing is itself always and necessarily a technological function and a form of translation, and that even speech is a form of telecommunication as the spoken word is mediated through the technological apparatus of the human body.<sup>6</sup>

Given their interest in the collaboration of multiple mediating technologies, it is also significant that Jane, Rob, and Seth all cite Marshall McLuhan’s famous expression

“the medium is the message” on multiple occasions, suggesting to me that Roberts means to engage the same questions about the function and interaction of mediating technologies that McLuhan famously explores.<sup>7</sup> In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan suggests that we are all mediums to an extent. He argues that because technological networks are extensions of the human body, even just “to listen to radio or to read the printed page is to accept these extensions of ourselves into our personal system” (50): a notion that echoes the ways mediums enter into spiritual networks and function as bodily mediators between our world and other ghostly dimensions. Moreover, McLuhan famously asserts that “the content of the medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph” (8). Fittingly, then, the Seth books are about spoken conversations, and as Rob’s constant editorial interruptions remind us, the texts themselves are not simply messages projected or inscribed seamlessly from one transparent form onto another. Rather, the Seth material takes as its subject the very difficulties involved in converting messages from one medium (psychic communication) into another (speech), and into yet another (the printed text).

Appropriately, Rob’s commentary throughout *Seth Speaks* testifies to the bodily, or perhaps mechanical, difficulties involved in the production of the Seth sessions, including Jane’s experiences in trance as well as the difficulties Rob himself encounters in his role as scribe. In “SESSION 534,” for instance, Rob describes suddenly losing the “ability first to spell, and then to write” (*Seth Speaks* 107) in the middle of transcribing a session. He interrupts Seth’s teaching with the following note:

The difficulty I had been experiencing with my spelling abruptly returned to an even greater degree. Along with misspellings and the crossing out of words, I now had to worry about simply keeping up with Seth's rather slow pace. For the first time I thought of asking for a break... I had trouble with the whole paragraph. (109)

When the session ends, Rob tries to tell Jane about his difficulties, but now he even has “trouble speaking coherently” (110). Finally, Seth “returns” to explain that Rob has “been acting out the material this evening” (110) and that his “altered states of seeing, writing, spelling, and speaking” (111) were enactments of the very phenomena described in that particular session; in this case, the medium (Rob) really *is* the message to an extent, and in fact, the medium is both *possessed* by and *transformed* into that message.

McLuhan argues that “it was not [always] obvious that the medium is the message” (13-14); in fact, he asserts that this now famous aphorism only became observable following a dramatic shift, which he attributes to the simultaneity of communication made possible in the “electric age.” As “sequence yields to the simultaneous” and “the world of structure” gives way to that of “configuration” (13), McLuhan dramatically asserts that:

The Western world is imploding... Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly we approach the final phase of the extensions of man—the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society. (3)

For McLuhan, “electric” technologies threaten the very underpinnings of Western culture, which he argues is founded on the principles and assumptions of the printed text. Of course, McLuhan's suggestion that Western culture is on the brink of a radical

transformation—particularly as he emphasizes the “final phase of the extensions of man” and a corresponding evolution of “consciousness”—is strikingly similar to Jane’s vision of the mass psyche, as well as the ufologist and millenarian predictions cited at the beginning of this chapter. Note the prominence afforded to new technologies in each version, as electricity, Ouija boards, and alien spacecraft all signal imminent new eras of consciousness. In addition, just as McLuhan argues that Western culture must relinquish its print-based assumptions in order to enter a final phase in human history, so Jane asks her readers to stop “translating” Ouija board communications “automatically through ancient beliefs” (*God of Jane* 256), urging them to learn to read the messages of the psyche through new interpretive frameworks. Both, I would argue, are concerned with the highly contested future of the printed text and with recognizing, and finally overturning, some of the assumptions of a print-based culture.

The fate of print in the age of television and the computer has long been a topic of debate, and while many have predicted the demise of the print medium, scholars have tended to view the shift as the most recent in a series of similar transitions in the history of communication. Poster, for instance, attempts to avoid notions of utopia or apocalypse by reminding readers that digital writing practices do “not mark the first reshuffling of the basic conditions of cultural formation” in history, since “decisive shifts in the systems of signification have accompanied humans throughout the past,” ranging “from smoke signals to writing and the alphabet” (5). Writing in 1983—only three years after the publication of *The God of Jane*—Benjamin M. Compaine in “The New Literacy” asserts that “we are on the verge of yet another step in the evolution of literacy,” explaining that

while many see television as the “enemy” of the printed text, “records, film, radio, and television have [all] successively been feared as threats to print. Yet all have survived and thrived,” and “neither [have] the printing press nor the typewriter replaced either speech or handwriting” (140). In this way, scholars have tended to emphasize the print medium’s surprising resilience and adaptability in the face of new media.

In *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin attribute media’s adaptability to a process they refer to as “remediation”—or “the representation of one medium in another” (45). They emphasize that “new digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture” (19)—they do not appear out of the blue like alien spacecraft, in other words—but rather they “emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts” (19). At the same time, Bolter and Grusin maintain that “older media can also remediate newer ones” (55), so that books, for instance, can incorporate the features of film or web pages. N. Katherine Hayles describes this “cycling of different media through one another” (5) as “the rapidly transforming medial ecology of the new millennium” (7): “ecology” indicating for Hayles that there can be as many different relationships between media in this new age as there are interconnections “between different organisms coexisting within the same ecotome” (5). Hayles argues that the print medium survives in the digital age partly as a result of its voracious remediations of new media, as books attempt, in other words, to devour and absorb the characteristics and features, not just of *new* digital media, but also of *past* mediums as well.

*The God of Jane*, I would argue, remediates multiple histories of mediumship (mediumship in terms of the tradition of channeled texts, but also in regard to technologies of communication), and briefly, I will consider an especially interesting sequence of remediation within the text in order to suggest that the manifesto refashions itself through the representation and remediation of other media. Notably in chapter 22, Jane describes watching television and seeing a “hell-fire preacher” hold “a Bible to the screen” (226), commanding his viewers “to touch the televised image of the Bible [to] be healed” (227). Obviously in this case, the television medium is represented within the pages of the manifesto, but in yet another hall of mirrors effect, the television is itself representing a printed text in the form of the Bible. Further, the preacher’s invitation to viewers to touch the televised image of a printed book lends the image on the screen an impossible materiality by juxtaposing the tactility of the text and the spectrality of the televised image, all while the passage also emphasizes the incantations of the preacher’s speech (all of which are mediated, by the way, through the apparatus of the television and then translated into the text of the manifesto). In the same chapter, Jane also happens to watch “an old Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde movie” (230) on television, so that the television represents and refashions a film, which is itself remediating a book by Robert Louis Stevenson, while, finally, all of these remediations are themselves described in the printed pages of the manifesto. Just as the Seth sessions emphasize the collaboration of multiple, human mediums (Jane, Seth, and Rob), so this sequence produces a series of remediating loops that draw attention to the interaction of multiple mediating

technologies. In this way, Jane's body and the manifesto both represent a kind of history of telecommunication.

For Hayles, while many still “see the electronic age as heralding the end of books,” what seems more likely is that the kinds of interactions between print and new media that I have just described “give us an opportunity we have not had for the last several hundred years: the chance to see print with new eyes” (33), allowing us to investigate the extent to which “literary criticism and theory are shot through with unrecognized assumptions about print” (30). In the following analysis, I will demonstrate that the manifesto, at least in part, describes Jane's experience seeing print “with new eyes,” as she learns to read the new texts of a New Age and to recognize the ways that her sense of “self” is in part determined by print-based assumptions. If her contemporaries have seen the advent of *electric* networks and technologies as the impetus for revising their notions of print, Jane—following the tradition of mediumship—is prompted by the appearance of alternate technologies, specifically *psychic* and *spiritual* networks, including the Ouija board and the mass psyche. And where contemporary scholars understand the interaction and evolution of media in terms of remediation, Jane learns to read the interaction of psychic structures, the survival of media, and the reconfigurations of authors, readers, and texts, all through a New Age version of *reincarnation*, which, similar to remediation, also investigates the possibility of multiple and diverse connections. In this way, the manifesto functions as a proto-text of an approaching New Age, anticipating the disappearance, or rather the reincarnation, of the

author-function in an era where the medium is both the message and also the new system of constraint in the circulation of discourse.

