"An Emancipated, Intellectualized Bundle of Nerves:" New Woman Identity and Hysteria in Nineteenth Century England

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INTRODUCTION:

Theories of the "Natural" in Social Discourse of the *Fin de Siécle*

> The brusque energetic movements, the attitudes of the arms, the direct speech, the inflexions of the voice, the masculine straight-forwardness and sense of honour and especially the attitude towards men, free from any suggestion either of shyness or audacity, will often suggest the underlying psychic abnormality to a keen observer.
>
> -Havelock Ellis, "Sexual Inversion in Women," 1895

A latchkey in one hand, a marked copy of Ibsen in the other. Swearing loudly with her friends, talking politics and birth control on the moving omnibus. Bobbed hair swinging, she steps onto the pavement at the next stop (sans male escort) and waves a hardy goodbye. Fumbling in her coat pocket for a cigarette, she finds one, lights it, and ambles towards Mrs. Massingberd's house for the feminist meeting *du jour,* a Pioneer Club socialist dialogue.

The clichéd caricature of the New Woman - harpooned in *Punch* cartoons and parodied in London plays and satire magazines - renders a singular picture of feminism in late nineteenth century England. Approximately ten years after the 1882 Married Women's Property Act, the publication of Olive Schreiner's well-received *The Story of an African Farm* (a novel that features both a transvestite and a heroine who proposes marriage), and the founding of the feminist Pioneer Club, it seems surprising that public aversion to female social liberties still thrived on a mainstream level in 1890's England. Gaining ground amidst troubling national crises – rising unemployment and a declining

birthrate, for example – the New Woman feminist wave contended for discursive space within competing theories of the Natural.

Late nineteenth century England saw growing fears that the world's major imperial power was degenerating, in populace number and in English racial purity. The eugenics movement – a project concerned with control of human reproduction – grew in response to anxiety surrounding falling birth rate figures. And as Richard Soloway points out, "generations of Victorians associated high fertility and large families with the vitality and progress of their country, despite the dire warnings of Thomas Robert Malthus and other nineteenth-century political economists," (Soloway 3). And though the rate of 35 to 36 births per 1000 of the population held steady throughout most of Queen Victoria's reign, that figure fell to 28.5 in the 1880's, a decline of more than 21 percent. As medical journals and newspapers urged married females to combat the diminishing population with a greater commitment to family (and specifically the reproductive aspect), "female demands for the vote, expanded education, greater economic, occupational, and professional opportunities, as well as control over property, children, and less explicitly, sexuality, called into question the stability of the family, the nature of authority, the fundamental religious, moral, and scientific basis of gender, and the very future of the race," (Soloway 110).

Jill Davis outlines the combative purpose of eugenics to the feminist project when she calls the enterprise "a specific form in which darwinist ideas came to contest feminist ideas about women's social role in nineteenth century England…predicated on the reduction of people to their sexual and reproductive roles, reasserting the biological binary of man/woman that feminism was struggling to deconstruct," (Gardner and

Rutherford, eds., 20). To extend that sentiment, eugenics not only reinscribed women as biological sustainers of the populace, but attempted to market them as mothers: procreative, but not necessarily sexual.

Interestingly, worried English imperialists were not the only supporters of eugenic theory; members of England's progressive Fabian Society, founded in 1884, subscribed to similar views. The Fabian Society was not a political party but rather a "socialist debating group," whose emergent social ideas came to influence England's Labour Party in the twentieth century. Havelock Ellis, a Fabian member and a major contributor to the burgeoning field of scientific 'sexology,' offers a striking articulation of eugenics thought. Though his 1894 project, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, promotes an enlightened attitude to sexual relations, his early twentieth century *The Task of Social Hygiene* outlines prescriptive guidelines for women from a specifically eugenics perspective:

> The breeding of men lies largely in the hands of women. That is why the question of Eugenics is to a large extent at one with the woman question. The realisation of eugenics in our own social life can only by attained with the realisation of the women movement in its latest and completest phase as an enlightened culture of motherhood, in all that motherhood involves alike on the physical and psychic sides. (Gardner and Rutherford, eds., 20-21)

Similarly, progressive novelist and social theorist Grant Allen writes in "Plain Words on the Woman Question" (*Fortnightly Review* 1889) that while he is "an enthusiast on the Woman Question," he urges "most women to become the mothers of at least four children, or else the [English] race must cease to exist." He continues,

> If some women shirk their natural duties, then a heavier task must be laid upon the remainder. But in any case almost all must become wives and mothers, and almost must bear at least four or five children. In our existing state six are the very fewest that our country can do with.

> …Indeed, so far am I from wishing to keep [the modern woman] in subjection to man, that I should like to see her a great deal more emancipated than she herself as yet at all desires. Only, *her emancipation must not be of a sort that interferes in any way with this prime natural necessity*. (Nelson, ed. 212-213 my emphasis)

Compounding the growing emphasis on motherhood as women's natural station, the rise of England's urban poverty during the 1880's and 1890's added class concers to the public discussion of the 'natural' English race. The inner city slums of the unemployed were viewed as breeding grounds for disease, ignorance, madness, and crime, problems some eugenicists felt so detrimental that the poor should not be allowed to reproduce (Showalter 5). In his essay "English Workers as They Are" (1887), H.M. Hyndman writes, "Everywhere no doubt, there is a certain percentage who are almost beyond hope of being reached at all. Crushed down into the gutter, physically and mentally by their social surroundings, they can but die out, leaving, it is hoped, no progeny as a burden on the better state of things," (Jones 289). By the early twentieth century, Hyndman would fatalistically claim that 25 percent of London's populace lived in extreme poverty (Jones 306), urging upper- and middle-class women to flush out encroaching urban degeneration with refined progeny of their own.

Even urban outreach efforts such as London's Salvation Army used metaphors of race to underline the 'natural' distinction between elite and lower classes. In his book *In Darkest England and Its Way Out* (1890), Salvation Army founder William Booth questions, "As there is a darkest Africa is there not also a darkest England? Civilisation, which can breed its own barbarians, does it not breed its own pygmies? May we not find a parallel at our own doors, and discover within a stone's throw of our cathedrals and palaces similar horrors to those which Stanley has found existing in the great Equatorial

forest?…As in Africa it is all trees, trees, trees, with no other world conceivable, so it is here – it is all vice and poverty and crime," (Showalter 5-6).

The threat of urban poverty – its proximity to civilized life – reached a climax in November 1887 on "Bloody Sunday" when mounted police were summoned by nervous shopkeepers to clear Trafalgar Square of homeless poor who had begun camping out near business establishments. A brief but fierce struggle to clear poor families from the area was recorded in local newspapers, and kept the West End in a state of crisis for weeks afterward (Jones 296). Clearly, class categories were not sufficiently fenced-in to the satisfaction of middle- and upper-class Londoners. West End reclaimed its elite boutique-commercial status as the upper crust of London sought to purify its own.

Disruptive class relations saw their parallel in gender relations. While Africa and India bred the "degenerate races," and London's slums contained the urban poor, feminism posed a frighteningly approximate threat in the late nineteenth century, penetrating the boundaries of the middle- or upper-class English home. Feminist initiatives – such as public efforts to gain admission to university lectures at Oxford and Cambridge in the 1890's – not only upset England's time-honored patriarchal tradition, but began to forge new understandings of men and women's natural behavior. As a result, scientific texts delineating gender rules plunged back into public debate during the 1880's and 1890's. As Andrew Wynter's popular medical text, *The Borderlands of Insanity* (1877), warned against "rot from a decay of vitality" that upper class young men were particularly susceptible to – resulting in weak minds that felt the lack of "directing" or "controlling power" (Showalter 11) – anthropologist J. McGrigor Allen outlined the

limits of female brain function in his essay, "On the Differences in the Minds of Men and Women" (1869). "In the highest realms of literature and science," Allen writes,

> Man reigns supreme. The inventing, discovering, creating, cogitating mind is preeminently masculine; the history of humanity is conclusive as to the mental supremacy of the male sex….In the domain of the pure intellect it is doubtful if women have contributed one profound original idea of the slightest permanent value to the world!...So little demand is there for the direct assistance of women in the mental departments which are the special province of man, that could all the male intellect in the world be suddenly paralyzed…there is not sufficient development of justice, morality, truth, or of causality and inventive power in the female sex, to hold the mechanism of society together for one week (Helsinger, Sheets, Veeder, eds. 77).

Additionally, well-known hereditary scientists such as Francis Galton used quantitative theories to predict female's limited mental functioning. Among the results of Galton's pioneering anthropometric studies of the 1880's, Soloway notes, was "the discovery that not only were women physically inferior to men, but in contrast to received opinion, their sensory acuity and, consequently, their intellectual ability were less developed than previously believed," (Soloway 115).

But as female brainpower increasingly became an undeniable fact through increasing numbers of female novelists, scientists, and political activists, many male scientists responded by linking an active female intellect with psychological disease. Nervous disorders such as anorexia, hysteria, and neurasthenia were associated with changes in women's aspirations. Sigmund Freud and Joseph Breur noted in their *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) that hysterical girls were likely to be "lively, gifted, and full of intellectual interests," women of "powerful intellect" and "sharp and critical common sense," (Showalter 40-41). In the 1890's, doctors estimated that for every one hysterical man in England, there were twenty hysterical women; for every neurasthenic man, fourteen neurasthenic women (DuPlessis ix). Recapitulating the women of the feminist

movement as psychologically unstable and therefore dangerous to their gender community, many doctors undermined the New Woman's advances in education, often to convincing effect. In 1896, for example, the Oxford Union voted overwhelmingly against admitting women to the B.A. degree, despite public opposition (Showalter 7).

