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THE NEW WOMAN IN FICTION AND HISTORY:  
FROM LITERATURE TO WORKING WOMAN

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Pittsburg, Kansas

May, 2016

THE NEW WOMAN IN FICTION AND HISTORY:  
FROM LITERATURE TO WORKING WOMAN

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# THE NEW WOMAN IN FICTION AND HISTORY: FROM LITERATURE TO WORKING WOMAN

An Abstract of the Thesis by  
Vicente Edward Clemons

The purpose of this study was to determine who the New Woman was, a figure of British feminism at the end of the Victorian Era. The New Woman presented Victorian Britain with an alternative model of womanhood that differed greatly from the ideal Victorian Woman. The New Woman was conceived in the pages of fiction by women writers who each had their own ideas on feminism. The New Woman triggered a panic over Victorian gender roles that in turn led to the creation by the Victorian media of another New Woman. However, the New Woman in practice did not entirely threaten Victorian patriarchy, but aided Britain and the empire through work in the public sphere. The New Woman was a complex figure in literature, media, and in practice. There was no single New Woman, but a multitude, and each spanned the entire spectrum of late Victorian feminism.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
CHAPTER I: The New Woman and Her Many Incarnations.....	1
The Literary New Woman.....	2
The New Woman in the Media.....	3
The New Woman in Practice.....	4
The New Woman Identity Crisis.....	5
 CHAPTER II: The Woman's Sphere and the Ideal Victorian Woman.....	 8
The Ideal Wife and Mother.....	10
How to Be a Perfect Wife and Mother.....	13
Victorian Science and the "Weaker Sex".....	18
The Ideal Woman and Working-Class Women.....	21
The Expansion of Women's Rights.....	23
Women Enter the Professions.....	26
A New Model of Womanhood? .....	29
 CHAPTER III: New Woman Writers and the New Woman in Fiction.....	 31
The New Woman in Literature.....	32
Sarah Grand's New Woman: The Educated Wife and the Sickly Husband.....	34
George Egerton's New Woman: Sexual Freedom and Marriage for Love.....	39
Olive Schreiner: The 'First' New Woman and the Freedom to Love.....	43
The Male Author Response: Thomas Hardy's New Woman.....	48
Bram Stoker's New Woman: Monsters v. the Perfect Wife.....	51
 CHAPTER IV: The New Woman and the Media at the Turn of the Century.....	 60
The Media's New Woman: Radical Man-Hating Feminist and Her Critics.....	62
The New Woman Fights Back: Supporters and the Victorian Media.....	68
 CHAPTER V: The New Woman in Politics: Careers and Politics in the Public Sphere	74
New Woman Feminism and Class.....	74
Victorians on the Defense: Attacks on Feminism.....	77
The Professional Career Woman: The Real New Woman.....	83
Recognition of Career Women and Feminists.....	91
New Woman Feminism and the Empire.....	93
 CHAPTER VI: The New Woman's Place in History.....	 98
 BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 101

## Chapter I

### Introduction: The New Woman and Her Many Incarnations

The late Victorian era saw the rise of many feminist movements including the well-known suffrage movement. Although suffrage and the suffragists have received great attention, another women's rights movement, the New Woman, predated the suffrage movement and has not generated the same interest from historians or the general public. Beginning in the 1880s, the New Woman emerged in the literature of feminist authors such as Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, and George Egerton. Nineteenth century Britain was a changing world. An economic boom created a rising middle-class, a higher standard of living, a consumerist culture, and greater distribution of wealth that changed the Victorian family structure. Women began to turn away from the ideal Victorian woman—the silent dutiful wife and mother in favor a new model of woman created from the pages of fiction. This New Woman was a fictional character who differed depending on the author's particular feminist views. Nevertheless, the New Woman took Victorian Britain by storm and became a sensation. The Victorian media took advantage of this gender panic and create their own New Woman. She was corrupted into a man-hating third sex bent on destroying Victorian manhood. Instead of equality, the media's New Woman wanted to topple Victorian patriarchy and become the masters of men. This cartoonish figure was lampooned in newspapers and magazines of the day, and was used

to terrorize the Victorian public—feeding the fears of women rights. However, in reality, the New Woman was different from the literary figure and the exact opposite of the media caricature. The New Woman in practice were professional career women who entered the public sphere and worked to promote Britain and the empire, while at the same time, advocating for women's rights. They were the “first” first-wave feminists of Britain. They joined the workforce as typists, secretaries, teachers, and writers. They also treaded carefully into the public sphere advocating for education reforms and supporting the empire. Far from toppling patriarchy and British hegemony in the world, the New Woman reinforced it. These forays into the public sphere showed that women could fit well into British public life. The New Woman marked a turning point for gender roles in Britain. There was no single New Woman, but a multitude within literature, the media, and in practice.

### *The Literary New Woman*

The New Woman was largely ignored by historians and critics, as were women's histories in general until the 1960s. For scholars history was the public sphere—the world of men including politics, wars, foreign policy, trade, economics, laws, etc. The New Woman figure was dismissed by historians and critics alike as a fictional character. The New Woman represented a new model of womanhood created by a group of women writers who desired more rights and opportunities for women. However, each New Woman writer created their own version of the New Woman—each one ran the entire spectrum of feminism at the turn of the century. Sarah Grand who wrote *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) was primarily concerned with equal education and public health. Her New

Woman was an educated woman who made independent decisions for herself and aided Britain's superiority. Another New Woman writer, Olive Schreiner, wanted sexual freedom for women, and her New Woman reflects this. Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) features Lyndell, a New Woman looking for love and challenges societal norms when she proposes to one man, while pregnant by another and dies in childbirth. George Egerton's New Woman in *Keynotes* (1894) also wishes for the freedom of sex and love, and uses philosophy to challenge Victorian gender roles. Each protagonist is a New Woman, but they are all very different women, just as their respective writers were. Both Sarah Grand and Olive Schreiner became suffragettes, while George Egerton became a socialist and later a communist, and was anti-suffrage. The New Woman figure was not a concrete figure, and she only became more difficult to pin down. In response to the New Woman, other authors also created their own New Woman, including Thomas Hardy who supported the movement, and Bram Stoker who did not, and featured the New Woman prominently in his most famous novel *Dracula* (1897). Further adding to the difficulty of pinpointing the New Woman was the reaction of the Victorian Media.

### *The New Woman in the Media*

Responding to the New Woman in literature, newspapers and magazines of the late-Victorian era created their own. This New Woman bears little resemblance to her literary counterparts and encompasses all the fears Victorian society had about women and the "gender panic." She was transformed into an Amazon, a "third sex," that was neither man nor woman, who wore trousers, smoked in public, rode bicycles, and had



careers outside the home—this New Woman wanted to replace men in the workforce and turn Victorian gender roles completely upside down. The media's New Woman was featured and caricatured in many Victorian newspapers and magazines; cartoons showed her engaging in men's pursuits and appearing to be more masculine than men. She was made fun of and reviled—in creating their own New Woman, the Victorian media created a sensation. The New Woman became a topic of conversation and debate, with both detractors and supporters writing their own letters to editors in support of or blasting the New Woman. Opinions from people of all walks of life were featured including authors and actors. While the intent was negative, the media succeeded in bringing women's rights and the "Woman Question" into the general public, increasing the public awareness for women's rights.

### *The New Woman in Practice*

While the New Woman in literature challenged Victorian gender roles, and the New Woman in media terrorized and captivated the public—the New Woman in reality was emerging in the public sphere. These women took advantage of greater economic opportunities and took professional careers such as teaching, secretarial work, typists, bookkeeping, etc. They also put their skills to work in single-issue pressure groups devoted to education and the promotion of empire. Rather than demonize them, their works were appreciated by the government and the public, so long as these female pressure groups campaigned for "safe" causes. Education, health, and missionary work were within the private sphere, and thus political campaigns of these issues were considered appropriate for women. These women were, on the whole, non-threatening to

Victorian and Edwardian Britain. There were however, some grumblings that women in the professions made terrible wives and mothers, but these fears were alleviated somewhat by the fact that most women quit their careers upon marriage. Far from the monster of the media, or the radical feminist of literature, the New Woman was a single, professional woman who contributed to society by their work in the public sphere.

### *The New Woman Identity Crisis*

The New Woman as a feminist icon is controversial for two reasons—thanks to the media, she was vilified as a radical cartoonish Amazon and because of her fictional origin, she has been dismissed by historians and literary critics. Ignored by academics, it was not until second-wave feminists in the 1970s that the New Woman emerged into the spotlight. Ann Heilmann notes that, “The impact of first-wave feminism, and in particular the New Woman movement, on the formation of *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth-century thought and cultural practice received ever increasing attention at the turn of the millennium.<sup>1</sup>” This was due in part to the New Woman having been a turn of the century phenomenon. In the 1990s and 2000s as the twenty-first century dawned, historians and literary critics looked back with special interest on the 1890s and 1900s.<sup>2</sup> However, academics were quick to discover that the New Woman as a feminist icon was not without problems. Each New Woman writer conceived of a different interpretation of the New Woman in literature. This issue was complicated further by the Victorian media which latched onto the New Woman and created a part caricature, part nightmare figure

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Heilmann, ed. *Feminist Forerunners: New Womanism and Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Pandora, 2003), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

of a New Woman, whom it was said, wanted to turn Britain upside down. This media New Woman was a tough man-hating “third sex” that hated men and wanted to replace them. She smoked in public, rode bicycles, wore trousers, and threatened the social order of Britain. This New Woman was wholly fictional and did not exist in the real world. Nevertheless, she too presented image of the New Woman. Yet, the New Woman in practice was nothing like the media portrayal, and softer reflection of the literary New Woman. Working in the public sphere, these women challenged Victorian patriarchy, but through safe channels at first, some of these women later joined the suffrage movement. The New Woman movement thus, prepared women for a life outside the home, while preparing women for political activism. Although there were arguments for women’s suffrage long before the New Woman movement, the true fight for suffrage did not begin until the decade after the New Woman movement—which is in fact a precursor. Unfortunately, because of its literary origins, and media sensationalism, the complexity of the New Woman movement has made defining her rather difficult for academics.

The New Woman movement was a valid feminist movement that led to the creation of a new breed of women who were active in public life. The multitudes of New Woman figures will be examined in detail. Chapter 2 of detail the life of women before the New Woman and the perfect Victorian model wife that was inaccessible for most Victorian women, and how this model came to be rejected. Chapter 3 will detail the literary New Woman by examining the works of three of the most important New Woman writers: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, and George Egerton. Examples of New Woman in literature written by men will also be examined including Thomas Hardy and Bram Stoker. Chapter 4 will examine the New Woman created by the anxious Victorian

media that vilified the New Woman, and inadvertently helped spread the word on this model of womanhood—and ignite New Woman feminism into the public consciousness. The reactions of the public will also be examined. And finally Chapter 5 will examine the New Woman in practice, the middle-class women who worked in professional careers and their entry into politics, and preparation for women's suffrage.

## Chapter II

### The Women's Sphere and the Ideal Victorian Woman

Gender roles in Victorian Britain were rigid, and at the same time, loosely defined. Men worked and earned money while wives stayed at home and took care of the children. This model was the standard for all Victorian families. Ben Griffin believes that the “shock” of the American and French Revolutions, and the chaos of the eighteenth century, resulted in a strong “reactionary line against radical politics” that included women’s rights or the “gender panic.”<sup>3</sup> Above all, Britain wanted a show of strength to reflect Britain’s new preeminence in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, and “the restoration of household harmony therefore became a pressing cultural preoccupation.”<sup>4</sup> From the bottom, gender roles in British society were restricted. Whether women lived up to these models was another matter entirely. Susan Zlotnik states that the Victorian ideal model was the result of an “ideology of domesticity,”

Emphasizing separate gendered spheres of private and public life, the ideology of domesticity emerged out of the evangelicalism of the Calphan Sect in the earliest decades of the nineteenth century to become the dominant ideology of the middle classes by the 1830s and 1840s. It figured women not merely as disembodied angels in the house but as powerful moral missionaries within the domestic realm. Women contained the potential repair and reform not only their husbands but also

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<sup>3</sup> Ben Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 39.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

the nation—as long as they remained morally intact and politically aloof, isolated from the workaday world of capitalist competition and parliamentary process.<sup>5</sup>

From this ideal, women were supposed to be the moral backbone of British society, although interestingly, Zlotnik notes that this ideology was for the middle class, and thus not for everyone. This class distinction has been noted by many historians. Martha Vicinus supports this analysis and writes that, “Before marriage a young girl was brought up to be perfectly innocent and sexually ignorant. The predominant ideology of the age insisted that she have little sexual feeling at all, although family affection and the desire for motherhood were considered innate.”<sup>6</sup> If women were to be the moral guardians, they had to be free of vice, but at the same time, they were second-class in regards to men. By virtue of this ideology, women were defined as the weaker sex. Their only goal was to be “good wives and mothers,” and as Margaret MacMillan notes, “Femininity was associated with weakness; women had to be protected because they could not protect themselves.”<sup>7</sup> Victorian femininity was defined by the ideal woman, yet this very femininity was the main strike against women in the public sphere. Women were the weaker sex; their sphere was in the home, not in public. Women had to uphold the gender roles of society, and this ideology was keeping them from acquiring equal rights as citizens. However, these gender roles could not hold up forever. The Victorian Era witnessed an economic and population boom that threatened the status quo because

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Zlotnik, “Domesticating the Empire: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England.” *Frontiers* 16, no. 2/3(1996): 51-68, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Martha Vicinus, ed. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), ix.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj: The Mothers, Wives, and Daughters of the British Empire in India* (New York: Random House, 2007), 47-8.

arising middle class and more opportunities allowed women to challenge Victorian gender roles and ignite feminist movements, the first of which became known as the New Woman movement. The old Victorian model of womanhood was broken from the beginning as only upper and middle-class women could aspire to it, and it only became more outdated as Britain advanced into the Industrial Revolution and economic boom, creating greater economic opportunities for men and women.

### *The Ideal Wife and Mother*

The perfect place for the ideal Victorian woman was the home. Judith Flanders cites Victorian writer John Ruskin, “wherever a true wife comes, the home is always around,” and expands on this idea stating that “Housekeeping was a source of strength for women, through which they could somehow mystically influence their husbands.”<sup>8</sup> Although confined to the home, women as moral guardians could keep their husbands in line as moral citizens of the nation as a Victorian ideal woman was supposed to do. From a position of lesser status than that of men, women shouldered the burden of the nation to create a strong and moral generation of Britons. Guiding women in this endeavor was an increasing supply of etiquette books that detailed life down to the smallest detail. Susan Zlotnik cites Sarah Stickney Ellis, a prolific writer of such books, who advises that “it is the domestic character of England—the home comforts and fireside virtues for which she is so justly celebrated.”<sup>9</sup> This remark by Ellis also illustrates another important point—

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<sup>8</sup> Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2004), 15-16 quoting John Ruskin, “Of Queens’ Gardens,” in *Sesame and Lilies: Two Lectures* (London: Smith & Co., 1865), 149.

<sup>9</sup> Zlotnik, 54 quoting Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Family Monitor and Domestic Guide* (New York, 1844), 5.

the alleged superiority of the “English” race. Pat Thane and Jane Mackay point out that “while all women were essentially domestic in this universalizing discourse, ‘the ideal Englishwoman’s special quality was that she practiced these virtues in a fashion superior to women of other countries.’ Englishwoman’s domesticity became one of the most visible and remarked upon signs of their—and their nation’s—superiority.”<sup>10</sup> The ideal Victorian woman set the standard for women in the western world and beyond. Wherever the British went, they carried these gender roles and ideas of femininity with them.

In order to become the perfect wife and mother, women had to first get married.

However, there were important considerations. As Flanders notes,

Marriage was the ultimate goal, but its very importance meant that it was better to reject a proposed connection that was not absolutely right. In addition, the custom of expecting one child (often the youngest daughter) to remain at home as a companion to the aging parents—a relic from earlier days and larger families—still seemed right to many, even though family size was dropping.<sup>11</sup>

For the middle and upper-class women and families, connections were of paramount importance when marrying their daughters. A man had to be at least rich enough to afford his own home. As Flanders states, “an establishment”—or the home— was the “holy grail” for both men and women, as a status symbol for men, and a place for women.<sup>12</sup> In this cult of domesticity, the home took center stage. Of equal importance to both sexes, the kind of home a man had announced his status to the public, while a woman had a place to become a wife and mother. As for unmarried daughters, Flanders brings up an

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<sup>10</sup> Zlotnik, 54 quoting Jane Mackay and Pat Thane, “The Englishwoman,” in *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920*, ed. Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 191.

<sup>11</sup> Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, 219.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.



interesting point, that the youngest often times remained unmarried to look after her parents, and this was seen as a noble role. Perhaps the most famous example of this custom is Queen Victoria, whose daughters fulfilled this role until they married, except for her youngest daughter, the Princess Beatrice who continued to fulfill this role even after she married—under the condition that she and her new husband lived with the queen year round.<sup>13</sup> Once married and settled in, women managed the household, raised the children, and were good wives and mothers. In short, their lives revolved around the home. The busier women were, the less time they had for potential trouble. Flanders notes one infamous passage in *The Odd Women* (1893) by George Gissing: “Women were very like children; it was rather a task to amuse them and to keep them out of mischief. Therefore the blessedness of household toil.”<sup>14</sup> Women were regarded intellectually like children and were even preferred this way. They were to be silent, or as Sarah Stickney Ellis put it, women’s “highest duty is so often to suffer and be still.”<sup>15</sup> The silent dutiful wife was praised as the ideal woman. A gentle disposition, silence, and complete ignorance of the world were considered the ideal traits in a wife.<sup>16</sup> This contrast of women, who were supposed to be morally superior to men, but completely ignorant, and regarded as intellectually inferior, was the conundrum that defined the ideal woman.

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<sup>13</sup> John Van der Kiste, *Queen Victoria’s Children* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2004), 124.

<sup>14</sup> Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, 247 quoting George Gissing. *New Grub Street*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968).

<sup>15</sup> Vicinus, quoting Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Daughters of England* (London, 1845), 73.

<sup>16</sup> Flanders, 313.