Jane learns to see print from a new perspective beginning in chapter 7 of the manifesto, when she explains that she and her husband have agreed to bequeath “all [their] papers, paintings, and related materials” to a “well-known library” in order to “insure that the Seth material would be preserved” (55) after their deaths.<sup>8</sup> She finds it especially “weird to imagine all of [their] paintings and books and private notes and Seth sessions—[their] *lives* in print and paper and canvas—stacked in some future library room, *surviving* manufactured products, while [their] flesh and blood was gone” (55). She regards the printed text as a medium of preservation, a kind of afterlife for the author, but what troubles her most in this case is the fixity of the printed text as a material object. Although her words will survive long after her death because of the durability of print, conversely, the texts are also necessarily confined to a single location and the words to a permanent sequence. Jane is understandably “dismayed” when she imagines that “those funny squiggles of ink and how [she] arranged them would one day be deciphered by others” (55), that she would be helpless to change or revise the material, so that rather than confine her existence to the permanence and inflexibility of the printed page, Jane fantasizes about “having a wild bonfire in the backyard—manuscripts, poetry, and notes all brilliantly flaming”(55-56).

In this case, Jane’s assumptions about the stability, coherence, and immobility of the printed text also determine her notion of self. If the printed words are fixed in a single sequence and confined to the boundaries of a single text, then Jane also sees her

self as a single consciousness, bound to a single body, perhaps transferable to multiple texts, but always in the form of mere copies, always the same words repeated in the same exact sequence. Her realization that her “squiggles of ink” will be fixed in a particular arrangement as they are “deciphered by others” (55) highlights a characteristic of print that Mark Poster also observes when he explains that “the traces of ink on the page are unaltered... by the reader so that others may read the same page or another copy of the page and see the same traces, the same arrangement of signs” (92). Poster emphasizes that the printed page exists as an object in a particular space and time—“obstinately enduring from moment to moment, subsisting in a place through the laws of inertia” (92)—thus mirroring Jane’s vision of her and Rob’s “*lives* in print and paper and canvas—stacked in some future library room” (*God of Jane* 55) like so many corpses. In this context, Jane’s book-burning fantasy seems to reflect her despair at the possibility that her “self” might also be bound to the same, seeming inflexible nature of print.

Significantly, Jane only abandons her destructive fantasy once she remembers “all the painstaking work [Rob has] done and still would do on the Seth material” (56): when she is reminded, in other words, that the Seth material is a product of the complex interactions and collaborations of *multiple* mediums. In this case, the printed text is not simply a vessel containing copies of *her* consciousness. Rather, since it brings together a combination of multiple collaborators, all mediated through several technologies and then multiplied across various texts, the materials attest to a much more complicated relationship between author and text than she had previously assumed, and subsequently alter her sense of a fixed and stable self as well. For if the materials embody the

collaboration of multiple authors within a single text, then this process not only preserves, but necessarily *transforms* each consciousness by combining and reconfiguring these various personalities into the same sequence.

Jane's new understanding of the collaboration involved in the production of the Seth material requires her to develop a corresponding framework for considering her relationship to the text. I propose that her discovery of "the God of Jane" in the very same chapter provides her the necessary means of understanding her self outside of the limitations of printed text, enabling her to conceptualize the intricate relationships that constitute a collaborative version of authorship. I am suggesting that the God of Jane concept, with its "intensely personal connection between each individual and the universe" (65), functions as an interpretive framework, allowing Jane to trace the interconnections between individual *collaborators* within the universe of a single text. That the God of Jane concept functions as a textual framework is indicated by the fact that the idea prompts the production of multiple texts, each bearing variations of the phrase as their title, including, of course, the manifesto itself as well as a poem by Jane's writer-friend Sue Watkins, titled "The God of Sue."

When she shares the God of Jane idea with her friend, Jane is delighted by "Sue's excellent, exuberant, personal interpretation" of the concept, "because it means that each person *can* interpret the basic idea itself in the most personally meaningful manner" (68). Unlike the strangers who Jane fears will merely "decipher" the printed Seth sessions in some future library, Sue is no passive reader or consumer; instead, she is something like an additional collaborator, who effectively re-writes Jane's idea into a new medium (a

poem). Earlier Jane preferred to destroy her work rather than subject it to the perusal and scrutiny of strangers, but less than fifteen pages later, she invites all of her readers to follow Sue's example and to "imagine [their] own God of Bob or Carol or whatever [their] name is" (69). Barthes proposes that "to read is to struggle to name, to subject the sentences of the text to [an erratic] semantic transformation," which "consists in hesitating among several names" (*S/Z* 92); in the manifesto, Jane asks her readers to literally re-name, and in effect, re-write her idea using their own names. Thus, the God of Jane concept literalizes Barthes' suggestion that to "find meanings is to name them; but these named meanings are swept toward other names" and those names "call to each other, reassemble, and their groupings call for further naming" (*S/Z* 11). As a result, the concept serves to indicate the texture of that impossibly plural, collaborative, and "writerly" work that readers do not merely read as "an object to dismantle or a site to occupy" but rather re-write and re-name from their own perspective, which is "already itself a plurality of other texts, of codes which are infinite" (10). As an invitation to readers and a record of their collaborative interactions with the text, *The God of Jane*—that is, the manifesto—by extension of its title, becomes a kind of proto-text for a new system of literary reception, heralding the arrival of a New Age that would be characterized, not by the disappearance of the author-function, as Foucault predicted, but by the emergence of a new psychic medium that reverses and multiplies the author-function, reconfiguring the relationship between authors and readers as readers re-write, rather than simply receive, the message.

Poster attributes a similar reconfiguration of the relationship between authors and readers to the shift from analogue to digital authorship. He argues that our understanding of authorship is based on our assumption that print represents “a technology of the analogue” and “that the book [is] an analogous reproduction of an original, authentic author” (65). In analogue technologies, where the relationship between the copy and the original “is one of analogy” (79), readers assume “a strong bond between the text and the self of the writer” (68). On the other hand, with digital technologies, “the material configuration of the copy bears no resemblance to the original” (80): that is, the original is converted into completely different codes and patterns for transfer. For instance, in the case of digitalization, a process of *digitization* occurs, as words are converted from alphabetic letters into a binary code of numbers.<sup>9</sup> In this way, Poster argues that the digitalization of authorship effectively “disrupt[s] the analogue circuit through which the author makes the text his or her own, [and] through which the mechanisms of property solidify a link between creator and object” (68). Poster suggests that digital writing thus “mobilizes the text so that the reader transforms it, not simply in his or her mind or in his or her marginalia, but in the text itself so that it may be redistributed as another text” (68), a process strikingly similar, of course, to the re-writings and re-namings through which readers reconfigure the God of Jane concept into “the God of Joe, the God of Lester, the God of Sarah...” (*God of Jane* 65).

According to Poster, “the change from print to computer writing [produces] a material change... in the way writing enters the world, circuits through it, and is stored in it” (78), necessitating new critical frameworks that are capable of tracing the now

constantly morphing inter-relationships among authors, texts, and readers, so that “the issue at stake in [the] digitization of authorship” is the question: “how is the subject reconfigured in this process?” (73). In writing and reading, in the moments of inscription and reception, if the subject (or a part of the subject) passes through a kind of interface or medium to be re-coded into a new configuration, or if the subject is digitized “into a [binary] series of zeroes and ones” (79), then what happens to the self in that process? This question has special relevance for Jane, since she views the texts of the Seth material as actual embodiments of her life. If it is true that the texts are a part or a version of her, then readers not only re-write Jane’s *idea*, but are necessarily re-writing her *self* as well when they interpret the materials.

This seems to be Jane’s concern when she realizes that her friend “visualize[s] the God of Sue as She” (68). Jane admits that the idea of a female divinity seems “reasonable enough,” but when *she* thinks “of the God of Jane... [she] just didn’t think of sexual elements at all” (68). Earlier Jane is dismayed by the possibility of being trapped within a single arrangement of letters and words in some future library, and similarly here she explains that she “wouldn’t want to be confined to a one-sexed God” (68) either. This prompts her to re-write the concept into yet another poem in order to maintain that the God of Jane chooses to be “one or the other / now and then, / and sometimes, both / or neither” (68) when it comes to gender, even though the materiality of a printed text (or a body, for that matter) might seem to demand “one or the other,” while “both or neither” could seem impossible. If Jane’s works are actually embodiments of her life, perhaps textual bodies, then how can her psychic manifesto and Sue’s “almost feminine

manifesto” (68) coexist, and what would that coexistence mean for Jane’s sense of self or selves? Can multiple versions of the author exist at once? The dilemma reminds Jane of “Seth’s view of subjective reality [which] includes the existences of many selves connected with the self we know,” prompting her to “wonder[ ] how these many selves fitted within the one-focus position that’s necessary in each separate lifetime” and how her own perspective might be related to the perspective(s) of her “reincarnational existences” (69).

