

A Gold Blossom: Practice, Rhetorical Invention, and Spirit Control in Amanda Jones's *Psychic Autobiography*

Elizabeth Lowry

Born in 1835 in East Bloomfield, New York, Amanda Theodosia Jones has been described as a teacher, inventor, businesswoman, poet, and Spiritualist.¹ Jones engaged in many intellectual and artistic practices over her lifetime, but her autobiography details how each was informed by the one practice that she considered to be her true calling: her spiritual practice as a psychic medium. In her autobiography, Jones discusses how various spirit controls acted as her advisors. For instance, a Dr. Andrews and a Dr. Hudson advised Jones how to perfect her invention of a canning method for food, and occasionally offered her business advice. Since the scientific practices in which Jones participated were primarily male fields, it would have appeared fitting to her readers that her spirit controls were men—and more significantly, doctors. But Jones also engaged in practices beyond those of scientific invention and mediumship: her work as an autobiographer reveals how she attempted to contextualize her achievements and interests to demonstrate how they were unified by the guiding principles of the spirit world. As such, I aim to examine Jones's practice and self-representation from a rhetorical perspective, considering how, in her autobiography, she accounted for engaging in what were considered strictly male endeavors. I ask: how did Jones use the power of her various practices to render her gender transgressions palatable to a nineteenth-century readership and what role did her spirit controls play in tempering the effect of these transgressions?

Jones's 450-page *A Psychic Autobiography* was published by Greaves of New York in 1910, two years before her death. The autobiography is dedicated to renowned psychologist William James. Although there is no concrete evidence that Jones had a relationship with James, the dedication suggests that she had at least made his acquaintance: "To Prof. William James who long ago proposed that I should prepare for publication a history of what I may venture to call my super-normal experiences."²

The fact that James apparently encouraged Jones to write her memoirs is significant at a time when women were discouraged from entering the public sphere. Like many other female autobiographers of that era, Jones explains that she was prompted by others to write her memoirs and would not have presumed to do so otherwise.