*How to Be a Perfect Wife and Mother*

Nevertheless, there were plenty of literary aids to help women achieve the model of womanhood. The most popular and influential was Sarah Stickney Ellis, who wrote *Women of England*, *Wives of England*, and *Daughters of England*. All three books were published in 1843 and were among the many manuals advising women on marriage and motherhood. To Ellis, such work was paramount to British culture and the nation's survival. In *Women of England*, she writes, "The national characteristics of England are the perpetual boast of her patriotic sons; and there is one especially which it behooves all British subjects not only to exalt in, but cherish and maintain... It is the domestic character of England—the home comforts, and fireside virtues for which she is so justly celebrated."<sup>17</sup> In other words, Ellis states that Britain's domestic virtue is superior to all other nations, and she believes it to be the envy of the world. Additionally Ellis believed that an educated moral woman greatly benefited the nation: a moral woman produced and raised moral children—leading to a stronger, moral, and superior society. She writes, "These facts are strong evidence in favor of a system of conduct that would enable all women to sink gracefully, and without murmuring against Providence, into a lower grade of society."<sup>18</sup> The moral degeneracy of the nation was very real fear, and Ellis believed that a lapse in morals led to the decline of Britain as a nation and as a world power. In the age of science, morality became linked with superiority, thanks in part to scientists like Charles Darwin. Science was used to strengthen the status quo of gender roles and class.

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Select Works of Mrs. Ellis: Comprising the Women of England, Wives of England, and Daughters* (Lexington: Forgotten Books, 2012), 5.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 8.

Rather than arguing that women were weak as was the norm, Ellis states that morality was an inherent trait for the female sex, and an asset that they could, and should use:

Yet among this unpretending class are found striking and noble instances of women, who, apparently feeble and insignificant, when called into action by pressing and peculiar circumstances, can accomplish great and glorious purposes, supported and carried forward by that most valuable of all faculties—*moral power*...<sup>19</sup>

The power of morality was seen as greater in women, for all their supposed weaknesses, than in men. However, this did not mean that women were morally superior. Ellis addresses this issue, writing that, “It is not to be presumed that women *possess* more moral power than men; but happily for them, such are their early impressions, associations, and general position in the world, that their moral feelings are less liable to be impaired by the pecuniary objects which too often constitute the chief end of men...”<sup>20</sup> While not necessarily stronger in moral power, by virtue of their second class status and limited exposure in the real world, women were “protected” from the temptations and vices of the world—and thus, less likely to give in to them, while men were exposed daily and, in Ellis’s mind, more inclined to give in to temptation. Protected from the evils of the world, women were uniquely suited to educate the family on morality. Providing the moral backbone of the nation, women’s role in education was of utmost importance and motherhood, which became a source of power for women—and the only “acceptable” kind of power in Victorian Britain. Ellis, like many writers, saw this role as the key to maintaining Britain’s superiority in the world. She adds that

A woman of cultivated understanding in the responsible task of educating the rising generation in reality fills of the most responsible stations to which a

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<sup>19</sup>Ellis, *The Select Works of Ms. Ellis*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

human being can aspire; and nothing can more clearly indicate a low state of public morals than the vulgar disrespect and parsimonious remuneration with which the aspects employed in education are sometimes required.<sup>21</sup>

Women, although kept in the home, had great power in shaping the morality of their children. It was believed that moral children grew up into moral adults, and also raised moral children, so the logic went, and keep Britain superior in the world. This idea of women having the power to maintain the English “race” was echoed by New Woman writers decades later.

Although Ellis states that women could empower themselves and the nation via domestic life, the vast majority of her works are advice on marriage and domestic life. In the *Wives of England*, she strongly cautions young ladies against marrying men of ill repute—and against marrying men, who do not love their wives:

Now, if on the near approach of marriage, a woman finds this tendency in the companion she has chosen, if she cannot open to him her whole heart, or if he does not open his heart to her, but maintains a distant kind of authoritative manner, which shuts her out from sympathy and equality with himself, it is time for her to pause, and think seriously before she binds herself for the life to that *worst of all slavery*, the fear of a husband.<sup>22</sup>

For Ellis, marrying for love to a man who loves and values his wife is crucial for an ideal marriage. Her comments imply that marriage is a partnership between equals, a curious statement in Victorian England. A wife and husband equally in love with one another create a happy home environment for the couple and later the children. Ellis believes that a marriage without love is a doomed marriage. She adds that, “The love of women appears to have been created solely to minister; that of man, to be ministered unto.”<sup>23</sup>Thr

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<sup>21</sup>Ellis, *The Select Works of Ms. Ellis*, 20.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 28.

ough love, a wife can aid her husband by presumably providing relief from the outside world, and later, that same love can nurture the children into successful adults. Therefore, Ellis sees love as the key ingredient to a happy, successful marriage, and home. Ellis further expands on the role of wives in the home:

And after all, what is it that man seeks in the companionship of woman?—An influence like the gentle dew, and the cheering light, more felt throughout the whole of his existence, in its softening, healing, harmonizing power; than acknowledged by any single act, or recognized by any certain rule. It is in fact a being *to come home to*, in the happiest sense of that expression.<sup>24</sup>

Like other Victorians, Ellis puts the ideal woman on a pedestal in glowing terms. Rather than a symbol of power, the whole of domestic life is thrust upon the shoulders of women. Women are to live for their husbands and their children for the good of the home and the nation. In *Daughters of England*, Ellis poses a question to all young women: “Is it your intention beyond this to live for yourself, or for others? Perhaps you have no definite aim as relates to this subject. You are ashamed to think of living for yourself, and deem it hard to live entirely for others; you therefore put away the thought, and conclude to leave this important subject until some future day.”<sup>25</sup> She cautions that young ladies, “Do not, however, be deceived by such a fallacious conclusion. Each day of your life will prove that you have decided, and are acting upon the decision you make on this momentous point.”<sup>26</sup> Girls must learn quickly that they are required to make sacrifices in life for the good of others. This is the role Victorian society has ascribed to them. Ellis points out that, “Women, in their position in life, must be content to be inferior to men; but as their

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<sup>24</sup>Ellis, *The Select Works of Ms. Ellis*, 38.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

inferiority consists chiefly in their want of power, this deficiency is abundantly made up to them by their capability of exercising influence...<sup>27</sup> Ellis admits that women are inferior, but also states that the home is where women have power. As a wife and mother, they have tremendous influence over their husbands and their children. Their sphere was the domestic, so they had to be content with the home and motherhood because they were deemed inferior for life on the outside. Women who did not conform were thought to be morally bankrupt: A woman who lived for herself was clearly an anomaly and dangerous.

Like children, women were to be seen but not heard and were regarded intellectually like children. This belief permeated Victorian society. Ellis cautions young women in *Daughters of England* that

There is, perhaps, no subject on which young women are apt to make so many and such fatal mistakes as in the regulation of their emotions of attraction and repulsion; and chiefly for this reason—because there is a popular notion prevailing among them, that it is exceedingly becoming to act from impulse of the moment, to be what they call ‘the creature of feeling,’ or, in other words, to exclude the high attribute of reason from those very emotions which are given them, especially, to serve the most exalted purposes.<sup>28</sup>

Ellis sees lack of emotional control as the downfall of many women. This view reinforces the idea that women were emotional, not logical, and therefore weaker than men. Judith Flanders even cites as an example Charles Dickens, in whose novels “emotional women came to bad ends,” and “In his own life, his daughter noted, Dickens had similar views. His wife was never allowed to express an opinion—never allowed to say what she felt.”<sup>29</sup> In this respect, Dickens and his wife had a typical Victorian marriage. This ideal marriage

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<sup>27</sup>Ellis, *The Select Works of Ms. Ellis*, 8.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 312.

and family was celebrated in Victorian culture. Painters such as George Edgar Hicks portrayed women in their art as wives and mothers caring for their husbands and children.<sup>30</sup> Popular belief held that while women were morally superior to men, intellectually they were inferior. Martha Vicinus describes this juxtaposition, “Women were educated to believe that they were, on the one hand morally superior to men in their lack of sexual drive and, on the other hand, inferior because of their weak natures,” adding that, “only the very bottom of society was immune to so pervasive a model of womanhood.”<sup>31</sup> Vicinus brings up valid points on two fronts. The alleged intellectual inferiority of women in regards to men, and an important class distinction between middle and upper class women and their working class counterparts. On the first point, science at the time was very clear on the matter, and on the second, Vicinus reveals that the ideal woman was a model that was completely unobtainable to working-class women. Both issues were tackled near the end of the Victorian era by a new model of womanhood.

### *Victorian Science and the “Weaker Sex”*

The nineteenth century was an age of scientific advancement, and among the scientific giants of that age was Charles Darwin. His book, *The Origin of the Species* (1859), revolutionized biology and the scientific community. The Victorians were deeply interested in science and naturally, this amounted to an obsession with race and gender from a scientific perspective. Darwin’s other famous work, *The Descent of Man* (1871), had just as much impact on Victorian society as *The Origin of the Species*.

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<sup>30</sup> Helene E. Roberts, “Marriage, Redundancy or Sin: The Painter’s View of Women in the First Twenty-Five Years of Victoria’s Reign,” in Vicinus, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, xiv.

Of the former, race and gender are major subjects of study, and here Darwin “scientifically confirmed” many Victorian views on female inferiority. For instance, Darwin writes:

There can be little doubt that the greater size and strength of men in comparison with women are all due in chief part to the inheritance from his half-human male ancestors. It is not probable that the greater strength of man was primarily acquired through the inherited effects of his having worked harder than women for his own subsistence and that of his family; for the women in all barbarous nations are compelled to work at least as hard as the men. With civilized people the arbitrament of battle for the passion of women has long ceased; on the other hand, the men, as a general rule, have to work harder than the women for their joint subsistence, and thus their greater strength will have been kept up.<sup>32</sup>

In this passage, Darwin bases the present physical inferiority of women on society, not biology, and as men worked harder than the women hunting and tool making, while women presumably did not, because they took care of the children. Humans evolved due to their environment, and the male of the prehuman species was already stronger than the female. Of course this argument has several flaws. Individual strength is not passed down from fathers to sons, and Darwin ascribes to primitive human cultures, Victorian gender roles. If women did the hunting and gathering, then their physical strength should rival men, but because they are physically weaker, they obviously stayed home and took care of the children. Modern understanding of human evolution, genetics, and archaeological evidence debunk these pronouncements, but unfortunately for women at the time, they were widely accepted.

With regards towards women’s intellectual inferiority, Darwin is equally harsh citing that:

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<sup>32</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (London: John Murray, 1871) The Andrew Project, <http://andrew.cmu.edu> (accessed September 1, 2015), 416.



The chief distinction in the intellectual powers of the two sexes is shown by man's attaining to a higher eminence, in whatever he takes up, than can woman—whether requiring deep thought, reason, or imagination or merely the use of the senses and hands. If two lists were made of the most eminent men and women in poetry, painting, sculpture, music (inclusive both of composition and performance), history, science, and philosophy, with half-a-dozen names under each subject, the two lists would not bear companion. We may also infer, from the law of the deviation from averages, so well illustrated by Mr. Galton, in his work on Hereditary Genius, that if men are capable of a decided pre-eminence over women in many subjects, the average of mental power in man must be above that of women.<sup>33</sup>

Like his argument on physical inferiority, Darwin's argument on intellectual inferiority is just as flawed. Darwin reasons that because there are so few famous women of accomplishment, women must be intellectually inferior. Ironically, by the nineteenth century, accomplished women of the various subjects mentioned could be found, except perhaps in music. Darwin's one major logical error ignores the fact that women have been kept from all of these professions by society. There are few if any "accomplished" women to be found because they were not allowed to be part of these professions. Women as musicians and artists were unacceptable to society, and those that dared, were often barred from artistic societies. Darwin's entire premise is biased against women—given the chance, there could have been female geniuses of every profession. Darwin too, realizes this point:

In order that woman should reach the same standard as man, she ought, when nearly adult, to be trained to energy and perseverance, and to have her reason and imagination exercised to the highest point; and then she would probably transmit these qualities chiefly to her adult daughters. All women, however, could not be thus raised, unless during many generations those who excelled in the above robust virtues were married and produced offspring in larger number than other women.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, 417.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

Darwin indicates that if given the proper education, women could reach the same level mental prowess, and like his earlier point of man transmitting physical strength, Darwin argues that women could potentially transmit their heightened intelligence to their daughters. This belief that strong and educated women could be beneficial to society was expanded upon by New Woman writers at the end of the Victorian era. Darwin does make a distinction that only certain women could attain such a level, and these women alone must produce offspring. Presumably the women who failed to reach such a level were lower class women, because along with beliefs of male superiority, there was an idea that the lower classes were more prone to vice and were intellectually inferior to the middle and upper class. They were poor because they spent all their money on vices such as alcohol: Thus, the poor were poor because they could not help themselves.

### *The Ideal Woman and the Working-Class Woman*

Working class women, on the whole, were under a different set of gender roles. By definition, working class women could never aspire to reach the ideal model of Victorian womanhood, for the simple fact that they worked outside the home. Peter Stearns notes that

The working-class wife was not supposed to work, at least outside the home. To do so would offend her husband's manhood, for it would demonstrate his inability to provide for her. It was firmly established in the working-class culture that only the sick or the depraved sent their wives out to work, and indeed outside of the textile towns only women whose husbands were ill or injured or drunkards or otherwise unemployable normally worked.<sup>35</sup>

Even among the lower-classes, the idea of women working was an affront to a Victorian man's masculinity: However, most working class families could not survive as single-

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<sup>35</sup> Peter Stearns, "Working-Class Women in Britain, 1890-1914," in *Vicinus*, 113.

income households. Stearns notes that, “Textiles were an exception—in cities like Blackburn close to 40 percent of all married women and widows worked in 1901, and by 1911 the figure approached 50 percent.”<sup>36</sup> During hard economic times, the situation worsened for the working-class, and not surprisingly, the number of single-income families declined. Stearns further notes that an economic recession in 1900 and rising inflation made it necessary for women to work outside the home, as two incomes were needed.<sup>37</sup> As women who worked outside the home, as far as the ideal model of womanhood was concerned, working-class women failed in two important roles: that of wife and mother. A working woman was an absent wife and mother, even if a woman could obtain a job in the textile industry, she was sure to raise more than a few eyebrows. As a result, most women who worked were unmarried and quit their jobs when they married.<sup>38</sup> Working-class families could not afford to have only one breadwinner. An economic recession like the one at the turn of the century crippled a working-class family further down the poverty line, yet a working woman was sign of her husbands’ failure as a man—widows being an exception to this rule—and the general inferiority of the working-class as a whole.

### *The Expansion of Women’s Rights*

While Victorian gender roles were rigid, women made small leaps in civil rights throughout the Victorian era with the help of some unlikely allies such as Samuel Smiles

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<sup>36</sup> Stearns, “Working-Class Women in Britain, 1890-1914,” 114.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>38</sup> Eleanor Gordon, “Women, Work and Collective Action: Dundee Jute Workers 1870-1906.” *Journal of Social History* 21, no. 1 (1987), 27-47.

and John Stuart Mill, the latter publishing the “bible of equal rights,” *The Subjugation of Women* in 1869, the same year that M.J.D Roberts notes that the question of women’s legal status in society began to be debated in Parliament and by the general public.<sup>39</sup> Ironically, this debate resulted in a setback for women’s rights, as that very same Parliament extended the Contagious Diseases Acts.<sup>40</sup> Decades earlier, in 1839, Samuel Smiles published an article, “A Word on Behalf of a Neglected Portion of Society,” in which he advocated for equality and challenged gender stereotypes in asking why was a woman considered inferior and the property of her husband, and as a result of the current law, a woman’s very identity was lost upon marriage.<sup>41</sup> Smiles questioned Victorian femininity in its entirety and brings up many issues for Victorian women. Once married, they were at the mercy of their husbands, and there were very few options out of an unhappy marriage.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, divorce was almost impossible to obtain; however, the Divorce Act of 1857 made it possible for divorce without an act of Parliament in the cases of bigamy, incest, or cruelty—with the latter open to interpretation.<sup>42</sup> While the Parliament requirement was lifted for these cases, divorce by cruelty was at the discretion of the judge. Furthermore, in the event of divorce, a woman relinquished all rights to her children, who were automatically given to the husband for full custody, because a woman having no means to support herself, she obviously could

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<sup>39</sup> M.J.D Roberts, “Feminism and the State in Later Victorian England.” *The Historical Journal* 38, no. 1 (1995), 85-110, 86.

<sup>40</sup> Roberts, “Feminism and the State,” 87.

<sup>41</sup> Alex Tyrrell, “Samuel Smiles and the Woman Question in Early Victorian Britain.” *Journal of British Studies* 39, no.2 (2000), 185-216, 194.

<sup>42</sup> Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, 233.

not support herself and her children. In one particularly notorious case, Andrew Steuart, a mentally disturbed former MP was on trial for assaulting his wife, who understandably wanted a divorce and custody of their children, but because Steuart's violence was directed towards his wife only, the judges felt that his children were in no danger.<sup>43</sup> Ben Griffin states that

In a passage that was to become notorious Ardmillan (one of the judges in the case) said that to 'to leave his little child in his house is, or may well be, to introduce a soothing influence to cheer the darkness, and mitigate the bitterness of his lot, and bring out the better part of his nature.' The distress that this decision would cause to a mother who had already suffered grievous wrongs at the hands of her husband, let alone the potential danger that the children might be exposed to, were simply not matters for the consideration of the court.<sup>44</sup>

This case illustrates the second-class status that women had at time. With no means to support themselves, it was deemed better to let the fathers have custody of the children, even if, as in this case, the father had a history of mental illness and might harm the children. That Steuart had at one time suffered a nervous breakdown and was institutionalized apparently did not matter to the court.<sup>45</sup> One wonders if the judges owed him political favors. That he only harmed his wife and never the children was sufficient enough for the court to grant him custody; however, women's rights and finances were changing. Also in 1870, the Married Women's Property Act was finally passed by Parliament, allowing women to keep their own property and wealth; in 1873 women were granted custody of their children from ages 7 to 16, while in 1878, women who had been

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<sup>43</sup> Griffin, *The Politics of Gender*, 3-4.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 3.

assaulted by their husbands could be awarded custody of children younger than 10.<sup>46</sup> It was not until 1925, that women could be given full custody of children.<sup>47</sup> These small gains in civil rights reflect the changing attitudes towards women as the nineteenth century drew to a close.