The denial of women to Oxford's doors is hardly surprising, given women's biological imperative of reproduction, a duty threatened by the desire to cultivate her mind or labor in the world. According to doctor G. Stanley Hall,

> the bachelor woman…has taken up and utilized in her own life all that was meant for her descendants, and has so overdrawn her account with heredity that, like every perfectly and completely developed individual, she is also completely sterile. This is the very apotheosis of selfishness from the standpoint of every biological ethics, (Russet, ed. 120).

And if a woman elected to nurture brain cells instead of babies, eugenicists alike cast a frowning look in her direction.

* * *

Belaboring under dogmatic cultural limitations, feminists in late nineteenth century England nevertheless made an unremitting argument for social advancement, as an 1894 *Punch* cartoon proclaims:

> There is a New Woman, and what do you think?
> She lives upon nothing but Foolscap and Ink!
> But, though Foolscap and Ink form the whole of her diet,
> This nagging New Woman can never be quiet!
> (Nelson, ed. 67)

And quiet she was not. Challenging the obligatory institution of marriage, writer Gertrude Atherton argues that women should forego a spouse if she happen to be naturally gifted, refusing her duty to become a wife, much less a mother. In her article "Does Marriage Hinder a Woman's Self Development?" (*Lady's Realm* 1899) she writes:

"If a woman deliberately goes in for a career, and her gifts and ambitions are both above the average, she certainly should make up her mind to stand alone…if a woman had made up her mind to train her gifts to the highest perfection, and rise to the first rank, then she must leave personal happiness to other people," (Nelson, ed. 202).

Novelist Mona Caird agreed, taking Atherton's argument one step further: not only should women be free to refuse marriage; larger society should reject marriage in its present form and instead forge "free marriages." In her article "Marriage" (*Westminster Review* 1888) Caird argues that the ideal marriage requires no legal bonds to tie two individuals together, a matter "in which any imposition, whether of law or of society, is an impertinence." For Caird, monogamy should not be enforced by law but rather by mutual agreement: "the idea of a perfectly free marriage would imply the possibility of any form of contract being entered into between the two persons, the State and society standing aside, and recognizing the entirely private character of the transaction (Nelson, ed. 196). Additionally, Caird envisions a literal "co-education of the sexes" preceding marriage, where girls would "no longer fancy themselves in love with a man because they had met none other on terms equally intimate, and they would not be tempted to marry for the sake of freedom and a place in life, for existence would be free and full from the beginning," (Nelson, ed. 197). Rather than separating spheres of gender, Caird appeals to her readers for co-ed schools where men and women form platonic, intellectually-driven friendships.

Alongside the Marriage Question, the debate over women's suffrage – introduced to Parliament as early as 1866 by John Stuart Mill – would thrive until 1928, when English women 21 and over were granted the right to vote (Nelson, ed. 119). During the

1870's, six Women's Suffrage Bills lost in the House of Commons; the next decade, novelist Mary Ward published "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage" (*Nineteenth Century* 1889) along with socially prominent women such as Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf's mother. The next month Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Margaret Mary Dilke published responses in the same journal: "women bring something to the service of the state different from that which can be brought by men," Fawcett writes. Dilke argues, "the fact is, we have made up our minds in England that to insure every class obtaining justice *every class must be directly represented*," (Nelson, ed. 135, my emphasis). Despite opposition, several suffrage societies were formed between the transitional decades between the 1860's and 1920's however, including National Society for Women's Suffrage (established 1866) and the Women Writers' Suffrage League, which included writers such as Sarah Grand and Olive Schreiner.

Writers also gave voice to social debates of the day in magazine publications and works of literature. Eliza Lynn Linton, one of the most outspoken nineteenth century critics of the "modern woman," disparaged female feminists for rejecting the exalted domestic station of traditional English womanhood. In an article entitled "The Girl of the Period" (*The Saturday Review*, 1868) Linton writes,

> Time was when the phrase, "a fair young English girl," meant the ideal of womanhood… It meant a girl who could be trusted alone if need be, because of the innate purity and dignity of her nature, but who was neither bold in bearing nor masculine in mind; a girl who, when she married, would be her husband's friend and companion, but never his rival…who would make his house his true home and place of rest…a tender mother, an industrious housekeeper, a judicious mistress.
>
> It was all very well in old-fashioned times, when fathers and mothers had some authority and were treated with respect, to be tutored and made to obey, but [the modern woman] is far too fast and flourishing to be stopped in mid-career by these slow old morals; and as she lives to please herself, she does not care if she displeases every one else. (Linton 340)

And yet, Linton's later novel *The Rebel of the Family* (1880) depicts an assertive New Woman heroine struggling to balance the competing demands of her conservative mother and sisters, and her radical friends in the women's rights movement. The surprisingly progressive features of her novel – the presence of a lesbian couple, a heroine who prioritizes her professional occupation over marriage – coupled with the reality of Linton's own independent, professional life renders the complexity of the Woman Question debate. Rarely was either camp, anti- or pro-New Woman, totally free of political contradictions.

An explicitly anti-feminist work, *The Revolt of Man* (1882) by Walter Besant reverses conventional male/female societal roles, depicting a female-dominated society where women have become judges, doctors, lawyers, and artists. Men are kept in complete subordination, forced to marry women old enough to be their mothers (Showalter 41-42). Describing the "commonplaces of education" after the "Great Transition" – the gradual substitution of women for men in political positions of power - Besant sketches his contemporary England through the dusty history books of this oppressive, futuristic world: "Even men, who learned little enough, were taught that in the old days strength was regarded more than mind, while the father actually ruled in the place which should have been occupied by the mother; these things belonged to constitutional history – nobody cared much about them," (Besant 172). Seemingly earnest in its warnings, *The Revolt of Man* nevertheless calls attention to women's failure to convincingly perform authority; his depictions of power-hungry women and nubile men are unwittingly humorous and eerie in their flip-flopped gender roles. Moreover, art,

education, politics, and culture have all deteriorated in this world under the faulty handling of women; Besant's intention is not to expose the stagnation of these male institutions but to warn against their infiltration by women. Using cues from the Victorian subordination of women, he writes entirely without irony of a future in which men must unite in revolt to abolish their oppression and reestablish patriarchal dominance (Showalter 43). A society of complementary roles – dominance and subordination – seems to be the only one Besant can envision for his novel, the only normal mode of gender relations.

The "oppressive" New Woman was also the sexual woman. During the 1880's and 1890's, sexuality – long hidden underneath layers of petticoats and female propriety – became a visible issue open for public debate. The sensationalized trial and conviction of Oscar Wilde in 1887 under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which made all male homosexual acts illegal, made sexuality a talked-about issue on a public level, while organizations like the Men and Women's Club discussed free sexual unions. In an 1887 *Fortnightly Review*, socialist and Men and Women's Club member Karl Pearson wrote, "I hold that the sex relationship, both as to form and substance, ought to be a pure question of taste, a simple matter of agreement between the man and [the woman] in which neither society nor the state would have any need or right to interfere…Its form and duration would vary according to the feelings and wants of individuals," (Showalter 50). In other words, Pearson argued for romantic unions with no legal stipulations, with seemingly no procreative purpose. In this type of discourse, sexual individuals shunned the nuclear family unit, and with the growing popularity and quality of birth control

options – such as a rubber version of the cervical cap for women, and condoms for men – this was now possible.

In light of progressive views towards sexuality, many doctors of the early Victorian school remained unconvinced. Like hysteria stemming from excitable intellect, female insanity, to sexuality writers such as Dr. William Acton, signaled an excitable sexuality:

> I have taken pains to obtain and compare abundant evidence on this subject, and the result of my inquiries I may briefly epitomize as follows: - I should say that the majority of woman (happily for society) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind. *What men are habitually, women are only exceptionally*. …There are some women who have sexual desires so strong that they surpass those of men, and shock public feeling by their consequences. I admit, of course, the existence of sexual excitement terminating even in nymphomania, a form of insanity that those accustomed to visit lunatic asylums must be fully conversant with (Helsinger, Sheets, Veeder, eds. 61, my emphasis).

But in the face of old sexual taboos made new, sexual equality continued to find advocates throughout the century. In his book *Creative and Sexual Science* (1875), Dr. Oliver S. Fowler proclaims in what few readers today would believe printable in a widely sold Victorian book, "ITS [the vagina's] ERECTILE tissues are enclosed between layers of muscles, so that passion in woman creates her vaginal erection just as it does penile in man…love alone contracts her vagina," (Helsinger, Sheets, Veeder, eds. 71). Similarly, American Elizabeth Cady Stanton maintained in 1883 that "a healthy woman has as much passion as a man," (Gordon 56) while respectable conservative Dr. George H. Napheys writes in *The Physical Life of Woman* (1876) that "it is a false notion, and contrary to nature, that this passion in woman is a derogation to her sex. The science of physiology indicated most clearly its propriety and dignity," (Helsinger, Sheets, Veeder, eds. 71).

However, even though pro-female sexuality voices were rare even in late nineteenth century England, sentiments like these nonetheless exacerbated male gender anxiety. Showalter correctly conjures images of female narcissism in paintings of the nineteenth century to illustrate this trend, which offered "gynecidal" visions of the femme fatale, women kissing their mirror images, or women engaging in autoerotic play. "In Ludwig won Hofmann's *The Valley of Innocence* (1897)," she writes, "a huge adolescent girl plays with the naked body of a toylike man. Beside her is a knife and a pile of decapitated male bodies, while a parade of other tiny men wait their turn for the massacre," (Showalter 10). Male novelists such as Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, offered extreme ideas of the "ideal" man and woman:

> The ideal man is entirely or almost entirely masculine and the ideal woman is entirely or almost entirely feminine. Each individual must have a preponderance, be it ever so little, of the cells of its own sex, and the attraction of each individual to the other sex depends upon its place on the scale between the highest and lowest grade of sex. The most masculine man draws the most feminine woman, and vice versa (Farson 215).