According to Seth’s teachings, reincarnation is a kind of “inner information-storing process that connects one generation to another in a kind of spontaneous, subjective ‘evolution’” (70). In the manifesto, the concept enables Jane to see how “personal identities could be maintained even through multiple existences” (70), but more than merely describing the survival of the self, I would argue that reincarnation serves as an interpretive framework; in the same way that *remediation* provides contemporary scholars a means of understanding the survival and evolution of print in a complex ecology of new media, so *reincarnation* allows Jane to follow the collaboration of multiple authors in the same text and to trace the multiplication and reconfiguration of the subject as it is channeled through various mediating technologies.

Jane initially tests reincarnation as an interpretive framework when she reads a poem titled “Tale of the Seamstress.” She describes the poem as “an imaginary dialogue between [herself] and a seamstress who is another portion of [Jane] living in a past century” (69), or perhaps “reincarnational self” (70). The seamstress is presumably a figment of Jane’s imagination, a character in a text, but as Jane re-reads the poem, it

becomes clear to her that her relationship with the seamstress is not so straightforward. In the poem, the speaker (presumably Jane) insists that “it’s [the seamstress] / who sits within [her] head, / and not the other way around” (75-76), but in response, the seamstress explains that, while this may be true from Jane’s perspective, in the seamstress’ “scale of events, / [Jane’s] world may— / or may not—happen” (80), and Jane is actually “just a dream and a half / [the seamstress] had in [her] head / while ironing” (82). This reversal turns Jane’s concept of reality inside out, forcing her to consider the possibility that she (Jane) is not just the author of the seamstress as she assumed, nor simply a reader of the poem in any conventional sense, but also, paradoxically, a reincarnated version of the seamstress and a character in the seamstress’ dreams, suggesting that multiple originary subjects can exist within the same text.

This paradox is dramatized in the poem when Jane tries to assert that her reality is more “real” than that of the seamstress, since her “world is here, concrete, / while [the seamstress’] is a vestige / of the past... or perhaps / only a figment of [Jane’s] imagination” (75-76). Initially, Jane attempts to exercise a kind of authority over the seamstress by insisting that she herself is “full of flesh and blood,” whereas the seamstress’ reality is “just mental” (76). Following this proclamation, however, Jane suddenly finds herself “in a room of cloth” (76), smelling the seamstress’ dinner and doing the seamstress’ work. Jane has apparently “changed I’s” (77). Transformed into the character she once wrote into existence and surrounded by the objects and sensations of that character’s imaginary world, Jane has passed through the medium of the text and entered the “mental” reality of the poem, switching “selves” with her reincarnational,

presumably fictional counterpart; in this process, Jane is re-coded into a new body. Her earlier fear of being confined to the pages of the Seth material in some future library is realized to an extent here, as she finds herself trapped in the fictional reality of a poem.

Foucault suggests that the way to “reduce the great peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world” is through the constraining figure of the author (221); however, the inversion produced in “Tale of the Seamstress” through the interplay of *multiple* reincarnational and authorial subjects effectively “reverse[s] the traditional idea of the author” (221), turning reality, the poem, and the printed text of the manifesto inside-out in a dizzying proliferation of fictional and alternate selves. Again, the traditional, perhaps analogue, link between author and text assumed by the print medium is severed in the poem, and Jane is no longer the sole “originator” of the verses but somehow shares responsibility for the text with a reincarnational self. The text has two centers, as it were, and somehow both Jane and the seamstress find themselves “variable and complex function[s] of discourse” (221), each able to step into the subject positions of character, author, and reader all within the same poem.

Consequently, the reversal also invites readers of the manifesto to consider the strange possibility that, from another perspective, the fictional world of the poem might exist, not only within or subordinate to the reality of *The God of Jane*, but alternatively—and perhaps simultaneously—outside it or above it. If Jane is a figment of the seamstress’ imagination and not the other way around, then the seamstress is also, in a sense, the creator of the manifesto itself, making *The God of Jane* an imagined document whose imaginary author (Jane) believes herself to be the author of a fictional poem about

a seamstress. For readers, this is both a confusing and a concerning development, for if *The God of Jane*—the material text itself—is an imagined object in the mind of the seamstress, then the reader who holds that text in hand is him or herself transformed into “just a dream and a half / [the seamstress] had in [her] head” (82).<sup>10</sup> The printed page—as well as readers’ own bodies, for that matter—are no longer merely material objects, but are transformed into imagined aspects of the text’s fictional, or perhaps virtual universe.

Just as Joyrich argues that television blurs the distinctions between reality and fiction, so fiction and reality enter into a dangerous correlation following the shift in “Tale of the Seamstress.” Further, the seamstress’ observation that she and Jane are “cross-stitched” with “threads of consciousness (80) into “a living tapestry / that changes all the time” (81), might also describe the precarious constitution of the manifesto itself, which is similarly woven together out of countless texts, each describing and combining disparate ontological levels of “reality.” Although Jane is used to believing that her physical reality is more real than the worlds she imagines in her fiction—or those she experiences in her psychic trances—a reincarnational heuristic collapses the distinctions between these opposing realities and convinces her that “sometimes aesthetic fact *could* be closer to truth than... scientific fact” (84); that perhaps “the poem [is] stating,” or even creating, “a factual psychological relationship” (84) between herself and the seamstress. If the difference between reality, fiction, and psychic information is not absolute, then perhaps fiction is not confined to the inert pages of a book, and nor would reality exist completely outside of the book’s covers; on the other hand, these seemingly

incommensurable ontological dimensions might even be braided together into the same text (as they are in the manifesto) in the manner of co-existing, reincarnational selves.

In effect, by positing the simultaneous existence of multiple originating authors, the inversion in “Tale of the Seamstress” reconfigures the print medium and obliterates the author-function, releasing the very proliferation of fiction that Foucault warns against. Initially, even Jane fears the “slippery chasms of ignorance and fanaticism [that] could open if we even imagined that all psychic information was factual,” and she worries that we would find ourselves at the mercy of “all those people whose ‘psychic sources’ told them that they’d been kings and queens, prophets or noblemen in previous lives; or those who were supposedly in contact with spacemen from other planets” (95). However, in the same way literary scholars agree that the emergence of digital mediums necessitates corresponding new critical frameworks for interpretation, so Jane realizes that the realm of “psychic” messages represents “an incredible, nearly unexplored system of inner communications” carrying “*all kinds* of data” (96); she has only to “learn[ ] to distinguish between psychic ‘news stories’ and psychic dramas, between intuitive documentaries and morality plays, between symbolism and fact” (96): to discover, or perhaps experience, the new “system of constraint” that organizes the circulation of these psychic texts.

Fortunately, Jane’s realization that there may be an as-of-yet undiscovered system of classifications organizing even psychic messages leads her to reconsider the contents of a psychological construct she calls “the Library” (93). Of particular interest to her are the psychic messages she stores there: documents she refers to as “the Codicils,” and which she understands are “actually statements based on Seth’s own material, presented

in a different way” (94). However, Jane has had considerable trouble making any sense of these documents or “fit[ting] them into any one category or another” (95). Ironically, part of her difficulty stems from the uncertain authorship of the material; as examples of automatic writing, the Codicils are not exactly the productions of her own conscious mind, and they are not coming from Seth; neither are the messages strictly fictional or factual for that matter, so she has labeled them simply as “psychic.” However, convinced now that factual, fictional, and psychological realities can coexist—like multiple authors—within a single text, Jane can approach the Codicils “from another perspective—not only as [sources] of, say psychic knowledge, but as [sources] of information—of facts as well” (94-95), enabling her to see how this material “fit with the God of Jane idea, the concepts in [her poem] ‘Origins,’ and how it also echoed Seth’s material—but from a different direction” (96). Once Jane reads them in connection to these other works, the Codicils come “into brilliant focus, as if [she] were reading them for the first time” (95).

