



TESE DE DOUTORAMENTO

**'MISTRESS OF HERSELF'. AESTHETICS AND DISCOURSES  
OF THE NEW WOMAN IN THE LATE VICTORIAN NOVEL**

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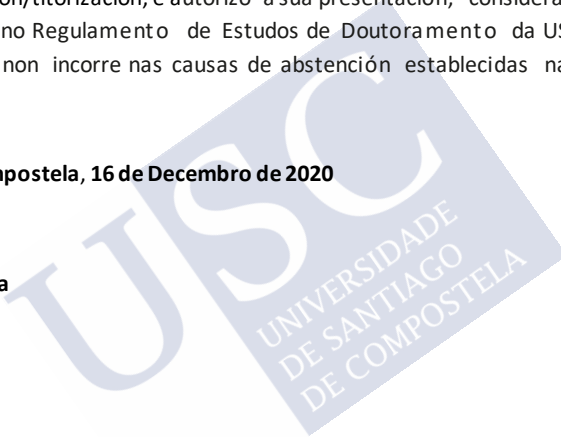
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## ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis explores the elusive nature of the New Woman in literary discourses produced in the last two decades of the nineteenth century in Great Britain. Partaking of a feminist revisionist endeavour, it offers close readings of this crucial gynocentric space of Victorian prose fiction. My research has been primarily addressed to the iconic New Woman fictions written by Henry James, Olive Schreiner, George Egerton and Sarah Grand. I have first and foremost focused on the literary aspect of texts which, I felt, have not been sufficiently examined in terms of the aesthetic and discursive configuration of late Victorian female subjectivity.

The in-depth, textual examination of each of the four publishing successes that constitute the selected corpus of this dissertation — Henry James's *Daisy Miller* (1878), Olive Schreiner's *The Story of An African Farm* (1883), George Egerton's *Keynotes & Discords* (1893-1894) and Sara Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) — has determined the need of both specific and more general methodological approaches. Some major premises on aesthetics and discourse analysis have informed this project. Rita Kranidis's studies on Victorian and feminist aesthetic ideologies in her *Subversive Discourse* (1995) have been very useful in the understanding of defiance and non-conformity as decisive aesthetic stances in the oppositional literature produced by women writers. Post-structuralist considerations on language as an unequalled site for the construction of meaning and gendered subjectivity (Weedon, 1987; Barret, 1986) triggered my research interest in the discourses produced by the New Woman heroines as they were built into the literary fabric of these late Victorian narratives. Judith Baxter's practical guide to feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (*Positioning Gender in Discourse*, 2003) and Judith Butler's notion of the *performative* self (Butler, 1990) have equally been instrumental in my tackling of language production and the circulation of discourses in the corpus. Projecting my own analysis through the lens of postmodern transgender discourse, I contend that the New Woman hybrid is "the monster that speaks to you" (Preciado, 2020).

Drawing on a wide variety of critical studies on the genre — of which a general review is also provided — as well as on the work of cultural historians, this dissertation claims that the complex New Woman topos is a contested site projecting kaleidoscopic images of female identities on the border, abiding in the crevices of cultural representations of normative womanhood. By paying attention to the aesthetic and discursive constructions of these heroines in revolt, I examine their inner contradictions as well as the most effective narrative strategies deployed by oppositional literature in its ultimate aim to advance a political agenda and change the world.

KEY WORDS: New Woman, feminist identity, Discourse, Aesthetics, Feminism, Henry James, Olive Schreiner, George Egerton, Sarah Grand



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*Este trabajo está dedicado a mi madre, Carmiña Eirín, en reconocimiento a su valentía y a su talento extraordinarios. Por haberme enseñado siempre, desde muy niña, que las mujeres hemos de ser independientes y luchar por nuestros derechos.*





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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. GENERAL PRESENTATION

The writing of fiction on the New Woman was a crucial part of the fight led by the feminist movement during the last two decades of the nineteenth century in Britain, right before its focus became decisively orientated towards the obtention of women's access to the ballot. The new fiction concentrated its efforts on the exhibition of the limitations inherent in the condition of woman as she was kept away from the institutions of social and political power as well as denied the financial and educational opportunities their male contemporaries enjoyed. The creation of powerful heroines that dared to oppose the intrinsic injustices of the Victorian social order was determinant in the campaign to forward the changes that were felt most urgent. By challenging the naturalised Victorian discourses on women's traditional roles and exposing the gender asymmetries that lied at the core of dominant ideology, these New Woman narratives were instrumental in the forging of new female identities both in fiction and in fact.

The critiques raised against the social position of women in England had been escalating through the century until they reached their zenith in the 1890s. The areas in which reforms had been increasingly demanded were multiple — access to all stages of education and all areas of employment, marriage and divorce laws, voting rights or contraception and birth control, to name just a few. Political activism had seen some of those demands satisfied when Girton College or Newnham opened their doors for women at the beginning of the eighteen seventies or when Oxford allowed women to attend classes and sit for examinations, although they would still have to wait until 1920 to be granted degrees at university. Also, in 1875, women had begun to serve as Poor Law guardians and eight years later, in 1883 — the same year in which Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* was published — the final repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts was finally achieved after an intensive campaign conducted by Josephine Butler. The Married Women Property Acts that were passed in 1882 and 1891 allowed women to regain possession of their earned income, and a new throng of nurses, teachers, midwives, journalists and writers gave visibility to the middle-class woman in the public sphere. Lower-class and working-class women had always had greater access to the sphere outside the home, “but this was hardly an elected condition, as they were among the most oppressed and underpaid of all Victorian workers” (Miller, 2008: 7). Feminists, social reformers and political campaigners hotly debated on the most impending issues to advance woman's cause and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies was finally established in 1897 to unify existing organizations under the leadership of Millicent Garrett Fawcett.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The following bibliographical sources have been of great use in providing a background for the period in women's history under analysis. Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Community and Work for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) and Martha Vicinus (ed.), *A Widening Sphere. Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1977); Barbara Caine's *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Jane Lewis's *Women in England 1870-1950. Sexual Divisions and Social Change* (Sussex and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); Susan Kingsley Kent's *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987); Ray Strachey's *The Cause. A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (New Preface by Barbara Strachey. 1928; reprint, London: Virago, 1978) remains, to this day, an invaluable source of information on the topic; Patricia Hollis's *Women in Public 1850-1900. Documents of the Victorian Women's Movement* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), Jane Lewis (ed.) *Labour and Love. Women's Experience of the Home and Family, 1850-1940* (Oxford: Basil

The late-Victorian New Woman writers and, more particularly, the so-called “feminist writers” (Showalter, 1977), engaged in the struggle for reform by introducing and circulating new discourses on womanhood which questioned the validity of former middle-class ideals of domestic womanliness.<sup>2</sup> When they decided to protest through literature against the crippling constraints inherent in the ideal, they were trying to mobilise their readership, emotionally and politically, against those very constraints. In order to facilitate the transfer of their feminist agenda onto literature they came up with New Woman heroines who, despite their differences, were conspicuously alluring and singularly attractive in their assertiveness. A hitherto unseen spirited, outspoken and morally sound female protagonist was given birth in order to rival and outvie more comforting accounts of normative Victorian womanhood destined to keep women in their traditional place outside the public sphere.

The New Woman has been variously studied by historians and literary critics as both a historical and fictional figure. However, her complex identity remains elusive and multiple, unstable and contradictory, to this day. As a historical being, she has been identified with a political force involved in feminist activism, social reform, extensive writing — including all genres (mostly novels, short stories, poems and plays), and the overall defence of women’s full incorporation into public life as citizens. Her parallel fictional identities seem to have been built from variously antagonistic ideological fronts which kept producing paradoxical images of the modern woman, celebrating her as a model of progress for the next century or excoriating her as a harbinger of the Empire’s demise, all in similar proportion. Researchers of the New Woman have insisted on the complexity of the term both in the fictional and factual realms. Thus, it has been associated with a “fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth-century women’s movement”, one which was presented “in multifarious guises in fiction and in the periodical press throughout the 1880s and 1890s. The ‘wild woman’, the ‘glorified spinster’, the ‘advanced woman’, the ‘odd woman’, the ‘modern woman’, ‘Novissima’, the ‘shrieking sisterhood’, the ‘revolting daughters’ — all these discursive constructs variously approximated to the nascent ‘New Woman’” (Ledger, 1997: 1, 2-3). The elusiveness of the phrase is also commonly observed as the New Woman is regarded as mainly “a product of discourse” (Ledger, 1997: 3); “Henry James’s literary conceit” (Smith-Rosenberg, 1989: 264); “a media construct” (Schaffer, 2001: 39; Tusan, 1998); “a theoretical concept” yet to be “materialized socially” (Kranidis, 1995: xiv); and even a “phantasmatic” figure, “a character, a set of demands, and a model for female readers” (Mangum, 1998: 1), “an imaginary icon” (Miller, 2008: 7). The question of the actual identity of the New Woman, therefore, reverberates through most academic work on the subject, to the point that, as Lyn Pykett has remarked, the indeterminacy of the concept would seem to “demonstrate that the New Woman did not exist. ‘New Woman’, both in fiction and in fact, was (and remains) a shifting and contested term” (Pykett, 2001: xi).

Be as it may, as Richardson and Willis suggest, certain similarities may be ascertained amid the myriad configurations of the New Woman, “her perceived newness, her autonomous self-definition and her determination to set her own agenda in developing an alternative vision of the future” (Richardson and Willis, 2001: 12). At all events, what remains fascinating for those of us interested in the New Woman topos is precisely its resistance to homogenization,

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Blackwell, 1986) and, more recently, Ben Griffin’s *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain. Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women’s Rights*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) provides an in-depth analysis of the Victorian ideal.

its impossibility to be reduced to a univocal, unambiguous essence. Such features continue to inspire and to stimulate research efforts. This doctoral dissertation is concerned with the fictional portrait, the particular rendering of the New Woman, as offered in four major late nineteenth-century fictions: Henry James's *Daisy Miller* (1878), Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), George Egerton's *Keynotes & Discords* (1893-1894) and Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893). The discussion of the female characters started in the following chapters shall attempt to address both the common features and the idiosyncrasies with which the term 'New Woman' has come to be associated.

The precise moment in time in which the phrase "New Woman" began to circulate in Britain has been regularly tracked down by scholars (Ardis, 1990: 10-28; Jordan, 1983; Rubinstein, 1986: 16-23; Schaffer, 2001: 39-52 and Tusan, 1998). Although it is commonly accepted that it was a phrase coined by Sarah Grand in 1894, Michelle Elizabeth Tusan has demonstrated that it was already capitalised and in circulation a year before in the periodical press. Likewise, Lucy Bland has remarked that the term "new woman" was first used in Sarah Grand's novel *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) (Bland, 1995: 144). The year 1865 has also been referred to as a birth date for the capitalised term in the *Westminster Review*, though in clear allusion to the new heroine of the sensation novels: the "New Woman...no longer the Angel, but the Devil in the House" (Heilmann, 2000: 22). Interestingly, I have found evidence of its existence — albeit in the lower case — prior to its famous appearance in the *North American Review* in 1894. Thus, the New Woman is mentioned ten years before in a scandalous, best-selling Spanish novel entitled *La prostituta*, by Eduardo López Bago, which addresses the international debate on legalised prostitution and the pandemic of syphilis. The quotation refers to a prostitute, Mari Pepa, newly arrived from Seville:

En Madrid fue recibida con todos los honores de la *mujer nueva*: habitó en el lupanar más aristocrático, y alcanzó dentro de él ciertas preeminencias sobre sus demás compañeras, entre cuyos privilegios debe mencionarse el de tener para sus tratos habitación fija y exclusivamente suya, la cual se componía de un gabinete con una alcoba de columnas a la italiana, en cuyo gabinete se colocó un precioso tocador, mientras que en la alcoba mandó poner su indispensable baño de cinc; porque el verdadero secreto de Mari Pepa, aparte de su mayor o menor grado de temperamento refractario, consistía en una limpieza extremada, con la cual conservó la sana frescura necesaria a la carne, viéndose en aquella andaluza reproducida y copiada la costumbre inglesa del baño frío en todo tiempo, hasta en los días de más crudo invierno, cosa que fue motivo de gran sorpresa y que ninguna tuvo suficiente valor para imitar (López Bago, 1884: 144-145).

The fact that the phrase was already italicised in the Spanish text reveals that it alluded to a well-known type, in this particular instance referring to a woman of loose morals and, oddly enough, English toilette habits. A later appearance of the new woman phrase as an already-fixed formula — although still earlier than the periodicals mentioned by British scholars — may be found in a realist text written by the Galician novelist Emilia Pardo Bazán in 1890-1891 entitled *Una Cristiana – La Prueba*. The phrase is used to characterise an English governess:

No hay que tomar al pie de la letra lo que dice un enamorado emberrinchado. 'Mo' no es la 'mujer nueva' [sic], convenido; pero acaso no es tiempo aún de que esa hembra excepcional aparezca en nuestra sociedad y la modifiquen... Entre tanto, 'Mo' es una real mujer, que me tiene ley, que dejaría por mí la proporción más brillante... y eso supone algo, compadrito. Mathew... ¿ves tú?, se casaba, 'iba al ara

de Himeneo', si a ella se le antojase. No es invención, no; cartas cantan... Y el tal Mathew tiene muchas libras (Pardo Bazán, 1890-1891: 176).

Again, the explicit reference to the *mujer nueva*, the New Woman, and the associated controversy surrounding her figure seem to imply that at the height of the 1890s the formula was already sufficiently in circulation so as to be recognised by the Spanish reading public.<sup>3</sup>

The first capitalised appearance of the phrase, however, has been traced by Michelle Elizabeth Tusan to an article published in *The Woman's Herald* in August 17, 1893, entitled "The Social Standing of the New Woman". This article in the women's press "marked the first time that the term New Woman with the imposing capital letters first appeared in a periodical" (Tusan, 1998: 170). Grand's article in *The North American Review* and the ensuing discussion over the definition of the New Woman would have later helped galvanise the phrase into life. From 1893 to 1897 the women's press tried to "create a respectable image for political women through the invention of the identity of the New Woman" whilst "a counter image of the New Woman as a dystopic vision of a society gone wrong was promoted by the main press" (Tusan, 1998: 169). According to this scholar, the New Woman was a utopian political identity created by the feminist writers in the women's press — notably in *Shafts* (1892-1900), *The Woman's Herald* (1891-1893), *The Woman's Gazette* (1881-1891) and *The Woman's Signal* (1894-1899) — a social reformer who would look after the interests of the nation without giving up her domestic duties. In fact, it was precisely her expertise as a domestic administrator and moral example that were projected as woman's major assets that would guarantee the sound management of public life.

## 1.2. *STATUS QAESTIONIS*: THE RESEARCH ON THE NEW WOMAN

A great variety of studies on the New Woman has been carried out from the first inquiries into the topic in the twentieth century. In this section, as one of the objectives set up in this dissertation, I intend to offer in chronological order a general overview of that scholarly research. Most studies can be classified according to their focus, the aspects in these fictions they decide to analyse and those that are left absent, the attention they pay to the New Woman feminist writers, in comparison to that bestowed on contemporary male realists, and closely linked to these two, the decade in which the studies were produced.

The reading of these pieces of research reveals considerable disagreement amongst critics with regard to the exact nature of the New Woman, which remains a constant focus of attention. Scholars also differ in their assessment of the literary and cultural value they attach to the new fiction. As a result, the New Woman emerges as a controversial figure both for feminist and non-feminist literary criticism, particularly when her modernity and alliance with dominant discourses on race, class and British nationalism are taken into consideration.

The first period of mainstream criticism of the New Woman genre<sup>4</sup> emerges at the beginning of the 1970s, in the wake of second-wave feminism. These pioneer scholars showed a legitimate interest in recuperating these novels from neglect and resituating them within the larger context of turn-of-the-century Victorian fiction and culture. This is the exhumation stage

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<sup>3</sup> Pardo Bazán, herself an outstanding feminist and intellectual of the Spanish nineteenth century, travelled extensively throughout Europe and to England in particular where she spoused and shared the views of John Stuart Mill on the Woman Question. This particular novel was also translated into English by Mary Springer, in New York, in 1891. I am indebted for this last reference to Dr. Cristina Patiño Eirín.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the New Woman fiction as a genre of its own see Heilmann, 2000; particularly her introductory "Regen(d)eration", pp. 1-14.

of the New Woman novel from the silence of history. However, during this decade scholarship tended to credit the male writers of the New Woman — most notably the work of Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, Henry James, George Moore, and George Gissing — over their female colleagues. The male treatment of the woman question was deemed both literary and superior to that meted out by their female contemporaries, who, at that stage, deserved scant attention. Several works stand out for their contribution and the critical stimulus they provided in the dawning field of New Woman studies.

In the late sixties, the New Critic Lloyd Fernando explored “The Radical Ideology of the ‘New Woman’” and reclaimed her “as a forerunner of modern exponents in the continuing debate on sexual emancipation” (Fernando, 1967: 206). Hardy, Moore, James and Meredith deserve special attention and only Olive Schreiner and Egerton are rescued in this “attempt to show that there are strong, historically justifiable grounds for examining both major and minor novels in greater detail and with greater relevance to the age in which they appeared” (Fernando, 1967: 222).

The fiction produced by the forgotten popular writers, the “minor novelists” of the nineties as they are called, starts being discussed at the beginning of the nineteen seventies in A. R. Cunningham’s “The ‘New Woman Fiction’ of the 1890’s”. With the exception of Grant Allen, this study focuses particularly on women writers such as Sarah Grand, George Egerton, Emma Frances Brooke, “Iota” (Mrs. Mannington Caffyn) and Menie Muriel Dowie, who “were challenging more than ever before the traditional concepts of the female role” (Cunningham, 1973: 178). Two main types of New Woman novel are distinguished: on the one hand, the “purity school” represented by Grant Allen and his “hill-top” novel, which is categorised as less radical; and, on the other, the novel characterised both by a heroine who is “the intellectualized, emancipated bundle of nerves” and by a more radical awareness of women as sexual beings (180). The same year there appeared Susan R. Gorsky’s “Old Maids and New Women” (Gorsky, 1973: 68-85), in which she explores the alternatives to marriage in Englishwomen’s novels in the period from 1847 to 1915 and pays some attention to Olive Schreiner and Sarah Grand, by focusing mostly on the plot and the limited career opportunities available to women both in fiction and in fact.

Elaine Showalter was the first scholar to focus on the group of writers which are the object of this dissertation. Her influential study — *A Literature of Their Own. British Women Novelists from Brönte to Lessing* (1977) [See, particularly, chapter VII: “The Feminist Novelists”: 182-215] — remains an excellent introduction to the genre and it contains a whole chapter dedicated to what she called “the feminist novelists”, women authors from the 1880s and 1890s who “played a central role in the popularisation of feminist ideology” (182). She claims that the death of George Eliot signalled the beginning of a new time in the history of the English novel and what she terms “the female tradition” which, with “the appearance of a new generation of writers”, would have moved from a feminine “into a Feminist phase”. Certain key issues in the development of the New Woman genre are mentioned, such as essential feminist challenges to the “many restrictions on women’s self-expression” or their attacks on patriarchal ideology and the glorification of woman’s self-sacrifice. These women writers “constructed a theoretical model of female oppression [...] and demanded changes in the social and political systems” (1977: 29). Showalter also pointed towards the abrupt disappearance of the three-decker novel in the 1890s as the opportunity for the feminist writers to find their own niche in the literary market and sell their “dreams”, “keynotes”, and “fantasias” to a welcoming female readership: “At the turn of the century came the purest examples of feminist literature, the novels, poems, and plays written as suffragette propaganda and distributed by the efficient and well-financed suffrage presses”. For her “[t]he feminist writers were not important artists” although the

American scholar underscores the relevance of this stage, “a declaration of independence, in the female tradition. They did produce some interesting and original work, and they opened new subjects for other novelists”. Elaine Showalter draws attention to the fact that feminist writers “challenged the monopoly of male publishers and rebelled against the dictatorship of the male establishment” (1977: 31).

This milestone of academic research on the topic of the New Woman novel offers a controversial approach with regard to the literary value it concedes to the texts produced by the feminist novelists. While implicitly acknowledging the validity of their writing strategies as instruments of potential political change, the condescension Showalter shows in her study has become a classic target of criticism by ulterior researchers in the field. At times, the American gynocritic justifies the treatment literary history has given the feminist writers on account of the interconnection she sees between the common stress-related illnesses which afflicted some of them and their dwindling literary production over the course of their careers. The figure of Olive Schreiner is severely excoriated on occasions, particularly as her work is contrasted with that of her male contemporaries, H. Rider Haggard or Andrew Lang, who “very naturally tended to see Schreiner’s work as deficient in qualities they themselves possessed. [...] George Moore found more than he wanted to know about sandhills, ostriches, and women, ‘but of art nothing; that is to say, art as I understand it — rhythmical sequence of events described with a rhythmical sequence of phrase’” (199). Overall, Elaine Showalter finds the feminist writers of the period tragically underambitious and depressing. A sense of failure, of talents and dreams of achievement gone to waste, looms over her chronicle of the literary and biographical journeys undertaken by these women writers.

The first book-length critical study on the topic, released under the title *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (Gail Cunningham, 1978), linked the work of female writers on the New Woman with the novels written by Thomas Hardy, George Meredith and George Gissing. Although this piece of research focuses on the work produced by “major writers”, who are unavoidably male, and the ways in which they exploited the New Woman trope, it also provides succinct but lucid analysis on the novels by so-called “minor writers” such as Sarah Grand, “Iota” or Emma Brooke. Most importantly, both Showalter and Cunningham’s studies were instrumental in the laying of foundations on which future scholars would continue to build their research on the New Woman for decades. Equally dismissive towards the feminist writers as Showalter, Cunningham’s study revealed, however, a similar interest in situating their work within a larger cultural context against which the attacks on marriage and the limitations imposed on womanhood could also be examined. Nonetheless, this work highlights the crucial fact that “for this brief period at least the emancipation of women and the emancipation of the English novel advanced together” (3). The New Woman is viewed as an aftermath of the reforms that had taken place in law, education and the professions, areas in which important achievements had already taken place by the 1890s, “when the New Woman began to emerge with a distinct identity” (10).

Another important piece of research in the closing years of the seventies is Patricia Stubbs’s *Women and Fiction. Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920* (1979). Both Cunningham and Stubbs discuss mostly the work produced by male writers alongside the fiction of both feminist and non-feminist women of letters such as Olive Schreiner, George Egerton, Mrs. Humphry Ward or Elizabeth Lynn Linton, among others. Stubbs’s broad use of the term “feminist” allows her study to accommodate male figures such as George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Grant Allen or H. G. Wells, who were largely perceived as such by their contemporaries. This wide-ranging discussion continues the processes of re-examination and re-writing of cultural and political history initiated by feminism by focusing on the relation of dominant images of women in

literature to social reality at the *fin de siècle*. An important claim in this critical work regards the close relationship between the novel genre and the little variety of images of women it produced since the eighteenth century: “Though we may deplore this narrow range of ‘types’ of women represented in fiction, it is important that we recognize that they are rooted in the very origins of the form and that they are part of a very strong tradition. This tradition has grown to some extent out of the historical reality of women’s experience, but it owes even more to the ideology which developed to disguise that experience” (Stubbs, 1979: xii). Stubbs criticises the failure of the feminist novel to “credit women with more forms of experience than their personal or sexual entanglements”. Because the novel continued to ignore women’s lives as active participants in the public sphere, both middle-class and working-class women, Stubbs claims that literature is “in a sense perpetuating a lie” (xiii). This study concludes that “what took place was an evolution, not a revolution in the portrayal of women” as the exaggerated emphasis on women’s sexuality these writings reveal shows the inner connection between the stereotypes of the past and those of the present (xv-xvi). With regard to the approach towards some of the feminist writers, Stubbs concedes that both Olive Schreiner and George Egerton “were exceptional in that they were gifted as well as hard up”, but she also laments that most of the others, “women like Emma Brooke (*A Superfluous Woman*), Edith Johnstone (*A Sunless Heart*) and, [...] Sarah Grand — just were not good enough as writers to turn their material into an important challenge to the literary tradition” (120). For Stubbs, the eighteen nineties marked “[o]ne of the clearest developments in the English novel”, which was “the disappearance of the virgin heroine and a readiness to incorporate sexuality into fiction. [...] But the recognition of female sexuality does not itself make a feminist novel” (225).

In Linda Dowling’s “The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s” (1979), the *fin de siècle* is shown as an “old world in collapse [...] that impelled the enemies of the avant-garde to identify, with a clairvoyance born of deep cultural anxiety, the New Woman and the decadent as twin avatars of the “New” (453). Dowling focuses on the late Victorian perception of the decadent and the New Woman as parallel forces of cultural degeneration, not opposing each other but, rather, “the values considered essential to the survival of established culture” (436). This essay anticipates Ardis’s later criticism of modernism’s “impulse to repudiate its own past” by failing to acknowledge the decadent and the New Woman as “the first rebellious expression of that disenchantment of culture with culture that Lionel Trilling has taught us to recognize as ‘modernism’” (436, 437). It also inaugurates a new path in the study of New Woman fiction as it focuses on its convergence with other major cultural phenomena in turn-of-the-century Britain.

The decade of the 1980s is characterised by a focus on the formal aspects of the genre. Although the prominence of male writers is still evident in one of the most relevant studies produced in this period, women’s dominance in the literary scene starts being acknowledged, particularly towards the end of the nineteen eighties, when there is a shift in focus which inaugurates the burgeoning of academic interest in the field. In 1982, Penny Boumelha released her book on *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*, in which she focuses mainly on the fiction produced by the author of *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1895). Only chapter 4, entitled “Women and the New Fiction” touches upon the feminist writers (see pp. 63-68). Boumelha acknowledges women’s at least numerical and commercial dominance in the literary scene in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and concedes that the relevance of women writers such as Grand, Schreiner or Egerton, lied in their own perception “as constituting by virtue of their sex alone a school or a class of writers” who, most importantly, wrote “with female readers in mind” when they made “a political or moral statement on behalf of their sex” (1982: 63). Boumelha reflects on the formal experimentation of the new writing

and rejects the stereotype according to which “the ‘New Woman’ fiction is marked by its adjustment to a characteristically feminine subjectivity” in order to argue for the unsettling of the objective narrator generated “by the tension between the male voice [...] and the periodic dissolution of the boundaries between author and character. It is as if at moments there is no mediating narrator, the writing of the fiction becomes for a time its own action, its own plot, enacting as well as articulating the protest of the text” (1982: 66-67). According to this scholar the “sex mark” invariably attached to the ‘New Woman fiction’ “marks a shift in the ideological project of novels about women during the fin de siècle period, away from the immediately preceding concern with womanliness, and toward the elaboration of a concept of womanhood” (1982: 73).

The year following Boumelha’s critical study, Ellen Jordan first claims in a subsequently much quoted article — “The Christening of the New Woman: May 1894” (1983) — that it was in “The New Aspect of the Woman Question”, Sarah Grand’s essay written in 1894 for the *North American Review*, where the phrase ‘New Woman’ was officially capitalised and began to be circulated in the periodical press. Towards the end of the 1980s a shift in the studies on the New Woman becomes evident as scholars begin to focus, more and more unapologetically, on the fiction written by women in the eighties and nineties. An outstanding example of this change in criticism may be found in Gerd Bjørhovde’s *Rebellious Structures. Women Writers and the Crisis of the Novel 1880-1900* (1987). The Scandinavian scholar focuses on the ways in which women writers of the New Woman negotiated their position as artists in late Victorian England. At the height of the late eighties, concentrating on these women writers was conceived as “the most pressing work at hand” as she aimed to account for the inexplicable “empty space in literary history between the death of George Eliot in 1880 and the appearance of Virginia Woolf on the literary scene in 1915” (ix, x). Bjørhovde challenges the literary canon and is unwilling “to accept unquestioningly the validity of such terms as ‘major’ and ‘minor’” (x). This is the first literary critic to entertain the idea that the feminist writers of the New Woman “may have been working, consciously or unconsciously, to dispose of the old forms of fiction as well, trying out something new” (11). In so doing, Bjørhovde adheres to one of the tenets in Cunningham’s previous study, according to which the emancipation of women and that of the English novel coalesced in time — and initiates a new phase in the literary studies of the New Woman novel by ceasing to regard the feminist writers as “artistic failures” and by “looking at them as pioneers, as writers who were trying out new things” (16).

The following decade, the 1990s, is a period of expansion for the literary and cultural studies on the New Woman novel. During this decade, this fiction is approached from a multitude of viewpoints: the formal and aesthetic innovations it brought into the history of literature (Ardis, 1990), the iconic figure of the New Woman in popular culture (Marks, 1990), the genre as an instance of the spectacle of femininity in a context of gender crisis (Pykett, 1992) or the feminist writers’ quest for political and subjective complicity with their female readership (Flint, 1993). New paths of research are introduced as the relationship of the new fiction with gender, class, race and cultural politics begins to be explored (Ledger, 1995; Chrisman, 1995) and the New Woman is likewise put in perspective with regard to other contemporaneous novelties, such as the new journalism, the new imperialism, decadence, lesbianism or the modern city (Ledger, 1997). The study of the antagonistic market forces at work in the production and commercialisation of the genre is another focus of attention (Kranidis, 1995) and monographic studies of the feminist writers start being produced (Mangum, 1998). The following pieces of research are thus particularly relevant in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Covering over a hundred New Woman novelists, short story writers and journalists, Ann Ardis's influential *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (1990) draws attention to three elements in New Woman fiction which had been previously regarded as evidence of its "aesthetic deficiency": "its ideological self-consciousness, its intertextuality, and its disruption of the conventional distinction between popular culture and high art" (3). Ardis, like Bjørhovde (1987), questions the literary canon and is the first critic to establish a connection between "the modernist's silence and the condescension or silence of feminist literary and cultural historians on the subject of the New Woman" (7). An interesting parallel is drawn between the response of the Victorian critical establishment towards these novels and the prejudices of contemporary critics as they coalesce in their repudiation of the politicisation of literature and the valorisation of the "formalist aesthetic we associate with high modernism" (4).

The omnipresence of the New Woman in popular culture is studied in Patricia Marks's *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press* (1990) and in Sarah Wintle's "Horses, Bikes and Automobiles: New Women on the Move" (2001). An exploration of the New Woman as Queen Victoria's granddaughter, Marks's study captures the fin-de-siècle's spirit by looking into satirical representations of modern womanhood. Although the forward movement of such women and their demands was not hindered by their merciless caricatures in the popular press, illustrators and satirists did not refrain from commenting on the new looks and mannerisms adopted by the New Woman as she increased her appearance in the public space. While the humorous representation of the new attire and the new ideas was undertaken with various degrees of animosity by the American and the British papers and magazines, revealing more democratic or less permissive attitudes towards the new urban icon of modernity — the New Woman was immoderately criticised from both sides of the Atlantic. As she announced her difference she became "the figure that all of the periodicals attacked most heartily" (208).

Lyn Pykett's *The 'Improper' Feminine. The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (1992) joins efforts with her critical predecessors in her aim to exhume the women's sensation novel and the New Woman writing, and to bring them back into literary history, restoring the place in the broader cultural history of the nineteenth century they deserve. Pykett's exclusive concern is fiction produced by women, which she claims to be ridden with "gender anxiety" (x). The third part of this book is entirely devoted to the fiction of the New Woman (see, particularly, Part III, "Breaking the Bounds: The Improper Feminine and the Fiction of the New Woman", pp. 135-197). This study regards the New Woman, "[f]irst and foremost", as "a representation", "a construct [...] who was actively produced and reproduced in the pages of the newspaper and periodical press, as well as in novels. The New Woman (and the moral panic which surrounded her) was yet another example of the way in which, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, femininity became a spectacle" (137-138). Pykett establishes that in late Victorian society, normative proper femininity was predicated as a sign of cultural health, whereas the iconic New Woman served a striking contrast of unruly social and gender behaviour which bespoke the underlying crisis of culture itself. The British scholar accounts for the critical neglect of both the sensation novels of the sixties and the New Woman novel of the nineties by making reference to a double perception, their close connection to the contemporaneous issues they addressed as well as their association with residual, rather than dominant, forms of fiction (199).

One of the sections in Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (1993) likewise focuses on the New Woman writing (see pp. 294-316). Flint emphasises that "both the sensation novel

and ‘New Woman’ fiction mock within themselves the belief that women read uncritically, unthoughtfully” (15), and explains that one of the effects of this type of literature was the stimulation of their female readership as rational and critical beings by “encourag[ing] an interrogative manner of reading. The questioning of the fictional characters’ destinies would, in this light, be instrumental in the development of a critical lens with which to examine their own position in society at large. This study identifies the elements that made the genre particularly controversial and situates it in the tradition of the feminist *Bildungsroman* (296). Flint’s account seems particularly on point as it addresses from a new angle the political scope of the New Woman writing through its ability to “strengthen the possibilities for binding women together through shared subjectivity” (299).

Sally Ledger’s “The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism”, in Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken (eds.)’s *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (1995) looks into the troubled relationship current feminist criticism has established with the Woman question at the turn of the century. Ledger widens the boundaries of Showalter’s analysis on gender relations by examining the interaction of the New Woman with decadence, the politics of empire and the emergent socialisms of the late nineteenth century. This study opens a new path in the studies on the New Woman and it traces late twentieth-century concerns with gender, class and race to the cultural politics of the 1880s and 1890s. Equally important is its consideration of the New Woman as a complex, unstable “category” both “as a discursive construct” and “as a representative of the women’s movement of the *fin de siècle*” (23). Laura Chrisman’s “Empire, ‘Race’ and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle”, (also in Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken’s *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*. 1995: 45-65) focuses on the work of George Egerton and Olive Schreiner in order to further explore the collusion of New Woman narratives with the ideologies of imperialism. Chrisman is critical of studies like Gerd Bjørhovde’s or Ann Ardis’s for their avoidance of such a troublesome aspect of the New Woman fiction. This essay continues the work initiated by Gayatri Spivak’s “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism” in 1985, which showed that “nineteenth-century British feminist literary identity was inextricable from contemporary ideologies of ‘race’, empire and colonialism” (45).

A compelling analysis of the context of market forces and competing forms of fiction that intervened in the emergence of the New Woman novels is produced by Rita S. Kranidis in her *Subversive Discourse: The Cultural Production of late Victorian Feminist Novels* (1995). Its focus on the production and commercialization of literary texts as well as on the complex relationships between publishers, writers and readerships is shared by Kate Flint’s earlier work (1993). Kranidis explores what she refers to as “the *generally* social function of progressive literature” and studies the feminist novels as instances of “oppositional literature” (1995: ix). She investigates the complex, antagonist relationship between feminist discourse and aestheticism, as well as the suspicious identification between women and the “masses”.

Locating the New Woman in the landscape of the metropolis, Sally Ledger’s *The New Woman. Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (1997) emerges in the late nineties as a ground-breaking reference book on the subject. It explores the multiple identity of the New Woman, provides a chronology of the historical and literary topos and addresses its links with socialism, imperialism, journalism, decadence, lesbianism, the modern city, modernism and mass culture. This study focuses mostly on prose writers — especially Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, Olive Schreiner and George Egerton but also on the male novelists’ reaction to the cultural phenomenon. Ledger discusses the “epistemological status” of the “semi-fictional New Woman” that emerged from the pages of turn-of-the-century journalism, as she “was predominantly a journalistic phenomenon, a product of discourse” (3). This important study differs from those by Ardis and Pykett in the relationship it establishes between the New

Woman and modernism. While the latter scholars regard the New Woman writers as early modernists, Sally Ledger finds greater significance in their dealings with politics and other heterogeneous forms of mass culture. Interestingly, despite her modernity, this study finds that the New Woman's conservatism (revealed in her involvement with eugenic and imperialistic discourses, or in her penchant for heterosexual marriage and sexual circumspection) prevents her from becoming truly seductive for current feminist criticism.

A monographic study on the work of Sarah Grand is contributed in 1998 by Teresa Mangum — *Married, Middlebrow and Militant. Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel*. Examining her literary feminism “as a commitment to an aesthetics based on education, ethics, and activism” (1998: 7), Grand is presented as a pragmatic Victorian who devoted herself to marriage reform while deeply believing in its potential to restructure women's lives and society at large. Mangum's in-depth, systematic analysis studies her position as a novelist as well as the interaction of her fiction with the most prominent social and political debates of the times.

The opening years of the twenty-first century witness the arrival of a large number of studies on the subject; many primary sources and texts written by the New Woman feminist writers get republished and new anthologies are launched into the market of women's studies. The presence of the New Woman as a key figure of modernity begins to be examined in different cultures from diverse angles as it amplifies its definition from icon of late-nineteenth-century British culture to endocentric force of almost ubiquitous presence both in Western and Eastern countries. It is revealed as an international, cross-cultural phenomenon (Heilmann and Beetham, 2004). New examinations of the tropes embedded within the genre's construction of women's subjectivity emerge as the discussion on the New Woman intensifies (Murphy, 2001). Further territories begin to be inspected by looking into the strategic aesthetics deployed in the depiction of the woman artist (Heilmann, 2004), or the collusion of the genre with regressive discourses on race and eugenics (Richardson, 2003). The following are some outstanding reference studies on the New Woman novel, including primary sources, published in the 2000s.

Ann Heilmann is a prominent New Woman scholar who has studied the relationship between second-wave feminisms and a remarkable range of New Woman writing in her *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (2000). This study tackles the genealogy of the New Woman and attributes the “semantic instability” of the phrase partly to “the multiplicity of agents who had an ideological stake in constructing her” (2). Focusing on the New Woman writers who mostly produced their work in the period from 1880 to 1910, Heilmann examines the complex connections of the new icon as both literary and historical figure with other major contemporaneous phenomena, mass culture and feminist activism. This study highlights the role of New Woman fiction as a crucial gynocritic space from which the feminist writers of the period undertook the ambitious task of transforming public opinion. Reflecting on the depreciation of the female writers' work with regard to that of canonical male writers of the *fin de siècle*, Heilmann concludes that the didactic approach of the former was interpreted as a flaw against the importance attached to the technical innovations and aesthetic complexities perceived by 1970s feminist critics in the fictions of George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, George Moore or Henry James. “By mobilizing the realist social-problem novel for its feminist project of social renewal, New Woman fiction adopted an oppositional stance both to the established tradition of realism and to the new literature of aestheticism” (6). Heilmann's perspective on the modernism debate is somehow aligned with the stance of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who prevent us from “trying to fit women's writing into male-centred categories of art and literature”, and questions, side by side with Lyn Pykett, the notion of high modernism itself. Quite persuasively, this study casts doubt on the suitability of “applying a label [*proto-*

*modernist*] compromised by elitist, conservative and firmly masculinist cultural politics to the socially inclusive, iconoclastic and fervently feminist framework within which these [women] writers located themselves” (8-9). In keeping with the work of other scholars, such as Rita Felski, Heilmann’s study emphasises the “modernity” rather than the modernism of the New Woman genre, particularly evident in its new conception of literature, gender identities and feminist theory. Published four years later, her *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, and Mona Caird* (2004) delves on the narrative strategies and revisionist aesthetics of the three “m/others of (feminist) art” while conducting a comparative analysis of their specific representations of the woman artist. This scholar has also edited extensive primary materials on the New Woman which constitute and invaluable resource for further research, such as *The Late Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts; Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, 5 vols. (1998).

Several collections of both literary and non-fictional work produced by the new feminist writers also deserve to be mentioned. Carolyn Christensen Nelson’s *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, and Drama of the 1890s* (2001) and Angelique Richardson’s *Women Who Did. Stories by Men and Women, 1890-1914* (2002) are two welcome anthologies. Richardson’s in particular contains a useful introduction in which she discusses the phenomenon of the New Woman both in Britain and in the United States (see pp. xxxi- lxxi). In a similar vein, M<sup>a</sup> Luisa Venegas, Juan Ignacio Guijarro and M<sup>a</sup> Isabel Porcel (eds. and trans.) present in their *Fin de siècle: relatos de mujeres en lengua inglesa* (2009) an anthology of short stories penned by eighteen women writers which must be equally celebrated as a long-awaited Spanish translation of the genre.<sup>5</sup> It offers a valuable introduction to the cultural, literary and socio-political contexts of the British and American New Woman, as well as an introductory biographical note prior to each of the stories.

The last decade has witnessed the emergence of New Woman studies within Spanish academia, which has mostly focused (though not exclusively) on the figure of George Egerton. To this respect, Venegas’s contribution to bring forward Egerton’s work has proved decisive in the attention gathered by the Anglo-Irish writer within the Iberian context. Her careful edition and translation of *Tónicas y Disonancias* (2013) is furnished with a lengthy introduction which contains relevant information with regard to the author’s biography, the literary context, and the critical reception of her stories by both her contemporaries and present-day scholars. The ulterior influence of these shocking late-Victorian narratives on modernist writers such as, notably, James Joyce, but also on Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, Kate Chopin or Katherine Mansfield, is also remarked in this study and serves as a preamble to Venegas’s in-depth analysis of the short stories from the various points of view of their recurrent themes and the most salient narrative devices they mobilised. Side by side, following the work of scholars such as Margaret Stetz (1982), Lyn Pykett (1995) or Gerd Bjørhovde (2012), who had previously pointed out the similarities between Egerton’s and James Joyce’s aesthetics, Venegas has also tackled the study of those parallelisms regarding not only the experimental techniques used by both writers but also their characterisation and plot devices. (“George Egerton, James Joyce and the New Woman”, 2013-2014)]

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<sup>5</sup> See also, in the Spanish context, an anthology featuring both male and female New Woman writers compiled the previous year by Marta Salís (trans.), *Cuando se abrió la puerta. Cuentos de la Nueva Mujer (1882-1914)*. Barcelona, Alba editorial, 2008.

The dawn of the New Woman in the period of the *fin de siècle* has been broadly studied by María del Mar Pérez Gil (2003) and Carmen Bretones Martínez (2008). The latter scholar has also paid attention to more specific aspects of the literary phenomenon. Thus, she has looked into the spatial coordinates inhabited by Sarah Grand's heroines as metaphors of the claustrophobic and oppressive environments they suffered, particularly as they moved from adolescence into wedded life (2011). She has also investigated the origins and major characteristics of the short story as a literary genre in which late-Victorian women writers found a particularly apt medium to try out their new experiments with narrative form (2015), and the Anglo-American feminist writers' penchant for marginal literary forms in which they managed to introduce their social reformist subject matter (2017). More recently, Bretones Martínez has examined the complex effects of frustrated marriages, prescriptive motherhood, poverty or religious repression on the female psyche as salient themes in Egerton's most famous short stories (2019). Likewise, Miriam Borham-Puyal's recent study has also contributed to draw attention towards the construction of the new Egertonian heroines as femininities in the margin — “bad wives, child murderers, and fallen women” — while focusing on the idea of “sisterhood” as a valid narrative means to restore the notion of a female community within the larger context of an otherwise systemically unequal society (2020: 26, 37).

The works of Thomas Hardy, Olive Schreiner, H. Rider Haggard, Sarah Grand, and Mona Caird are examined in Patricia Murphy's *Time Is of The Essence. Temporality, Gender, and the New Woman* (2001), which searches for the relevance of the cultural construction of time in the articulation of the Victorian debates on the Woman Question. Murphy argues that temporal discourses which encoded “repressive definitions of female subjectivity” were mobilised by late-century novels in their response to the threats posed by the New Woman (Murphy, 2001: 2).

*The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact. Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms* (2001) is a collection of fourteen essays edited by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis with a foreword by Lyn Pykett. It emphasises the wide diversity of the debates on femininity at the end of the nineteenth century and is proof of the intense and lively scholarly discussion generated by the subject at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In their introduction, Richardson and Willis turn to Mary Wollstonecraft to trace the origins of the New Woman and offer powerful illustrations of her iconic figure taken from the periodical press.

Angelique Richardson's *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century. Rational Reproduction & the New Woman* (2003) expands the studies on the New Woman into a hitherto unexplored territory by focusing on “the often repressive class politics”, rather than on the progressive aspects of the genre (see also Ledger's “Unlikely Bedfellows? Feminism and Imperialism at the *fin de siècle*”, *The New Woman* [1997]). Richardson examines the intersections of eugenics, rational reproduction and feminism in the context of fiction in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. She acknowledges the uncomfortable connection between the feminist writers and eugenics — which in Victorian Britain, the scholar claims, was primarily a class biased discourse, “a matter of rhetoric and representation”. This study highlights the coexistence within Sarah Grand's and George Egerton's feminist fictions of eugenic discourses and regressive ideas promoting the regeneration of the British imperial race alongside their incontestable challenges to the social and sexual politics of the late nineteenth century.

A new approach to the subject is offered in the collection of fourteen essays edited by Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham in 2004 under the title *New Woman Hybridities. Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930*. This new path enables the comparison of the multiple identities of the New Woman from a cross-cultural, cross-national

perspective while addressing her pervasive presence within consumer culture and feminist writing. The role of the periodical press in the production and circulation of New Woman images, women's subversion or endorsement of dominant models of representation, and the participation of white New Women in hegemonic discourses on race are central issues attended to in this study. The useful concept of "hybridity", adopted from Homi Bhabha's work in postcolonial theory is aptly invoked in order to refer to the diverse ethnic and national origins of the figure.

Iveta Jusová's *The New Woman and The Empire* (2005) investigates the intersections among gender, class, race, and sexuality in the work of Sarah Grand, George Egerton, Elizabeth Robins and Amy Levy. Jusová's work gives an important new turn to New Woman studies by taking into consideration colonial issues investigating from that perspective the use of diverse backgrounds in New Woman writing, such as Malta in the case of Sarah Grand, Ireland as an English colony in the case of George Egerton, or the notion of a Zionist homeland in Amy Levy's texts. This scholar pays close attention to the disparate ways in which these authors negotiated the relationship between their respective New Woman agendas and the *fin-de-siècle* racial bias embedded within colonial narratives of evolution. By looking into the strategies used by late-Victorian women in their aim to confer their feminist activity with greater public prominence, Jusová's close readings of New Woman writing reveal that many a time such efforts were made at the expense of marginalising others. This study examines the relevance and the limitations that the embracement of imperialist narratives of a superior race inevitably placed in the articulation of Grand's and Elizabeth Robin's feminist strategies. Thus, Grand's concerns in her purity novels focused on "the interests of white English middle- and upper-class women, [...] disavowing the experience of women of other classes and races" (Jusová, 2005: 10), while Robin's investment in the imperialist ethos was revealed in her exaltation of the United States and Britain as superior cultures and peoples. According to this scholar, George Egerton's narratives, however, did not sanction racial discrimination as her essentialising concept of "women's nature" — though problematic from a different angle — "enabled her to envision a bond among women capable of overcoming their racial and social differences" (Jusová, 2005: 88). Finally, this work also explores the complex ways in which Amy Levy, writing from a doubly marginalised position as a Jewish woman, used irony in order to minimise the impact of anti-Semitic, evolutionary discourses. The interest in the relationship between late-nineteenth-century fiction and the history of imperialism has drawn the attention of other scholars, such as Lyn Pykett (1992), Sally Ledger (1997), Angélique Richardson and Chris Willis (2001).