And yet ironically, women of the late nineteenth century blurred the lines between "the most masculine man" and "the most feminine woman" daily. Many – but importantly, not all – women of the feminist movement increasingly adopted "Rational Dress," or what is now called 'menswear' fashion for women. Petticoats and corsets were traded for trousers and Norfolk jackets; long, pinned hair blunted to shorter styles such as chin-length bobs. Not surprisingly, "the recurrent satirical mockery of the New Woman for her loss of femininity" could be found in *Punch*, writes historian Susan C. Shapiro; the New Woman's "masculinization is found not merely in her appearance, but in her character as well," (Shapiro 512). She writes about an 1895 *Punch* cartoon titled "The New Woman," which depicts two women in starched shirts with striped ties (one

smoking a cigarette), addressing a young man reaching for the door. 'You're not leaving us, Jack. Tea will be here directly!' to which Jack responds, 'Oh I'm going for a Cup of Tea in the Servants' Hall. I can't get on without Female Society, you know!' (Shapiro 512).

"Female society," as the late nineteenth century would prove, became increasingly hard to manage. Literary analogues to women's 'true nature' prevail in fictional writings from the late nineteenth century, situating the multi-faceted social debate of woman's natural place as a site for textual dismantling. In this study, I identify three areas of the deconstructed female nature in New Woman literature: gender, sexuality, and intellect.

The fixedness of the female gender gets destabilized in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, featuring a myriad of effeminate men and boyish girls. The "middle" of Stoker's gender spectrum is perhaps occupied best by one of the *Twins*' dual heroines, Angelica, who is not only physically more robust than her twin brother, but convincingly masquerades as a young, male fiddle-player. She also forms an intimate (and latently homoerotic) relationship with the local intrigue, a male tenor in the church choir. Even in Stoker's *Dracula*, obedient, wifely females such as Mina Harker stumble oddly into New Woman tendencies. Typewriting her way into a predominantly male social sphere, Mina has, as we are told, "a man's brain – a brain that a man should have were he much gifted – and woman's heart," (Stoker 240). Ever quick to redraw the lines of gender however, Stoker's fatherly, old-order hero in *Dracula* reminds Mina the "man's work" of killing vampires: "to destroy this monster…it is no part for a woman," (Stoker 240).

Female's naturally "absent" sexuality reappears in full force on the pages of New Woman writing, yet the debate is far from decided: while sexually repressed New Women have extramarital affairs, a single feminist denies a "free marriage" proposal in George Gissing's *Odd Women*. Furthermore, a sexual free union and an asexual Christian marriage are dual paths sought out by Thomas Hardy's New Woman heroine Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*, leaving neither to be desired by the novel's end. Finally, the heady contemporary female of *The Story of an African Farm*, Lyndall, finds herself pregnant out of wedlock towards the novel's end, with little (if any) emotional remorse or fear of social ostracism. In resourceful New Woman fashion, she finds a different man to fall in love with her and promptly proposes marriage to him.

Finally, the neurasthetic Evadne Frayling of Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* reflects the relentlessly curious female intellect embodied by the New Woman, which points to the subject of my research: New Woman identity and her troubling psychological instability. This essay seeks to examine the rift between the "natural" woman and the deviant New Woman of late nineteenth century through literature of the time period. Through George Egerton's *Keynotes*, George Gissing's *The Odd Woman*, Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as a kaleidoscope lens of nineteenth century feminism, we see the fictional New Woman clutching onto, grappling with, and occasionally shaking off her "old" sensibilities – not totally free, however, of a turbulent psychosis.

Perhaps disturbingly, the New Woman is frequently represented as psychologically precarious or quasi-masochist by her opponents *and* her supporters,

suffering depression, mental breakdown, or premature death. Do fits of psychological instability reduce the New Woman to her old cliché - an object of feeling - or rather, signal an important rupture in collective women identity? In other words, is the New Woman's hysteria on an individual level symptomatic of collective progress, the purging of one woman's hegemonic identity as an analogue to the eroding control of females on a societal level? I would argue that female hysteria – too often the stereotypical trope of the Victorian woman - is reappropriated by New Woman literary advocates as a subversive tool for social change. Examining the literary treatments of three "women's issues" receiving significant cultural attention in the late nineteenth century – reading, cross-dressing (both through modern dress and through the literal enactment of a different gender), and maternity – in these novels, I theorize that shaking off old Victorian, "naturally female" shackles, manifest in female psychological distress, creates a clean slate for New Woman identity as her former restrictions become instead cultural possibilities. Moreover, each act – reading, transgendering, motherhood - invokes what I term 'dualities of identity' for fictional New Women, mobilizing a transformation of traditional social norms that fuse each activity with new cultural meaning. Signified by madness or death, New Women literally forge alternate selves as they simultaneously bury convention.

CHAPTER ONE

Text and the Female Mind: The New Woman Reader in *The Odd Women, Story of an African Farm,* and *The Heavenly Twins*

Though largely conservative by today's standards the mainstream novel of the late nineteenth century, if not quite racy, certainly enjoyed eased restrictions. Several cultural factors liberated the once prudish novel; among them, the decline of England's circulating libraries that enforced literary morality, the disappearance of the Victorian three-volume novel, and a growing popularity of the slim, portable single-bound format (Showalter 15-16). New Woman writers approved of the trend: in 1885, George Gissing wrote, "It is fine to see how the old three-volume tradition is being broken through. One volume is becoming commonest of all. It is the new school, due to continental influence," (Gissing and Gissing, eds. 166). Cosmopolitan New Women became single-book consumers, and the novel's new singular form itself suggested its owner's independence.

In a period when middle-class writers exchanged social values and even instigated legal reform through the medium of fiction, reading itself signified not simply a form of entertainment but a political gesture. Feminist readers found a like community among fellow New Woman literati, and discovered nuanced, complex versions of femaleness in New Woman characters. For a modern woman of the late nineteenth century, the novel became as regular a daily accoutrement as her omnibus pass.

This chapter examines three readerly heroines in New Woman novels; Monica Madden of *The Odd Women*, Lyndall of *Story of an African Farm*, and Evadne Frayling of *The Heavenly Twins*. Two of these heroines die premature deaths; the other is

diagnosed with hysteria. Significantly, all three novels depict intellectual women in a tenuous relationship with reading, an activity deeply entwined with the state of their psychoses. While *The Odd Women*'s heroine fails to replicate the fantasized romance plot of novels in her own life, both Lyndall in *Story of an African Farm* and Evadne of *The Heavenly Twins* engage in reading to mobilize a disciplined self-education. In all three works, the heroine's novel becomes the heroine's plight; she in turn reads fantasy or intellectual edification into her own New Woman narrative. However bleak, death or madness for each New Woman heroine nonetheless evidence an upward trajectory out of mental stagnation, mobilized by the activity of reading. Monica and Lyndall both perish, though Lyndall's intellectual legacy continues through her brother, Waldo; for Evadne, reading acts as a mental antidote for her hysteria. The vicious liabilities of reading for New Women in these novels – death or hysteria – become legible as severe ruptures in conventional feminine social norms, leaving new pathways of intellectual pursuit for allies of the New Woman's cause. As political historian Carole Pateman has observed, women have traditionally been perceived as figures of disorder, "potential disrupters of masculine boundary systems of all sorts," (Showalter 7-8). Likewise, the New Woman readers of *The Odd Women*, *The Story of an African Farm*, and *The Heavenly Twins* - far from "martyring" themselves to the act of reading - draw attention to a social, gender boundary system that would appear to punish women for cultivating their intellect.

I. Reading and the Impulse of Pleasure in *The Odd Women*

In shopgirl-heroine Monica Madden, Gissing constructs a female character raised with middle-class propriety and the moral injunctions that accompany it. Orphaned at a relatively early age and left with stunted domestic training, Monica supports herself at a

draper's on London's industrial Walworth Road, boarding in a mass all-women dormitory. With these life circumstances, she occupies intermediate space on English class strata that explains her exposure to low literature (romance novels). Too long entrenched in the "vulgar" sphere of public labor, Monica turns to fantasy, here represented by the act of reading, to satisfy the desire for stimulation in monotonous, painfully boring work conditions. Such an act is inevitably linked with the degraded pleasures of the masses, and Monica – in seemingly typical Victorian fashion – endures the consequences of association with sexual desire and with the class-infected "vulgarity of mass experience," (Shapiro-Sanders 2).

With bleak financial and social circumstances, Monica lights upon a marriage proposal by an older "man of means," Edmund Widdowson, only to entrap herself in a depressing marriage with a tyrannical and jealous husband. A short while after their marriage, as a result of the increased stultification of her solitary life she complains of isolation: "Couldn't we go away somewhere? I don't think we shall ever be quite well staying here," (Gissing 158) and "life will be a burden to me before long if I don't have more freedom," (Gissing 163). Uninterested and indifferent towards dutiful domestic industry – as Widdowson laments, "would it not be well if she spent an hour a day in sewing or fancy work?...Widdowson, watching with a keen eye, soon remarked that her use of the needle was only a feint," (Gissing 153) – Monica turns to reading as a daily "indulgence." Seizing the opportunity to cultivate domestic sensibilities in his young wife, Widdowson recommends proper reading material for her, explaining that:

> "Women's sphere is the home, Monica. Unfortunately girls are often obliged to go out and earn their living, but this is unnatural, a necessity which advanced civilization will altogether abolish. You shall read John Ruskin; every word he says about women is good and precious…I sincerely believe that

> an educated woman had better become a domestic servant than try to imitate the life of a man," (Gissing 152-153).