Exactly when she has been searching for a new system for classifying psychic messages, Jane begins to realize that the Codicils themselves “offer new codes or assumptions upon which to base individual life and civilization,” replacing old patterns of thought and leading humanity “toward [its] fullest development as individuals and as a species” (94). I would suggest, then, that the Codicils are actually instructions for interpreting and organizing the new texts of the New Age. In addition, they also explain the structure and organization of the Library itself (not to mention the manifesto), serving as directories that outline new systems and patterns for tracing the possible

reconfigurations of authors, readers, and texts. Significantly, then, the new “code” outlined most prominently in the Codicils is the concept of reincarnation. In fact, the first Codicil that Jane re-reads (“Psychic Structures”) explains that the coexistence of psychic structures—which I take to mean psychic messages or “texts” in this context—depends on an intricate system of reincarnation, whereby an individual personality or structure is able to “escape[ ] in death by altering its attention... and then by re-forming itself in time as per reincarnational existences” (97), approximating the manner in which scholars suggest new media remediate other forms.

Moreover, the concept of reincarnation is not just useful for reading the messages of a future age, for it can also be applied retroactively to earlier texts. For instance, after Jane re-reads “Psychic Structures” (a document written three years before the manifesto), suddenly she is able to put several additional texts into conversation with each other in a new way, seeing how her “‘heroic dimensions’ discussed in *Psychic Politics* correlated with the dimensions in which the Library’s psychic superstructures existed; and both correlated with Seth’s Framework 2” from *The Individual and the Nature of Mass Events* (100). In short, Jane is now able to see that she has “been getting the same information from different levels of consciousness,” and by viewing these texts as reincarnated versions of each other, she can finally start to “put it all together” (100).

Reincarnation, while still providing a kind of system for organizing the relationships between authors, readers, and texts, provides a flexible framework that allows a multitude of subjects and media to coexist in various and simultaneous relationships. If the author-function has conventionally provided clear and stable

boundaries for separating texts from texts, authors from readers, and reality from fiction, then a reincarnational framework, on the other hand, allows Jane to see the ways “relationships and boundaries change constantly as new hookups are formed and new connections found” (*God of Jane* 96). Reincarnation teaches Jane to ask different questions of texts: no longer, “who really spoke” and “is it really he and not someone else?” (Foucault 222), but the questions of a New Age instead: “what are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects” and “who can assume these various subject functions?” (222). Thus, the concept allows Jane to perform a kind of psychic “typology of discourse,” so that she can begin—in Foucault’s words—to “distinguish the major categories of discourse” (220) and to trace the myriad “relationships peculiar to discourse (not reducible to the rules of grammar and logic)” (220) when it comes to the psychic messages of the New Age.

With her newly discovered, reincarnational typology, Jane is able to recognize that the next Codicil she re-reads—titled “The Personal Universe”—is “like a mental program from some psychic: ‘University of the Air’” (*God of Jane* 100). Similar to “Psychic Structures,” this document also describes the features of the new text of the New Age. Restating the concepts of reincarnation and the God of Jane, this essay suggests that “the individual person *is* the center of the universe,” so that “the universe has as many ‘centers’ as it has ‘points’ within it. That is, the universe is, at every hypothetical point, a center” (100). I would argue that this is another way of describing the poem, “Tale of the Seamstress,” a text that has multiple authors who are each “*the* center of the universe”—or rather, the text—“from [their] own viewpoint” (101).

Significantly, Jane is able to use this same notion of multiple centers to interpret “The Personal Universe” itself, adding several editorial insertions to the essay in order to indicate transitions where the document jumps from one “center” or viewpoint to another, sections where the text reverses field: for instance, “note the change of viewpoint here from the previous material” (102) and again, “note here, the return to the earlier tone and viewpoint” (103).

Landow and Delaney restrict their use of the term “hypertext” to refer to documents written specifically with the use of a computer in order to “transcend the linear, bounded, and fixed qualities of the traditional written text” (*Hypermedia and Literary Studies* 3); however, with its inclusion of texts like “The Personal Universe” and “Psychic Structures,” I would argue that *The God of Jane* is able to achieve many of the same effects, but through the medium of print. Landow and Delaney explain, for instance, that “hypertext provides an infinitely re-centerable system whose provisional point of focus depends upon the choices made by a truly active reader” (6), and in the case of the manifesto, I contend that Jane is that “truly active reader” who “move[s] through [a] web or network of texts”—as she re-reads the Codicils, for instance—and it is *her* choices and experiences that “continually shift the center—and hence focus or organizing principle—of [the reader’s] investigation and experience” (6). In effect, *The God of Jane* becomes a record of Jane’s journey through an intertextual system of her own devising, so that even if the manifesto itself is neither a hypertext nor a “psychic” text *per se*, by representing, or remediating, the features of these other media, the

manifesto is able, at the very least, to suggest the possibility that print might paradoxically transcend the very limitations of print.

*The God of Jane* is something like a map of Jane's journey in and through a seemingly endless sequence of texts. As readers of the manifesto, our task, then, is to follow the elaborate intertextual pathways that Jane opens up across multiple works. In "Twenty Minutes into the Future or How Are We Moving Beyond the Book," Landow asserts that "hypertextualizing a text produces not an electronic book, but a miniature electronic library" (226-227), and I would argue that, although the Seth materials are not precisely digital productions, the manifesto, by including excerpts and passages from the rest of the Seth books, effectively "hypertextualizes" the Seth material into something like a psychic library, mirroring the "future library" where Jane's education in the limitations of print began. For as the manifesto moves from excerpts of Jane's personal poetry, to letters from her readers, to Seth sessions included in other Seth books, Jane's path through this network creates a series of links that connect all the works, turning the manifesto into a universe of print or a virtual library, in which "each [*text*] is connected with each other probable [*text*]; and each *is the* center from its own viewpoint," an intertextual field with "no beginning or end" (*God of Jane* 101).

With no beginning and no end, if we imagine reading the manifesto as an attempt to follow Jane's readerly journey, we find that each text alluded to or included in the manifesto becomes a kind of escape route whereby Jane manages to elude our grasp, writing her way out of our reach and into farther corners of her library. If earlier Jane feared being trapped permanently in the pages of an inert text, readers find that she has

built countless trap doors and secret passageways into the material, as references and excerpts of other works function as portals into the pages of those other texts. These links, then, form an endless maze of possible routes through the material, producing what Foucault describes as the “space into which the writing subject constantly disappears” (206). As an example, early on in the manifesto, Jane explains that *The God of Jane* is actually an “extension” of one of Seth’s books, *The Individual and the Nature of Mass Events*, which is itself “an extension of his *Nature of Personal Reality*” (*God of Jane* 19);<sup>11</sup> however, if we attempt to follow Jane’s trail out of the manifesto and catch her in the pages of *Mass Events*, we inevitably find ourselves lost in a sea of additional texts or else back in the very place we started.

Specifically, in chapter 14 of the manifesto, Jane includes excerpts from a deleted Seth session, explaining that the material was produced in the same time period that Seth was dictating sections of *Mass Events*. The date provided for the deleted session is July 12, 1979, but if we try to find the context for this excerpt in the pages of *Mass Events*, we find a sizable gap spanning the period from June 27 to July 18. In his opening notes for “Session 866” (delivered July 18), Rob explains that in this three week interval, “Seth has given us but two regular sessions—both on subjects other than those for *Mass Events*—and two private sessions” (*Mass Events* 267): one of which, presumably, is the deleted session included in the manifesto. However, moving backwards to the latest session included in *Mass Events* (June 27), Rob’s notes actually refer explicitly to *The God of Jane*. In that session, Seth teaches that “each being experiences life as if it were at life’s center” (*Mass Events* 261), and Rob’s endnote for this passage explains that “Jane has

been quite intrigued by the idea of ‘personal centering’ as she put it in *her* notes for *God of Jane*,” and that “she also wants to study the subject for her book in connection with *reincarnation*, the origins of our species—and even of our world” (266 italics mine).