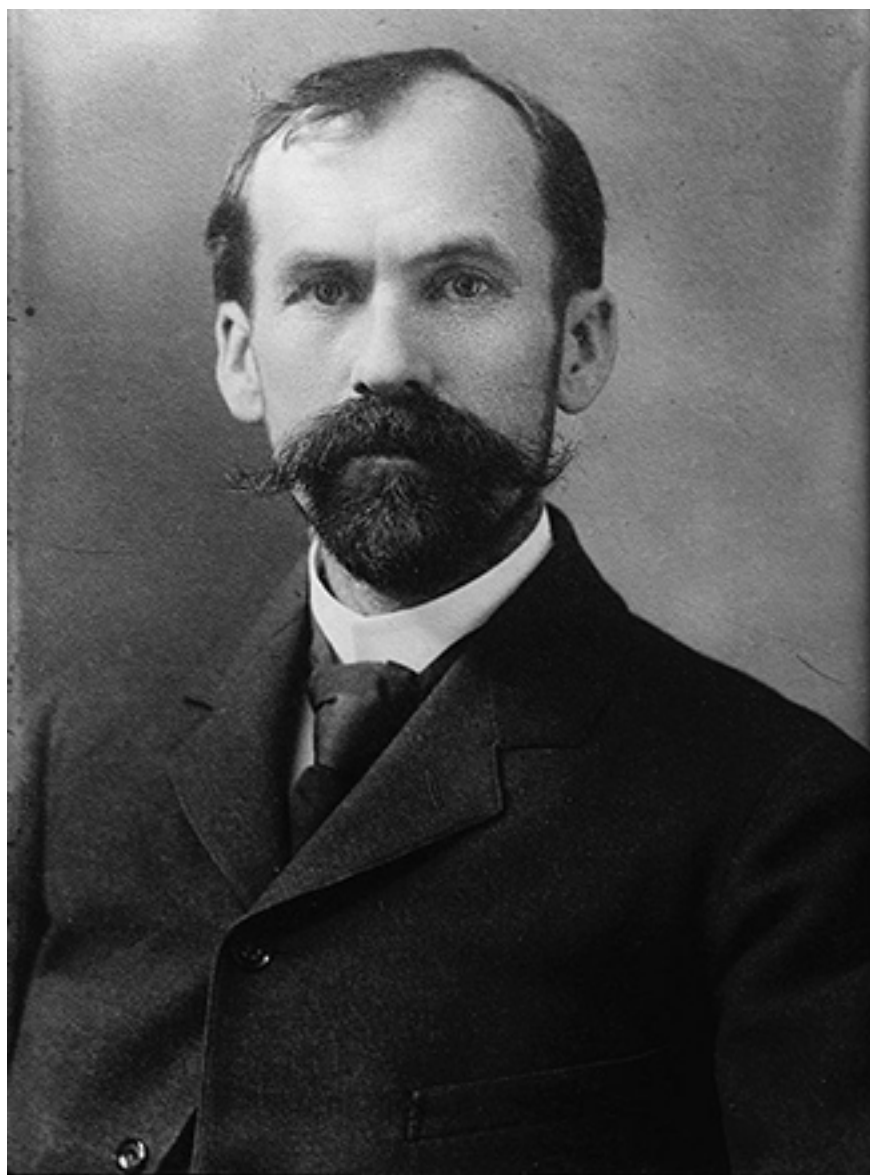
A Psychic Autobiography also includes an introduction by Dr. James Hyslop, who at that time was the secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research. In his introduction, Hyslop attempts to build Jones's ethos and attest to her readability by reminding potential readers of her success as a poet. In doing so, Hyslop cites the following collections: *Ulah and Other Poems* (1861), *Atlantis and Other Poems* (1866), *A Prairie Idyll* (1862), *Rubaiyat of Solomon and Other Poems* (1905), and *A Mother of Pioneers* (1908). The poems are, as Hyslop puts it, "dramatic" in style, and their subject matter ranges from an appreciation of nature to eulogies for fallen soldiers. In addition to commending Jones's prowess as a poet, Hyslop vouches for Jones's authenticity as a Spiritualist, scientist, and autobiographer. At the time it was common practice for women's autobiographies—particularly those that touched upon unorthodox subject matter—to be endorsed by a man. In some cases, the editor's endorsement would suffice, but in other cases a male "expert" was called upon to preface the work in question. Of Jones's spirit communiqués, Hyslop writes: "I do not speak for them as scientific evidence of the supernormal, where that method involves certification and corroboration for each incident, but I do speak for them as human experiences coming from a source that is entitled to have its testimony heard."³ Despite Hyslop's reluctance to claim that Jones's experiences might amount to "scientific evidence of the supernormal," he highlights Jones's experience as a scientist as evidence that she was worth listening to: "These accomplishments have made her well enough known to make attention to her psychic experiences desirable."⁴

While Jones made no overt reference in her autobiography to political events or dates of national importance, she was by no means apolitical. Her dismayed reaction to the Civil War's death toll can be found in her anti-war poems "A Soldier's Mother" and "Prophecy of the Dead" which first appeared in April 1861. Later in her life—according to the *Women's Who's Who of 1912*—Jones took up the suffragist cause. However, talk of any suffragist activity or discussion of women's rights is conspicuously absent from Jones's autobiography, most likely because she was afraid of alienating her readers. Women were not supposed to express political opinions—at least not openly. Approximately two thirds of *A Psychic Autobiography* is dedicated toward documenting Jones's life as a Spiritualist, while the rest covers her life as an inventor and businesswoman.

The autobiography can be a baffling text to reckon with. Jones's prose is dense and convoluted and her writing style tends to be digressive. She

periodically breaks what appears to be a linear narrative to include pages of poetry on flowers and angels as well as lectures on complex Spiritualist principles, often omitting key words or references that would help a reader to follow her train of thought. Further, when reading Jones's writing it can be difficult to distinguish fact from fantasy, especially when she discusses her dreams and visions of the spirit world. Significantly, however, the theme of invention—as it pertains both to writing and to technological ingenuity—features prominently in Jones's work, presenting her with a series of conundrums relating to authorship and gender roles.