As we approach the second decade of the twenty-first century, we may perceive a new turn in academic studies on the New Woman. While the three major focuses of the scholarly work published on the topic had been a concern with the exploration of a new feminine aesthetic; the intersection between New Woman writings and dominant ideologies of racial discrimination, British imperialism and eugenics; and, conversely, "the international, multi-ethnic and multi-racial dimensions of the New Woman" (Heilmann, 2005: 36), the recent trends over the past years appear to have shifted towards the investigation of the New Woman in connection with what I would tentatively designate as the underworld, both in a literal and figurative sense: lawbreaking and criminal acts, the violence of the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic and the masochistic tendencies of new heroines resisting the oppressive forces of the patriarchal order.

Thus, we find arguably one of the most interesting pieces of research on the New Woman which somehow inaugurates this new period in a scholarly research that is going to gravitate increasingly towards the sinister, murkier aspects surrounding the trope of advanced womanhood. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller finds a niche within the history of feminist social studies

and claims the significance of the female criminal in *fin de siècle* culture as a genuine agent of subversion, a narrative figure which had been so far overlooked, mostly owing to the Foucauldian sway over Victorian studies on criminality (2008: 5). By drawing attention to the deep fascination crime fiction and criminals exerted on the Victorian public, which was symptomatic of modern life itself, Miller argues that those popular sensational narratives made use of “the shocking figure of the female criminal to naturalize change”. This scholar studies the relevance of three new crime genres that flourished in the last two decades of the nineteenth century — the detective series, the crime film, and the so-called “dynamite narrative” — to find that the non-factual female outlaw, “a ubiquitous persona in turn-of-the-century crime narrative, was a herald of changing political and social conditions, changing gender roles, and changing definitions of ‘private’ and ‘public’” (2008: 2-3). Highlighting the era’s obsession with the new, the female felon emerges as a crucial figure that was utilised to incarnate the new choices and freedoms available to women as well as to account for the awe inspired by modernity. Baptising her as the “New Woman Criminal”, this study examines a new cultural representation of women in public which departed drastically from the picture offered by factual records of female offenders in the late Victorian period. Miller’s research thus focuses exclusively on the fictional New Woman as a “figure of fantasy” and “imaginative creation” that displayed all her influence in stark contrast with the overall image of poverty and desperation real female criminals projected from the Victorian newspapers. *Framed. The New Woman Criminal in British Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (2008) describes the immersion of popular crime genres within the increasingly more visual culture of the period and shows the inextricable link between women outlaws and the “social and political shifts associated with modernity, including the rise of first-wave feminism, the proliferation of consumer culture, increasing legal intervention into the private sphere, democratization, and the first sustained campaigns of terrorism in Britain” (Miller, 2008:7).

The paths of research on the New Woman novel are effectively expanded by Patricia Murphy’s second large-scope work on the genre, *The New Woman Gothic. Reconfigurations of Distress* (2016). By exploring its intersections with the Gothic, particularly as the new heroine was variously perceived as both victim and villain in the late-Victorian period, this study searches for the eerie elements that may be found in the realistic British novels featuring the modern woman. Claiming that the new fictions drew from and reworked literary conventions already adumbrated in Romantic novels, the mid-nineteenth century urban Gothic and sensation novels from the sixties, Murphy looks into the narrative deployment of the fin-de-siècle Gothic in order to instil new breadth in the investigation on the New Woman, rather than to claim the existence of a distinctive literary subgenre. (Murphy, 2016: 4).

The intricacies of what she designates as “New Woman Gothic” are examined in several main aspects: the disturbing blurred boundary between the prostitute and the modern woman, and the threatening urban maze of a sexualised cityscape in which to negotiate female presence; the conventions of the labyrinth, live burial, entrapment, and “Gothic ruin, which exists within rather than outside the body” and “reveal that few modern women can flourish in the harsh environment they encounter in the fin de siècle” (Murphy, 2016: 30, 269); or, finally, the villainous characters, mostly the bad husband who takes physical and disciplinary control of woman, and the bad mother whose behaviour condemns the new heroine to a dismal Gothic fate. Thus, a multitude of fin-de-siècle New Woman narratives are analysed as instances of a re-emergence of what Ellen Moers called “the Female Gothic”, which had been characterised in late eighteenth-century novels “by its scrutiny of the plights of vulnerable protagonists struggling against oppressive male authority and deleterious interventions” (Murphy, 2016: 1). Such a revival in late-Victorian Britain would have been occasioned by the cultural anxiety

generated by Darwinian accounts of evolution, fears associated with the empire's crisis and the threats of species degeneration that lurked in most contemporary narratives. Interestingly, this study examines diverse configurations of the New Woman as both "monstrous aggressor" and as "maligned victim" of "Gothic threats", posing the paradigmatic presence of "Gothic attributes" as "narrative threads rather than all-encompassing patterns in novels supportive of the New Woman" (Murphy, 2016: 2). In this sense, it is important to emphasize that the strength of this piece of research lies in its capacity to approach New Woman novels under a new light, rather than in the eventual re-labelling of this fiction as "Gothic", which stimulates the reading of this *fin-de-siècle* literature in search of new tropes, thus opening new lines of enquiry and understanding.<sup>6</sup>

Even more recently, Alexandra Gray's work (*Self-Harm in New Woman Writing*, 2018) has offered new ways to understand New Woman writing from a literary and theoretical point of view while furnishing evidence of an aspect of late-Victorian women's lives — self-harm — which is otherwise conspicuously absent from historical records. Drawing on Mark Seltzer's productive conceptualization of a Victorian 'wound culture' in his *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (1998), Gray studies "the suffering female form" as "a synecdoche for the social and political upheavals of the period." (Gray, 2018: 198) The trope of self-harm is analysed from a double perspective, both as a common thread "in narratives about female experience within a restrictive society that values women's bodies in complicated ways, and limits their capacity for achievement" and as "a way of reading the process of New Woman writing — a disruptive literary strategy through which the damaged body was dramatized, by writers who rebelled against Victorian patriarchy but also wrote within its cultural, political and religious frameworks." (Gray, 2018: 197) This piece of research places a key emphasis on the close connection between content and form in New Woman writing by showing that the harshness and violence of the self-destructive images deployed increased over time as the three-volume novel was progressively abandoned towards shorter genres, notably poems and short stories, which provided the New Woman writers with greater freedom to explore taboo subject matter.

Taking into consideration a wide range of New Woman texts, Gray explores images of self-sacrifice and self-abasement in novels by Mona Caird and Victoria Cross who, despite their different sensibilities within the woman debate, both "critiqued and yet internalised Christianity". The engagement with Christian ideology and iconography is found to be a common element in all the texts under scrutiny (Gray, 2018: 32, 75). Self-starvation is presented as a characteristic instance of female self-damage in novels by Sarah Grand, concluding that the passive-aggressiveness of her heroines is conditioned "by the formal limitations of the realist novel, requiring either their assimilation into the society of which they are a part, or their complete destruction" (Gray, 2018: 116). Excessive drinking in texts written by George Gissing, George Egerton and Mary Angela Dickens is presented as a self-destructive strategy of female resistance which variously predicates the drunken woman's body as a sight to be either kept hidden or publicly exposed. Finally, complex metaphors of self-mutilation and self-wounding are examined in George Egerton's short stories and Amy Levy's poems as failed attempts to overcome female trauma. As in the case of female drinkers, the practice of self-mutilation constitutes "a tactic to both disrupt patriarchal control of the body and survive the

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<sup>6</sup> Another recent study which may be inscribed within the trend of the New Woman in connection with the underworld is Elizabeth D. Macaluso's *Gender, the New Woman, and the Monster* (2019) which — though coldly received by critics (Kistler, 2020) — constitutes an attempt to explore the monster and the New Woman as liminal figures at the *fin de siècle* in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, and Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire*.

internalisation of religious codes” (Gray, 2018: 201). Interestingly, this study claims that these representations of female self-harm constituted a pioneering response “to the lived experience of women in the period” by the New Woman writers, who regarded “the body as a repository of ideology, long before any coherent psychiatric explanation for the practice of self-harm was to emerge” (Gray, 2018: 200).

At present, almost a hundred and forty years after the New Woman’s eruption in the literary scene with Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*, she continues to excite the attention of academia as well as of the reading public. The work initiated by New Woman scholars in the late seventies has finally yielded fruit as this central figure of late-nineteenth-century British culture seems to have been given back her rightful place in history. New close readings of New Woman fictions shall continue to reveal this new fiction as an inexhaustible source of keys with which to keep reinterpreting the past as well as the history of women’s writing. The strategic steps, questionable or not, taken by the feminist writers to make progress in the admirable fight against patriarchal oppression deserves our continuous revisitation and close study. The present dissertation aspires to be inscribed within such research effort.

### 1.3. JUSTIFICATION OF THE SELECTED CORPUS AND GENERAL OBJECTIVES

By the turn of the century, more than a hundred novels and many more short stories had been published by and about the New Woman, and this iconic urban figure was applauded and reviled from the pages of magazines and newspapers (Ardis, 1990: 4; Richardson and Willis, 2001: 1). The vast material created by many New Woman writers at the turn of the century is necessarily excluded from the scope of my analysis, which does not aim at being exhaustive in the range of texts covered but thorough in the study of the chosen selection. Novelists such as Mona Caird, Emma Frances Brooke, Mary Cholmondeley, Jane Hume Clapperton, Lady Florence Dixie, Menie Muriel Dowie, Isabella Ford, Annie E. Holdsworth, “Iota” (Kathleen Mannington Caffyn), or Arabella Kenealy; poets such as Amy Levy or ‘Michael Field’ also contributed to the expansion of the nineteenth-century imagination and helped to introduce the feminist agenda into the realm of popular fiction. Their polemical texts were instrumental in the forging of an alliance between female readers and the radical points of view of the new assertive heroines who charged against the social and political limitations of the constrained womanly woman.<sup>7</sup>

This doctoral dissertation concentrates on some of the most iconic New Woman fictions produced by four major late-Victorian prose writers of diverse, transnational origin. An Anglo-American writer who features as a prominent figure in the literary canon but was ambivalent towards women’s cause — Henry James (New York, 1843 - London, 1916) — and three conspicuous *fin-de-siècle* feminist writers: South-African-born Olive Schreiner (Wittebergen, Cape Colony, 1855 - Wynberg, Cape Town, 1920); Australian-born George Egerton (Mary

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<sup>7</sup> *A Superfluous Woman* (New York: Cassell, 1894) was Emma Frances Brooke’s most famous novel. Mona Caird wrote the influential collection of essays *The Morality of Marriage and Other Essays on the Status of Woman* (London: George Redway, 1897) and is also well known for her New Woman novel *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894; reprint, New York: The Feminist Press, 1989). Mary Cholmondeley’s *Red Pottage* (1899; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1985) is concerned with the topic of the woman artist. Jane Hume Clapperton’s *Margaret Dunmore; or a Socialist Home* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, Lowry and Co., 1888), Isabella Ford’s *On the Threshold* (London: Edward Arnold, 1895), Annie E. Holdsworth’s *Joana Trail, Spinster* (London: W. Heinemann, 1894) and Lady Florence Dixie’s *Gloriana: or, The Revolution of 1900* (London: Henry and Co., 1890) introduce different urban elements in the New Woman novel as they variously deal with the problems of socialist and feminist politics or the reform of prostitution. Menie Muriel Dowie wrote *Gallia* (1895; reprint, London: Everyman, 1995), “Iota” is well known for *A Yellow Aster* (Leipzig: Bernard Tauchnitz, 1894) and Arabella Kenealy’s *Dr. Janet of Harley Street* (London: Digby, Long and Co., 1893) features a portrait of a woman doctor.

Chavelita Dunne Bright; Melbourne, 1859 - London, 1945), who referred to herself as “intensely Irish” (White, 1958: 14); and the Anglo-Irish writer Sarah Grand (Donaghadee 1854 – Calne 1953).

Henry James’s *Daisy Miller* (1878) is the first text analysed in depth. The critical references to James as one of the inventors of the New Woman triggered my research interest on this particular short novel which, nonetheless, has not been sufficiently studied from such a theoretical angle. It is my aim to ascertain the possible trace of a New Woman in the making and search for the keys to the construction of a femininity in revolt which could partake of an identity conducive to an emerging modern woman of greater feminist impetus. Similarly, I have deliberately focused on the respective major works of the three first-generation New Woman writers — O. Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), G. Egerton’s *Keynotes & Discords* (1893, 1894), and S. Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) — as these have proved to be, both then and now, the *pièce de resistance* of their fictional worlds. Thus, the present study concentrates on late Victorian renderings of the New Woman produced by three women’s rights advocates, mostly because of their phenomenal success and decisive influence on the configuration of the genre.

The texts which conform the corpus of this dissertation were all immensely popular best-sellers. *Daisy Miller*, as is well-known, was an immediate success that gained widespread popular acclaim for Henry James, and it continues to be, to this day, one of his most popular stories. *The Story of an African Farm* constitutes a landmark in the ulterior development of the New Woman genre. Lyndall, its female protagonist, “is the first wholly serious feminist heroine in the English novel, and she remains one of the few who is not patronized by her author” (Showalter, 1977: 199). W. T. Stead, one of Schreiner’s contemporaries, remarked in the *Review of Reviews* a year after its publication, that it had immediately turned the South-African writer into ‘The Modern Woman *per excellence*, the founder of the modern school’ (Stead, 1894: 64). The Australian-born author of *Keynotes* and *Discords* gained also a huge popularity during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Egerton’s *Keynotes* sold up to 6,000 copies in its first year of publication and it had already been translated into seven languages before the century was over, reaching the second top position in American sales’ ranking (Stetz, 1999: 34). *The Heavenly Twins* was a best seller for ten years which “launched Grand’s career as a controversial novelist and an advocate of women’s rights” (Mangum, 1998: 9). This particular novel is still regarded by some critics as “perhaps the biggest New Woman blockbuster” (Dunst, 2014: 351), one which would gain for Grand regard as “the genre’s foremost writer” (Bonnell, 1995: 123).

It made sense to explore what was unique and foundational in the aesthetic and discursive representations of these heroines — mostly because of the shock value of the chosen narratives, the traceable impact they must have had in their avid readerships and the unique ways in which each writer helped to configurate the genre. I felt compelled to navigate the different approaches, the, at times, antagonistic views each writer held on the construction of the heroine, their specific objectives within or without a feminist agenda, and last, but not least — particularly in the case of the three women writers — the intellectual and emotional self-expression they bestowed on their female protagonists. The exhumation of these texts should not suffice. It is imperative that we look into them with fresh eyes and continue the search for strategies in discourse. These novels were a great success, they caused sensation and were instrumental in the advancement of feminist ideas among the general reading public, but they were also at the cutting edge of narrative techniques and the development of new feminine subjectivities. Their intense modernity continues to astonish readers and researchers alike.

## 1.4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND CONCURRENT OBJECTIVES

### 1.4.1. The Aesthetics of The New Woman

We have seen how British New Woman writing was traditionally disqualified as ‘popular’ by the scholars of the genre until the 1980s. The significance of these narratives was usually downplayed on account of their not being considered literary or artistic enough, particularly as they did not address so-called universal topics (Magnum, 1998:5). They were censored or at least belittled by the fact of their engagement in political and social polemics which exclusively affected women’s lives. Rita Kranidis has studied, to this respect, the impact of Victorian aesthetic ideologies — from Carlyle and Ruskin to Arnold and Pater — in the reactionary movement which debarred social reality from aesthetic discussions. This conservative trend reached its zenith in the 1890s and it was uncompromising in its negation of any link between real life and art (Kranidis, 1995).

The aesthetics of activism, the protest against social impediments for women’s full development as citizens and the feminist vindication of a change of affairs stood in contrast with the Aesthetes of the 1890s, despite the penchant for experimentation with narrative form of the New Woman writers and their proto-modernist innovative structures which are generally ascribed, almost exclusively, to so-called high art. The narratives produced by Olive Schreiner, George Egerton and Sarah Grand involved thematic as well as formal non-conformity, and in their work both transgressions must be understood as inextricably linked. In this sense, borrowing the term ‘cultural work’ from Jane Tompkins, Ann Ardis reminds us that “literary texts were evaluated in the 1880s and early 1890s as ‘agents of cultural formation’, not as works of art whose formal complexity was to be admired (Ardis, 1990: 29).

The feminist writers contravened the conventional assumptions regarding not only the legitimate motivation for women to write but also the type of literature they could produce. Theirs was an aesthetics of defiance, which gained them all sorts of hostilities due to the alleged corrupting vigour they were inoculating into literature. They were the descendants of that “d--d mob of scribbling women” against whom Nathaniel Hawthorne had charged in 1855 in a famous protest against the increasing power of women writers over the literary market (Wood, 1971: 1). However, unlike second-wave Victorian women novelists such as Charlotte Yonge, Dinah Craik, Margaret Oliphant or Mrs. Henry Wood, to whom Elaine Showalter has referred as “the novelists with a purpose” (Showalter, 1975: 5), Schreiner, Egerton and Grand focused on the emergency of gaining power for women as a collective and spurred the imagination of their readership as they strove to offer new discursive models for them. They also tried to enlarge women’s consciousness of themselves by producing alternative images of womanhood for, as Patricia Stubbs aptly remarked in 1979, “images are not an innocent pictorial guide to reality, a neutral mental shorthand which helps us to recall the outside world. We use these simplified ideas of how people and things ‘really are’ to make sense of our own experience of the world; but this is an essentially subjective process. So far from helping us to perceive a supposed ‘reality’, it in fact creates that reality from within. Our images create the world for us; they shape our consciousness” (Stubbs, 1979: ix).

Despite their different approaches to the woman question and their diverse projects with regard to women’s emancipation, the writings of Olive Schreiner, George Egerton and Sarah Grand synthesised art form and feminist activism in ways which were conducive to the spread of female solidarity and the proliferation of women’s networks. Their pioneering “feminist art” was overtly critical with patriarchy and deliberately reflected upon the experience of being women. Their New Woman writings were consciously subversive in their aim to conquer

historically denied territories and gain control of the awkward processes of representation. The aesthetics of the New Woman writing purposefully merged literary strategies with feminist tactics and found in the process of consciousness-raising a means to both awake and bring together their female readership. Interestingly, the same tactics would be applied in the 1960s by the feminist artists in the visual arts, for whom consciousness-raising was crucial to help women become aware of their shared problems as a collective: “Además de cohesionar a las mujeres, otros logros de los [grupos de toma de conciencia] fueron: potenciar la autoestima, propiciar la interpretación política de la vida cotidiana, construir la teoría desde la experiencia personal y diseñar planes de acción política para dar respuestas a la opresión femenina” (Carro Fernández, 2012: 122). Almost a century earlier, the New Woman writers were already implementing some of the stratagems of the radical feminists of the nineteen sixties, long before the Movement for Civil Rights and the Women’s Liberation Movement.

In this particular sense, and in striking similarity with the aesthetics of the novels by the women writers analysed in my own study, the feminist artist Judy Chicago appropriately acknowledged in *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (1977) the enabling quality of those consciousness-raising groups as they were instrumental in transforming their own circumstances as women — and as female artists in the margins of the canon — into their legitimate artistic subjects: “en vez de preguntarnos ‘¿quién soy’, nos preguntamos ‘¿quiénes somos?’” (Qtd. in Carro Escudero, 2012: 122). As the Spanish writer Marta Sanz remarks, reflecting on the role of the writer in present-day capitalist societies, “La ideología hegemónica idealiza el yo y aísla el yo como si no formase parte de un nosotros. Se subraya la creencia de que el yo artístico debe parapetarse mucho más que el resto de los yoes porque tiene la obligación de revolverse contra los colectivos que pretenden anular su conciencia —¿su vanidad?— y de mantener la pureza frente a un supuesto aborregamiento militante.” (Sanz, 2014: 117) The late-Victorian women writers faced discredit and their work went unacknowledged for too long on account of their mundane concern for the transformation of women’s lives. Because they radically understood that the real experience of *fin-de-siècle* middle-class women living under patriarchal law had to be told in literary form, their art became tinted with a political bias which was unpalatable for the reactionary advocates of old aesthetic ideologies. It was their daring exposure of the constrictions and injustices women faced in their private and public lives as well as the concomitant urge to revolt against the dominant ideologies which had created them, that doomed these texts to decades of oblivion. Commenting on the reluctance of contemporary writers to engage in political activism, Sanz adds:

Algunas novelas gustan, “aunque” sean políticas: se les hace una concesión. La política, como defecto estilístico, sólo se asocia a un determinado tipo de ideología. Todas las novelas se comprometen, todas dejan una huella negra sobre la nieve blanca; sin embargo, algunas huellas se difuminan, se mimetizan con la atmósfera del discurso del poder, reproducen el esquema dominante y su ruido se amortigua en la complacencia y en la comodidad colectiva (Sanz, 2014: 121-122).

It is one of the general objectives of this dissertation to trace that audacious black footprint on the white snow and look into the images that were so painstakingly created by the New Woman writers in their aesthetic reinvention of the new heroines.

As I shall examine in the chapters that follow, the feminist writers dared to experiment with literature as a particularly apt medium to make bold moves into the women’s liberation processes underway. Olive Schreiner’s inauguration of a new method of representation and the disruption of traditional expectations of the English realist *Bildungsroman*, George Egerton’s

innovative metafictional devices and narrative techniques in *Keynotes & Discords*, or Sarah Grand's breakdown of traditional novel structure and experimental story-telling strategies are, as I intend to show, conspicuous instances of their direct confrontation with "repressive social ideologies, including the dominant Victorian aesthetic ideology, as an intellectual discipline that minimized the significance of both women and women's rights activism" (Kranidis, 1995: 71).

#### 1.4.2. The Relevance of Discourse

Cultural historians have commonly agreed on the crucial role played by the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts in the development of a public discussion of sexuality and in the gradual acceptability of women's involvement in it. The controversial campaign led by Josephine Butler in the 1870s and 1880s against the infamous CD Acts, which would eventually end in 1886 with their repeal, not only signalled the entry of large numbers of women into political life but, most importantly, exposed the Victorians to women speaking in public on a wider variety of topics. The disturbing and shocking effect of female free speech — particularly as it addressed "a subject on which all respectable and decent women must of necessity be totally ignorant" (Williams, 1984: 20) — was so intense that many feminists decided to stay away from Butler's campaign (Kent, 1987: 19-20; Walkowitz, 1980; Flint, 1993: 299-300). Some others, however, "insisted on their right to use the male sexual vocabulary, and to use it forcefully and openly" (Showalter, 1977: 31). This was the background against which the New Woman's speech was to be forged in literature by the authors examined in the present study. It will be my contention that the heroines created by Schreiner, Egerton and Grand in particular borrowed some of that audacity and unleashed their rage against the patriarchal oppression of women through language.

Language has been pinpointed by poststructuralist theorists as an inescapable aspect in any analysis of power. In the absence of such a "thing as a purely ideological state apparatus", it is claimed to constitute a formidable site for the construction of meaning (Barret, 1986: 95). Thus, "language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is *constructed*. [...] Language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific" (Weedon, 1997: 21). Since one of my immediate concerns is the reflection upon the most effective ways in which the New Woman writers constructed rebellious female subjects, it is only fitting that I look into their speech and examine carefully the discursive practices involved in the new modes of representation. A concomitant aim shall be the analysis of the diverse approaches of the feminist writers in particular as they deployed their narrative strategies in order to help women subjects develop their own voice. By delving into the mechanisms that were most useful in the design of the new heroines as speaking subjects, this dissertation seeks both to reveal and highlight the speech principles at work behind the New Woman's practice of self-expression.

In order to study the New Woman discourses as well as the discourses on the New Woman that circulate in the selected corpus I have found particularly useful the methodological strategies made available by feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis. Judith Baxter's *Positioning Gender in Discourse* (2003) has been an invaluable tool in the process of writing this dissertation. According to this scholar, "FPDA can be defined as a feminist approach to analysing the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions in their world according to the ways in which they are located by competing yet interwoven discourses" (Baxter, 2003: 1). In keeping with the notion of a gendered identity that is bom

within discourse, I have found equally important to remark throughout my analysis on the diversity and multiplicity of identities involved in the term (New) Woman as well as on the *performative* nature of such identities in the forging, particularly as speech is produced and negotiated (Butler 1990: 24-25 and Butler, 1991).

In a similar vein, the progression of this dissertation from my opening analyses of Elizabeth Lynn Linton's antifeminist rhetoric in her construction of "The Girl of the Period" for the *Saturday Review* in 1868 and Henry James's shocking conceit of the female grotesque in *Daisy Miller* (1878), onto the remaining three chapters dealing mostly with the feminist heroines created by Olive Schreiner, George Egerton and Sarah Grand in their most iconic narratives, is meant to constitute an illustration of the relevance of the "co-construction" or interaction of discourses — not just within each text but also across the diverse texts that left a mark on the 1880s and 1890s — which is instrumental in the process of identity formation (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999).

I shall be using the term "discourse" in two ways. A conventional one, as a continuous piece of written or spoken language, and a post-structuralist one, in Foucauldian fashion, as a form "of knowledge or set of assumptions, expectations and explanations, governing mainstream social and cultural practices". A notion of "power constructed not as a possession, but as flowing omnidirectionally in a net or web-like fashion, such that powerlessness is no longer considered a feature of all women", has equally proved essential in my consideration of the female protagonists that lead the way in these late-Victorian narratives of insubordinate womanhood (Baxter, 2003: 7, 5).

These are all fundamental aspects in my methodological approach to the texts under scrutiny. Although they are, in essence, crucial viewpoints identifiable in third-wave feminist theories (Mills, 2002), I have also drawn on a multitude of theoretical positions to adjust the focus of my analytical lens in each of the chapters that make up this doctoral thesis.

In my own interrogation of the selected corpus with regard to the function of female discourse — what can language solve when confronting patriarchal dominance? — I shall be repeatedly making reference to a feminist speech of insubordination, a language of revolt, a discourse of disobedience which I have found conspicuously present in the configuration of the New Woman. By such terms, I aim to designate an empowering practice of self-expression which is transformative and belligerent, when need be. As I shall attempt to explain in the following section, I interpret the New Woman trope as "the monster that speaks", the maladjusted Victorian freak that takes the floor and addresses a bewildered audience.

Because the bond of social reality and linguistic analysis is crucial in the unmasking of the social imbalances that affect (women's) lives (Ivitate González, 2021) — this dissertation is concerned with the examination of the role of feminist speech in New Woman narratives which attempted to expose such inequalities and ultimately serve as an antidote against their perpetuation. The analysis of the new heroines' discursive practices further reveals an interesting, though also at times disturbing, parallelism between some of the old concerns and demands of late-nineteenth-century feminism and those which still need to be fully addressed or satisfied today.

My own interpretation of the New Woman as the monster that rises and exerts her rights to speak and be heard regards the female heroine — albeit the narrative limitations which constrained her — as an agent of social and political transformation. Seen in this light, her own identity is changed by means of her active, verbal intervention against oppression; her discursive tactics are analytical, as she reasons out the mechanisms at work behind those oppressive forces, making visible their artificial nature, built *ad hoc* in order to satisfy interests very different than her own.

Thus, for instance, George Egerton's heroines continuously challenge Irigaray's notion of "the pressure of passivity" as they fight woman's relegation to the function of specularity. They exist not as mere objects which reflect the value, transcendence and perpetuation of the male subject (Irigaray, 1974) — instead, they explore the specificity of their own identity as women who have eternally harboured the suspicion of a *terra incognita* within, the certainty of a unique sexuality and an autonomous self. Egerton's short stories present women as subjects in the process of gaining access to their own representation.

The study of Sarah Grand's new heroines' speech — the particular case of Angelica Hamilton-Wells in *The Heavenly Twins* seems paradigmatic — shows the inextricable tie between female revolt and gender identity discourses. By means of the monstrous New Woman trope — which is, as I shall contend, present in all the narratives selected for analysis, from Elizabeth Lynn Linton's horrific *Girl of the Period* to Henry James's grotesque *Daisy Miller*; from Olive Schreiner's awe-inspiring *Lyndall* to Sarah Grand's ambiguous *Angelica* — this novel situates the debate on gender identity centre stage. *Angelica's* bold statements — "I don't see why I should be severely consistent. Let me be a mixture" (Grand, 1893: 482) — make proper "gender trouble" as she appears to question the extent to which the practices that regulate gender formation determine identity and the inner coherence of the subject (Butler, 1990a, 1990b).

Some New Woman discourses also reflect the contradictions and limitations that loom over women in their double roles as mothers and social agents, which continues to be a prevailing issue in early twenty-first-century capitalist societies. *Lyndall's* demands to enlarge the options available for female life in Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* and the toll her motherhood exacts on her scarce prospects of personal fulfilment resonate in contemporary feminist debates which measure women's workstyle choices, the difficult conciliation of working time and family care, as well as the unattainable balance between work, motherhood and personal realisation (Badinter, 2017).<sup>8</sup>

Because these *fin-de-siècle* narratives reflected upon issues which are still hotly debated by feminism today, such as the linguistic and political representation of female subjects, gender diversity and the identity of the subject, the social regulation of gender identity or the complex dilemma between motherhood and social agency, to name a few — it is important to unravel the intricacies of the New Woman's dissenting discourse. From her objections to enforced patriarchal law we may obtain valuable insight into our own tribulations as twenty-first-century women. The speech of the monster must be heard.

### 1.4.3. "Mistress of Herself"?

The notion of becoming "Mistress of Herself", as designated in this dissertation's title, may appear problematic from a theoretical point of view. The presumption of a *self*, let alone of a *feminist self*, sounds utterly essentialist to modern critics; however, I believe it is necessary to question how these late-Victorian narratives conceived of such an idea. It is my aim to examine those essentialist presumptions rather than to uphold them. I specifically allude to an aspiration to liberate woman from the state of numbness and passivity into which dominant culture wanted to constrict her. The deliberate desire to become an active agent in her own existence and in her own consciousness. Undoubtedly, in order to free women from their shackles, they had to be

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<sup>8</sup> As the French feminist philosopher explains, "Toda cultura está dominada por un modelo maternal ideal que puede variar según las épocas. Sean ellas conscientes o no, pesa sobre todas las mujeres. [...] Hoy el modelo es más exigente que nunca. Más aún que hace veinte años, cuando se señalaba ya la amplitud de los deberes maternos: Estos ya no se reducen únicamente a los cuidados corporales y afectivos, implican también una atención escrupulosa al desarrollo psicológico, social e intelectual del hijo. La maternidad representa, más que en el pasado, un trabajo a tiempo completo" (Badinter, 2017: 143).

able to imagine themselves as free agents by envisioning new possibilities. Beyond their respective narrative destinies, as I would like to contend, these heroines incarnate the will to dream, the impetus to construct a new identity which rebels against biological expectations and cultural impositions. They succeed because in this process they manage to tell their own story in their own terms.

The wish to take the reins of woman's representation and woman's discourse, to own the portrayal of female form and substance, to grab the chisel and the keys to her own inward and outward rendering, constituted the means to challenge gender prejudices. In so doing and so aspiring, the New Woman heroine of feminist narratives became "a disruptive agent in herself", a catalyst of insubordination, "as she embodied the goals and struggles of the feminist movement as a whole" (Kranidis, 1995: 72). "Mistress of herself", excoriated Elizabeth Lynn Linton, "the Wild Woman as a social insurgent preaches the 'lesson of liberty' broadened into lawlessness and licence" (Linton, 1891b: 596).

Real women, of course, were also adamant in their demand not to be hindered in their personal aspirations. As Alys Pearsall Smith made evident the same year she married Bertrand Russell from the pages of the *Nineteenth Century*, in her article "A Reply from the Daughters", she wanted to "belong to herself". The daughters in revolt aspired to move freely beyond the family realm and have access to education and the workplace (Smith, 1894: 450). Two decades before her, Helen Taylor had expressed in identical phrase that woman "claims the right to belong to herself" (Hollis, 1979: 294).

Since this dissertation is concerned with the feminist contestation of a prescriptive Victorian female identity, there is an implicit assumption that there was a dominant conception of such a notion. My intention is not to present the latter as an unproblematic or immutable concept despite the operational quality it had at the time. As Nancy Armstrong has convincingly argued, the cultural effort invested in the production and maintenance of the liberal humanist subject as an autonomous, self-sufficient and self-contained individual was certainly strenuous (Armstrong, 1987). To this respect, I would like to adhere to Ann Ardis's remark:

the New Woman's claim to the right of self-definition should be recognized not simply as an expression of but as a challenge to the tradition of liberal humanism. As women articulate specific needs and desires—the desires not of "Woman" but of *women*, of discrete historical agents—they challenge not only the bourgeois Victorian social order's prescriptive definition of "correct" female behaviour but also the pattern of thinking in hierarchically organized binary oppositions that pits men against women, "good" women against "fallen" ones, the middle class against the working class, and European against non-European cultures (Ardis, 1990: 27).

### **1.5. FASHIONING THE NEW WOMAN: THE IMPORTANCE OF LOOKING GOOD**

Mary Poovey has argued that ideologies are not to be understood as monolithic and univocal, since they are contradictory, "both contested and always under construction", continuously "open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formations" (Poovey, 1988: 3). Because the powerful Victorian ideological formation of "The Girl of the Period" — Elizabeth Lynn Linton's notorious creation for the *Saturday Review* in 1868 — had such an impact in the readership of the late 1860s and the following decades, I would like to offer a succinct analysis of this antifeminist rhetoric *par excellence* as a sort of preface to the following chapters in my dissertation. I here attempt to show its inner strategies to cope with major cultural anxieties which were also condensed within later attacks against the New Woman of the eighteen eighties and nineties. In so doing, Linton's influential essay prised open a space for contestation which

was abundantly occupied by the advocates of the New Woman. The following chapters, therefore, may be viewed as analyses of the new imaginative responses generated in order to counterattack Linton's mainstream aesthetic representation of deviant female novelty.

The strategic representation of beautiful, physically attractive heroines in the literary narratives of the New Woman under analysis in the following chapters of this dissertation constitutes, from this point of view, an aesthetic response consciously articulated in order to contradict the monstrosities envisaged by conservative discourses on "strong-minded women" which prevailed in mainstream Victorian periodicals. Interestingly, very similar strategies were being deployed by nineteenth-century feminists who tried to mitigate reticence or animosity against women's cause by means of an alluring display of womanliness. Thus, as Ray Strachey recalled, Emily Davies, "the chief arbiter of tactics and the chief organiser of campaigns" in the demands for women's access to the secondary and higher education in the 1860s, "was remarkably cautious and tactful in her actions" as she fought for the permanent admission of girls to the Oxford and Cambridge Local Examinations (Strachey, 1928: 131, 132):

To this end the committee staged a special meeting of the Social Science Association, to which Mr Tomlinson, the secretary of the London centre, was invited to come "to testify (if you can conscientiously)", as Miss Davies put it, "that everybody behaved properly, and nothing alarming or scandalous happened at the experimental examination. . . ." A number of other Cambridge men were invited, "especially enemies, to give them a chance of being converted." To make the chance of this greater, Emily Davies took great care to secure some well-dressed and good-looking young women to fill up the front row. She anxiously inquired of her friends whether any of the audience "were strong-minded looking", and pointed out that Miss Garrett at any rate looked "exactly like one of those girls whose instinct it is to do what you tell them" (though here appearances were terribly deceptive!). This meeting went off well, and it was followed by a considerable discussion in the Press and in academic circles, and by several special lectures and pamphlets" (Strachey, 1928: 134).

The effectiveness of such stage directions was once more successfully put to the test on the nerve-racking occasion of women's rights advocates being heard before a Royal Commission so as to defend solid teaching for girls in good secondary schools in 1865: "Curiously enough this nervousness of Miss Buss was as effective in its way as Miss Davies's collectedness. 'We were all so much struck by their perfect womanliness', said one of the commissioners. 'Why, there were tears in Miss Buss's eyes!' Nothing could have been more reassuring" (Strachey, 1928: 137). The favourable report issued by the Schools Enquiry Commission finally appeared in 1868, the same year in which the *Girl of the Period* was born in the conservative press, assuming not only the importance of the proper instruction of girls but also their capacity and their interest in receiving such instruction, thus marking the beginning of a series of reforms in girls' schools and the public perception of middle-class female education.

Almost thirty years later, in 1895, when the mainstream press vented its rage on the New Woman as a dreadful site where the masculine and the feminine merged, her image was equally renovated in the pages of the feminist periodicals *Shafts* and *The Woman's Signal* in a deliberate effort to confer the female urban icon with an aura of legitimacy and respectability amid their readerships. A letter signed by "A Thorough Believer in the New Woman" chastised "the 'Manly' New Woman of Mr. Punch" for seeking "to be an imitation of man in every aspect". The authentic New Woman, claimed this staunch advocate, "is pre-eminently womanly and desires to remain so. She prefers the society of her own sex to that of men, and is, as a rule, popular among women—which I think you will admit is a very good test of her womanliness"

(“The New Woman” as quoted from *The Times of India* in *The Woman’s Signal*, December 26, 1895, p. 407. See Tusan, 1998: 176).

The battle for the aesthetics of emancipated womanhood seems to have been fought indefatigably on all fronts. The looks of the modern middle-class girl who dared to step out onto the public sphere were decisively engineered by advocates and detractors of the rights of women who were fully aware of how much was at stake in the war of representation. A revealing early instance of Elizabeth Lynn Linton’s engagement in the depiction of women in public as a horrific spectacle may be found in an article written in April 1, 1854, for Charles Dickens’s *Household Words*, entitled “Rights and Wrongs of Women”:

A woman such as ye would make her—teaching, preaching, voting, judging, commanding a man-of-war, and charging at the head of a battalion—would be simply *an amorphous monster*, not worth the little finger of the wife we would all secure if we could, the *tacens et placens uxor*, the gentle helpmeet or our burdens, the soother of our sorrow, and the enhancer of our joys! (Linton, 1854: 158) [first italics mine]

The article was a contribution to the attacks on women’s emancipation endorsed by Dickens himself, who had created in *Bleak House* (1852-53) a satiric caricature of the activist Mrs. Jellyby, a philanthropist who ignores her own needy children and neighbourhood to set up a mission in Africa. Linton’s article was meant to contradict the arguments of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an American who had actively supported the participation of women in the legal, medical, and political public realms (Anderson, 1989: 137). What concerns me here is Linton’s graphic configuration of woman in public, engaging in traditional male roles, as “an amorphous monster”, a beastly figure capable of destroying “the instinct of protection in man and the instinct of dependence in woman” since, so it was predicated, her new activities would necessarily entail the neglect of all womanly duties (Linton, 1854: 158). The portrait of such a creature made up of, somehow, unorganised matter is perfected and brought to the extreme in “The Girl of the Period”. As Diana Fuss has explained, the depiction of identity is a process that “draws its very lifeblood from the restless operations of identification” (Fuss, 1992: 93). Linton assembles, to this respect, a series of narrative conceits in order to produce a socio-political fiction of a dehumanised female as a potential agent of degeneration. Her process of identificatory images is carefully vertebrated around the concepts of the abominable and the grotesque, in the hope that her creation would secure its marketability for the Victorian press and serve as an actual deterrent for her readers:

Nothing is too extraordinary and nothing too exaggerated for her vitiated taste; and things which in themselves would be useful reforms if let alone become *monstrosities* worse than those which they have displaced so soon as she begins to manipulate and improve. If a sensible fashion lifts the gown out of the mud, she raises hers midway to her knee. If the absurd structure of wire and buckram, once called a bonnet, is modified to something that shall protect the wearer’s face without putting out the eyes of her companion, she cuts hers down to four straws and a rosebud, or a tag of lace and a bunch of glass beads. If there is a reaction against an excess of Rowland’s Macassar, and hair shiny and sticky with grease is thought less nice than if left clean and healthily crisp, she dries and frizzes and sticks hers out on end like certain savages in Africa, or lets it wander down her back like Madge Wildfire’s, and thinks herself all the more beautiful the nearer she approaches in look to a negress or a maniac (Linton, 1868: 2-3). [my italics]

A defender of sensible dress reform herself, Linton finds fault with the Girl of the Period's penchant for exacerbation. Her self-stylisation enacts the performativity of the monstrous. The aberrant manipulation and interference with the dimensions of her garments, accessories, and hair is a two-fold revelatory instance which unveils her pathologized body and "vitiating taste". Her physical proximity and close resemblance to those two Victorian ideological formations of abnormal femaleness, the black woman and the mad woman, foreshadow an identity which belongs in the margins of society. Presented as an outcast, the alterations inflicted on her bodily attire disclose almost a corporeal transfiguration and an identity on the border unknowingly walking the tightrope that separates humanity from social degradation. "Her main endeavour is to outvie her neighbours in the extravagance of fashion. No matter if, in the time of crinolines, she sacrifices decency; in the time of trains, cleanliness; in the time of tied-back skirts, modesty; [...] as she lives to please herself, she does not care if she displeases everyone else" (Linton, 1868: 3).

Most Victorians were traumatised by the implications of Darwin's theory of the species by natural selection. The evolutionary ideas contributed by Lamarck, Herbert Spencer and, later on in the nineteenth century, Max Nordau's degeneration theories left a mark in the collective imagination as they examined the transformations of species, human society and culture (Hurley, 1996: 6, 169). Undoubtedly, as I would like to contend, Linton made the most of the horror triggered by those narratives of bodily transfigurations which threatened the integrity of the species by following the logic of adaptation to the environment. Her opportunistic appropriation of the possibilities opened by Darwinism, as she consciously shaped and reshaped the Girl of the Period as an implausible combination of body types, skin colours and mental illness, grasped at the anxieties of her contemporaries in order to defend the healing potential of a lost ideal, "the fair young English girl of the past" (Linton, 1868: 2).

It is the Girl of the Period's resemblance to all these categories of a lesser humanity — the prostitute, the "negress", the mad woman, the masculine unproductive female, the hermaphrodite — that translates as repulsive in Linton's discourse. Her interracial, cross-class and cross-gender identity is of the essence in this portrayal of a non-femininity, a grotesque creature always on the verge of becoming a different entity. Thus, the merging of masculine and feminine features, black and white races, madness and sanity, turns emblematic in Linton's article. A certain sense of the uncanny emerges from the modern girl's *unheimlich* nature as it is her unfamiliar familiarity that is found disturbing. In stark contrast, the stunning physique of Henry James's ambiguously frivolous Daisy Miller and of Olive Schreiner's political Lyndall, the enticing sensuality of George Egerton's protagonists and the visually proper femininity of Sarah Grand's Evadne Frayling will later emerge as vigorous instances of the aesthetic contestation carried out by the advocates of the New Woman against those reactionary forces which wanted to hinder her progress and keep her influence under control.

### **1.5.1. "I Am The Monster That Speaks To You". The New Woman Hybrid Was A Postmodern Transgender Monster.**

Late-Victorian medical and sexology discourses developed from the seminal work of Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing — *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886) — and Havelock Ellis — *Sexual Inversion* (1897) — treated women in same-sex relationships and women posing as desiring subjects in general as deviant figures of the urban landscape. They were accused of sexual inversion and consistently denigrated on account of their engagement in relationships which were not focused on reproduction but on the satisfaction of the inner sexual drive the proper Victorian female was supposed to lack. They were designated a "third sex", as their unwomanly behaviour could no longer fit the rigid existing taxonomies of morality and sexual

identity. Accordingly, these women were deemed unfit for the reproduction of the species as they would potentially pass their abnormal characteristics to their offspring and, by and large, to the British race.

Kelly Hurley has theorised the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic and its focus on the “abhuman”, a crucial trope circulated by late-Victorian discourses on degeneration which enabled the fabrication of a “gothic nightmare of heredity” (Hurley, 1996: 67). In so far as the decline of mental and physiological traits is presented as the source of all social evils manifested in the urban environment, the abhuman is portrayed as a hybrid of the bestial and the human, abiding in the blurred frontier that separates both categories. The new monster is an “interstitial creature” whose ambiguity is manifested in body, gender and sexual orientation. Drawing on social anthropology, Hurley highlights the relevance of “liminality” in the fabrication of *fin-de-siècle* Gothic monstrosities. It is precisely their “border entity” and perceived “lack of categorical integrity” that is wielded against them as evidence of the cultural and biological danger they represent (Hurley, 1996: 24).

In her own analysis of the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, Patricia Murphy has recently explored “the trope of the blurred boundary, which enables entities or states that should be unequivocally divided to overlap and intertwine in dismaying indecipherability”. Drawing on Eugenia DeLamotte’s feminist study of the nineteenth-century Gothic, Murphy connects the notion of “the double” in Gothic literature with that disturbing “threshold space”, the “unstable boundary” that separates, and yet intertwines, life and death, “self and Other” (Murphy, 2016: 27). The crucial obfuscation of demarcation lines between identity categories is a common thread in the narratives analysed in this dissertation, as I intend to show in the chapters that follow. But the hybrid nature of the monster — I would like to contend in my own study — her half humanity and partial bestiality is presented as a fulcrum, a privileged epistemological stance from which to observe and inaugurate female speech. In so far as the New Woman embraces her liminality and daringly becomes “the monster that speaks”, she is enabled to create a new space of insubordination from which she is to be heard.

Diagnosed as mentally ill and gender dysphoric, the trans-gender, non-binary Spanish philosopher Paul B. Preciado addresses an assembly of scientific experts who have objectified him. By drawing on the powerful symbolism of the romantic trope of the monster in Victor Hugo’s *L’Homme qui rit* (1869) — “What have I come to do here? I have come to be terrible. I am a monster, you say. No, I am the people. Am I an exception? The exception is you. You are the chimera and I am the reality” — Preciado, speaking as a transgender male, impersonates the monster who tells the story from both sides of the gender barrier: “Yo soy el monstruo que os habla. El monstruo que vosotros mismos habéis construido con vuestro discurso y vuestras prácticas clínicas. Yo soy el monstruo que se levanta del diván y toma la palabra, no como paciente, sino como ciudadano y como vuestro semejante monstruoso” (Preciado, 2020: 18-19). In the present section, I shall attempt to establish a parallelism between postmodern transgender monstrosity and *fin-de-siècle* New-Womanly liminality based on the striking similarities I have found embedded in such apparently distant discourses of revolt against hegemonic ideologies of gender identity. Following the compulsion already uttered by Jane Eyre decades before — “Speak I must”<sup>9</sup> — the new heroine is about to raise her voice as she demands to be heard.

I would like to argue that the New Woman, via her predecessors the Girl of the Period or the Wild Woman in the antifeminist accounts of modern womanhood, performs a transgression

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<sup>9</sup> The pertinent quote corresponds to chapter 4 in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and is recalled by Lyndall Gordon in the introduction to her recent study of the life and work of Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Olive Schreiner and Virginia Woolf (Gordon, 2017: 18)

in the late-Victorian period which is analogous to the one announced in the postmodern report above. Lyndall Gordon reminds us in *Outsiders. Five Women Who Changed the World* (2017) that one of the most significant attributes of the nineteenth-century proper woman was her internalization that she had to remain silent in the public space. The art of self-effacement by keeping quiet had to be practised at the risk of being regarded immodest or unwomanly. Female assertiveness and self-expression were thus deemed unnatural, alien to the notion of Victorian femininity (Gordon, 2017: 15). Distorted as a monstrous female, a neurotic hermaphrodite, a hideous patchwork of diverse ethnicities and abnormal desires, the Girl of the Period, transmuted into the New Woman, dares — like the abused transgender human — to reclaim her identity in a context of prescriptive silence by appropriating for herself the right to speak in her own name, by asserting the ultimate right to own the elocution and address a listening audience:

Yo, como cuerpo trans, como cuerpo de género no-binario, al que ni la medicina, ni la ley, ni el psicoanálisis reconocen el derecho a la palabra, ni la posibilidad de producir discurso o una forma de conocimiento sobre sí mismo, he aprendido, como el simio Pedro el Rojo, el lenguaje del patriarcado colonial, he aprendido a hablar su lenguaje, el lenguaje de Freud y de Lacan, y estoy aquí para dirigirme a ustedes (Preciado, 2020: 19).