Additionally, an economic boom in the 1880s brought more job opportunities for the middle-class. At the same time, changing attitudes towards sex, with the “application of female sexual standards to all levels of society,” meant that middle-class women had more wealth to spend, but were still constricted by the same values from earlier in the century, though men also began to feel some of these constraints.<sup>48</sup> Female sexual mores were applied to women *and* men from all levels of society. Men too had to be morally right, and having affairs outside of marriage brought the potential of a ruined image. This change resulted from the belief in the scientific community of maintaining a strong “English” race that required both men as well as women to be physically, mentally, and morally fit. A nation of morally, physically healthy, and prosperous citizens was crucial for the expansion of the British Empire, amid fears that Britain was slipping behind the competition. As a result, Britain was almost pathologically obsessed with disease and vice. E.M. Sigsworth and T.J. Wyke note that, “Prostitution and venereal disease were the subject of repeated Parliamentary inquiry. Those who wished to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869 published at least 520 books and pamphlets on those topics, while those seeking to maintain and extend them generated a

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<sup>46</sup>Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, 233.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, xiv-xv.

comparable flow.”<sup>49</sup>The Contagious Diseases Acts captured the popular imagination and revealed the depth of concern over venereal disease. The acts targeted women only, forcing infected women to be registered, but men were not. For infected men went home to wives or married sexually ignorant virgins, infecting them as well. The repeal of these acts was a victory for women’s rights, and the public was on the side of women, though this only reveals the concern for the “race” as a whole. There were over 900 public meetings for repeal, and between 1870 and 1895 there were over 17,000 petitions with 2,606,429 signatures for repeal.<sup>50</sup> These numbers reveal just how controversial the Acts were at the time and how tirelessly the campaign for repeal worked toward its goal. This was another victory for women’s rights in Britain, and a shadow of things to come.

### *Women Enter the Professions*

As for middle-class women, their lives changed little during the economic boom after 1870, but the lives of their working-class sisters benefitted familywisewithout benefitting the women themselves. Vicinus notes that families became single-earner families, while women stayed home and that, “The perfect lady under these conditions became the woman who kept to her family, centering all her life on keeping the house clean, the children well disciplined, and her daughter chaste.”<sup>51</sup> Although no longer necessary for work, these women now confronted the dull restricted lives of middle-class women. At this same time, infant mortality rate declined, and the growing middle-class

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<sup>49</sup> E.M. Sigsworth and T.J. Wyke, “A Study of Victorian Prostitution and Venereal Disease,” in Vicinus, 77.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, xiii-xiv.

now had disposable income, creating a consumerism society.<sup>52</sup> In addition to growing income, the population of Britain also increased. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis note a wide gender gap that occurred in Victorian Britain,

In the development of early feminism pragmatic forces came into play no less than ideological ones. For example, in the census of 1851, it was revealed that there were 400,000 ‘surplus’ women. Without a husband, women had no one to keep them or to enable them to reproduce legitimate children; unmarried women were thus surplus to social reproductive requirements. They posed a considerable if inadvertent threat to separate-sphere ideology: uncontained by spouses, they risked spilling out in the public sector, becoming public and visible. It was hard for a surplus woman to be an Angel in the House.<sup>53</sup>

This gender gap created problems for Victorian gender roles. A surplus of women with no husband to be found, and in need of financial support, a career was their only option, and “spilling out into the public sector” was exactly what some women did, though not without difficulty. In 1852, Samuel Smiles again published an article in which he decried the backwardness of British society not allowing women in the workforce. He cites Europe and the United States, where

Women were able to look after themselves much better elsewhere. French middle-class women became shopkeepers; in Paris there were female bookkeepers, copying clerks, conductors of journals, and writers of books; in France, Switzerland, and the United States women were engaged in manufacturing design and wood engraving...<sup>54</sup>

Compared to the rest of the civilized world, Britain, Smiles warned, was falling behind. In 1852, these fears were justified, but change was already underway. Between 1851 and 1901, the number of women in the workforce nearly doubled from 2,832,000 to

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<sup>52</sup>Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, 6.

<sup>53</sup> Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, eds. *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fine-de-Siècle Feminisms* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 4.

<sup>54</sup> Tyrrell, “Samuel Smiles and the Woman Question,” 208.



4,751,000.<sup>55</sup> Clearly, large numbers of women had careers outside of the home. This became even truer at the close of the nineteenth century and the dawn of the twentieth; in the 1890s, 175,000 women were employed as laundresses, while the number of professional women climbed from 106,000 in 1861 to 429,000 in 1901—the bulk of these women being teachers, with 80,000 women in 1861 to around 172,000 in 1901, though not all were “fully trained and certified.”<sup>56</sup>

Although more and more women were entering the workforce, not every woman enjoyed a job outside the home. Employment increased, but not as rapidly as the female working population. This led conversely, to a high unemployment rate for women. Due to population growth, the number of unemployed women doubled from 5, 294,000 to 10,229,000 in 1901.<sup>57</sup> The vast majority of women remained unemployed despite increased opportunities and education for women. As a result, universities increasingly opened to women, though most were only allowed to study languages, nursing, and teaching, and even then, were not allowed to graduate.<sup>58</sup> Rare examples of educated women include Britain’s first female doctor, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, and her sister, women’s rights activist and later president of the NUWSS, Millicent Fawcett. In her autobiography, Fawcett recalls their father fully supported his daughter Elizabeth’s ambition to become a doctor, although his wife had serious reservations at first.<sup>59</sup> And yet

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<sup>55</sup> Richardson and Willis, *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, 5.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Callum G. Brown and W. Hamish Fraser, *Britain since 1707* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2010), 378.

<sup>59</sup> Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *What I Remember*. (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 33.

as Alex Tyrrell notes, women “were not excluded from the public sphere in the ‘absolute sense’ during the first half of the nineteenth century” as many “women’s missions” worked in philanthropy, missionary work, and participated in single-issue politics such as the Anti-Corn Law League and anti-slavery movements.<sup>60</sup> These brief forays into the public sector provide a starting point for the suffrage movement, as well as provide ammunition for the New Woman movement.

### *A New Model of Womanhood?*

Despite these advances, women remained as restricted as before. They could not take part in this new Victorian Britain and fell victim to the old ideal of womanhood. Vicinus brings up a crucial point about this old model that applied to all women of all classes,

The main difficulty with the perfect lady as a model of behavior even in the middle classes (and it came to be accepted, in an altered form, in other classes) was the narrowness of the definition. Few women could afford to pursue the course laid out for them, either economically, socially, or psychologically.<sup>61</sup>

Working-class women, because they worked outside the home, could never be an ideal mother and wife, yet this was the standard by which she was judged. For middle-class women, they lived their lives by this standard and could never hope to escape it.

Although an economic boom created many more opportunities for the middle-class and even raised some working-class families up to middle-class status, the ideal model of womanhood remained. The time was ripe for a new model of womanhood to replace the perfect lady,

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<sup>60</sup> Tyrrell, “Samuel Smiles and the Woman Question,” 20.

<sup>61</sup> Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, x.

The perfect lady, in turn, gave way to the ‘perfect woman’ or as she is sometimes called, ‘the new woman,’ who continued to hold chastity as an ideal, but made it equally applicable to men as to women. Moreover, through a variety of economic and social changes her sphere of action became greatly enlarged. The new woman worked, sought education and fought for legal and political rights. While few lower class women immediately benefitted from the gains made by upper class women in these fields, the process of change to an ideal more closely modeled on social and psychological reality could not be halted. Emancipation once begun was inexorable.<sup>62</sup>

There was no coincidence that a new model of womanhood emerged during this period.

Unlike the ideal model that came before, the new woman—a working, independent woman was a model that all women of all classes could aspire to given the education.

The New Woman fought for precisely that, equal educational opportunities with men, a professional job, and to the horror of late Victorian Britain the New Woman fought for greater political freedoms as well. This new model, this New Woman, this alternative born in the pages of fiction played a key role in challenging Victorian gender roles, though exactly what was a New Woman is open to interpretation.

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., ix-x.

## Chapter III

### New Woman Writers and the New Woman in Fiction

The “Woman Question” plagued the latter half of Victorian Britain, the most controversial issue being women’s suffrage. For some women, the primary cause of the “Woman Question” was the limiting lifestyle of the ideal woman. In order for women to advance in society—and ultimately politically, a new model of womanhood was needed. However, the New Woman model was a fractured ideal that came to represent many different feminist ideologies and was a reflection of New Woman authors. As the Victorian model woman was a woman of contradictions, so too was the New Woman. Even Queen Victoria was not immune from the contradiction of her gender and her crown as Adrienne Auslander Munich illustrates in an old Victorian joke:

It was a Victorian commonplace to observe that the Queen ruled her nation as a mother and her household as a monarch. Ruling is mixed up, the joke suggests; Victoria’s idea of rule is backwards. Supposedly the Queen should rule her kingdom as a monarch and her household as a mother. Putting the saying right by reversing the reversal, however, reveals the difficulty that the witticism disguised—the problem of a model, a figure, an adequate symbol of this Queen’s rule.<sup>63</sup>

This joke reveals that Queen Victoria as queen and “mother of the nation,” did not fit the type of ideal woman Victorians themselves idolized. As “mother of the nation,” Munich

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<sup>63</sup> Adrienne Auslander Munich, “Queen Victoria, Empire, and Excess.” *Tulsa Studies in Woman’s Literature: Woman and Nation* 6, no. 2 (1987), 265-281, 265.

suggests that as a mother, the Queen's body belonged to the private sphere, while as queen; her body belonged to the public.<sup>64</sup> Queen Victoria occupied both the public and private sphere when women were only supposed to occupy the latter. The ideal model of womanhood was only obtainable by upper class and middle class women, and held women back from the public sphere. Fortunately, in the 1880s, a new model did emerge. This period, as noted by Callum G. Brown and W. Hamish Fraser, "witnessed first-wave feminism... But feminism was broader and deeper than merely the suffrage cause. At stake was an ideology that women deserved equal rights to men in all areas of education, work, and pleasure."<sup>65</sup> This ideology gave birth to first-wave feminism, known as the New Woman movement.

### *The New Woman in Literature*

The New Woman began in Victorian literature. She was a fictional character, but came to represent what a woman fully active in society with all the benefits enjoyed by men could become. Between 1883 and 1900, over 100 novels were written by writers who relatively obscure even in their day, Ann Ardis notes, as they are to experts in Victorian literature in the present day.<sup>66</sup> New Woman novels and their authors were and to some extent, remain obscure to the public. The authors themselves came from the new middle-class. Talia Schaffer notes that the prominent leaders from the movement such as

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<sup>64</sup>Munich, "Queen Victoria, Empire, and Excess," 265.

<sup>65</sup>Brown and Fraser, *Britain since 1707*, 366-7.

<sup>66</sup> Ann Ardis, *New Woman, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 4.

Mona Caird, Lady Jeune, and Sarah Grand were working women with careers as typists, teachers, clerks, and journalists.<sup>67</sup>

As women with careers of their own, these authors and others turned to fiction to express their resentment with the limitations of Victorian society. They began by rebelling against acceptable norms by adopting behaviors shocking for women at that time such as walking unchaperoned, smoking in public, riding bicycles, cutting their hair short, and wearing plain dresses; however, Talia Shaffer claims that “These women rarely described themselves as ‘New Women,’ that is a modern usage.”<sup>68</sup> This suggests that the movement itself was not as clear cut. Every New Woman writer had a different vision for a New Woman—depending on the writer, a New Woman wanted sexual freedom, an education, and freedom to marry for love, equal rights with men, and a professional career. These distinctions carried over into the real world as well. Not every woman who worked for herself, smoked, or rode a bicycle claimed to be a “New Woman.” What separated these women from those who did was ideology, or at the very least, a perceived ideology.

While the authors may have been obscured at the time, the New Woman was not. New Woman was seen as a radical group hell-bent on tearing Victorian society asunder.

Talia Shaffer describes the woman the Victorians saw,

When people wrote and spoke about the ‘New Woman’ in the 1890s, they were usually referring to a very different figure: the unsexed, terrifying, violent Amazon ready to overturn the world. The ‘New Woman’ was a comic fictional figure composed of *Punch* cartoons, much-vilified novels, and ominous warnings in popular articles. As Mrs. Morgan-Dockrell declared, the ‘New Woman’ was ‘a figment of the journalistic imagination.’ This grotesque buffoon, whether

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<sup>67</sup>Richardson and Willis, *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, 39.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

bicycling in bloomers, ogling men, or thrusting her fist in the assembled faces of Parliament, was a media construct...<sup>69</sup>

This is an important distinction between the fictional New Woman featured in literature and the “real” New Woman in late Victorian Britain. Literary critic Sally Ledger agrees with Shaffer and argues that, “The New Woman of the *fin de siècle* had a multiple identity. She was, variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was also often a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth-century women’s movement.”<sup>70</sup> Separating the fictional and real New Woman is a difficult task, even without media sensationalism. New Woman novelists, while agreeing that women needed equality with men in order to fully function in society, each advocated for a specific cause.

*Sarah Grand’s New Woman: The Educated Wife and the Sickly Husband*

It was novelist Sarah Grand who first coined the term New Woman, and she became the poster woman for the movement, although it was not until the 1980s that Grand and her work began to be seriously studied. Even her biographer, Gillian Kersley admitted that “few people I came across in the 1970s had heard of Sarah, apart from vaguely as author of some book call *The Heavenly Twins*.”<sup>71</sup> Born Frances McFall in 1854, she was the wife of a British soldier and spent many years abroad.<sup>72</sup> Her experiences in

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<sup>69</sup> Richardson and Willis, *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, 39.

<sup>70</sup> Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>71</sup> Heilmann, *Feminist Forerunners*, 19.

<sup>72</sup> Iveta Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 14.

the empire came to define her political views, including feminism, and she reinvented herself as a New Woman. She was a major critic of the Contagious Diseases Acts and actively supported the repeal, and in her most famous novel, *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), she harshly criticized the Acts' suppression and blame of women, while Parliament all but ignored the men.<sup>73</sup> Though a work of fiction, the novel served as Grand's mouthpiece for her feminist views. Jusová states that by "Introducing the first two volumes of *The Heavenly Twins* with quotes from Charles Darwin, Grand leaves no doubt that her work was meant as a contribution to the Victorian evolutionary discourse."<sup>74</sup> Science and the purity of the English "race" for the sake of empire are at the heart of the novel; however, Grand argues that in order for Britain to maintain supremacy, women must achieve equal rights. Just like New Woman characters, Grand divorced her husband and struck out on her own as an independent woman, and adopted a new name, Sarah Grand.<sup>75</sup> Grand was a complete feminist who later supported the suffrage movement, though she identified as a "suffragist rather than a suffragette."<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, in Grand's novel, *The Heavenly Twins*, the difficulties of being a Victorian woman are played out to full dramatic effect.

The three female protagonists in the story are very different from one another and come to very different ends. Angelica is allowed by her parents to have the same education as her brother and exemplifies the ideal new woman—well educated and looking for a place in life above female limitations. She is "bored" with life "due to a lack

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<sup>73</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 14-15.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>75</sup>Heilmann, *Feminist Forerunners*, 19.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.



of professional opportunities,” but manages to hold out for and marry a suitable husband.<sup>77</sup> Angelica gets a happy ending because she is educated and free-spirited enough to marry a man suitable to herself. This is the only happy marriage in the story, and no doubt, Grand wanted to show that women should have the education and independence to advance themselves. The other two female characters are not as lucky. Like Angelica, Evadne too is highly educated, but is doomed by societal expectations to a marriage with a weak husband who also suffers from syphilis; being educated, Evadne refuses to sleep with her husband and thus, spares herself from the devastating illness.<sup>78</sup> Even less lucky is Edith. She is a conventional Victorian girl, is the least educated out of the three women, and also marries a syphilitic husband—which results in her contracting the disease, going insane, and dying young, but not before giving birth to a mentally disabled son.<sup>79</sup> The novel makes it clear that innocent uneducated girls forced into marriage with morally bankrupt men results in the death and degeneration of the women and their offspring and, potentially, the English race as a whole. The Contagious Diseases Acts that inspired the novel, only targeted prostitutes, and place the blame on them for the degeneracy of Britain, but men were not checked at all, and men infected with venereal diseases later infected their wives. Grand argues that this double standard is killing women and the people of Britain. An educated female populace with the freedom to make their own decisions could weed out degeneration by refusing to marry degenerate men. Grand, as Jusová states, in “Adopting the popular theories and fears of the potential evolutionary

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<sup>77</sup>Heilmann, *Feminist Forerunners*, 16-7.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 18.

repression, Grand suggests that their inadequate schooling and their marriages to immoral (and thus, in Grand's narrative, 'inferior') men confront women with influences that virtually guarantee their eventual deterioration."<sup>80</sup>Prostitution, while part of the problem, is not the entire problem. Also at fault are the men who visit them and then introduce venereal disease into the rest of British society. Grand also takes aim at the nature vs nurture debate of Darwin and others. In describing the attributes of her female characters, Jusova states that, "Grand presents most of her characters' childhood talents, strengths, and weaknesses as inherent rather than acquired. Still, her novels also question Darwin's biological determinism since they all portray women—as either thwarting women's inherent talents or encouraging their full development."<sup>81</sup>Grand challenges evolutionary science by attesting that if given the opportunity, women could become members of society, but science is not the only thing challenged by Grand.