But Monica disagrees, claiming the importance of producing "interest," rather than industry, through reading. As she headily explains to her husband, she desires to "read a different kind of book; books that really amuse me, and give me something I could think about with pleasure," (Gissing 163). Moreover, Monica turns to reading for respite from her marriage: she "found more attraction in books as her life grew more unhappy," (Gissing 202).

Monica's internationalization of the romance plot – catalyzed in her real life by Harry Bevis, a young, charismatic interloper – marks a crucial turn in Gissing's treatment of Monica's highly symbolic novel reading. Not only finding "attraction" but perceiving real life parallels in romance story, Monica's narrative impulse becomes intertwined with the novels she reads:

> Sometimes the perusal of a love story embittered her lot to the last point of endurance. Before marriage, her love-ideal had been very vague, elusive; it found scarcely more than negative expression, as a shrinking from the vulgar or gross desires of her companions in the shop. Now that she had a clearer understanding of her own nature, the type of man correspondent to her own natural sympathies also became clear. In every particular he was unlike her husband. She found a suggestion of him in books; and in actual life, already, perhaps more than a suggestion (Gissing 202).

Evoking language such as "vulgar" and "gross" to describe Monica's former company, Gissing points to the production of desire in low-class labor conditions, as his heroine unwittingly draws on the same "gross" literary mechanisms to conjure an illicit affair plot. Having frustrated her "marriage plot," Monica projects a romance narrative onto Mr. Bevis complete with old romance novel trappings: clandestine meetings, passionate kisses and secret letters. The latter Monica reads with voracity until Bevis' last

emotional scribble arrives to break things off, jarring her romance-hero psychological representation of him. Still more literary character than man in Monica's mind, Bevis' image "stood in that already distant past like a lay figure, the mere semblance of a man. And with such conception of him his letter corresponded; it was artificial, lifeless, as if extracted from some vapid novel," (Gissing 295). With three brief chapters remaining, Monica soon dies after giving birth.

For this paper's purpose, the loaded symbolism of reading by a female character and her eventual death that follows offers a useful parallel. Though the romance fantasy dies along with Monica Madden, her newborn daughter lives, cradled in the arms of the novel's most outspoken (and quintessentially New Woman) feminist: Rhoda Barfoot.

> She took the baby in her arms, and walked about with it for a long time in the garden, often murmuring, 'Poor little child! Dear little child!' There had been doubt whether it would live, but the summer seemed to be fortifying its health…
> The dark, bright eye was Monica's. And as the baby sank into sleep, Rhoda's vision grew dim; a sigh made her lips quiver, and once more she murmured, 'Poor little child!' (Gissing 335-336).

Monica's "poor little child," albeit motherless, also represents a new generation. With the burial of frustrated, fictional fantasization comes new possibility for New Women's daughters, nurtured by New Women survivors like Rhoda Barfoot.

II. Legacy of Intellect and *Story of an African Farm*'s Female Scholar

Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* follows the life course of hero and heroine; New Woman Lyndall and her brother Waldo. Written from the margins of British Empire in South Africa, *The Story of an African Farm* depicts two characters that seek "salvation" in self-education against stifling gender and class restrictions.

Importantly, both characters are visited by "strangers" who respectively awaken dormant parts of their natures: Lyndall's stranger offers sexual exchange; Waldo's, intellectual. The two strangers function here as external reminders of Lyndall and Waldo's individual intellects: Lyndall's stranger is a man she refuses to marry although she carries his child, due to their intellectual incompatibility. Waldo's stranger is a Frenchman, a mystic visitor to his family's property who recognizes Waldo's crude artistry in a wooden carving Waldo has fashioned.

Although illness and a problematic pregnancy kill Lyndall before the novel's end, Waldo – Lyndall's intellectual proxy – takes up his sister's studious habits, pointing to an intellectual legacy inspired by Lyndall. Significantly, the male character in this novel is the only one who "survives" reading, yet Waldo is neither admiring nor representative of the men around him, and in fact appears overtly feminized in his interaction with the French stranger. And while Lyndall's readerly influence finds continuity in her brother, her death immediately following her pregnancy suggest an aborted version of Lyndall as a traditionally Victorian Wife and Mother. Even after the death of her baby, Lyndall admits that "I did not love it; its father was not my prince; I did not care for it," (Schreiner 278).

Unlike her contented and thoroughly domestic sister Em, Lyndall taps her intellectual instinct practically from youth. Talking with her sister on the farm, Lyndall declares to Em,

> "I intend to go to school."
> 'How?'
> The child took not the slightest notice of the last question, and folded her small arms across her knees.
> 'But why do you want to go, Lyndall?'

> 'There is nothing that helps in this world,' said the child slowly, 'but to be very wise, and to know everything – to be clever.'"

Lyndall's early wisdom – charged with the conviction of her creator, Olive Schreiner – belies an unsettling truth about women's limited access to higher education in the late nineteenth century. Lyndall eventually does attend school – "finishing school" – where she finds not an intellectual collective of bright female minds, but a girls' boarding-school for "feminine refinement." When she returns to the farm, grown, she explains her independent regimen of self-education in the midst of domestic learning to Waldo:

> "When the drove made cushions, and hideous flowers that the roses laugh at, and a footstool in six weeks that a machine would have made better in five minutes, I went to my room. With the money saved up from such work I bought books and newspapers, and at night I sat up. I read, and epitomized what I read…On the whole, I am not dissatisfied with my four years. I have not learnt what I expected; but I have learnt something else," (Schreiner 186).

Lyndall's clever use of resources facilitate her education: she literally uses domestic economy to buy reading material, acting here as a symbol for the larger task of self-learning. In the process, Lyndall gives pause to her stoic, contemplative brother. As the two chat upon her return, Waldo looks "at her so intently that he stumbled over the bushes. Yes, this was the little Lyndall who had worn the check pinafores…" (Schreiner 187). Perhaps Waldo reads Lydall's entry into intellectual space with earnest because he has recently experienced an intellectual awakening of his own with a transient stranger. And interestingly, Waldo's experience of intellectual exchange seems to feminize him: during their visit, Waldo encourages his Stranger with "passionate flashes, more thirsty and desiring than the love-glances of a woman," (Schreiner 164). Conversely, Lyndall refuses giving "desiring love-glances" to her stranger *because* of her frustration with his intellectual inadequacy. While Lyndall's stranger attempts to seduce her despite their

intellectual divide, she coldly restrains him from kissing "the little lips that defied him," (Schreiner 238).

It is crucial to bear in mind that women of Lyndall's generation took part in intellectual life against the social norm, in the face, as Mark Sanders points out, "of the reproductive inscription of female sexuality," (Sanders 80). Lyndall's pregnancy out of wedlock poses her in dramatic opposition against the conventional model of Victorian wife and mother; henceforth her baby dies, she dies, all after refusing to marry a man who stimulates her sexually but not mentally. "You call into activity one part of my nature," she explains to her lover, "there is a higher part you know nothing of, that you never touch. If I married you, afterwards it would arise and assert itself, and I should hate you always, as I do now sometimes," (Schreiner 237). And when Lyndall's miscarried child ruins her health, she asks on her deathbed not for companionship or nourishment, but for her books:

> "'Now bring my books to me,' she said, motioning eagerly with her fingers, 'the large books, and the reviews, and the plays; I want them all.'
> [Gregory] piled them round on the bed; she drew them greedily closer, her eyes very bright, but her face as white as a mountain lily.
> 'Now the big one off the drawers. No, you need not help me to hold my book, she said; 'I can hold it for myself,'" (Schreiner 276).

Intellect and Victorian domesticity stubbornly refuse to converge in Lyndall's identity; in the end, the mother dies while the intellect survives in *African Farm*'s character of parallel consequence, Waldo. Notably, his Stranger leaves Waldo what Lyndall's Stranger does not: a book "round which to hang your ideas" (Schreiner 172). And as Lyndall leaves her Stranger's home, lamenting "I am so weary of myself! It is eating my soul to its core – self, self, self! I cannot bear this life! I cannot breathe, I cannot live! Will nothing free me from myself?" (Schreiner 241), the function of reading in this novel

becomes clear: to extend and harness an overactive intellect. Lyndall's Stranger denies her a book – along with any other symbol of intellectual reciprocity – and as a result, nothing "frees her from herself."

III. *The Heavenly Twins'* Nervous Reader Heroine

Sarah Grand is credited with coining the term "New Woman" in 1894 in an essay titled "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," where she remarks that "man deprived us of all proper education, and then jeered at us because we had no knowledge…narrowed our outlook on life so that our view of it should be all distorted, and then declared that our mistaken impression of it proved us to be senseless creatures," (Nelson, ed. 143). Grand's heroine in *The Heavenly Twins*, Evade Frayling, is in many ways a fictive response to Grand's complaints: Evadne is self-educated, a voracious reader and writer, shrewd and articulate in conversation. She is also diagnosed with hysteria towards the end of her first marriage, a condition closely resembling depression to the contemporary reader. Her doctor (and future, second husband) Dr. Galbraith notes that in her illness, Evadne had become "a lonely woman losing her mental health for want of active occupation and a wholesome share of the work of the world to take her out of herself. Her disposition was practical, not contemplative; but she had been forced into the latter attitude, and the consequence was…a diseased state of the mind," (Grand 626).