The fictions under scrutiny in the following chapters all pivot on a strikingly similar stance, as their new heroines come into adulthood by deploying the linguistic tools of patriarchy in order to subvert them and demand to be regarded as full citizens and political subjects. The audacious words pronounced by the New Woman monster gave rise to a clamour that could not be stilled, they managed to change their world as well as ours. The New Woman fiction has to be read but it also needs to be listened to.

The most crucial narrative moment in each of the New Woman fictions analysed, as I shall be arguing, corresponds to the female protagonists' coming of age as speaking subjects, an event that bespeaks their intrepid attempt to emancipate themselves from the institutions of normative gender identity, family, and romantic love, which have effectively curtailed their autonomy and mutilated their capacity to conquer new freedoms as desiring women.

In a paragraph reminiscent of Victor Hugo's extract above, Sarah Grand's narrator in *The Heavenly Twins* — focalising on the secondary character of the Tenor by means of the free indirect speech — accounts for the enticing, perfectly hybrid nature of Angelica Hamilton-Wells in disguise as a boy:

He had been enchanted, like Reymond of Lusignan in olden times, by a creature that was half a monster. The Boy had been a reality to him, but the lady had never been more than a lovely dream, and the monster—, well, the monster had not yet appeared, for that dark haired girl in the unwomanly clothes, with pride on her lips and pain in her eyes, was no monster after all, but an erring mortal like himself, a poor weak creature to be pitied and prayed for. And the Tenor bowed his sunny head and prayed for her earnestly through all the long hours of solitary suffering which closed that day" (Grand, 1893: 504).

Sarah Grand's creation of a young heroine able to mutate gender at will and combine "boyishnesses" and "womanishness" in perfect balance echoes the twenty-first-century desire of the transgender human to leave the mortiferous cage of mutually exclusive gender identities (Grand, 1893: 504): "Les hablo hoy desde la jaula escogida y rediseñada del «hombre trans», o, para ser más exactos, de «cuerpo vivo de género no-binario», una jaula política que es en

todo caso mejor que la de los «hombres» y la de las «mujeres» porque al menos reconoce su estatuto de jaula” (Preciado, 2020: 21). As Angelica puts it, “I don’t see why I should be severely consistent. Let me be a mixture—not a foul mixture, but one of those which eventually results in something agreeable, after going through a period of fermentation, during which they throw up an unpleasant scum that has to be removed. [...] And so I am unusual, [...] but there will be plenty more like me by and by” (Grand, 1893: 482, 483). Grand’s New Woman appears to rejoice in her mixture, her lack of definition, the liquid condition of genders that soak every layer of her transitional self.

Angelica’s willful obliteration of the performative acts involved in playing the role of an upper middle-class woman proves to be liberatory, if only temporarily, in Grand’s story, while it reveals the cultural nature of such acts: “it was not the first time that a boy had been successfully personated by a girl, a man by a woman; [...] the part had been well played; not only attitudes and gestures, but ideas and sentiments, and the proper expression of them had been done to perfection—which led up to another assertion of hers. She had been a boy for the time being, there was no doubt about that” (Grand, *Heavenly Twins*: 503-4). Angelica’s transition into a male and detransition into a female are presented as a masquerade that ultimately shows the overlapping of gender identities is second nature to her—“I thought I should like to see the market-place by moonlight, and then all at once I thought I *would* see it by moonlight. That was my first weighty reason for changing my dress. But having once assumed the character, I began to love it; it came naturally; and the freedom from restraint, I mean the restraint of our tight uncomfortable clothing, was delicious. I tell you I was a genuine boy. I moved like a boy; I was my own brother in very truth. Mentally and morally, I was exactly what you thought me,” (Grand, 1893: 456). The symbolic appropriation of a new voice by means of her strategic gender mimetism involved in the transitional process of becoming a male is successfully completed in so far as the Tenor’s belief in Angelica’s charming masculinity is sincere. Sarah Grand’s young new heroine is a gender dissident that will inevitably return to the social constraints that await her as a woman, but she will do so purveyed with a greater clear-sightedness into her hybrid nature, her transformative self, the monstrous “mixture” she inhabits. In Grand’s late-Victorian narrative of female insubordination, Angelica becomes the monster that speaks.

Just as the twenty-first-century transgender male celebrates his liberation from the unbearable torment of fulfilling a gender role s/he was most unwilling to perform — “Todas las cartas estaban echadas para mí. Las niñas no podían hacer la mayoría de las cosas de las que los niños disfrutaban. Se esperaba de mí el cumplimiento de un trabajo de género y sexual eficaz, silencioso y reproductivo. Debía convertirme en una buena novia heterosexual, en una buena esposa, en una buena madre, en una mujer discreta. [...] ¿Qué había en mi cuerpo que permitiera predecir toda mi vida? (Preciado, 2020: 23, 24) — Angelica fights the binarism and the forceful cultural pressure not to make a fuss and to remain silent: “I had none of the domestic virtues, and yet they would insist upon domesticating me; [...] I had the feeling never actually formulated in words, but quite easy to interpret now, that if I broke down conventional obstacles—broke the hampering laws of society, I should have a chance— [...] I felt a galling sense of restraint all at once, and I determined to break the law that imposed it; and that alone was a satisfaction—the finding of one law that I could break” (Grand, 1893: 450, 451). Both monstrous entities would appear to be making a similar claim from two extremely distant points in time and space coordinates, the experience of childhood in a Spanish Catholic town in the twilight of Franco’s dictatorial regime and the experience of girlhood within an aristocratic Victorian family in the eighteen seventies. Separated by almost a century, the analogous tactics of the postmodern transgender male and those of the New Woman in Sarah

Grand's novel involve ceasing to be a woman, which arguably poses the obliteration of imposed gender expectations as a plausible strategy for feminism. Rejoicing in the pleasure of disobedience, Angelica alleviates boredom and the grim prospect of an uneventful life as a domestic woman: "the waste of power which is involved in such an existence. [...] I hope to live, however, to see it allowed that a woman has no more right to bury her talents than a man has; in which days the man without brains will be taught to cook and clean, while the clever woman will be doing the work of the world well which is now being so shamefully scamped" (Grand, 1893: 453). The new heroine envisions her masquerade as a way out, a means to escape the oppressive yoke of proper femininity: "But my dress was an obstacle. As a woman, I could not expect to be treated by men with as much respect as they show to each other. [...] Because I was a woman I knew I should be insulted, or at all events hindered, however inoffensive my conduct; and so I prepared this disguise. And I began to be amused at once. It amused me to devise it" (Grand, 1893: 451). As Paul B. Preciado recollects, "De mi útero rebelde y después testosterónico debieron salir también todas las otras estrategias: la rabia que me hizo desconfiar de la norma, el goce de la desobediencia. Como los niños repiten los gestos que les procuran placer y aprendizaje una y otra vez, así repetí yo los gestos que rompían la norma para encontrar una salida" (Preciado, 2020: 27).

The experience of fighting the regime of sexual difference and the double standard of morality, so we are prevented in both texts, does not entail an immediate assumption of liberty. Liberation is not the aftermath of gender exchange. While for the female-born Spanish philosopher becoming "a man like any other man" was never a desideratum, for it would reabsorb identity into a different set of diversely suffocating limitations, Grand's *New Woman* — particularly in the case of Angelica Hamilton-Wells, but also in the case of Evadne Frayling — embraces insubordination as a search for a mere breathing outlet; she attempts to leave the regime of mindless conformity with patriarchal law not to find freedom, but to survive. Verbalising her yearning to be liberated from the old shackles becomes thus an epistemological necessity, but Grand's novel prevents us from the banality of taking that liberation for granted. "La libertad es una salida, un túnel. La libertad, como ese nuevo nombre por el que ahora me conocen, o este nuevo rostro vagamente hirsuto que ven ante ustedes, no te la da nadie, se fabrica. Y mi puerta de escape fue, entre otras cosas, la testosterona. En este proceso, la hormona no es de ninguna manera un fin en sí misma: es una aliada en la tarea de inventar un afuera" (Preciado, 2020: 30).

## 1.6. DISSERTATION LAYOUT

In the introductory chapter to my dissertation I have offered a general presentation to the topic of the *New Woman* in which I have inscribed the new fiction as a creative feminist manoeuvre to help advance the women's liberation movement in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. I have also resituated the time coordinates of the *new woman* phrase by demonstrating that it was already in circulation in the Spanish realist novel of the first half of the nineteenth century in clear allusion to an English female type — at least a decade before 1894, the date commonly held by scholars to coincide with the birth of the *New Woman* in the periodical press. Next, I have attended to my first aim to provide a general overview of the research produced on the *New Woman* topos over the last fifty years since its first emergence in the 1970s. The scholarly research has proved to be very diverse in its scope across these five decades of *New Woman* studies and the lively discussion on the topic continues to generate interest and to open new paths of inquiry transnationally. This introduction has also attempted to justify the choice of the four major *New Woman* narratives produced by Henry James, Olive Schreiner, George Egerton and Sarah Grand as a subject of research. The primary aim I shall

be pursuing is two-fold and concerns the textual analysis of the aesthetic and discursive representation of the new female heroines in these writers' most iconic and best-selling fictions on the New Woman — *Daisy Miller*, *The Story of an African Farm*, *Keynotes & Discords* and *The Heavenly Twins*, respectively. I have outlined the main tenets of a diverse methodological approach which will pay attention to both the aesthetic ideologies and the discursive practices imbricated in the construction of each New Woman text under scrutiny and in the feminist subjectivities that emerge within them. I have likewise addressed the problematic issue of applying a feminist, post-structuralist, anti-essentialising methodological lens to texts which were produced in a period in time when the discourse on the autonomy of the self and the process of female consciousness-gaining was, paradoxically, still operational but increasingly suspicious and kept at bay, as I hope to demonstrate in my analysis of the selected corpus. Finally, I have deemed relevant to provide some instances of the antagonistic ways in which the emancipated woman was fashioned and stylised by her advocates and detractors, both in fiction and in fact, in my broad aim to show the political significance which the aesthetic struggle and the representation of the New Woman took on. Drawing on my own analysis of Elizabeth Lynn Linton's fabrication of "the Girl of the Period" — a well-known precedent of the New Woman in the Victorian conservative press in 1868 — as the horrific site of an atrocious femininity, I have argued for an interpretation of the New Woman trope, epitomised by one of Sarah Grand's female protagonists in *The Heavenly Twins*, as "the monster that speaks". I have also established a parallelism between postmodern transgender monstrosity and *fin-de-siècle* New-Womanly liminality by anchoring my analogy on the striking similarities I have found embedded in such apparently distant discourses of revolt against hegemonic ideologies of gender identity.

The second chapter in this dissertation explores the arguable foundational aspects of the New Woman that may be found in Henry James's *Daisy Miller* (1878). I shall trace the most salient instances of female unruliness incarnated by the eponymous heroine in three interwoven sections. My analysis is commenced with James's drawing of Winterbourne's defective masculinity, the anomaly of this American male and his taxonomising tendencies. As I will contend, his failed attempts to recover a lost position of authority over the female sign all but point towards a tragic lack, that of a Wildean temperament of receptivity which would enhance his appreciation of Daisy's novelty. A second section is devoted to James's heroine as the Bakhtinian feminist fool, a funny improper lady whose uncontrollable laughter lays bare the inconsistencies of the dominant discourse on woman. Daisy's exhibitionism and continuous breaches of propriety have powerful symbolic consequences in the new cultural order our heroine seems to inaugurate. Finally, the last aspect addressed goes back to the question of Daisy's language of disobedience and the idiosyncrasy of her assertive speech of female desire. The decentralisation of the middle-class love project effected by Daisy's carnivalesque behaviour is ultimately placing humour at the service of both socio-political transgression and her self-transformation into a kaleidoscopic, heterogeneous femininity. Daisy's triumphant death as a single woman, her final assertion of difference and female power discards all tragic notes of martyrdom as she remains, in James's own words "the woman in the world who is least afraid" (James, 1906, 1907: 59).

The third chapter focuses on Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and is organised into three main sections. The first section, "The Aesthetic Construction of the Heroine in *African Farm*", offers an analysis of the visual representation of Lyndall, its heroine, in this pioneer New Woman novel. The textual relevance granted to the looks of the female protagonist justifies attention, particularly as it engages in a dialectical relationship with her discursive practices. Drawing on aesthetic concepts of *eurhythmia* and *kalokagathia*, as well as

on Foucault's notion of fetishism and deviation, I will study the narrative implications of the new heroine's magnificent physique. My objective in the second section, "A Discursive Analysis of the Novel", is to look into the construction of female subjectivity through language by studying both the protagonist's linguistic utterances and her dialectical confrontation with hegemonic discourses in the novel. The contrast with contemporary ideas circulated in the works of John Stuart Mill and Olive Schreiner's non-fictional work will provide a framework for the female protagonist's speech. Finally, a third section delves into "The Debate on Marriage", as a particularly apt means to explore the ways in which Schreiner's novel configures its heroine as a desiring subject while it promotes the political agenda of the protean New Woman.

The fourth chapter examines George Egerton's *Keynotes & Discords* (1893-1894). The first part of the chapter, "Celebrating the Feminine", constitutes an exploration of two major premises which I have found embedded in the construction of female identity in the stories: the intertwining of seduction and enigma as mechanisms that make possible Egerton's particular rendering of womanhood. My aim is to situate Egerton's female protagonists immersed in a process of subjectivity formation which is highly dependent on a system of perception and dialogue with their external and internal worlds. I contend that the modernity of Egerton's fiction inheres in its reformulation of a Paterian, Wildean aesthetics, as it concedes woman complete responsibility over the creative and hermeneutic processes. The second part, "Narratives of Desire", is the result of a close analysis of language, understood in its broadest sense, as a central focus in the narratives and of how it may be working in complicity with the ideological project of femininity fostered by George Egerton's work. Egerton's stories tend to construe the unstable category of woman within a large framework of complex identifications with more or less fixed groups such as the witch, the devil, the exotic dancer or the gypsy, conveniently hailed in order to suit and project the desired image of femaleness that constitutes the major ideological undertaking of these *centrifugal* narratives, as I have designated them. These heroines' penchant for escapism into fantasised otherness reveals an Heraclitean vision of identity which, as I shall argue, is essential in Egerton's fiction. The third and final part, "Utopia Envisaged", is a study of how female dissatisfaction may be transformed into a positive device in order to move beyond convention and reinvent female identity.

The fifth and final chapter tackles Sarah Grand's monumental novel, *The Heavenly Twins* (1893). The first part, "The Proem to *The Heavenly Twins*", offers an analysis of a largely unexplored aspect of Grand's novel. By drawing attention to the major trope of the chime reverberating from Morningquest's cathedral tower, I shall attempt to establish a relation between the novel's aesthetics, the conflictive discourses on religion set in motion from the allegorical proem and Grand's personal ethical project. The second part, "Changes in Perspective", constitutes an exploration of the narrative strategies deployed in the novel as these tend to reproduce the major aesthetic reflections set in motion by the trope of the chime in the proem. By focusing on structure and story-telling processes I shall argue that the novel's attempt to change the world was pursued both through narrative content and form. I will also contend that religion is a pivotal topic in *The Heavenly Twins*, one which is surprisingly absent from most critical analyses of Grand's fiction, for it provides a crucial lens with which to examine the construction of female characters in discourse. Finally, the third part, "Prescribing the Remedy", offers a close examination of the New Woman's discursive tenets instantiated in

the linguistic tactics developed by Sarah Grand's heroine, Evadne Frayling, as she struggles to establish her own language of authority against the dominant discourses on woman in the novel.



## 2 HENRY JAMES'S NEW WOMAN. DWELLING IN CARNIVAL: DAISY MILLER'S DISOBEDIENCE

Given the substantial importance attached to the so-called Woman Question since the mid-nineteenth century it seems reasonable to search for earlier examples of feminine novelty that could have emerged in the literary scene before the boom of the New Woman genre in the 1890s. Literature provided an extraordinary medium to negotiate new meanings on womanhood as well as to palliate the fears of socio-political conflict that might have been fuelled by changes in the Victorian world outside the literary realm.

With this aim in mind, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg included Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer in the category of first-generation New Women on account of their passionate rebellion against "social conventions and [their] social consequences". Henry James was fascinated by the American female as she rose to an unprecedented position of cultural prestige and authority in the nineteenth century (Pollack, 1993: 5), and became in James's fictions "captain of her own destiny", thus preparing the ground for future New Women to come (Smith-Rosenberg, 1980: 264, 275). Angeliqe Richardson has observed that "[w]hile New Women have been associated primarily with British culture, their presence and popularity soon spread to other parts of the world, most notably the United States, and they became one of the most striking features of the late nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic" (Richardson, 2002: xxxiii). Famously, the contested debate on the New Woman which was held in 1894 between Sarah Grand and Ouida in the pages of the first American literary magazine, the *North American Review*, "propelled the term into general usage" (Mangum, 1998: 2) and the capitalised phrase referring to emancipated womanhood gained international acceptance and popularity.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Vivian Pollack has seen Daisy Miller as a fictional heroine that "conjures up the disturbing spectre of an erotically aggressive New Woman" (Pollack, 1993: 6), while Martha Banta has recently prevented us from considering James as a "proto-feminist":<sup>2</sup> "He cannot be expected to respond with either sympathy or understanding to the New Woman as she attempts to enter the corridors of political power as a turn-of-the-century Daniel Webster or to achieve recognition within the professional world" (Banta, 1998: 23). Although Banta specifically disregards this popular Jamesian story, my own reading of Daisy Miller as an incipient, immature New Woman of the 1870s will attempt to show that, despite James's

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<sup>1</sup> As a result of the press success of Grand's "The New Aspect of the Woman Question", the *North American Review* published "The Modern Girl" and "The Man of the Moment" by the same author, who began a series of lectures on female emancipation both in America and in Britain. Richardson also records that her novel *The Heavenly Twins* "took [...] the public by storm, selling over 100,000 copies in the United States, and over 20,000 copies in Britain (where it was reprinted six times in its first year)". Another interesting examination of the modern woman appeared in 1895 in *A Study in Bloomers, or, The Model New Woman*, written by the American novelist George F. Hall (2002: xxxiv).

<sup>2</sup> James's *The Bostonians* (1885) is the novel in which he addressed the issue of equal rights for women, two years after the publication of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*. As he recorded in his notebooks: "The characters who figure in it are for the most part persons of the radical reforming type, who are especially interested in the emancipation of women, giving them the suffrage, releasing them from bondage, co-educating them with men, etc. They regard this as the great question of the day—the most urgent and sacred reform". James similarly considered that "the situation of women, the decline of the sentiment of sex, the agitation on their behalf" was "the most salient and peculiar point in our social life" (Matthiesen and Murdock, 1947: 46, 47). The feminist response to James's novel, however, was adverse and his story was rejected as mere caricature by the contemporary press (Anderson, 1984: 17).

ambivalent position towards the feminist cause, the resistances deployed by his heroine share similarities and may be conducive to the emerging profile of a New Woman identity.

Henry James's 1878 narrative is apparently very simple.<sup>3</sup> A reckless American girl enjoying her holiday in Europe breaches all sense of Victorian propriety as she innocently delights in the company of her numerous suitors, only to catch malaria in Rome and die after a flirting episode in a moonlit Colosseum. As I intend to show, such simplicity is only superficial for James's story carries within a good number of complex cultural transformations that may account for the extended fear of American women, which would spread throughout the Victorian world in the 1890s. In fact, as Christine Stansell has noted, "nowhere in Europe — or in the world, for that matter — did modern culture orient itself to the New Woman as its defining figure as it did in America" (Stansell, 2000: 232). Elizabeth Lynn Linton's attacks in 1891 on the figure of the American woman in her famous "The Wild Women as Politicians" may serve as an appropriate example:

By the very nature of things, by the inherent qualities of their sex—its virtues, defects, necessities—women are at once tyrannical and individual. In America, when they get the upper hand, they wreck the grog-shops and forbid the sale of all liquor whatever. And these women who thus destroy a man's property and ruin his fortunes in their zeal for sobriety may saturate themselves with tea, ether, or chloral, to the destruction of their health and nerves. They may resort to all sorts of perilous experiments to prevent unwelcome results;—but these are their own affairs and the men have no right to interfere. (Linton, 1891a: 85)

Interestingly, on one occasion Henry James himself had to come up in defence of his own creation, the flirtatious Daisy Miller, so as to soothe Linton's reproaches on account of the heroine's overt defiance of the American expatriate community's conventions in old Europe. James thus wrote in a letter to Linton that "Poor little Daisy was, as I understand her, above all things *innocent*", even too innocent "to take the measure really of the scandal she produced". In a similar vein, the writer went on to underscore that Daisy "was too ignorant, too irreflective, too little versed in the proportion of things" to realise her transgressive achievements in the story: "The whole idea of the story is the little tragedy of a light, thin, natural, unsuspecting creature being sacrificed as it were to a social rumpus that went on quite over her head and to which she stood in no measurable relation" (Edel, 1975: 303-04). James's fascination for the modern American woman is also apparent in *The American Scene* in which he observed that the country's social life was "constituted absolutely by women" and acknowledged that "the woman produced by a woman-made society alone has obviously quite a new story" (James, 1907: 255, 256).

The same year of Linton's denunciation of the American woman's licentiousness saw the publication of Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), where humorous conversations abound on the fashionable tendency to marry American women at the beginning of the nineties: 'They don't last, I am told', says one character, 'A long engagement exhausts [American women], but they are capital at a steeplechase. They take things flying'. Lord Henry's cynical comments sound particularly incisive; for him, 'American girls are as

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<sup>3</sup> This short novel first appeared in *Cornhill Magazine* in June-July 1878, and it was published in book form the following year. It soon became a phenomenal success and "James's most popular story" although it was also, quite paradoxically, "his first tale to be rejected by an American journal" (Righelato, 2006: ix). Henry James recalled in his 1907 "Preface to 'Daisy Miller'" how the scandal caused by the story had been explained to him: "a friend to whom I appealed for light, giving him the thing to read, declared it could only have passed with the Philadelphian critic for 'an outrage of American girlhood' (James, 1907: 3).

clever at concealing their parents, as English women are at concealing their past' (Wilde, 1891: 51). Later on, he rhetorically asks 'Why can't these American women stay in their country? They are always telling us that it is the Paradise for women', only to answer immediately: 'It is. That is the reason why, like Eve, they are so excessively anxious to get out of it' (Wilde, 1891: 52). Particularly pungent is Lord Henry's remark that marriage is hardly a thing that one can do now and then, 'Except in America' (Wilde, 1891: 102).

The references above produced by Linton and by Wilde's characters are only two conspicuous guides for the increasing interest and concern created around the particularities of the American female and the aura of democratic freedom associated with her. *Daisy Miller* constitutes in this light an incredible source of insights on the new political possibilities opened by James's heroine as she was perceived to be in revolt, paying no heed whatsoever to the dictums of the recalcitrant forces in the story. The overriding contemporary anxiety regarding what "the large and apparently growing class of not specially occupied single women" would do was lurking at the core of those attacks targeted against the novelty James's heroine incarnates (James, 1907: 88-89).

My own reading of *Daisy Miller* as a "female grotesque" — to borrow Mary Russo's expression — derives from this scholar's idea that "for a woman, making a spectacle out of herself had [...] to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries" (Russo, 1986: 213). Daisy's behaviour becomes a bold affirmation of feminine performance and masquerade against the silence and withdrawal conventional society means to impose upon her. It is precisely this image of unruly womanhood that has triggered my selection of James's story for its inclusion in the present study, as well as the ambiguities and gender asymmetries involved in Daisy's portrait.

In the pages that follow I intend to explore the foundations laid down by such female unruliness in three interwoven sections. My analysis is commenced with James's drawing of Winterbourne's defective masculinity, the anomaly of this American male and his taxonomising tendencies. His failed attempts to recover a lost position of authority over the female sign all but point towards a tragic lack, that of a Wildean temperament of receptivity which would enhance his appreciation of Daisy's novelty. A second section is devoted to James's heroine as the Bakhtinian feminist fool, a funny improper lady whose uncontrollable laughter lays bare the inconsistencies of the dominant discourse on woman. Daisy's exhibitionism and continuous breaches of propriety have powerful symbolic consequences in the new cultural order our heroine seems to inaugurate. Finally, the last aspect addressed below goes back to the question of Daisy's language of disobedience and the idiosyncrasy of her assertive speech of female desire. The decentralisation of the middle-class love project effected by Daisy's carnivalesque behaviour is ultimately placing humour at the service of both socio-political transgression and her self-transformation into a kaleidoscopic, heterogeneous femininity. Daisy's triumphant death as a single woman, her final assertion of difference and female power discards all tragic notes of martyrdom as she remains, in James's own words "the woman in the world who is least afraid" (James, 1906, 1907: 59).

## 2.1. FREDERICK WINTERBOURNE, THE MALE ANOMALY

### 2.1.1. Taxonomising Womanhood

One of the most interesting instances of a Jamesian heroine being literally interpreted as a sign of culturally established connotations is rendered by Frederick Winterbourne's first attempts to decipher the canvas of the American girl:<sup>4</sup>

Winterbourne had not seen for a long time anything prettier than his fair young countrywoman's various features—her complexion, her nose, her ears, her teeth. He had a great relish for genuine beauty; he was addicted to observing and analysing it; and as regards this young lady's face he made several observations. It was not at all insipid, but it was not exactly expressive; and though it was eminently delicate, Winterbourne mentally accused it—very forgivingly—of a want of finish. He thought it very possible that Master Randolph's sister was a coquette, he was sure she had a spirit of her own [...]. (140)<sup>5</sup>

The previous passage constitutes an example of how Winterbourne reproduces a good number of gendered cultural ticks which assimilate him to the commonplace of the nineteenth-century male character who adopts the mentality of the science man, the taxonomist.<sup>6</sup> Showing an almost vital need to do away with the mystery he finds embodied by woman, Winterbourne follows a rigorous method to achieve his goal.<sup>7</sup> Just as the procedure followed by scientists was the building of hypotheses, he sets off to decode and read the canvas of womanhood by paying heed to the Victorian premise according to which a woman's body carried with it, inscribed in it, the psychological makeup of her inner self.<sup>8</sup> To this respect, Ludmilla Jordavova has observed that eighteenth and nineteenth medical discourses focused on “the idea of the body as sign” and “sanctioned a particular form of inferential thinking, that moved from visible indicators on a surface (either the body itself or clothes) to invisible traits inside

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<sup>4</sup> The treatment of Daisy Miller as a portrait is consistently insisted upon throughout the whole story. Interestingly, towards the end of James's narrative there is an explicit allusion to Daisy as a “picture of a different kind” whose contemplation is enjoyed by a friend of Winterbourne's in juxtaposition with the portrait of Innocent X by Velázquez (183). Adeline R. Tintner and Jeffrey Meyers have studied the asymmetries involved in the truly innocent pose of Daisy Miller beneath the more than dubious innocence of the Pope. See Tintner, 1979: 71-78; and Meyers, 1979: 171-78.

<sup>5</sup> All textual references are taken from the 1983 Penguin edition. *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*. Ed. Michael Swan. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1983.

<sup>6</sup> Winterbourne's addiction to forward analyses based on direct observation reveals how James's male protagonist is prey of the influence exercised by the trends of Empiricism and Positivism, advanced by David Hume and later onwards by August Comte, in nineteenth-century mentality. Winterbourne's positivist mind links him to the figure of the ‘science man’ obsessed with gathering all kinds of observable data in order to reasonably justify his ulterior assertions. In a similar vein, Gilbert Osmond—the male tyrant in James's *The Portrait of a Lady*—exhibits another curious tendency: as a ‘collector’ of objects Osmond “was fond of originals, of rarities, of the superior and the exquisite; [...] he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by declining [Lord Warburton's] hand”. Osmond shall be gathering all kinds of evidence to pass judgement on Isabel Archer, his future wife. (James, 1881: 354).

<sup>7</sup> The times in which James wrote and published *Daisy Miller* were witnessing both the rise of an increasing concern with the possibilities of the American girl and the deep immersion of the American male in the realms of business and market productivity. Lisa Appignanesi has explained to this respect that “since it is men who run the world of politics, business and the mundane extensions of technology which appear to have exhausted mystery, then it is in woman that the possibilities of another order, a new resolution, a new way of viewing reality must reside. Thus the artist turns to the feminine, the mystery she still represents, and uses it as a mediational core for his art” (Appignanesi, 1973: 14).

<sup>8</sup> Two pseudo-sciences, Physiognomy and Phrenology, which largely influenced the nineteenth-century imagination, taint Winterbourne's method of observation. The belief that physical traits were able to disclose the truths of the inner self and reveal one's character was deeply rooted in an epoch which demanded that female respectability be physically paraded and written in women's bodies. For an analysis of the relation between the aspect of women and their presupposed moral qualities see, for instance, Nead (1988).

the body” (Jordanova, 1989: 26-27). This belief, however, was matched, if not overshadowed, by the prominent suspicion that the parallelism between body and soul could be susceptible of manipulation at will by cunning members of the female class. Thus the figure of the cautious interpreter of signs, the male semiotician, was deemed necessary in order to establish or deny the authenticity of such a correlation.<sup>9</sup>

Hence Winterbourne’s minute observation of our still-unnamed heroine’s features. In his attempt to draw clear-cut conclusions about the real nature of his new female acquaintance, Winterbourne, nevertheless, seems to meet at first with certain obstacles that prevent him from establishing a definitive diagnosis as “[n]ever [...] had he encountered a young American girl of so pronounced a type as this” (143). Thus, her face “was not at all insipid, but it was not exactly expressive”; “it was eminently delicate”, but it showed “a want of finish” (140)—an observation shared by Winterbourne and the narrator alike, as the latter implicitly meddles in the body of the diegesis.<sup>10</sup>

Once these obstacles have been conveniently discarded—the somewhat contradictory messages carved in her face being attributed to her young age—Winterbourne does not vacillate in his labelling of the American girl as a “coquette”. While acknowledging that she differs from other (proper) ladies in her “having a spirit of her own” (140), Winterbourne seems to momentarily disperse his fears of a burlesque womanhood—“but in her bright, sweet, superficial little visage there was no mockery, no irony” (140)—behind a veil of patronising delight upon the contemplation of Daisy’s childish beauty. So far unacquainted with “young ladies of this category”, Winterbourne’s fear of “great coquettes—dangerous, terrible women, with whom one’s relations were liable to take a serious turn” becomes from the beginning of the story one of the most characteristic traits of his interior portrayal of the American girl (144).

In a certain sense, much of what we get to know about Daisy’s figure is filtered and focalised through what Percy Lubbock has termed “the panoramic” offered by Winterbourne.<sup>11</sup> As readers, we do not know more about the riddle posed by Daisy Miller’s identity than “[p]oor Winterbourne” himself does (143). The narrative makes its way alongside the male protagonist’s vain intent to disclose and unmask the true nature of Miss Miller. His diverse and often contradictory relation to the canvas of the American girl conforms the inevitable response to a portrait which is never flat nor dull for it is full of seams, the seams in which the meaning of female identity itself is being negotiated:

Certainly she was very charming; but how deucedly sociable! Was she simply a pretty girl from New York State—were they all like that, the pretty girls who had a good deal of gentlemen’s society? Or was she also a designing, an audacious, an unscrupulous young person? Winterbourne had lost his instinct in this matter, and his reason could not help him. Miss Daisy Miller looked extremely innocent. Some people had told him that, after all, American girls were exceedingly innocent; and

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<sup>9</sup> As Laura Mulvey has argued, woman “stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning” (Mulvey, 1975: 433).

<sup>10</sup> The present study makes use of terminology adopted from the influential school of Narratology. Some texts have proved to be of particular interest, such as Gérard Genette (1966), (1983), and (1987).

<sup>11</sup> The term refers to one of the structural elements alternating in James’s fiction. “The panoramic” refers to what James called “picture” or the rendering of interior thought. The second element is what Lubbock denominated “the dramatic”, which corresponds to Henry James’s “scene” or “discriminated occasions”, a narrative strategy that mainly reveals character through speech and action. Notably, Winterbourne and Daisy would be associated with the “picture” and the “scene” in their respective fictional renderings. (Lubbock, 1921: 157-202).

others had told him that, after all, they were not. He was inclined to think Miss Daisy Miller was a flirt—a pretty American flirt. (143-44)

In trying to ascertain the true nature of Daisy Miller, Winterbourne is also, inevitably, revealing a weakness which forces him to withhold what would be his first unchecked reaction to Daisy's obvious charms. His first response is a very positive one, he is both "amused" and "decidedly charmed" by our heroine's "extremely innocent" appearance (143), but Winterbourne feels neither safe nor satisfied with his first impressions and decides to probe into the potential dark areas of Daisy's psychology. In a crucial sense which is examined below,<sup>12</sup> Winterbourne's perplexity derives from Daisy Miller's verbal conduct, for the fashion in which she expresses herself "seemed a kind of demonstrative evidence of a certain laxity of deportment" (143). And yet Daisy's charms have such a powerful effect on Winterbourne that he offers particular resistance to dumping her into the class of hopeless reprobates — "But this young girl was not a coquette in that [terrible] sense; she was very unsophisticated" (144). Interestingly, Winterbourne rectifies his pernicious verdict on Daisy convinced that he has "become dishabituated to the American tone" (143). It is, after all, not simply a question of gender for the American male but also, and very significantly, a verification of national breeding, as Winterbourne is determined to establish a marked difference between proper and improper women, on the one hand, and female Europeans and Americans, on the other: "he was vexed at his want of instinctive certitude as to how far her eccentricities were generic, national, and how far they were personal" (185).

Winterbourne's mind is particularly prone to classifying and pigeonholing the members of the female gender into rigid categories differing in their respective degrees of social acceptability:<sup>13</sup> John H. Randall III has noted, to this respect, his tendency to see "life through the spectacles of the picturesque. What he responds to is a guidebook view of life, not life itself" (Randall III, 1965: 575). Throughout the story, he is taking all efforts to make Daisy fit into his preconceived ideas of womanhood, even if the attempt involves the contemplation of a new profile still to be demarcated — "He had never, as yet, had any relations with young ladies of this category" (144) — thus revealing the male neurotic need to control woman, to keep her under surveillance, and his ultimate demand not to be confused by her:

It was impossible to regard her as a perfectly well-conducted young lady; she was wanting in a certain indispensable delicacy. It would therefore simplify matters greatly to be able to treat her as the object of one of those sentiments which are called by romancers 'lawless passions'. That she should seem to wish to get rid of him would help him to think more lightly of her, and to be able to think more lightly of her would make her much less perplexing. But Daisy, on this occasion, continued to present herself as an inscrutable combination of audacity and innocence. (170-171).

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<sup>12</sup> See 2.3. "The Female Fool's Language of Revolt" below.

<sup>13</sup> His taxonomic tendencies are aligned with the feverish penchant for classification exhibited by Mrs Lynn Linton in her infamous catch-phrases: "the shrieking sisterhood", "modern man-haters", "the epicene sex", "the discontented woman", "drawing-room epiphytes", "shunted dowagers", "la femme passée", "spoilt women" — to name just a few of her myriad declensions of abnormal femininity she gathered in *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, New Burlington Street, 1883. 2 vols). Winterbourne tends to represent women as a homogenous mass merely because of their belonging to a particular gender, comfortably liable to be further subcategorised. The comfort hegemonic discourses derive from such homogenisation is in keeping with the gratification postcolonial theory has detected in Western representations of non-Western cultures whose individuality is never taken into consideration (Said, 1978: 4). Just as race and culture may be mystified and homogenised merely on account of its being non-Western, so can gender and class, due to their being non-masculine and non-hegemonic.

This obsessive exigency and recurrent failure to accommodate Daisy into the conceptual grid of discernible woman categories forces the patriarchal gaze to develop new strategies of adjustment in its confrontation with the startling female sign. One of such strategies is the withholding of assent over a presumably unquestionable biographical fact, namely, her being a true American. Once Daisy has broken down all norms of social acceptability, the Europeanised Americans James's heroine frequents cease to invite her to their houses and parties: "these people had quite made up their minds that she was going too far [...] and they intimated that they desired to express to observant Europeans the great truth that, though Miss Daisy Miller was a young American lady, her behaviour was not representative—was regarded by her compatriots as abnormal" (184). A similar realisation has taken place in Winterbourne's mind earlier in the story as Daisy's behavioural peculiarities differ from those of conventional "pretty American girls" such as his own cousins, who are acknowledged "tremendous flirts" (150). The momentous oscillation in the consideration of the Jamesian heroine (signifier) as either a proper American girl (*original*) or as an instance of anomalous womanhood (*imitation*) confirms, on the one hand, the malleability and arbitrariness of the signified (in this case, the root concept of 'being American') while it reveals, on the other, the ways in which the signified is created on the basis of the changing meanings the young heroine triggers for the American matrons in the story. The conservative discourse on American girlhood seems to imply that orthodox American girls are those who actually remain in America. I would like to argue that, in this light, the original which Daisy stands for at the beginning of the story — "Never, indeed, since [Winterbourne] had grown old enough to appreciate things, had he encountered a young American girl of so pronounced a type as this" (143) — ceases to be identical to itself by virtue of her breaches of propriety, thus suppressing the illusion of seamless identity and static selfhood. Seven years before the publication of *Daisy Miller*, Charles Darwin had observed in *The Descent of Man* that "with woman the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of *imitation*,<sup>14</sup> are more strongly marked than in man", thus investing with scientific authority a prevailing social prejudice against woman's inferiority with regard to man's "more courageous, pugnacious, and energetic" nature (Darwin, 1871, vol. 2: 326-7). Shrewdly, these matrons turn Daisy into a poor imitation, a fake, a vulgar copy of the standard of American girlhood they purport to preserve before European eyes. By conveniently placing her in the margins outside the spheres of national, class, and gender normality, an apparent illusion of stable categories is guaranteed, managing to assuage the fears stoked by new models of femininity daring to differ from socially condoned rules of conduct.<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to notice the extrication of the category of American young womanhood from deviant femininity performed by the American matrons, while their lack of

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<sup>14</sup> My italics.

<sup>15</sup> The question of representation, the adequacy and adaptation of the particular to the original, almost an abstract idea in its perfection, remain crucial in this story. The extent to which Daisy accommodates herself to the real thing, the prototype of the American girl, is studied in close detail and constitutes a pervading concern in the text. The confusion it generates among the rest of the characters is further enhanced by her having two different names, as Winterbourne soon learns from Randolph, Daisy's little brother: 'Her name is Daisy Miller [...] [b]ut that isn't her real name; that isn't her name on her cards'. 'Her real name is Annie P. Miller' (141). The dichotomy between the original and its imitation, so conspicuous in James's fiction, may be linked to the disturbing implications it would acquire in the mid-nineties after William Heinemann's publication of the first English translation of Max Nordau's *Degeneration*. Quoting Benedict Morel in 1857, Nordau's precursor on the topic, this influential text affirmed that "[t]he clearest notion we can form of degeneracy is to regard it as *a morbid deviation from an original type*" (qtd. in Murphy, 2016: 10). For the German scientist, the degenerate was (in Lintonian fashion) mentally ill and required therapy. The uneasiness with which Daisy Miller's different femininity is received in James's story, being interpreted as anomalous divergence from the norm, is thus both evocative and anticipatory of later discussions which would link the so-perceived sexual aggressiveness of the New Woman to her menacing capacity to arrest the healthy development of the species (see, for instance, Stutfield 1895).

perceptiveness with regard to the actual anomaly in the text, which Frederick Winterbourne represents, is left unchecked. For Winterbourne's masculinity is never questioned despite his double-sided deflection. As D. M. Fogel has convincingly argued, not only is he "an American male who does not live in America", he is, oddly enough, "an American male who is 'not in business'", undoubtedly the most virile occupation conceivable for a young man of his time and nationality.<sup>16</sup> Winterbourne's evasion from the world of male competition becomes in this light a disturbing sign of anomalous masculinity, an oddity paralleled only by his dependence and subservience to the two kinds of women he admits in his life, the sexless widows (his aunt, Mrs. Costello, and Mrs. Walker) whose ideology he pays homage to, and the — presumably — highly sexual, unmarriageable women he returns to at the end of James's story.<sup>17</sup>

Winterbourne's efforts to convince Daisy of his being a "real American" have a particular significance in this context as the idea of character and personality being modelled upon coordinates of nationality was another anxiety fuelling James's story.<sup>18</sup> There is a recurrent concern in his characters to elucidate the accuracy of people's national origin. Daisy's inquisitorial attitude with regard to Winterbourne's background reveals a distrust that is ultimately questioning the authenticity of masculinity itself: "She asked him if he was a 'real American'; she wouldn't have taken him for one; he seemed more like a German—this was said after a little hesitation, especially when he spoke" (140). But Winterbourne's affirmative response to Daisy's question—already in excess as her little brother Randolph had gathered this piece of information earlier in the story (138)—somehow does not convince James's heroine, who still insists on a third occasion: "And you are really an American?" (146). The belonging to a specific nationality gives rise to certain expectations which do not appear to be matched at first sight by Daisy's direct experience with Winterbourne.

James's heroine shows instead a preference to mingle with Mr Giovanelli who, interestingly, remains the only real European in the story. Mrs Costello's objections to Daisy's taking her *courier* for a real count thus reverberate in Winterbourne's following comments about her Italian suitor: "'He is not a real gentleman, [...] he is only a clever imitation of one. He is a music-master, or a penny-a-liner, or a third-rate artist. Damn his good looks!' [...] Winterbourne felt a superior indignation at his own lovely countrywoman's not knowing the difference between a spurious gentleman and a real one" (170). For James's heroine a real gentleman is revealed in his gallant treatment of women; similarly, a real compatriot is identified not only by a behaviour in accordance with the American custom, but also by his speech. And, as we saw above, Winterbourne's language is, somewhat disturbingly, not in keeping with that of an American male: "Winterbourne, laughing, answered that he had met Germans who spoke like Americans; but that he had not [...] met an American who spoke like a German" (140).

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<sup>16</sup> D. M. Fogel continues to discuss the sexual politics involved in James's story and concludes that "[f]rom the vantage point of nineteenth-century American culture, there is something slightly effete in Winterbourne's lack of occupation. His unmasculine detachment from "business" goes hand in hand with his being very much a habitué of a society of women, one ruled by matrons such as his aunt, Mrs. Costello, and Mrs. Walker who act as self-appointed arbiters of the patriarchal social code" (Fogel, 1990: 55).

<sup>17</sup> Winterbourne's acquiescence in the power of women has been pointed at by Susan Koprince, "The Clue from Manfred in *Daisy Miller*", *Arizona Quarterly* 42:4 (1986): 300; and Motley Deakin, "Two Studies of *Daisy Miller*", *Henry James Review* 5:1 (1983): 19. See also Fogel, (1990): 79.

<sup>18</sup> The conflict of interpretation in which James's characters seem to be immersed is also explored in other stories, notably in his famous "The Real Thing". In that story working class people acting as models for a painter are taken for real aristocracy, while the true originals fail to fulfil the expectations of the eye. See Henry James, "The Real Thing", *Daisy Miller and Other Stories*, ed. Michael Swan (1893; Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1983) 43-69.

My point is that Daisy's comfortable adherence to the original behaviour code of the good American girl — emphasised by her joyful dismissal of Winterbourne's love making in favour of Mr Giovanelli's — is what truly destabilises the male protagonist.<sup>19</sup> His anxiety is in this sense spurred by the pain Daisy has inflicted on his wounded pride, hence the insistence on trying to pass for unforgivable epistemological confusions on our heroine's part what is exactly the reverse: her consistency with, to my mind, a tenaciously articulated language of female desire. As we are about to examine, the consensus reached by these Europeanised Americans regarding the indictments of Daisy's misconceived perceptive talents shall be instrumental in Winterbourne's strategy to deviate attention from his dubious qualification as a genuine American male.

### 2.1.2. The Crisis of American Masculinity

The excess Daisy incarnates represents a challenge for Winterbourne's neurosis. When he seems to have safely enshrined Miss Miller within the limits of a recognisable category, Winterbourne is assaulted by new doubts: "Was she simply a pretty girl from New York State—were they all like that, the pretty girls who had a good deal of gentlemen's society? Or was she also a designing, audacious, and unscrupulous young person?" (144). Female character is thus conceived of in terms of opposite extremes by Winterbourne's dualistic philosophy: utter innocence versus wicked audacity, no space being allowed for areas of intersection where naïveté and a certain sophistication may coalesce and interact. The American male is determined to attach Daisy to either extreme and weighs to that end the opposing characteristics observable in her character and behaviour. She is "very charming", "pretty", looks "extremely innocent", and is "very unsophisticated"; while, at the same time, she is "deucedly social", and enjoys male company (144). The confusion experienced by Winterbourne is made evident by a narrator asserting that the former "had lost his instinct" in the matter of elucidating the real identity of the eponymous heroine (144).

The only means for Winterbourne to recover his lost position of authority, to restore the orthodoxy that Daisy Miller's demeanour questions, is his male attempt to return her to a fully round category, to a well-known type: the "pretty American flirt" (144). His previous vacillations are at times apparently resolved and the American male rejoices in his having won the argument by sophistry: "Winterbourne was almost grateful for having found the formula that applied to Miss Daisy Miller. He leaned back in his seat; [...] he wondered what were the regular conditions and limitations of one's intercourse with a pretty American flirt. It presently became apparent that he was on the way to learn" (144).

Once the complexity of female identity has been conveniently reduced to a "formula", Winterbourne becomes automatically enabled to treat Daisy as a mere commodity over which certain "regular conditions and limitations" are bound to apply. Commodification of the female subject is the stratagem at work to re-inscribe woman in the compulsive masculine economy of the commercial contract. We have seen how this realm, the business world, is yet

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<sup>19</sup> John Hay, a contemporary observer of James's heroine, remarked in 1879 that Daisy's behaviour was strictly in keeping with the "rural American standard" where the Victorian system of chaperonage Daisy glaringly violates was not followed:

She is represented [...] as bringing ruin upon herself and a certain degree of discredit upon her country-women, through eccentricities of behavior for which she cannot be held responsible. Her conduct is without blemish, according to the rural American standard, and she knows no other. It is the merest ignorance or affectation, on the part of the anglicized Americans of Boston or New York, to deny this. [...] In every city of the nation young girls of good family, good breeding, and perfect innocence of heart and mind, receive their male acquaintance *en tête-à-tête*, and go to parties and concerts with them, unchaperoned. (Quoted in Fogel, 1990: 51-52)

another mystery for Winterbourne who lives ostracised in Europe, away from the land where all the money making takes place. He reveals himself as a pretender, in this sense, an usurper of identities — the truly manly and the entrepreneurial — invading the context in which the proper American male felt most at ease, the arena where he could recover his position of superiority.<sup>20</sup> Winterbourne is thus characterised by his adoption of a “business imagination”, a pose meant to reassert his faulty masculinity, anomalous from the point of view of the capitalist American male, the figure James decided to maintain absent from his *nouvelle*.<sup>21</sup> Winterbourne’s language of commercialism, his treatment of Daisy as a commodity, is instrumental in his attempt to recover an advantageous position in the uneven social game between the sexes.