For Jones, the tension between womanhood and technology is linked to common nineteenth-century beliefs about invention and its privileging of masculinity.⁵ Typically, invention was considered to occur according to a "Romantic" model—that is, the work of an individual genius, laboring alone while drawing on inspiration from a muse. When Jones attempted to incorporate a typically Romantic nineteenth-century view of invention into her autobiographical construction of self, she recognized the degree to which her entry into science suggested to her audience that she had committed a grave *faux pas*—that is, a rejection of her femininity. Hence, her autobiography begins to reveal models of invention that can act as alternatives to—or extensions of—the rather limited Romantic model. Drawing on the scholarship of Karen Burke LeFevre,⁶ I will demonstrate that Jones's autobiography uses discourses of Spiritualism to illustrate increasingly collaborative models of invention. Jones does this in an attempt to open a rhetorical space for female creators. While digressive portions of the autobiography (such as poetry and lectures) often obscure the tensions between gender and invention, I argue that the process of autobiographical writing itself indicates Jones's attempt to reconcile her lost sense of femininity with late-nineteenth-century constructions of technology and its authorship *vis a vis* gender.



Dr. James Hyslop

A Psychic Autobiography

BY

AMANDA T. JONES

Author of "ULAH," "ATLANTIS," "POEMS," (of the Rebellion)
"A PRAIRIE IDYL," "RUBAIYAT OF SOLOMON," "POEMS;
1854-1906," Etc.

With Introduction by JAMES H. HYSLOP, Ph. D., LL. D., Secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research

*Drink waters out of thine own cistern and running
waters out of thine own well.
Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad and rivers
of waters in the streets.*

—Proverbs V; 15, 16

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Historical Context: 1876 and 1893

Extending LeFevre's premise that "the self that invents is ... not merely socially influenced but even socially constituted,"⁷ it is important to examine the social collective of which Jones was a part. As a scientist, Jones is best known for inventing the vacuum method of canning food and for opening the Women's Canning and Preserving Company in Chicago in 1890. Although Jones discusses canning methods in her autobiography, and similar information appears in anthologies documenting women's scientific inventions, it is difficult to find much on record in terms of Jones's life as a factory owner and businesswoman. Historian Wendy Gamber claims that this is because women mostly operated small businesses and were consistently omitted from economic histories which have long privileged the study of corporations.⁸ For the most part, however, Jones's experience emblemizes that of the typical nineteenth-century female inventor in that she was unmarried and that she invented for her livelihood.⁹ Jones was fortunate to have had a high school education in the arts, but had received little formal education in science.¹⁰ Moreover, women who did study science in the nineteenth century were typically steered toward human biology, which would help with nursing, and botany, where their "natural" attention to detail was useful in the cataloguing of flora and fauna.¹¹ Moreover, according to Matilda Joslyn Gage's 1870 commentary on the female inventor, "Women have not dared to exercise their faculties except in certain directions unless in a covert manner. A knowledge of mechanics has been deemed unwomanly."¹² Nonetheless, between 1873 and 1914, Jones received a total of fourteen patents for mechanically based inventions.

The period during which Jones was most active as a scientist is highly significant, both in historical and personal contexts. Although Jones did not provide specific dates in her autobiography other than for her parents' marriage, her father's death, and her own birthday, she indicated two distinct chronological phases in her life, suggesting that she was primarily a practicing Spiritualist advisor and healer until she began to market her inventions and became a business owner. She continued to identify as a Spiritualist after entering a new phase of life first as an inventor and later as a factory owner when she reached middle age in the 1880s. However, Jones's Spiritualist practice in later life was far more solitary than it had been in her youth; life in the public sphere meant little time to return

to writing poetry or to Spiritualist “sittings.” Certainly, life as a scientist presented significant challenges for women. The notion of “professional” science and the construction of the “professional scientist” was preempted by the Philadelphia Centennial. That is, a professional scientist—at least within the context of the World’s Fair—was determined by individual authorship. This professionalism was (like the field of science itself) considered to be an exclusively male province. In *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation*, Nina Baym observes, “The overall number of women trying to do ‘real’ science—that is, carry out an original scientific project under professional auspices and be known for having done it—seem to have been extremely small.”¹³ This raises the question of how a professional scientist is distinguished from an amateur one—an issue which will be taken up later in this study.