How and why does Evadne – bookish and smart from her youth, like Schreiner's Lyndall – descend into mental stagnation? First, the circumstances of Evadne's marriage sever her from her father, whose staunch conservative views ironically spark Evadne's self-study as a child. Mr. Frayling embodies Grand's portrait of knowledge-hoarding

men, smirking to young Evadne after she finishes a substantial novel only to pick up another: "now, isn't that like your sex?…You pick things up with a parrot-like sharpness, but haven't intelligence enough to make any practical application of them," (Grand 12). Thereafter, Evadne "always had a solid book in hand, and some standard work of fiction also; but she read both with the utmost deliberation…After studying anatomy and physiology, she took up pathology as a matter of course," (Grand 23). Evadne also reads canonical classics her father recommends – *Roderick Random* and *Tom Jones* – only to produce careful, dissenting literary criticism in her "Commonplace Book." When Evadne's marriage to Colonel Calquhoun results in lifelong silence from her father (due to both Evadne's reticence to marry Calquhoun once she discovers sordid secrets of his past, and to the condition of nonsexual partnership she eventually marries him on) one of her outlets of intellectual conversation ceases, further relegating her to the role of wife instead of curious, liberal-minded daughter.

Furthmore, reading for Evadne is not only a response to her father's condescension, but a moral prerogative Grand takes up through her heroine throughout the novel: it ensures women an education otherwise denied them through formal schooling. As a child Evadne notices that many "subjects were surrounded by mystery which should have been explained," (Grand 23). The qualifier "should" underlies Evadne's attitude towards female intellectual ignorance; she actively rejects the cliché by maintaining a stocked library in all of her living spaces. When Dr. Galbraith treats Evadne for hysteria, she draws associations between reading and social progress: when explaining her habit of dreaming to Dr. Galbraith, she notes that historically, she has

> "tried to work out schemes of life in my head, as I would do a game of chess; not schemes of life for myself, you know, but such as should save other people from being very miserable. I wanted to do some good in the world…and that kind of thought naturally resolves itself into action, but before the impulse to act came upon me I had made it impossible for myself to do anything, so that when it came I was obliged to resist it, and then, instead of reading and reflecting, I took to sewing for a sedative," (Grand 626).

Evadne assuages her anxiety for social change with mind-numbing domestic tasks – Dr. Galbraith later compares "woman's embroidery" to a "man's cigarette" – having become a "lonely woman gradually losing her mental health for want of active occupation," (Grand 626). While her husband (Colonel Calquhoun) takes up the old male trope of activity and physical virility, Evadne finds herself increasingly isolated within a comparatively still domestic space.

Dr. Galbraith prescribes books to Evadne to "take her out of herself," and observes that he "had never known her so delightful as she was…while showing me her books," (Grand 631). Eventually, Evadne emerges from her suffocating mental condition, while her new husband Dr. Galbraith – a possible Grandian prototype of the New Man – encourages her intellectual activity for her happiness as much as her livelihood. Importantly, Evadne's former domestic persona, once quiet and embroidering, channels itself into a more active role as a mother of three children. And Evadne's perusal of Dr. Galbraith's library signals her renewed association of reading with moral edification: "sitting on the floor in the library…[Evadne had selected] a book…on the heredity of vice," (Grand 662).

The New Woman reader-heroines of these novels highlight the important distinction between "pleasure" reading and intellectual study in these novels, a division that undergirds changing tastes in female readership as informed by New Women

prerogatives. While the trickiest heroine of this set is arguably Lyndall, who reads for self-education and is not rewarded, but dies prematurely, Evadne and Monica are no less vulnerable, suffering psychological and social consequences for their imaginative flights. As a subverted trope however, the function of female hysteria coupled with reading further emphasizes the hegemonic crisis of Victorian women in the nineteenth century. New Women writers, men and women, seem to play out their worst nightmare of the feminist cause: that over-educating women breaks their psychoses down, rendering them childless (and at times lifeless). But "new hysteria" disallows women to be merely victims of their psychoses. Subversive and powerful, the act of reading offers both infection and cure to a troubled mind, and New Woman writers use the paradox to shatter the conventionally dormant, female Victorian mind.

CHAPTER TWO

'Rational Dress' and Cross-Gendering: Masculinization of the New Woman in *Dracula* and *The Heavenly Twins*

By the late nineteenth century, the modern women's habit of donning conventionally male garb was neither new nor particularly unheard of, flourishing often on the British stage. J.S. Bratton comments on the history of female cross-dressing in her essay "Irrational Dress," tracing the stage practice to "'the breeches role' as undertaken by actresses Nell Gwynne and Moll Davis during the Restoration to Mme Vestris in the 1830's," (Gardner, Rutherford eds., 82). By the early nineteenth century, she remarks that "it was the rule, rather than the exception, for boys to be played by women," (Gardner, Rutherford eds., 83). Even off the stage, masculinization of the female body was not a phenomenon of the nineteenth century New Woman. Two centuries earlier, a British preacher named Thomas Fuller lamented that "many [women] so affect man-like clothes and shorn hair, it is hard to discover the sex of a woman through the attire of a man," (Shapiro 511). Moreover, the inevitable concomitant "masculine attire" with "masculine behavior" preceded the New Woman well before her time, as an eighteenth century male essayist attests: "is there not one reason to apprehend that the same habitual dress has an influence on the manners? Is it not likely that she who constantly assumes a manly appearance, and a roughness of garb, should likewise display something similar, in her behavior?" (Shapiro 512). With masculine dress, females were assumed to simultaneously adopt masculine performance, dangerously unveiling gendered performance as an adaptable set of gestures and behavioral traits, rather than an extension of predetermined biology.

And perhaps the New Woman used this to her advantage. With the adoption of 'rational dress' (a phrase coined in the nineteenth century) came a liberation from corsets and conventionally female niceties alike. Although the New Woman had not invented rational dress – as centuries-old sermons attest – the thrill of a topsy-turvy world where women dress and act like men was a social intrigue not ignored by New Woman fiction. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Grand's *Heavenly Twins* encapsulate two sides of the cross-gendering debate: while Grand's cross-dressing heroine triumphs in *Heavenly Twins*, relishing in the freedom of rational dress and her eased gender restrictions, Stoker's potential New Women are punished for their transgendering acts, silenced into feminine obedience. He offers a telling commentary in his 1908 novel *Lady Athlyne* on the biologically determined nature of gender:

> All men and all women, according to him have in themselves the cells of both sexes; and the accredited masculinity or femininity of the individual is determined by the multiplication and development of these cells. Thus the ideal man is entirely or almost entirely masculine, and the ideal woman is entirely or almost entirely feminine. Each individual must have a preponderance, be it ever so little, of the cells of its own sex, and the attraction of each individual to the other sex depends upon its place in the scale between the highest and lowest grade of sex. The most masculine man draws the most feminine woman, and vice versa… (Farson 215)

In *Dracula*, Stoker creates two female characters, one of whom becomes infected with the desire to enact male behavioral traits: a virile sexuality. Lucy Westenra, the dangerously sensual version of the New Woman, is eventually slain by four men, while her best friend Mina Harker (the only female character still living by the end of the novel) experiences brain fever as a result of Dracula's latently sexual bite. Mina's intellectually hungry, "male" brain comprises her compliant feminine pose, and like Lucy, Mina must be re-gendered through feminine silence.

In her article "The Man of the Moment," featured in a 1894 *North American Review*, Grand celebrates the stamina of modern women, who

> …can be busy from morning till night, in doors and out. They attend to their duties and their pleasures, too; work, walk, ride, drive, and dance to-day, and come down as fresh as ever to work, walk, ride, drive, and dance to-morrow without support from any stimulant but their own good spirits, good appetites, and unimpaired digestions. (Nelson, ed. 150)

It is no surprise then that one of her heroines in *The Heavenly Twins* not only behaves like an active young man but dresses like one too. Angelica Hamilton-Wells manages to play out her cross-gendering episode relatively unscathed, avoiding death and hysteria. Interestingly, it is the man both in love with her and tricked by her cross-gendering act who dies instead.

Both novels demonstrate their heroines' duality of identity as they swap conventionally male and female behavior, underlining the New Woman's increasing conflation of masculine and feminine performance. Rather than essentializing Victorian womanhood, their performances of hysteria or actual cross-dressing signify a departure from conventionally feminine performance.

I. "She has man's brain and woman's heart:" Coded Cross-Gendering in *Dracula*

The dichotomous angelic and monstrous female characters in *Dracula* show extreme though not uncommon depictions of Victorian femininity, embodied by the figures of Mina Harker, Lucy Westenra, and three anonymous, intensely sexual vampiresses. Carol Senf observes that "four of the five women [in *Dracula*] are portrayed as vampires – aggressive, inhuman, wildly erotic, and motivated only by an insatiable thirst for blood" (Senf 34), who also have a proclivity for the kind of sexual role reversals frequently associated with the New Woman. Mina Harker, who no less

poses a threatening gender crossover with her "man's brain," experiments in safer New Woman territory in *Dracula* by indulging her intellect rather than her body. Importantly, Mina never explicitly claims New Woman identity in the novel, apparently preferring Victorian wife posturing. Her writerly actions belie the conservative views she proclaims however, making Mina the novel's closest rendition of the New Woman who, by the end of *Dracula*, has asserted her intellectual tendencies beyond conventionally feminine boundaries and as a result, must be silenced.

> During Jonathan Harker's visit to Count Dracula's castle, which opens the novel, he encounters three vampiresses at night who simultaneously repulse and thrill him:
> There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips.
> …I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation. The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me.
> …There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and…she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth….I closed my eyes in a langorous ecstasy and waited – waited with beating heart. (Stoker 61-62)

The vampiresses are the novel's first glimpse of aggressive, unfeminine sexuality, but it is Lucy's eroticism that dominates the first half of the novel. When it came to sexuality, the New Woman was more frank and open than her predecessors (Senf 35), and while Lucy hardly claims the social label of "New Woman" (as she writes to Mina at one point in the novel, "my dear Mina, why are men so noble when we women are little worthy of them?" (Stoker 80)) her coded sexual voracity links her to New Woman thought. In a single day, Lucy accrues marriage proposals from three men, lamenting societal restrictions that limit her to only one partner: "why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" (Stoker 80). It is her sensual nature

rather than her hesitance to disappoint suitors that underlies her wish, as she makes clear in her intimate description of one particular proposal: "Mr. Quincey P. Morris found me alone. It seems that a man always does find a girl alone. No, he doesn't, for Arthur tried twice to *make* a chance, and I helping him all I could; I am not ashamed to say it now," (Stoker 79).