Though Rob’s notes do not give an exact citation or location, the note he refers to appears directly after “Tale of the Seamstress” in the manifesto:

Tracing my lines of thought backward, I saw that the God of Jane was the trigger for the comparisons... I was now making: that, and my new understanding of what “Tale of the Seamstress” was really saying... that *my* line to the universe was direct in my time, whoever else I might be in other realities... and the same would apply to the seamstress, of course... each other consciousness would be personified or individualized in the same fashion, experiencing physical reality from its own center... how did that sense of personal centering fit in with, say, the origins of the word, or of our species? (*The God of Jane* 85)

Thus, following this intertextual trail leads us straight back to the same text (and to the same conversation) that we just left in the manifesto, but now with additional perspectives (both Rob’s and Seth’s) and texts threaded into our path. By traveling back and forth between *The God of Jane* and *Mass Events*, readers sew the texts together, traveling out of the boundaries of one text and emerging into the inverse perspective, or viewpoint, of a different work.

In addition to fusing these texts into new relationships, this method of weaving also reorganizes the individual passages of both works into new configurations. Rather than having to read the manifesto (or *Mass Events* for that matter) in a straight path from beginning to end, the intertextual connections open up endless passageways through the same materials. Readers can keep their experience of the texts “alive” in perpetuity simply by jumping back and forth between the two and testing different entry points (not

to mention branching into additional referenced or excerpted works). One significant result of this feature is the apparent destruction of textual boundaries. In effect, there is no beginning or end to distinguish one book from the next in the Seth material. To this point, Jane's poem "No Matter Where I Look"<sup>12</sup> asserts that "no matter where I look, I seem to be / at the center of a world / that forms perfectly around me" (*Mass Events* 266). There is no last page of *Mass Events*—"no lopsided vision [that] shows / the world spread only to my left, / with my image on the last right edge" (266)—nor first page of *The God of Jane*—for neither "has the world / ever appeared just ahead, / while nothingness began / just behind my back" (266). Instead, the reader of the Seth material "always seem[s] inside / dimensions of depth / and weight" (266), since the individual works overlap in the manner of psychic structures, approximating the remediating characteristics of new media.

Perhaps this overlapping effect explains why Jane "experience[s] an odd new anticipation" (*God of Jane* 169), even with Seth's dictation of *Mass Events* apparently coming to an end, and even as her readers and correspondents are convinced that "disaster was approaching" (170). Jane describes receiving countless letters at this time from her readers, who are having "difficulties interpreting" their own attempts at automatic writing and Ouija board communications (170); these psychic messages seem to threaten "that soon it would all be over: The West Coast would fall into the sea" or "an unusual lineup of the planets would bring about catastrophe" (170). Mirroring the millenarian claims of the ufologists, some of Jane's readers are receiving "warnings of planetary disasters and world's end," messages from spacemen prophesying various

catastrophes that will “result in a new consciousness, either on a purged but pure Earth, or ‘beyond’” (213). That many of Jane’s readers dread an imminent apocalypse—particularly as we approach the final pages of the manifesto, and just as Seth appears to be nearing the end of *Mass Events*—is no coincidence, for, as I have demonstrated, Roberts is engaging larger conversations over the fate of print in the digital age.

The dread expressed by Jane’s readers, then, reflects the anxieties of her age, echoing similar convictions that the book is a doomed artifact, that print will be replaced by television, that the author-function will disappear entirely, that the Author is dead, that structuralism is past, that the New Criticism is old, that modernism is finished, and that Western civilization has run its course. Even contemporary scholars like London and Sword re-inscribe this rhetoric of crisis in regard to the tradition of mediumship, lamenting, for instance, the seeming disappearance of literate mediums into the void of New Age mysticism and the vacuum of television-culture in the late twentieth century. Perhaps *The God of Jane* allows us to see that these fears are themselves related to assumptions that stem from the material characteristics of the codex book, from the implications of a beginning, middle, and end, from perfect divisions that separate individual works, and from permanent, unalterable sequences of individual letters. Through the framework of reincarnation, however, *The God of Jane* is able to avoid a rhetoric of crisis. Rather than confining meaning to presumably stable, singular entities and constraining figures like “text,” “author,” or “reader,” reincarnation invites readers to seek meaning in the interaction between plural authors, readers and texts, to trace a host of possible connections between compound authors and subjects across multiple works,

even as these constituents proliferate, transform into one another, and travel through each other in the manner of “psychic structures.”

Bolter and Grusin suggest that “our culture wants both to multiply and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them” (5), and they theorize that these cross-purposes are the “opposite manifestations of the same desire... to get past the limits of representation and achieve the real” (53). In this context, I propose that Jane’s vision of the mass psyche—that vast network of psychic communication—is a remediation, or a representation, of an ultimate new media, since psychic communication (and thus mediumship) employs simultaneously the logics of “transparent immediacy”—whereby an interface “erases itself, so that the user is no longer aware of confronting a medium” (24)—and “hypermediacy”—which “acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible” (34). In other words, even as it suggests a form of communication ostensibly independent of the use of mediating technologies like print or screen, the mystical concept of psychic communication draws our attention to the ways the medium’s own mind, body, and written accounts necessarily perform mediating functions. According to Bolter and Grusin, “transparent technologies” attempt to erase existing media, and yet they are always “compelled to define themselves by the standards of the media they are trying to erase” (55), so that Roberts and Seth, for instance, inevitably compare the mechanics of their psychic collaboration to the mediating technologies of letters, telegrams, radios, books, and televisions, an attempt to work around and yet acknowledge “the stubborn materiality of language” (Sword 162). In this regard, even the concept of psychic

communication, the possibility of an ethereal network of information transfer, indicates that “there is nothing prior to or outside of the act of mediation” (Bolter and Grusin 58), that all communication is necessarily mediated.

In fact, the practice of mediumship has always reminded us that “the medium is the message” (McLuhan) and that “all mediation is remediation” (Bolter and Grusin 55). In its histories, mediumship draws our attention to the limitations of the printed text and the materiality of language, even as mediums turn those limitations inside out by writing what they couldn’t know, in ways they couldn’t learn, and through voices they had no way of accessing. Read in its cultural context and seen as part of the tradition of mediumship it so clearly participates in, *The God of Jane* reveals that mediumship has always pointed to an alternative “system of constraint” through which to organize the circulation of discourse: a reincarnation of Foucault’s “author-function,” as it were, perhaps a *media*-function, which would allow us to consider the ways authors, readers, and texts are all channeled through one another and transformed in the process into infinite new combinations and incarnations.

#### Endnotes

1. According to Hanegraaff, the New Age movement is especially difficult to define because it lacks “self-proclaimed leaders, official doctrines, standard religious practices, and the like,” so that “New Age” is simply “a *label* attached indiscriminately to whatever seems to fit it, on the basis of what are essentially pre-reflective intuitions” (1). Therefore, Hanegraaff defines the New Age, perhaps inevitably, as that which is not or is radically opposed to the *old* or *present* age. If Western culture is founded on principles of reason, logic, and objectivity, for instance, then the New Age movement emphasizes intuition, plurality, and interiority instead.

Significantly, scholars face similar difficulties attempting to define post-structuralism, a movement in literary criticism that is approximately contemporary both with the New Age and with the publication of the Seth material. Comparable to the New Age movement, there are no “self-proclaimed leaders, official doctrines, [or] standard [critical] practices” (Hanegraaff 1) that systematically identify or unify post-structuralism as a whole (for although we can point to prominent post-structuralists like Barthes, Kristeva, and Foucault, they did not necessarily consider or identify themselves as post-structuralists). Rather, the term “post-structuralist” is also applied as a label to indicate numerous departures and distinctions from its precursor, “structuralism.” Therefore, if structuralist criticism typically asserts “objectivity, scientific rigour, methodological stability and other highly rationalistic-sounding terms,” then post-structuralism, on the other hand, proposes “uncertainty, indeterminacy, incommunicability, subjectivity, desire, pleasure and play” (Allen, *Intertextuality* 3) instead.

2. Seth also describes his “presence” in the Seth sessions as “sort of a vitalized fourth-dimension letter or communication, in which... the medium is the message,” to the extent that Jane “is turned into a vitalized telegram” (270). But where telegrams “merely send words, [Seth] send[s] portions of [himself]” (270).

3. This destabilization is especially pronounced when Seth explains that, because of interference from the “atmospheric conditions” he has to travel through, his “presence” in the sessions is not always consistent, and he sometimes sends Jane pre-recorded conversations for the sessions. Still, Seth insists that “he is always “automatically a part of the message” (270), so that it “makes no difference whether or not” a session is more “immediate” (270) or whether it is “a film or a playback” (271) version.