Romantic Views of Invention, Spiritualist Influence, and the Social Collective

In her autobiography, Jones describes a vision of a “blazing comet,” signaling that “God has a gift for me—a wonderful, great gift.”¹⁴ This vision suggests that the divine had conveyed to her all the knowledge she needed to conceive of her food-canning invention. Further, this notion of divine inspiration typifies a Romantic view of invention:

Spirits may clear away the mists before us;—it is our eyes that see! Spirits may point the way; it is our feet that walk! Spirits may scatter thoughts like meadow-flowers; our hands must gather them. Whatever spirits know, they have no right to tell us—they have no power to tell us—unless we have the necessary mind and brain development enabling us to fully apprehend. Then we can meet as equals—not before. And so this gold blossom dropped beside me,—so I picked it up.¹⁵

Here, the relationship between individualism and the divine is clarified according to Platonic tradition. An invention is a “gold blossom” fallen from heaven that needs only to be picked up by the right person. This claim suggests that the artist or creator is a rare individual who is sensitive enough to receive messages from the gods. Only those who are blessed with “eyes that see” are able to find the path indicated by the spirits. Brilliant ideas need only to be recognized by a person with “the necessary mind and

brain development,” that is, someone in a state of evolution that is on a par with the spirit world itself.

This Platonically inspired Romantic view assumes that inventions migrate fully formed from the divine into the mind of an individual “chosen” author. But this was a problematic belief for a Victorian-era woman because it did not allow for women’s creativity or invention. The individual with “the necessary mind and brain development” was assumed to be a man. Women found that people were “eager to tell them that Nature had provided women with a physique that would punish them with madness and disease if they attempted to rival the males.”¹⁶ Further, according to Battersby, the Romantics took “maleness as the norm for artistic or creative achievement, however ‘feminine’ that male might be. Great artists and scientists have *male* sexual drives, whether or not they are biologically female. Males can *transcend* their sexuality; females are *limited* by theirs—or, if not, must, themselves have *male* sexual energy.”¹⁷ Battersby’s reference to a “feminine” male is highly significant in that the nineteenth-century genius (particularly the poet) was believed to have feminine qualities such as sensitivity and intuition. However, since the creative drive itself was understood to be masculine, the “feminine” qualities of a creative male were commended rather than denigrated. Although nineteenth-century constructions of male biology did not necessarily have to exclude feminine qualities, female biology was unaccepting of anything other than the feminine; hence, creative women like Jones were expected to lose their femininity when they indulged in inventive work. “The occasional female creator could be countenanced; but being a creator and a truly feminine female were deemed to be in conflict.”¹⁸ Significantly, however, Jones expressed far more concern about losing her femininity when engaged in scientific pursuits than when writing her poetry. Although she claimed creative genius in both realms, creativity in science placed her womanhood at greater risk than creativity in the arts. Perhaps this was because creativity in poetry was widely understood to signify an adoption of certain socially sanctioned “feminine” qualities. Invention in the sciences, however, did not accommodate femininity in any form; instead, invention in the sciences emphasized the male nature of creativity all the more. As Battersby says, women choosing to begin a career also had to choose “what to *be*: a woman or a sexual pervert.”¹⁹

Nonetheless, in some places in Jones’s autobiography she exhibited a fierce desire to assert her own authorship and to take credit in the same

way that a man does:

No spirit told me this. I have inventions—patentable—patented. They are as much my own as are my many poems—mostly studied out by slow and painful process, often at bitter cost. To every patent application I have taken an oath, unperturbed: “This is my invention.—This I claim.”²⁰

Here, Jones stressed that she was not told what to do by a (presumably male) spirit helper and emphasizes the individual toil and suffering associated with creative genius. It is a “slow and painful process,” but one that indicated authorship—an expression of individuality. As a woman, Jones quickly realized that she must claim authorship over her technological inventions or, as was often the case with female inventors, the credit would be taken from her by a man. Her inventions, she says, have been earned “often at a bitter cost.”²¹ The vexed relationship between women and science therefore arises in part from what LeFevre terms the “social collective” view of invention, in which Jones was hindered by a culture that discouraged women from being active creative agents.