Lucy's divided character – one side that defers to social propriety and accepts one husband, the other side that desires three lovers – further manifests itself when Lucy takes up "her old habit" of sleepwalking. During a visit to Whitby together, Mina worriedly reports in her journal that "Lucy was very restless all night…she got up twice and dressed herself….It is a very strange thing, this sleep-walking, for as soon as her will is thwarted in any physical way, her intention, if there is any, disappears, and she yields herself almost exactly to the routine of her life," (Stoker 106-107). Lucy's sleepwalking links her symbolically to a debased female social role, such as prostitution (she only dons a nightdress when she sneaks out), and it is her restlessness within her restricted social station that ultimately leads her to Dracula.

"Vampirism" here radiates sexual undertones; Judith Roth is not far from the truth when she explains that "the only relations with vampires are sexualized in this novel; indeed a deliberate attempt is made to make sexuality seem unthinkable in 'normal relations' between the sexes," (Roth 115). Lucy's sexual appetite becomes all the more apparent after she has transformed into a vampire: shortly after her initial bite from Dracula she writes to Lucy that she has "an appetite like a cormorant" (Stoker 124). The old, repressed Lucy gradually disappears during her transformation; she reports in her diary that she is "getting so strong again that I hardly know myself" (Stoker 150),

signifying a rupture in feminine identity as she adopts behavioral traits more characteristic of the New Woman. Lucy's fangs suggest her fully realized sexuality; her altered physical condition mirrors her strengthening rebelliousness: "Whilst asleep she looked stronger…her open mouth showed the pale gums drawn back from the teeth, which thus looked positively longer and sharper than usual; when she woke the softness of her eyes evidently changed expression, for she looked her own self, although a dying one," (Stoker 166). Dr. Seward's analysis of the change in Lucy reveals certain preconceptions about women's nature. Believing that the true Lucy is characterized by her soft eyes, docile nature, and tenderness, he cannot recognize the increased strength or the sharp white teeth and their potential for pain, aggression, and violence (Senf 43).

The males in the novel finally reinscribe Lucy to an asexual Victorian woman when they literally destroy her body and thus her sexual vehicle. In a scene eerily suggestive of gang rape (Showalter 181), Dr. Seward, Dr. Van Helsing, Arthur Holmwood, and Quicey Morris restore Lucy to virgin docility after decapitating her and driving a "round wooden stake, some two and a half inches think and about three feet long" through her heart. Upon encountering Lucy in her tomb, her hungering female sexuality horrifies them all: "She seemed like a nightmare of Lucy as she lay there; the pointed teeth, the bloodstained, voluptuous mouth – which made it a shudder to to see – the whole carnal and unspiritual appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy's sweet purity," (Stoker 221). After effectively brutalizing her wanton body, the men are relieved to see that "in the coffin lay no longer the foul Thing that we had so dreaded and grown to hate…but Lucy as we had seen her in life, with her face of unequalled sweetness and purity," (Stoker 224). Desperate to maintain conventional beliefs towards

Victorian femaleness, the men in *Dracula* effectively reverse the New Woman identity transformation. Rather than using death or hysteria as a means to liberate females' suppressed nature, Stoker has *Dracula*'s men seize the opportunity to correct New Woman sexuality, using death to reify her social restrictions.

Mina Harker navigates her female territory more successfully than Lucy even while taking on traits of the New Woman, albeit New Woman qualities such as intelligence and productivity rather than open sexuality. When we meet Mina in the beginning of *Dracula*, she is an assistant schoolmistress. She learns shorthand and train schedules to assist her husband Jonathan in his work, thereby combining New Woman resourcefulness with traditional Victorian wife duties. And although she is aware of the socially constructed nature of feminine behavior – she reflects in her journal that "you can't go on for some years teaching etiquette and decorum to other girls without the pedantry of it biting into yourself a bit" (Stoker 182-183) – she views the bold New Woman with some reservations. She clucks at New Woman writers who "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," (Stoker 109). Nonetheless, Mina represents the New Woman's intellectual abilities; with her "sweet woman's heart" and her "man's brain" she is a dangerous hybrid who must be domesticated through hysteria (Showalter 181). When she offers her assistance to the men regarding Dracula's journey, she is promptly silenced by the fatherly Van Helsing: "We men are determined – nay, are we not pledged? – to destroy this monster; but it is no part for a woman. Even if she be not harmed, her heart may fail her in so much and so many horrors, and hereafter she may

suffer – both in waking, from her nerves, and in sleep, from her dreams," (Stoker 240). Ironically, the exact opposite happens: after her silencing, Mina is unable to sleep, has terrible dreams, and begins to feel depressed and anxious. Mina's suppression of intellect – similar to the New Woman's plight – leads to her individual hysteria which makes her all the more vulnerable to Dracula's voracious appetite.

> Dracula eventually preys on Mina, and with its metaphorical links to venereal disease, his bite literally marks Mina with impurity: besides his teeth marks on her neck, a seared mark on her forehead affirms her corruption: "Unclean! Unclean! Even the Almighty shuns my polluted flesh! I must bear this mark of shame upon my forehead until the Judgement Day," (Stoker 296).

Moreover, Dracula's power takes Mina over as their psychoses become linked together: "Mina opened her eyes; but she did not seem the same woman. There was a far-away look in her eyes, and her voice had a sad dreaminess which was new to me," (Stoker 309). What Dr. Seward observes is Mina's psychological connection to Dracula's travels – a quite literal masculinization of her mind – which he and Dr. Van Helsing exploit to track down the monster.

Like the brutal domestication of Lucy, a similar reversal of New Woman liberation is enforced by the men on Mina. Having gained access to male mobility through Dracula's mind, Mina is psychically able to go (however unwilling) on a man's journey, but only for a short while. The male good guy gang – their ranks swelling to five now – effectively slaughter the male host of Mina's mind, catching and murdering him at his own castle. By the end of *Dracula*, Mina has returned to her sweet, wifely identity, and has born a son with her husband Jonathan who imagines that his son's "bundle of names links all our little band of men together," (Stoker 368). Like Lucy, Mina is happily reinscribed to docile Victorian womanhood after bordering on the edge

of New Woman liberation, with its promises of conventionally male freedoms, for too long. While Mina's brain fever offers a new departure from her female psyche (which proves threatening as it is to the men in *Dracula* even before it fused with Dracula's literal mind), it is ultimately not a vehicle of social liberation for her. Rather, it is treated as a foreign host that must be murdered before it eats away at Mina's Victorian sensibilities. After her episode, she assumes not the independent route of New Woman, but becomes more conservative than ever in conventional domesticity as devoted wife to Jonathan Harker.

II. Angelica, the "Boy" in *The Heavenly Twins*

Angelica's tomboy nature makes her the robust counter to Evadne Frayling's version of the nervous New Woman. Like Lucy, Angelica also possesses a restless spirit that drives her to leave home in the middle of the night; unlike Lucy, she is fully conscious of her wanderings. "I've run away, I walked all the way home," she explains to her brother one morning after one of many brief disappearances. "I cut across the pine woods, and the big black shadows fluttered about me like butterfly bogies, and I wasn't afraid. I threw my arms about, and ran, and jumped, and *breathed*!" (Grand 305-306). Angelica, the adventurous Victorian female stuck in a social role she finds suffocating, openly embraces her impulse for New Woman freedoms such as unescorted romps through the forest. Athletic, larger than her twin brother, and unceasingly clever, she is also an advocate of rational dress and takes this practice to its logical end in *The Heavenly Twins* by disguising herself as a young man, signifying her transformation into New Woman identity without, miraculously, death or hysteria.

Disguised as "the Boy" Angelica befriends a famed yet isolated choir soloist in her town. "The Tenor" is often amused by the Boy's (Angelica's) mannerisms, noticing that he moved "with as much delight in the free play of his muscles as if he were only let out to exercise them occasionally," (Grand 384). To the Tenor's mind, the Boy marries the best qualities of both a masculine and feminine nature, for his

> moments of thoughtfulness…gave glimpses of another nature underneath, with
>
> more substantial qualities. The Tenor soon perceived that he was not all mischief, romp, and boyishness…but beneath there was a strong will at work with some purpose (Grand 385).

And when the Tenor asks the Boy if he calls himself "a man," he flatly rejects gender labeling, preferring instead to be known as "a bright particular spirit," (Grand 393). Furthermore, the Boy articulately defends the New Woman's cause, asking the Tenor directly if he "knows what it is, the great oppression of the ages?" Throughout their relationship, the Tenor is fascinated with his curious companion, who strolls only at night, serenades him by violin, and knows how to cook.

The Boy's metamorphosis, induced by a near-fatal drowning episode, at once suggests the permanent cleansing of Angelica's social restrictions and horrifies the Tenor, who in saving Angelica, catches a chill which eventually develops into fatal sickness. He is at once disillusioned by both the Boy and the pretty young woman he saw weekly at church (Angelica) who, up to now, he had logically presumed were two separate individuals. Angelica articulately explains her desire to masquerade as a young man, noting her "signs of awakening" as proof of her just cause. This is what truly takes the Tenor aback: Angelica's confident defense of her trickery. As the

novel's omniscient voice, Grand offers insight into the Tenor's reaction as representative of men-in-general's attitude towards New Women: "it is a noteworthy fact, as showing how hopelessly involved man's moral perceptions are with his prejudices and faith in custom even when reprehensible, that the Tenor was if anything more shocked by Angelica's outspoken rejection to grossness," (Grand 459-460).