I would argue that confrontation with the man-created riddle of womanhood is what effectively dethrones this atypical American male, positioning him in an awkward standpoint of inferiority, incapable as he is — because of his Manichaeic, flawed perception — to assimilate diversity and novelty as possible components of female identity. Winterbourne’s crisis of seeing, his trauma of perception — which is, by and large, the drama of most male characters who undertake the vain task of unmasking female identity in late nineteenth-century narratives — lies precisely in this absence, the lack of what Oscar Wilde would term in 1891 the “temperament of receptivity” before the work of art. In “The Soul of Man under Socialism”, originally published in 1891 in *The Fortnightly Review*, Wilde voiced strenuous objections to what he referred to as “the question of popular control in the matter of Art” (Wilde, 1891: 42), which appear to suit my argument of Winterbourne’s flaw. Complaining about the desire of the public, both popular and educated, “to exercise authority over the artists and over works of art”, Wilde locates here the reason for the generalised lack of taste and temperament:

For an educated person’s ideas of Art are drawn naturally from what Art has been, whereas the new work of art is beautiful by being what Art has never been; and to measure it by the standard of the past is to measure it by a standard on the rejection of which its real perfection depends. A temperament capable of receiving, through an imaginative medium, and under imaginative conditions, new and beautiful impressions, is the only temperament that can appreciate a work of art. (Wilde, 1891: 43-44)

Winterbourne’s inability to appreciate and sympathise with the beauty of the new cultural artefact Daisy stands for gives us the measure of his failure to meet the standards of an ideal Wildean spectator, of an aesthetically civilised masculinity. What Winterbourne’s scopophilic pathology regarding Daisy’s spectacle ultimately makes visible is not a symptom of a consciousness gaining process — as Marcia Ian would seem to suggest<sup>22</sup> but rather, as I would like to argue, a failed attempt to reassert his faulty masculinity, which he knows at odds with the ideological imperative according to which the American man was “visible and thinkable only as the American ‘business man’” (Fowler, 1984: 10).

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<sup>20</sup> Henry James would have inherited from his father the idea that if one possesses “the business imagination” “one’s relation to other persons will generally parallel one’s relation to things”. See Henry James’s “Sublime Economy”, quoted in Fowler, 1984: 150.

<sup>21</sup> For an account of commercialism as the province of men in America see Fowler, 1984: 3-27.

<sup>22</sup> Although Ian’s discussion does not include the study of *Daisy Miller*, her comments via psychoanalysis on James’s concern with “consciousness” and the “unconscious”, which pervaded *fin-de-siècle* epistemology, may well be applicable to the characters in this story. See Ian, 1995: 127-28.

Because Winterbourne does not understand what he sees he tries to impose his own clichéd ideas on what woman should be. His attitude is both dualistic and prescriptive, grounded as it is in the polarisation of gender. He means to intervene in the canvas of womanhood: while remaining blind before everything he cannot understand in that canvas, he attempts to exercise his authority over it. Male anxiety is thus triggered by female difference. Winterbourne feels both attracted by the challenging attitude of Henry James's fictional heroine and threatened by the new response she requires him to produce: 'I haven't the least idea what such young ladies expect a man to do' (148). As Robert Weisbuch has remarked, "Winterbourne is castrated [...] by Daisy less than by himself. He has taken this parental stance towards her [...] to avoid real competition. Indeed, Daisy's whole attempt with Winterbourne is to help him locate his manhood".<sup>23</sup> Daisy's novelty in her production of social discourse demands not only Winterbourne's revision of an obsolete, stale ideology whose validity is questioned throughout James's story, but also the development of his imaginative faculties in the reception and hermeneutic processes initiated by the male gaze.

I have attempted to demonstrate that the scrutinization of woman's body and image, together with the corresponding fabrication of her psychological and moral identity is Winterbourne's major fixation in the story. His compulsion echoes and somewhat anticipates the efforts taken by criminological theories developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most notably by Cesare Lombroso and Alphonse Bertillon,<sup>24</sup> according to which the verification process of identifying a criminal mind was made possible through the empirical observation of physical features. Henry James's story, however, by means of Winterbourne's frustration — the irremissible consequence of his arrested development as interpreter of the work of art — would prove such efforts futile. In this sense, I am arguing that the visual and discursive confrontation with the American New Woman undoes the effects of criminologist discourse logic by eluding the constraints of its taxonomies and by revealing more about the masculinity in crisis behind the voyeuristic gaze of the observer than of the woman-object scrutinised.

Much as Henry James's narrative is the story of Daisy Miller's search for a space in which to develop her identity within a hostile social environment, it is also the story that tells us about the evolution of Frederick Winterbourne, the American male confronting the shocking canvas of an incipient new womanhood, the tortuous emergence of a new male temperament of receptivity. The "sins of the spectatorial" revealed by the male protagonist in this journey towards a new consciousness become in this sense a token of his fearful "refusal to live with mystery" (Weisbuch, 1993: 76).

The process followed by Winterbourne in his psychological confrontation with the challenging individuality of Daisy Miller might be summarised in different stages which I have identified as follows: a first moment in his perceptual treatment of Daisy is characterised by an intense superiority feeling. On dealing with woman as a mere sign to be made sense of and explained, Winterbourne delusively believes himself in possession of all the keys to meaning and feels master of the signification process. The second stage immediately following is one of bewilderment. Daisy does not conform to his stereotyped notions of womanhood, either proper or improper. She is an odd hybrid, a mixture of different

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<sup>23</sup> According to Weisbuch, "This is the motive for all her teasing and taunting, to persuade him to behave as a man toward her but via love rather than authority". Weisbuch, 1993: 80. My own reading with regard to Daisy's motivation, as I am about to explain, differs greatly from Weisbuch's.

<sup>24</sup> Although it was not translated into English until 1911, Lombroso's *L'Uomo delinquente* had been published in Italy in 1876, two years before the success of James's *Daisy Miller*. In 1890, Havelock Ellis's *The Criminal* introduced the ideas of the Italian criminologist in the English-speaking context and the English translation of Lombroso and William Ferrero's *La Donna delinquente* appeared only five years later. See Miller, 2008: 229.

recognisable identities. Winterbourne's bafflement triggers his interest in Daisy and hence his vain appropriation attempts in order to return her to a static sign of identifiable meaning. The American male claims for himself the right to interpret the world for Daisy, to impose his own perception of the object. Denying Daisy her own voice, Winterbourne's ultimate aim, almost in a Gilbert Osmond-like fashion, is to suppress speech altogether; but only to experience frustration and defeat in his aim, which finally turns him into a victim of jealousy. Finding Daisy inexplicably untainted by this last fault, Winterbourne distrusts our heroine's innocent approaches to other men, believing himself the only legitimate desirable object of her attention. The painful realisation of Daisy's lack of commitment to his person, even as a frivolous suitor, forces Winterbourne to develop strategies to cope for displacement in the female imagination. These are mainly two: the deployment of a disciplinary discourse which passes harsh judgement on Daisy — as Winterbourne feels increasingly excluded from her flirtatious games — alongside his somewhat forced condescension and pity:

he saw Daisy [...] roll away through the cynical streets of Rome, he could not deny to himself that she was going very far indeed. He felt sorry for her — not exactly that he believed that she had completely lost her head, but because it was painful to hear so much that was pretty and undefended and natural assigned to a vulgar place among the categories of disorder. (183)

These five stages in Winterbourne's reaction to the challenge posed by James's young heroine may be summed up in what constitutes the ultimate failure in the American male's attempt to fully grasp and explain woman's nature. It is after all a question of authorising or denying Daisy the key to perception. Even when it appears that Winterbourne is convinced of Daisy's innocence, deep inside the debate goes on:

He said to himself that she was too light and childish, too uncultivated and unreasoning, too provincial, to have reflected upon her ostracism or even to have perceived it. Then at other moments he believed she carried about in her elegant and irresponsible little organism a defiant, passionate, perfectly observant consciousness of the impression she produced. He asked himself whether Daisy's defiance came from the consciousness of her innocence or from her being, essentially, a young person of the reckless class. (184)

A further interesting twist in Winterbourne's design to make sense of Daisy's psychological makeup takes place right after he becomes certain of not having a chance to conquer her heart: "It was as if a sudden illumination had been flushed upon the ambiguity of Daisy's behaviour and the riddle had become easy to read. She was a young lady whom a gentleman need no longer be at pains to respect. [...] He felt angry with himself that he had bothered so much about the right way of regarding Miss Miller" (188). Winterbourne's ease in his temporarily confirmed judgement, however, is only apparent: "What a clever little reprobate she was, and how smartly she played an injured innocence!" (188). Winterbourne's Christian morality does not allow him to regard death as a fair punishment for her notoriousness: "[he] had now began to think simply of the craziness, from a sanitary point of view, of a delicate young girl lounging away the evening in this nest of malaria. What if she were a clever little reprobate? That was no reason for her dying of the *perniciosa*" (188-89).

The final point that deserves attention is Winterbourne's reaction to Daisy's death, to her absence. To the young American's surprise, Daisy was not after all engaged to Mr Giovanelli,

as the Italian suitor, mourning Daisy, declares her ‘the most innocent’ girl, confiding to Winterbourne that she would have never married him (191). Interestingly, the American heroine’s rebuff of the marriage idea is conclusive in Winterbourne’s realisation that he has misread Daisy, that “he had somehow missed her, and now it was too late” (185). He “said it was on his conscience that he had done her injustice”. ‘I was booked to make a mistake. I have lived too long in foreign parts’ (192). What for James’s male protagonist is a moment of enlightenment, a sudden awareness of his “spectatorial sins” regarding Daisy’s figure, represents just a timid atonement for his defective masculinity. On learning that Daisy had no intention to marry Mr Giovanelli, Winterbourne feels empowered once more to interpret Daisy’s desires now that she is dead. Wrapped up in his culpable admission of misperception lurks the hope that what Daisy truly rejected was the idea of committing herself to the Italian suitor but not the idea of the marriage project itself. Winterbourne thus loses, as I finally would like to contend, a last opportunity to make amends with his flawed manhood, perhaps his best chance to achieve a visionary moment of self-redemption in James’s story.

The young American’s final retreat into Geneva — “the little metropolis of Calvinism” to which he has always felt attached to (136) — and, most importantly, his return to the sheltering heaven suggested by the mysterious and euphemistically called “very clever foreign lady” — the easily recognisable type of notorious femininity — not only provide a predictable, albeit disappointing, end to James’s superb narrative, they also stand for Winterbourne’s ultimate ostracism (192). The circular parabola described by his retirement to the same space of gender polarisation where he was found at the beginning of the story says much about Winterbourne’s inability to confront “the bittersweet sense of lost relation” irretrievably posed by Daisy’s death, as Marcia Ian has observed: “The drama of this loss is both highly erotic, saturated with the anxiety of dependency and nostalgic melancholy, and highly ironic, precisely because of the absurdity of this eros. Consciousness cannot exist without something to have seen, something to have loved” (Ian, 1995: 118-19). To Winterbourne misfortune, this is exactly what he has missed, the chance to perceive Daisy’s individuality in a new light deprived of Victorian prejudice, the chance to articulate his interest in the startling American heroine on a different footing, suppressing the male compulsion to appropriate her as sign.

## 2.2. FOOLING AROUND IN DISOBEDIENCE WITH DAISY MILLER

### 2.2.1. The American Girl’s Suspension of Etiquette

In order to approach the singularity of Daisy’s polemical character it is important that we should follow the trajectory of the linguistic and plot subversions carried into effect by the Jamesian heroine in this late 1870s *nouvelle*. Daisy Miller’s improprieties and peccadilloes may be grouped under several main categories that are tentatively listed below. As I intend to show, they all lead to a willing suspension of discipline revealing a carnivalised conception of the feminine self.<sup>25</sup> My own reading of Daisy as the Bakhtinian image of the *fool* attempts to

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<sup>25</sup> I have found the Bakhtinian notion of “carnival” particularly useful for my analysis of Daisy Miller’s breaches of propriety:

The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary life, that is noncarnival life, are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it—that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people.

show the destabilising, and ultimately empowering, effects involved in the theatrical deactivation of authoritative discourses represented by the Calvinistic moral code present in the story. With that aim in mind, in this section I shall be paying attention to the following aspects / performances of the female fool: her suspension of the distance between the sexes; her blurring of gender borders and reversal of gender roles; her freedom of association; the objectification of the male sex; her constant renewal and improvisation; her aloofness from the project of middle-class love and the marriage career; the suspension of class and gender hierarchies; her challenge to the gendered division of labour; her joyful resistance to being assimilated by normative discourses on womanhood; and last, but not least, her laughter. These are the performative acts that constitute Daisy Miller as a troublesome female identity and an incipient New Woman.

The heroine's first contravention is the suspension of the distance between the sexes. Daisy Miller's first indiscretion is constituted by her violation of the Victorian system of chaperonage, a social convention that demanded strict observance both in England and the Continent at the time the story was written (Fogel, 1990: 51-55)<sup>26</sup>. In North America, however, women were not subject to such a rigid control and enjoyed more freedom to behave autonomously in public.<sup>27</sup> The Jamesian heroine was, in either case, anticipating in practice the future demands pressed for by her British sisters in revolt in the nineties, as the following excerpt published in the *Westminster Review* in June 1894 shows:

Lady Jeune regrets that "some girls sigh for latchkeys, and wish to pursue their occupations and amusements without any chaperone—in short, for the perfect freedom that marriage alone should give a woman". [...] I am only eighteen years old, and can boast of a latchkey, and am never chaperoned; and, speaking from my own experience, I think I may venture to assert that any young girl who takes the moulding of her life into her own hands, and asserts her right as an individual to the exercise of individual thought and action, will never have occasion to regret the step. She will attain experience of the world that will strengthen her character, bring out all her graver, nobler qualities, and render her a being well worthy "man's" respect and reverence! (Hemery, 1894: 285. 286)

The story is thus commenced with Daisy's ready acceptance to be spoken to at liberty by a young unmarried man (Frederick Winterbourne) in the public space of a conservative Swiss town, counting only with the company of her younger brother, Randolph. The fact that Daisy's behaviour is in accordance with the American norm seems to be somehow overlooked by her "amused, perplexed" new (American) male acquaintance who expects Daisy's conversion to the Continental conventions (143). It is the beginning of a large number of improprieties culminating at the Pincio gardens, where James's heroine — still rejecting to do

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The quotation is from Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, (first published in Leningrad in 1929 under the title *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Art*. It was republished with additions under the new title in Moscow in 1963). I shall be quoting from Caryl Emerson's edition (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 122-23.

<sup>26</sup> In fact, the inobservance of this rule of social conduct still shocked traditionalists well into the twentieth century. As the English journalist commented in *Glances Back* (1917):

the young women of mid-Victorian days were chaperoned everywhere. Even married women would have hesitated to dine in a restaurant without male escort. Today our young women take each other out and puff their cigarettes in places of public resort. No wonder the surviving mid-Victorian rubs his eyes sometimes when he looks around him and wonders if he is still living in the London of his youth and young manhood. (Richardson, 2002: xxxiii)

<sup>27</sup> As Harvey Green has noted, "unchaperoned social activity was the norm" in America (Green, 1983: 12).

as Romans do — is equally recriminated for her meeting with Mr. Giovanelli, the Italian suitor, while being unescorted. Her discordant voice is particularly heard at that point as she ironically appropriates the disciplinary language of Mrs. Walker in order to legitimise her autonomous decision to act according to her own desire: ‘Gracious me!’ [...] ‘I don’t want to do anything improper’ (167). Daisy’s mockery, her use of irony as a conscious trope becomes here an interesting rhetorical strategy that may posit a contradictory note in a univocal portrayal of Daisy as truly innocent. The difficulties found in the attempt to ascertain either innocence or duplicity as a constant feature of Daisy’s moral makeup are thus highlighted by her feminist disruption of the expectations her audience has of her position.<sup>28</sup>

Another interesting instance of Daisy’s unafraid language is exemplified by her overt flattering and publicly expressed opinions with regard to Mr. Giovanelli’s virtues, the male character providing the Jamesian heroine with a chance to articulate a female vision of desire, a female gaze, so to speak. Daisy’s sharp comments stand up in open contrast with Winterbourne’s timidly interior and conflicting interpretations of her moral makeup, examined in the previous section: “‘He’s an Italian’, Daisy pursued with the prettiest serenity. ‘He’s a great friend of mine—he’s the handsomest man in the world—except for Mr. Winterbourne! [...] He’s tremendously clever. He’s perfectly lovely!’” (166).

Her comments are in fact shaping one of Daisy’s most daring attitudes, which are illustrative of her second major contravention: her suspension of gender borders and her reversal of gender roles. The deactivation of gendered cultural conventions effected by the American girl in the text is juxtaposed with the recalcitrant opposition of Winterbourne and the conservative society he adheres to. Almost twenty years after James published his commercial success, Ouida — the best-selling novelist of powerful romances — would charge against this Millerite<sup>29</sup> quality that tended to dissolve the difference between the sexes. Ouida found such a characteristic disturbingly present in American women: “Everything which tends to obliterate the contrast of the sexes, like your mixture of boys and girls in your American common schools, tends also to destroy the charm of intercourse, the savor and sweetness of life.”<sup>30</sup>

My aim, however, is to show that although Daisy is being reprimanded for specific breaches of impropriety — such as her violation of the chaperonage system, presumably meant to sustain the “charm of intercourse” — it is a different kind of misconduct that truly threatens the status quo of the disciplinary culture represented by the Anglicised Americans. The

<sup>28</sup> Nancy K. Miller has pointed out the enabling use of irony as a feminist tool in her discussion of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*. (Miller, 1986: 114). Dona Haraway has also noted the relevance of irony in socialist feminism: “Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into large wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true”. “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s”, *Socialist Review* 80 (May–April 1985): 65, quoted in Miller, 1986: 119.

<sup>29</sup> The term “Millerite” was circulated by William Dean Howells, who commented the following on the huge popularity of Daisy Miller among the reading public: “Henry James waked up all the women with his *Daisy Miller*, the intention of which they misconceived, and there has been a vast discussion in which nobody felt very deeply, and everybody talked very loudly. The thing went so far that society almost divided itself into Daisy Millerites and anti-Daisy Millerites” (Howells, 1928; vol. 1: 271).

<sup>30</sup> The fear of the American New Woman was a commonplace in the dominant antifeminist discourse of the 1890s, hence Ouida’s warning from the pages of the *North American Review* against the inevitable moral decay she found involved in the emancipated type:

Seclusion lends an infinite seduction to the girl, as the rude and bustling publicity of modern life robs woman of her grace. Packed like herrings in a railway carriage, sleeping in odious vicinity to strangers on a shelf, going days and nights without a bath, exchanging decency and privacy for publicity and observation, the women who travel, save those rich enough to still purchase seclusion, are forced to cast aside all refinement and delicacy. (Ouida, 1894: 617)

transgressions I am referring to are conveniently silenced in the text, strategically circumvented by the rest of the characters, perhaps too aware about them, too threatened to confront them. By not verbalising their fear, the representatives of the authoritative discourse in James's story painstakingly sustain the comforting illusion that those transgressions do not exist. The veil remains unlifted, and the illusion of their maintenance of power is retained. Daisy's reversal of gendered cultural conventions is a conspicuous example of a feminist transgression that is not dealt with in the text. Thus, I would argue that it is not so much Daisy's unescorted strolls around Rome with Mr. Giovanelli as her verbalised rejoice in the beauty and company of a male inferior that stupefies and freezes the Puritan mind. In a sense, Daisy is finding a new space for her own voice, a carefree voice of female desire which clashes with the monolithic language of Mrs. Costello.

Another example of Daisy's daring attitude featuring her tendency to reverse gender roles takes place towards the end of the story when she attends Mrs. Walker's party and, to the surprise of those present, starts to boast about Mr. Giovanelli's charms. It is Daisy who is objectifying the male Italian, exhibiting him, as it were, almost turning him into a spectacle. We learn from her that she has had "the greatest time at the hotel" with her suitor. "Of all this Daisy delivered herself with the sweetest, brightest audibleness, looking now at her hostess and now round the room, while she gave a series of little pats round her shoulders, to the edges of her dress" (177). Paying no heed to the possible effect her own words may bring — aware as she is of the malicious gossip her conduct has propitiated — Daisy gives free rein to an enthusiastic, uncensored account of her indulging experience with the "beautiful Italian". As the previous quotation suggests, body, dress, and speech become interwoven in the discourse of joyful unconcern inaugurated by the dynamics of the feminist fool.

The above-mentioned suspension of gender barriers, which traditionally denied women the right to indulge in the sight of masculine physical beauty, is consistently matched by the heroine's freedom of association, another maxim of her behavioural peculiarities. Daisy takes delight in male society. She insists numerous times on her having a great deal of male friends on both sides of the Atlantic, a fact in which she takes pride and proclaims everywhere she goes: "I'm very fond of society, I have always had a great deal of it. [...] I used to go to New York every winter [...]. Last winter I had seventeen dinners given me; and three of them were by gentlemen, [...] I have always had', she said, 'a great deal of gentlemen's society'" (143). Interestingly, Daisy's penchant for masculine company is greeted with complacency by her mother: 'Of course, it's a great deal pleasanter for a young lady if she knows plenty of gentlemen' (165). Oddly enough, Mrs. Miller's timid criticism of Daisy's behaviour, her "utter failure to discipline" a revolted daughter, have been pointed out as major reasons for our heroine's lack of sobriety in her social conduct and final death (Fogel, 1990: 10) — a standpoint which, somehow, would ultimately reinforce a conservative interpretation of James's story.

The male society Daisy indulges in is constantly renewed and enjoyed. It is almost as if, in the company of Daisy Miller, men became objectified, an implicit realisation that seriously troubles Mrs. Costello as she acknowledges that Mr. Giovanelli has been chosen 'by his handsome face, and thinks Miss Miller a young lady *qui se passe ses fantaisies!*' (182). In short, it is men who entertain Daisy, they who keep her spirits high. Men are left at a loss with the modern American girl, incapable as they are to figure out her intentions — for in all likelihood she has no intentions whatsoever, at least not the predictable kind expected within the boundaries of the Victorian code. This constitutes another dangerous threat posed by the feminist fool dwelling in the realm of carnival: unconcerned by the development of a planned strategy to fight for her space within a hostile environment, improvisation and constant

innovation become inadvertent tools to tackle the inertia of stagnant conventionalisms. The image of a young woman protagonist as a potentially dangerous force out of control is especially transgressive, particularly her own positioning in a new space of unconcern, resisting to be interpreted in accordance with obsolete coordinates of social respectability. Her contrivances are closely linked to the freedom distinctively enjoyed by the (male) fool whose site Bakhtin locates in the notion of incomprehension itself.<sup>31</sup>

Daisy seems to enjoy both male society and conversation in and out of themselves, pursuing no further ends, as we learn in her spontaneous confession to Winterbourne: ‘The society is extremely select. There are all kinds—English, and Germans, and Italians. I think I like English best. I like their style of conversation. But there are some lovely Americans [...] I never thought dancing was everything. I was always fond of conversation’ (168). This is what the conservative forces in the story, represented by the unnatural American male, are not ready to accept. Doing so would dramatically unsettle the enforced narrative of gender complementarity and monogamous bliss they advocate. It would directly question the idea that the interaction of both sexes was exclusively meant to test their respective adequacy for the bridal scene—the ultimate episode in a proper lady’s life justifying Ouida’s defence of the “contrast of the sexes”. Daisy’s complete aloofness from the project of middle-class romantic love and the marriage career leaves her male counterpart without a role to play in the story, thus implicitly depriving him of the inherently superior position culture automatically grants him as male. Most importantly, the Jamesian heroine is not predicating her own idea of happiness on the culturally imposed objective of mating with the other sex.

Her amicable intercourse with the working classes provides a further contravention of the rigid Victorian code of social class differentiation, perceived as it is as a menacing attitude on our heroine’s part. Winterbourne thus finds fault with the mysterious connection Daisy has established with Eugenio, her family’s employee: “A tall, handsome man, with superb whiskers, wearing a velvet morning-coat and a brilliant watch-chain, approached Miss Miller, looking sharply at [Winterbourne]. ‘Oh, Eugenio!’ said Miss Miller, with the friendliest accent” (146). Eugenio’s fine appearance does not pass unnoticed by Winterbourne’s disturbed, possessive instincts already alarmed by Daisy’s suspension of hierarchical structures. The breaking down of class borders, and Daisy’s shortening of the distance that separates the *courier* from the social standing of the Millers may be interpreted as an instance of an interaction which effectively undoes society’s strict compartmentalisation of individuals according to their respective upbringing and pedigree. “Because carnival potentially involves everyone it sets the scene for dialogue, for communal heteroglossia” (Bauer, 1988: 680); this is the actual effect of Daisy’s interplay with the other characters, a multiplicity of voices that manage to unmask the prejudices of the authoritative speech in the story.<sup>32</sup>

Mrs. Costello further complains about Daisy’s “intimacy with her mama’s courier” whom they treat ‘[...] like a familiar friend—like a gentleman. I shouldn’t wonder if he dines with them. Very likely they have never seen a man with such good manners, such fine clothes, so like a gentleman. He probably corresponds to the young lady’s idea of a Count. He sits with them in the garden, in the evening. I think he smokes’ (148). Once in Rome we learn from Mrs. Costello’s pungent note that ‘the courier continues to be most *intime*’ with the Millers (162). Such a confusion and blurring of clear-cut distinctions between the social classes is

<sup>31</sup> Dale Bauer has explained that “[h]istorically, the fool has not been a woman and has not exercised the freedom of, say, Lear’s fool. But the freedom of Shakespeare’s fool is that of wisdom and wit; the freedom of Bakhtin’s fool is that of incomprehension” (Bauer, 1988: 678).

<sup>32</sup> Bauer’s discussion of the Bakhtinian fool through feminism has been fundamental in elaborating my own argumentation of Daisy Miller as a feminist fool. See her “Gender in Bakhtin’s Carnival”, *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1988). I am quoting from its reprint in Warhol and Herndl (1993).

particularly irritating for Winterbourne's aunt. Daisy seems not to make any differentiation on the basis of social standing, as we confirm from the fact that she resorts to her chambermaid in order to furnish herself with a sound opinion of Mrs. Costello (151).

There are numerous associations in the text that link the female protagonist to a type of inferior status. Mrs. Costello passes harsh criticism on Daisy and her kin for their being 'very common, [...]'. They are the sort of Americans that one does one's duty by not—not accepting' (148). Such an attack on account of the American girl's commonality, her vulgarity — as the Puritanic widow implies — is perfectly matched by Winterbourne's negative metaphoric identification of Daisy with the "Comanche savage" (148).<sup>33</sup> Thus, I would like to argue that Winterbourne's metaphor of the modern girl as a native American savage is effectively intensified, rather than mitigated, by negation: 'But, my dear aunt, she is not, after all, a Comanche savage' (148). Psycholinguists have pointed out that the rejection of a similarity to the image produced by the speaker "allows an instant activation of an affirmative metaphoric comparison [...] which highlights the affinities [the speaker] intends to deny" (Giora, Fein, Metuki and Stern, 2010: 226). What interests me here is both the immediate accessibility of the negated concept and the salience of the "Comanche savage" as an appropriate comparison for James's heroine, as active inferences in the process of comprehending Winterbourne's negation. Such an equation of our heroine with the icon of uncivilised selfhood *per excellence* seems particularly apt for Winterbourne's disciplinary mind, as he tries to palliate his anxieties about women by wielding the powerful weapons of sarcasm and discredit.

The image of Daisy as a "Comanche savage" may be analysed from the point of view of colonialism: the new American girl as a colony to be subjugated, a native to be exterminated, as she interferes with the logic of the empire. The fears of the coloniser are emphasised both in the rhetoric of the dangerous savage, and in the discourse wielded so as to justify its domination as the native Other.

Postcolonial theorists have drawn attention to the way the colonisers are represented in relation to the colonised. It may not seem farfetched to claim that Daisy Miller is portrayed as the native Other since Winterbourne's depiction partakes of some of the most salient characteristics attributed to the natives, according to postcolonial theory. Thus, she is potentially carrying within a darkness to be prevented against. Outside her usual environment, she is represented as somewhat exotic, she is definitely mysterious and even hostile to the admonitions given by Mrs. Walker. Most significantly, she is made to stand in contrast with both Europeans and Europeanised Americans. She appears to belong almost to a different race. Edward Said argued in *Orientalism* that the exoticisation and mystification of the East is a commonplace in Western literature, which tends to represent it as savage and seductive, closer to decadence, sexual desire or cruelty, in contrast to the West which emerges as civilised, rational and reasonable (Barry, 2008: 192; Said, 1978: 1-4). In a similar vein, it may be argued, Daisy is exoticised by hegemonic discourses in James's fiction; quite tellingly, she is viewed from the point of view of the white male protagonist, represented as desirable,

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<sup>33</sup> It is significant to notice the recurrent connection between female protagonists featuring novelty and transgression as identity hallmarks with an image of untamed womanhood, with the *savage*. It is only appropriate that American girls such as Daisy Miller and Isabel Archer be associated with the "Comanche", the native American woman. Thus, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, Isabel Archer is amused by her being regarded as a "barbarian", a "poor savage[ ]" in her "war-paint and feathers" (James, 1881: 123). A counterexample of the use of native Americans as subject matter may be found in one of the reform novels by the American popular novelist and medical doctor Mary P. Sawtelle, who — like many other popular women writers, such as Celia Parker Woolley or Caroline Corbin, sought to reform realist fiction "in order to fulfil their own literary and non-literary ends". Her *The Heroine of '49: A Story of the Pacific Coast* (1891) denounced the racial and gender inequality prevailing amongst the first white settlers of Oregon, and even tackled "the injustices of the Indian wars, the dispossession of tribal lands, the forcing of Indians onto reservations" while holding the US government accountable "for not honouring its treaties with Indians, not compensating them for their land" (Wadsworth, 2011: 1, 6).

unfathomable and irreverent.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, the Europeanised Americans consider themselves morally and culturally superior to the Millers, but Daisy's failure to acknowledge such superiority generates a potential site from which to mount resistance against the power they attempt to exert.

Quoting Wole Soyinka's analysis of *négritude*, Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism* that "the concept of *negritude* is the second, inferior term in an opposition—European versus African—[...] Europeans are analytical, Africans 'incapable of analytical thought. Therefore the African is not highly developed' whereas the European is" (Said, 1993: 229). In James's story a similar "racist syllogism" is echoed in Winterbourne's recurrent judgement on Daisy as a "completely uncultivated", "unreasoning", "very ignorant" and "unsophisticated" female (149, 184, 162, 144). Her closeness to a stigmatised, imperialistic vision of the native savage is further highlighted by the male protagonist, who continues to dismiss the Miller family as culturally inferior: 'Daisy and her mamma have not yet risen to that stage of [...] culture, at which the idea of catching a count or a *marchese* begins. I believe they are intellectually incapable of that conception' (182). Seen in this light, James's *nouvelle* reproduces what in postcolonial theory has been called an "encounter between the civilized and the wild" (Marrouchi, 1999: 29). The superiority of the Western, imperialist culture tends to undermine all other cultures. As a result, it is the Western perspective that comes to be seen as the norm (Said, 1978: 7, 6). Darkness and decadence are thus projected onto the non-Westerners by culturally hegemonic discourses in an attempt to articulate the essence of what is Western. The darkest human traits attributed to the colonised "have helped to define Europe" by "defining what is not considered Western" (Said, 1978: 1).

A similar strategy is set in motion by the Europeanised American matrons in James's fiction as they finally claim that Daisy is not a true American girl; by focusing on all the behavioural features which allegedly highlight her deviations from the norm they are trying to stabilise the concept of American (proper) womanhood, in an ultimate attempt to define themselves. Ashcroft has remarked that the maintenance of authority over the colonised requires the description of the Other as fundamentally different from the self (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin et al., 1989: 103). Winterbourne's metaphoric identification of Daisy with the Comanche savage produces a contradictory portrait in which she is depicted as both impersonating and lacking individuality. Peter Barry has written that the representation of the colonised in Western literature takes no individual aspects into account, they seem to belong to a homogenous mass dominated by emotions which are ordained by race rather than by personality or deliberate personal choice (Barry, 2009: 186). In this sense, the matrons' shared criticism of Daisy's alleged commonality, her lack of distinct traits, alongside Winterbourne's efforts to assimilate her into a recognisable category of womanhood are in keeping with the homogenisation of the native Other in postcolonial literature. From this point of view, Daisy is deprived of a personality of her own, while presented as driven by whimsical desires dictated by her pertaining to a somewhat wild essence. However, most interestingly, an inherent contradiction remains embedded in her portrait as the purposeful homogenisation of Daisy as savage and common would be clashing against the non-representative quality of her idiosyncratic behaviour.

Such an incisive attack on the novelty of woman, under the guise of a suitable analogy with unruly women, was a rhetorical strategy still in vogue in the 1890s. Winterbourne's

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<sup>34</sup> Approaching the end of the nineteenth century, the British social commentator Hugh E. M. Stutfield would refer to the American New Woman as "an exotic of the 'orchidaceous type'" as he explained that "as we see her on this side of the Ocean", "[t]he American woman is regarded by many people as the highest development of modern feminism" (Stutfield, 1897: 105).

metaphor of the Comanche savage inevitably conjures up images of cruelty and wildness that are ostensibly echoed in Elizabeth Lynn Linton's generalised fear of American women. The antifeminist journalist thus charged in 1892 against the speeches of a new race of British women:

which recorded the fact that two young American women were arrested for having concealed about them in a proclaimed district, the one a seven-chambered and the other a five-chambered revolver, with ammunition; and which celebrates with a beating of its tomtoms and a braying of its cow-horns all and sundry who go off the beaten track of womanly modesty and reserve.<sup>35</sup>

Linton's attempt to caricature the American woman as a creature of murderous instincts results perhaps from an excessive zeal in her final aim to preserve a more traditional view of womanhood which was perceived in danger of extinction at the time she was writing. Interestingly, the fright Linton meant to instil in her readership was supposed to neutralise the possible appeal the American type's alluring independence might have exercised amongst British women. The apprehension exhibited towards the former's alleged perversion was then intended to silence an empowering discourse on woman that shattered the very foundations of the bourgeois social order.<sup>36</sup>

It is significant to notice in this context the way Daisy's wildness — to use a very Lintonian term — is stressed at other points in the story: "Winterbourne listened with interest to these disclosures [his aunt's], they helped him to make up his mind about Miss Daisy. Evidently she was rather wild" (148). Her wildness is matched by yet another threatening characteristic for 'She is completely uncultivated', as Winterbourne determines, in his consistent effort to link Daisy to the lower classes (149). The association of James's American girl with the uncultured savage constitutes a new parallelism between the anxieties triggered by the latter and the virulent discourse against the New Woman in the decade of the nineties. Ann Ardis has explained the rationale underlying the connection of both images, the uneducated female and the libidinous new type:<sup>37</sup>

To the old [French] aristocracy, the lower class *was* a woman, a woman who could no longer be dominated "sexually", a woman who would no longer submit to domestication. Almost one hundred years later in England, the same logic, the same need to protect the cultural hegemony of the dominant class, fuels comparisons of the New Woman with the sexual "anarchists" of the French Revolution. (Ardis, 1990: 24)

In fact, such a concern to preserve the "cultural hegemony of the dominant class" triggers a fretful discourse on the harmful effects of a possible contagion, a corruption by proximity to the inferior class represented by Mr. Giovanelli and those "third-rate Italians" with whom Daisy "rackets about" in the story (162). In a sense, the good logic of such fears would appear to be finally corroborated by the story's tragic end. The cultural and racial decline associated with the uncultured female that Linton would portend some thirteen years later from the pages

<sup>35</sup> See Elizabeth Lynn Linton, "The Partisans of the Wild Women", *The Nineteenth Century* 31 (1892): 462.

<sup>36</sup> Eliza Burt Gamble constitutes a relevant example of an American woman writer who claimed for the superiority of the female sex over the male — not only with regard to the moral qualities, but also to the intellectual ones. For her, women are 'the very fountain whence spring the higher faculties'. Eliza Burt Gamble, *The Evolution of Woman: An Inquiry into the Dogma of her Inferiority to Man* (New York, 1894) v-vi, 78-9 (qtd. in Rubinstein, 1986: 11).

<sup>37</sup> For an analysis in full of the relationship between the "Parisian women" of the French Revolution and the New Woman see Ardis, 1990: 23-26.

of *The Nineteenth Century* reverberates in the personal degeneration that most characters perceive in the trajectory of James's heroine.<sup>38</sup> Daisy dies because she mingles with the wrong kind of people and class, in the wrong space, that of malarial Rome. The story would carry within its own antidote, so to speak. It would prove to be a deterrent for young female readers tempted to follow Daisy's steps, thus describing a boomerang effect that reminds us of the way in which Grant Allen's 1895 novel, the scandalous *The Woman Who Did*, was received.<sup>39</sup> In a similar vein, Richard Grant White remarked in the *North American Review* that although James had produced "a characteristic portrait of a certain sort of American young woman, who is unfortunately too common", the story "may have some corrective effect".<sup>40</sup> My own reading of James's *nouvelle*, however, goes against the grain of such logic.

Another interesting example of Daisy breaking the law of hierarchy refers specifically to the traditionally stiff family rank and age barriers. It is only appropriate to make reference to the opinions collected by an unknown commentator of the *Saturday Review* in 1871, evocative as they are of Daisy Miller's irreverence at the end of the same decade: "No-one who studies the present temper of women can shut his eyes to the fact that there is a decided diminution among them in reverence for parents, trust in men, and desire for children".<sup>41</sup> A sharp observer may easily find a correlation between the object of the attacks in the previous example and the American girl of new and autonomous desires portrayed by James. We never witness our heroine asking for advice or guidance from her mother. Rather, Daisy's assertiveness seems to be native in her and is remarkably at odds with the vacillating and fearful Mrs. Miller. Daisy's denial of any authority over her is comically registered in the story when she forces her mother to attend Mrs Walker's party on her own, to go public and unaided by a male escort. Mrs Miller then confesses that "I'm so frightened; I don't know what to do; it's the first time I've ever come to a party alone—especially in this country. I wanted to bring Randolph or Eugenio, or someone, but Daisy just pushed me off by myself" (176). Daisy's behaviour suspends discipline and hierarchy within the family realm.

Furthermore, her rejection to perform a traditionally female occupation signals another disruption of womanly propriety, her suspension of the gendered division of labour, a pillar of the Victorian law of sexual complementarity and the subjection of women. On two occasions we thus hear Daisy reject the role of teacher, first she expresses her lack of interest furnishing as excuse Randolph's intelligence: "There was an English lady [...] [who] wanted to know why I didn't give Randolph lessons—give him "instruction", she called it. I guess he could give me more instruction than I could give him. He's very smart" (142). The second

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<sup>38</sup> For a comparison between emancipated women threatening "the stability of society and the well-being of the race", and the "yelling *tricoteuses*" of revolutionary France see, for instance, Elizabeth Lynn Linton, "The Wild Women as Politicians", *The Nineteenth Century* 30 (1891a): 79, 80, 81. For an identification of these "political firebrands" with the debased, working class woman see Linton's "The Wild Women as Social Insurgents", *The Nineteenth Century* 30 (1891b): 599. Mona Caird, a prominent feminist writing in the same period, explains the polemical images put forward by Linton on account of women's greater proximity to Nature and their "quick response to stimulus". As women are possibly "more responsive than men are to their surroundings, and all that Mrs. Lynn Linton says, if true, about the wildness of ignorant women in times of excitement—she cites for example the *tricoteuses* of the French Revolution—might perhaps be explained on this ground". "A Defence of the So-Called 'Wild Women'", *The Nineteenth Century* 31 (1892): 821.

<sup>39</sup> Allen's protagonist, Herminia Barton, commits suicide after a notorious life of sexual scandals and the repudiation of her own daughter. Reviewing the novel, W. T. Stead — the well-known editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* — concluded that "the book was its best antidote", because of the "boomerang effect" that Herminia's punishment supposed. (Stead, 1895: 177).

<sup>40</sup> Edmond L. Volpe has shown, nevertheless, that the reception of James's story in the periodical literature of 1878-79 was certainly a positive one, with the exception of some comments gathered in "The Contributor's Club", a regular column in the *Atlantic Monthly*, accusing our heroine of an "unpardonable incivism" and unpatriotic feeling. "The Contributor's Club", *Atlantic Monthly* 43 (Feb. 1879): 258 and (March 1879): 399. See Volpe, 1958: 55-59; and Fogel, 1990: 12-24.

<sup>41</sup> "The British Mother Taking Alarm", *Saturday Review* 9 Sept. 1871: 335.

time Daisy has resolved that Winterbourne would be particularly suitable for the task: “Don’t you want to come and teach Randolph?” [...] Winterbourne said that nothing could possibly please him so much; but that he had unfortunately other occupations. ‘Other occupations? I don’t believe it!’ said Miss Daisy. ‘What do you mean? You are not in business’” (160). Daisy’s reversal of gender roles openly contravenes the traditional natural order that the *Saturday Review* had already sought out to preserve — against the notoriety of the “Girl of the Period” — ten years before James published his popular story: “[...] things are left undone which, for all the generations that the world has lasted, have been *naturally and instinctively* assigned to women to do [...] and *any system which ignores these divisions of labour, and confounds these separate functions, is of necessity imperfect and wrong*”.<sup>42</sup> The task of nurturing and teaching Randolph is thus “left undone” in the story as Daisy remains aloof from such a commitment. This irreverence on our heroine’s part is almost pushing her femininity off limits, making visible the true mechanisms at work behind the contemporary legend of the specific functions of the sexes. As Martha Banta has shown, such a narrative continued to be reinforced from the pulpit of the state in the first decade of the twentieth century. The then President Theodore Roosevelt expressed “his unswerving belief that the nation’s future greatness depended upon upholding two related ideals: the strenuous assertion of American masculinity demonstrated as will, work, and readiness for moral (and mortal) combat, and the patriotic support given by the American female who dedicates her life to mothering strong sons”.<sup>43</sup> James’s characterisation of both his American girl and Winterbourne’s unmanly idleness could have satisfied little the sensibility of a leading man like Roosevelt.

Daisy’s irreflective incomprehension of social conventions becomes manifest in her absence of fear. Her lack of embarrassment and direct glance provide sound evidence for Daisy’s mindlessness in the events that inform James’s story. Her accepting a situation such as Winterbourne’s spontaneous approach and conversation as perfectly natural becomes revealing of her character: “neither offended nor fluttered”, “she gradually gave him more the benefit of her glance; and then he saw that this glance was perfectly direct and unshrinking”. In a rather telling way, the same naïve, irreflective incomprehension, serves to mitigate the effects of the bold visual contact established by our protagonist: “it was not, however, what would have been called an immodest glance, for the young girl’s eyes were singularly honest and fresh. They were wonderfully pretty eyes” (140).

Another significant instance in the text referring to Daisy’s endeavour to validate the legitimacy of her own discourse and remain (immaculately) untainted by the social creed sustained by dominant ideology occurs later on in the story, when she gives an account of the reasons for Mrs. Miller’s timid disapproval of the former’s behaviour: “[...] mother doesn’t like any of my gentlemen friends. She’s right down timid. She always makes a fuss if I introduce a gentleman. But I *do* introduce them—almost always. If I didn’t introduce my gentlemen friends to my mother’, the young girl added, in her little soft, flat monotone, ‘I shouldn’t think I was natural’” (152). Daisy’s own words attest her manifest will to remain consistent with herself, with her own idea of how she should be, “natural” against the artificial impositions of socially accepted mores. She does not mean to cause offence to society. Because she sees no evil in her own behaviour, Daisy Miller is able to carry her acts to their last consequences. She is not at fault, maybe the framework is wrong — as Umberto Eco

<sup>42</sup> “What is Woman’s Work?” *Saturday Review* 15 Feb. 1868: 107.

<sup>43</sup> See Martha Banta’s interesting study on the dialectical views of Roosevelt and James on the issue of gender. “Men, Women, and the American Way”, *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, ed. Jonathan Freedman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 25.

would have it in his explanation of the misreading fool.<sup>44</sup> Her only flaw is that incomprehension, her failure to understand conventional ideology. But rather than failure to comprehend, I would argue that Daisy offers an unparalleled joyful resistance to that comprehension, which constitutes yet another contravention of the established social order. She does not fail because she does not try to understand. Comprehension means assimilation, the end of her difference, the abortion of an identity that is being born through Daisy's unsought dialogical confrontation with her world. This is, to my mind, what Daisy's comic resistance entails:<sup>45</sup> the power of her joyful aloofness from the mainstream discourse on woman is turned into a politically enabling device that helps to differentiate clearly her own voice. There inheres a most revolutionary aspect of James's particular portrait of revolted womanhood. Thus, when Mrs. Walker recriminates Daisy for her non-observance of the rules governing a young lady's good reputation, Daisy retorts "smiling intensely. 'Talked about? What do you mean!' [...] 'I don't think I want to know what you mean', said Daisy presently. 'I don't think I should like it'" (172). Her opposition to comprehend, assimilate, and incorporate dominant thought is particularly evident in this example.

Daisy's failure to understand, as the prescribing mentality of Winterbourne would have it, is her failure to understand things in a certain way, the only way acceptable for dominant ideology. Her inability to interpret reality according to a given set of correspondences previously established for the maintenance of social hierarchy triggers Winterbourne's anxieties, which he ultimately resolves by attempting to return Daisy to a stereotype of morally faulty womanhood. It is significant, to this respect, the episode of Winterbourne's jealousy noted above (Daisy has shown her preference for Mr. Giovanelli), which exemplifies his monolithic thought with regard to the difference between reality and representation, between proper and improper ladyship:

It would therefore simplify matters greatly to be able to treat her as the object of one of those sentiments which are called by romancers 'lawless passions' [...] to be able to think of her more lightly would make her much less perplexing. But Daisy, on this occasion, continued to present herself as an inscrutable combination of audacity and innocence. (170-71)

It is relevant here to mention another occasion in which Winterbourne tries to interpret the world for Daisy. Just as we saw him in the previous section trying to disclose the real nature of Mr. Giovanelli to our heroine, he now attempts to open her eyes to the true meaning of convention regarding the game of flirting: 'Flirting is a purely American custom; it doesn't exist here [...]. Though you may be flirting, Mr. Giovanelli is not; he means something else' (179). This embodies one of Daisy's major revolts in the story, her resistance to letting others interpret reality for her and her failure to admit that there is a unique way of making sense of the world around her. She owns her perspective, her point of view of things, and resolves not to be assimilated by the mainstream standpoint.