A Lost Womanhood

Widespread gender anxiety meant that women’s inventions were always seen as either superfluous to prevailing social needs or—in some cases—as a threat to the existing social order. In *Retrieval of a Legacy: Nineteenth Century American Woman Inventors*, Denise Pilato discusses how, due to an overwhelming social bias against granting patents to women, female inventors were frequently discredited.²² Further, most women’s inventions were used in the home and were therefore considered less important than inventions used in other, more public, spheres—particularly the battlefield. Smith-Rosenberg, Russett, and numerous other scholars have outlined the various ways in which the Victorian-era scientific establishment, threatened by women’s social progress, attempted to find scientific evidence of women’s intellectual inferiority so as to bolster a conviction that women should remain in their “natural” socially designated sphere. Various women negotiated these prejudices by claiming that their inventions were divinely inspired by male spirits, however, this tactic often backfired as many patent issuers interpreted references to spirits as markers of feminine weakness and superstition.²³ In a similar vein, LeFevre discusses ways that

inventors were attached to the social collective. If the inventor's attachment was strong, "their ideas may be very much in accord with the prevailing collective views or rules; if their attachments are weak, they may be more likely to produce ideas that...will face considerable resistance from people who are more firmly attached to collective views."²⁴ It is evident that a woman's attachment to the social collective in the realm of science was weak. The "resistance" that LeFevre describes came in many forms, particularly in the common social perception that engaging in scientific pursuits was tantamount to a rejection of femininity. It is unsurprising, therefore, that after becoming a patented inventor, Jones's autobiography reflects an increasing discomfort with her social role as a woman and with how she is perceived by other women.

For example, Jones describes one particularly troubling dream in which she is in the mountains—an image of significance because, according to Battersby, mountains were often associated with the Romantic sublime. There, Jones sees a "little group of women" standing near to her, while a larger group of women (consisting of a thousand or so) gathers further away. The larger group "seemed to look on me with favor; still they kept apart."²⁵ When Jones turns to look at the "little group" that are "pressed so very close" she sees that "there were four or five among the group that scowled at me. The eyes were full of hatred. That was terrible! They would have murdered me it seemed, but had not weapons save their stabbing eyes. I had been used to woman's love and had not realized a woman's power to hate."²⁶ The mountains symbolize an arduous journey with the possibility of coming upon impassés and chasms at every turn. These particular mountains appear to be uniquely populated with women, suggesting that this dangerous excursion into the Romantic nature of invention is one that many women attempt to make, but that few successfully manage. Who are the women who stand in judgment of Jones? What has she done to inspire such animosity? Is it possible that these women are jealous of Jones's power? Is it possible that the women are her abandoned feminine side and that they shun her because she's been audacious enough to enter the male world? No matter what the speculation, this dream offers a vivid and disturbing portrayal of gender anxiety.

In contrast, when describing her life prior to becoming a scientist and inventor, Jones demonstrated little to no anxiety over prescribed gender roles. In the years defined primarily by her poetry writing and work as a Spiritualist advisor, she moved from one Spiritualist home to the next,

always welcome at Clifton Springs Spa where she was surrounded by like-minded people. When she went public with her canning method, however, she entered the male domains of law, business, and science. It is at that point that Jones seems—albeit inadvertently—to feminize Spiritualism and its various nurturing communities. Once Jones recognized and internalized common cultural constructions of the male public and the female private, Spiritualism came to represent a sacred domesticity. It is perhaps for this reason that Jones tended to idealize her experience as a woman prior to entering the public sphere. Upon becoming a competitor within the marketplace she wondered: “Was ever woman’s life so revolutionized? Out in the open, haunting shops and factories, planning manifold devices, solving mechanical puzzles—what had become of all my pretty times? No more rhyming, story-telling, broidering, playing tunes, gossiping, sowing seeds, and plucking lovely flowers.”²⁷ The verb “haunting” is significant here as it suggests that Jones saw herself as a ghost. This could mean that she conceived of herself as invisible in a predominantly male world, and also that she conceived of her feminine self as being dead. The “revolution” did not come without sacrifice, and the public sphere is framed as being dull and inhuman; the phrases “manifold devices” and “mechanical puzzles” are devoid of affect. Meanwhile, Jones idealized a past in which she had the luxury of engaging in musical and literary arts—not to mention the carefree frivolity of “gossiping” and “plucking lovely flowers.” Apparently, Jones missed the domestic sphere, but her wistfulness and nostalgia suggest a belief that—as with childhood—she could never return to its innocence. Later also, as Jones mentioned the plight of the working-class woman, it becomes clear that she was aware of her own class privilege and that the experience of being a woman with “pretty times” is not available to everyone. Thus, the dream of the hateful women may have signified guilt—as evidenced by the thousands of women who appeared to witness Jones and her small passionless coterie as “other.” It is as if Jones were looking into a mirror trying to anticipate how others would see her when they looked at her—to see what she reflected back upon the feminine principles of her culture.