4. Thus, even though Jane and Robert may think it impossible for Seth to “be someplace else at the same time,” certain “that all of [his] energies must be focused here if [he is] here,” Seth maintains that this is not the case, explaining that there are “aspects of [his] identity with which [they] are not acquainted,” since “all the *channels* are not yet working on this set” (271 italics mine).

5. Notably, where Seth’s suggestion seemed to imply that Jane functions as an exterior screen, perhaps her body or her voice “projecting” Seth, here the projection occurs *within* the channel, in her mind, indicating yet another reversal, this time from outside to inside, exterior to interior.

6. Intriguingly, this conversation all takes place in an introduction written for *Mass Events* but also included in *The God of Jane*.

7. The reference to McLuhan is made explicit in at least one case, as Rob writes a letter including the following sentence: “To paraphrase (the Canadian writer and educator Marshall) McLuhan, ‘The medium *is* the message’” (*The God of Jane* 48).

8. This is presumably Yale's library, which includes the Jane Roberts papers in its collection. See "Yale Finding Aid Database" in references.

9. Moreover, the process of digitalization also reminds us that print—though it may be an analog version of handwriting—necessarily "relies on the alphabet," which is a form of digital technology, since phonetic alphabets are "composed of units that, in their combination bear no relation to the meaning of the words they generate" (Poster 81).

10. The effect that Roberts achieves in print is similar to what Katherine Hayles observes of electronic literature. Hayles explains that when we read certain digital texts, "we become part of a cybernetic circuit," and we "metamorphose from individual interiorized subjectivities to actors exercising agency within extended cognitive systems that include non-human actors" (51). In "Tale of the Seamstress," this is not only the case for Jane, who seems to enter the reality of the poem and act out the part of the seamstress, but also for the reader of the manifesto, who rather than entering into a cybernetic circuit, virtually enters the reality of the text itself.

11. A rare discrepancy: Rob suggests, on the contrary, that "Mass Events had its origins two Seth books ago—way back in Volume I of "Unknown" Reality, which Seth finished dictating in June 1974" (*Mass Events* 7).

12. Incidentally, Rob includes this poem in its entirety within the very same end note that he mentions *The God of Jane* and "personal centering." The poem "No Matter Where I Look" is also included in its entirety in the manifesto on page 87.

## CONCLUSION

## LITERARY TRADITION IN THE AGE OF JANE

Rouze up, O Young Men of the New Age!

—William Blake, *Milton*

Just for a moment, I glimpsed that expansive creative psychic framework in which we all exist—a framework big enough to include the poet and the scientist, the priest, the heretic, the witches and witch hunters, and all of the living characters of historic time, living their lives rambunctiously, according to their prized beliefs about reality.

—*The God of Jane* 137

Because my emphases on garden paths and mediating technologies may seem somewhat disjointed, I will briefly indicate a passage of *The God of Jane* in order to connect these themes. Early on in the manifesto, Jane describes her attempt to paint a bouquet of irises that were “grown in a garden belonging to [her] friend’s father, and [that] now sit[ ] beside [her] typewriter” (23). In addition to juxtaposing nature and technology, reality and representation, this sequence also indicates the interdependence of these seeming contraries by highlighting multiple processes of mediation, for Jane not only attempts to represent the irises in her painting, she also draws attention to the fact that her painting-process is itself translated into writing through the mediating technology of the typewriter. Further, even the irises themselves, she argues, are already “intermediaries, almost hiding the fact that they *are* the universe-turned-into-irises” (23). Jane senses “some inarticulate connection” between the irises in her garden “and [her] attempt to duplicate them” with her paint brush, a kind of mystical union “with that greater creativity from which the world, you and I, and the flowers emerge” (22). In my

copy of the manifesto, I've circled and starred the phrase "you and I," and I've written in pen: "When I read this, I'm somehow speaking as Jane and she's speaking as me."

According to Barthes, "*in the text, only the reader speaks*" (S/Z 151), and yet, in the manifesto, it is clear that this speaking reader is one medium in a chain of mediating collaborators and technologies, both speaker and spoken, narrator and narrated. Here again, author and reader, medium and message trade places and travel through one another in the manner of psychic structures.

Later on in the manifesto, Jane explains that her readers have sent countless letters requesting her advice as they attempt to make sense of the psychic messages that they have received through their own experiments with automatic writing and Ouija boards. According to Jane, "the letters seemed to say, 'Psychic manifestos are great. But how do we interpret this stuff?'" (170). This question has also been central to my project in this thesis, along with a related question: namely, "how might Roberts' psychic manifesto help us to interpret the Seth material?" In short, I have suggested that *The God of Jane* functions as its own reading guide, and that it also offers interpretive frameworks for approaching the complications presented by channeled texts. In this conclusion, I review the principles of interpretation outlined in the manifesto, indicating possible applications to the Seth material and suggesting additional implications for further inquiry and for literary studies more generally.

In the first chapter, I argue that *The God of Jane* can be read as meta-commentary on the production and interpretation of channeled texts, showing that the manifesto combines and transforms several features of the modern spiritual autobiography and the

self-begetting novel to this end. I demonstrate that even while Jane learns to read her own autobiography over the course of producing the manifesto, the work is also interpreting *itself* at the same time. Through these alternate processes of interpretation, the manifesto constantly reconfigures the relationship between authors, readers, and texts. In fact, Roberts seems to propose that these constituents interact with each other in the manner of “psychic structures,” forms and systems that can “turn themselves inside out” and “travel through [one] another” (97) in endless combinations. Further, these complex interactions demand that readers employ multiple frameworks of interpretation that are similarly flexible, reversible, and mobile, able to follow new connections while constantly re-framing boundaries. I concluded that any interpretation of the manifesto requires multiple and self-conscious reading paths, which I compare to the so-called “garden paths” that linguists and narratologists suggest constitute, at least in part, the complicated processes of interpretation.

In the second chapter, I trace an alternate path, this time placing *The God of Jane* in an historical and cultural context in order to suggest that Roberts—even as she translates the practice and tradition of mediumship into the symbolism of New Age mysticism and the context of the late twentieth century—is also a literary theorist in her own right. Like many of her contemporaries, Roberts is attentive to the ways in which “the medium is the message,” and as a result, her work emphasizes the mediated nature of all writing and considers the manner in which authors, readers, and texts are necessarily transformed and interconnected through the processes of mediation and interpretation. In this way, Roberts even anticipates the innovations of digital writing

practices, particularly their reconfigurations of the conventional author. In addition, I also argue that the manifesto—which both describes and displays many of the characteristic features of what would later come to be known as electronic hypertexts—can be read as a prototype and a reading guide for the new texts of a New Age. I concluded that Roberts’ notion of the mass psyche and its corresponding network of psychic communication both erases and simultaneously highlights the mediating processes that underlie all forms of communication.

The interpretive methods outlined in the manifesto have in common the notion that interpretation always involves an act of mediation and that mediation implies a necessary transformation and multiplication of content. Thus, ideas, texts, and selves can be said to continue or survive in new and various contexts only to the extent that they are capable of undergoing drastic change and reconfiguration. In the same way that I have argued the survival of mediumship in the late twentieth century depends on its reconfiguration into the unfamiliar symbols of New Age thought, so the survival of the Seth material depends on interpretive approaches that will transform the material into new configurations. I contend that Roberts, in her attempt to create a “multidimensional” (50) and “living art” (51), fashions the manifesto and the Seth material into living documents that can and in fact must be reconfigured and multiplied into new iterations by her readers in order to survive.

Roberts’ objective, I would argue, is to prevent texts as well as methods of interpretation from becoming stagnant, rigidifying into strict dogma, and consolidating into a single, absolute sequence or perspective. She is concerned, in other words, that we

are limited to understanding “ourselves and the world in the old fashion, putting reality together in habitual ways” (238). In order to “short-circuit [such] automatic reactions” (91), Roberts primarily relies on paradox. For example, her response to the “sexual stereotyping that runs through nearly all psychic literature, drama, and folklore”—the image of “the languorous lady collapsing in a trance or near-faint while in the shadows of the boudoir or parlor or séance room lurks the powerful male spirit or vampire” (242)—is, paradoxically, to practice the very forms of trance-mediumship that sustain and perpetuate these stereotypes. She does not, in other words, reject the stereotype of the “‘susceptible’ woman” by refusing the function of medium outright, but instead she embraces the role, precisely in order to turn it inside out, to suggest that mediumship involves more than “letting ‘the source possess her’ completely” (242). We can see the same paradoxical method at work in the ways Roberts, ironically, fashions a printed text (the manifesto) that somehow transcends the limitations of print, allowing us to see our ossified assumptions about both gender and materiality in new ways, and thus enabling us to formulate alternate interpretations.