The Victorian marriage too, comes under fire. The character of Evadne, who functions as a kind of author avatar of the story, makes scathing remarks on marriage. Evadne states that "I would stop the imposition, approved of custom, connived at by parents, made possible by the state of ignorance in which we are carefully kept—the imposition upon a girl's innocence and inexperience of a disreputable man for a husband."<sup>82</sup>Evadne further adds that, "Besides, marrying a man like that, allowing him an assured position in society, is countenancing vice, and"—she glanced round

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<sup>80</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 21.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>82</sup> Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (Lexington: CreateSpace, 2015), 36.

apprehensively, then added in a fearful whisper—“helping to *spread it*.”<sup>83</sup> In other words, Victorian marriage must change for women and society as a whole to prevent deterioration of Britain. Women must be educated and make educated decisions in life to avoid terrible consequences, and for the undesirable men to be weeded out of British society and—presumably, the gene pool. Prostitutes are not the problem, innocent uneducated girls are—along with morally inferior men who contract and spread venereal diseases. Edith’s mentally impaired son, born as a result of her contracting syphilis from her husband, is the future of Britain if women are not given equal education. Angelica and Evadne as educated women are spared from venereal disease and Evadne stands up for herself by refusing to consummate her marriage with a carrier of syphilis. Ann Heilmann notes that, “Although Edith (the Old Woman) is constructed as Evadne’s (the New Woman’s) opposite, the two friends change dramatically as a result of their marital tragedies, with Edith becoming more like Evadne, and Evadne turning into a weak-spirited, submissive Edith.”<sup>84</sup> Marriage destroyed the spirit of both women, providing ammunition for New Woman critics that they were out to destroy the institution of marriage. Yet that is not what Grand is arguing at all. Ledger argues that Grand did not believe that the New Woman presented a challenge to the Victorian institution of marriage while other New Woman writers did believe this.<sup>85</sup> Talia Shaffer claims that Sarah Grand was a “difference feminist,” namely that men and women were inherently different and that their roles in public ought to reflect this, and Shaffer adds that,

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<sup>83</sup> Grand, *The Heavenly Twins*, 36.

<sup>84</sup> Richardson and Willis, *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, 124.

<sup>85</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 21.

She [Grand] particularly wants women to assist helpless victims of men's sexual appetites. Grand justifies such rescue work according to women's natural housewifely and maternal instincts. 'True womanliness is not in danger,' Grand asserts, 'and the sacred duties of wife and mother will be all the more honorably performed, as sons' husbands' characters improve.'"<sup>86</sup>

Grand's New Woman is still a wife and mother with a moral duty to her husband and children, but this moral duty cannot be fulfilled due to a woman's lack of education. With a proper education, a woman could be a better wife and mother, as well as prepared for a life outside the domestic sphere. Thus, an educated woman could become an invaluable asset in both the public and private spheres. Education brought new opportunities and power to women and benefitted Britain as a whole; equal education was a common theme for new woman literature.

#### *George Egerton's New Woman: Sexual Freedom and Marriage for Love*

Like Grand, George Egerton, the penname of Mary Chavelita Dunne, was a woman of the empire. Born in 1859 in Australia to a Welsh mother and an Irish father, Egerton grew up poor and later shared her father's hatred of England, while strongly identifying with her Irish heritage.<sup>87</sup> Egerton only came into wealth later in life through her career as a writer, making her a New Woman in life as well as her career. Unlike Grand, Egerton was strongly interested in philosophy, especially Nietzsche, and in 1893, published her most famous and influential work, *Keynotes*.<sup>88</sup> A collection of short stories, the female protagonist is a New Woman with strong opinions on sex, marriage, and

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<sup>86</sup> Richardson and Willis, *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, 41.

<sup>87</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 49-50.

<sup>88</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 52.

women's rights. In the story "A Cross Line," the main character spends most of the story in contemplation of the events around her, and her unspoken thoughts reveal a feminist outlook on the state of Victorian gender relations. After a conversation with a male character, "...she laughs, laughs softly to herself, because the denseness of man, his chivalrous, conservative devotion to the female idea he has created, binds him, perhaps happily, to the problems of her complex nature."<sup>89</sup> Egerton lays out the problem with the ideal model of womanhood—it is a social construct of man, based on their views of how a woman should be, and not how they actually are. Men see women through this lens, that tell them women are frivolous and emotional, but do not really understand how women's minds work. Men do not engage women in "real" conversations; they engage women with only "polite" conversations that do not allow women to really say what they think. The same character further muses that "... and well it is that the workings of our hearts are closed to them, that were are cunning enough or great enough to seem to be what they would have us, rather than be what we are..." adding that men have,

All overlooked the eternal wildness, the untamed primitive savage temperament that lurks in the mildest, best woman. Deep in through ages of convention this primeval trait burns—an untamable quantity that may be concealed but is never eradicated by culture, the keynote of woman's witchcraft and woman's strength.<sup>90</sup>

Egerton implies that women have been constrained by man's vision of what they should be. In reality, all women have desires as men do, but because of man's vision, they cannot express themselves. Patriarchal Victorian society has created an ideal woman that

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<sup>89</sup> George Egerton, *Keynotes* (Lexington: Leopold Classic Library, 2015), 29.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 30.

no woman could aspire to be, and women are “cunning enough” to know what men want of them, while men do not realize that women are smarter than they seem to be.

While the female protagonist finds humor in the lack of understanding between men and women, in another story, the humor is all gone. “Now Spring Has Come,” introduces the same woman, but this time she is far less forgiving of women’s second class status. Once again, her unspoken thoughts reveal the truth she is unable to say aloud:

Isn’t it dreadful to think what slave we are to custom? I wonder shall we ever be able to tell the truth, ever be able to live fearlessly according to our light, to believe that what is right for us must be right!<sup>91</sup>

She likens women to slaves of convention, of their status in life because of societal constraints. She goes on further to name all the major factors in the denial of women’s rights: “It seems as if all the religions, all the advancement, all the culture of the past, has only been a forging of chains to cripple posterity, a laborious building up of moral and legal prisons based on false conceptions of sin and shame, to cramp men’s minds and hearts and souls, not to speak of women’s.”<sup>92</sup> Egerton places the blame on religion and culture for denying women rights. The “sin and shame” of Eve has been used by Judeo-Christian societies for centuries to deny women rights. Egerton compares the Judeo-Christian societies to Victorian Britain where women are confined to the home and held to an unrealistically high standard. Victorian Britain celebrated the purity and innocence of the virgin. According to Egerton, and many New Woman writers, this was a major obstacle for Victorian women. Egerton’s female protagonist goes on to say, “What half creatures we are, we women!—hermaphrodite by force of circumstances, deformed

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<sup>91</sup> Egerton, *Keynotes*, 48.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-9.

results of a fight of centuries between physical suppression and natural impulse to fulfil our destiny. Every social revolution has told hardest on us: when sacrifice was demanded, let women make it.”<sup>93</sup>By referring to women as “half creatures,” Egerton accurately describes the status of women in Victorian Britain. Although human, they have few civil rights and no freedoms. It is interesting to see that Egerton mentions the very frightening word “revolution.” In all social revolutions, when men have gained rights, women have stayed the same. This passage suggests that in order for women to gain equal rights and move out of the shadow of the Victorian model woman, a gender revolution needs to occur. Women’s rights were already a sore point for most MPs in Parliament, but to even suggest a gender revolution could have made allies a bit weary.

Ironically, Egerton herself was politically inactive and refused to even be labeled as a feminist. Sally Ledger notes that in an interview for the gentlemen’s magazine, *The Idler* in their 1894 issue when they interviewed New Woman writers, Egerton had this to say about feminism,

Surely the fact of my having written a little book, for the love of writing it, notwith a view to usher a revolt or preach a propaganda, merely to strike a few notes on the phases of the female character I knew to exist, hardly qualifies one have an opinion, or present it to the average young man.<sup>94</sup>

Egerton denies trying to stir up a sexual revolution, per se, but states that her only wish is to make her readers think. To Ledger this statement means that, “Egerton had no interest in the women’s suffrage cause or in those women who were fighting for equality with men in the workplace, regarding them as ‘desexualized.’ Her position was that she wanted

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<sup>93</sup>Egerton, *Keynotes*, 49.

<sup>94</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 188.

‘not civil but sexual rights for women.’”<sup>95</sup>The female protagonist of *Keynotes* certainly muses and longs for sexual freedom with statements that horrified most Victorians.

Ledger further states, comparing Egerton to other New Woman writers, that

George Egerton’s popular *Keynotes and Discords* stories are not as notable for their faith in power and significance of maternity, and for their conviction of women’s moral superiority, as for their undeniable daring in their expression of female sexuality. Much of Olive Schreiner’s fiction, too, idolizes motherhood. And the desire to prevent ‘degenerate’ (syphilitic) men from marrying, articulated in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* through the horrific narrative of the birth of Edith Beale’s syphilitic child, bears witness to Grand’s preoccupation with the strength and purity of the British ‘race.’<sup>96</sup>

Like Grand, Egerton argues for greater freedoms for women in the private sphere, but stops short of the public. Although she rejected the feminist and suffragist label, Egerton was an advocate of sexual freedom, the freedom to choose the best husband for oneself, and marriage for love is of paramount importance for the New Woman movement.

#### *Olive Schreiner: The ‘First’ New Woman and the Freedom to Love*

The first New Woman writer to be labeled and embrace the label of “feminist” was Olive Schreiner.<sup>97</sup> While other New Woman writers primarily wrote about women’s issues in fiction, Schreiner was one exception. She actively wrote fiction and non-fiction that dealt with politics, especially women’s issues, earning praise from suffragists like Arabella Shore, whose review of Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), she called Schreiner “daring,” and “recklessly unconventional,” though she criticized the

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<sup>95</sup>Ledger, *The New Woman*, 188.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>97</sup> Olive Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xiii.



“reveries and rhapsodies” that were “not always readable and sometimes singularly out of place.”<sup>98</sup> In her non-fiction essay, *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner proclaims that capitalism is flawed, especially for middle-class women who did not enjoy jobs and opportunity in a capitalist economy.<sup>99</sup> Her political views also evolved over time: always a freethinker, later in life she became a social Darwinist and an advocate for eugenics.<sup>100</sup>

Nevertheless, Schreiner is most remembered for her fiction. Her novel remains one of the most controversial works of the late Victorian period and firmly thrust the New Woman into the spotlight through Lyndell, the New Woman protagonist. According to Ledger, Schreiner became a feminist icon in the 1970s and 1980s when her works were rediscovered by feminist literary critics in the wake of the ‘second-wave’ feminism.<sup>101</sup> Unlike the politically inactive Egerton and the Sarah Grand who sat on the fence, Schreiner was wholly feminist, and in *The Story of African Farm*, Schreiner’s protagonist is a reflection of this. While the new woman was a controversial figure, Lyndell seemed to embody the worst kind of fallen women. As Carol Senf puts it, Lyndell “proposes to one man when she is already pregnant by another.”<sup>102</sup> Lyndell wants more than anything, the kind of sexual freedom that is enjoyed by men. As Heike Bauer states, Lyndell “deliberately seeks to dissociate the female condition from the body by arguing for the

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<sup>98</sup>Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, xxvi.

<sup>99</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 41.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>101</sup> Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, 72.

<sup>102</sup> Carol A. Senf, “Dracula”: Stoker’s Response to the New Woman,” *Victorian Studies* 26, no. 1 (1982): 33-49, 36.

rational female mind.”<sup>103</sup> In other words, Lyndell is an inverted female—a woman who takes on the masculine role. She actively seeks out a husband and a marriage on her terms; unfortunately, her journey does not end happily. Unlike other New Woman protagonists, Lyndell dies in childbirth at the age of seventeen, seemingly paying the price for her transgressions. Not surprisingly, the book stirred up controversy in Britain when it was published, and Schreiner herself was bewildered by some of the criticism. In a letter to a friend, she writes,

One thing I always find difficult to understand is how people gather from any of my writings that I think lightly of marriage. I think it to be the most holy, most organic, the most important sacrament in life, and how men and women can enter into it with the lighthearted indifference they do, has always been, and is, a matter of endless wonder to me.<sup>104</sup>

Marriage was of paramount importance to Schreiner, as evidenced by Lyndell not taking marriage lightly; she simply wants a marriage of equals, and this proves to be her downfall. The man she thought she loved and becomes pregnant by, she discovers is not for her. In a conversation with another character, Lyndell makes the case for women’s rights while refuting real world arguments made by men at the time and in the future against women’s rights. She begins,

They bring weighty arguments against us when we ask for the perfect freedom of women, ‘she said, ‘but, when you come to the objections, they are like pumpkin devils candles inside; hollow, and can’t bite. They say that women do not wish for the sphere and freedom we ask for them and would not use it.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Heike Bauer, “Theorizing Female Inversion: Sexology, Discipline, and Gender at the Fin de Siècle,” *Journal of the History of Sexology* 18, no. 1 (2009): 84-102, 100.

<sup>104</sup> Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, xix.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

Lyndell challenges the arguments against equality by stating that they are empty pretenses. The idea that women do not want equality and will not take advantage of it, if given, is an empty argument. Schreiner believes that women will take advantage of equal opportunities in education and politics. Lyndell further argues that

Then they say, 'If the women have the liberty you ask for, they will be found in positions for which they are not fitted!' If two men climb one ladder, did you ever see the weakest anywhere but at the foot? The surest sign of fitness is success. The weakest never wins but where there is handicapping... If we are not fit, you give us to no purpose the right to labor; the work will fall out of our hands in those who that are wiser.<sup>106</sup>

In this argument, social Darwinism comes into play. Critics are worried that women will enter into politics and professions for which they are not fit, but Lyndell argues that unfit men who do are bogged by failure and never find success. Well educated women will find success in politics and the professions—they just need the chance to prove themselves. Lyndell makes a statement that could be a feminist rallying cry, “*We bear the world, and we can make it.*”<sup>107</sup> She further elicits another argument critics make against women’s rights:

They ask, “What will you gain, even if man does not become extinct?—you will have brought justice and equality on to the earth, and sent love from it. When men and women are equals they will love no more. Your highly cultured women will not be lovable, will not love.”<sup>108</sup>

This argument claims that the educated “mannish” New Woman is undesirable to men. Men do not want women who want to be their equals as it is not natural. If equality is

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<sup>106</sup>Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, 159.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 161.

won, “love” will disappear, leading to the extinction of humanity. Lyndell counters this by claiming that

A great soul draws and is drawn with a more fierce intensity than any small one. By every inch we grow in intellectual height our love strikes down its roots deeper and spreads out its arms wider. It is for love's sake yet more than for any other that we look for that new time.<sup>109</sup>

Lyndell argues that education and equality for women will give them a deeper understanding of love and life, as they can now enjoy its full benefits. All of society will benefit from women's equality. Sadly for Lyndell, her unconventional life, her youth and inexperience cause her death. Her method of death, childbirth, still very dangerous for women at the turn of the century, can be seen by some as divine retribution for her life, or by others as a victim of women's oppression. Schreiner herself suffered many miscarriages, so Lyndell's death is an echo of Schreiner's personal life.<sup>110</sup>

For literary critics, Lyndell “is the prototype New Woman.”<sup>111</sup> Lyndell undoubtedly was the prototype for Victorian culture as well, and became one inspiration for the numerous caricatures of the “Wild Woman” bent on destroying society. Ledger notes that “The making of Lyndell's feminism is explicitly associated not only with her own oppressive childhood but also with her witnessing of other's oppressions at the hand of feckless imperialists.”<sup>112</sup> Schreiner too attacks British imperialism in the novel, the agent of this imperialism being Lyndell, oppressed by British society like the natives of the empire. Unlike Grand, Schreiner's New Woman novel reveals that imperialism is not

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<sup>109</sup>Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*, 161.

<sup>110</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 77.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*

good for Britain, or the British woman. Ann Ardis in analyzing the novel as a whole, states that,

The middle of Schreiner's narrative presents a full-scale critique of the Victorian sex and gender system. But the end of the novel nonetheless deflects that critique because the woman who metaphorically kills the angel in the house dies anyway, leaving the Victorian social order intact.<sup>113</sup>

In this way, Lyndell while a New Woman is also a fallen woman who pays the price for her sexual freedom. The novel itself raises many questions and exposes Victorian oppression of women and double standards, but as the woman who raises these questions and tries to fight the oppression dies, Victorian society claims yet another female victim. The questions raised, however, are still there and relevant.

#### *The Male Author Response: Thomas Hardy's New Woman*

Not all new woman characters are written by women. Male authors also featured New Woman in their works as well, with some showing positive support, while others ridiculed the very notion of the New Woman. One supporter of the New Woman movement was Thomas Hardy. His 1895 novel *Jude the Obscure* features a new woman main character, Sue Bridehead; however, like Lyndell, Sue is trapped by the circumstances of her sex and comes to a tragic end along with Jude, the man she loves. Both Sue and Jude marry other people. Sue marries schoolmaster, Mr. Phillotson, whom Sue quickly becomes repulsed by due to his advances in the marriage bed, and Jude is trapped into a marriage with Arabella who pretends to be pregnant in order to rope him into marriage. Jude's marriage is a disaster, and he divorces Arabella, and Sue divorces her husband and lives unmarried with Jude. They are happy with their two children, but it

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<sup>113</sup> Ardis, *New Woman, New Novels*, 66.

does not last. During their brief marriage, Arabella became pregnant and gave birth to a boy whom she gives up to Jude. Their son is emotionally damaged and kills his two half-siblings while Sue suffers a miscarriage. Believing the marriage cursed, Sue divorces Jude and undergoes a religious conversion, giving up her New Woman ideology, and remarries Mr. Phillotson. Jude also remarries his Arabella, but is miserable and dies shortly after. The terrible ending to Jude and Sue, as well as the tragedies they were put through, was too much for the public, and the novel was criticized so harshly that Hardy never wrote another novel, and concentrated the rest of his life on poetry. Of the criticism, Hardy writes in his 1912 preface,

In my own eyes the sad feature of the attack was that the greater part of the story—that which presented the shattered ideals of the two chief characters..., My own opinion at that time, if I remember rightly, was what it is now, that a marriage should be dissolvable as soon as it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties—being essentially and morally no marriage—and it seemed a good foundation for the fable of a tragedy...<sup>114</sup>

Like Schreiner's heroine, marriage is the chief cause of misery for the main characters of this book. Hardy clearly supported divorce as an end to bad marriage for men and women. Both Sue and Jude are trapped in miserable marriages by circumstance, and only find happiness in their brief marriage to one another, but the consequences of their previous marriages spill over into their current marriage, dooming Sue and Jude.