Earlier in her autobiography, Jones described a prophetic vision in which she was in a setting similarly emblematic of what Battersby describes as the “Romantic sublime,” that is, on a stone bridge spanning a chasm separating one mountain from another. Jones described the bridge as “so strong and heavy, neither flood nor earthquake could have done it harm;

and just above the bridge the rocks were all as one.”²⁸ From the bridge, Jones saw “two shining spirits—tall women-spirits—angels if you choose to call them so—descend and come to me across the mountain.”²⁹ One of the angels was holding a sleeping baby which she put in Jones’s arms, and then indicated a cross high up on the mountain from whence she came. She then says, “*Let no one take the child. Bear it—a precious burden, till you have reached the cross. Then lay it down, close to the foot, and pass! Nothing shall hurt the child.*”³⁰

The Christian symbol of the cross does not necessarily come as a surprise as Jones was raised in the Christian tradition and many nineteenth-century Spiritualists incorporated Christian beliefs into their practices. The fact that the spirits are female is significant since they indicate not only a sense of community among women, but also a preoccupation with the creative principle of birth. One of the angels is holding a child of indeterminate gender, while the other angel appears to be assisting her. Linking the image of the child to the cross suggests a form of sacrifice. Jones is to be the vehicle by which the child (perhaps symbolizing an invention) becomes known to the world, the means by which its power is unleashed. Like Jesus, the child is to be left as an offering to the human race, but unlike Jesus, the child will not be put to death. Jones’s invention—or her brainchild—is to remain intact; it is safe from harm. Jones does not give birth to the child herself, instead, she “discovers” it via the angels. The child cannot reach the cross without Jones who is indispensable to the process of bringing knowledge to the world. The conveyance—or application—of the child to the cross is as essential a component of invention as the mysterious origin of the child itself. In a sense, the casting of Jones as a vehicle for future knowledge can also be seen as a link between past and present, a representation of transition—passing across the stone bridge—and of the potential for intellectual growth and human progress. Jones’s dream of the hostile women on a similar mountainside can also be interpreted in terms of a movement between past and present. Once upon a time, Jones was like the other women—the many thousands that stand on the steep slopes of the mountain. Through her inventions, she is set apart from them—“othered.” However, if the exchange between the smaller and larger group of women is to be understood as a transition between past and present, it can be interpreted in typically progressive nineteenth-century terms. According to Timothy Hickman, this means constructing the past as an “other” entity—an entity from which a departure must be made.³¹

As Hickman tells us, a key component of modernist thought involved clarifying and re-inscribing the boundaries between past and present in order to reify a linear movement of progress. For example, in a close reading of Frances Willard's *How to Win*, Hickman illustrates how Willard, as well as other writers and speakers of the nineteenth century, deployed "a strategy that separated the antiquated from the modern and thus helped to produce the sense of modernity itself."³² However, as Hickman points out "not all writers identified changed gender relations as the definitive element of their era, nor did they agree on modernity's meaning. Highlighting technological change was a more common way to identify the present as a break from the past."³³ In response to Hickman, I would argue that although not everyone cited changing gender relations "as the definitive element of their era," it appears that gender and technology were inextricably linked. It stands to reason, therefore, that "highlighting technological change" also implied changing gender relations. As evidenced by Jones's autobiography and numerous other sources of that era—including the documentation from exhibitions at the World's Fair—technology itself was considered to be a distinctly masculine field. Certainly, technology could be used by women to achieve feminine ends, but—as Jill Galvan points out—the nineteenth century woman often became the passive instrument of technology, too. But, according to Willard, assumptions about women must be updated along with emerging technologies. If women could assert a break with social mores of the past, they would conceivably be able to present new collaborative models of a feminine relationship to technology. The idea of producing a "sense of modernity" suggests a sociocollective model of invention, one that feminists hoped would open a rhetorical space for women.