At the same time, Roberts’ New Age proposes not just *a* change or a single reversal, but a principle of continuous and paradoxical flux instead, so that the manifesto heralds the advent of a method of interpretation that would take transformation and multiplication as both its foundational assumptions and its primary objectives. According to Wouter Hanegraaff, “most of the beliefs which characterize the New Age were already present by the end of the nineteenth century,” making it reasonable to wonder “whether the New Age brings anything new at all” (483); to this point, I argue that what makes the

New Age “new,” particularly in the context of Roberts’ work, is the way it seeks to reinvigorate existing concepts and turn stereotypes inside out by taking seemingly incongruent ideas, texts, and assumptions and passing them through each other in order to create paradoxical combinations: consider, for example, the simultaneous juxtaposition and interconnection of garden imagery and technologies of mediation cited at the beginning of this conclusion. Similarly, if the Seth material is especially literary, as I have argued, then it is equally scientific, theological, philosophical, and metaphysical—an unlikely combination and juxtaposition that asks readers to redefine the boundaries separating seemingly incommensurable ideas, texts, and even fields of knowledge—necessitating a corresponding investigation of our own interpretive methods and prompting the formulation of new and increasingly multiplicative frameworks that might somehow account for and connect these paradoxes and contradictions.

How, then, might the paradoxical principles of interpretation suggested in Roberts’ psychic manifesto help us make sense of the Seth material? To begin, readers can attend to the ways that the Seth material effectively interprets itself; in other words, we can look for the frameworks and concepts suggested in Seth’s teachings that might also be applicable to the interpretation of texts—like Seth’s notion of reincarnation, for example, which seems to provide a potential framework for tracing multiple and simultaneous relationships between authors, texts, and readers. At the same time, readers might also observe the ways the material inevitably resists and revises the very interpretive methods it proposes, turning them inside out in order to prevent their becoming normative like the assumptions they are meant to revise in the first place.

I propose that further inquiry might also look to the ways the Seth material reconfigures the relationship between authors, readers, and texts, drawing on and challenging our conventional notions of literary production and reception. In this regard, the material's emphasis on the collaboration of Jane, Seth, and Rob would obviously be a productive point of entry. Similarly, we can observe how the material also draws attention to the collaboration of various *media* (both human and technological); in other words, readers might trace the transformations of the material as it is mediated through multiple channels, even considering the ways the printed Seth material remediates the features of speech, television, and digital writing technologies into the conventions of the printed text. Further, we might also productively position the Seth material alongside Roberts' contemporaries, comparing her ideas about texts (and Seth's) to those of literary critics and theorists from the same period (Kristeva's version of intertextuality, for instance, or Derrida's work on centering). Of course, if the manifesto is any indication, we can expect that the Seth material also anticipates more recent developments in literary theory and even parallels the critical approaches employed by current literary scholars in regard to channeled texts from earlier eras, present-day digital texts, and the relationship between authors, readers and texts.

Throughout this thesis, I also make the case that we can read Roberts' work, and thus the Seth material, as a continuation of the tradition and history of mediumship. If scholarship has established that channeled texts from the Victorian and early modernist eras can be helpfully interpreted as examples of meta-commentary on authorship and the production of texts; in connection to the emergence of concurrent technologies of

communication; and as a means of investigating the ways women writers have taken on the role of seemingly passive mediums in order to, paradoxically, challenge such gendered stereotypes, then this thesis suggests that the same are also productive methods of interpretation in regard to the manifesto, and I propose the Seth material as well.

At the same time, even as I argue that Roberts' version of channeling represents a continuation of the tradition of mediumship, I maintain that it also necessarily transforms and reconfigures this tradition by translating it into the context of the late twentieth century, since Roberts re-interprets, or perhaps *channels*, mediumship into the symbology of New Age mysticism. Thus, in the same way that we might read the Seth material through the frameworks scholars have already developed for interpreting the channeled texts of previous eras, we should also be attentive to the inverse relationship, to the ways the Seth material challenges and transforms those frameworks in turn. In this context, the Seth material might be said to continue, not just the *practice* of mediumship, but also the *interpretation* of mediumship.

Moreover, if Roberts can be said to continue a tradition established by previous mediums like Hester Dowden, Geraldine Cummins, and Pearl Curran, then I posit that subsequent research might productively locate additional New Age mediums in this same tradition; for instance, we might consider the channeled works of J Z Knight, Shirley MacLaine, and Sanaya Roman, among others, in relation to the tradition of literary mediumship outlined by scholars like London and Sword, observing the ways these New Age mediums necessarily adapt this tradition as they translate it into a new era. Even though my project in this thesis is focused primarily on the ways Roberts' work can be

read as part of a specific tradition of literary mediums, nevertheless, to suggest that this is an end in and of itself is to work against the manifesto's principle of change that I have indicated, and to defeat one of the prominent characteristics of mediumship. In other words, to locate Roberts' work in what might appear to be a separate, single lineage of literary mediums and to stop there would be to allow this alternate tradition of authorship to congeal into something like the strict, inflexible canon of Western literature that mediumship works to revise and revitalize in the first place.

In this regard, mediumship is decidedly *not* an isolated or separate literary tradition. In fact, mediums consistently attach themselves to already established literary figures and traditions, not in order to create a distinct tradition of their own, but primarily, I would argue, in order to restore, revise, and reimagine existing traditions, to prevent literary histories from becoming stagnant, to create, in other words, a flexible and reversible canon that, paradoxically, transcends the limitations of a literary canon. For instance, Hester Dowden—in what is a typical maneuver for many literary mediums—claims to channel her messages from famous dead authors like Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde. By suggesting that Shakespeare and Wilde are revising their works through her and from beyond the grave (even producing additional “posthumous” works—notably in the form of literary criticism), Dowden not only inserts herself into a chain of canonical literary figures, she also asks her readers to re-see these famous authors and their works from a different angle, to expand and reorganize the canon, in effect, and to read it through a new, ghostly framework. Similarly, Geraldine Cummins channeled a wealth of information concerning the early Christian apostles, information lost or left out of early

church history but given to her by a first-hand witness and a friend of the apostle Paul, a spirit by the name of Cleophas; similar to Dowden's channeled works, the material Cummins adds to this tradition, far from negating the existing canon, prompts readers to reconsider canonical works (in this case the biblical New Testament) from additional and alternate perspectives instead.

Thus, if Roberts proposes methods of interpretation that are designed to reinvigorate texts, to prevent literature from being reduced to a fixed sequence or interpretation to a single perspective, then mediumship might be said to take on a similar objective in regard to the literary canon as a whole. Rather than watch literary traditions calcify into strict, inflexible canons, the practice of mediumship scrambles the conventional, linear, and patriarchal chain of established literary authors into new sequences, bringing long-dead poets into collaborative relationships with contemporary authors and mediums in order to make possible new connections. By bringing past and present literary figures into anachronistic relationships with each other, mediums exhibit, and perhaps literalize, what T.S. Eliot calls "the historical sense" (74): the "perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" (74). In other words, mediums seem to rely on the notion T.S. Eliot suggests is essential to the poet of tradition, that all of literature "has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (74), even to the extent that "the past [can] be altered by [the] present as much as the present [can be] directed by the past" (75).

Where Harold Bloom describes the relationship between contemporary artists and their precursors in terms of an "anxiety of influence"—whereby "strong" male poets

wrestle with their literary forefathers in order to claim control of their generative, literary powers—mediumship, on the other hand, connects authors and mediums from different eras through something more like a psychic collaboration. I argue that mediums are not attempting to overcome their literary ancestors or claim their precursors' powers solely as their own; rather, mediums channel the works of established literary figures from the past and translate them into the present—an act of interpretation that necessarily multiplies and transforms the original message—primarily in order to restore and transmit these messages and visions for the benefit of contemporary society. Of course, mediums are not alone in their efforts to use works from the past in order to shape the present; literary criticism, for instance, seems to have a similar function, as it constantly develops new methods for re-interpreting old texts in new contexts.