Inspired by the New Woman movement, Hardy's Sue Brideshead is a young New Woman actively looking for a marriage on her own terms. Although she is a young country girl, she seems wise beyond her years, and has travelled to London. Jude attributes her worldliness to her time in London: "She was quite a long way removed from the rusticity that was his. How could one of his cross-gained, unfortunate, almost

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<sup>114</sup> Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xlv-xlv.

accursed stock, have contrived to reach this pitch of niceness? London had done it, he supposed.”<sup>115</sup> Sue is no country girl; she is sophisticated and knows exactly what she wants. Rather than wait for him to come home, she goes to meet him at work and “reproached him with not letting her know” he was in town.<sup>116</sup> Her brazen behavior and matter of fact attitude are commented on by other relatives, and Jude himself, becomes attracted to her because of it. One relative describes Sue as a kind of tomboy, “She was not exactly a tomboy, you know; but she could do things that only boys do as a rule.”<sup>117</sup> Sue conjures up images of New Woman smoking and riding bicycles. However, her worldliness and New Woman ideals prove to be her undoing. Her first marriage to Mr. Phillotson, she quickly discovers, is neither a fairy tale, nor lives up to her modern ideals. She confesses to Jude the state of her marriage:

It would have been wrong, perhaps, for me to tell my distress to you, if I had been able to tell it to anybody else. But I have nobody. And I must tell somebody! Jude, before I married him, I had never thought out fully what marriage meant, even though I knew. It was idiotic of me—there is no excuse. I was old enough, and I thought I was very experience.<sup>118</sup>

The young and inexperienced New Woman is no match for Victorian society, because she is now trapped in a loveless marriage with a man she grows to despise, and as a result, Sue seeks a way out and comfort from the man she loves. She further elaborates on the need for divorce becoming a viable option for women:

I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly. I daresay it happens to lots of women; only they submit and I kick... When people

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<sup>115</sup>Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 84.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 206.

of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say!<sup>119</sup>

Sue advocates for divorce while admitting that she, as a New Woman, is not going to stay in this marriage. She will “kick” her way out of it and move in with Jude. Sadly, this marriage is doomed by tragedy as well. Defeated by fate, and believing herself cursed for marrying Jude and ending her first marriage, she remarries her first husband and leaves Jude to die in despair. Little wonder then, that the novel received such fierce criticism due to the punishment of its New Woman heroine, possibly giving the impression that Hardy was anti-New Woman. However, as he stated in the preface of the 1912 edition, Hardy was for women’s rights in regards to divorce and marriage, and later championed women’s rights in other areas as well.

*Bram Stoker’s New Woman: Monsters v. the Perfect Wife*

Another famous author also used the New Woman in his novels for dramatic effect. Bram Stoker, like Hardy, was influenced by New Woman literature to write these women in his own. However, Stoker has a very different opinion of the New Woman as seen in his most famous novel, *Dracula* (1897). Although the number of female characters is small—only five and of these, only two are major characters, they drive the story. The first female characters met in the story are the three vampire lovers of the Count. Jonathan Harker encounters the trio while exploring Dracula’s castle. The encounter is shocking for Harker, as the three pounce on him, but are interrupted by the Count himself. As Robert Luckhurst describes,

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<sup>119</sup>Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 206.



When the Count holds them off with his dramatic statement ‘This man belongs to me!’ the innocent Harker perhaps understandably ‘sank down unconscious,’ unable to deal with the implications of this declaration of possession... His remaining adventures in the castle result in ‘brain fever’ (a euphemistic term implying complete mental breakdown), and in his marriage to Mina the husband is the weak and convalescent half of the venture.<sup>120</sup>

Right from the beginning, Harker is emasculated by three lascivious vampire women, and emasculated even further by the Count’s “declaration of possession.” Most disturbingly from a Victorian point of view, Harker remains a weak and emasculated man unable to defend his wife from a monster for the entire novel. Although *Dracula* is a horror novel, this flipping of the gender roles appear to be part of the horror. Ledger notes that this was a typical male fear of the New Woman.<sup>121</sup> The New Woman was seen as a masculine woman who desired to flip gender roles and take a man’s role in the world. The three vampire women who are in the active role in the seduction of Jonathan Harker are thus the sensationalized New Woman of pop culture. As for the two non-vampire women—Mina, Harker’s fiancée and later wife, and Lucy Westenra—Luckhurst notes, that it has long been held that Stoker incorporates two opposing views on the New Woman.<sup>122</sup> Lucy and Mina are two very different women. Lucy is the immature coquette who receives three marriage proposals in one day and secretly desires to marry them all; she gains four “husbands” via blood transfusions, and as a vampire eats children, before finally being grotesquely killed by her three suitors.<sup>123</sup> In the novel, Lucy muses in a letter to Mina,

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<sup>120</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xx.

<sup>121</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 103.

<sup>122</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, xxi.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

“Why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her?”<sup>124</sup> Sally Ledger notes that Lucy’s blood transfusions by four different men “closely resemble[es] a process of insemination.”<sup>125</sup> Lucy gets her wish in a symbolic sense, she is “married” by blood to four different men: her three suitors and Doctor Van Helsing. Her death also involves these four men and resembles a gang rape; Lucy is dispatched by the men she is “married” to.<sup>126</sup> The hypersexual New Woman monster is staked in her coffin and brutally murdered by two doctors, a lord, and a hyper-masculine adventurer. Masculinity is saved by these four men in a climactic scene.

Dracula’s death by contrast is “anticlimax” and quick.<sup>127</sup> Dracula lord of the Vampires and would-be invader of Britain is stabbed in the heart by a bowie knife and his body crumples to dust with no righteous fury or indignation. This suggests that Dracula is a lesser monster than Lucy Westenra. The threat of the New Woman was “real” in the Victorian mind, while Dracula was a fictional vampire, although of course, the New Woman herself began as a fictional character. Lucy Westenra both as a woman and as a vampire was the antithesis of what a good Victorian woman should be and like Lyndell, she dies. Sally Ledger states that “Lucy’s sexuality reveals itself powerfully as she continually tries to escape from her bedroom at night for a series of sexually charged encounters with Count Dracula.”<sup>128</sup> Sex is the downfall of Lucy. She dies as a result of her overt sexuality, easy prey for a foreign monster.

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<sup>124</sup>Stoker, *Dracula*, 59.

<sup>125</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 104.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>128</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 101.

Mina on the other hand, is an independent woman. She is a “self-supporting schoolmistress and administrator, the information center, whose secretarial skills manage the information systems of the brotherhood;” she acts as a “telephone” or channeler so that the men can know Dracula’s whereabouts, and she actively takes part in the fight to kill Dracula, all while playing the role of “dutiful wife, disdainful of the New Woman’s demand for equality.”<sup>129</sup> Although she is a professional woman, her middle-class and independent life appear to be where her role as a New Woman stops. Ledger notes that her career choice as a typist who gives up her job upon marriage is typical of the New Woman.<sup>130</sup> She is no Lyndell, Sue, or Evadne arguing for women’s rights in love, marriage, education, and career.

Rather, Mina Harker desires to be the perfect wife for Jonathan, albeit in an unconventional way. In a letter to Lucy, Mina writes,

I have been working very hard lately, because I want to keep up with Jonathan’s studies, and I have been practicing shorthand very assiduously. When we are married I shall be able to be useful to Jonathan and if I can stenograph well enough I can take down what he wants to say in this way and write it out for him on the typewriter, at which I am also practicing very hard.<sup>131</sup>

Unlike Lucy who is gushing over her three suitors, Mina only wants to be the perfect wife and companion to her future husband, but instead of traditional wifely duties, Mina uses her intelligence and practical skills to help her husband, who is a clerk. Not only do her skills with a typewriter and stenograph help Jonathan, they prove crucial in the fight against Dracula as well. She uses her skills to record the diaries of each character via

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<sup>129</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 52.

<sup>130</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 105.

<sup>131</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 53.

stenograph and typewriter, to put the events of the story in chronological order.<sup>132</sup>

Furthermore, rather than try to shield her from horrific events such as Lucy's demise, the men resolve to tell her everything, and as Mina herself states, "Fortunately I am not of the fainting disposition."<sup>133</sup> She is spared nothing, yet never flinches from helping her husband and the others in their quest, which is a far cry from her emotionally fragile husband, who even late in the novel is still in a fragile state.

Whether Mina Harker is a New Woman is certainly open to interpretation. Mina is a middle-class professional woman, but she is no feminist as evidenced by equality in sex and marriage meaning nothing to her. The overtly sexual women are the undead vampires—Lucy later included. Carol Senf states that, not only does Mina Harker not succumb to the temptations of the vampire, but she is also largely responsible for the capture and death of Dracula.<sup>134</sup> Mina remains the "pure virgin," and although she is directly involved in the action, it is her virtue that the men are protecting. Additionally, despite Abraham van Helsing being both a doctor and a vampire expert, Senf believes that Mina is presented as the most intelligent character in the story. Mina has memorized the train schedule, studies maps, and uses the information gathered while under hypnosis to aid her companions in following Dracula back to his lair.<sup>135</sup> Mina Harker is the true hero of the story; She is both the damsel in distress and the hero who slays the monster. Senf further elaborates that Mina "combines the independence and intelligence often

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<sup>132</sup>Stoker, *Dracula*, 206-7.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>134</sup> Senf, "Dracula: Stoker's Response," 34.

<sup>135</sup>Senf, "Dracula: Stoker's Response," 48.

associated with the New Woman with traditional femininity...”<sup>136</sup> However, Mina herself is skeptical of the New Woman. In a letter to Lucy, Mina pokes fun at the New Woman.

She writes,

Some of the ‘New Woman’ writers will some day start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won’t condescend in future to accept. She will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it too!<sup>137</sup>

Rather than advocate for equality, Mina thinks it an absurd idea. Mina is too traditional to be a New Woman, despite her intelligence and professional skills that mark the New Woman. Senf argues that,

Mina rejects both the forwardness and the sexual openness of the New Woman writers. She never mentions the writers to whom she refers, but Stoker could have been thinking of Grant Allen, Emma Frances Brooke, Menie Muriel Dowie, George Egerton, Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, or even Hardy, Meredith, Moore, or Gissing, all of whom created heroines who rejected aspects of the traditional female role.<sup>138</sup>

Stoker’s Mina Harker therefore resides in a grey area between the traditional Victorian wife and the New Woman—an alternative to both models. This in itself is problematic and reveals that, there were disagreements as to what a New Woman should be. Senf notes that Mina, as have scholar in the real world, lumps all the New Woman writers together, despite evidence to the contrary.

The New Woman figure was many things and it is difficult to define her because there were differences of opinion over what she should be and advocate for. Some of the writers were actively working from a feminist perspective while others wanted to

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>137</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, 85.

<sup>138</sup> Senf, “Dracula: Stoker’s Response,” 36.

“portray the New Woman’s dangerous limitations or self-delusion. Some simply wanted women to be more informed while others wanted to be more experienced as well.”<sup>139</sup> Hardy wanted marriage equality. Sarah Grand wanted an educated informed woman with the freedom to marry whomever she chose. Egerton also wanted marriage equality, though she was against women in politics. Olive Schreiner a feminist and activist wanted full women’s rights. As for Stoker’s view, although a “modern woman,” Mina Harker is no New Woman, and remains a traditional wife. Senf states, “That she is *not* a New Woman can be seen in her criticism of the New Woman writers, her choice of profession—the New Woman writers favored such nontraditional professions as medicine, nursing, and business for their heroines.”<sup>140</sup> Despite a professional career as a schoolteacher and administrator, her profession is not *good enough* for the New Woman movement. Mina is too traditional to be an independent woman and in fact “abides by the group’s will instead of making an individual decision,” when New Woman were themselves concerned with the individual, a woman making her own decisions as opposed to following her husband.<sup>141</sup> While Hardy supported women’s rights, Stoker was equally inspired by the New Woman, but took the opposite approach. The New Woman was so different from what a woman should be that by the last decade of the nineteenth century, she was everywhere in literature and in the public imagination. Sally Ledger cites the trials of Oscar Wilde as events that captivated the public and reveal the anxieties

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<sup>139</sup>Senf, “Dracula: Stoker’s Response,” 37.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 45-6.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 48.

of sex and gender.<sup>142</sup> Both Oscar Wilde and the New Woman threatened established gender roles and opened a firestorm of critics to maintain the status quo. Andrea Peterson notes that these critics,

Although initially limited to a few male journalists writing for a handful of periodicals, these extreme and alarmist views were swiftly perpetuated and popularized by major newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph*, irrespective of the fact that most New Women writers actually sought to reform marriage rather than eradicate it and frequently promoted sexual abstinence.<sup>143</sup>

Adding to the problems of the New Woman movement was the division between its writers. Andrea Peterson cites these divisions that carried over into the suffrage movement, and led to criticisms over single-issue women's groups made up primarily of middle-class women who ignored the needs of working-class women.<sup>144</sup> The New Woman was a middle-class movement, a fictional role model created by working middle-class women who could not or did not aspire to the Victorian ideal. As with the suffrage movement, working-class women were left out of the loop. Sally Ledger too, notes that the movement was not clearly defined by writers, as "Sarah Grand championed sexual purity and motherhood," while Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is "notable for Sue Bridehead's vehement opposition to legal marriage."<sup>145</sup> Meanwhile Egerton championed sexual freedom as did Schreiner. Grand also championed education and imperialism, while Schreiner came out against the latter. Egerton was non-political and did not think women should have the right to vote, while Schreiner and Grand were both suffragists. The

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<sup>142</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 95.

<sup>143</sup> Heilmann, *Feminist Forerunners*, 24.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>145</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 11-12.

literary New Woman was a complex figure that could not be tied, either literally or figuratively. The real New Woman—Britain's working middle-class women was no less complex. Yet another cause of difficulty in pinning down the New Woman was the Victorian media. Newspapers and magazines of the day lampooned and vilified the New Woman, and created an entirely new definition—one that became a media sensation at the turn of the century.



## Chapter IV

### The New Woman and the Media at the Turn of the Century

The New Woman was the polar opposite of the Victorian ideal woman. She wore “practical clothes,” rode bicycles, smoked in public, and most shocking of all, “refused the traditional marriage scenario, opting for a single lifestyle and professional career instead.”<sup>146</sup> These characteristics provoked much comment from British society. Cartoonists of the day featured the New Woman wearing pants, smoking, riding bicycles, and engaging in traditional male activities. The antithesis of what a proper woman should be, according to Iveta Jusová, the New Woman “ranked among the most controversial phenomenon in late-nineteenth-century Britain,” and were scorned as “the odd woman,” the “revolting daughter,” the “wild woman,” and the “novissima.”<sup>147</sup> With their shocking behavior and unladylike ambitions in the public sphere, it is not hard to see why they were viewed with such scorn. There are many examples of New Woman in late Victorian literature. What she was in literature has been argued by literary critics and historians since the 1970s when the New Woman was dug up by feminist scholars, and pushed into the disciplines of English and Women’s History.<sup>148</sup> The literary New Woman was not a

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<sup>146</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 1.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ardis, *New Woman, New Novels*, 7.

concrete realization. For Sarah Grand, a New Woman wanted an education and equal marriage, for Schreiner and Egerton, sexual freedom. In reality, New Woman was an educated middle-class woman in a professional career. Sally Ledger notes that “To a certain extent, the history of the New Woman is only available to us textually, since the New Woman was largely a discursive phenomenon.”<sup>149</sup> Ledger further argues in favor of the “historical” New Woman in that “the way in which she was constructed as a product of discourse, is just as ‘real’ and historically significant as what she actually was.”<sup>150</sup> Whether or not she existed in the real world, the fact that she existed as a model of womanhood is “significant” in late Victorian history. Andrea Peterson agrees that the New Woman was a figure in fact and fiction, and the definition of the movement as a whole, changed after the 1970s. She writes that

In recent years, the term New Woman has broadened both its parameters of definition and chronology. Ledger cites various feminist historians, such as Judith Walkowitz and Lucy Bland, who have used the term New Woman to describe both ‘late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminists,’ thereby inaugurating ‘a genealogy of first- and second-generation New Woman,’ with the second generation living and writing in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>151</sup>

As Peterson notes, some historians have broadened the term “New Woman” to include all forms of late nineteenth- century and early twentieth-century feminisms and “first” wave feminists. Not everyone shares this view. The New Woman and New Woman writers have been dismissed by many literary critics and historians. Ann Ardis cites Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) in which she refers to the works of Olive Schreiner, George Egerton, and Sarah Grand as “minor works by ‘minor’ women

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<sup>149</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 3.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Heilmann, *Feminist Forerunners*, 24-5.

writers.”<sup>152</sup> Reactions against the New Woman refute this view. The New Woman was a media sensation that became a pop cultural icon. Separating this icon from the “literary” New Woman, and the New Woman in practice—working middle-class women, is quite a challenge. The Victorian media only added more confusion by adding fuel to fire and creating their own New Woman. This sensationalism catapulted the New Woman into the British consciousness and the “Woman Question” became a major issue for the Victorian public. The reaction to the Victorian media’s New Woman—both positive and negative reveals that this New Woman is just as complex and difficult to categorize and her literary counterpart.

*The Media’s New Woman: Radical Man-Hating Feminist and Her Critics*

In 1894, the *Grantham Journal* asked its female readers to define the New Woman. The paper’s reasoning for definition is given simply as, “At the present moment, when the New Woman is much to the front, it is interesting to know what some other women think of her.”<sup>153</sup> Because the New Woman was already a phenomenon at this time, the paper joined many others in attempting to gauge public opinion. At least a dozen women were interviewed by the writer, and their opinions are unanimous in condemning the New Woman. The writer proclaims,

She is variously described as “A fresh darn on the original blue stocking” (which definition received the prize), “The old maid trying to be the young man,” “Sex of one and half a dozen of the other,” “A creature of opinions decided and skirts divided,” “One who has ceased to be a lady, and has not yet attained to be a gentleman,” “The unsexed section of the sex,” “Man’s newest and best reason for remaining single,” “Madam become Adam,” “A fast sailing craft sailing near the

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<sup>152</sup> Ardis, *New Woman, New Novels*, 6.