Significantly, the Tenor dies shortly after Angelica's transformation, calling attention both to Angelica's hardiness as a New Woman heroine and her former male companion's utter denial of her successful transgendering. Angelica, admittedly grievous over her friend's death, nevertheless refuses to apologize for her adventure. Though sorry she has deceived the Tenor, she reminds herself she is sorry "simply because he had found her out; simply because there was an end of a charming adventure," (Grand 497). Perfectly attuned to the social climate Grand writes in, Angelica predicts "there will be more like her" and continues to dress herself in men's clothing. While visiting her brother Diavolo shortly after her friend the Tenor has died, Angelica his closet:

> Angelica went to Diavolo's room, and presently returned with a suit of his clothes. These she put on, and then, without haste…found herself out in the open air, under the stars, on a gravel walk, with a broad lawn stretched before her. She stood a moment, breathing deeply in pure enjoyment of the air, then put up both hands to rearrange a little cloth cap she wore which was slipping offer her abundant hair. Then she threw up her arms and stretched every limb in the joy of perfect freedom from restraint, (Grand 530).

Clearly relishing in the eased movement men's clothing provides, Angelica allows herself to recall advice given to her after her friend's unfortunate death: "only be

true." True to her nature, Angelica welcomes her new ability to dress like a man, and dons both men's and women's clothing throughout the remainder of the novel, attesting to her eased identity through both gender performances.

It is worth mentioning that transgendering in New Woman fiction not only played itself out in women who take on male behavior or dress; Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* features a cross-dressing male who successfully enjoys a brief career as a female nurse. As a physical representation of duality of identity, transgendering in New Woman fiction reflects a real social hysteria surrounding the innovation of 'rational dress' in the nineteenth century, and furthermore signifies a rupture with the traditional strictures of Victorian womanhood. While Stoker's *Dracula* posits female transgendering that, according to him, seem implied by New Woman reforms (such as rational dress), he makes visible latent fears of uncontained femaleness that eased gender conventions could invite if not corrected by vigilant men and female madness itself. By contrast, Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* adopts the scenario of women acting like men and reverses the outcome. To the New Woman's credit, Angelica embraces rational dress long after her experiment, and it is her facile versatility in the remainder of the novel to enact both conventionally masculine and feminine behavior that firmly establishes her as a prototypical New Woman. Significantly, her metamorphosis from Angelica, to Boy, to New Woman spares her the female hysteria or death that accompanies most New Woman heroines; through the death of the Tenor, the male psychosis proves less stable than her own.

CHAPTER THREE

Motherhood, Domestication, and Escape Routes in *Jude the Obscure*

For the majority of the nineteenth century, the self-worth of a typical middle class Victorian woman was predicated on her ability to cultivate serene domestic life, particularly through her role as a mother. In *Demography and Degeneration* Soloway remarks that the Victorian middle classes had "invested…the mother, with such unique and special qualities, that threats to domestic life could easily be amplified into multiple scenarios of disintegration and ruin," (Soloway 110). The exaggerated virtues of the family and a woman's sanctified station within it are echoed in literature of the century, notably Coventry Patmore's ode to the Victorian wife, "The Angel in the House" (1854):

> Man must be pleased; but him to please
> Is woman's pleasure, down the gulf
> Of his condoled necessities
> She casts her best, she flings herself…
> While she, too gentle even to force
> His penitence by kind replies,
> Waits by, expecting his remorse,
> With pardon in her pitying eyes;
> And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
> A comfortable word confers,
> She leans and weeps against his breast,
> And seems to think the sin was hers;
> Or any eye to see her charms,
> At any time, she's still his wife,
> Dearly devoted to his arms…
> (Abrams and Greenblatt, eds. 1723-4)

For women, marriage and motherhood predominated in the 1800's as a social mandate, and towards the end of the century the slipping national birthrate prompted eugenic theory, elevating motherhood to a nationalist cause. Soloway explains that the Woman Question became "a magnet for a host of deep-seated fears, concerns, and sometimes

hopes about the future," (Soloway 111). The New Woman's insistence on sexual equality and contraceptive methods, such as family planning and condom usage (Soloway 110) stirred new attitudes towards compulsory motherhood. In effect, New Women appeared to challenge "what many people believed were the sustaining strengths of Britain's favored place in the world – the patriarchal family, the division of labor, and the nurturing of a great imperial race," (Soloway 111). New Woman fiction was demonized by many conservative imperialists as a social poison, as Linda Dowling notes: "the loosening of sexual controls apparently encouraged by…New Woman fiction was almost universally believed by late-Victorian critics to threaten the vital bonds of state and culture," (Dowling 438).

New Woman writers, however, did not totally erase motherhood from their novels. Instead, they used fiction to question to the nature and existence of a maternal instinct, making visible women's ambivalence, if not outright distaste, for motherhood. This is not to say the figure of the nurturing mother was nowhere present in New Woman fiction: by the end of *The Heavenly Twins*, for example, Evadne Frayling has achieved both a rich intellectual life and a domestic role as mother to three children. But overall the mothers of New Woman fiction were largely more complex than their calm Victorian predecessors. Once again, hysteria serves as a useful trope to demonstrate the characters' divided loyalties: independent New Women on the one hand, curious about their identities distinct from children, and inheritors of the "Angel in the House" domestic ethic on the other.

Figurative and literal departures from compulsory motherhood and domestication are examined closely in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* through heroine Sue Bridehead's

distinct psychological passages. Sue "escapes" domestication twice in *Jude the Obscure*: her first escape liberates her from a domestic training program, the second from legalized marriage through a sleep-induced act of hysteria. Sue experiences hysteria again in *Jude*, and it is in response to her maternal failure. Kathleen Blake observes Sue's precarious treatment of maternity, noting that children for Sue "represent a conflict between personal liberty and concession to one's kind," (Blake 723). While Sue's attitude toward children and wifely duty are no doubt complicated, her hysteria – an escape method from Victorian domestic conventions Sue either has no stake in or has adopted prematurely – stems from a common New Woman concern: that maternity and domestication alike threaten sexual liberty.

Sue Bridehead, Social "Ishmaelite" in *Jude the Obscure*

In the Postscript of *Jude the Obscure*'s 1912 edition, Hardy noted a critics view that Sue was "the woman of the feminist movement – the slight, pale, "bachelor" girl – the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions are producing," (Taylor, ed. xxv). In the beginning of the novel Sue certainly embraces her independent nature; a favorite proclamation of hers is "I shall do just as I choose!" She describes herself as an "Ishmaelite," recalling the wild rebel Ishmael from Genesis: "his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him," (Genesis 16:12). And more than becoming a mother, Sue yearns to be a child again: "I crave to get back to the life of my infancy and its freedom," (Hardy 139).

In typical New Woman fashion, Sue aspires to support herself financially. Shortly after meeting Jude, she applies to Training-School to become a teacher, exclaiming "how independent I shall be after two years' training!" (Hardy 133).

However the women at the Training-School at Melchester where Sue enrolls are safe but restless in the blockaded sexuality of their college regimen:

> They formed a pretty, suggestive, pathetic sight, of whose pathos and beauty they were themselves unconscious and would not discover till, amid the storms and strains of after-years, with their injustice, loneliness, childbearing, and bereavement, their minds would revert to this experience as to something which had been allowed to slip past them insufficiently regarded (Hardy 141).

Sue wants financial independence, but apparently not at the price of discovering her beauty and pathos until her "after-years." Nor does she want that "something" – her sexuality – to slip past insufficiently regarded. Her eventual escape from the Training School can only signify sexual liberation; she flees to Jude's house and explains to him: "They locked me up for being out with you; and it seemed so unjust that I couldn't bear it, so I got out of the window and escaped across the stream!" (Hardy 144). Sue refuses to contain her latent sexual pathos within "civil" social spaces: she proudly proclaims after her escape that she is a "negation of civilization" (Hardy 147), linking her personal ethic to wildness and authenticity, not social conformity.

Sue's second escape and first bout of hysteria occurs when she leaps from her matrimonial bed, shared with Phillotson, her husband and boss at the school where she eventually teaches. As he enters the dark room and begins to undress, he hears Sue – fitfully asleep – rise to the window:

> There was a cry from the bed, and a quick movement. Before the Schoolmaster had realized where he was he perceived Sue starting up half-awake, staring wildly, and springing out upon the floor on the side away from him, which was towards the window. […] Before he had thought that she meant to do more than get air she had mounted upon the sill and leapt out…
> 'I was asleep, I think!' she began, her pale face still turned away from him. 'And something frightened me – a terrible dream – I thought I saw you - ' The actual circumstances seemed to come back to her, and she was silent. (Hardy 226-227).

Again Sue seems to reject contained sexuality in this passage, delaying the consummation of her domestic life by fleeing from the symbolic site of her marriage. Her "terrible dream" is perhaps continued matrimony with Phillotson, though it is equally arguable that Sue's nightmare stems from her unwillingness to submit to domestication itself. Moreover Sue's increasing proclivity for windows (and more generally, her hysteria) "negates civilization," evoking the New Woman in her disregard for social convention that would siphon her personality and specifically, her sexuality.

After Sue's liberation from traditional marriage with Phillotson, a relatively happy period of "free union" follows with Jude. The free union was a progressive, informal marriage practice advocated by many New Woman writers and political figures in the nineteenth century whom Hardy would have been familiar with, such as Eleanor Marx and Olive Schreiner. In an 1886 letter to Karl Pearson, Schreiner wrote that "the most ideal marriage at the present day seems to me to be the union of two individuals, strongly sympathetic, who after deep thought enter in the sexual relationship," (Showalter 50). But however idealistic, free unions still posed the greatest risk to women who – being childbearers – had the most to lose upon entering a mutually consenting sexual relationship with no legal guarantees. Sue undoubtedly feels emancipated from Phillotson, but still waits a considerable amount of time before "giving into" Jude, begging him not to regard her as "a cold-natured, sexless creature…for keeping you at such a distance!" (Hardy 267).