The effective weapon wielded by James's feminist fool is unequivocally her "inexhaustible good humour" (180), her contravention of the traditional belief in the idea that women were devoid of a sense of humour. But as we learn from the story, the laughter of the

<sup>44</sup> Umberto Eco, "The Frames of Comic 'Freedom'", *Carnival!* 8, qtd. in Bauer 678, 683.

<sup>45</sup> Teresa de Lauretis has warned us against the possible unsavoury effects of resistance as an enabling feminist device: "[...] by the very nature of power and of the mechanisms that harness power to institutions, [...], resistance tends to be cast as op-position, tends to be seen as locked in an opposite position [...]. Thus, it is not just accommodated but in fact anticipated, and so effectively neutralized" (De Lauretis, 1986: 3). Daisy's ambiguity, her hilarity and sustained mirth, would arguably retain the valuable transformative power of resistance before the official language of social respectability.

fool causes offence. Alfred Habegger has explained in his study of “funny women” in American literature that one of the major reasons for such a mistake was that “[t]he social roles assigned women in the nineteenth century led them to assume their responsibility for the care of others, embody the finer feelings and discriminations, function as vicars of Christ in a coarse, ungodly world, and aspire to a high, self-sacrificial way of living. These imperatives forbade laughter” (159). I have counted more than fifteen explicit references to Daisy’s physical expression of laughter in the story, plus numerous other references to her penchant for teasing and jocosity. Ranging from her typical “little laugh” (168) to her exhibitions of a “delighted laugh”, to outbursts of uncontrollable, “violent laughter” (178), Daisy’s mirth is not mere giggling.

James’s creation of a funny improper lady was in a sense responding to a well established tradition of popular women novelists in America, but his innovation rested elsewhere, in the inner workings of female humour itself.<sup>46</sup> The humour displayed by our feminist fool is a two-fold mechanism that balances laughter as a major physical response on the one hand, and a jocose, ironic discourse articulated at the service of carnival itself, on the other. If the freedom of laughter was thought to belong to the province of girlhood, its exhibition as Daisy enters the realm of adult ladyship becomes in this light a conscious device to escape the numberless attempts in the story to appropriate the improper female back into convention. It is significant to notice that the first “little laugh” Daisy gives in James’s narrative occurs precisely after she confronts Mrs. Costello’s prejudice: “Miss Daisy Miller stopped and stood looking at him. Her prettiness was still visible in the darkness; she was opening and closing her enormous fan. ‘She doesn’t want to know me!’ she said suddenly. ‘Why don’t you say so? You needn’t be afraid. I’m not afraid!’ And she gave a little laugh” (151). Daisy realises that the matron’s stiff morality code prevents her from making an acquaintance of a young lady that has so compromised her reputation by paying no heed to the imperative of the chaperonage system. Interestingly, Daisy has inferred this truth all by herself, as Winterbourne is once again too timid and hesitant to verbalise his aunt’s bigotry. Daisy’s reaction achieves a double effect as it makes visible — expresses out loud — not only Mrs. Costello’s, but also Winterbourne’s intolerance, while poking fun at such a flexible law that paradoxically allows the American suitor to indulge in the same thing — Daisy’s exclusive company — that he is prejudiced against. Laughter is then achieving a double aim: first and foremost, Daisy’s fun — which is liberating as it relieves the fool from the pressure surrounding her — and secondly, the distancing effect it produces with regard to the prescribing righteousness that pervades dominant thought itself.

In open contrast with Daisy’s gaiety stands Winterbourne’s gravity, a constitutive characteristic of the male protagonist that is constantly rebuked by the feminist fool.<sup>47</sup> It appears that the average American male of the last decades of the nineteenth century was irritated by the sense of humour of upper class American women, which was found excessive, particularly by that “perpetual chaff and banter he is expected to indulge in his intercourse

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<sup>46</sup> Mary Jane Holmes and Adeline D. T. Whitney published in the fifties and mid-sixties, respectively, two novels featuring uninhibited young heroines with a remarkable sense of humour: *The English Orphans* (praised for its “comic vein” in the *North American Review*) and *The Gayworthys*. Alfred Habegger has noted the existence of three main types of humorous females in American literature: “the wise old woman”, the “queer” or “original” girl (since “neither had yet been inhibited by femininity”), and “the bright, witty lady” characterised by her “responsive quickness”. For a discussion on “Funny Women”, see Habegger, 1982: 157-71.

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, pages 159, 177, 178, and 186, for examples of Daisy’s condemnation of Winterbourne’s “stiffness”.

with ladies”.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, the stiffness of the American male is matched by his dread of the fool’s mockery: “I’m afraid you are chaffing me” — he admits once — and by his aversion of Daisy’s laughter: “[Winterbourne] had been a little afraid that she would talk loud, laugh overmuch”, (156, 158). And it is exactly this fear that triggers Daisy’s determination to use her gay, unmannered discourse against the stereotyping forces of the story.

Daisy’s constant, sustained, unrivalled gaiety, her unfaltering optimism, therefore, become a relevant characteristic of James’s portrait of the American girl. Humour is a powerful response to the gravity of Winterbourne’s discourse: “She looked at him a moment, and then burst into a little laugh. [...] ‘What on *earth* are you so grave about?’ she suddenly demanded, fixing her agreeable eyes upon Winterbourne’s” (159). Once more, Daisy’s raillery becomes instrumental in her inauguration of dialogical interaction with the conservative forces in the story. Despite the innocence that characterises her young age, she proves to be a mature reader and interpreter of Winterbourne’s duplicity — as he flatters her beauty but remains silent about the social flaws he finds inscribed in her personality. Daisy expresses her surprise while compelling her male acquaintance to gather the necessary courage to call a spade a spade. Her gaiety contrasts with Winterbourne’s uneasiness before our heroine’s personality: “he was touched, shocked, mortified by it. ‘My dear young lady’, he protested, ‘she [Mrs. Costello] knows no one. It’s her wretched health’” (151).

Interestingly, there are two elements that help James’s forward heroine articulate her response to male incoherence, elements that shall reverberate in other narratives studied throughout this doctoral dissertation,<sup>49</sup> namely, her humour and her resort to nature as a source of psychological balance. Both elements precede a moment of realisation in which humour helps cast in doubt other cultural codes:<sup>50</sup>

The young girl walked on a few steps, laughing still, “You needn’t be afraid”, she repeated. “Why should she want to know me?” Then she paused again close to the parapet of the garden, and in front of her was the starlit lake. There was a vague sheen upon its surface, and in the distance were dimly seen mountain forms. Daisy Miller looked out upon the mysterious prospect, and then she gave another little laugh. “Gracious!” she *is* exclusive!” she said. (151)

The full display of her unparalleled humour appears to reach its climax in Daisy’s elated aphorism, of an otherwise impeccable logic: “[flirting] seems to me much more proper in young unmarried women than in old married ones’ (178). Such an axiomatic joke, if meant to banter Winterbourne’s socially constructed sombreness, leaves the latter totally unarmed for further dialectical confrontation. But perhaps the most powerfully irreverent image is that of Daisy “still showing her pretty teeth” as she smiles back at Mrs. Walker (167). The physical gesticulation involved in laughter was particularly off limits for women as a gag in a Beadle joke book published in the mid-seventies suggests: “a woman can laugh too much. It’s a fact; for only a comb can always afford to show its teeth”.<sup>51</sup> I would like to finish this section on

<sup>48</sup> H. H. Boyesen thus wondered: “What can be more distressing to a man, who has outgrown his first, callow youth, than the perpetual chaff and banter in which he is expected to indulge in his intercourse with ladies?” H. H. Boyesen, “German and American Women”, *Literary and Social Silhouettes* (New York: Harper, 1894) 32-33, qtd. in Habbeger, 1982: 157.

<sup>49</sup> I have found that there are three closely interwoven threads which are instrumental in the forging of certain New Women’s identities: their humour, their resort to the shelter of Nature, and a crucial moment of self-realisation. Such analysis accounts for my reading of George Egerton’s female protagonists and it would also include Angelica Hamilton-Wells, the irreverent feminist *fool* in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893).

<sup>50</sup> This is the major possibility rendered by the display of humour, according to Umberto Eco. See his “The Frames of Comic ‘Freedom’” in *Carnival!* 3, qtd. in Bauer, 1988: 683.

<sup>51</sup> *The Dime Pocket Joke Book*, 1 (New York: Beadle, 1875): 15.

Daisy's improprieties with such a powerful sight in mind, that of the feminist fool exhibiting her pretty white teeth as she gets the last laugh.

### 2.2.2. Daisy's Exhibitionism

Daisy openly reveals to Winterbourne in conversation a trait of her character that contributes to situate her before her male counterpart's eyes below the levels of lady-like propriety, namely, her excessive consumerism, her sin of consumption. Through the use of the free indirect speech the reader enjoys the flavour of Daisy's child-like enthusiasm with regard to clothes and swanky resorts: "She declared that the hotels were very good, [...] and that Europe was perfectly sweet. She had ever so many intimate friends that had been there ever so many times. And then she had had ever so many dresses and things from Paris" (143). Daisy's consumerism — revealed in her rather simplistic and childish style — once again, inevitably links James's heroine to the construct of conflictive womanhood scrutinised by Elizabeth Lynn Linton in the *Saturday Review* a decade earlier, the reckless "Girl of the Period".<sup>52</sup> As shown in the introductory chapter, the type was then characterised as "a creature whose sole idea of life is fun; whose sole aim is unbounded luxury", notably, two features it has in common with the Jamesian American girl (42).

Just as Linton found the Girl of the Period's inadequate love of fashion strictly dishonourable, as well as her "frantic efforts to excite attention", James's Puritan matrons demonstrate similar alarm in their response to Daisy's dress code (42). Significantly, though, Daisy's sin regarding clothes is not one of bad, dubious taste, but exclusively, one of excess. While Mrs. Costello acknowledges to her nephew that Daisy 'dresses in perfection—no, you don't know how well she dresses. I can't think where they get their taste', (148) the refinement of her garments seems to be at odds with the inadequate circumstances chosen by Daisy to exhibit them.<sup>53</sup> Having dressed up well ahead of dinner time just to "sit round with Mr. Giovanelli", Mrs. Miller's mild disapproval of Daisy's private exhibition for the Italian suitor serves only to ruffle Mrs. Walker's sense of decorum: 'This is most horrible!' [...] 'Elle s'affiche. It's her revenge for my having ventured to remonstrate with her. When she comes I shall not speak to her' (176-77). Dress is thus interestingly identified by this bulwark of conservatism as instrumental in Daisy's stratagem to undermine convention.

Karen Horney pointed out in the late thirties that the unquenchable thirst of material goods experienced by some individuals could be due to the fact that "greedy persons distrust their capacity to create anything of their own, and thus have to rely on the outside world for the fulfillment of their needs" (1937: 126). Although the explanation produced by the Freudian revisionist may well account for the Jamesian American girl's inadequate sense of self, Daisy Miller's indulgence in fashionable clothes situates her in an era in which commerce was geared to the construction of middle- and upper-class ladies as consumers. The ambivalent portrait of Daisy as both improper and complicit with one of the most important activities allowed to women in late-nineteenth-century capitalist societies is a token of the various

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<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Lynn Linton, "The Girl of the Period", *Saturday Review* 14 March (1868): 339-46. It was later reprinted in her *The Girl of the Period and Other Social Essays* (Two volumes. London: Richard Bentley & Son. 1888. Vol. 1: 1-9). A newer reprint can also be found in *Strong-Minded Women And Other Lost Voices from Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. Janet Horowitz Murray (New York: Pantheon, 1982) 41-44.

<sup>53</sup> Daisy's dress code is a source of both criticism — for the immodesty displayed in her private exhibition before the Italian male — and admiration. Watching Daisy walk down the stairs, Winterbourne's imagination enters the world of romance as he indulges in the sight of her dress. He imagines himself about to elope with the beautiful maiden, a ludicrous idea that stands up in open contrast with Daisy's aloofness from any romanticism: "She came tripping downstairs, buttoning her long gloves, squeezing her folded parasol against her pretty figure, dressed in the perfection of a soberly elegant travelling costume [...] as [Winterbourne] looked at her dress and, on the great staircase, her little rapid, confiding step, he felt as if there were something romantic going forward" (158).

ideological positions she occupies in James's text. Rachel Bowlby has studied the emergence of consumer culture in the period and claimed that consumerism is a very deceptive way of exercising power. Focusing on shopping as "a new feminine leisure activity" available for women — who were called to beautify their homes and themselves — she remarks that "the making of willing consumers readily fitted into the available ideological paradigm of a seduction of women by men, in which women would be addressed as yielding objects to the powerful male subject forming, and informing them of, their desires. The success of the capitalist sales project rested on the passive acceptance or complicity of its would-be buyers, and neither side of the relationship can be thought independently of the other" (Bowlby 1985: 19-20). E. D. Rappaport's extensive study on women's public presence in London's West End, has analysed consumerism and feminism as two concomitant late-Victorian phenomena which did not go unheeded by conservative social and political observers. While the latter complained that love of dress dragged middle-class women into the urban shops, where they could mingle with the opposite sex and take to "flirting", feminists — though equally critical of frivolity and consumption excesses — "imagined women's shoppers as allies in the cause for women's emancipation" and "started clubs because they felt commercial culture and governmental efforts ignored urban women's physical and psychological needs" (92-93). The geographical proximity of women's clubs, feminist institutions and the best shops in London helped to normalise female public life, upsetting the traditional social order while promoting the growth of consumerism (Rappaport, 2000: 92-93).

Henry James's construction of femininity in revolt is deeply entrenched in the portrayal of his heroine as a frenzied consumer. Thus, while all the proper American males are absent from the events narrated — presumably immersed in business, producing and manufacturing the goods to allure women — Daisy's passion for dress is evidence of the constant renewal of her needs and of her unquenchable desire. Henry James was very critical with the fact that the only activity valued in American society was that which brought in its wake monetary profit. Nevertheless, while he "wished men to become more than money-makers and power-brokers in the manly world outlined by Theodore Roosevelt", "he would be dismayed if women moved into the worlds of business or politics" (Bantha 33). Daisy's compulsive consumerism becomes in this light a mere response to the materialist society that has doomed her to remain the male capitalist's idle object. It is only her being in excess that triggers anxieties amid dominant discourses on womanhood in the story, a trait which the young American woman exploits in her own benefit.

Interestingly, it is through clothes that Daisy had made her first contact with the old continent: "Whenever she put on a Paris dress she felt as if she were in Europe" (143). Dress develops a powerful role in the shaping of her imagination. Symbolically, it enhances the American girl's power to draw admiration and become ostensibly inserted in the contested arena of the public spectacle. Her impulse buying is connected to her inability to commit, which poses her as a site of conflicts between capitalist ostentation and the puritanical mentality. Hers is a female identity on the border.

Daisy's enthusiasm for clothes is only matched by her inclination to wear splendid jewellery — "[she] sat there with her extremely pretty hands, ornamented with very expensive rings" — a habit shared with her mother: "Like her daughter, Mrs. Miller was dressed with extreme elegance; she had enormous diamonds in her ears" (153, 142). Daisy's attitude towards luxurious ornaments could not be further away from the Puritanic pose exhibited by George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke, who represents a different kind of advanced womanhood.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Dorothea "could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery". Her initial attitude towards jewellery shows the same Puritanic prejudice to the

As Mariana Valverde has shown, excessive love of finery was believed to have a pernicious effect on morals, particularly as such interest in fashionable apparel was related to an inevitable financial decline should the girl in question fail to equip herself with a male conveniently furnished with a fortune.<sup>55</sup> Such ideology dating back to the 1830s and 1840s is still present in James's text, thus implicitly rising the question of who is going to provide for Daisy's excesses in the event of Mr. Miller's ceasing to do so.

Daisy's exhibitionism seems unaffected and unchecked. James's heroine derives genuine pleasure from her being exposed to public scrutiny; the female fool advocates her right to delectation while shunning Winterbourne's moralising recriminations regarding her affair with the Italian suitor '[...] that goes on with such peculiar publicity' (181). She takes pride in her good looks and exquisite dressing code, and is unafraid of showing it: "she avoided neither his eyes nor those of anyone else, she blushed neither when she looked at him nor when she saw that people were looking at her" (158).

Later onwards in the story Mrs. Costello, a conspicuous representative of dominant ideology in James's narrative, criticises Daisy for 'She has picked up half a dozen of the regular Roman fortune-hunters, and she takes them about to people's houses. When she comes to a party she brings with her a gentleman with a good deal of manner and a wonderful moustache' (162). It is interesting to notice that, while Mrs. Costello complains about the fact that freedom of movement in the public space remains a male prerogative in Roman society — 'Of course a man may know everyone. Men are welcome to the privilege!' (162) — she does not approve of Daisy's seizure of such a freedom for herself. This is part of the fool's performance and exhibitionism. Her mindless disregard of orthodoxy lays bare the inconsistencies of the dominant ideology that foreground sexual difference.

To a large extent, it is Daisy's going public that accounts for her final extinction. Thus, when she is dying of malaria, her brother Randolph produces as an explanation for her having caught such a terrible illness, her unorthodox exposure in the public arena: 'It's going round at night, [...] —that's what made her sick. She's always going round at night' (190). Daisy dies because she does not abide by the social rules, this is the logic of conservatism, a way of interpreting the story which tends to be enforced by those who survive her in the Jamesian narrative.

However, it is Daisy herself who contests such a deterministic interpretation. As Winterbourne ventures to pass judgement on our heroine at her insistence to meet Mr. Giovanelli without an escort — 'Well, she's a cool one!' (169) — the fool immediately responds to his inferences with feminist determination, followed by a humorous display of indifference towards male criticism which overall informs all her interactions with Winterbourne: "'I don't like the way you say that,' said Daisy. 'It's too imperious'. [...] 'I have never allowed a gentleman to dictate to me, or to interfere with anything I do'" (169). Thus, when Winterbourne suggests that she should listen to a gentleman — "the right one" — "Daisy began to laugh again, 'I do nothing but listen to gentlemen!'" (169).

I started this section with a reference to the mechanism by which the exhibition of the American businessman's wealth transmuted woman into an icon of material success — her father's. We have seen how this objectification of the American girl as an exhibitionist, the showcase of the American male's monetary gains, clashes with the anxieties her own excess

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dismay of her sister Celia, anxious to wear their mother's old jewels: 'necklaces are quite usual now; and Madame Poignon, who was stricter in some things even than you are, used to wear ornaments. And Christians generally—surely there are women in heaven now who wore jewels'. (Eliot, 1872: 6, 10).

<sup>55</sup> (Valverde, 1989: 170). The relationship between consumerism, love of fashion, and developed capitalist society is an important theme of another successful American text of the turn of the century, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900).

as a consumer raises in the straight mind of the puritanical matrons. I would like to consider now a further issue that makes manifest the dislocations of identity performed by the female fool: Daisy's initiative in her linguistic interactions with Winterbourne and her insurgent language.

### 2.3. THE FEMALE FOOL'S LANGUAGE OF REVOLT.

#### 2.3.1. The Decentralisation of The Middle-Class Love Project

We have examined how Daisy's aloofness from the project of middle-class love and the marriage career constituted one of the most relevant transgressions carried out by James's heroine. I would like to move my argument one step forward and link such a transgression with the process of identity formation undergone by the female protagonist. One of the direct consequences of Daisy's flirtatious games is the actual banishment of the pervading discourse on marriage as destiny coded as myth. In a broad sense, Daisy reinvents intentions. As she resolves to visit the Château Chillon with Winterbourne, she accepts his invitation "very placidly". "She didn't rise, blushing, as a girl in Geneva would have done" (145). The disempowering effect produced on the American male is complete: Winterbourne becomes marginalised, deprived as he feels of his natural role, that of impersonating the necessary objective for the female imagination. Such a decentralisation of the masculine force is reproduced later on in the story, in a second journey Daisy undertakes with her male companion:

Winterbourne was a man of imagination and, as our ancestors used to say, of sensibility; [...] he was disappointed. Daisy Miller was extremely animated, she was in charming spirits; but she was apparently not at all excited; she was not fluttered; she avoided neither his eyes nor those of anyone else; she blushed neither when she looked at him nor when she saw that people were looking at her" (158).

Such disappointment at Daisy's failure to centre her attention on him is once again echoed in Rome where the reencounter between both protagonists takes place. Winterbourne then ruefully realises that he had not "made an ineffaceable impression upon her heart" (162). Daisy's blighting of the romantic illusion — which quarantines female desire except in the context of a male-dominated, monogamic, heterosexual economy of gender asymmetry — as a fallacious narrative is effectively achieved through her joyful behaviour. The female fool's gaze is democratic and free, its curiosity knows no boundaries and consistently frustrates Winterbourne's fantasy, which has conceived of their excursion as "an escapade—an adventure—[...] even allowing for her habitual sense of freedom, he had some expectation of seeing her regard it the same way" (158). Winterbourne typically imagines an elopement, he sees himself as the raptor of the improper lady, making use of the male prerogative that allowed seducers to patronise and interpret the moral quality of the same female partners in whose blemished reputation they rejoiced. Once again, male pleasure is derived from a prototypical symbolic order meant to guarantee male supremacy over tamed womanhood.

Daisy is completely unaware of the free rein Winterbourne has given to his thoughts. She displays the alienation of the fool, her refusal to understand being highlighted by the fact that Henry James's narrator never enters her mind. We cannot penetrate into her consciousness, we can merely attest Daisy's suspension of discipline and feel shocked with the rest of the characters in the story. Her resistance to being interpreted and made sense of is dependent on her refusal to interpret, to comprehend orthodoxy. Daisy's failure to let her discourse become

uniform and immersed in Winterbourne's context is in this sense the major event that informs the story. The divergence of the respective *ideologemes* present in James's *nouvelle* signals the beginning of the contest for meaning, the site where consciousness may be acquired.<sup>56</sup>

A curious example of the fool unmasking the ideological forces operating in Winterbourne's romanticised discourse takes place upon the latter's imminent return to Geneva. James's heroine thus

opened fire upon the mysterious charmer in Geneva, whom she appeared to have instantly taken it for granted that he was hurrying back to see. How did Miss Daisy Miller know that there was a charmer in Geneva? Winterbourne, who denied the existence of such a person, was quite unable to discover; and he was divided between amazement at the rapidity of her induction and amusement at the frankness of her *persiflage*. She seemed to him, in all this, a queer mixture of innocence and crudity. (160-61)

Daisy's utterances are shockingly unmitigated by decorum. It is not difficult for her to see through Winterbourne's real motives to leave Vevey, the little town in Switzerland where the first two parts of the story take place. Interestingly, she considers the existence of another woman in Winterbourne's life not as a threat to her potential future relationship with the latter, but, rather the reverse, as a source of comic relief. The frankness and gaiety with which she addresses such a delicate issue leaves our American male, once again, completely bewildered. Winterbourne's response is encapsulated in his explanation of Daisy as *the other*, a hybrid combining "innocence and crudity", a merciless child with a biting sense of humour (160).<sup>57</sup> The dichotomy, however, is never solved, as deep down incertitude remains: is Daisy really innocent or is she, perhaps, too worldly, as her comments seem to suggest? For Henry James this is "the trick that life plays [...] Life itself leaves you with a question—it asks you questions".<sup>58</sup>

Daisy keeps teasing Winterbourne about this mysterious lady, hypothetically awaiting him in Geneva, who appears to be taking absolute control of his comings and goings: "her personal accent was now making its appearance. It sounded very distinctly, at last, in her telling she would stop 'teasing' him if he would promise her solemnly to come down to Rome in the winter" (161). Daisy's own unique language is being exceptionally perceived by Frederick Winterbourne as he discovers — against the grain of the dominant ideology he stands for — the multiple identities of the pretty American girl. To this respect, the importance of her "thin, gay voice" cannot be sufficiently emphasised (151). In "The Question of Our Speech" — an article published by James in 1905 upon his return to the United States after an absence of twenty years — the writer stressed the significance of the *vox Americana* as a distinct element of national character, particularly "among our women, younger and older, as to whom in general, and as to the impression made by whom, the question of voice ever most comes up and has most importance". It seems justified in this sense to both seek and establish a parallelism between Daisy's gay voice and the matching humorous personality of the female fool since, as James insists "[t]he voice [...] is, as to

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<sup>56</sup> "Ideologeme" is the term Bakhtin uses to describe the discourse of the speaking character: "Every word/discourse betrays the ideology of its speaker, great novelistic heroes are those with the most coherent and individuated ideologies. Therefore, every speaker is an ideologue and every utterance is an ideologeme" (Bakhtin, 1981: 429).

<sup>57</sup> Following the same line, Daisy is also referred to as an "inscrutable combination of audacity and innocence", and her conversation as an "odd mixture of audacity and puerility" (170, 180). Such descriptions emphasise Winterbourne's dualistic mind, his tendency to explain Daisy in terms of polarised qualities.

<sup>58</sup> The quotation is taken from an interview of Henry James by Florence Brooks. "Henry James in the Serene Sixties", *New York Herald* 2 Oct. 1994: magazine section (sec. 4), 1. Rpt. In Walker, 1999: 37.

much of its action and much of its effect, not a separate, lonely, lost thing, but largely what the tone, the conscious, intended, associated tone, makes of it—”.<sup>59</sup>

If the gaiety traced in Daisy’s “personal accent” responds then to a deliberate choice of attitude we may argue that the ultimate function of the female fool’s language in the text is that of inscribing her jovial difference in the larger but otherwise monotone discourse that pervades the story. Daisy’s peculiar voice and “personal accent” serve one unique purpose to this respect, that of inserting variety and difference in the story. Locating in her special tone the very roots of the fool’s personality, Daisy reaches a moment of feminist resolution in her perceptive claim to discriminate herself against other social codes: ‘I’m dying to be exclusive myself’ (151). Such an aim to distinguish herself, to render her discourse non-uniform appears to be in keeping with Henry James’s idea of the “centrality of discrimination in linguistic communication as the model for everything that matters in society” (Walker, 1999: xxxi). Language becomes then, inevitably, instrumental in the process of identity differentiation shown by the female fool. Daisy Miller’s “teasing” becomes in this light both cause and effect of her performative self. Humour is a pungent tool utilised in the articulation of a female voice in revolt, while it destroys the illusion of uniformity and homogeneity Winterbourne has sought to preserve.

A parallel incident in the story which would appear to suit my argument takes place in Rome as Daisy rejoices in the male Italian’s flirting with other women: ‘there’s Mr. Giovanelli, leaning against that tree. He’s staring at the women in the carriages: did you ever see anything so cool?’ (169). Daisy does not pass any judgement on her continental suitor, on the “beautiful” Italian’s behaviour, though she openly pays tribute to his good looks. She is not afraid, but rather, amused by male flirtatious conduct, by witnessing the moment of disclosure, in which the suspension of the masculine monogamic illusion takes place. Interestingly, Daisy does not feel at any point in the story that she is competing against other women for the masculine prize, an observation that provokes Winterbourne’s dismay as he realises that Daisy is “a girl who would never be jealous” (180).

The previous incident may well serve as a cue to understand her attitude towards the wedlock career. For she is not interested in marriage, at least not in marrying Mr. Giovanelli. We learn more from the conversation Winterbourne maintains with his aunt, Mrs. Costello, about the anxieties of the American male’s discourse on dangerous womanhood: ‘I don’t believe she thinks of marrying him [Mr Giovanelli]’, [...] ‘and I don’t believe he hopes of marrying her’. This is how Winterbourne temporarily resolves the perceived asymmetry between Daisy’s lack of interest in legitimising her relationship with Mr. Giovanelli with the sanctities of marriage, on the one hand, and Mr. Giovanelli’s desire to capture a good match, on the other. To which Mrs Costello retorts: ‘You may be very sure she thinks of nothing. She goes on from day to day, from hour to hour, as they did in the Golden Age. I can imagine nothing more vulgar’. (182) Paradoxically, Daisy’s lack of a plan, her improvisation — which would appear to attest her genuine innocence — is taken for a sign of perversity and demoralisation. Such an impropriety on Daisy’s part is on a different level ultimately disclosing another basic inconsistency lying at the core of the Victorian discourse on proper womanhood: the unwritten law according to which, behind a veil of ingenuousness, proper ladies must have a programmed scheme in their interactions with the other sex. Her deviation

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<sup>59</sup> “The Question of Our Speech” was addressed to the graduating class at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, June 8, 1905. It was first published by James in *The Question of Our Speech; The Lesson of Balzac: Two Lectures* (Boston: Riverside, 1905) 3-52. The same year it was published in *Appleton’s Booklovers Magazine* 6 (Aug. 1905): 199-210. Posthumous republications include the following: *French Writers and American Women*, ed. Peter Buitenhuis (Bradford CT: Compass, 1960) 18-31, and *Questions of Our Speech* Rpt. (New York: Haskell, 1972) 3-52. I have used the latest publication available (Walker, 1999: 51, 52).

from such a pattern as well as her lack of predictability over her non-adjustment to the old, but still culturally imposed, standard of woman.

Winterbourne thus continues with his speculations on the likelihood of Daisy's engagement: 'I rather doubt whether he dreams of marrying her. [...] He has nothing but his handsome face to offer, and there is a substantial Mr. Miller in that mysterious land of dollars. Giovanelli knows that he hasn't a title to offer. If he were only a count or a *marchese!*' (182). Winterbourne's conception of marriage is inscribed in a strict tradition that guarantees the mating of equally wealthy partners, be their wealth grounded either on material profit or on social prestige. Notwithstanding, Mr. Giovanelli's lack of a title is not the reason why Daisy is not interested in a marriage project for, as Winterbourne explains in his peculiar patronising tone, 'Daisy and her mamma have not yet risen to that stage of—what shall I call it?—of culture, at which the idea of catching a count or a *marchese* begins. I believe they are intellectually incapable of that conception' (182). The stage of culture that the American male refers to was positively enjoyed by the archetypal American woman of the last decades of the nineteenth century, whose prominent advantages James listed as follows in his article "The Manners of American Women": "her socially unshackled state, her celebrated queenship, her notorious success, her facility of marriage with foreign nobles, the frequent wealth of her father, the constant absence of her husband, the approved propriety of her conduct and the rare observed occasions of her embarrassment" (Walker, 1999: 112).<sup>60</sup> The essence of the American woman was to be sought in the fact that she had been "grown in an air in which a hundred of the 'European' complications and dangers didn't exist" (James, 1907: 256). Interestingly, the anxieties previously posed by Daisy's symbolic alliance with the lower classes seem to be reinforced by her lack of interest in marrying into the European aristocracy. Undoubtedly, her refusal to abide by the stereotype of proper ladyship and her disruption of expectations with regard to making a good marriage are crucial aspects in the construction of the female fool as an agent of revolt, as well as instances of the greater freedom the American New Woman was determined to enjoy with regard to European females. The next section aims to shed some light on the identity politics revealed through Daisy's *ideologeme* and her spirited resistance to being interpreted and made sense of.

### 2.3.2. Insurgent Female Speech

For Henry James the art of conversation was endowed with a redeeming power that approached its practitioners to a state closer to civilisation. He proposed accordingly to instil American citizens with a new sense of the social good that necessarily implied the reformation of linguistic manners. As he claimed in 1905, in "The Question of Our Speech":

If we may not then be said to be able to converse before we are able to talk [...], so we may be said not to be able to "talk" before we are able to speak [...]. All life therefore comes back to the question of our speech, the medium through which we communicate with each other; for all life comes back to the question of our relations with each other. These relations are made possible, are registered, are verily constituted, by our speech, and are successful (to repeat my word) in proportion as our speech is worthy of its great human and social function; is developed, delicate, flexible, rich—an adequate accomplished fact. (Walker, 1999: 44)

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<sup>60</sup> "The Manners of American Women" first appeared in *Harper's Bazar* 41.4 (Apr. 1907): 355-59; 41.5 (May 1907): 453-58; 41.6 (June 1907): 537-41; 41.7 (July 1907): 646-51. I am quoting from Walker, 1999: 82-112.

Two years later, in his book *The American Scene*, James continued to predicate a new conception of culture grounded upon the foundation of a balanced exchange of ideas between the sexes that would undo the contemporary narrow distribution of gender functions exacted of males and females in America.<sup>61</sup> There James manifested his interest in the formation of individuals who, independently of their sex, were devoted to the creation of culture through conversation rather than to the mere generation of material wealth for the nation. Identifying Washington D.C. as the idyllic society — the epitome of the fulfilment of each sex through their cultivation of the art of language — this City of Conversation provided James with a model for the American Way in which “men and women, working in unison, create a life of the mind and the imagination through good talk that centers on topics other than strategies of political power or the enhancement of material gain” (Bantha, 1998: 31).

Bearing in mind that these were the ideas James advocated some thirty years after the publication of “Daisy Miller”, it seems interesting to trace back in his portrait of the American girl the possibilities that the latter’s pursuit of conversation may encapsulate. For Daisy’s confession that she “[...] never thought dancing was everything. I was always fond of conversation” is surely not a vain preference (168). Does the female fool’s language cause any major changes in the story? And, if so, how does her linguistic pose modify our perception of Daisy as a guileless and narcissistic American girl? My aim is to show that, regardless of her limitations — mostly, her youth, inexperience, and lack of a solid education — the transformations effected by our steadfast heroine are in fact both visible and relevant in the development of the narrative.

Having remarked the significance of the “personal accent” and “gay voice in the fool’s attempt to legitimise her own *ideologeme* within the range of voices orchestrated in the story, it may be relevant at this point to consider the specific ways in which Daisy’s language is materialised into a powerful weapon of disobedience. At the beginning of his intercourse with our female protagonist, Winterbourne appeared to confirm the adequacy of his unfavourable verdict regarding Daisy’s moral standing on the basis of another relevant tendency of our American girl, her natural penchant for dialogue: “Before long it became obvious that she was much disposed towards conversation” (140). Daisy’s verbal eagerness and vocal activity contravene the principle of reticence and modest passivity that was bound to guide a proper lady’s speech when addressing a male interlocutor. Her zeal to partake in the linguistic exchange is therefore perceived as a flaw that would ultimately doom her daring femininity to a squalid social destiny. This instance constitutes the first reference to Daisy’s natural predisposition to become engaged in an economy of dialogical confrontation, to both insert her discourse in context, and expand the story itself into a polyphony of varied idioms. This is the potential aim of the feminist fool’s speech: to naturalise a utopian communication between both genders, promoting linguistic interchange in a context of unconstraint deprived of cynicism and duplicity.

Once Daisy has abdicated from the cultural imperative of the romantic dream she opens up a new untrodden space for the linguistic transaction between the sexes. A particularly empowering discursive tool utilised by Daisy to this respect is the deployment of her “*inexhaustible sense of humour*”. The comic registers adopted by our heroine are both diverse and suited to the specific context in which they occur, as we may observe in the following

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<sup>61</sup> James encouraged female suspicion towards the gendered distribution of cultural functions in American society by claiming that the American woman was bound to realise her loss in the male “agreement signed and sealed” that doomed her to the sphere of the strictly social and private world. Woman must put an end to that contract and say “No, this is too unnatural; there must be a trap in it somewhere—it’s addressed really, in the long run, to making a fool of me”. *The American Scene*, ed. John F. Sears (1907; New York: Penguin, 1994): 257.

examples. Thus, upon Winterbourne's insistence that Daisy should know his name in full, the female fool exhibits a comic inability to verbalise a masculine identity she does not acknowledge: "'Oh, dear, I can't say all that!' said [Daisy], with a laugh" (153). On a second occasion, Winterbourne's attempt to sabotage Daisy's rendezvous with Mr. Giovanelli is equally ridiculed: 'Do you mean to speak to that man?' / 'Do I mean to speak to him? Why, you don't suppose I mean to communicate by signs?' (169). Humour is particularly useful to resist convention. Having been already exposed to the recalcitrant criticisms of the old matrons, Daisy's joking sounds genuinely ironic. She hides her overt transgression behind an attempt to be consistent, and socially appropriate, following the law of social kindness towards her Italian suitor, but not towards the old widow: 'But did you hear anything so cool as Mrs. Walker's wanting me to get into her carriage and drop poor Mr. Giovanelli; and under the pretext that it was proper: People have different ideas! It would have been most unkind; he had been talking about that walk for ten days' (178).

In the same line, Daisy pokes fun at Winterbourne's jealousy; his criticism of Mr. Giovanelli for having invited Daisy to walk with him in Rome — 'he would never have proposed to a young lady of this country [Italy] to walk about the streets with him' — is met with Daisy's jocular retort: "'About the streets?' cried Daisy, with her pretty stare. 'Where then would he have proposed to her to walk?'" (178). Daisy's raillery may also sound childish as she claims to prefer "weak tea" to Winterbourne's advice (179). But as we saw in the previous sections her axiomatic jokes can also be particularly incisive (178). The female fool keeps teasing Winterbourne till the very end of the story as, for instance, when she makes him think that she is engaged (187). Daisy's fooling around further confuses Winterbourne: "'Since you have mentioned it', she said, 'I am engaged.' . . . Winterbourne looked at her; he had stopped laughing. 'You don't believe it!' [...] 'Well, then—I am not!'" (187). Her humour progressively tends to the metaphoric, as Daisy's discourse becomes more elaborate and increasingly complex; thus she sharply jokes about the idea of Giovanelli and herself being "Christian martyrs" about to be devoured by the cutting ideology Winterbourne represents: 'Well, he looks at us as one of the old lions or tigers may have looked at the Christian martyrs!' (188). Such metaphoric quip is the mechanism set in motion by the female fool as she confronts monolithic discourse in the story. Her ironic remarks have also been instrumental in the forging of her narrative identity; for example, when she claims to expect conventional behaviour in men but — arguably — not necessarily in women: "Daisy stood there smiling; she threw back her hair and gave a little laugh. 'I like a gentleman to be formal!'" (156). The linguistic games in which jocosity is derived from open disregard of parental authority and a special use of literalness are also typical of James's female fool. Thus, for instance, when Mrs. Walker suggests that she should go for her walks with her mother, Daisy replies humorously: "'With my mother dear!' [...] Winterbourne saw that she scented interference. 'My mother never walked ten steps in her life. And then, you know', she added with a laugh, 'I am more than five years old'" (172). Her retort — carrying within as it does an unquestionable biographical detail — sounds definitely patronising, as if the rest of the characters were not able to realise the obvious. But Daisy's humour is more than mere proper lady's witticism. Her constant pursuit of amusement and fun constitutes a defining characteristic of our heroine whose chaffing becomes transgressive as it effects a rupture of social expectations and gendered logic.

The exhibition of a humorous discourse is likewise tinged by Daisy's enthusiastic partake in the linguistic exchange between the characters in the story. Just as we saw that her teasing revealed a conscious acknowledgement of her position of difference in the world, her

initiative in the linguistic interactions with the American male constitutes from the beginning of the narrative a particularly useful device in the construction of her identity:

Miss Miller continued to converse upon the affairs of her family, and upon other topics. [...] She talked to Winterbourne as if she had known him a long time. He found it very pleasant. It was many years since he had heard a young girl talk so much. It might have been said of this unknown young lady, who had come and sat down beside him upon a bench, that she chattered. [...] She had a soft, slender, agreeable voice, and her tone was decidedly sociable. (142)

Daisy gives free rein to her desire to talk and does so in an unrestrained, calm manner, heedless of the fact that her interlocutor is an unknown unmarried man, disregarding the social convention that expected her to be nervous and babble, rather than talk. Daisy's "talk" is somehow found excessive, overabundant, but her inexhaustible chatter reminds us of the "talking machines" that Margaret Lonsdale charged against from the pages of *The Nineteenth Century*: despite the apparent differences that separate Daisy Miller from the cultivated women who sought out to reform the world at large, both morally and socially, the new heroine's exhibitionism, her insistence on "being seen as well as heard" more than justifies the parallelism between the transgressions carried out by both representatives of the female gender in the public sphere (Lonsdale, 1884: 409):

[...] is this to improve the world at large? We present ourselves before our children or our younger sisters as talking machines, too often one-sided, with only one idea, as specimens of what they too may become when by aid of our example they shall have rid themselves of all latent feelings of retirement, and quietness, and dislike of being stared at bodily and spiritually by the multitude, and shall have put on, like their elders, a panoply of self-assertion which gradually thickens and becomes a brazen front upon which nothing short of an arrow or a sword-thrust can make a mark or leave an impression. (Lonsdale, 1884: 414)

Luce Irigaray has explained in her seminal work "This Sex Which Is Not One" that the feminine in the novel tends to emerge in a disruptive excess which is the voice of gender itself. I would like to argue that Daisy's disruptive excess is illustrated by her resolution to have a public presence and an audible voice outside the realm of womanly convention. Our heroine's famous maxim "If I didn't walk I should expire" may well be interpreted in this sense as "If I didn't talk I should expire", for this is the most prominent way in which the female fool distinguishes herself in the text (172). Daisy would thus be rejecting the patriarchal law that dictates the lack of woman's intrinsic value, which dooms her to gain importance only through her selflessness. She is in fact expressing her identity by means of an assertive language of — explicitly female — desire: "Of her own tastes, habits, and intentions Miss Miller was prepared to give the most definite, and indeed the most favourable, account" (159).

She is in charge of voicing her own needs and wants, and those wishes collide with the expectations of patriarchy. In a certain sense, Daisy owns the expression of *her* desires by a reversal of what feminist criticism has identified as "Echo's speech problem".<sup>62</sup> Her

<sup>62</sup> In Caren Greenberg's outline of the Echo and Narcissus myth, Echo's speech problem is the discipline imposed by a wrathful Juno, who has been distracted from discovering Jove's infidelity by Echo's incessant chatter. Condemned to eternal repetition, Echo falls in love with Narcissus but she cannot declare her love because she is not able to "initiate a conversation with him". Narcissus rejects Echo's embraces by "saying that he would rather die than give her power over him, and Echo responds by saying that she gives him power over her". After the rejection scene nothing is left of Echo but her voice. See

assertiveness, her eagerness to articulate her female urges and initiate a conversation all evidence a conscious manipulation of language in order to actively insert her own difference, her own identity, in the text. She *becomes* “the monster that speaks” in as much as she differs. Her identity is in a constant state of becoming that runs parallel to Daisy’s collisions against the monolithic thought Calvinistic society represents. The American woman’s “labial and lingual and vocal independence”, as Henry James held, was a sign of her “glorious courage”, but he further sought to probe into the subtleties of the linguistic performance of his countrywomen: “You speak, you claim, as you like: well, *how* is it then that, individually, you do like?—which, as the basis of your taste, it would be interesting to know”.<sup>63</sup> The answer James proposed in his 1878’s story to the stimulating question of how an American woman—a female individual—might actually like to speak can be discerned in his construction of Daisy’s *idialogeme* of self-affirmation.

In “The Speech of American Women” James further noted, while contrasting masculine and feminine speech as well as their respective areas of influence, that in fact “the women, on our side of the world, actually enjoy and use the authority [...]. They have taken it over without blinking, they are encamped on every inch of the social area that the stock-exchange and the football-field leave free; the whole of the social initiative is in other words theirs, having been abandoned to them without a struggle” (Walker, 1999: 66). There are numerous instances in James’s story that illustrate the way in which Daisy takes the initiative in her dialogical interactions with Winterbourne. Typically, she does not wait to be asked or invited by her male counterpart. Instead, she freely expresses her wishes without gauging the effect they may produce in Winterbourne’s disciplinary mind. What is more, Daisy rather anticipates, runs over male desire itself.

The following examples are intended to illustrate such a peculiarity of the female fool’s identity. It is nearly midnight when Daisy thus challenges Winterbourne: ‘Don’t you want to take me out in a boat?’ (155); her insistence and demanding tone sounds particularly daring while it triggers Winterbourne’s romantic imagination: “‘Well, I want you to take me out in a boat!’ Daisy repeated. [...] she turned round and was looking at Winterbourne. Her face wore a charming smile, her pretty eyes were gleaming, she was swinging her great fan about. No; it’s impossible to be prettier than that, thought Winterbourne” (156). At times, Daisy turns into the *provocateur*, moved by the only wish to shock and cause stupefaction. This is a real declaration of intentions on her part. She wants to force opposition so as to reassert her resistance and make evident her firm resolution to remain different despite the attempts to discipline her: “‘That’s all I want—a little fuss!’ And the young girl began to laugh again” (157). Acknowledging her own exercise of female power, Daisy is greatly amused by Winterbourne’s flattery as she rejoices in the control of male speech: ‘I like to make you say those things! You’re a queer mixture!’ (159). On other occasions she manipulates Winterbourne on account of his vulnerability before her unrestrained jocosity. Thus, she comically promises him that “she would stop ‘teasing’ him if he would give his word to come down to Rome in the winter. [...] ‘I don’t want you to come for your aunt, [...] I want you to come for me’. [...] He declared that, at any rate, he would certainly come. After this Daisy stopped teasing” (161).

In keeping with what James would note some thirty years later, American women “in the matter of speech or anything else” do not “*acknowledge* authority” (“The Speech of American

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Caren Greenberg, “Reading Reading: Echo’s Abduction of Language”, *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, eds. McConnell-Ginet, Borker, and Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980) 304, qtd. in Modleski, 1986: 126.

<sup>63</sup> Sic. James first published “The Speech of American Women” in *Harper’s Bazar* 40:11 (Nov. 1906): 979-82; 42:12 (Dec. 1906): 1103-06; 41:1 (Jan. 1907): 17-21; 41:2 (Feb. 1907): 113-17. I am quoting from Walker, 1999: 62-63.

Women"; Walker, 1999: 72). Daisy's retort to Winterbourne's remark regarding his intention to remain with her so as to prevent her privacy with the Italian suitor, is particularly enlightening: 'I don't like the way you say that, [...] It's too imperious'. [...] 'I have never allowed a gentleman to dictate to me, or to interfere with anything I do'. (169). As James remarked, "It was not in the nature or the position of the American woman, I was given to understand, to put up with oppression" ("The Speech of American Women"; Walker, 1999: 75). Likewise, the authority gained by women was in detriment of male power: "no mere man may correct a mere woman in any contingency whatever, since this undermines the whole theory of queenship [...]. He has abdicated his right to take his stand on what pleases him, and can accordingly but shift it all ruefully, in the service of his mate, to those perilous ledges which represent all the admonitory margin now left him" ("The Manners of American Women"; Walker, 1999: 109). As we may observe in the quotation above, Winterbourne does not enjoy this privilege of correction over the female fool, hard as he tries to enforce it.

James illustrated in Daisy "the great feminine collectivity asserting itself as against all interference and so quite effectually balancing against any discipline of friction within the herd" ("The Manners of American Women"; Walker, 1999: 109). Interestingly, the female fool seems to assert her difference by a negative association with other female positions she rejects. She sounds adamant as she eschews identification with Italian ladies, proclaiming her own divergence: 'I, thank goodness, am not a young lady of this country. The young ladies of this country have a dreadfully poky time of it, so far as I can learn; I don't see why I should change my habits for *them*' (178). Her words are aimed at rejecting the orthodoxies of Italian convention as well as its exemplary purpose over her Americannes. Daisy's ironic confirmation to Winterbourne of having interiorly grasped her own difference has a demolishing effect on the male's self-confidence: 'I am a fearful, frightful flirt! Did you ever hear of a nice girl that was not? [...] you are the last man I should think of flirting with. As I have had the pleasure to inform you, you are too stiff' (178).