Internal Dialogic and Collaborative Models of Invention

Jones's autobiography reflects an attempt to negotiate an assumed incompatibility between her gender and genius by extending the definition of the Romantic model of invention to encompass other more collaborative models. When reading Jones's work through the lens of LeFevre's theories on invention, Jones can be interpreted as attempting to separate a creative self from a critical self in what LeFevre terms an "internal dialogic" approach to invention. Based on Freudian psychology, the internal dialogic can operate as an internalized sociocollective that LeFevre describes as



“the locus of evaluation ... [that] lies within the individual but is also influenced by the social world from which it came.”³⁴ For Jones, casting her internal dialogic voice as an active voice speaking to a more passive self points to an attempt to retain her femininity: she is essentially feminine, albeit temporarily instructed by a male voice. This passage indicates how Jones engages a second construction of self that exists apart from a more ordinary self. She writes:

Waking that day out of my usual air-bath slumber...I said (these are the very words): *I see how fruit must be canned without cooking it. The air must be exhausted from the cells and fluid made to take its place. The fluid must be airless also—a light syrup of sugar and water—that, or the juice of the fruit.*³⁵

Jones believes herself to be unusually lucid after an “air-bath slumber,” which perhaps explains why she feels that her words emerge from another self, enabling which—in LeFevre’s terms—might be referred to as an “internal social construct.”³⁶

Jones further extends the idea of the internal dialogic experience by establishing the collaboration of a controlling male spirit who provides her with instruction. Jones describes this spirit, a Dr. Jonathan Andrews, as: “old and very old, if time in Spirit-life be measured by progression.... He might have visited a myriad worthier; but one I loved had brought him,—he had chosen me.”³⁷ However, even while Dr. Andrews has Jones under his control, “never once did he transgress the limit. Meantime, each was at liberty,—he to speak his thoughts, and I to think my own. Sometimes I disagreed with him at first and had to be convinced by argument or explanation.”³⁸ When Jones claims that Dr. Andrews did not “transgress the limit” she emphasizes, that despite the Doctor’s “presence” she retained her agency and ability to respond to him critically. Therefore, while Jones acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge and the importance of collaboration, she continues to remind the reader of individual authorship. When the first canning method does not work, Jones must come up with another idea on her own. “Did I appeal to spirits? No not I! Some lady—thought to be a medium—had said unwisely: ‘Scald your fruit:—not boiling water—some degrees below.’ Well what was that but cooking? Still it served to set me thinking. Warmth it seemed, would aid expansion; let us have a little warmth.”³⁹ This particular passage is lifted from a letter that Jones writes to her cousin, Dr. Cooley, who was instrumental in helping Jones to develop her invention through work in the laboratory. “The laboratory tests were promising; we saw the air escape—tearing the grapes apart, and knew of nothing more to do after the flasks were filled with fluid only to seal them up (though that was difficult) and wait to prove results.”⁴⁰ Later, Jones and Dr. Cooley again engage in correspondence over how to alter the experiment. Of her collaboration with Dr. Cooley, Jones says:

See what it is to be a Scientist. Up to that point the thoughts had been my own of precedence and right. And yet, without his supplementing thought, this work of mine had ended then and there. I do not say he was inspired, but I had been inspired to visit him, and more than that to put my trust in him as one whom others trusted—souls released from earth.⁴¹

The use of the capital “S” for the word “Scientist” connotes its importance to Jones—“Scientist” is a title that one must earn. Here, Jones emphasizes that the cultivation of individual genius requires support. Although Jones claims ownership over the invention because it was she who had been “inspired,” she needed Dr. Cooley’s help and she believes that the spirits brought her together with him. This speaks to Jones’s recognition of the necessity of collaboration in the formation of knowledge and the construction of meaning. That is, invention becomes social when inventors “involve other people as collaborators or reviewers whose comments and invention, or as ‘resonators’ who nourish the development of ideas.”⁴² Moreover, from a rhetorical perspective, discussing male helpers may lend Jones an ethos that—as a woman—she may not have been able to claim otherwise. Just as a man must vouch for Jones’s authenticity in the foreword to her autobiography, Dr. Andrews and Dr. Cooley serve to vouch for Jones’s competence in the realm of science.