<sup>153</sup> “Definitions of the ‘New Woman’,” *Grantham Journal*, September 22, 1894, 6.

wind, and carrying no balliast,” “An old dish with new seasoning,” “Mannishness minus manliness.”<sup>154</sup>

Sadly, the writer neglects to say where these women came from, their occupations, or class. Whatever their station, it appears that all women perceived the New Woman in a negative light, but these “definitions” are negative opinions from the women of Grantham, England, with the first “definition,” the writer finds amusing and refers to the New Woman as a mend on the “original” blue stocking. This reader believes that the New Woman is a hole or not a “whole” woman when compared to the “original” Victorian woman, and she must be mended or put back together. The second opinion, utilizes a common theme of New Woman critics by making light of their supposed gender confusion. The New Woman was perceived as halfway between woman and man, or women who wanted to be men. Nearly all of the other “definitions” point out this perception, “Madam become Adam,” and “Sex of one and half a dozen of the other,” and “One who has ceased to be a lady, and not yet attained to be a gentleman.” This perception of a “third sex” became endemic in the British media, and catapulted the New Woman into the position of one of Britain’s greatest threats at home. They were women who wanted to become men, and they were also neither. That they wanted equality with men, to the media, meant that they were some kind of “third sex” that threatened men.

Another newspaper article claimed that men were on trial by a jury of New Women. “A Reply to the New Woman” appeared in *The Newcastle Weekly Courant* in 1894. The author of this article takes issue with New Woman novelists—Sarah Grand in particular. In the introduction, the author alleges that,

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<sup>154</sup>“Definitions of New Woman,” 6.

The end-of-the-century young man is on trial. The lady novelist is his judge, and the jury, packed largely with New Women, will have little hesitation in finding him guilty. Manifold are his crimes, if but the half one hears to be true. He is selfish, luxurious, effeminate, and vicious. He has no pluck... He tyrannises abominably over poor defenseless women. To sum up, he is a worthless and somewhat disgusting creature, and Woman—the New Woman—rebellious against her natural instincts, will no more seek intercourse with him, but rather shriek from him with aversion and loathing.<sup>155</sup>

According to the author, Victorian gender roles have been turned upside down; men are now weak and effeminate while women are more masculine, and more importantly, both effeminate men and masculine women despise one another. While charges are brought up against men, the author wastes no time in condemning not only the New Woman, but New Woman literature as well. He writes that

The indictment is a heavy one, and it is variously framed. It is chiefly contained in the works of the new female school of physiologico[sic]-psychological fiction, with which novel-readers are becoming so unpleasantly familiar. The neurotic story has long since supplanted the erotic. We are forced now to read of heredity and pathology, of diseased babies, and of anaemia, morbidly introspective demands full of self-torturings and soul-questionings.<sup>156</sup>

The author believes that New Woman literature is to blame for this inversion of the sexes. He alleges that New Woman literature is full of perverse topics such as venereal disease, and psychological issues that the general reader is “forced” to read. The novel he describes is Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*, in which one woman is doomed to marry a syphilitic husband, contracts syphilis herself, and succumbs to insanity, while giving birth to a disabled infant. According to the writer, New Woman novels written by women for women, paint a picture of men as a “vile, degraded being, diseased and enfeebled, as a

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<sup>155</sup> “A Reply to the New Woman,” *The Newcastle Weekly Courant*, December 1, 1894, issue 11472.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

rule, in mind and body.”<sup>157</sup> He names Sarah Grand who has taken “The modern Caliban, the Man of the Moment,” and “has his lineaments vividly portrayed by her with a hand that does not spare. She has ruthlessly torn aside the veil which hitherto shrouded his iniquities, and he stands revealed... in his utter repulsiveness.”<sup>158</sup> Grand has exposed the physically ill and morally bankrupt Victorian man, but to the author, Grand’s assessment reflects on *all* men. Furthermore, the New Woman is a “Shrieking Sisterhood” who scorn the decay of man and proclaim “with refreshing frankness that, in spite of the decay of male manners and morals, ‘the manners of the New Woman are perfect.’ I would say the same of her literary style!” The disdain of the author for the New Woman is evident. They are like harpies blaming men for all their ills, while proclaiming their superiority—a complete reversal of “normal” gender roles. He also takes one last jab at New Woman literature. The entire article is based upon the author’s belief that the New Woman has begun a battle of the sexes, and that men are losing. Of course nothing could be further from the truth. Sarah Grand’s novel, for example, shows what can happen when ignorant girls marry morally weak men, leading to the conclusion that Grand is calling for a higher education and moral standard for both men and women, a conclusion lost on this particular author.

Critics of the New Woman can also be found among their fellow novelists. The *Grantham Journal* interviewed Victorian novelist Sir Hall Caine in 1894. The author states that Hall Caine “cannot resist the feeling that there is among the leaders of what is

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<sup>157</sup>“A Reply to the New Woman.”

<sup>158</sup>Ibid.

called the New Womanhood an erroneous idea of the lives that men lead.”<sup>159</sup> Having heard from the New Woman novelist side, the paper appeals to a male novelist to set the record straight on “real” Victorian men. The author quotes Hall Caine as saying,

“I have travelled a good deal,” he says, “lived much among men, and claim to know my own sex, and I say confidently that by far the larger proportion of men live clean and wholesome lives. At the same time, I am conscious that many men live impurely, and that there is a danger that women be thrust in ignorance into purely conventional marriages, which, if they knew more, they would shrink from in horror. My position is this: that a woman should marry for love; that in order to marry for love she should be free to love only where her judgment approves, and that a judgment based on ignorance may be dangerously unsound.”<sup>160</sup>

Hall Caine dismisses the generalizations of the New Woman—or what the media thinks that the New Woman generalizes, that all men are bad. There are some bad men out there, to be sure, but it is important for women to be aware, and choose a husband wisely. Caine agrees completely with Sarah Grand that women should marry for love and be on the lookout for dangerous men. He further drives home this point,

I am forced to the conclusion that all women should know certain facts about the world in which they live. To tell girls the kind of life that some men live might have the effect of rubbing the bloom off their modesty; but even that is better than that their happiness should be wrecked through ignorance. The first generation of the emancipated always have to pay for their emancipation, and so, may be, girls of the present day will have to pay the price of knowledge. But all this will amend itself; men men’s lives will become purer when women demand that they shall be pure; so that in a generation or two we shall get back for woman that sweetness and bloom that is half her charm, and that freedom in the choice of a life-partner which is her inalienable right.<sup>161</sup>

Caine believes that women have a right to marry for love and a right to happiness.

Marrying for love will benefit both women and men, and the family as a whole. This all

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<sup>159</sup> “Mr. Hall Caine on the ‘New Woman,’” *Grantham Journal*, September 29, 1894.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

sounds positive, however, Caine states that when they marry for love, women will get back their charm and innocence—a sly reference that Caine is not altogether attracted to a New Woman. He ends the interview by taking a step back. He criticizes the New Woman by stating what he believes to be their ultimate failure—the failure to address the simple “fact” that men and women are unequal.<sup>162</sup> According to Caine, the New Woman does not talk of the “absolute” inequality of the sexes that “began in the Garden of Eden, and will go on till the last woman is born.” He adds that

It is not an inequality of intellect, but of sex. How can we escape from the belief that woman is the subject creature? Once a woman marries, she becomes conscious of this, willy nilly. There is no getting over the essential inequality of sex. The male is of necessity the dominant creature. Nature tells us so in a thousand voices... This great truth was recognized in the Garden of Eden, it has been recognized in all history, and must be recognized in the end. Can we think that a group of women at the end of the nineteenth century are going to alter all this, to reverse the order of all the ages and all the climes, and change the laws of nature?<sup>163</sup>

For Caine, the New Woman movement is a failure because for all their hopes for women, women are still the weaker sex, a “fact” known to the western civilization and written in the Bible itself. The New Woman movement does not and cannot refute the Bible, and thus, cannot change anything all. The movement might as well be a passing fad that will disappear with time. While he may agree with them on certain points, Hall Caine does not take the New Woman seriously, and his overall message is that no one else should either. Women have always been subservient to men (in western civilization at least) and always will be. The Bible says this must be. Western culture says this must be. The New Woman movement was destined to lose.

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<sup>162</sup>“Mr. Hall Caine and the ‘New Woman.’”

<sup>163</sup>Ibid.



*The New Woman Fights Back: Supporters and the Victorian Media*

Newspapers and magazines across Britain took the New Woman and turned her into a dangerous third sex. Reviled in the press and the subject of popular gossip, supporters and champions of the movement fought back against this image. In a direct response to Hall Caine's interview, actress Helene Gingold wrote a letter to the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* to express her opinions of the New Woman and refute Hall Caine.<sup>164</sup> She states that the New Woman is

The Zeitgeist of the end of the century, and her aim is not to fight, but serve with men in the battle of life. She has found out that there is something for her to live for besides motherhood, pickling and sewing. Pickling and sewing I dismiss with the remark that our great manufacturers do the things much better and far more economically...

Gingold makes the case for careers outside the home, because with the advances in technology, women have fewer ways to work at home. Rather than challenging male supremacy in a battle of the sexes, Gingold argues that the New Woman wants to help men in the workplace and at life. Gingold then tackles the issue of motherhood, "As for motherhood, it is difficult to choose between the prunes and prisms of our grandmothers and the laxity of maternal parents of the to-day, who accept the state of maternity without a thought to the earnest of duties thereof."<sup>165</sup> Gingold asserts that girls of today rush into marriage and motherhood without much thought, and then find themselves bored with their lives, and trapped. She contrasts these girls and women of the past with the New Woman:

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<sup>164</sup> Helene Gingold, "The New Woman: A Vindication." *The Pall Mall Gazette*, September 28, 1894, issue 9209.

<sup>165</sup> Gingold, "The New Woman: A Vindication."

She can work in nearly all departments as well as man himself, and instead of unsexing her, this has broadened her sympathies and lessened infinitely her unlovely characteristics of pettiness and spite. The New Woman has been brought up with brothers, has joined in their studies and games, and through it has become bright in intellect, strong of limb, and beautiful to look upon.<sup>166</sup>

The New Woman, according to Gissing is a different breed of women from earlier generations because she is better educated, more physically fit, can think for herself, and is ready for a life outside the home, as well as within it. Previous generations of women

were justly considered the subordinates of men. With the glamor taken off they were vaporish, hysterical idiots, fainting away at the slightest provocation, and sometimes without even the latter excuse. The New Woman accepts life as a reality, knowing there is something to accomplish in it, and this without neglecting either husband or home...<sup>167</sup>

Previous generations of women really were delicate and flighty, and unsuited for a life outside the home because they did not know any better. The New Woman, however, can do it all—work in the home and outside it. Gissing further boasts that, “The true man that is fortunate to win a New Woman for a wife will find that his house is more carefully managed than his grandfather did before him, and moreover possesses what his ancestor never did, and that is, a sympathetic companion.”<sup>168</sup> Gissing asserts that the educated New Woman will make a better wife and companion than the old Victorian model wife. A wife knowledgeable in practical skills is a better help to her husband than a wife who only has domestic skills. Lastly, Gissing takes aim at Hall Caine.

Mr. Hall Caine has said that every woman finds out her inequality to man after she is married. This is a sweeping assertion. Every man is not Mr. Hall Caine, and a clever woman on finding out she has married a fool, will not worship that man simply because he is a man. Mr. Hall Caine has also said words to the effect that

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<sup>166</sup>Gissing, “The New Woman: A Vindication.”

<sup>167</sup>Ibid.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid.

the men he has met have led pure lives. Has Mr. Caine observed the idle ‘hupper suckles,’ as Jeames says? Or is he the genius who consorts only with his own kind?<sup>169</sup>

Gingold deflects Hall Caine’s own words back at him. Hall Caine overgeneralized women and men in his article, and Gingold makes note of that. A woman married to an unfit husband will not be happy in her marriage, and even men who lead pure lives have faults. Gingold is thoroughly in favor of the new woman and successfully defends her and refutes critics like Hall Caine.

Domestic work and idleness are the subjects of another article supporting the New Woman. E. Lynn Linton, one of Britain’s first female journalists also responded to New Woman critics. Like Gingold, Linton points to the changes at home as the cause of the New Woman movement, “This movement among women, like so much else, is due to the new conditions of society and domestic economy, whereby restlessness has been created and the home occupations which once absorbed the sex have been superseded by general and special providers.”<sup>170</sup> Advances in technology and society have created a vacuum in domestic life that women are struggling to fill. The struggle has created an anxiety among women, and this anxiety is what fuels the New Woman. Linton states that,

With this loss of domestic duties and the cessation of domestic activities the home naturally becomes monotonous, and the girls refuse to stay in it if they can in any way escape, while the married women delegate their dwindled duties to the servants, and stream out to the club and the shops, their friends and the office, for the excitement home cannot afford them. Anything for a change! In familiarity breeds contempt, sameness creates satiety; and change from even good to bad is preferable to an unbroken round of good.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup>Gingold, “The New Woman: A Vindication.”

<sup>170</sup>E. Lynn Linton, “Mrs. E. Lynn Linton on the New Woman’s Movement,” *The Newcastle Weekly Courant*, March 10, 1894, issue 11434.

<sup>171</sup> “Mrs. E Lynn Linton.”

Since there is now less for women and girls to do at home with current technology and servants, whom the middle class can now afford, women are idle and looking for something to do. Linton argues that restlessness and idleness for girls and women is not good for them or anyone. Working outside the home is the lesser of two evils. It is better for women to be kept busy with work than to have them idle. A career of their own is the better alternative to idleness and restlessness at home. Linton, herself a professional career woman, is not surprisingly in favor of women working outside the home.

Among the more serious charges against the New Woman were that they wanted to emasculate men and switch gender roles. In 1894, an article in the *Cheltenham Chronicle* appeared where these charges are debated. “The ‘New Woman’ Defended” a lively response to another article appearing in *The Lady*. The article begins by taking a shot at the media sensationalism of the New Woman claiming that the New Woman is not reviled and in fact, has many supporters, despite the media’s best efforts to claim the contrary.<sup>172</sup> The author wishes to know what men really think about the New Woman without all the media sensation. The author argues that, “Man has always had the privileged of coming and going as he pleases. Women may not seek to fetter him, but she has as much right to know where he goes and what he does as he has to know her outgoings and incomings—that is to say if she be his wife.”<sup>173</sup> Men, the author states, are hypocritical in that they demand obedience from their wives, but do not feel the need to be loyal in return. Husband and wife should be equal and that is what the New Woman is

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<sup>172</sup> “The ‘New Woman’ Defended,” *The Cheltenham Chronicle*, August 11, 1894, issue 4411, p. 3.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

trying to be, the equal wife. The author continues that women should seek a career outside the home, because within the home, “her services as nurse and housekeeper deserve a monetary recognition over and above the bed and board and general maintenance her husband is bound to give her.”<sup>174</sup> Women work in the home and are not paid for it and their husbands are unwilling to pay her; therefore, women will have to have a career outside the home in order to earn money for the family. The author admits that “This goes very much against the grain with the average man, who considers that woman should consider being his wife and the mother of his children quite privilege enough for the like of her.”<sup>175</sup> Most men are satisfied with a woman who will act as a wife and mother, and little else. They expect their wives to feel the same, but of course they do not. The author states that the problem lies with the husband.

He is a creature who cannot brook interference; woman generally can. Man is perfectly sure of everything, of his own origination, be it understood. Woman, if worth anything, is open to reason. Man has been spoilt throughout the ages by a rooted sense of his own superiority. Woman, in her supposed inferiority, has suffered and thought, and consequently she wears her honors meekly, and lets man down in such a tender fashion that he hardly knows where he is, and would fain overstep the boundaries, till he finds that when she has made up her mind she is just as firm as she is gentle.<sup>176</sup>

As Hall Caine argued that male superiority has always been and always will be, this author also states that this has been true, but unlike Hall Caine, sees a change happening at present. Of the New Woman specifically, the author ends with a rebuttal of the belief in a battle of the sexes:

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<sup>174</sup>“The ‘New Woman’ Defended.”

<sup>175</sup>Ibid.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

Man is perpetually afraid that woman wants to get the upper hand and assert her superiority, but that is not so. The New Woman knows her place; she is the equal of man in conducting the affairs of life, and at last she is aware of it. She expects from him all that he expects from her, and she has been so long tyrannized over that she knows the misery of it, and has too much sense and good feeling to inflict any such ignominy on her whilom lord and master.<sup>177</sup>

There is no battle of the sexes. Women do not wish to topple men from their place in the world. The New Woman wants equality with men, not supremacy. There is nothing to fear, the author suggests, because women know the feeling of oppression, and will not wish it on men, especially their husbands.

The New Woman was not the ghastly figure the media made her out to be. The Victorian media took pieces of the New Woman of literature to create a monster of a woman in order to terrorize the public. This New Woman did not exist in the real world at all, and was a pale shadow and cartoon of the real New Woman who did live and work. The media only added to the confusion as to who these women really were. However, the media did have one positive outcome; it catapulted women's rights into the public consciousness. Everyone was talking about the New Woman from lowly workers, to authors, and actors. The historical New Woman, the New Woman in practice was not the monster the media made her out to be, nor did she quite live up to the expectations of some New Woman writers. Nevertheless, thanks to the media, New Woman in practice gained visibility in the public, and her work in the public sphere, for good or ill, could no longer be ignored by an uninterested public. The media's New Woman was another incarnation that triggered a public response in proponents and opponents. The historical New Woman was even more complex than in fiction.

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<sup>177</sup> "The New Woman Defended."

## Chapter V

### The New Woman in Practice: Careers and Politics in the Public Sphere

The New Woman was a many sided figure. In literature, there was no agreement as to what she was. She was variously, a career woman, and advocate for women's rights, be they sexual freedom, education, suffrage, or some other combination. The media of the day capitalized on these disagreements and created their own New Woman, a man-hating amazon set to dominate the world, pushing men onto the sidelines. This media New Woman further elicited shock and revulsion, as well as admiration and excitement. However, this New Woman is fictional. The New Woman in practice was very different from her portrayal in the media, but like her literary incarnations, did challenge the old Victorian model, and launched themselves into the public world of men.