Daisy's speech is therefore revealed as open and uncensored. Overtly challenging at times, her language of self-assertion rejoices in its ability to shock convention and its control of male discourse. Acknowledging no authority, the female fool is both literal and unafraid of words. The episode regarding the possible meeting between Mrs. Costello and Daisy Miller is particularly revealing in this sense. Winterbourne cannot decide how to approach the subject as his aunt has declined to become acquainted with Daisy on account of her overt improprieties. The reluctance, lame excuses, and oblique language Winterbourne utilises are met with the heroine's straightforward speech: "'She doesn't want to know me!' she said suddenly. 'Why don't you say so? You needn't be afraid. I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid!' And she gave a little laugh" (151). As James remarks in "The Speech of American Women",

The conditions of American life in general, and our great scheme of social equality in particular, have done many things for her, and left many others undone; but they have above all secured her this primary benefit that she is the woman in the world who is least "afraid". There is no doubt that, as a foundation, this has been an excellent thing for her; it has had at any rate more to do with her "success" than all the rest of her attributes together. (59)

Her lack of fear, her verbal and discursive bravery, thus become a defining trait of James's Daisy Miller. Fearlessness is one of the major attributes that distinguishes the idiom of the modern American woman, it is "her one great sign", one of the main features that "were to call attention [...] to all those attitudes of fear that had been immemorially considered, in 'Europe', to grace the feminine character". James further noticed that this is the real

“American idiosyncrasy” that should serve as a guide for women from other countries who “have been allowed to see what it is to go in fear neither as matrons nor as maidens, neither as sweethearts nor as wives, neither as mothers nor as daughters nor as sisters, neither as members of society, nor as “leaders” of it, nor as free and independent conversers in it” (“The Speech of American Women”; Walker, 1999: 60).

Daisy’s language tumbles down logical thought and her disruptive discourse goes against the rules of established social speech. Grounding her opinions not on sound reasons but, rather, on “pretexts” of a somewhat elusive nature, Daisy allows herself the privilege of being inquisitorial with regard to her male interlocutor:

Miss Miller’s observations were not remarkable for their logical consistency; for anything she wanted to say she was sure to find a pretext. She found a great many pretexts in the rugged embrasure of Chillon for asking Winterbourne sudden questions about himself —his family, his previous history, his tastes, his intentions—and for supplying information upon corresponding points in her own personality. (159)

Similarly, Winterbourne finds himself “reduced to chopping logic about this young lady; he was vexed at his want of instinctive certitude as to how far her eccentricities were generic, national, and how far they were personal” (185). Daisy’s speech affects and transforms Winterbourne’s idiosyncrasy as it forces him to adopt a different standing, a new point of view from which to receive our heroine’s novelty.

It is precisely all this conscious tumbling down of logic, Daisy’s determined blighting of the consensus on female propriety and common sense through her forward language and jocular remarks that I find conclusive in my interpretation of James’s American girl as a subversive heroine and an incipient, however immature, New Woman. Female subjectivity is constructed through a language of disobedience in James’s narrative, as Daisy’s identity is forged upon its confrontation with other female images she does not desire for herself. James’s heroine thus cancels the so-far unquestioned validity of an obsolete model of womanhood that no longer satisfies the American girl. In a certain sense, her ultimate plunge into death — it must be borne in mind that Daisy has been duly warned about the perils involved in hanging out around malarial Rome — sounds almost suicidal. Her physical extinction becomes then, paradoxically, her last manifesto of self-affirmation; her corroboration of the fact that if she is to continue living, she is to do so in her own terms. In the Jamesian rationale the female fool can only exist to flout taboo and challenge moral and social laws.

Ross Posnock and Pierre A. Walker have both pointed out the importance that Henry James attached to the idea of consciousness as ultimate alertness with regard to what is different from the self: “knowledge of things is in part possible due to an awareness of the opposite or the absence of those things; things are not known only in themselves but in reaction to other things” (Walker, 1999: xxxii).<sup>64</sup> Such a conception of identity formation as a complex process of interrelations is, as I would like to argue, particularly in point in *Daisy Miller* as the female fool performs the self in contestation of other normative female images and discourses. For James’s most popular heroine exists, and emerges as “the monster that speaks”, in as much as she reacts against and casts off an increasingly outworn model of

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<sup>64</sup> A similar explanation is presented by James in “The Long Wards” and “The Question of the Mind”. Likewise, for Posnock “the Jamesian self is perpetually negotiating an identity out of its interaction with various others” (Posnock, 1991: 136).

female identity. Enhancement of the appreciation of variety and distinctions, in this sense, was a major issue in James's agenda as social critic: "[...] my plea for the mild effort of differentiation"; "[...] my appeal for the varied articulation which recognizes, among noted sounds, variations of identity", can only be understood against the modern tendency to uniformity he deplored ("The Speech of American Women"; Walker, 1999: 75). Daisy prefers to be hailed as "reckless" and "all improper" rather than become uniform; she chooses to die but does so with a violent laugh (173). Presenting as she does an alternative to the disciplinary thought Winterbourne and the old matrons represent, she confronts dominant discourse with her own difference and a violently facetious chat of self-affirmation. The deployment of a conservative discourse which attempts to stigmatise Daisy's behaviour is thus necessary in the process of her identity formation, as it provides her with a rhetoric to revolt against, a social and moral language to oppose.

What Henry James proposes instead of the centred self is "a heterogeneous, theatrical self [that] 'bristles' with the mobility and impurity of internal difference, of something not wholly itself but infiltrated by 'a different mixture altogether'" (Posnock, 1991: 58). As the story progresses and Daisy is exposed to various situations in which her genuinely naïve search for pleasure is halted by the disciplinary mind, James's heroine starts to develop her own voice, a language of insurrection which is particularly staggering when dialogically confronted with the representatives of conservative discourse. Her outrageous 'If I didn't walk I should expire!' reminds us of her determination to remain heedless of social convention and the Roman custom, of her commitment to pursue personal freedom (172). She has resolved to inscribe her own individuality in the larger social context to the bitter end. Daisy's existence is only possible in carnival, in the alternative world of difference and non-conventional thought. Her yielding to the impositions of the dominant ideology would imply her extinction and this is a major realisation for Daisy in the story.

As James noted in "The Question of Our Speech":

You don't speak soundly and agreeably, you don't speak neatly and consistently, unless you *know* how you speak, how you may, how you should, how you shall speak, unless you have discriminated, unless you have noticed differences and suffered from violations and vulgarities; and you have not this positive consciousness, you are incapable of any reaction of taste or sensibility worth mentioning, unless a great deal of thought of the matter has been taken for you. (Walker, 1999: 46)

While an interpretation of Daisy Miller as a female fool of emerging feminist impetus may help to reveal the distortions inflicted on her identity, the temptation to idealise the Jamesian heroine must be avoided. As Said reminds us via Wole Soyinka, "adoring the Negro is as 'sick' as abominating him". (Said, 1993: 229) The appearance in fiction of the first truly political New Woman heroine would take place five years after Daisy's death in the Pincio gardens. Her efforts to *speak soundly* and *consistently* a new language of revolt would be greeted with a loud applause as she dared to flagrantly defy outmoded gender roles.

## 2.4. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have offered a reading of Daisy Miller as an incipient, immature New Woman of the late 1870s. Regardless of Henry James's ambivalent position towards the feminist cause, I have found that the resistances deployed by his heroine share similarities and may be conducive to the emerging profile of a New Woman identity in fiction. Analysed from

the viewpoint of a “female grotesque”, to borrow Mary Russo’s phrase, and the Bakhtinian fool, James’s creation of a composite, kaleidoscopic female identity as paradoxically both inadvertent and bold is instrumental in the effective resistances mediated by the character.

In the first section I have focused on Frederick Winterbourne, the male protagonist in Henry James’s *nouvelle*, and on his deficiencies as an interpreter of the startling womanhood Daisy Miller represents. Almost in the guise of a science man, a physiognomist, Winterbourne rigorously builds hypotheses in order to identify the true nature of the elusive American girl. His methods of observation respond to a belief in the Victorian discourse according to which woman’s inner self and true character were revealed by her corporeal features as female respectability was required to be physically paraded and written in women’s bodies. In James’s narrative, woman’s identity emerges as the cultural repository of a mystery to be elucidated but also as a contested site of alterity in which the possibility to conceive of innovative ways of interpreting resides.

I have emphasised the male crisis of seeing as a perception trauma of which Winterbourne’s endless taxonomies of women are a symptom. By collapsing surface and depth, he presents the female body as a readable collection of signs to be both penetrated and kept under surveillance. Interestingly, the emerging female identity in this Jamesian narrative is presented as both powerless and powerful, at times as an impenetrable sign, a mere bearer of meanings imposed from outside and yet, simultaneously, as capable of forcing dominant discourses on womanhood to negotiate and alter those meanings which no longer seem to fit, which are no longer sufficient. I have argued that by drawing attention to the inadequacies of obsolete conceptions of women, the arbitrariness of the culture-specific process of signification is revealed and, as a result, a tentative new space is prised open for the emerging American New Woman to define herself in her own terms. Identity is therefore presented as necessarily multiple and shifting, as a non-static category.

I have focused on the anomalies of Winterbourne’s masculinity by addressing his evasion from male occupations and his dependence on conservatism and a polarised notion of gender and female identities. His conflict of interpretation arises as he strategically takes to deviate attention from his dubious qualification as a genuine American male. I have also tried to show James’s male protagonist as a pretender, an usurper of masculine identities as he adopts the business imagination in his attempts to commodify Daisy.

The story ultimately exposes the failure and futility of his prescriptive, dualistic mind heavily reliant on binary oppositions to succeed in the interpretation of woman. Male fears of dangerous womanhood come to characterise his vacillating prognosis as he continuously redraws the inner portrait of the young American girl. I have similarly attempted to link Winterbourne’s crisis of seeing, his trauma of perception, to the lack of a Wildean temperament of receptivity. In this sense, his inaptitude to appreciate the challenges of a shifting, kaleidoscopic female identity is the measure of a rigid imagination unable to acknowledge as beautiful that which has never been. The New Woman figure thus ultimately causes a revision of obsolete ideologies whose validity is questioned while it prompts the development of new imaginative discourses in the hermeneutics devised by the male gaze. Confrontation with the hybrid nature of the modern American woman brings about the loss of male privileges in the processes of signification but such a loss is desperately battled as Winterbourne compulsively attempts to reappropriate her as sign.

The second section in this chapter has examined the multi-layered subversions carried into effect by the Jamesian heroine. Drawing on the Bakhtinian notion of the fool, I have argued that such improprieties lead to a willing suspension of discipline and reveal a carnivalized conception of a feminine identity in revolt. The following performative acts have

been identified in Daisy's behavioural misdemeanours: the suspension of the prescribed distance between the sexes, the blurring of gender borders and gender roles, a freedom of association which is irreverent toward class hierarchies, an objectification of the male sex, a constant renewal and improvisation of appetites and desires, an aloofness from the marriage project and middle-class romantic love, a suspension of class and gender hierarchies, a challenge to the gendered division of labour, a joyful resistance to being assimilated by normative discourses on womanhood and, finally, her resonating laughter.

I have attempted to show such performative acts as destabilising and ultimately empowering elements at play in the female fool's theatrical deactivation of authoritative discourses. The deployment of certain rhetorical devices such as irony, the malleable configurations of body, dress and speech adopted by the female fool both conform and are constitutive of a problematic identity which emerges in the text as a precursor of later constructs on American womanhood. I have also focused on the ability of dominant discourses to silence or exacerbate diverse elements they find particularly disturbing in the emerging womanhood. These opposite discursive strategies are conveniently mobilised as the conservative forces in the story try to circumvent the most unpalatable performances of the female fool — such as her delectation in masculine beauty — by deviating attention towards lesser offences.

A salient discursive practice utilised by the Puritanic forces in James's *nouvelle* is the metaphoric identification of the modern American girl with the "Comanche savage", a recurrent device present in dominant discourses against the New Woman — as the examination of Elizabeth Lynn Linton's diatribe against progressive womanhood revealed in the previous chapter. Deployed as a means to palliate the growing anxieties aroused by the female fool in the story, it projects the image of unruly womanhood as a native to be exterminated for her interferences with the logic of the empire. Following a postcolonial theoretical approach, this particular section has focused on the elements that the disciplinary discourses in the story find embedded in Daisy: the enigma she represents, her darkness within, her exoticised image as a foreigner and a racialised woman who is depicted as culturally inferior — these are all attributes conveniently constructed as a means to contain the threat posed by her defiant power, by her difference. My analysis of the savage metaphor has attempted to reveal it as a defence mechanism that justifies the maintenance of authority over the female fool while allowing for the temporary stabilisation of the category of proper, conforming womanhood. Interestingly, an inherent contradiction has been found encapsulated within this discursive ruse as it simultaneously homogenises Daisy as a common savage and highlights her unique, idiosyncratic behaviour.

The comic resistance exercised by the female fool against assimilation into normative behaviour, her aloofness from conventional ideologies on identity, gender and social propriety and her refusal to yield to external pressures are never overcome in the narrative. The capacity of the female fool to remain firm in her own difference is politically enabling in this Jamesian rendering of female dissidence. Her humorous approach to the exigencies and formalities imposed by conservatism, serves a liberating purpose as it showcases the artificiality, the arbitrariness of those conventions. Her excessive laughter and relentless gaiety thus triggers male anxiety and is a crucial constitutive element of this portrait of irreverent female identity.

A major performative act mounted by the Jamesian heroine is likewise analysed in the middle section of the chapter: her exhibitionistic sin of consumption. Her exacerbated love of fashion and luxury situates Daisy in the context of late-nineteenth-century capitalist societies and her consumerism is instrumental in the composition of her ambivalent portrait. Construed

both as the male capitalist's idle object and as an agent of transgression through her own excess and unquenchable desire Daisy emerges as a female identity on the border.

The final section of this chapter has addressed the dislocations produced by Daisy's dismantling of the love project, which are relevant in the transformation of the female protagonist from passive object of the male gaze into a potentially rebellious identity of autonomous female desire. Studied in contrast with the fallacious narrative of monogamic love enforced by Frederick Winterbourne, Daisy's blighting of the romantic illusion, her freedom of movement and association, are decisive in her construction as a hybrid of opposing qualities all the more daring because of her genuine lack of interest in the marriage career.

Drawing upon the articles written by Henry James in which he analysed diverse aspects and social mores of turn-of-the-century North American culture, I have attempted to show Daisy's inflection of the *vox Americana* as a distinctive feature of her difference. Her joyful personal accent, her language of nonconformity, is explained as both cause and effect of her performative self. The occasional pungency of her humorous remarks, the rejection of formulaic feminine responses in linguistic interactions, her unpredictability and constant improvisation, all point toward an affirmation of her dissension. To this respect, and by means of a thorough examination of Daisy Miller's language, the final section in the chapter has attempted to trace the transformations effected by the Jamesian heroine's insurgent speech in the development of the narrative.

The social space she occupies constructs ideological values differently. Her natural penchant for dialogue and conversation characterises a female language which is transformed into a weapon of disobedience. Her verbal eagerness and vocal activity contravene ideologies of modest femininity while, at the same time, change the monologic regime of the narrative into a polyphony of varied idioms. Ultimately, Daisy's speech pursues the naturalization of linguistic intercourse between (single) men and women, eschewing all the conditionings that the romantic dream necessarily involved. In this sense, the deployment of humour in confrontation with monolithic discourses in the story is of the essence. In her constant pursuit of fun, Daisy's jocularly becomes transgressive as it effects a rupture of social expectations and all gendered logic. I have also tried to present the heroine's double resolution to have a public presence and an audible voice distinct from womanly convention, as instances of her disruptive excess, which Luce Irigaray has identified with the voice of gender itself. Daisy's identity is effectively construed as a verbal expression of her female desire. She is, so to speak, constituted in her language of revolt. In a reversal of Echo's speech problems, Daisy's determination to articulate her female urges and initiate the conversation constitute James's proposal of a female identity incarnated in her own language of self-affirmation. Similarly, the refusal to acknowledge authority — a recognisable trait of American women's speech, according to Henry James — is traceable in his construction of Daisy Miller. Her adamant rejection to be identified with other females in the story is a proclamation of independence, and her lack of fear and discursive bravery a major distinctive feature of the modern American woman — “her one great sign”, in James's own words. Thus, an alternative interpretation of the story's tragic denouement is offered as an affirmation of the protagonist's legitimate pursuit of personal freedom, an outright rejection to be assimilated into prescriptive female conduct. Daisy's final death as an irreducible icon of autonomous behaviour discards all tragic notes of martyrdom as she remains, in Henry James's own words, “the woman in the world who is least afraid” (James, 1906, 1907: 59).

### 3 THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM: OLIVE SCHREINER'S PROTEAN NEW WOMAN

*The Story of an African Farm* was first published by Chapman and Hall in January 1883, and it soon became a major success that would witness up to fifteen editions during Olive Schreiner's lifetime.<sup>1</sup> This intellectual story of ground-breaking novelty<sup>2</sup> is set some twenty years behind its own publication date but time references are certainly scarce in this novel with the exception of the narrator's explicit mention of the year 1862, precisely when Lyndall, the female protagonist, is twelve years of age.<sup>3</sup> The lapse of two decades was thus separating Schreiner's avid readers from the early life experiences of the characters depicted in her novel.

The mid-Victorian era had been marked by an increasing material prosperity, the result of Britain's unrivalled industrial production and foreign trade. The period of political stability enjoyed by the wealthy upper and middle classes had led them to adopt a general mood of self-complacency that would last until the beginning of the seventies, when the changes both in the international distribution of forces and in the British power of expansion began to show unequivocal signs of alert.

The supremacy of Liberalism and the doctrines of Evangelicalism provided the necessary political and religious foundations to redirect the gross profits of such a buoyant economy towards the material improvement of Victorian society at large. The development of physical sciences and the growth of free-thinking and rationalist movements allied in a joined effort to meliorate the living conditions of mid-Victorians. The application of the Christian moral ethic that found in self-improvement its highest virtue resulted in the remarkable betterment of factory conditions, general education or public health. Even the introduction of modern

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<sup>1</sup> *African Farm* was a very successful book despite its revolutionary ideas on the Woman's Question; in fact, as Nancy L. Paxton has commented, it was one of the first feminist texts published after George Eliot's fiction which enjoyed both critical and public applause (Paxton, 1988: 566). Schreiner had completed a first version of *African Farm* by 1879. She further revised her text upon its being turned down by an English publisher the following year. Finally, George Meredith's recommendation of the book was decisive in Chapman and Hall's acceptance to publish it in two volumes. A second edition quickly followed in 1883. For these and other biographical details, see Ruth First and Ann Scott's *Olive Schreiner: A Biography* (London: The Women's Press, 1989). The copy of the novel I have handled, and from which I shall be quoting is a widely available reprint of the second edition, published in one volume in July 1883.

<sup>2</sup> Schreiner's tale has been consistently regarded as a landmark in the history of feminism in the novel since its publication date. W. T. Stead, the conservative editor of the *Review of Reviews*, considered it the first example in that literature of revolt that would characterise late Victorian times ("The Novel of the Modern Woman", *Review of Reviews*, 10, 1894: 64-74). Ellen Jordan has pointed out that the publication of *African Farm* in 1883 was "the first indication that a new breed of feminist was in the process of being born" (1983: 19), and Elaine Showalter has written that Schreiner's protagonist is "the first wholly serious feminist heroine in the English novel" (1977: 199).

<sup>3</sup> All further references to specific dates or years are deliberately omitted from the story. Time is a blurred and diluted concept which the readers are compelled to recreate on their own. The beginning of chapter II mentions the year of 1862 and the second part of the novel starts out with a chapter entitled "Times and Seasons" in which we are merely informed that "three years have passed". It must be, therefore, 1865 and Lyndall would be fifteen years old. The story moves suddenly forward in chapter IV (Part II) as the narrator cryptically gives a new temporal reference by means of the free indirect speech: "Strange to go away for four years". We may accordingly infer that it is now 1869 (see pages 10, 101, and 149, respectively). A final mention to a time frame occurs in chapter XI as the story is approaching its end, when we learn that a letter from Lyndall has been received "almost a year ago now — just when she left" (218). It would appear logical to think that the novel finishes some time around the year of 1870.

plumbing was the direct consequence of the availability of scientific knowledge.<sup>4</sup> However, the murkiest sides of Victorian prosperity would become visible in due time.

The doctrine of Liberalism had its finest exponent in John Stuart Mill who had brought about his influential essay *On Liberty* in 1859,<sup>5</sup> the same year that saw the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. On the political arena, Lord Palmerston (1784-1865) came to represent the commercial hegemony of the industrial and middle classes whose prosperity began to decline after 1870. This decade was inaugurated with the unification of Italy and the German Empire, which constituted a turning point in the history of Britain's political and colonial dominance in the world. The rise of public opinion and the flourishing of the cheap popular press were new attributes of an urbanised modern Britain that was increasingly forced to vouchsafe to her citizens the social security and welfare they demanded. The Great Depression of the 1870s due to the price slump in agriculture accentuated the perception of new weaknesses in the economic machinery of the empire.

As Elaine Showalter and Judith Walkowitz have shown,<sup>6</sup> the British *fin de siècle* was a period characterised by great turbulence. The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw the proliferation of sexual scandals — most notably, in 1885, W. T. Stead's "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon", which centred on child prostitution; Jack the Ripper murders in 1888, and the famous Oscar Wilde trials in 1895. These, together with other significant historical episodes such as the Trafalgar Square riots, the Bloody Sunday in 1887, or the great dock strike in 1889, evidenced a deep social and economical crisis that managed to spread panic amid the middle class. The pervading parliamentary debate with regard to the Irish Question and the incertitude created by the inevitable consequences of Victorian Liberalism, the emancipation of women and the freedom for workers, were major concerns of the times.

A new agricultural depression developed in the 1880s and caused major migratory movements away from the countryside into the cities. The years immediately following the publication of *African Farm* were marked by a profound industrial stagnation which dramatically augmented the figures of the unemployed and worsened the conditions of the urban poor. These social outcasts were increasingly perceived as immoral, brutish and — as Angelique Richardson has shown (2003: 13-32) — biologically degenerate, which in turn fuelled the anxieties of the well-to-do classes who began to fear that the whole civilization was under threat. The consciousness of decline and the threat posed by industrialised foreign competitors energised Britain's expansion of its overseas markets and her struggle to gain control of new territories. The imperial project was not only financially profitable for Britain, it also provided an opportunity to promote British cultural values through the establishment of white settlers around the world. The emblem of the colony could thus be persuasively brandished as a double sign of vigour, for it was the source of raw materials and new markets for British manufacturers as well as the most tangible symbol of the nation's glory.

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<sup>4</sup> For a brief, though rather triumphant, discussion of the middle years of Queen Victoria's reign (1851-1874) see, for example, David Thomson's *England in the Nineteenth Century* (1950), London: Penguin, 1978: 99-168; or H. C. G. Matthew's "The Liberal Age (1851-1914)", *The Oxford History of Britain*, edited by Kenneth O. Morgan, Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999: 518-81.

<sup>5</sup> The figure of John Stuart Mill was fundamental in Victorian thought and his writings were particularly relevant in Olive Schreiner's representation of Lyndall, as I intend to show in the present chapter. For further references to his essays, I shall quote from *On Liberty and The Subjection of Women*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> See Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, New York: Viking, 1990, and Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992.

As Iveta Jusová has explained, the aggressiveness of the imperial project in Africa was particularly intense. The acquisitions in East, South, and West Africa had gained around 40 million people and 2.8 million square miles for Britain by 1911. But the exaltation of the empire had both advocates and dissidents, who felt uncomfortable with the idea of “cultural and racial superiority of the British”. The “civilizing mission” interpreted as the “White Man’s burden” stirred up similar “anxieties over the likelihood of racial degeneration of the ‘imperial race’ through its contact with the presumably inferior races overseas (as well as the nation’s ‘degenerate’ classes in its own midst)” (Jusová, 2005: 2-3).

The story Olive Schreiner chose to tell takes place in a remote unnamed outpost of the British empire in South Africa during the 1860s.<sup>7</sup> The British had taken over the Cape in 1806 when most of the settlers were Dutch; a massive arrival of British settlers and missionaries in the 1820s was favoured by the government to promote farming and ensure the visibility of the empire along the frontiers. A long period of quarrels then started between the Boer farmers, the expansionist zeal of British rule, and the Africans — which would culminate in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), an armed conflict that England would have to wage without allies and amid great international hostility.

For the imperial metropolis South Africa was a far-off possession of scant allure during the major part of the sixties until the first diamond field was discovered in 1867. This date signals the beginning of the heyday of South African mining colonialism and it specifically coincides with the final date of Schreiner’s tale of revolt. The Empire became thus revitalised although its prospects of further expansion were severely contracted as time went by.<sup>8</sup> One of the most important issues analysed in *The Story an African Farm* is the large notion of progress through conflict, and how opposing discourses on gender, class and race both clashed against and fuelled the interests of the new imperialism.

The figure of Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) stands out in this context as one of the most relevant thinkers and feminist writers of her time. The ninth child of an English Dissenting mother and a German Lutheran father, she was born in a missionary family in colonial South Africa.<sup>9</sup> From very early stages of her life she forged her identity as a revolted daughter who

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<sup>7</sup> It is the story of a disintegrated family in a sheep and ostrich farm owned by Tant’ Sannie, the Boer woman who performs the role of dysfunctional mother. There are three motherless children: Waldo, the transcendentalist son of the farm manager; Em, Tant’ Sannie’s submissive stepdaughter; and Lyndall, Em’s outspoken cousin, whose coming of age is marked by harsh encounters with other characters in the novel. According to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Schreiner’s tale signals the rupture of story as it constitutes “a critique of three dominant narratives” and “marks the ‘end’ of the consoling stories of the Christian, quest, and romance varieties” (1985: 21). My analysis in the present chapter focuses on the story led by Lyndall, who leaves the farm to attend a boarding school. In her pursuit of independence she rejects her lover’s marriage proposal, has an illegitimate child who lives only for a few hours, and finally dies.

<sup>8</sup> An aggressive mood of arrogance and jingoism would come in due time to characterise the dominant discourse of the British Empire as an effective means to mitigate the challenges to its supremacy. Some of the stories written by R. L. Stevenson, W. E. Henley, Joseph Conrad, and, particularly, Rudyard Kipling would, in diverse degrees, show in the last decade of the nineteenth century a common imperial patriotism that fascinated town-dwellers, although their fiction — as is the case of Conrad with regard to Belgian imperialism — was also critical with the expansionist project. One of the most successful novelists of the 1880s, Henry Rider Haggard, immediately outsold all his contemporaries when he published *King Solomon’s Mines* in 1885, and *She* in 1887, where he explored the stereotypes often associated with colonialism.

<sup>9</sup> Ann Heilmann has observed that Schreiner’s biographers have contributed to the creation of a rather unfavourable image of the writer as an unbalanced woman artist trapped between genius and hysteria. S. C. Cronwright-Schreiner’s *Life of Olive Schreiner* (1924) seems to have influenced to this respect later perceptions of the novelist, such as Virginia Woolf’s, who regarded Schreiner as “one half of a great writer; a diamond marred by a flaw” (“Olive Schreiner”, 1925; in Clayton, 1983: 94). Elaine Showalter (*A Literature of their Own*, 1977: 194-98) and biographers Ruth First and Ann Scott (*Olive Schreiner*, 1980) have perpetuated this idea of a neurotic writer whose personality crippled her own life and work. (Heilmann, 2004: 261)

found herself at odds with the circumstances surrounding her world. When she was eight years old she declared herself an atheist and deserted the church, later to devote all her passion and faith to defend the cause of those who had to experience the harshness of colonial capitalism.<sup>10</sup> Her frequent migrations between Africa and Britain gave her a sharp sense of the bitter aspects lurking behind Victorian prosperity, and Schreiner would finally raise her voice against the widespread patriotism that characterised fin-de-siècle Britain. She was a socialist feminist and she joined the Fellowship of the New Life in 1881, and the Women's League of the Social Democratic Foundation. Together with Maria Sharpe and Eleanor Marx, Schreiner was a member of the avant-garde Men and Women's Club and kept correspondence with Karl Pearson during 1886. When she returned to South Africa from London in 1889, she married a farmer and politician called Samuel Cronwright. She became a prominent member of the South African suffrage movement in the early twentieth century although she resigned from the South African Enfranchisement League when black women were excluded from the qualification for the vote.<sup>11</sup> In 1895 she had a daughter who lived only a few hours and had no other children. *The Story of an African Farm* was her first novel, published in 1883; she also wrote *Trooper Peter Halkett of Mashonaland* (1897) — a novella in which she publicly condemned Cecil Rhodes on account of the atrocities committed against African people and their land — and a collection of short stories entitled *Dreams* (1890). *Woman and Labor* (1911) was a polemic non-fictional work; her novels *From Man to Man, Or Perhaps Only* (1926) and *Undine* (1929) were published posthumously, nine years after her death in South Africa. Schreiner, however, for all her frenzied attacks on her imperial world and its cult of womanhood, was not free from contradictions that render both her life and writings much more complex and polyphonic.<sup>12</sup> The following pages are the result of my own analysis of such contradictions as they emerge from the dialogue established between the feminist agenda developed by Lyndall, the female protagonist in *African Farm*, and the ideas Schreiner held in her most influential essays — *The South African Question* (1899) and *Woman and Labor* (1911).

<sup>10</sup> For an interesting account of how Olive Schreiner became a Church renegade out of sheer rebellion against domestic violence and the lessons of a punitive God, see Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995: 260-62). McClintock devotes an entire chapter to the author of *African Farm*, see chapter 7, "Olive Schreiner. The Limits of Colonial Feminism" (1995: 258-95).

<sup>11</sup> As Ledger remarks, however, Schreiner "cannot be given a clean bill of anti-imperialist health. [...] a few years earlier she had been a strong supporter of the Boers. She had even gone so far as to defend the Boers' extermination of black Africans, during the early years of settlement" (Ledger, 1997: 67).

<sup>12</sup> Despite her being regarded as "a suffragette before there were any", and although *Woman and Labor* soon came to be hailed as the Woman's Bible, the contradictions embedded in Schreiner's potent feminism have been the object of numerous attacks by prominent feminist scholars and writers in the twentieth century (Lessing, 1968: x). Thus, some South African feminists have found Schreiner's political vision "ameliorative and colonialist [...] if not ideologically racist" (Barash, 1989: 269). On the contrary, other scholars have defended the opposite view and argued for the centrality of Schreiner's novel in the tradition of anti-apartheid literature, regarding *African Farm* as "one of the earliest novels to campaign against racial injustice in what was later to become the Republic of South Africa [...] capturing a vivid sense of the emotional and psychological toll that apartheid exerted on its earliest victims, Schreiner expressed the grievances that racial oppression engendered" (Ogede, 2000: 251). New Woman scholars such as Sally Ledger have nevertheless stressed "the complicity and the resistance of white British women in relation to the turn-of-the-century imperialist project" thus undermining the idea promoted by imperial histories that "women played only an indirect role in the larger processes of the empire" (Ledger, 1997: 63; see particularly chapter 3, "Unlikely Bedfellows? Feminism and Imperialism at the Fin de Siècle": 62-93). Ledger warned late-twentieth-century feminist historians not to be surprised "to discover that even one of the heroines of 'first-wave' feminism was to some extent complicit with the racial ideologies of imperialism. For feminist thought and practice in the second half of the nineteenth century were shaped by the ideology of imperialism to a far greater extent than has hitherto been acknowledged" (Ledger, 1997: 66).

I have organised the present chapter into three main sections. The first section, “The Aesthetic Construction of the Heroine in *African Farm*”, offers an analysis of the visual representation of the heroine in this pioneer New Woman novel. The textual relevance granted to the looks of the female protagonist justifies attention, particularly as it engages in a dialectical relationship with her discursive practices. Drawing on aesthetic concepts of *eurhythmia* and *kalokagathia*, as well as on Foucault’s notion of fetishism and deviation, I will study the narrative implications of the new heroine’s magnificent physique. My objective in the second section, “A Discursive Analysis of the Novel”, is to look into the construction of female subjectivity through language by studying both the protagonist’s linguistic utterances and her dialectical confrontation with hegemonic discourses in the novel. The contrast with contemporary ideas circulated in the works of John Stuart Mill and Olive Schreiner’s non-fictional work will provide a framework for the female protagonist’s speech. Finally, a third section delves into “The Debate on Marriage”, as a particularly apt means to explore the ways in which Schreiner’s novel configures its heroine as a desiring subject while it promotes the political agenda of the protean New Woman.

### 3.1. THE AESTHETIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE HEROINE IN *AFRICAN FARM*

#### 3.1.1. Visualising Lyndall

One of the most important aspects that may be analysed in *African Farm* is the question of *representation*, which is significantly highlighted in the preface to the novel signed by Ralph Iron — the name Schreiner chose as pseudonym.<sup>13</sup> The reflections posed thereby with regard to the art of mimesis supply the barely inaugurated genre of the New Woman novel both with new prospects and contradictions.

The technique of representation undertaken by the implied author is alluded to as “the method of the life we all lead”, as opposed to the so-called “stage method” (xxxix). The former is characterised by the lack of all certainties: “nothing can be prophesied. [...] When the curtain falls no one is ready. When the footlights are brightest they are blown out; and what the name of the play is no one knows” (xxxix). In accordance to this view, the absence of the most elementary sureness, the suspension of all certitude by the reader–spectator is a prerequisite that is fundamental in the pursuit of the real, ultimately in the access to Truth itself.<sup>14</sup> The sense of “satisfaction” and “completeness” that inevitably follows from the stage method adopted by classic realism will be sacrificed in Schreiner’s novel in the interest of its new conception of the relationship between reality and fiction. Getting closer to *the real* thus requires a painting of human life that is liberated from the ballast of received knowledge and expectations. Hence the author’s intention to emphasise the contrast between *African Farm* and the taste for those trite stories of “wild adventure; of cattle driven into inaccessible ‘kranzes’ by Bushmen; ‘of encounters with ravening lions, and hair-breadth escapes’” (xl). As

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<sup>13</sup> There is a clear resonance of the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, a major influence in Schreiner’s thought, in her adoption of this pseudonym as well as in her naming the two orphans “Em” and “Waldo” (Showalter, 1977: 199).

<sup>14</sup> A reversal of the mechanism at work in classic humanism takes place. Thus the preface is tentatively arguing against the obvious attractiveness of that “stage method” which — within a post-structuralist logic — stands for fixed notions of linguistic processes and representational techniques that are appealing “in so far as they offer a degree of certainty about life and apparent access to truth” (Weedon, 1987: 80). The important question of the individual’s search for truth is a focal concern in Schreiner’s novel which shall be addressed below in section 3.2. “A Discursive Analysis of the Novel”.

we continue to learn from the preface, “[s]uch works are best written in Picadilly or in the Strand: there the gifts of the creative imagination, untrammelled by contact with any fact, may spread their wings” (x1).

It will be my contention that Schreiner’s conception of the most suitable object of representation and her normative poetics for the new woman artist — “to paint the scenes among which [she] has grown” and “find the facts that creep in upon [her]” (x1) — led her to explore new narrative techniques and to render unpredictable conclusions for her characters, which could hardly satisfy neither literary conventions nor the morale of a readership trained in the English realist *Bildungsroman*.<sup>15</sup> Schreiner’s actual dismissal of the commonplace in her writing — as well as her disavowal of the satisfactions derived from it — was somehow inflicting her realism with a Millian sense of value<sup>16</sup> as well as forging a new intellectual space that would prove to be particularly enabling for the feminist cause: the *topos* of uncertainty, as the realm in which political changes could be deferred. The conflicts at stake in the issue of representation thus go hand in hand with the larger political concerns of utopia and material change that constitute the philosophical substratum of the novel. For the feminist protagonist of *African Farm*, a real possibility of satisfaction is tragically counterfactual considering women’s disabilities in the 1860s, so she is merely contented to ‘find out what is beautiful and what is ugly, what is real and what is not’, an aesthetic and epistemological search which, though no substitute for happiness, ‘is enough for [her]’ (163).

For the purposes of my own aesthetic analysis of Lyndall’s portrait in *African Farm*, I would like to establish an analogy between the challenge posed in the preface against a hackneyed conception of realism and one of the principles set up by a landmark of twentieth-century feminism:

women must learn how to question the most basic assumptions about feminine normality in order to reopen the possibilities for development which have been successively locked off by conditioning. The new assumption behind the

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<sup>15</sup> Schreiner has been consistently criticised for a number of arguable flaws in her narrative style and conception of plot. An anonymous early reviewer in *Young Man* felt uncomfortable with “the vagueness and indeterminate convolutions of the plot”; G. W. Cross wrote in 1897, “[p]lot has never been the author’s strong point”; similarly, Hugh Walpole said in 1927 that “construction was never Olive Schreiner’s strong suit”. Schreiner defended her method in a letter to her friend Havelock Ellis, who shared some of the criticisms above: “This of course is not a justification of my method but touches what seems to me a weakness and shallowness in your mode of criticism” (quoted in Treagus, 2014: 27). Schreiner’s innovative method “seemed an affront to polite agreements regarding form which had been maintained by authors and their readers for most of the nineteenth century. However, more recent readings of this novel have suggested that rather than letting her passion run away with her to the detriment of the novel form, Olive Schreiner very knowingly usurped the traditions of the English *Bildungsroman*, and intentionally shaped the structure of her text” (Treagus, 2014: 28).

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)’s criterion of value was dependent on the amount of pleasure and pain a specific action was likely to cause. Several circumstances or variables were included in his felicific calculus (intensity, duration, un/certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity and extent), an algorithm that would determine the moral status of an action, law or institution (Crimmins, 2019). His ethical hedonism thus valued such actions, laws or institutions in terms of the satisfaction or amount of happiness they contributed to people “famously concluding that if pushpin (the nineteenth-century equivalent of video games) gave as much pleasure as poetry, then they were equally good” (O’Grady, 1996: vii). In opposition to this Benthamite notion of value, predicated on the greatest satisfaction for the largest amount of people, John Stuart Mill produced a new evaluative standard so as to incorporate the radical, more intellectual gratifications, which he deemed intrinsically more desirable than other pleasures. He introduced this concept of qualitative value in *Utilitarianism* (1863), in an effort to conciliate the ideal of universal happiness with his principle of liberty. In Mill’s words: ‘It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied’ (see chapter 10, “J. S. Mill’s Hedonism”, in Rosen, 2003: 166-184).

discussion of the body is that everything that we may observe *could be otherwise*.  
(Greer, 1970: 17)

Just as the preface was appealing to a new reader whose wilful suspension of certitude entailed the questioning of all received knowledge, the women's liberation movement — almost ninety years later — was claiming for the necessity of a similar provocation with regard to the dogmatic assumptions about the female body.

The attractiveness of Schreiner's protagonist becomes in this context an important characteristic that will become, as I intend to demonstrate, a continuous source of insights in the development of Lyndall's feminist theory. Her first appearance in the novel corresponds to that of a naked sleeping beauty:

The figure in the companion bed belonged of right to the moonlight, for it was of quite elfin-like beauty. The child had dropped her cover on the floor, and the moonlight looked in at the naked limbs. (2)

The number of references made throughout the story to Lyndall's beautiful physique is substantially long to justify their careful examination. It is relevant in this sense to differentiate between two major points of view present in the novel: first of all, the perception — shared by all primary and secondary characters, named and unnamed, as well as by a dubiously omniscient narrator<sup>17</sup> — which focuses on Lyndall's beauty. Second of all, the protagonist's own perception, her unique way of conceptualising the female aesthetic.

The first viewpoint seems to be gratifyingly unanimous. Thus, there is a certain delectation in the contemplation of Lyndall's body: the "elfin-like beauty" of "beautiful little Lyndall" (2, 8). Her body is perceived in terms of aesthetic refinement and there is a recurrent insistence on size: "her dainty little arms" become, by force of repetition, as defining a feature as the rhetorical stamina of the feminist heroine (154). According to Gregory Rose, the transvestite character who will almost change genders and become a woman as he nurses Lyndall in her death bed: "She has got the littlest hands I ever saw — I could hold them both in one of mine, and not know that I'd got anything except that they were so soft; but she held [the wildest] horses in as if they were made of iron" (173). Equal attention is drawn towards her gesturing apparatus, particularly the one displayed by her lips, focused on by the narrator's efforts to reveal Lyndall's moods. Thus, the scornful trembling of her lips (12), her quivering lips (149) or Lyndall's continuous biting of her lips (60, 94, 157), are all meant to be signs of her moral reactions. The narrator's comments, functioning almost as stage directions, are interwoven in Lyndall's subversive speeches in order to describe the young girl's earnest concerns. The heterodiegetic concentration on her privileged physique is in fact creating a tension between Lyndall's identification with a beautiful white female body and the character's discursive resistance to being the beautiful object of contemplation.

Likewise, the emphasis on size turns out to be conspicuous: Lyndall's "naked little limbs" (2), "dainty little arms" (154), "her small, proud head" (57), "the little quivering face", the "little finger [she ran] savagely along the topmost bar" (156), "the bitter silvery laugh, so

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<sup>17</sup> One of the challenges issued by Schreiner's novel concerns the conventional method of narration adopted in classic realism. Her narrator thus fluctuates between varying degrees of omniscience and makes frequent use of the free indirect speech whereas Lyndall's voice is clearly heard without intermediaries as she "defies traditional narrative strategies of containment" (Ardis, 1990: 68).

seldom heard [...] [s]he bit her little teeth altogether” (157). Such references to an apparent fragility and delicacy are inserted in the textual body at significant moments in which Lyndall’s feminist discourse becomes especially powerful and fierce. By means of the narrator’s voice and the comments offered by the rest of the characters on Lyndall’s anatomy — whose qualities would partially place her into the cage of what Germaine Greer has referred to as “the castrate”<sup>18</sup> — Schreiner’s story is effectively creating a feminist heroine in stark contrast with the rest of the female characters, who are perceived as alienated and unattractive.

The disturbing asymmetry between Lyndall’s looks and her speech, on the one hand, and between her physical nature and that of other women in *African Farm*, is a powerful tool in the task of representation. Ann Ardis has seen a radical difference, a “‘before’ and ‘after’ quality” in the novel’s representation of Lyndall. In the first part of the book (Chapters I to XIII), she looks like the “Victorian angel in the house”, she is identified with a princess. According to Ardis, this is “[b]efore Lyndall speaks, before the chapter ‘Lyndall’ disrupts the course of events in the novel” (Ardis, 1990: 62). The physical portrait of the protagonist and her language of revolt would therefore appear to exist separately. My own reading differs in the fact that I consider Lyndall’s image to be in conflict not only with her speech but also with itself. Her looks have from the beginning of the story a subversive power to conquer new plausibilities for female identity.

Size and beauty are the axis around which the visual perception of females is registered in the novel. Both Em and Tant’ Sannie — the other two women with a significant role in the story — stand out in pitiful contrast with Lyndall’s perfectly feminine design. Tant’ Sannie, the uncouth obese widow, is an example of atrophied womanhood whose gluttony sins are only matched by her voracious appetite for new husbands. Em’s deformity is early recorded in the novel as she “was grown into a premature little old woman of sixteen, ridiculously fat” (119), while the racially stereotyped, young black mother is “a sullen, ill-looking woman, with lips hideously protruding” (53). The grotesque representation of these swelling Boer women, the contrast between their oversized bodies and their lack of intellectual curiosity, together with the remarkable marginalization of black characters in *African Farm* are important reasons why Schreiner’s anti-racism has been called into question (Ledger, 1997 : 80; Heilmann, 2004 : 139).<sup>19</sup> The fear of female monstrosity is an ingredient present in

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<sup>18</sup> In *The Female Eunuch* Greer has explained that the misrepresentation of the female as a sexual object implies the obliteration of all signs of independence and vigour in her body. “The characteristics that are praised and rewarded are those of the castrate — timidity, plumpness, languor, delicacy and preciosity” (Greer, 1970: 17).

<sup>19</sup> The secondary African characters that appear in the novel — notably “the Hottentot maid”, the “Kaffir servants” or other “niggers”, as they are referred to by Tant’ Sannie — are unnamed, primitive, inarticulate females with a propensity to both suffer and enjoy violence when it is exerted on others. When the missionary Christian Otto Farber, perhaps the kindest character towards Africans in the novel, is expelled from the farm, the “Hottentot maid” burst into laughter: “It was so nice to see the white man who had been master hunted down” (56). Such inter-racial hostility is somewhat paralleled by Lyndall’s observation regarding a Kaffir male, which is infused with racial superiority: Will his race melt away in the heart of a collision with a higher? Are the men of the future to see his bones only in museums — a vestige of one link that spanned between the dog and the white man? (195). Such instances in Schreiner’s novel have made some critics conclude that “if *African Farm* can claim to redress dominant orthodoxies, racial hegemony is not part of the equation” (Heilmann, 2004: 139). However, the implied author is also critical at times of the unmitigated racism that characterises degenerate characters like Tant’ Sannie, who bans the presence of the Kaffir servants at Bonaparte Blenkins’s sermon: “The kaffir servants were not there, because Tant’ Sannie held they were descended from apes, and needed no salvation” (35). The ambivalence and complexity of the discourses on race mobilised in the novel shows that Schreiner’s position was variable, though inevitably uncomfortable for present-day feminists.

*African Farm* — which in the last analysis enhances Lyndall’s harmonious appearance to the point of the fetish. Thus, Em, Lyndall’s most humble and loyal cousin, has idealised the latter’s beauty to the extent of tempting her own suitor, Gregory Rose: ‘When my cousin comes tomorrow you will see a beautiful woman [...]. She is like a little queen: her shoulders are so upright, and her head looks as though it ought to have a little crown upon it. [...] I am sure you will love her’ (147). Lyndall’s fetishised beauty is predicated upon a deviation whereby the insistence on the apparent meaning of the signifier — her idealised looks — is meant to clash against the process of identity formation of the signified.<sup>20</sup>

The disparity between the expectations raised by Lyndall’s physical representation as an angel of beauty and the conclusions drawn from the actual construction of her persona through her vigorous speech may be seen at its best in the opening paragraph of Chapter IV in Part II, fittingly entitled “Lyndall”. Schreiner’s protagonist has just returned from her educational experience at a boarding school in England. Four years have gone by and she has managed to retain her queenly bearing:

She was more like a princess, yes, far more like a princess, than the lady who still hung on the wall in Tant’ Sannie’s bedroom. So Em thought. She leaned back in the little armchair; she wore a grey dressing-gown, and her long hair was combed out and hung to the ground. Em, sitting before her, looked up with mingled respect and admiration. (149)

This textual mode of representation purposefully selects a technique which produces appearances, rather than images. Lyndall’s *eurhythmic* portrait partakes more of the simulacrum than of an accurate rendering of her figure.<sup>21</sup> The motif of the false impressions produced by Lyndall’s outward appearance is further stretched in the novel as we realise the contrast between her landlady’s conclusions about her personal wealth: ‘She has heaps of money to pay you with; has everything that money can buy’ (240) — and the grim reality of her financial situation: ‘she has not anything in the world but a poor fifty pounds’ (173).