I would argue that the mediated, collaborative understanding of tradition posited by literary mediums can also help us to reframe the relationships between established, canonical writers. We might consider William Blake, for instance, and his poem *Milton* in these terms. Intriguingly, Blake's poem begins by asking the "Young Men of the New Age" to set things right in the world of literary tradition by finally bringing the "grand works of the more ancient, and consciously and professedly Inspired men" to their "proper rank" (95). In the poem, Blake's version of the long-dead Milton works to accomplish this reversal by journeying across dimensions of time, space, and consciousness, reuniting with his emanation Ololon, and joining himself to Blake's poetic endeavors. According to Mary Lynn Johnson, "each poet participates in the self-transformation of the other" in this process, enabling Milton to "correct his personal and

doctrinal errors and rekindle[ ], through Blake, the spirit of prophecy in Britain” (233). Johnson argues that, for Blake, the “transmission of [Milton’s] prophetic legacy to [his own] generation” (233) has been obstructed, because “England’s literary, religious, and political iconoclast has himself become an icon; the champion of liberty has become, through his critical legacy, an instrument of oppression” (234). Thus, it is “only by “rejecting this false identity [that] Milton the poet—rewritten in (and as) *Milton* the poem” (234)—can “release the imaginative powers urgently needed” (234) in Blake’s era. Milton’s legacy, in other words, has been frozen into rigid and oppressive dogma, and in the same way that Roberts offers interpretive strategies designed to reinvigorate calcified traditions, so Blake channels Milton’s ghost for the same purpose: to reconfigure his precursor’s prophetic message and correct his errors in order to reawaken a contemporary spirit of prophecy.

Working from the preface of *Milton*, Johnson argues that Blake’s “New Age demands from its youth new works of imagination... that would do for Blake what Blake did for Milton: correct his errors and free up his misdirected creative energies to regenerate contemporary society” (247). For Johnson, many of “Blake’s failings and blind spots” (247) are bound to his understanding of gender relationships in the New Age, so Johnson suggests that:

If we are to achieve a more imaginative, humane, and forward-looking vision of gender equity and reconciliation, we must look to a new prophet, not an Ezekiel of this time, but a new Deborah, or perhaps, a voice-hearing activist like Joan of Arc. (247)

Since she does not claim to channel Blake directly,<sup>1</sup> Jane Roberts can not be said to intentionally or consciously “re-envision all that is liberating in Blake’s work,” but she

*does*, at the very least, closely resemble Johnson's proposed candidate for this task: "a voice-hearing activist like Joan of Arc" (247). Thus, I suggest that Roberts, like Blake, calls on her long-dead, literary ancestors in order to revise the traditional canon and awaken imagination in her own time.

*Milton* begins with Blake learning from the muses that for the last "One hundred years," Milton has been "pondering the intricate mazes of Providence / Unhappy tho in heav'n" (96). Intriguingly, *The God of Jane* begins with a similar vision of the afterlife, a prefatory poem titled "ee cummings' ghost" attributed to Jane Roberts. But where Milton is unhappy in the afterlife, cummings apparently finds himself "the rollicking pioneer / of a brand-new planet," and the "very first settler / of lands that form themselves / into the shapes / of his desire" (vi). I would argue that if Blake calls on England's champion of liberty to reawaken prophecy in Britain, then Roberts summons cummings' legacy in order to release a similar vision. And just as Blake attempts to set things right by replacing the works produced by the "Daughters of Memory" with those received from the "Daughters of Inspiration," Roberts attempts to rectify a similar injustice by bringing cummings back to his "proper rank," restoring his reputation and influence to the time before "his vision was swallowed by Darwinism and Freudianism," and before "his optimism went out of style" when "Eliot's pessimism pervaded the arts and sciences, and it became fashionable to be bored with life" (*God of Jane* 254). Roberts realizes that she herself contributed to this injustice by aligning her work with Eliot instead of cummings, and in order to correct her "error," she will have to channel the energies of "peculiarly American thinkers" like cummings, Whitman, Thoreau, and Emerson, who all stress

“individuality, mysticism, strength, expression, and responsibility” (253). Notably, Roberts does not simply replace Eliot with another single author; instead, she displaces Eliot by suggesting a collaborative effort, pointing to Cummings and a host of additional American poets, specifically the transcendentalists. By replacing the “individual talent” with a team of individualists, Roberts attempts to clear a path for “a democracy of spirit, an end to divine hierarchies” (255), and just as Blake channels Milton in order to awaken prophecy in England, Roberts draws on this collaboration of literary precursors to unlock her specifically American vision.

In this way, the manifesto, and perhaps mediumship in general, points to the extent to which our literary tradition is determined by our understanding of the author as a single, founding father. In effect, Roberts questions the parentage of the American literary tradition, suggesting multiple points of origin in order to create a decentralized and democratic canon. I suggest that Roberts’ is a form of literary criticism that readers can practice too; like mediums, we can look for the places where literary tradition is monopolized by the shadow of a single author and suggest the possibility of additional collaborators. To conclude, I will attempt such an exercise in the case of the New Age movement, demonstrating that scholarly dismissal of the New Age may be a result of our insistence on the authority of the solitary, founding father.

In the footnotes of *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, Hanegraaff engages in a lengthy argument over the parentage of the New Age movement, which I argue is in vital ways a contestation of authorship. Hanegraaff repeatedly dismisses Christoph Boehinger’s suggestion that William Blake could have introduced the term “New Age”

and should thus be considered the source of the contemporary New Age movement.

According to Hanegraaff:

The mere fact that [Blake] seems to have been the first one to speak of a “New Age”—in itself a quite unspecific millenarian term—is hardly sufficient to assign to Blake a major key function (second only to Swedenborg) as historical precursor of the New Age Movement. (96)

In another footnote, Hanegraaff admits that he “fully agree[s] with Bochinger about Swedenborg’s importance with respect to New Age religion” (378), but again he contends that “Bochinger’s focus on Blake seems disproportionate” (379). In limiting the lineage of the New Age movement to a single author (Swedenborg), Hanegraaff is attempting to define the New Age as a coherent, singular tradition, and I would argue that this classification of the New Age as a strictly religious and cultural phenomenon (an offspring of Swedenborgianism)—and decidedly *not* a literary movement—is related to literary scholars’ seeming preprogrammed dismissal of the New Age more generally.

But what if we were to entertain the possibility that in addition to Swedenborg, Blake was also an important precursor of the New Age movement, that Blake’s New Age and Roberts’ are perhaps related to each other in fundamental ways? For one thing, it would give us a different perspective from which to consider Blake.<sup>2</sup> But under such circumstances, we might also imagine those “new age disciples” (*Writing Double* 210) and even “the spacemen and saints and psychic heroes of automatic writings and Ouija board messages” (*God of Jane* 256) from a different perspective: not as merely spiritualist fanatics (though they may be that as well); but also as heralds of Blake’s particularly *literary* New Age, the prophets of a new era in the history of art; and as Blake’s “consciously and professedly Inspired men” (95) and women. Blake

characterizes “the nature” of his “Work [as] Visionary or Imaginative... an endeavor to Restore <what the Ancients calld> the Golden Age” (555); thus, by offering Blake as one possible author of the New Age, in effect, we would be suggesting that Roberts shares his mission; that hers is also a restorative vision of the history and future of art; and that she and Blake have perhaps both

Glimpsed that expansive creative psychic framework in which we all exist—a framework big enough to include the poet and the scientist, the priest, the heretic, the witches and witch hunters, and all of the living characters of historic time, living their lives rambunctiously, according to their prized beliefs about reality. (*God of Jane* 137)

This is, perhaps, the dubious fantasy of mediumship: that there exists an impossible network connecting the living and the dead, authors and mediums, prophets and psychics, and that readers, moreover, might have access to this unimaginable system of interconnections too: a ghost of a possibility that is perhaps vital to the very project and the persistence of literature as well, even if it suggests that academia is not the only medium, nor the sole arbiter of what counts as literary criticism.

### Endnotes

1. In *The World View of Paul Cezanne*, Roberts claims to channel Paul Cezanne, but she offers the following observation in defense of her methods (and sanity): “William Blake saw angels and believed that much of his own work was dictated by spirits. Was he merely deluded? If so, *that* kind of delusion makes sanity a weak mental brew at best” (17). In this way, we might say that Roberts, even if she does not necessarily channel Blake, at least sees herself operating in the same tradition or method as Blake.
2. See Kathleen Raine, who makes an argument to this effect in *Blake and the New Age*.

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