Conclusion

The Romantic view of invention (as well as the social collective in which it occurs) becomes a hindrance to Jones as she attempts to construct herself as a woman both in her autobiography and in a male public sphere. However, with regard to the transgression of gender roles, Jones does find ways to temper social judgment—and her own judgment of herself. One approach Jones takes is to conceptualize of herself as being two separate selves: a creative or “inventive” self and a more ordinary nineteenth-century female self. For Jones, the inventive self is dictatorial and active, pushing her to try new things, while the ordinary Jones is more passive or “feminine” in nature and must be prodded by the “other” voice. Further, in an effort to gain acceptance from her readers, Jones deploys what LeFevre refers to as a “collaborative” approach to invention. That is, in order to retain her femininity, Jones discusses her male helpers, emphasizing her

difference from them in an attempt to preserve her own individuality and sense of authorship while simultaneously building an ethos as a scientist.

Jones's own movement across models of invention could be read as an attempt not only to negotiate between male and female worlds, but also between constructions of the past and present in order to reconcile the two. Jones's autobiography describes a "past" Spiritualist lifestyle in conflict with "present" institutions of science and business. However, as I have shown, Jones's personal constructions of past and present are quite different from those advocated by women such as Willard. While Willard views technology as bearing liberatory potential for women to exercise their womanly influence, Jones experiences a life dedicated to technology as being stressful, impersonal, and unwilling to accommodate femininity. It is a life that is made possible only by divine intervention, by spirits who guide and support her throughout her career. For this reason, I read *A Psychic Autobiography* as an attempt to reconcile various seemingly incompatible aspects of nineteenth century life—a reconciliation made possible through Spiritualism. However, even Spiritualism is hard for Jones to discuss intellectually: the uneven quality of her writing and its frequent lack of clarity highlight the difficulty of such an endeavor. At times, Jones includes poetry where a reader might have liked concrete explanations, or she may omit key details of an event because those details do not act in service of her introspection. For Jones, perhaps reconciliation can only be found in those more indeterminate sections of her work—in the liminal spaces between sleeping and dreaming; the spirit world and the material world.

Notes

1. Denise Pilato, *Retrieval of a Legacy: Nineteenth Century American Woman Inventors* (Westport Conn.; and London: Praeger Publishing, 2000), 129.
2. Amanda T. Jones, *A Psychic Autobiography* (1910; rep. New York: Arno Press, 1980), 4.
3. Jones, *Psychic Autobiography*, 5.
4. Ibid.
5. See Christine Battersby's *Gender and Genius: Toward A Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
6. Karen Burke LeFevre, *Invention as a Social Act* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 2.
7. LeFevre, *Invention as a Social Act*, 2
8. Wendy Gamber, "A Gendered Enterprise: Placing Nineteenth-Century Businesswomen in History," *The Business History Review* 72, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 189.
9. Pilato, *Retrieval of a Legacy*, 109.
10. Ibid., 193.
11. Louise Stevenson, *The Victorian Homefront: American Thought and Culture 1860-1880* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 128-32.
12. Matilda E. Joslyn Gage, *Woman as Inventor*, (Fayetteville, N.Y.: F.A. Darling Printer, 1870), 5.
13. Nina Baym, *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation* (New Brunswick, N.J.; and London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 89-93.
14. Jones, *Psychic Autobiography*, 339.
15. Ibid., 339.
16. Battersby, *Gender and Genius*, 90.
17. Ibid., 18.
18. Ibid., 6.
19. Ibid., 45.
20. Jones, *Psychic Autobiography*, 343.
21. Ibid.
22. Pilato, *Retrieval of a Legacy*, 2.
23. Ibid., 18-19.
24. LeFevre, *Invention as a Social Act*, 82.
25. Jones, *Psychic Autobiography*, 360.

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 355.
28. Ibid., 345.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Timothy Hickman, "Gendering Modernity: Frances E. Willard's Politics of Technological Sentimentality," in *Becoming Visible: Women's Presence in Late Nineteenth-Century America*, edited by Janet Floyd, Alison Easton, R. J. Ellis and Lindsey Traub (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010), 286.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., 291.
34. LeFevre, *Invention as a Social Act*, 56.
35. Jones, *Psychic Autobiography*, 343.
36. LeFevre, *Invention as a Social Act*, 56.
37. Jones. *Psychic Autobiography*, 191.
38. Ibid., 192.
39. Ibid., 343.
40. Ibid., 341.
41. Ibid., 346.
42. LeFevre, *Invention as a Social Act*, 2.