#### *New Woman Feminism and Class*

Some scholars question whether the New Woman can be called a feminist group at all. Ledger blames the media sensationalism of the New Woman for “narrowing the parameters of the debate on the Woman Question, so that the New Woman novel, and not the ‘real’ New Woman (that is, late Victorian feminists) became the center of controversy.”<sup>178</sup> Critics seized the literary New Woman and radicalized her into a man-

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<sup>178</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 9.

hating monster bent on destroying Britain. Ann Ardis also blames late Victorian media for denying the New Woman movement any substance:

Labeling the New Woman a literary rather than a 'real' phenomenon, these critics locate all 'genuine' change, all 'real' reform, in the nonliterary realm. Thus, they curtail the discussion of art's relation to life that is such a large part of the debate on the New Woman in the early 1890s. Moving literature from the center to the margin of culture, they relegate the New Woman novel to the margin of that margin.<sup>179</sup>

By dismissing New Woman fiction, both critics and historians have dismissed the New Woman figure in real life, burying the New Woman in literature and history as a feminist movement. The issue of class also hurts the New Woman as a feminist movement.

According to Deborah Thom, the New Woman "is impaired by a narrow academicism which leaves it only weakly aligned with the project of feminism."<sup>180</sup> This argument claims that the New Woman was too narrowly defined that it cannot be called a true feminist movement, but is instead more of a class movement. However, the same could be said of late Victorian and early twentieth century feminism as a whole. Many first-wave feminists had strong ties with Liberalism, and most feminist pressure groups were made up of middle- and upper-class women, including the New Woman movement, and the Suffrage Movement.<sup>181</sup> Other single-issue pressure groups included the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and anti-vivisectionists.<sup>182</sup> Ledger notes that the first suffrage societies in Britain were made up of the middle class, even at the turn of the century, when in 1900, 29,000 Lancashire women signed a suffrage petition and sent it to

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<sup>179</sup>Ardis, *New Women, New Novels*, 13.

<sup>180</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 3.

<sup>181</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>182</sup> Ardis, *New Women, New Novels*, 15.



Parliament.<sup>183</sup> In this regard, the New Woman movement was no exception, and its dismissal for classism and elitism is unwarranted. Class played a major part of the New Woman and suffrage movements. The New Woman movement “was confined largely to women (and men) of the middle and upper classes, from bohemian and artistic groups, who either had less need to worry about moral condemnation or who turned their lifestyle into a form of protest, rather than a test of conformity.”<sup>184</sup> Thus, the New Woman began from the middle-class and artistic groups of Britain’s elites. While the scandalous and unconventional behavior of artists and writers could be ignored by society depending upon their popularity and quality of work, not all sins could be forgiven.

Of the many anxieties that plagued Britain at the turn of the century; sex and sexuality were at the forefront. Jusová notes that the Jack the Ripper murders, the scandal of Oscar Wilde, and W.T. Stead’s exposé of child prostitution all rocked Britain to the core.<sup>185</sup> As far as the Victorians were concerned with sex, any deviation whatsoever was enough to demonize anyone—and the New Woman movement’s desire for sexual freedom of women threatened the family, female virginity, patriarchy, and Britain’s superiority, yet, major changes occurred in Victorian domestic life. The latter half of the nineteenth century brought an increase in birth control advice and awareness through books and pamphlets, less restrictive dresses for women, reduced birthrates and smaller families, as well as a higher standard of living especially for single women—and as a

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<sup>183</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 37.

<sup>184</sup> Brown and Fraser, *Britain since 1707*, 367.

<sup>185</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 1-2.

result, a female consumerist culture.<sup>186</sup> British society and especially for women was already changing. The Victorian family was smaller and women had access to more wealth, with which they entered into a consumer culture. The old model of womanhood was becoming outdated. The “sexually feckless and promiscuous” New Woman was seen as a threat to male sexuality, a threat that eventually spilled over into politics with their “greater political demands.”<sup>187</sup> These “demands” inevitably included suffrage. Women had made small gains in civil rights with the passing of the Married Women’s Property Acts, the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, and the passage of laws that awarded women partial, and later the option of sole custody of their children. However, these gains neither brought equality, nor lifted women up from second status citizens. The New Woman openly addressed these issues and more.

#### *Victorians on the Defensive: Attacks on Feminism*

Following the trickle of gains in civil rights, the New Woman desired “women’s economic independence and sexual liberation.”<sup>188</sup> Control of their own bodies and income provided women with a greater role in Britain, and once women were allowed to contribute to society beyond the private sphere, they could also enter into politics. Bodily and economic independence were seen by the New Woman as stepping stones toward equality. Not surprisingly, they were viewed with horror and blamed for many calamities that befell Britain at the turn of the century. Sally Ledger notes that, “Despite the middle-

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<sup>186</sup>Brown and Fraser, *Britain since 1707*, 367-8.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 369.

<sup>188</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 4.

and upper-class orientation of the fictional New Woman..., the New Woman as she was constructed in the periodical press of the fin de siècle was repeatedly linked with socialism and with the working man.”<sup>189</sup> Women’s rights and equality obviously had socialist undertones that enemies of the movement were quick to exploit. Critics “blamed the New Woman for the spread of socialism and nihilism... undermining the long-term interests of the English nation,” and they were seen as “dangerous to the integrity of the English ‘imperial race’ and the institution of the British Empire,” and lastly, “not as a remedy...but as a cause” for Britain’s decline.<sup>190</sup> During this period of decline in Britain, the New Woman was blamed as a cause for the degeneration of Britain’s manpower at home and in the empire. Coupled with increasing imperial competition from France and Germany, Britain was anxious over the state of its empire. However, New Woman writers were just as worried over the state of the empire. Jusová notes that, “...as present-day feminist scholars have begun to acknowledge, many British fin-de-siècle women were actually deeply interested in the maintenance of the British Empire, and their work was often steeped in their imperial culture’s racial bias.”<sup>191</sup> The empire was at the forefront of concern and New Woman writers used the empire as an avenue into the public sphere. They argued that in order for Britain to remain a world power, women needed to be given equal opportunities with men. Women needed an equal education, equal job opportunities, and a voice in politics to help maintain the empire and Britain’s supremacy. Thus, the New Woman linked colonization with women’s rights. Jusová cites

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<sup>189</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 35.

<sup>190</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 4.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 5.

Vron Ware and recognizes that “feminist ideology and practice were shaped by the social, economic, and political forces of imperialism to a greater extent than has been acknowledged,” and Anne McClintock drives home this point, “...although women and men did not experience imperialism in the same way... white women were not the helpless onlookers of empire but were ambiguously as complicit both as colonizers and colonized, privileged and restricted, acted upon and acting.”<sup>192</sup> Rather than confined to the home, women were active within the empire. Rosemary George agrees with this view and cites Denise Riley’s idea of the “social sphere” to refer to an invisible line where women’s private sphere met the public sphere, but was safe enough not to cause concern from patriarchy; within this “social sphere, women “became both agents and objects of reform in unprecedented ways,’ but these divisions also kept ‘women’s spheres’ out of politics.”<sup>193</sup> As agents of the empire, Victorian principles, and British superiority, women could move out of the private sphere and into the public realm, but stop short of politics while safely staying in women’s social sphere. Feminists, especially, the New Woman used the empire to further their agendas and step over that line, though not all New Woman crossed the political line. However, Victorian patriarchy was not the only obstacle in the way of women’s rights.

Science too, was against them as it seemingly validated Victorian prejudices against women in the public sphere. If women were intellectually inferior to men, they simply had no place in public life, especially politics. With the findings of scientists like

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<sup>192</sup> Jusova, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 6.

<sup>193</sup> Rosemary Marangoly George, “Homes in the Empire, Empire in the Homes.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 26 (1993-1994), 95-127, 100.

Charles Darwin, politicians and the British patriarchy had scientific “proof” of women’s inferiority. Jusová states that

The evolutionary discourse enlisted the Victorian ideal of ascetic, self-disciplined femininity for the purposes of the English bourgeois nation and the British Empire. Science was manipulated by those who wished to keep middle-class women out of the professional world and to restrain their sexuality to conjugal beds so that they would not be distracted from successfully reproducing the British “imperial race.”<sup>194</sup>

Science was still used to reinforce the status quo and keep women in the private sphere even in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Patricia Murphy notes that Darwin’s *Descent of Man* “acted as a kind of cultural trigger for stimulating literary interest in the subject through the treatise’s gender-charged scientific assertions and the prominence of its controversial author.”<sup>195</sup> Darwin can be credited with beginning the “scientific” argument of women’s intellectual inferiority, and others were quick to contribute. In 1869, J. McGrigor Allan published an article “On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women,” where he wrote, “man’s realm is the intellect—woman’s the affections.”<sup>196</sup> Another contributor, Luke Owen Pike remarked that women throughout history had always been emotional and incapable of rational thought.<sup>197</sup> Even psychologists reinforced this view. In 1891, psychologist Harry Campbell stated that women are

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<sup>194</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 9.

<sup>195</sup> Patricia Murphy, *In Science’s Shadow: Literary Constructions of Late Victorian Women* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 1-2.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 11 quoting J. McGrigor Allan, “On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women.” *Journal of Anthropological Society of London* 7 (1869), cxcv-ccxix.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 11 quoting Luke Owen Pike, “Woman and Political Power.” *Popular Science Monthly* 1 (1872): 82-94.

“inclined to be weak-willed, acting upon the impulse of the moment...”<sup>198</sup> All of this damning “evidence” from experts served to combat New Woman writers and other feminists who argued the opposite. In 1874, at a gathering for anthropological enthusiasts, Emma Wallington refuted these claims, “The weight of the evidence goes to show that the intellectual capacity of woman does not differ from man’s more than that of men differs among themselves; in other words, the differences are not so much of sex as of individuals.”<sup>199</sup> Not surprisingly, Wallington’s rebuttal was met with scorn because both her arguments and, presumably her gender were against her. It is not difficult to see that feminists had the scientific community against them—as well as the rest of society. The New Woman argued against the science of Darwin and others, with the help of professional women and pro-feminist scientists. The most extraordinary of these was Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Britain’s first female doctor and a feminist. She argued, as did the New Woman writers that “there is sex in mind and there should be sex in education.”<sup>200</sup> For women to prove their worth to society and obtain professional careers—and ultimately equality in politics, they must first achieve equal educational opportunities as stronger women meant a stronger Britain.

Advocating for equal educational opportunities was nothing new. A century earlier, in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft advocated the same in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. New Woman writers took up the mantle left by Wollstonecraft to advocate for

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<sup>198</sup> Murphy, 13 quoting Harry Campbell, *Differences in the Nervous Organisation of Man and Woman: Physiological and Pathological*. (London: H.K. Lewis), 1891.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. 17 quoting Emma Wallington. “The Physical and Intellectual Capacities of Woman Equal to Those of Man.” *Anthropologia* 1 (1874): 552-65.

<sup>200</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, 9.

women's education and the entry of women into the public sphere. As Wollstonecraft herself argued,

my main argument is built on the this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be ineffacious with respect to its influence on general practice. And how can woman be expected to co-operate unless she knew why she ought to be virtuous? unless freedom strengthen her reason till she comprehend her duty, and see in what manner it is connected with her real good? If children are to be educated to understand the true principle of patriotism, their mother must be a patriot...<sup>201</sup>

Wollstonecraft believes that women cannot become full citizens in society, if they lack an education. She argued that women could never benefit Britain if they remained uneducated because a limited education limited women in society and brought down the nation. Wollstonecraft blames the notion that women are weaker than men on the lack of education for women:

The education of women has, of late, been more attended to than formerly, yet they are still reckoned a frivolous sex, and ridiculed or pitied by the writers who endeavor by satire or instruction to improve them. It is acknowledged that they spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves—the only way women can rise in the world—by marriage.<sup>202</sup>

Here, Wollstonecraft states that women are second class citizens because they are more concerned with their appearance and attracting a husband than exercising their minds. Marriage was ironically, the only avenue by which a woman could rise in society; hence, lack of education and the emphasis on marriage reinforced the notion that women were the weaker sex. The system of patriarchy kept women as second class citizens and in turn,

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<sup>201</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Mineola: Dover, 1996), 2.

<sup>202</sup>Ibid., 9.

led to the belief that women were weaker. This argument easily applied to women of the Victorian period. Marriage was still the only way a woman could rise in society, even though women in the late Victorian Britain could own property and have their own income. Wollstonecraft further drives home the need for education:

I speak of the improvement and emancipation of the whole sex, for I know that the behavior of a few women, who by accident, or following a strange bout of nature, have acquired a portion of knowledge superior to that of the rest of their sex, has often been overbearing; but there have been instances of women who, attaining knowledge, have not discarded modesty, nor have they always pedantically appeared to despise the ignorance which they labored to disperse in their own minds.<sup>203</sup>

Wollstonecraft admits that some educated women have been known to upset the patriarchy and behave in unwomanly ways. This comment almost anticipates the New Woman a century later, who were famous and infamous for those very reasons. Greater education meant more opportunities for women, and these opportunities were located outside the private sphere. Educated women like Elizabeth Garrett Anderson were an anomaly in mid-Victorian Britain, but by the late Victorian period, they were becoming increasingly common, though still not of equal standards with men. Picking up where Wollstonecraft left off, New Woman writers argued for a new model of womanhood, one where women were given an education and a career outside the home.

### *The Professional Career Woman: The Real New Woman*

While the media was raging over the New Woman, and their perceptions of the New Woman, the “real” New Woman of Britain was gaining ground in education and in their choice of careers. By the 1890s, more and more women entered the professions and

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<sup>203</sup> Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, 182.



carved out a niche for themselves as secretaries, bookkeepers, typists, and schoolteachers. This real life New Woman like her literary counterparts was the subject of much gossip. An article in *The Spectator* titled “The Professional Woman,” appeared in 1906 during the height of the suffrage movement in which the editors highlight the differences between Victorian women and these new professional women. The writer argues that

In the professional woman of today, we see a new development. Two characteristics hitherto inconspicuous have come to the front—independence, and the desire for definite work. By this independence we mean something far wider than the mere wish to have her own way, and by this industry something far more active than mere dislike or disapproval of idleness.<sup>204</sup>

The editor noted these women differed from the Victorian woman as they are far more independent and desired to work. He also mentioned that the women desired a professional career not out of a simple desire for work, but “something” more. The differences between professional women and Victorian women were further highlighted:

There is no more remarkable sign of the times than the contrast that is presented by the Early Victorian woman who made her own living, and the woman of the twentieth century who makes hers. The gentlewoman of fifty years ago who could not afford to do nothing had only one thing she could do. She must perforce teach children, a task for which she had often no aptitude, and generally no training. She was in the position of a dependent, chosen, not on the ground of proficiency, but on the ground of character. No prizes gleamed before her eyes, she had no field for her ambition. From social pleasures and chances of marriage, she was almost entirely cut off. Naturally a sensible woman did not get out to earn her bread if she could help it. Nowadays hundreds are earning it from choice. In the intellectual division of the middle class the women considerably outnumber the men.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> “The Professional Woman,” *The Spectator*, February 17, 1906.  
[http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/17<sup>th</sup> february-1906/10/the-professional-woman](http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/17th%20february-1906/10/the-professional-woman) (accessed June 24, 2015), 10.

<sup>205</sup> “The Professional Woman.”

Fifty years ago, women essentially had no job other than that of mother and teaching children, and naturally women did not work outside the home. The last sentence says much about Britain in the first decade of the twentieth century. Not only are women working a common occurrence, but in the “intellectual division” more women are employed or seeking employment in this field than men. This is a far cry from the Darwinian view that women were intellectually inferior to men. The article states that the gateway for women to professional careers was education. “A good education nowadays is cheap, cheaper than a bad one. The girls’ public day schools prepare pupils—or give them the chance of preparing themselves—for many of the tests which fence off the arena of the professional woman,” adding that “Charity organizations, secretaries, hospital almoners, and factory superintendents swell the ranks of professional women.”<sup>206</sup> Advances in education, particularly girls’ education brought women into the workforce. More women had access to education, and in turn, were able to enter into professional careers. Women benefited from the already changing attitudes towards women’s education and working outside the home. These women were essentially “New Woman.” Among these women are Emily Davies, who campaigned for equal education and founded Girton College at Cambridge for women in 1873; Elizabeth Garrett Anderson who became one of Britain’s first female doctors, and her younger sister Millicent Garrett Fawcett, who married Henry Fawcett, a cabinet minister for Gladstone and suffrage supporter—Millicent herself later led the NUWSS.<sup>207</sup> All three women came from

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<sup>206</sup>“The Professional Woman,” 11.

<sup>207</sup> Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women’s Suffrage Movement* (New York: Rivers Oram Press, 2000), 60-1.

middle-class backgrounds and had active careers outside the home. All three women also supported the suffrage movement.

However, career women did not necessarily sit well with some. The article takes several issues with women in the professions. First and foremost, is that a career interferes with their work in the home:

The truth is that a woman who becomes enamored of her work—and the great majority of women who work with their heads do become enamored of it—cannot stop working. Regular hours are difficult for women to keep... They have had no time which they could look on as certainly their own, and the habit of age sticks by them.<sup>208</sup>

Of course if women are working, according to Victorian logic, their role as wife and mother suffered. Many MPs and anti-suffragists took issue with this “fact,” including the editors of *The Spectator*. They further argue that “It is a truism to say that women love power. Speaking generally, the woman without children feels the lack of it...” but adds that

The fact remains that most professional women remain single; and when they do not, they give up their professions. To this, as to almost every generation, we find notable exceptions... A few, a ‘very few, married women with children have succeeded in a remarkable degree, especially in medicine. But such cases can never be common, as they necessitate quite abnormal health and strength.<sup>209</sup>

The author states that a woman can only be a real woman once she becomes a mother, and can never find the satisfaction in a career that she can in motherhood. The only saving grace of the professional woman is that they either remain single or give up their jobs for the sake of motherhood, and women who manage both are still considered “abnormal.” These sentiments were no doubt expressed by many men and women during

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<sup>208</sup>“The Professional Woman.”

<sup>209</sup>Ibid.

this period. The article ends by trying to strike a balance, “Perhaps in an ideal state of society there would be no professional woman... But we are a long way from any ideal state, and it is certain that the professional woman is a good outcome... At her worst, though a disagreeable, she is not a despicable character, and at her best she has no faults, except her virtues.”<sup>210</sup> In an ideal world, women stayed in the home as they should, however, professional women do contribute positively to society as a whole. The article attempts to sum up the pros and cons of professional women and their benefit to society. The author appears to have mixed feelings for professional women. It reveals the arguments used against these women—that work outside the home will make women poor wives and mothers. The author tries to placate such fears by acknowledging that most women leave their careers upon marriage and that those who remain working while taking care of children, while abnormal, are few and far between.