Oddly enough, it is precisely Gregory Rose, the character that will end up being the most servile to Lyndall, the only one who dares to criticise the heroine’s demeanour. In a letter to his sister Jemina he finds fault with Lyndall’s pride on account of her good looks and education: “She thinks just because she is handsome there is nobody else but her been to boarding school before” (172). Lyndall’s beauty and attire are carefully inspected by Greg Rose at the dance scene after Tant’ Sannie’s wedding. Spellbound by the spectacle of femininity, he furtively indulges in an almost eroticised scrutiny of the female body: “Lyndall sat before him, her chin resting in her hand; her eyes, steel-grey by day but black by night [...] he dared to inspect the little hands and neck [...]. She was dressed in black, [...] and the little hands were white, and the diamond ring glittered. Where had she got that ring?” (180). The visual journey becomes inquisitorial as Greg Rose appears to have detected a sign of

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<sup>20</sup> Sex “was defined by the interlacing of function and instinct, finality and signification; moreover, this was the form in which it was manifested, more clearly than anywhere else, in the model perversion, in that ‘fetishism’ which, from at least as early as 1877, served as the guiding thread for analyzing all the other deviations” (Foucault, 1978: 154).

<sup>21</sup> A fragment from Plato’s *Sofist* explains the ways sculptors dealt with the problem of proportions and perspective in Greek ancient times. They used to adapt the size of each part of the human body to the perspective from which the figure was contemplated. Hence the distinction between *eurhythmia* (the adaptation to the visual needs of the spectator) and *symmetry* (the technical application of those proportions in a mathematical way) (Eco, 2004: 75).

impropriety, a source of anxiety. His male perspective sounds almost triumphant in that final interrogation as he believes to have found the oddity, the unfitting element within an otherwise exquisitely balanced image of (white) feminine beauty.

Later on in the novel, when Lyndall has already explained herself in full and given free rein to her advanced ideas she further becomes the object of another visual scrutiny. On this occasion it is her unnamed stranger, her lover, who discovers the signs of time in the canvass of womanhood. The evolution undergone by Lyndall's appearance has added new appeals to her persona, endowing the female protagonist with a new power:

to the face whose beauty is the harmony between that which speaks from within and the form through which it speaks, power is added by all that causes the outer man to bear the impress of the inner [...] the beautiful woman finds her fulness of bloom only when a past has written itself on her, and her power is then most irresistible when it seems going. (207)

This is the definition of female beauty provided by Schreiner's narrator: equilibrium, consonance between discourse and body, a psycho-physic concord between appearance and inner self, the Greek ideal of the *kalokagathia* (Eco, 2004: 45). It is my contention that *African Farm* construes a connection between Lyndall as an aristocratic ideal of beauty (she is variously identified with a "little queen" and a "princess") and her ethical virtue, explained as the heroine's consistent adherence to her feminist creed, her loyalty to Em and Waldo, and her unflinching courage throughout the novel. The glorification of her feminine beauty is instrumental in the depiction of Lyndall as an extraordinary white woman, whose imperturbable bearing will help her deploy a liberational discourse amid the hostile environment in which she is brought up. Lyndall has arduously gained awareness towards the end of the novel, which reverberates in her outer visible self, the result of the conjoined effects of "pain and time" (206). That instance of the hegemonic discourse on womanhood, according to which a woman's soul was written in her body, is here used by the narrator in order to dismantle a conservative myth: the ugliness of the feminist woman, the emancipated female, the "woman on top".<sup>22</sup> I would argue that the construction of Lyndall as a beautiful body to admire produces an effective dislocation of the hegemonic aesthetic prejudice against the advanced woman popularised by satirical magazines like *Punch* by rewriting those charges of monstrosity onto the discursively regressive female characters in the novel. Such a decision, though racially prejudiced and reinforcing the polarised view of woman as either beauty queen or monster, is nevertheless strategically adopted for the effective transmission of feminist demands. The novel would be, in this light, consciously creating an extremely alluring heroine, a seductress that would draw us to discover the greater inner beauty of her discourse.

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<sup>22</sup> The nominal phrase is taken from the title of Natalie Zemon Davis' article in which she explores the implications of the malevolent visual treatment generally applied to the images of unruly womanhood in pre-industrial Europe ("Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe", 1978).

### 3.1.2. The Sleeping Beauty Myth

Lyndall's first appearance on stage is, in effect, as an asleep naked beauty.<sup>23</sup> In fact, she would appear to be more in keeping with the idealised abstractions found in the tradition of fairy tales. Most definitely, she is a rare beauty, of the type one does not expect to find in the middle of nowhere, amid the decadence of a poor farm in South Africa. Leaving aside the extraordinary resemblance Lyndall bears with *la belle au bois dormant*, Schreiner has created a woman protagonist that clearly resists inclusion within the gender economy of a Perrault's tale. The narrator of *African Farm* chooses to make further use of the sleeping metaphor in order to reflect the elusiveness of the passing of time both in the story and in the process of character formation that Lyndall undergoes:

Then a new time.  
Before us there were three courses possible — to go mad, to die, *to sleep*.<sup>24</sup>  
We take the later course; or nature takes it for us. (109)

Sleep becomes in this light a mechanism of self-defence in which human reason may take rest: "So the questioning Devil in us drops asleep; and in that sleep a beautiful dream rises for us. Though you hear all the dreams of men, you will hardly find a prettier one than ours" (109). The mythopoeic construction of the heroine as a sleeping beauty thus enables both her defensive cancelling of all questioning and the possibility to envision an altered status quo for women during the dream. Human is therefore to be understood explicitly in female terms. In the rationale of Schreiner's own tale, it is female incredulity and disbelief — her stern interrogation of an incomprehensibly hostile world — that puts the beauty queen, the young princess, to sleep.

In a double subversion of the fairy tale convention it is the female subject, the beauty of the karroo, who chooses to fall asleep. In this escapism from the harshness of reality she discovers the beauty of the dream, the pleasurable experience of an alternative world, the feminist utopia. It is the new woman's prerogative to indulge in the fantasy of an eternal state of welfare as "[s]leep and dreams exist on this condition — that no one wake the dreamer" (112).

Just as Lyndall is fully aware of her physical charms she understands her condition of dreamer and thus explains the frustration that the end of her sleep necessarily entails: 'I will do nothing good for myself, nothing for the world, till someone wakes me. I am asleep, swathed, shut up in self; till I have been delivered I will deliver no one' (162). When Schreiner's protagonist utters these words she is immersed in the process of developing a feminist theory of change. The transfiguration of her utopian dream into a materialist politics of feminist welfare conjures up images of pessimistic enclosure and paralysis: 'To see the good and the beautiful [...] and to have no strength to live it, is only to be Moses on the mountain of Nebo, with the land at your feet and no power to enter. It would be better not to see it' (162). Lyndall's awareness of oppression is well grounded on her lived experience both

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<sup>23</sup> In her essay *Women, Art, and Power*, Linda Nochlin has drawn our attention to the necessity to investigate into the "ongoing subtext underlying almost all individual images involving women" and to challenge the unspoken assumptions that inhere in the discourse of gender difference (1988: 2). It is particularly relevant to emphasise the total unavailability of the female nude for women artists during the nineteenth century. Nochlin records that even in 1893 (ten years after the publication of *African Farm*) life drawing was forbidden to female students at the Royal Academy in London (159).

<sup>24</sup> My own italics

in the farm and in the metropolis. No Prince Charming can kiss her free, no man's love can save her from the prison of political deprivation and powerlessness. She fantasises instead with the procrastination of the inevitable "time of waking: short, sharp, and not pleasant, as wakings often are" (112). As Christa Knellwolf has put it, the "aesthetic abstraction" in the representation of the female body is instrumental in "the recognition of social injustice and therefore is the precondition for political action" (2001: 161). I would like to argue that the discourse on beauty triggers Lyndall's shrewd analysis on womanhood and becomes a crucial device in the construction of her identity as a contradictory sign, as I intend to show in the following section.

### 3.1.3. The Looking Glass

According to the fairy-tale fantasy woman is saved from the numbness of sleep by the magical effects of heterosexual love. She can recover her freedom in so far as she is the beautiful object of male desire. Her function as gratification of male needs justifies her existence and renders her meritorious of a place within the realm of domestic bliss made possible by the gains of man's labour.

Lyndall's creation of a theory on beauty is aimed at making visible the incongruities of such a cultural narrative. The aesthetics of the New Woman rethinks the myth by a careful process of misplacement. Thus, Lyndall rewrites woman's joy precisely in her wilful decision to fall asleep — where myth had placed woman's malefic disappearance, her tragic unconsciousness — for it is in the dream that she gains consciousness and the satisfaction of seeing utopia fulfilled, while instead identifying beauty and gender asymmetry as woman's malediction: 'But we are cursed, Waldo, born cursed from the time our mothers bring us into the world till the shrouds are put on us' (154). Beauty and its reward within the fairy-tale conditioned mind, manly love, are exploited by Lyndall in a new formula of reversal that accounts for female oppression.

The critique of the contradictions Lyndall finds embedded in the concept of the pretty woman becomes the building site of equally subversive reflections on power and identity.

'the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us by the ends it sets before us. To you it says — *Work*; and to us it says — *Seem!* [...] Strength shall not help you, nor knowledge, nor labour. You shall gain what men gain, but by other means. And so the world makes men and women'. (154-55)

The workings of ideology are best seen when dealing with the mechanisms deployed in the formation of gender. Lyndall's theory makes it clear that human beings are not automatically born into a specific male or female version. One is not born a woman,<sup>25</sup> Lyndall claims as she

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<sup>25</sup> Schreiner's text becomes clearly inserted in the history of anti-essentialist narratives of sexual difference whose twentieth-century landmark has been Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). Diana Fuss has convincingly argued that "most feminist theorists are, in fact, *both* essentialists and constructionists" (1989: 121). In this sense it is possible to trace Lyndall's essentialism in her explanation of universal female oppression, or in her assumption that all women regardless of their historical and cultural circumstances are subjugated by a symbolic system which is always identical to itself. I would like to argue that Lyndall's essentialist stance is justified by its strategic value, which allows her to acknowledge the oppression of the racial female Other, as in the following observation, where race, gender and class categories are addressed: 'There at the foot of the "kopje" goes a Kaffir; he has nothing on but a blanket; he is a splendid fellow — six feet high, with a magnificent pair of legs. In his leather bag he is going to fetch his rations, and I suppose to kick his wife with his beautiful legs when he gets home. He has a right to; he has bought her for two oxen. There is a lean dog going after him, to whom I

engages in the task of “reject[ing] the idea that any essential or natural givens precede the process of social determination” (Fuss, 1989: 3). On the contrary, it is “the world”, society and culture at large, that narrow down the possibilities formerly available to us. It is the task of the dominant ideology to limit the number of subject positions at the disposal of human beings.<sup>26</sup> Hers is an anti-essentialist viewpoint that regards gender identity as the result of a construction, not as an effect of innatism. In this sense it is important to see the parallelism between Lyndall’s resort to the sleep metaphor and the possibilities Psychoanalysis has located in the realm of the unconscious since both strategies are deployed in order to show that sexual difference must be accounted for rather than taken for granted.

Such a theoretical finding appears to have tremendous political implications for Lyndall, who continues to elaborate on its consequences as she finds fault with the space the world has reserved for women. The construct of “woman” is urging born females to excel in their capacity to simulate — ‘*Seem*’ — and to be content with their ostracism regarding the world of male toil, be it physical or intellectual. Deprived of access to qualified work — the most logical means to gain a relevant social and financial status in Victorian society — women are bound to take refuge behind the only source of power allowed to them: beauty itself: ‘Look at this little chin of mine, Waldo, with the dimple in it. [...] I can win money with it, I can win love; I can win power with it, I can win fame. What would knowledge help me? The less a woman has in her head the lighter she is for climbing’ (155). It is Lyndall’s privilege to verbalise and cry out loud this mighty realisation as she sets out to disclose the subtlest intricacies underlying white women’s oppression. It is easy to suspect that almost any middle-class Victorian woman should have been fully aware of such a mechanism, on the other hand, as their survival and prosperity depended strictly on this tacit understanding. The principle of womanly modesty was conveniently operating, however, as it was meant to prevent such overt outcries as Lyndall’s.<sup>27</sup> In fact, two parallel principles were at work, that of womanly modesty and, secondly, woman’s homage and yielding to flattery.

Flattery was essentially devised to elicit woman’s belief in the verisimilitude of the most significant event of her pre-marital life: romance and the courting situation. Verisimilitude was largely dependent on female credulity, on her inner feeling that man could not resist her womanly charms. A whole socio-political system was hinged upon the successful encounter

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suppose he never gives more than a bone from which he has sucked the marrow; but his dog loves him, as his wife does. There is something of the master about him in spite of his blackness and wool. See how he brandishes his stick and holds up his head!’ (194)

<sup>26</sup> Schreiner would insist in *Woman and Labor* that sex differences are artificially emphasised by the socio-political order so as to produce gendered individuals: “If we examine the physical phenomenon of sex as it manifests itself in the human creature, we find, in the first stages of the individual’s existence, no difference discernible, [...] between those germs which are ultimately to become male or female. Later, in the fetal life, at birth, and through infancy, though the organs of sex serve to distinguish the male from the female, there is in the general structure and working of the organism little or nothing to divide the sexes”; “and such psychic differences as appear to exist in later childhood are undoubtedly very largely the result of artificial training, forcing on the appearance of psychic sexual divergencies long before they would tend to appear; as where sports and occupations are interdicted to young children on the ground of their supposed sexual unfitness; as when an infant female is forcibly prevented from climbing or shouting, and the infant male from amusing himself with needle and thread or dolls. [...] The male and female brains acquire languages, solve mathematical problems, and master scientific detail in a manner wholly indistinguishable” (1911: 187, 189). Evadne Frayling, Grand’s self-taught heroine in *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), would claim almost identical similarities in the intellectual capacities of both genders, as I shall discuss in Chapter 5, section 5.3.1.

<sup>27</sup> As in the story of Merlin and Vivien — described in Lord Alfred Tennyson’s cycle of narrative poems entitled *Idylls of the King* (1859)—the latter enticed him to disclose the secret of his magic only to use it against him. Thus women who were aware of their own sexuality and attractiveness caused general unease.

of man and woman in the romance scene. It is easy to understand why women devoted most of their energies in creating an inflated notion of themselves that would ultimately justify the inevitability of the mating system. Thus, woman began to cherish the chains of her bondage, and she did so from childhood — as Lyndall cleverly points out: ‘They begin to shape us to our cursed end [...] when we are tiny things’ (155).

The instrumentality of the looking glass in the strategy laid out by ideology cannot be sufficiently highlighted. Lyndall herself regards this most feminine object as a conspicuous tool in the personal project of becoming a woman.<sup>28</sup> For it is before the mirror that woman checks her beauty, and it is the mirror that gives back a meliorated image of the self. Woman is taught from infancy how to look at herself in the glass, and how to find thereby inscribed the promise of a reward that shall confirm her inner hopes and, thus, prevent her emancipation from the fantasy of middle-class love.

The New Woman manages to give an extra turn to the motif of the looking glass and transforms the symbol of female subjugation *par excellence* into a means of personal empowerment. Her rejection of romantic love as an oppressive fallacy leads her to give up all expectations of a male saviour — to continue with the sleeping beauty metaphor. Lyndall knows there is no Prince Charming capable of freeing and waking her — and the manly stranger masquerading as such, Lyndall’s lover, never stands a chance of performing that role. At this point the looking glass acquires a new meaning for Schreiner’s protagonist as she continues to explore its relationship with female identity. We see her holding the mirror at crucial times of her personal history: once she is determined to elope with her lover into a free union — having refused to marry him — and as she lies dying (210, and 252 respectively). Lyndall’s own tale had misplaced woman’s curse where she was meant to find reward, and in the unsavoury time of awakening and death the New Woman is left with no saviour figure other than herself: ‘We are all alone, you and I’, ‘We are not afraid; we will help ourselves!’ (252); ‘We are not afraid, you and I; we are together; we will fight you and I’ (252).<sup>29</sup> “The dead face that the glass reflected was a thing of marvellous beauty and tranquillity” (253) — Lyndall dies a sleeping beauty as she avoids male appropriation and undoes the spell cast by the looking glass.

#### 3.1.4. Lyndall’s Aestheticism

It is not a fact without significance that Schreiner should have chosen to introduce us to Lyndall as she is about to enter that stage of life mostly characterised by physical and psychological change, adolescence. With the arrival of menstruation the average middle-class Victorian girl was further subjected to a number of modifications affecting her whole range of living habits. Her education was truncated, she was fed according to a low-protein diet, and dressed for the first time with a boned corset. The supposed feebleness of her mind and

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<sup>28</sup> This is another crucial instance of the affinity between Lyndall’s approach to the explanation of the socio-political space that “woman” represents and psychoanalytical theory. The work of Jacques Lacan has developed a model of identity formation in which the mirror catalyses the acquisition of gendered subjectivity and a place in the symbolic order. Prior to this mirror phase the child is neither feminine nor masculine, and the contemplation of itself in the mirror brings back an imaginary sense of the self as the source of meaning of which it is an effect. See, for example, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose’s (eds.) *Feminine Sexuality: Jaques Lacan and the École Freudienne* (1982), or Elizabeth Grosz’s *Jacques Lacan. A Feminist Introduction* (1990).

<sup>29</sup> The same realisation is reached in Schreiner’s “Three Dreams in a Desert” (1890), where the heroine can only count on her own resources to free herself once she has internalised the subject condition of woman: “He cannot help her: *she must help herself*” (*Dreams*: 73, emphasis in original).

fragility of her body were the most commonly held arguments that justified the enforcement of self-restraint and discipline.<sup>30</sup> It was at this particular moment in a girl's life, this time of self-suppression in which a woman was subtly indoctrinated with making the least of her, when the novelist decides to produce Lyndall's declaration of personal ambitions:

‘When I am grown up [...] there will be nothing that I do not know. I shall be rich, very rich; and I shall wear not only for the best, but every day, a pure white silk, and little rose-buds, like the lady in Tant’ Sannie’s bed-room, and my petticoats will be embroidered, not only at the bottom, but all through’. (12)

Set against the context above described, Lyndall's requisition sounds enraged, exacerbated, definitely improper. Knowledge, wealth, and fancy dress are interwoven in a fantasy of adult female power. The central importance she gives to costume was shared by all Victorians, for whom dress was the reflection of both occupation and social stature. Interestingly, Lyndall gives a first twist to convention as she dreams about an ideal outfit whose lavishness shall mirror her own personal riches — and most significantly, not those of a potential husband. Despite her young age, Schreiner's protagonist is fully aware of the fact that a woman's identity was read in the clothes she wore. It is befitting in this sense that her personal endeavour to become a wealthy woman should be corresponded by her interest in exhibiting the sort of attire that bespeak fortune.

Lyndall's utterance ultimately asserts her aspiration to indulge excessively in all that is conspicuously forbidden to woman. Her love of splendour and magnificence, her eagerness for sumptuous fabrics and luxurious underwear reveal an inadequate passion for sartorial elegance that was found to be intemperate by Victorian moralists — particularly as married women were supposed to wear dressier outfits than single women. The Baroness Staffe, in *The Lady's Dressing-Room* affirmed that ‘A virtuous woman has a repugnance to excessive luxury in her underclothing’, thus inscribing female morality in the modesty displayed by her dressing habits, even those which were best not spoken of.<sup>31</sup> Lyndall is not immune to the allure of a beautiful and expensive dress, it is a commodity to which she aspires in so far as it will speak of her own wealth, the wealth of a knowledgeable woman. Her most unpardonable breach of propriety, however, is not the aspiration *per se*, but rather the fact that she should verbalise it.

Lyndall's return to the farm after her four-year absence at the boarding school is first acknowledged by Waldo on account of a change in her clothing: “She wore a dress of a simple cotton fabric, but very fashionably made, and on her head was a broad white hat. To Waldo she seemed superbly attired. She saw it. ‘My dress has changed a little’, she said, ‘and I also; but not to you’” (151). Lyndall is no longer the pinafores girl she used to be. She has become a proud young woman and she wants that change to be reflected in her clothes. She may not be able to wear a new white silk every day, but she certainly manages to show off

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<sup>30</sup> See Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House* (2003). London: Harper Perennial, 2004. Her chapter “The Morning Room” (pp. 254-285) provides an interesting account of Victorian dressing habits.

<sup>31</sup> Baroness Staffe, *The Lady's Dressing Room*, trs. Lady Colin Campbell (London, Cassel & Co., 1892: 236). Quoted in Flanders (p. 270) who adds that “Even in France, thought by many to be a running sewer of depravity, elaborate underwear was suspect”.

clothes to her greatest advantage, even the easily affordable ones made of cotton.<sup>32</sup> We get to see her wearing different outfits that provide an image of conflicting womanhood. In her first appearance back in the farm, “[s]he was more like a princess, yes, far more like a princess, than the lady who still hung in Tant’ Sannie’s bedroom” (149). With her hair combed out and hanging to the ground, wearing a grey dressing-gown, Lyndall’s beauty surpasses that of the woman in the illustration on the wall. By virtue of her image she would have erased all trace of her original belonging to the social structure of the farm — an impression shared by other characters who are deceived by Lyndall’s appearance. The landlady who lodges the protagonist at the end of the novel thus describes what she imagines to be Lyndall’s financial situation: “She has heaps of money [...] has everything money can buy” (240). The counter-factuality of such an assumption comes to highlight the contradictory nature of the New Woman’s image. It is interesting to bear in mind, to this respect, the way in which an advice book published in the early 1870s warned its readers: “A lady should never dress above her station; it [...] leads to all sorts of evils”.<sup>33</sup> The fact that we never get to see Lyndall wearing mourning clothes after the death of her infant child is equally indicative of a most unconventional female identity.<sup>34</sup> After a period of convalescence immediately following her tragic loss she thus commands her nurse, Gregory Rose: ‘Get one of my white dresses — the one with the pink bows. I do not even want to think that I’ve been ill’ (250).

The fascination for jewellery exhibited by the New Woman is present throughout Schreiner’s novel and Lyndall’s personal history. An adolescent brought up in the barrenness of a semi-desert, Lyndall makes a point of her taste for self-ornamentation. Chapter II registers her artistic fastening of an ice-plant leaf “on to the front of her blue pinafore with a pin” (11). The satisfaction of this simple act of self-embellishment triggers Lyndall’s first reflection on the importance of jewels in the formation of female identity: “‘Diamonds must look as these drops do’, she said, carefully bending over her leaf, and crushing one crystal drop with her delicate little nail. ‘When I [...] am grown up, I shall wear real diamonds, exactly like these, in my hair’” (11).<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> High-quality cotton and linen fabrics were mass-produced from the late eighteenth century which “meant that these fabrics were affordable for the working and middle-classes; the fact that they could be washed, unlike silk, was an added bonus which resulted in an improvement in general standards of hygiene” (Blackman, 2003: 18).

<sup>33</sup> Ross Murray. *The Modern Householder: A Manual of Domestic Economy in all its Branches* (London, Frederick Warne & Co., 1872), pp. 372-74.

<sup>34</sup> The devastation suffered by Queen Victoria upon the sudden death of her Prince Consort in 1861 was shown in the strict mourning she kept until her own death, some forty years later. A very rigid code of appropriate mourning clothes was accordingly devised and enforced to varying degrees among all social classes, as women “at the lower end of the scale had to attempt on a small income to obey rules laid down by the more prosperous” (Flanders, 2003: 341. See particularly chapter 10, “The Sickroom”, pp. 302-48). A mother of a deceased infant was supposed to keep a first mourning of three months, often with no crape. See also, Suzanne Fagence Cooper, *The Victorian Woman*. London: V & A Publications, 2001 (“Death and Mourning” pp. 22-26).

<sup>35</sup> Lyndall’s taste for diamonds may be confronted with the ideas put forward by Schreiner in *The South African Question* and her fears, towards the end of the century, of seeing South Africa’s “mines of gold and diamonds, its coal fields and even its most intractable lands, [...] passed into the hands of a very small knot of speculators” (1899: 70). Similarly, the feminist writer charges against the “low fever of anxiety for chance wealth” that feeds on the population of South Africa, particularly on gambling women whose greed for easy riches aligns them with the category of the prostitute. The association of female gamblers and harlots — a nineteenth-century apprehension present in novels such as George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876) — is explored by Schreiner in her critique of those women decked “with a thousand pounds’ worth of jewels, while the South African next door has nothing” (64), and her persistent observation that “the wealth that should have made us one of the richest peoples in the world has left us one of the poorest, and [...] decks foreign women with jewels, while our citizens toil in poverty” (71). It is quite contradictory that Schreiner should construct her feminist heroine in fiction in a way so contrary to the ideas she espoused in her non-fictional work.

The resolution to be gratified with the exhibition of diamonds forces Em to launch that most disturbing question: ‘Where will you find them, Lyndall?’ (11). Em’s domesticated imagination can only conceive of female access to the icon of wealth through marriage: ‘but now we are only twelve, and we cannot marry till we are seventeen’ (11) — without daring to envisage a different means to provide for her future comfort. One of the ironies of imperialism was the creation of an ideal of bourgeois woman whose direct dependency on the profits of the increasingly parasitic British economy<sup>36</sup> was built on her ignorance of the squalid aspects of colonialism (Ledger, 1997: 63). Lyndall, of course, does not venture to question the origin of the diamonds she is craving for, nor does she attempt to establish any connection between the rapine of the African colonial body and the lucre of Victorian femininity. Far from that. She starts instead to lay out an entirely different plan from Em’s, complicit as it is with the general design of the imperialist project. Given her disadvantageous position as a female orphan of scarce means she expresses her desire to spread her wings and leave the farm. Unlike Em, Lyndall cannot hope for the arrival of any riches, which legitimises her discourse: ‘When you are seventeen this Boer-woman will go; you will have this farm and everything that is upon it for your own; but I, [...] will have nothing. I must learn’ (12). The New Woman predicates her right to have an education upon the sheer necessity to make her own living. Just as in Lyndall’s rationale there was no Prince Charming, the second mighty realisation is that there shall be no uninterested, bountiful provider. “‘There is nothing helps in this world’, said the child slowly, ‘but to be very wise, and to know everything — to be clever’” (12).

Unfortunately, Lyndall’s idealisation of education will prove to be another fantasy as her financial position and prospects are not significantly altered once she is back from her boarding school. Fifty pounds are everything she has for a fortune and these she shall eventually bequeath to Em from her dying bed. Notwithstanding her meagre advances to this respect, it takes her exactly four years to get herself a huge diamond ring. Lyndall is now a nineteen-year-old girl disenchanted with her experience at the boarding school. Back to the farm after a four-year lapse she flaunts her jewel with an “intense amusement” (25) which is significantly absent from most of her other scenes in the novel. The disproportionate size of her jewel characterises “a ring more suitable for the hand of a man, and noticeable in design — a diamond cross set into gold, with the initials ‘R.R.’ below it” (149). Lyndall’s joyful and proud display of her jewelled finger is unmistakably taken for a sign of a secret engagement by Em’s tractable mind, which occasions Lyndall’s most affronted new-womanly response: ‘I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man’s foot; and I do not so greatly admire the crying of babies [...]. There are other women glad of such work’ (149).

Such an immodest ostentation of the jewel inevitably rises alarming questions with regard to its origin and purpose. Proper ladies were disciplined into the right way to include jewellery as a part of their own attire: women’s attractiveness was regarded as the reflection of the comfort and wealth enjoyed at home, it was the token of the financial prosperity attained by the Victorian male. The exhibition of beautiful attire was proper in so far as it referred to somebody else’s gains, the father’s or the husband’s. Women were therefore expected to remain entirely aloof from the process of money-making. It is in this context that Lyndall’s affront must be taken into consideration. For her, ‘a woman who has sold herself,

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<sup>36</sup> For a discussion on how Britain was ceasing to be a competitive world economy, living at the expense of her plundering of Africa, see Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

ever for a ring and a new name, need hold her skirt aside for no creature in the street. They both earn their bread in one way' (156). The wealth a woman attains through marriage is not only disempowering but also degrading for her sex, it erases the frontiers between the self-possessed, lawful middle-class woman and the prostitute. Schreiner would put it quite bluntly in *Woman and Labor*:

Probably three-fourths of the sexual unions in our modern European societies, are dominated by or largely influenced by the sex purchasing power of the male. With regard to the large and savage institution of prostitution, which still lies as a cancer embedded in the heart of all our modern civilized societies, this is obviously nakedly the case; the wealth of the male as compared to the female being, with hideous obtrusiveness, its foundation and source of life. But the purchasing power of the male as compared with the poverty of the female is not less painfully, if a little less obtrusively, displayed in those layers of society lying nearer the surface: From the fair, effete young girl of the wealthier classes in her city boudoir, who weeps copiously as she tells you she cannot marry the man she loves, because he has only two hundred a year and cannot afford to keep her, to the father who demands frankly of his daughter's suitor how much he can settle on her before consenting to his acceptance, the fact remains, that, under existing conditions, not the amount of sex affection and attraction, but the extraneous question of the marital possessions of the male, determines to a large extent the relation of the sexes. (1911: 252-53)

Interestingly, for the benefit of the New Woman and her feminist discourse, it was necessary to maintain those frontiers perfectly discriminated. The prostitute and the middle-class wife in search of financial security had their "freedom of choice" equally limited. Only the "entrance of woman to the new fields of labor and her increase freedom and intelligence will dislocate the relations of the sexes" (Schreiner, 1911: 255).

Lyndall's fracture of the expectations raised by her ring brings about a second modification of the symbolic order, similar to the one accomplished by her treatment of the looking glass. Schreiner's precocious feminist uses the ring as a symbol in order to reveal the fallacy of the so-called pedestal theory, according to which women were kept in an artificial position of superiority so as to prevent their access to the solution of their problems. Trotting out her precious stone, Lyndall launches a rhetorical question:

'Don't you wish you were a woman, Waldo?' (153). The negative answer received from the poorest orphan in the farm, Lyndall's soul mate, comes as no surprise for her: 'I thought not. Even you are too worldly-wise for that. I never met a man who did. This is a pretty ring', she said, holding out her little hand, that the morning sun might make the diamonds sparkle. 'Worth fifty pounds at least. I will give it to the first man who tells me he would like to be a woman. There might be one on Robbin Island who would win it perhaps, but I doubt it even there. It is delightful to be a woman; but every man thanks the Lord devoutly that he isn't one'. (153)

The process Lyndall follows in her disclosure of the cultural fallacy of women's social superiority is neat. Firstly, she has torn to pieces the hegemonic association held between the ring and matrimony as "some form of sexual sale" and, secondly, she has deprived the jewel of its magical function: that of erasing all trace of a hierarchical link between man and wife.

Deferential admiration of the female object was surreptitiously meant to compensate for her powerlessness before an all-mighty husband (Schreiner, 1911: 257).

The ring, therefore, has helped identify and single out one of the most operative paradoxes of the socio-political order. The exacerbated desire brought about by woman was in direct proportion to the aversion produced by the idea of becoming one.<sup>37</sup> Desire for the female object is predicated upon the silenced repulsion of being the object herself. Lyndall's conclusions, drawn through her concern with jewellery, sound particularly audacious as she rhetorically challenges Waldo to rebut her arguments. Interestingly, the three male categories tentatively addressed by the feminist pioneer as possible wilful holders of the ring and the female identity attached to it, are the poor, the aesthete, and the lunatic. However, she soon discards as ludicrous her fantasy of gender exchanging. What Lyndall is trying to point out is that, regardless of the oppression any human being may be subject to — be it caused by extreme poverty or mental derangement — gender oppression is always already there, operating in the first place and prior to all others.

### 3.2. DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL

#### 3.2.1. Lyndall's Freedom of Speech

The analysis of language in Schreiner's novel is fundamental in my own tracing of the ways in which subjectivity is textually constructed, as well as in the examination of the clashes produced by antagonistic discourses on the female individual as they comply with or resist the established power relations induced by patriarchy.

The first part of *The Story of an African Farm* comprises thirteen chapters during which Schreiner's protagonist is mostly silent. Her first years of adolescence are characterised by a verbal stillness, which is all the more striking when compared with the deluge of words Lyndall vents after her return from the boarding school, once she has come of age. Such a linguistic repose, however, is effectively counterbalanced by a few comments of great impact, which are taken to be signs of her individuality and eccentricity in the farm. Likewise, the first half of the story is the space devoted to the exhibition of the monolithic discourses wielded by those subjects which are closer to caricature than to character in the novel. Lyndall's response to the discursive behaviour of Bonaparte Blenkins and Tant' Sannie in particular, as well as to Em's masochistic language, are instrumental in the forging of the feminist subjecthood enacted by Schreiner's revolutionary text.

Lyndall's earliest attempt on self assertion arises in the explanation she produces to her orphan cousin Em, who is ridden by frustration as she is unable to perform the easiest of domestic tasks; Lyndall appears to have mastered the technique of threading beads without ever letting any fall off her needle: "'I try', said the little one gravely, moistening her tiny finger. 'That is why'" (5). Perseverance is the lesson implied by the twelve-year-old protagonist whose discerning capacity is noted in one of those few occasions in which the narrator's own comments are introduced: "She never made a mistake" (8). The construction

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<sup>37</sup> Elaine Showalter has associated the symbol of the ring to the image of the *os cervix* Schreiner used in *Woman and Labor*. The ring stands in this sense for the "*os cervix* of woman, through which the head of a human infant passes at birth" (1977: 195). Similarly, Helen Bradford has argued that the ring is a symbol of the pregnant womb (1995: 633). Men would be therefore repelled by the idea of fulfilling woman's reproductive functions.

of Lyndall as a reference of power in the farm despite the obvious shortcomings of a young girl growing up in such a far-flung outpost of the empire is worthy of some consideration.

The self-esteem Lyndall already exhibits in the shaping years of her adolescence is so consolidated that it necessarily establishes a conflict with one of the theories Schreiner's novel would be trying to endorse, the construction of the subject through experience. The notion of identity posed in the first part of the novel is then somewhat problematic in the light of Lyndall's representation as an all-conscious, knowing and rational subject. Her remarks contribute to a rather unified image of her identity, particularly those regarding her confrontation with discipline in the story. Power of will is offered as an essential quality defining Lyndall's personality from the start, enabling her to change the course of her own life and even twist her aunt round with her little finger, so to speak. Her determination to provide herself with a proper education is so firm that she does not even consider for a minute Tant' Sannie's opposition: "'I intend to go to school' [and if she won't let me] 'I shall make her'" (11). The idea of Lyndall as a mighty individual regardless of her young age is further reinforced by Em's words of admiration for "she *always* does what she says" (42).

Lyndall seems to be always in earnest, particularly as she has to face the fanaticism and the claims of infallibility that mark Bonaparte Blenkins's discourse. The newly arrived outlander — Tartuffe like — has taken control of the farm and its inhabitants by concealing his greed and most spurious ends under a veil of religious rightfulness that gains him a position of undisputed power. Bonaparte chastises Waldo at will and tortures Em exercising a domestic violence that draws Tant' Sannie's complacency but brings in Lyndall's rebelliousness. His double role as instructor of the children and as religious lecturer is thus challenged by the young heroine, who openly denies the punitive authority he represents. Once she has discovered that the English man is an impostor — who takes Copernicus for an Emperor of Rome — Lyndall consistently contests his influence in the farm as we learn from Em: 'whenever he talks she just looks out at the door, as though she did not hear him [...] she just put her books under her arm and walked out; and she will never come to his school again' (42).

Lyndall's interest in astronomy and the zodiac signs is considered inadequate by Blenkins's disciplinary mind, "not a fit and proper thing for little girls to talk about" (42). His futile efforts to maintain the control of knowledge and to keep female speech under surveillance are crucial in the way the story vertebrates Lyndall's reaction to lying, to non-factuality, as well as her indefatigable quest for truth. There are two instances in which Blenkins gives his unchecked opinion in the novel that seem particularly relevant. The first occasion takes place when he is asked for an informed explanation on who Copernicus was, "and he said he was one of the Emperors of Rome, who burned Christians in a golden pig, and the worms ate him up while he was still alive" (42). The second episode concerns his conclusions with regard to book reading in the farm, an activity he categorically forbids:

Whenever you come into contact with any book, person, or opinion of which you absolutely comprehend nothing, declare that book, person, or opinion to be immoral. Bespatter it, vituperate against it, strongly insist that any man or woman harbouring it is a fool or a knave, or both. Carefully abstain from studying it. Do all that in you lies to annihilate that book, person, or opinion. (79)

It is only appropriate that one of the books secretly enjoyed by Waldo should be John Stuart Mill's *Political Economy*, which Blenkins, in a wild stretch of his imagination, takes to be

dealing “with the cheapest way of procuring clothing for the army and navy” (79). Mill had defended the liberty of thought and discussion as one of the main tenets of the modern state and a guarantee of its material and moral progress for “the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation” (Mill, 1859: 19). The evil that lurks behind such an unimaginative individual as Bonaparte Blenkins spreads not so much from his violence and the repression he exerts upon his fellow creatures, but rather from his total inability to establish real communication and give credit to any opinion that might differ from those commonly held as prevalent, which he takes to be his own.

Significantly, Blenkins’s speech is not at all comprehensible for those individuals in the farm whom he manages to deceive and allure. His love talk to Tant’ Sannie’s obese niece, the wealthy Boer heiress, reveals his utter dismissal of language as an effective means of communication: “he understood that it is the eye, the tone, the action, and not at all the rational word, that touches the love-chords” (96). Chapter V (Part I) is equally revealing with regard to Blenkins’s disposition towards language. As a preacher addressing his parishioners, he would be expected to show with eagerness the skills of a talented speaker; however, his performance is above all physical. Tant’ Sannie is particularly impressed by his shining black cloth, the one thing that “exercised a subduing influence over her” (35). The display of studied poses, and his exaggerated mannerism are in keeping with his fake solemnity and his effective disregard for truth<sup>38</sup>. The way he groans at “the end of each line” and “twice at the end of each verse”, the gravity as he sits down, the compulsive rearranging of his clothes, and nose blowing — the appendix in which the evidence of his bogus kinship to the aristocracy would reside — are all part and parcel of his strategy to delude a congregation which he knows to be willing to conform with received knowledge (36). Hence, all the narrator’s comments on Blenkins’s sensational Sunday service — adequately entitled “What is a liar?” — focus on visual aspects aimed at revealing the fraudulent nature of his speech. Leaving aside Em and Lyndall, the only attendants who speak English, the rest of the audience is comprised of Tant’ Sannie (the Boer woman) and a few unnamed Africans who “did not understand the discourse, which made it the more affecting” (39).

Blenkins’s discursive flaws, his assumption of infallibility and claims to absolute certainty are in fact the result, rather than the origin, of his utter fear of language as a means to exchange and produce knowledge. The intolerance and bigotry J. S. Mill had charged against are paradigmatic in Blenkins’s restraints on discussion, and also — as I intend to show — in Tant’ Sannie’s defective understanding of verbal communication. Language is a constant source of conflict for this character throughout the novel. Her frequent swearing in Cape Dutch is as violent as her irrational prejudice against book reading. Her inability to understand English precludes a successful interaction with one of her suitors, Blenkins, as well as a first-hand experience with the Bible, the only text she would ever consider handling. Tant’ Sannie

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<sup>38</sup> Both Bonaparte Blenkins and Tant’ Sannie are characters heavily influenced by the force of uncontested hegemonic discourses, which they try to wield or incorporate in their own interest. *African Farm* is a novel which tried to build — through the discursive gift of its tragic heroine — a resistance against such predicaments which were passed as truths despite (or probably because of) the fact that they were never object of rational analysis. According to Schreiner, “[t]he fact that a statement is frequently made or a view held forms no presumptive ground of its truth; but it is undoubtedly a ground for supposing that there is an *appearance* or semblance which makes it appear truth, and which suggests it. The universally entertained conception that the sun moved round the world was not merely false, but the reverse of the truth; all that was required for its inception was the fallacious appearance suggesting it” (1911: 249).

is on the side of received opinions, and her discourse is inflected with superstition and a fanatic assertion of blind obedience to the Calvinistic law according to which whatever is not a duty, is a sin:

‘is *this* a time to bring ungodly things about the place, to call down the vengeance of the Almighty God to punish us more? Didn’t the minister tell me when I was confirmed not to read any book except my Bible and hymn-book, that the Devil was in all the rest? And I never have read any other book’, said Tant’ Sannie with virtuous energy, ‘and I never will!’ (80-81)

Just as the Boer woman must rely on the Hottentot maid’s dubious skill to adapt the Bible into Dutch, knowledge is always the result of a poor translation. Her unquestioned acceptance of what is customary and her stagnant refusal of whichever opinions might be at variance with those prescribed by the authority render Tant’ Sannie as a vulnerable character hardly deserving the rank of individual. She thus falls an easy prey of Blenkins’s fallacious adulation and of his appeal to the doctrine of human nature’s basic corruptness as he maliciously indicts the compassionate German Otto for stealing one of her sheep. Tant’ Sannie’s brutal recrimination of the theft that she takes for granted is ironically substantiated on her ability to grasp meaning: ‘You thought he could not make me understand, but he did, you old fool! I know enough English for that’ (55). The severe domestic rule of the Boer woman is manifested in her resistance to widen the space for debate as old Otto begs for a chance to defend himself, for an opportunity to contest the falsehoods Bonaparte Blenkins has fabricated. Verbal violence — the “flood of speech” that Tant’ Sannie vented and which “convulsed the Hottentot, so low were its images” — demarcates a discursive stance that dreads speculation once it has established an opinion as truth (57). Misleading uninstructed people is Blenkins’s prerogative as he proclaims himself the enemy of “free discussion”, which Schreiner’s novel — I would like to argue — clearly interpreted in the terms J. S. Mill had made explicit:

That simple minds, having been taught the obvious grounds of the truths inculcated in them, may trust authority for the rest, and being aware that they have neither knowledge nor talent to resolve every difficulty which can be raised, may repose in the assurance that all those which have been raised have been or can be answered, by those who are specifically trained to the task. (Mill, 1859: 39)

Lyndall’s positioning with regard to language and discussion is consciously situated on the side of rational debate as she contradicts and disproves at will the opinions programmed by the established authority. Her concern with language as a sign of identity is made apparent in the offence she takes at Tant’ Sannie’s coarse discursive manners, from which Schreiner’s feminist protagonist intends to protect her impressionable cousin: “‘Come, Em’, said Lyndall, lifting her small, proud head, ‘let us go in. We will not stay to hear such language’” (57). As a little child, Schreiner had been forbidden to speak Dutch, particularly by her English Dissenting mother, Rebecca Lyndall, “for English was the language of the racially elect and the borders of racial difference had to be violently policed” (McClintock, 1995: 262).<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>39</sup> Schreiner recalled being whipped fifty times when she was only five for swinging on a door handle and using a taboo Dutch word, exclaiming: “Ach, it is so nice outside” (Lessing, 1968: xvi).

memories of the violence inflicted by her mother are echoed in the constant lashes and physical assault to which most characters are subject in the novel.

The tyrannical exercise of power is instrumental in Lyndall's personal development as well as in the shaping of her meticulously rational speech. The cruel episode in which both Em and Lyndall are locked in so as to prevent their farewell to old Otto is particularly relevant to this respect. Thus, while Em despairs and accepts the situation as inevitable, Lyndall puts all her means to abscond their new prison and tries to make a hole. Em timidly inquires about Lyndall's prospects of success: 'Do you think you will be able to?', 'No; but I am trying' is her laconic response as she plans to burn down the whole house (58). Perseverance is accompanied by an active resistance to accept fate as inescapable, but most importantly by her opposition to adopt the discursive role of the victim: 'If you like to sit there and howl till the morning, do. Perhaps you will find that it helps; I never heard that howling helped anyone' (59). Repressive power tries to instil meekness in those whom it considers and treats as its inferiors. Lyndall discourages Em from abiding by the discursive law which dictates mortification and self-denial as a means to address those in charge of power, convinced as she is that it is precisely the voluntary impersonation of such a linguistic stance that justifies power in the exertion of its misconceived authority: 'The more you beg the more he will not' (93).

One of the linguistic strategies devised by Lyndall's speech in its determination to ward off coercion is the change of verbal modality. Following the dictates of her maxim: 'Life is too short to run after might, we must have certainties', she would appear to be turning mere possibility into definiteness (162). Her authoritative discourse is revealed in her overriding preference of the imperative mode, as she demands from Waldo: 'You must teach me to drive. I must learn something while I am here', or as she tries to ease Waldo's pain: 'You must forget', 'You must eat' (68), or — more significantly, as she urges him to 'Speak! speak!' (162). The enforcement of silence as a mechanism to prevent the development of thought and discussion is a particularly relevant target in Lyndall's rhetorical attacks, which ultimately stress the novel's concern with the control over language. For Schreiner's feminist protagonist 'the difficulty is not to speak; the difficulty is to keep silence' (162), resolved as she is to regain the position of power denied to women within the system of patriarchy that wields the regulation of speech as "the tool of subjection" (Knellwolf, 2001: 178).

Quite significant, then, is the narcotic effect Lyndall's speech undergoes towards the end of the story in that finely sensual encounter with "her stranger". As the narrator comments, "It certainly was not in her power to resist him", and for the first time in the entire novel we witness how Lyndall suspends language as she can barely answer the embrace of the manly man with just a few monosyllables: 'Don't you want to talk to me?' 'No'; 'Do you want to be quiet now?' 'Yes' (207). The discursive position temporarily adopted proves to be both a source of conflict in Lyndall's representation as a coherent feminist subject as well as an attempt to account for the uncomfortable pleasure involved in allowing man to arrogate power to himself. It is thus a vehicle in Lyndall's understanding of sexual indulgence as a mighty force at work in women's traditional role of willing subordination. Schreiner's novel, however, grants its protagonist the chance to recuperate fully the timbre of her voice as she lies in her death bed bossing Gregory Rose around: 'Now open the shutter wide', 'Now bring my books to me', she said motioning eagerly with her little fingers 'the large book, and the reviews, and the plays; I want them all'. As the narrator confirms: "The old, old tone was again in the sweet voice. He obeyed her" (244).

Chapter IV of the novel's second part, simply entitled "Lyndall", offers an exclusive space for the protagonist to engage in a rational debate on the woman question. This chapter adopts the form of a dialogue in which most reflections are triggered by the questions Lyndall rhetorically poses to Waldo. It is almost a debating society, in miniature and peripatetically arrayed, that finds its first stimulus in her provocative interrogations: 'Don't you wish you were a woman, Waldo?', 'Do you take an interest in the position of women, Waldo?' (153).

The style of discussion adopted by Lyndall is ostensibly indebted to Mill's writings. Her tendency to dissect arguments and, particularly, to argue both sides of an issue is highly indicative of her professed love for certainties, after which she can only aspire through the careful examination and contrast with antagonistic discourses. A zeal for analytic acuteness characterises Lyndall's exposition:

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

'If the bird *does* like its cage, and does like its sugar and will not leave it, why keep the door so very carefully shut? Why not open it, only a little?' (159)

In *Woman and Labor*, Schreiner would answer Lyndall's question by commenting on the real causes that lay behind the cultural imperative of the middle-class woman's absence from the professions:

We, we men of the race, will perform its mean, its sordid, its grinding toil! For woman is beauty, peace, repose! Your function is to give life, not to support it by labor. [...]