It is important to note however that Sue's apparent coldness belies her actual sexual drive which, though atrophied through deliberate repression is still a present force. Her purchase of the statues of Venus and Apollo early in the novel, her reading of

Swinburne, and her interpretation of the Song of Solomon as a paean to "ecstatic, natural, human love" (Hardy 152) all attest to Sue's viably sexual nature. It is the consequence of sex she fears, both the conquering of her independent spirit and affirmation of her status as a potential child-bearer. Until the unexpected arrival of the couple's first child Sue enjoys Jude's diminutive, childlike epithets for her: "little girl," "baby," "fairy." In fact, Jude and Sue's first child is technically not even hers, but a son from Jude's previous marriage with Annabella. And when their new son "Father Time" first calls Sue mother, she begins to feel herself "getting intertwined with my kind." She feels she must give over "struggling against the current," (Hardy 279).

Maternity for Sue conflicts with her drive for self-mastery, and she doubts her ability to effectively mother children. To her "it seems such a terribly tragic thing to bring beings into the world – so presumptuous – that I question my right to do it sometimes!" To Phillotson, she likens herself to a fallen Eve unfit to "people" society. She wishes that "some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise," (Hardy 225). But Sue cannot have it both ways; she decides to compromise between free love with Jude and maternity, not wholly resigning herself to the latter, by having children and not marrying. When Father Time asks why she had children, she curtly explains that "it is a law of nature" (Hardy 333) for women to do so.

The most dramatic enactment of Sue's hysteria occurs in response to the decimation of her family: following an argument with her son, where he indicts her for bringing socially ostracized children into the world, he promptly kills himself and his siblings. Sue's double mistake – for becoming a mother and for not reassuring her son's imploring accusations with "pleasant untruths" – throws her "into a convulsive agony

which knew no abatement…her slight figure shaken with her gasps, and her eyes staring at the ceiling," (Hardy 336). At this point Sue has become both a deeply sympathetic and reproachful character in *Jude*, but Father Time's catastrophic murder/suicide in *Jude* is so broadly symbolic that it is difficult to locate total blame in either Sue or Victorian society. His decision seems to act out what Sue already feels, that she should not have children despite her sexual nature, and the suicide note he leaves – "Done because we are too menny" – reflects his internalized self-conception as excess to Sue's independent identity.

Sue's hysteria in Jude directs her to opposite fates: after her leap from Phillotson's window, she undertakes free union with Jude; after the death of her children, she returns to Phillotson in an attempt to adopt an extreme form of self-renunciation. But both acts of hysteria are crucially linked to the same anxiety: that she is unfit to be in a conventionally domestic or maternal role. Whether or not Jude is a pro- or anti- New Woman novel is debatable and finally left unresolved by the novel's end: Sue resigns herself to an unhappy marriage with Phillotson while Jude himself dies. Hardy's political sympathies however do not seem to be anti-New Woman so much as hesitant towards sexual union in general. In an 1896 letter to Florence Henniker, Hardy writes "seriously I don't see any possible scheme for the union of the sexes that would be satisfactory," (Hardy and Pinion, eds., 52). Neither does Hardy seem to hit upon a satisfactory union that endures in Jude. But despite Sue's juggle of social nonconformity and Victorian conventionality, she is unquestionably happiest in her days of childless union with Jude, testifying the to the type of optimistic free love envisioned by Schreiner and her contemporaries. Both acts of hysteria are also acts of emancipation; when we leave Sue

with Phillotson, he reassures her he will not “intrude upon her privacy any more than I did before,” (Hardy 369). And if guaranteed “privacy” seems little consolation to Sue given her recent tragedy, it is keen recognition on Phillotson’s part of his wife’s resolutely solitary, independent nature.

CONCLUSION:
New Woman Fiction and Hysteria

New Woman fiction in the late nineteenth century was characteristically frank in its treatments of taboo social issues, and offered realistic heroines boldly rebellious against societal restrictions for women. That the literary trope of female hysteria should be revitalized and subverted in New Woman fiction is keenly insightful and overtly political on the part of its writers. New Woman writers reverse an old trope against its essentializing implications, imbuing their smart heroines with new resolve in *The Heavenly Twins*, creating an important legacy of reading and self-education in *Story of an African Farm*, and eradicating destructive romance myths *The Odd Women*. Furthermore the dubious treatment of mad New Women in *Dracula* and *Jude the Obscure* nevertheless gestures at liberating social possibilities now available to the aspiring New Woman: sexual and intellectual experimentation in *Dracula*; free union and self-mastery in *Jude.*

George Egerton's *Keynotes*, published in 1893, takes up reading, cross-gendering, and maternity in her short stories of New Women. While most New Woman writers were realists (such as Grand) and naturalists, Egerton was stylistically innovative in her stories, subordinating plot to focus instead on impressions, moments of time, and psychological states (Nelson, ed. 3). Her work offers a fitting complement to the novels examined here in its treatment of female psychoses. As Nelson notes in *A New Woman Reader*, Egerton's stories demonstrate her disdain for conventional morality, which she believed "was constructed by men and imposed on women, narrowing their lives and experiences," (Nelson 3). In *Keynotes*' "Now Spring Has Come," she states that "man manufactured an artificial morality…and established a system that means war, and

always war, because it is a struggle between instinctive truths and cultivated lies," (Egerton 49). Egerton celebrates female instinct and intuition in her stories, urging women to break free from conventionality and to embrace their "untamed spirit" and "eternal wildness," (Egerton 30). And unlike many New Woman writers, who depicted their heroines' hysteria as a final endpoint to restrictive Victorian womanhood, Egerton proclaims that woman's untamable quality is both "woman's strength and woman's witchcraft," (Egerton 30). Her heroines - who indulge their frequent flights of imaginative fancy during otherwise droll or painful circumstances - offer a final spin on female hysteria in New Woman fiction: rather than an act against conformity, hysteria is a healing psychological medium available exclusively to introspective New Women.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine etymology of the word "hysteria" in "Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, and Sexuality" to point out its specifically feminine linguistic roots, noting its gender bias inscribed into the word itself. "Such linguistics," they note, "examine lexical asymmetries that reify sexist stereotypes…and the absence of words that testify to patriarchal blindspots female hysteria and male ____? One writer suggests "testeria")," (Gilbert and Gubar 520). Their observation is not off the mark: M.R. Beard traces the definition of "hysteria" *Woman as Force in History* to its seventeenth century Latin etymology "hystericus" (meaning "of the womb") from the Greek term "'hustera,' "the womb," (Beard 89). Beliefs that hysteria originated in the womb (Beard 89) has had a legacy of stigmatizing women as psychologically unstable. By selecting issues of significance to women in the nineteenth century, New Woman writers capitalized on the trope of female hysteria by connecting it to highly complex social acts: reading, transgendering, and maternity. My term "dualities of identity" finds

grounding in each activity, and helps explain the purpose of hysteria as a subversive social message in New Woman fiction. In reading, female heroines take up several New Woman causes, namely self-education, but postmodern theory reveals the identity split experienced in a single individual, between independent reader subject and reader-inside-text. As Linda Flower notes, "the ways other people, the past, and the social present contribute to the production of a text, through cultural norms, available language, intertextuality…and so on" (Villanueva, ed. 706) both shatter the myth of "the isolated creator" and point to the collaborative process between writer *and* reader. As New Woman heroines read texts, like outside readers read New Woman heroines as text, each "reader" becomes aware of his or herself as both a member "of the social present" and conspiratorial insider to another "present," offered through the text in hand. As an act of identity splitting, New Woman heroines owed to their creators the mobilization of new forms of existence. Similarly, transgendering allowed New Woman heroines to quite literally adopt male bodies or conventionally male behavior that opened up reflexive performances of gender both exciting and physically liberating. Most successfully played out in this study by Angelica, "the Boy" in *The Heavenly Twins*, this gender-identity split capitalized on the campaign for 'rational dress' for women in Victorian society and, as in the example of *Dracula*, allowed women to dabble in male sexual or intellectual spheres formally preclusive to them. Finally, maternity for New Woman revisits the controversy many progressive feminists had to reconcile, with many on opposite sides of the ideological fence. Troubling to many New Woman advocates, the dual identity of "individual" and "mother" seemed an impossible combination, while writers such as Grand and Egerton encouraged New Woman to strengthen future generations of girls by

becoming instructive mothers themselves. “The woman [of the future] will be stronger and better,” she writes in her 1984 article “The New Aspect of the Woman Question.” “It is the woman’s place and pride and pleasure to teach the child,” she remarks (Nelson, ed. 143). In exploring the potential of New Women to be both mothers and intellectuals, activists, political figures – overall, thoroughly *individuals* – New Woman writers used maternity to examine both its threatening and pleasurable results.

As the novels in this paper demonstrate, the New Woman writers represented the psychological nature and social conditions of women in a variety of forms. All of their stories, as Nelson notes, focus on women “who have abandoned their traditional sphere to lead more complex lives” (Nelson, ed. 6), and the transition to unfamiliar social terrain was inevitably associated with marked psychological – or in some cases, fatal – consequences. Significantly each treatment of hysteria and women’s emancipation are unique to the novel’s aim and overarching social message, finally diversifying “woman’s nature” as larger and more dizzyingly complex than simplistic psychological instability. Instead of reinstating the New Woman in Victorian stereotypes, “hysteria” in New Woman fiction turned female psychological bias back on itself, to rupture convention through emancipating social acts.

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