As for whether women were intelligent enough for a career outside the home, the debate over women’s intelligence was still being waged at the turn of the century. In an article appearing on August 28, 1897, *The Spectator* enters the debate in response to an infamous meeting of the British Association in Toronto, Canada where Sir William Turner presented a paper detailing the intellectual shortcomings of women based on the physiology of the brains of men and women.<sup>211</sup> The author of the article explores the issue of intelligence and sex, and attempts to find a middle ground without offending either side. Of Sir William, the author writes,

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<sup>210</sup>“The Professional Woman.”

<sup>211</sup> “The Brains of Men and Women,” *The Spectator*, August 28, 1897.  
<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/29th-august-1897/10/the-brains-of-men-and-women> (accessed June 24, 2015).

Since Sir William Turner has been, we believe, a rather strong opponent of the admittance of women on equal terms with men in the University, some bias may possibly have crept into the essay which he read, but in the main the facts are incontestable. Men are born into the world with heavier brains than women, and the relative difference continues throughout life.<sup>212</sup>

Without offending Turner and his supporters, the paper agrees with the “fact” that men’s brains are heavier than women. The paper acknowledges that not everyone believes that men are intellectually superior, and by everyone, the paper specifically names the New Woman. Of their opinion, the author writes,

The ‘new woman’ claims that she can compete successfully with man in his own field of work, and we are constantly reading of some woman lawyer, or auctioneer, or professor, whose existence is held to be sufficient answer to these old-fashioned people who think that, in spite of all the ‘new woman’ and ‘revolting daughters,’ woman has still a sphere that is her own to which she should devote herself, and that man has his sphere into which it is not desirable that women should penetrate. It is not a question of placing legal restrictions in the way of feminine action; for many of those who are firmly convinced that women will fail in trying to do men’s tasks, are also quite willing that they should try if they wish to.<sup>213</sup>

The author addresses the New Woman and concedes that there are many people who believe that women should at least be allowed to *try* in the public sphere. This passage reveals many underlying themes in feminism: the hard line New Woman who wants equality, those who oppose any notion of equality, and lastly a group in the middle who believe women are inferior, but must be allowed to enter into the public sphere. The article further delves into the evolutionary biology of the brain to show how men and women differ:

We say that a man with a big neck, denoting an excessive cerebellum, will probably be a man of great will power, of immense but regulated nervous energy... It is true that many men of inferior intellect show the same phenomenon,

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<sup>212</sup>“The Brains of Men and Women,” 10.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., 10.

but they are generally men of power of some kind, if it is only the power of a determined burglar. But turn to women, and it is manifest that women would lose much of their charm if it were. The curve of a woman's neck is one of her attractive features; it would disappear with a powerful cerebellum.<sup>214</sup>

This author echoes Darwin in that women have evolved smaller features for the sake of beauty. Thus, the logic went that a woman with a big heavy brain had a big head, and was not attractive to men—her beauty was sacrificed for intelligence. Even as late as 1897, this belief was still commonplace.

Furthermore, the author continues by citing Darwin and other biologists by stating that women are more mentally unstable:

It is notorious that women are deficient here, that a woman breaks down far oftener, that she fails in great designs, that her energy, while striking, is not sustained, that her nervous power is weaker than that of man. We are told sometimes that physical exercise will change all this, we are pointed to the tall, shapely, handsome women, so many of whom one's eye gladly lights upon, we are reminded of the Amazons, and of tribes where women fight as well as men.<sup>215</sup>

In other words, either women are weak, emotional, and beautiful, or they have equal intelligence, in which case they must be physically built like Amazons to accommodate such a brain. Like Darwin, the article cites strong women as Amazons. The similarities do not end here either. They also make the same argument that if women are as intelligent as men, as the New Woman asserts, where are all the female geniuses? The author states,

Women, it has often been said, have yet to produce their Newton, their Dante, their Aristotle, their Pascal, their Goethe. The assertion is very feebly met by the contention that women's education has been for centuries neglected. It was not education which enabled Pascal as a child to see his way through problems which not one man in a thousand can understand after prolonged mental drill. It was not

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<sup>214</sup>"The Brains of Men and Women," 10.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 10.

education which gave the race its great men poets. ‘They lisped in numbers for the numbers came!’ But where are their feminine equals?<sup>216</sup>

This argument is the same argument that Wollstonecraft, and the New Woman writers made. The latter and Wollstonecraft all advocate for women’s education so that women can shine, but Darwin as well as the author of this article point out that “genius” is inherited. Pascal was a genius, though not educated—although of course, his genius was only realized after he had started his education. The author fails to realize this fallacy as did Darwin. The author concedes that the brains of men and women are different, because the world is divided between male and female; differences are inherent in the sexes.<sup>217</sup> The author does not know why men and women are different—or at least is not willing to answer—and leaves it up to God. The article ends on this conciliatory note that is meant to satisfy all sides of the debate: “What we do not wish to infer from this, is any dogma of sexual inequality. It is not true to say that the sexes are unequal, but it is true to say that they are different and that the Creator designed that each should be complementary to the other.”<sup>218</sup> Although claiming not to take sides, this article refutes the New Woman’s notions of education being the key to women’s genius and equality by following the old-fashioned view of genius as an inherited trait. By stating that men and women are simply different, the author states the obvious and takes the safe way out; however, such an article infuriated New Woman writers and their supporters. Like the old debate, this article solved nothing, but merely showed that the debate was still raging, even while women had begun to enter the professions.

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<sup>216</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>217</sup>“The Brains of Men of Women.”

<sup>218</sup>Ibid.

### *Recognition of Career Women and Feminists*

As controversial as they were, women who did not fit the Victorian model did obtain national recognition. While the *New Woman* ignited a culture war in books and newspapers, real women were also getting noticed. Jihang Park examines two national magazines, the annual *Who's Who* and *Men of the Time*, both of which underwent changes in the latter half of the century in terms of recognition of women:

*Men of the Time*, spite of the name, contained women also, but it is nevertheless significant and symbolic that in 1891 its title was changed to *Men and Women of the Time*. *Who's Who* previously a handbook of the titled and official classes only, changed to its present form in 1897. It then opened its pages to all the most prominent people in the kingdom, whether their prominence was inherited, acquired through the holding of the public offices, or simply the result of ability.<sup>219</sup>

As more and more women entered the professions, their contributions to their field began to be noticed by the public at large. Rather than having their work derided or ignored, these professional women were thrust into the spotlight thanks to such works. The idea of women working was still a novelty in the 1890s; their gender alone thrust them into the spotlight, as did their contributions. Certain women who distinguished themselves in their professions were “rewarded” with recognition in both magazines. Such women included celebrities of their day:

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson was not only one of the first woman physicians, but a staunch feminist. Florence Nightingale was a professional, a feminist, and a social reformer. Lady Florence Dixie was a writer, an explorer, a feminist, and a journalist. In such cases, they are classified according to their principle

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<sup>219</sup> Jihang Park, “Women of Their Time: The Growing Recognition of the Second Sex in Victorian and Edwardian England.” *Journal of Social History* 21, no. 1 (1987): 49-67, 49.



achievement. Anderson was therefore classified as a professional; Nightingale as a social reformer; and Lady Florence as a journalist.<sup>220</sup>

It is interesting to note that none of the women above were classified in a special category for women, but instead were placed under their profession along with men. All of these women came from a middle or upper class background. The first edition of the newly renamed *Men and Women of the Time* paints a very different picture from earlier editions under the old title. In 1862, out of 2272 entries, only 118 were women, comprising 5% of the total for that year; the 1887 edition—the last before the title was changed to *Men and Women* named 108 women who comprised only 4% of the total, while the 1891 edition included 171 women who made up 7% of the total.<sup>221</sup> Although only a two percent increase in twenty-nine years, this shows that more women were entering the workforce and their work was noted by the public; furthermore, Park notices a growing recognition of feminists as well. The 1891 edition was the first to include prominent feminists compared to the 1862 edition that featured no feminists at all.<sup>222</sup> Was the recognition of feminists a positive one? According to Park, the recognition of feminists might not have been completely positive:

The inclusion of these feminist appears to speak for a greater recognition of the women's movement; and yet a closer examination reveals an evident hostility to the suffrage movement and especially to certain sections of it... Significantly, in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, as the women's movement advanced, suffrage became the dominant issue, to the neglect of such other feminist concerns as education and employment. Indeed, many of these early feminists failed to become involved in the promotion of women's political rights... However, by the 1890s, the suffrage movement had converted most women activists, whatever their special interest may have been. This trend was further

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<sup>220</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>221</sup>Park, "Women of Their Time, 52.

<sup>222</sup>Ibid., 53.

strengthened by the dramatic emergence of the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903.<sup>223</sup>

By the 1890s, women's suffrage had become the dominant issue for feminists eclipsing education and sexual freedom advocated by the New Woman. Most feminists came around to the political arena, but as Park states, the Women's Social and Political Union—the official name of the militant suffragists, was looked upon negatively. The Pankhurst women—Emmeline, Christabel, and Sylvia were not featured at all until 1914, when the militant suffragists temporarily suspended their actions to help with the war effort, however Sylvia was still ignored due to her socialist leanings and denunciation of the war.<sup>224</sup> Based on Park's evidence, the Pankhursts were most likely included because of their help for the war effort, and not for any of the militant activities. Militant suffragists like the Pankhursts were hated even by other feminists. As Park notes, feminists were active in all areas of women's issues before the 1890s when suffrage became *the* issue.

#### *New Woman Feminism and the Empire*

One often overlooked political issue that women took part in was the promotion of the empire. New woman novelists like Sarah Grand advocated for sexual freedom for women to improve the English race and the empire, but in reality, there were women who were actively engaged in the politics of empire, although their work has often been ignored until recent times. Sally Ledger notes that “Feminist and historical research has, in the postcolonial years of the late twentieth century, been somewhat perplexed to find

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<sup>223</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>224</sup>Park, “Women of Their Time,” 59.

complicity with, rather than opposition to imperialism among Victorian feminists.”<sup>225</sup> Sarah Grand promoted the empire along with women’s rights in *The Heavenly Twins*, while Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of An African Farm* took the opposite approach. Ledger further argues that using the empire to promote women’s rights was neither unique nor unexpected for feminists groups including the New Woman,

Victorian culture was underpinned by a strong sense of national and racial superiority, which was in turn based on Britain’s imperial status. Middle-class Victorian feminists generally shared these assumptions, often identifying their cause with the British imperial mission. Feminists were able to exploit ideological assumptions about women’s superior moral strength to enable themselves to take up imperial service in the name of Victorian womanhood.<sup>226</sup>

Women as the “moral” guardians of the nation could extend their duties to the empire. However, in order to do this, they had to leave the private sphere and enter the public sphere. Durba Ghosh cites Antoinette Burton’s book, *Burdens of History* (1994) as bringing women imperialists to the attention of scholars, and linking imperialism to suffrage, as women were “active imperialists” who used their concerns and works for the empire “as a way of advertising their ability to be productive members of the nation—and thus ready for the vote.”<sup>227</sup> By becoming active in the empire, women were treading into the public sphere, especially politics. Most groups did so, quietly. One such group was the Victoria League, which was formed in 1901, as the “only predominantly female imperial propaganda society,” but even the League “always permitted men as members,

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<sup>225</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 64.

<sup>226</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, 64.

<sup>227</sup> Durba Ghosh, “Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalization?” *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 3 (2004), 737-55.

and from 1907 recruited male ‘experts’ to the executive committee.”<sup>228</sup> The Victoria League was primarily interested in fostering a sense of unity between the peoples of the empire, while promoting and celebrating British culture. Like most female imperialist groups, the Victoria League has often been ignored. Eliza Riedi agrees with Ghosh that

Although most of these organizations admitted women as members, women’s involvement in the formation of Edwardian popular imperialism has been comparatively neglected. This stems from the unwillingness of ‘traditional’ imperial historians to engage with gender history. Ronald Hyam’s dismissal of feminist history in his 1990 *Empire and Sexuality* is only the most notorious example of this reluctance.<sup>229</sup>

As New Woman writers and groups like the Victoria League show, women were actively concerned with the empire. Promotion of the empire allowed feminists to blur the line between the public and private spheres. The “political” nature of the Victoria League did not escape notice. Riedi notes the three strategies the League adopted to accommodate fears that they were dabbling in politics:

As a woman’s association in a ‘man’s world’ of imperial affairs, the Victoria League adopted three main strategies. First, it insisted that it was ‘apolitical.’ Always acutely anxious to avoid party-political affiliations, the League managed better than most imperial propaganda societies to sidestep close association with the Conservative party... Secondly, it presented itself in deliberately (but misleading) unassertive terms, aspiring in its constitution only to ‘support and assist’ imperial projects. Thirdly, the League restricted its scope of action to include only ‘practical’ work in areas that could be seen as legitimate extension of the ‘domestic sphere’ that Victorian ideology granted to women.<sup>230</sup>

The League wished to protect itself from politics by not identifying with any one political party—no doubt for membership reasons, and also to avoid being disbanded altogether

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<sup>228</sup> Eliza Riedi, “Women, Gender, and the Promotion of Empire: The Victoria League, 1901-1914,” *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (2002): 569-99, 572.

<sup>229</sup>Riedi, “Women, Gender, and the Promotion of Empire,” 570.

<sup>230</sup>*Ibid.*, 572.

for their political work within the empire. Despite claiming not to be interested in politics, the League did engage in political work. They helped with the war effort, combated anti-nationalism, promoted education, channeled funds to hospitals and encouraged hygiene; all of their efforts were actively seen in the wars in South Africa at the turn of the century.<sup>231</sup>

In Riedi's view, the Victoria League women "were claiming their place in the Empire and asserting the value of women's contributions to the imperial project."<sup>232</sup> Through the empire, women could contribute to the politics of Britain, while safely claiming that they were still within the domestic sphere. Education of children, concern for soldiers in war, and hospitals all come from women's alleged natural tendency for caregiving. These were "safe" activities for women, even if they did have one foot in the public sphere. Through their work, the League gained more members and soared in popularity, as evidenced by the fact that in 1901, they had just 148 members, but 1915 membership had swelled to 6,500; most women came from the middle-class, but after 1906, women of the working-class also began to join; Riedi attributes this to the "landslide" victory of the Labour party in 1906 that necessitated an outreach to working class women.<sup>233</sup> The Victoria League was a popular outlet for women to engage in politics, but they were by no means the only political group to do so.

The New Woman was a literary figure, a media cartoon used to scare Victorians at the turn of the century, and a real working professional woman. There was no one New Woman but several. While the cartoon image of a gender bending cartoon is concrete, the

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<sup>231</sup>Riedi, "Women, Gender, and the Promotion of Empire," 573.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid.

<sup>233</sup>Ibid., 577.

literary New Woman is less so. There are multiple New Woman in literature with some wanting equality, some wanting education, some wanting sexual freedom, and all of them wanting love, marriage, a career, and a life of their own. The real New Woman managed to become the first wave of women who juggled a professional career and motherhood at the same time. These women pushed into the public sphere and shocked Victorian Britain, creating a gender panic that created the icon. They also pushed carefully into politics as far as they were allowed to serve their country and the empire; to this end, they acquired political skills that they used to dramatic effect in the fight for suffrage. As with the literary character, the New Woman in practice cannot be simplified; some entered the political realm, other focused on their careers, whatever her aim—she differed greatly from the women of the previous generation. She was an active member of British society and gave Britain a glimpse of what a woman can accomplish if given equal opportunities.

## Chapter VI

### The New Woman: From Fiction to History

The New Woman emerged from the pages of fiction into the real world of turn-of-the-century Britain. In literature, there was no single New Woman. Sarah Grand's New Woman was educated and wanted an equal marriage. Olive Schreiner's New Woman wanted equality and sexual freedom, and George Egerton's New Woman also wanted sexual freedom. Though different, they had many traits in common. They were all independent, educated, and desired equality—though what kind of equality depended on the writer. Whatever her literary incarnation, the New Woman was both a challenge and an alternative to the old Victorian model. The old model was outdated by the 1880s. All women were held to this high standard that was all but unobtainable for working-class women, and proved too much for restless middle-class women. An economic boom in the 1880s, created a consumer culture and new job opportunities for men, of which women wanted a part. As if on cue, the New Woman emerged to give these women something to aspire to. However, the literary New Woman was far from perfect. Grand's New Woman was trapped in a loveless marriage to a sick husband, and Schreiner's New Woman dies in childbirth. Only Egerton's New Woman appears to live a happy life. If the New Woman was to have equality and enjoy opportunities hitherto exclusive to men, Victorian society must change to allow this.

From the literary New Woman came the media's creation, perhaps the best known New Woman. She hated men and threatened the Victorian man and Victorian society. She was a cartoon, and a shadow of what the New Woman really was. The media took the worst qualities of the New Woman in literature to create their Amazonian bogeywoman. However, this New Woman had the intended yet unintended consequence of bringing women's rights to the public consciousness. The "Woman Question" had been a political issue since the 1860s, but the New Woman and the media renewed the conversation. Everyone knew who the New Woman was through the literature and especially through the media. While many fell into the media's trap and feared the New Woman, not everyone did. Some sympathized with her and others advocated for her. Whatever the reaction, she was now in the spotlight as the women's rights and the suffrage movement in particular, benefitted from this exposure.

In practice, the New Woman was different yet similar to her literary counterpart, and completely different from the media creation. She worked outside the home in a professional career and benefitted from a new public education. Rather than tearing Britain down, she supported it through a career as a teacher, a typist, a secretary. She aided her husband outside as well as inside the home. More important was the New Woman contribution to the empire and political issues. The New Woman model provided women with a direct entry into the world of politics through single-issue groups promoting education and the empire. These professional women even won recognition for their work and individual women were featured in Britain's magazines. The New Woman came into prominence through the fiction of feminist authors, and ultimately through her own merit, into the public sphere of Victorian Britain. Though the New



Woman figure is difficult to pinpoint, she embodied the hopes of a life in the public sphere—a goal that became reality for women at the turn of the century. Whether or not they directly challenged Victorian gender roles or took on the label, middle-class women working in professional careers were a new type of woman that differed greatly from the women of the previous of generations. These women became their own New Woman and a valid contributor to feminist movements and British society.

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