It is the thought of the woman-doctor with an income of some hundreds a year, who spends the evening smoking and reading before her study fire or receiving her guests; it is the thought of the woman who, as legislator, may loll for perhaps six hours on the padded seat of legislative bench, relieving the tedium now and then by a turn in the billiard or refreshment-room, when she is not needed to vote or speak, it is the woman as Greek professor, with three or four hundred a year [...]; it is she who wrings his heart. It is not the woman, who, on hands and knees, at tenpence a day, scrubs the floors of the public buildings, or private dwellings, that fills him with anguish for womanhood: [...] It is not the labor, or the amount of labor, so much as the amount of reward that interferes with his ideal of the eternal womanly; (1911: 212, 213).

Thus, the real source of anguish was the notion of women as competitors in the public space once they had been given access to the higher professions. The dismantling of the powerful argument according to which women's disabilities were grounded on their happy consent to be dominated, serves as a reference of the link Lyndall's discourse establishes between Mill's concern with the "fatality of birth" — which excluded women from the education and the professions open to men — and the post-structuralist, feminist focus on the access to knowledge as a key political issue. Chris Weedon thus explained one of the aims of late twentieth-century feminism: "We need a theory of the relation between language, subjectivity, social organization and power" (Weedon, 1987: 12). It is my contention that the most daring intellectual pose Lyndall enacts, and the feminist agenda Schreiner's novel

predetermined at the beginning of the 1880s, constitute a clear adumbration of the exigencies that were to be still highlighted over a century later. In her attempts to make sense of the existing mechanisms at work in the subordination of women to the interests of men, Lyndall's eloquent analysis is carefully constructed as a consciously political speech. Her loquacious examples and counterexamples, the verbosity unleashed in order to exhaust all possible lines of argument with regard to the position of women as social inferiors is balanced by few occasions in which she speaks "very measuredly" (159). Schreiner's chapter constitutes almost a practical lesson on how to make a speech, and it ultimately suggests a notion of language as the most effective site of political change. Lyndall's obsessive distinction between the points of view of two differing subject positions confers an anaphoric tone to her disquisition:

'Then they say, "If the women have the liberty you ask for, they will be found in positions for which they are not fitted!" [...] 'They say women have one great and noble work left them, and they do it ill'. (159)

'They say that we complain of woman's being compelled to look upon marriage as a profession; but that she is free to enter upon it or leave it as she pleases'. [...] 'They ask, "What will you gain, [...]? When men and women are equals they will love no more'. (161)

The constant confrontation of what a blurred "they" has prescribed as the natural discourse on woman with the demands of Lyndall's assertive "we", makes explicit her sense of belonging to a gender, the female, which is understood in terms of political subordination: 'And then, when they have no other argument against us, they say — "Go on; but when you have made women what you wish, and her children inherit her culture, you will defeat yourself. [...]" Fools!' she said, curling her pretty lip" (160). The argumentative nature of her speeches inevitably aligns Schreiner's protagonist with the figure of the platform speaker, capable of alluring her audience. She is, more than ever before, the monster that takes the floor and speaks. The cautionary resonance that tinges Lyndall's discourse reaches at times the ardour of a political agitator eager to bring about a feminist politics of change, as Waldo encourages her to pursue: 'But why do you not bring that time?' 'When you speak I believe all you say; other people would listen to you also' (162).

The mental vigour displayed in her daring speculations is equally significant in Lyndall's explicit challenge of the discursive positions conventionally assigned to men and women, as representative of their differentiated interests: 'Women bore me, and men. I talk so to — "Going to the ball this evening? — Nice little dog that of yours. — Pretty little ears. — So fond of pointer pups!" — And they think me fascinating, charming!' (165). The theory of language thus generated restores the notion whereby the transformation of political relations must be necessarily predicated on a conscious objection to the social pressures to conform. A constant rethinking of linguistic production as well as of the type of language produced is therefore instrumental in Lyndall's project to defy the rules of conduct as established by the despotism of convention. The struggle against inertia and homogenisation is in this sense a source of intellectual gratification: 'No, don't thank me; I come for my own pleasure. I never find anyone I can talk to' (165).

### 3.2.2. The Politics of Change: Lyndall as a Desiring Subject

At this point I would like to focus on one of the most pervading aspects of *African Farm*, the arguable nihilism it predicates as a means to bring about its project of political change. I have tried to explain at the beginning of the present chapter that the realist method adopted by Schreiner — “the method of the life we all lead” (xxxix) — deprived its readers of the satisfactions that inhere in the predictable recognition of stereotyped gender roles in the events narrated, while it created, by the same token, a politically enabling space for a new woman’s subjectivity: the *topos* of uncertainty as the realm of the possible. One of the most significant disruptions carried out by *African Farm* on the expectations generated by the *Bildungsroman* affects the pace of narrative time. Patricia Murphy has studied temporal subversion in Schreiner’s novel and claimed that it “situates masculine linear temporality as a controlling force” while “simultaneously disrupt[ing] its hegemony through the inexorable intervention of feminine time. In the narrative chaos that ensues, *African Farm* creates a liberatory space within which alternate constructions of gender can be imagined and enacted”<sup>40</sup> (Murphy, 2001: 190). The traditional Victorian novel tended to reinforce restrictive gender roles through its linearity, conventional narrative structure and “teleological format”. As Murphy reminds us, drawing on Rachel Blau DuPlessis,<sup>41</sup> “such texts indirectly reinforce the separate spheres; by offering only limited scenarios for a female character, these narratives implicitly validate them” (190). Schreiner’s new conception of realism called for a representation of characters who were not at ease in their gendered life experiences, thus allowing for a new hermeneutical possibility in which readers could react to and be confronted with the frustrations inherent in being a woman in the colonies. By erasing the link between the novel and the expectations of univocal progress in character formation, Schreiner’s text was proposing a venture into the uncertainties of a new gender semiotics where the possibilities of interpretation and creation could be expanded.

The final questions posed by the narrator of *African Farm* upon Lyndall’s death sound rather disturbing for a reader in search of absolute truths: “Had she found what she sought for — something to worship? Had she ceased from being? Who shall tell us? There is a veil of terrible mist over the face of the Hereafter” (253). The lack of an omniscient narrator supports the idea that there is no God: “Now we have no God”,<sup>42</sup> “What should we think of now? All is emptiness” (113, 116). Within this Nietzschean regime, we are all alone, Lyndall in her death bed, in the text — and so are we as readers. There can be no certainties, not even about the presence of life or death. Lyndall’s indefatigable pursuit of truth — “we must have certainties” (162) — symbolises the vain search of the humanist subject that wishes to attain full consciousness through experience. The protagonist’s unflinching resoluteness, her stalwart “trying” (58) contrasts with one of the most potent naturalistic images in the text, the vain struggle to survive of a black beetle which has been toiling in its effort to furnish its

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<sup>40</sup> See in particular her chapter entitled “Dissolving the Boundaries: Temporal Subversion in *The Story of an African Farm*”, *Time is of the Essence. Temporality, Gender, and the New Woman* (2001). Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, pp: 189-225. Murphy applies Kristeva’s model of gendered time as a tool to evaluate the novel’s iconoclastic modernity, “Olive Schreiner’s narrative and linguistic experimentation represents an early assault on a masculinized linear form and language” (Murphy, 2001: 2).

<sup>41</sup> See her *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985.

<sup>42</sup> Schreiner’s novel thus contains the first indirect literary reference to Nietzsche, even before George Egerton’s explicit mention in her *Keynotes*. See chapter 4, note 24, in this doctoral thesis.

home with a great ball of dung: Doss, the dog at the farm “broke the ball, and ate the beetles’ hind legs, and then bit off its head. And it was all play, and no one could tell what it had lived and worked for. *A striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing*” (74).<sup>43</sup> The hollowness of the insignificant insect’s exertion serves as emblem for the second part of the novel, which is started with this nihilist warning *in exergum*.

The metaphor is somewhat extended by Lyndall’s resentful commentary on the insurmountable obstacles woman finds in her path towards emancipation: ‘A little bitterness, a little longing when we are young, a little futile searching for work, a little passionate striving for room for the exercise of our powers,— and then we go with the drove. A woman must march with her regiment’ (155-56). A whole life’s endeavour may be easily frustrated as this unusual concession to fatality appears to suggest. The inevitable question that follows is therefore who or what can be blamed for women’s destiny as it is presently conceived. Chance, the brutality of a merciless nature, or the games of a whimsical God do not appear to play an important part in Lyndall’s reflection. Deliberately situated outside conventional religious practice, she proclaims herself an active dissident:

‘It must be very nice to believe in the Devil’, she said; ‘I wish I did. If it would be of any use I would pray three hours a night and morning on my bare knees, “God let me believe in Satan”. He is so useful to those people who do. They may be as selfish and as sensual as they please, and, between God’s will and the Devil’s action, always have some one to throw their sin on. But we, wretched unbelievers, we fear our own burdens; we must say “I myself did it, I. Not God, not Satan; I myself!’ (177)

Religion was one of the powerful forces of Victorian thought; genuine religious faith and the humility before the acts of God were not only taken for granted but, most importantly, they helped to compensate the arrogance of a nation satisfied with its material progress (Thomson, 1950: 106; Griffin, 2012: 111-136). However, the perception of human dissatisfaction with regard to the state of affairs in this world, which was shared by Catholics, Tractarians and Evangelicals, had provided the germ for agnosticism and unbelief in Victorian times (Pollard, 1969: 42). Lyndall’s blasphemous speech is defying all sense of religious decorum, showing no fear of God whatsoever, and boldly rejecting the idea of a superior being endowed with the power to change woman’s fate.

A thoughtful agnostic, Lyndall’s positivism is inscribed in her rejection of the Christian cult and rituals, in her detachment from the worship of God. In keeping with the followers of the French thinker Auguste Comte, the female protagonist has decided to choose her saints, so to speak, among intellectual or political figures of justified eminence, hence her confessed admiration for Copernicus and Napoleon Bonaparte.<sup>44</sup> This process of secularisation is

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<sup>43</sup> My own italics. Schreiner’s caption addresses one of the concerns that disturbed the socialist utopian William Morris, who made a clear distinction between “Useful Work versus Useless Toil” in 1884, a year after the publication of *African Farm*.

<sup>44</sup> The French writer H. B. Stendhal had also been a great admirer of the figure of Napoleon, and in his autobiography written in the 1830s highlighted his like for mathematics as a suitable instrument to battle hypocrisy and clericalism (See *Vie de Henry Brulard*: 88, 124). Likewise, the *African Farm*’s (female) narrator confesses to take refuge in mathematics as a means to confront the void left by an absent God: “What should we think of now? All is emptiness. So we take the old arithmetic; and the multiplication table [...]. We take a strange satisfaction in working arithmetical problems. [...] We save money for a Latin Grammar and an Algebra [...] poring over them as over our Bible of old” (116).

matched by a socialist pragmatism, which had had its roots in Victorian Utilitarianism, and by Lyndall's adherence to a utopianism understood in the sense that William Morris would later on in the century promote from his *News from Nowhere* (1890). Paradoxically, it is the irretrievable loss of faith in a Christian superior force that implicitly forwards a new manifestation of belief in the possibility of change and revolution. The claim for personal responsibility that constitutes Lyndall's blasphemy thus escapes the horror of extreme pessimism, for it encapsulates the prospect of seeing humanity transformed.

The subject position occupied by the New Woman requires that the revolution be enacted by women and men alike. Lyndall believes in progress, and in this particular sense she is very Victorian. Her politics of change are grounded on the acceptance of the individual's capacity to own her destiny and model it in order to attain a bettered society — a conception which has enormous consequences for the socio-political status of woman.<sup>45</sup> Thus, in strict accordance with Lyndall's agnosticism, woman is not to be considered (socially and politically) an innocent child;<sup>46</sup> on the other hand, if the situation of women is not the result of God's will then it must have been procured by her male fellows. What man does can be undone. This way of thinking was necessarily placing woman in a politically enabling position. Needless to say, the acceptance of such onus implied also the giving up of certain undeniable female "prerogatives", which Lyndall makes visible in numerous occasions throughout the story — but most importantly, it involved the gaining of new privileges, the taste of new pleasures and freedoms hitherto denied to women as such.

One of the issues that appear to haunt Lyndall's transformative language is the concern with female access to power, and more particularly, the conspicuous absence of distinguished women from the great records of History. As she dwells on this matter, the novel's protagonist finds it appropriate to bring Waldo's attention to an imagined female Napoleon: 'Do you think if Napoleon had been born a woman that he would have been contented to give small tea-parties and talk small scandal? He would have risen; but the world would not have heard of him as it hears of him now [...]' (158). For the feminist heroine it is clear that historically relevant women have been consistently silenced and "denied the right to exercise [their power] openly" (158). As a result, there is an apparent void, an only artificially created (man-made) hole that would support the idea of men's superiority. In the rationale of the New Woman men's power is predicated on women's invisibility.<sup>47</sup> The purpose of Lyndall's

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<sup>45</sup> The immediate consequence of the New Woman's link with nihilism is clearly political, which would explain the anxieties to which it gave rise. If God's eyes are not watching us nor our deeds — we are alone, by ourselves in the universe without a supernatural force to blame for our sins or thank for our achievements. Woman must confront woman. She must bear her own burdens and be not afraid to respond before the world: "It was I who did it". The impact of this claim becomes visible in the range of novels that echo such a phrase from their title as is the case of Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895) and the related saga, published in the same year, *The Woman Who Didn't*, *The Woman Who Wouldn't*.

<sup>46</sup> The cult of the child and the cult of innocence had been promoted by the idealisations of the Romantic movement. The application of these characteristics to the ideal of womanhood had proved to be an extremely useful mechanism in the maintenance of women outside the public realm of commerce and capitalism.

<sup>47</sup> Lyndall's insights seem quite applicable to the present times, since many social and political factions continue to explain women's absence from positions of real power on account of their unsuitability, their lack of either ambition or talent based exclusively on their sexual condition. Feminist scholars, such as Linda Nochlin, have famously addressed this issue; her important essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" demystifies the notion of "Genius" and concludes that the "fault lies not in [...] our hormones, or menstrual cycles, [...] but in our institutions and our education", which have permanently discouraged individuals who were not "born white, preferably middle class and, above all male" (Nochlin, 1988: 150).

controversial formulation is to emphasise the need to create a new space for women where by they can move away from the margins of power:

‘Power!’ [...] ‘Yes, we have power; and since we are not to expend it in tunneling mountains, nor healing diseases, nor making laws, nor money, not on any extraneous object, we expend it on [men]. You are our goods, our merchandise, our material for operating on; we buy you, we sell you, we make fools of you’ (158).

Lyndall appropriates for herself the language of the market place to render visible the hollowness, the absurdity of the arguments brought against women’s actual empowerment and “perfect freedom” (159). She proceeds to dissect the nature of such arguments and identifies an essentialist discourse on woman’s unsuitability to exercise authority that is exclusively grounded on a fixed idea of nature: ‘They say that women do not wish for the sphere and freedom we ask for them and would not use it!’ (159). However, ‘What women by nature cannot do, it is quite superfluous to forbid them from doing’, as J. S. Mill had argued in *The Subjection of Women* (Mill, 1869: 129). Lyndall’s aspirations include the free competition among individuals, regardless of their sex, to occupy all positions of responsibility in the socio-political arena.<sup>48</sup>

The only empowering female experience which is sanctioned by society is based on the capacity to give birth. Motherhood is closely knit with the idea of power, and most importantly, it provides feminist politics with a legitimised platform from which it is possible to demand further privileges: ‘The mightiest and noblest of human work is given to us, and we do it ill. [...] And yet, thank God, we have this work, [...] it is the only window through which we see into the great world of earnest labour’ (160). It is interesting to see the confluence of apparently antagonistic discourses on womanhood in Lyndall’s utterance: the thesis of woman’s mission on the one hand,<sup>49</sup> and the language of female emancipation through the access to proper labour on the other. *African Farm* manages to turn motherhood into a contradictory discursive device upon which it is possible to call for both female power and woman’s lawful experience of pleasure: ‘We bear the world, and we make it’ (160); as Waldo acknowledges, ‘It is a marvellous thing that one soul should have the power to cause another’ (176). The rhetorical appropriation of this hegemonic view on woman’s mission entitles the New Woman to demand “the reward of useful labour” (160).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Lyndall’s concern is given a paramount importance by Mill in the opening paragraph of *The Subjection of Women* (1869); thus, for the feminist thinker, “the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes — the legal subordination of one sex to the other — is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and [...] it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other” (Mill, 1869: 118).

<sup>49</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century Evangelicalism had encouraged the link between womanliness and the idea of women fulfilling their biological destiny in the functions of mother and wife. The rejection of these positions was taken as an irreverence to the world created by God. Judith Flanders has noted to this respect that by the second half of the century “25 per cent of women had paying work of necessity, in order to survive. Most of the remaining 75 per cent worked at home. [...] among the middle classes only the very top levels could afford the number of servants that made work for housebound women unnecessary” (Flanders, 2003: xxx).

<sup>50</sup> In his lecture “Art and Socialism” (1884) William Morris thus combined the ideas of useful work and pleasure as a desideratum to be achieved in a transformed society: “It is right and necessary that all should have work to do which shall be worth doing, and be of itself pleasant to do; and which should be done under such conditions as would make it neither over-wearisome nor over-anxious” (Morris, 1890: 253).

Another instance of Lyndall's seizure of an argument typically deployed by dominant ideologies on womanhood in order to suit her own political aims is the double question of progress and the human race, which Schreiner's protagonist specifically equates with "the nation" (165). Her intention is to dismantle the cultural narrative whereby women's demands of "the broadest culture" and unrestrained access to "knowledge" were consistently denied on the grounds of the British nation's welfare: "when they have no other argument against us, they say — "[...] when you have made women what you wish, and her children inherit her culture, you will defeat yourself" (160-61). Extremely pernicious effects, including the ultimate extinction of the human race, were wielded by hegemonic discourse as the hypothetical result of a union between two fully cultured beings — male and female: "Man will gradually become extinct from excess of intellect, the passions which replenish the race will die" (161).<sup>51</sup> The target of the New Woman's indictment is the superstructure's interest in keeping the two sexes wide apart, a typically Victorian obsession — the artificial necessity to preserve the demarcation of functions.<sup>52</sup> It was precisely the blurring of boundaries between the lawful transmitters of passion and intellect that conjured up those images of apocalypse Lyndall is charging against.

For her, the first duty of woman is with herself and it implies the development of all her faculties and possibilities in order to orient and best serve the next generation.<sup>53</sup> The New Woman's language of political transformation uses the available discourse on woman as the repository of love and the nurturer of the race designed by nature to advance her claims for freedom, and thus construes a compelling image of a feminist utopia which is deferred:

'It is for love's sake yet more than for any other that we look for that new time'.  
[...] 'Then when that time comes, [...] when love is no more bought or sold, when it is not a means of making bread, when each woman's life is filled with earnest, independent labour, then love will come to her, a strange sudden sweetness breaking in upon her earnest work; not sought for, but found. Then, but not now.  
(161-62)

### 3.3. THE DEBATE ON MARRIAGE

#### 3.3.1. Parasitism or Marriage as Trade

The first reference to the marriage institution that appears in the novel is made by contented Em, who dreams away with the far prospect of leaving the farm: 'I suppose some day we shall go somewhere; but now we are only twelve, and we cannot marry till we are

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<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, Schreiner would use this same argument — the utter extinction of the human race — in her *Woman and Labor* to warn her contemporaries against the evil effects of "parasitism".

<sup>52</sup> In her essential analysis of the Victorian house Flanders explains the changes effected with regard to previous centuries in which the rooms had been multi-purpose. In the nineteenth century "segregation of each function of the house became as important as separation of home and work [...], and in turn each room was the physical demarcation of many further segregations: of hierarchy [...]; of function [...]; and of further divisions of public and private" (Flanders, 2003: xxiv-xxv). Interestingly for the purposes of my argument above, Flanders continues: "Even those forced to live in houses small enough to require multi-purpose rooms felt that 'Nothing conduces so much to the degradation of man and a woman in the opinion of each other' than having to perform their separate functions together in the same room" (Flanders, 2003: xxv).

<sup>53</sup> This is a commentary to Genesis (chapter XXIV), taken from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* (1895), which appears to match perfectly Lyndall's argument. This text, which was one of the results of the American women's emancipation movement, was an attempt to reform society through the revision of the canonical interpretation of the sacred texts.

seventeen' (11). Marriage is presented by this character as the only conceivable means for a woman to have access to the outer world, the public space that lies beyond the suffocating realm of the farm's domesticity. Lyndall's first outraged retort — 'And you think that I am going to stay here till then?' — constitutes in this light a powerful rejection of the agenda that has been likely set up for her kind. Far from denying the positive material side of matrimony, a precociously emancipated Lyndall asserts her determined will not to wait for marriage to empower her. A disinherited orphan, Lyndall's precarious financial prospects — 'you will have this farm and everything that is upon it for your own; but I [...] will have nothing. I must learn' (12) — place her in a critical situation in which the scarcity of choices available to her but intensify Lyndall's determination to choose a path other than wedlock.

The creation of a female hero thus characterised by her lack of parents and by poverty allows Schreiner's colonial narrative to implement a critique of marriage which is fundamentally economic. The subversion of the expectations generated through the mechanism of the orphan<sup>54</sup> is in this context instrumental in the transformation of a romance story into the feminist *Bildungsroman*<sup>55</sup> Schreiner's novel inaugurates. Lyndall's insistence on her personal preference to remain single despite her dire financial situation at the age of seventeen — 'I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man's foot' (150) — is indicative of her feminist response to the economic penalties imposed upon women without husbands. Such a standpoint ultimately aligns Lyndall's discourse with the defence of single women led by prominent feminists, such as Ann Richelieu Lamb, earlier in the century: "Why so many unmarried women are unhappy, is *not* because they are old maids, but in consequence of *poverty*, and of the difficulty they encounter in maintaining a decent position in society, which we know in this country depends upon the value of our property, not upon our mental endowments and moral worth. [...] This is the evil which distresses and undermines their existence" (Horowitz, 1982: 50).<sup>56</sup>

The loudest supporters of wedded life in the novel, Tant' Sannie and Bonaparte Blenkins, those who wield the discourse on its sanctities more often, are significantly the most cruel and debased characters in the story. This is the panegyric tone adopted by Bonaparte Blenkins to extol womanhood: 'For a woman that is my wife I could live; for the woman that is my wife I could die! For a woman that is my wife I could — Ah! that sweet word *wife*; when will it rest upon my lips again?' (46). The widower has resolved to marry Tant' Sannie's fortune and knows how he must handle such an enterprise. He must wait for four years or else her will

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<sup>54</sup> Rachel Blau Duplessis has explained in her analysis of narrative strategies in novels such as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), how the "critique of social conditions that orphans symbolize (poverty, vulnerability, exclusion) will be muted by the achievement of the blessed state of normalcy [via marriage to the male hero], so thrillingly different from deprivation. Through the mechanism of orphans, novels can present standard family, kinship, and gender relations as if these were a utopian ideal" (Duplessis, 1985: 9).

<sup>55</sup> Rita Felski uses the phrase "feminist *Bildungsroman*" in order to refer to a type of self-discovery narrative "characterized by a historical and linear structure [in which] female self-discovery and emancipation is depicted as a process of moving outward into the public realm of social engagement and activity, however problematic and fraught with difficulties this proves to be" (Felski, 1989: 126-27).

<sup>56</sup> This extract belongs to Ann Richelieu Lamb's "Old Maidism!" (1844); it was written in response to Sarah Lewis's "Can Woman Regenerate Society?", published the same year as part of the large controversy on redundant women. According to the 1851 census, 30 per cent of British women between the ages of twenty and forty were single. Excerpts of both texts are reproduced in Horowitz Murray (1982), pp. 49-50 and 28-31, respectively. It is relevant to notice that the life conditions of the single woman with sufficient financial means were better than those of the married woman, since the former was entitled to keep her property as well as her rights to buying and selling, all of which was denied to those women who decided to get married.

shall be lost: ‘then why propose? Wheedle her, tweedle her, teedle her, but *don’t* let her make sure of you [...] when a woman is sure of you she does what she likes with you; but when she isn’t, you do what you want with her’ (83). His stratagem may be best understood in the light of the words he pronounces from the pulpit as the Bible preacher, the predator, a dilettante who indoctrinates the people at the farm. These are his two commandments:

‘Firstly: let us never commit suicide. [...] Secondly: let us not love too much. If that young man had not loved that young woman, he would not have jumped into Mount Etna. The good men of old never did so. Was Jeremiah ever in love, or Ezekiel, or Hosea, or even any of the minor prophets? No. Then why should we be? Thousands are rolling in that lake at this moment who would say, “It was love that brought us here”. Oh, let us think always of our own souls first’ (38).

The Boer woman thus explains in an equally unsentimental vein:

‘marriage is the finest thing in the world. I’ve been at it three times, and if it pleased God to take this husband from me I should have another. There’s nothing like it, my child; nothing’

‘If the beloved Redeemer didn’t mean men to have wives what did He make women for? [...] If a woman’s old enough to marry and she doesn’t, she’s sinning against the Lord [...] It’s evident. He wants babies, otherwise why does He send them? [...] There’s nothing like being married, [...] If a woman’s got a baby and a husband she’s got the best things the Lord can give her [...]. As for a husband, it’s very much the same who one has. [...] A man’s a man, you know’. (262-3)

The narrator ironically explains that in her “mind the relative functions of heart and stomach were exceedingly ill-defined” (47) — “I know how it was when my first husband died. They could do nothing with me”, the Boer-woman said, ‘till I had eaten a sheep’s trotter, and honey, and a little roaster-cake. *I know*” (46). The gluttony Tant’ Sannie displays, once her mourning period is barely inaugurated, matches her coarse materialism and hardness of feeling. Boasting about the large number of suitors after both her fortune and her self-proclaimed beauty, Tant’ Sannie uses the language of mercantilism and capitalist exchange: “‘Good Lord!’ [...] ‘it’s the seventh [suitor] I’ve had this month; but the men know where the sheep and good looks and money in the bank are to be found’, she added winking knowingly” (167). Hers is a masculinised discourse, and her perspective sounds virile, unwomanly, as she divests marriage of its aura of pure, uninterested love. It is significant that despite her brutality and ignorance she should be so acutely aware of the fact that the ideology governing the marriage institution is that of the market place. Human worth is predicated on property. Her idea of marriage is not precisely linked to that of love, but to that of materialist profit: “once she was married to her husband Bonaparte it would not matter whether a sheep spoiled or no — when once his rich aunt with the dropsy was dead. She smiled as she dived her hand into the pickle-water” (95).

‘One can always get another husband’ (70). Husbands can be easily replaced according to the Boer woman who tends to associate matrimony with violent death: ‘I dreamed of a great beast like a sheep, with red eyes, and I killed it [...] and my killing him meant marriage’ (168). As Lyndall protests, ‘Do they see nothing, understand nothing? It is Tant’ Sannie who buries

husbands one after another, and folds her hands resignedly, — “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord”, — and she looks for another’ (161). The novel implies that it is women like Tant’ Sannie that must be accountable for promiscuity, not the New Woman in search of intellectual and social freedom. The former’s gore dream reveals an unromantic, insensitive conception of marriage which is in overt conflict with Lyndall’s and her new-womanly utopian view of what it should be like. Schreiner’s distribution of those competing discourses on marriage alongside such characters as the coarse Boer woman and the New Woman is turning upside down the hegemonic standpoint with regard to advanced womanhood heralded by Elizabeth Lynn Linton from the periodical press. Linton seemed to be describing a repellent Tant’ Sannie as she was charging against the modern type in her article “The Wild Women as Social Insurgents”: “Down in the North.country villages, and elsewhere, she will find her prototypes calmly smoking their black cutty-pipes, with no sense of shame about them. Why should they not? These ancient dames with ‘whiskin’ beards about their mou’s’, withered and unsightly, worn out, and no longer women in desirableness or beauty — why should they not take to the habits of men?” (Linton, 1891b: 597)<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, Schreiner answers back with a heroine whose daintiness and charming beauty are as conspicuous as her mighty feminist discourse.

Far from rejecting the idea of love, Lyndall appears to expect too much from it in her idealisation of perfect equality between the sexes. With regard to marriage itself, Lyndall has a different proposal to make. Given the present state of affairs she can only associate the institution with the female’s subjection to the male and the cumbersome tasks derived from motherhood. Needless to say, Schreiner’s heroine claims to have different aspirations for ‘There are other women glad of such work’ (150). As it is presently conceived, the entire marriage career — encompassing both married life and the necessary steps women must take in order to achieve such a goal — is tinted with the shameful colour of female degradation: ‘A little weeping, a little wheedling, a little self-degradation, a little careful use of our advantages, and then some man will say — “Come, be my wife!” With good looks and youth marriage is easy to attain’ (156).

Lyndall’s daring identification of the married woman with the prostitute — in a similar fashion as Daniel Defoe and Mary Wollstonecraft had done the previous century — is bold and unmitigated.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Similarly, in “The Wild Women as Politicians”, Linton portrayed the alleged masculinisation of the modern woman as a symptom of her unfitness: “Quite as disagreeable as the bearded chin, the bass voice, flat chest, and lean hips of a woman who has physically failed in her rightful development, the unfeminine ways and works of the wild women of politics and morals are even worse for the world in which they live” (Linton, 1891a: 79). Undoubtedly, antifeminist discourse was adamant in its representation of the New Woman as a resentful virago who chastised men because of her impossibility to become the object of male desire. The consistent depiction of feminine, beautiful heroines by the New Woman writers could be explained on this account as an effort both to dismantle this prejudice and to draw attention to the political agenda their fiction was trying to advance.

<sup>58</sup> Lyndall’s discourse against this conception of marriage as a profitable move in the social ladder echoes Mary Wollstonecraft’s indictments in 1792: “In the middle rank of life, [...] men, in their youth, are prepared for professions, and marriage is not considered as the grand feature in their lives; whilst women, on the contrary, have no other scheme to sharpen their faculties. It is not business, extensive plans, or any of the excursive flights of ambition, that engross their attention; no, their thoughts are not employed in rearing such noble structures. To rise in the world, and have the liberty of running from pleasure to pleasure, they must marry advantageously, and to this object their time is sacrificed, and their persons often legally prostituted” (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 176). Wollstonecraft records Daniel Defoe’s earlier use of the phrase “legal prostitution” in *Conjugal Lewdness; or, Matrimonial Whoredom* (1727).

‘a woman who has sold herself, even for a ring and a new name, need hold her skirt aside for no creature in the street. They both earn their bread in one way. Marriage for love is the beautifullest external symbol of the union of souls; marriage without it is the uncleanliest traffic that defiles the world’. (156)

Significantly enough, women’s alleged privileges and advantages over men are highlighted as those that can only bring forth social and moral ruin to the former. Fragility and beauty are the icons of idle femininity making woman eligible for the altar in so far as they distance her from the dignified experience of serviceable labour.

Marriage spares woman the trouble of going through the painstaking process of professional training and gaining competence in any field of remunerated labour — or so the dominant discourse on marriage would appear to suggest.<sup>59</sup> Not surprisingly, Lyndall wishes woman would not be spared such a thrill. Much to the contrary, it is in the economic asymmetry of the marriage formula — whereby liquidity must necessarily be wrought out of the male so that woman may become the lawful and perfectly idle dependent — where the germ of degeneracy lurks for the feminist pioneer. It is very interesting to notice that Lyndall’s stark rejection of the immoral wife should coalesce with the criticisms launched by Elizabeth Lynn Linton against “The Girl of the Period”, a debauched woman whose “horror of all useful work” leads her to find in marriage the opportunity to indulge “in all forms of luxury and selfishness” at her husband’s expense: “She has married his house, his carriage, his balance at the banker’s, his title” (Linton, 1868: 5, 6). While the antifeminist journalist was aiming against the prototype Schreiner’s advanced heroine was supposed to incarnate, her charges sound conspicuously similar to the complaints Wollstonecraft made against the idle married woman as prostitute: “[such] women seek for pleasure as the main purpose of existence. In fact, from the education they receive from society, the love of pleasure may be said to govern them all”, “[t]he same love of pleasure, fostered by the whole tendency of their education, gives a trifling turn to the conduct of women in most circumstances: for instance, they are ever anxious about secondary things; and on the watch for adventures, instead of being occupied with duties” (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 176). It seems that both feminist and antifeminist discourses mobilised similar concepts — such as love of pleasure versus love of duty — and fuelled similar anxieties regarding the changes in womanhood if only to opposite political ends. In the case of Linton to reinforce the status quo, the doctrine of the separate spheres, and the ideal of virtuous reproductive femininity, while in the case of Wollstonecraft and Schreiner to foster a new ideal of productive femininity engaged in respectable public labour and in equalitarian socio-sexual relationships.

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<sup>59</sup> In fact, the average middle-class woman had to become truly competent in a large number of activities related to the government of her household, the domestic realm over which she was supposed to reign. The popularity of best-selling manuals such as *Mrs Beeton’s Book of Household Management*, published in parts between 1859 and 1861 may well account for the training all efficient housewives were perceived to require. Thus, for Mrs Beeton the “mistress of the house” was like “the COMMANDER OF AN ARMY, or the leader of any enterprise”, at all events someone who had to administer the home with businesslike proficiency (Beeton, 1861: 7). It is important to notice in this sense Olive Schreiner’s concern for the necessity to do justice to woman as a “domestic laborer” demonstrated by her “examination of the work woman has done and still does in the modern world, and the gigantic evils which arise from the fact that her labor, especially domestic labor, often the most wearisome and unending known to any section of the human race, is not adequately recognized or recompensed” (Schreiner, 1911: 14-16). Lyndall is nevertheless referring to the public sphere when she laments woman’s absence from the professions.

Despite most of the investigations led by Acton, Mayhew and Stead on the question of prostitution,<sup>60</sup> — whose approach tended to concentrate on the courtesan and the outcast — the most representative profile of the profession was the average young woman who was in need of a supplement to her low pay from the factory or domestic service. Among the most commonly held assumptions regarding the origin and causes of prostitution was the degeneracy that was felt to be essential to the poorer classes, as a result of their “crowded sleeping quarters, love of dress, greed, drunkenness, and natural viciousness” (Horowitz Murray, 1982: 392, 408).

The Victorian era was characterised by an overriding obsession with the figure of the prostitute. Olive Schreiner’s own arguments concerning this major fixation are exposed in what the South African author termed “the question of parasitism” to which she devoted three entire chapters out of the six composing her influential *Woman and Labor* (1911). The relevance of this particular question is explained on account of the fact that “it explains many phenomena that nothing else explains” (Schreiner, 1911: 14); and it is such undesirable “phenomena” that Schreiner purports to examine in her book. The nationalistic tone adopted in her analysis reaches at times an imperialistic zeal which is particularly instrumental in the writer’s aim to advance women’s rights.

In order to describe the faults Schreiner finds imbedded in modern civilisation she makes use of the illness metaphor — thus implying that her society suffered from severe ailments which the female parasite would come to epitomise:<sup>61</sup> “Female parasitism in the past resembled gout — a disease dangerous only to the over-fed, pampered, and few, never to the population of any society as a whole” (114). Schreiner’s clamour is for women’s demand to have access to the higher professions, so far exercised as an exclusively male privilege; the fervour and the jingoistic discourse embraced in her pursuit of such a goal are put at the service of that socio-political aspiration.

As a result of industrialisation, modernity has deprived woman of her former functions in the realm of productive and social labour. With the breakthroughs in industrial machinery the traditional tasks carried out by women together with the skills such manual labour was expected to develop have been respectively eliminated and atrophied. Woman has been rendered valueless by modern civilisation. Schreiner thus identifies the paradox lying at the heart of such modernity: whatever is dear in the name of progress and for the sake of the nation’s advantage is necessarily predicated upon the idleness of half its social body, the female.

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<sup>60</sup> Henry Mayhew, in his *London Labour and the London Poor* (1849) had established that both marriage and much formal morality were irrelevant among the poorer classes. Thomas Hood’s popular poem, “The Bridge of Sighs” contended that prostitutes were bound to fall prey of all sorts of diseases and distress. William Acton, in his thorough study *Prostitution considered in its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects...* (1857) did not manage to reduce the fear of venereal disease although he claimed that prostitutes generally enjoyed a better health than female factory workers. The Contagious Diseases Acts were passed between 1864 and 1869 with the aim of curbing the spread of sexually transmitted illnesses. As a result, any woman suspected of prostitution in areas near military garrisons and ports could be forcibly examined and hospitalised, while male customers were spared genital inspection. The 1870s and 1880s were marked by continuous calls to repeal the acts, a goal that was finally attained in 1886. For a detailed study on prostitution in nineteenth-century Britain, see Judith R. Walkowitz’s *Prostitution and Victorian Society. Women, Class, and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1980.

<sup>61</sup> Paradoxically, as Horowitz Murray explains, “prostitutes were generally healthy, if only because they ate better than seamstresses or the mothers of large families and were therefore better protected against tuberculosis, the disease that claimed the most victims in nineteenth-century England” (1982: 392).

Idleness, having no occupation whatsoever — particularly an intellectual one — is equivalent to uselessness in Schreiner’s argument. The lack of *value of use*, to recuperate a Marxist concept, middle class women have been urged to embody represents the major anxiety in *Woman and Labor* for “What becomes of the country if the women forsake their toil?” (1911: 32), “Who will rear and shape the nation [...]?” (1911: 33). It is in the nation’s interest to become liberated from the dead weight such idle women stand for. Once more the old argument of the common good is wielded in order to legitimise feminist demands. The well-being of the race itself is endangered by this burden of unoccupied females: “That almost entirely modern, morbid condition, affecting brain and nervous system, and shortening the lives of thousands in modern civilized societies [...] is vulgarly known as “overwork” or “nervous breakdown” (1911: 45). The strenuous work to which “the modern male of the cultured classes” is unduly subjected is explained by his duty to provide not only for himself but for “a larger or smaller number of entirely parasitic females” who are equally dependent upon him (1911: 45). Schreiner’s ability to make her feminist claims coalesce with the priorities of the Empire is here seen at its best. A careful reading of this text thus shows the skill exhibited by the South African feminist to apparently turn a subversive argument, namely, woman’s right to fulfil herself in all kinds of works, into another instance of the dominant ideology on *woman’s mission* — that is to say, to nurture and rear the nation. It may also provide evidence of the ways in which the New Woman writer’s discourse was paradoxically working in complicity with hegemonic discourses on womanhood while pursuing a prevalent ambition to do justice to the feminist cause and achieve for women their equal share of remunerative, “honored and socially useful human toil, our full half of the labor of the Children of Woman. We demand nothing more than this, and we will take nothing less. *This is our ‘Woman’s Right!’*” (1911: 65).

Equally instrumental in Schreiner’s socio-political essay is her treatment of the prostitution problem. In keeping with the nationalistic discourse formerly deployed against the cumbersome obstacle woman’s idleness creates in the path of progress, straight images of degeneration are conjured up by the sight of female prostitutes, that “mighty army of women [...] reduced by the dislocations of our civilization to accepting sexual relationships which almost negate child-bearing, and whose only product is physical and moral disease” (1911: 61-62).

As part of the larger concern with female dependency on male financial support Schreiner addresses prostitution and sex parasitism as two analogous phenomena of antisocial behaviour likely to bring about the empire’s decay itself. Two illustrative examples of apocalypse are conveniently recollected in order to suit her arguments, to wit, the situation of upper-class males in pre-Revolutionary France and the downfall of the Roman Empire.<sup>62</sup> On both historical episodes the idleness enjoyed by the members of such distinctive societies at the peak of their progress and development is seen by Schreiner as a parasitism that was in fact conducive to their fatal destruction:

Among the wealthy and so-called upper classes, the males of various aristocrats have frequently tended to become completely parasitic after a lapse of time, but

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<sup>62</sup> Joseph Bristow notes in his introduction to *African Farm* that Schreiner had read W. H. Lecky’s *History of European Morals* (1869) and Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88). (xiii)

such a condition has always been met by a short and sharp remedy; and the class has fallen, or become extinct. (1911: 74)

The welfare of the nation demanded the finding of a cure, a remedy to heal the sick modern females, if British society was to prevent its own regression at all. Such a cure would inevitably bring in its wake the opening of new fields of action for women, “new forms of labor” that would put an end to the enforced passiveness of the female and its harmful aftermath (1911: 75). This is one of the fundamental tasks that Lyndall takes upon herself in *African Farm*; as a feminist thinker and theorist Schreiner’s heroine expresses the need to imagine and ultimately create new choices for women so that the latter could emerge into new identities of financial independence and political visibility.

The writer’s own reflections on sex-parasitism in the animal world are extrapolated and imported into her socio-political discourse as they are found to convey “suggestive and instructive side-lights” with regard to the position of women in contemporary society. Thus, having noticed that sex-parasitism may likewise appear on male and female forms, Schreiner concentrates on the description of termites and the following type of lower animals whose degeneration is worth quoting at length:

Among other insects [...] another form of female parasitism prevails, and while the male remains a complex, highly active, and winged creature, the female, fastening herself by the head into the flesh of some living animal and sucking its blood, has lost its wings and all activity, and power of locomotion, having become a mere distended bladder, which when filled with eggs bursts and ends a parasitic existence which has hardly been life. It is not impossible, and it appears, indeed, highly probable, that it has been this degeneration and parasitism on the part of the female which has set its limitation to the evolution of ants, creatures which, having reached a point of mental development in some respects almost as high as that of man, have yet become curiously and immovably arrested. (1911: 76)

Although Schreiner’s analysis fails to explain why parasitism is found in animals in the first place the writer proceeds to continue with the analogy she has located between the parasitic nature of certain insects and “the human female” of all developed societies since the beginning of history (1911: 77). The universalising view offered in *Woman and Labor* in order to account for the passivity of women fails, on the one hand, to acknowledge the essential role inherent in the production of eggs, which guarantees the continuance of the species, and therefore is at odds with the notion of passivity itself — while it also fails to differentiate between animal and human / social behaviour, on the other. The notion of parasitism is equally applied to all civilisations, ancient and modern, Eastern and Western alike, and it is inflected with a language reminiscent of Marxist concepts such as the exploitation of cheap labour force and the surplus of wealth it generates. Olive Schreiner’s views on Economy and power are decisive in her explanation of the present status quo of women. Thus, the whole question of parasitism and the corruption it inevitably entails for the New Woman writer are only possible provided

a point in civilization is reached [...] when owing to the extensive employment of the labor of slaves, or of subject races or classes, the dominant race or class has become so liberally supplied with the material goods of life that mere physical toil on the part of its own female members has become unnecessary. (1911: 78-79)

The backstage of progress and the grandiose fable of the Empire was, in this light, inextricably linked to the history of man's oppression — whereby class boundaries are warranted by the necessity to create superfluous wealth so as to maintain the privileged in their position of power. The reflections of a South African writer such as Olive Schreiner, brought up in the colonies, must be to this respect particularly worthy of some consideration. The equation between exploitation and development is further complicated by the addition of a new puzzle, which manages to give an unexpected turn to Schreiner's formula. Hence, according to the feminist writer's rationale, once opulence has been attained by modern society, a new process of oppression and power asymmetry necessarily begins to operate:

The males of the dominant class have almost always contrived to absorb to themselves the new intellectual occupations, [...] and the females of the dominant class or race, for whose muscular labors there was also no longer any need [...] have existed through the passive performance of sexual functions alone, (1911: 79)

The fact that dominance should be exercised not only alongside the axis of class but also alongside that of gender is of primal importance in the present analysis. For those who truly hold power are not merely the upper classes but, more distinctively, its male members. The new distribution of power requires the enforcement of a new theory of value, a powerful instrument at the service of ideology, whereby physical toil is devalued in favour of the intellectual activities which are conveniently monopolised, claimed as natural, by men. A novel situation then presents itself for whereas gender segregation still occurs in underdeveloped societies, both sexes are in charge of performing tasks which are regarded as useful. The society of opulence however, is characterised by a tragic imbalance which concentrates the notion of value on male occupations and leaves women with a void.

It is within this frame that Schreiner explicitly insists on equating allegedly opposed categories of female respectability:

Then, in place of the active laboring woman, upholding society by her toil, has come the effete wife, concubine or prostitute, clad in fine raiment (1911: 79)

[...] fed on luxurious viands, [...] waited on and tended by the labor of others. [...] she bedecked and scented her person, [...] and, loaded with jewels, she sought by dissipations and amusements to fill up the inordinate blank left by the lack of productive activity. (80) Finely clad, tenderly housed, life became for her merely the gratification of her own physical and sexual appetites, and the appetites of the male, through the stimulation of which she could maintain herself. And whether as kept wife, kept mistress, or prostitute, she contributed nothing to the active and sustaining labors of her society. She had attained to the full development of that type which, whether in modern Paris or New York or London, or in ancient Greece, Assyria, or Rome, is essentially one in its features, its nature, and its results. She was the "fine lady", the human female parasite —the most deadly microbe which can make its appearance on the surface of any social organism. (1911: 81)

Such a decided effort to merge those two antagonistic types of women, the prostitute and the rightful wife, as the most relevant socio-political consequence derived from development

produces an important effect, that of suspending the illusion of a real choice open to the female between profligacy and respectability. In Schreiner's analysis all these women types — “the effete wife, concubine or prostitute”, “the kept wife” or “kept mistress”, “the ‘fine lady’” — are integrated into one kind, the parasite. Distinctions as to the varying degrees of womanly decency are not simply blurred, but altogether eliminated. The lifting of the veil implied the realisation that no woman could be innocent, a major piece of the cultural dogma that the circulating ideology on proper womanhood had painstakingly tried to enforce.

What Schreiner's daring identification ultimately brought was the effectual indictment of a system in which women's powerlessness and financial dependency on men was turning them into mercenaries. The emancipationist nature of a text such as *Woman and Labor* demanded that both women and society at large faced the grim reality of their own debasement as a substantive stage previous to social regeneration. Schreiner's discontent with the ways in which the question of prostitution and parasitism was being tackled by her contemporaries can be heard from the pages of her essay. Neither “the moral reformer” nor “the intellectual platform of the would-be scientist” managed to treat the issue at stake adequately enough as there appeared to be a generalised reticence to link the phenomenon of prostitution and female parasitism: “We are left with a feeling that the matter has been handled but not dealt with: that the knife has not reached the core” (1911: 81-82).

The concept of a mercenary wife is further explored to the point of epitomising the germ of degeneration. Thus, while the notion of parasitism was the result of an apparent socio-economic bonanza, it carried within a terrible seed that would destroy the society that had paradoxically allowed for its occurrence. In accordance with the South African feminist's analysis, such corruption had even more evil consequences when taking place within marriage, the “kept wife” was, in short, regarded as an even more corrupt type than the prostitute herself. The concern with inheritance and the necessity to meliorate the race are introduced in her dissertation in order to fuel more anxiety and provide further impetus to the diatribe against female parasitism. Thus the influence of “germinal inheritance” through “gestation”

causes even prostitution (in many respects the most repulsive form of female parasitism which affects humanity) to be, probably, not more adverse to the advance and even to the conservation of a healthy and powerful society than the parasitism of its child-bearing woman. For the prostitute, heavily as she weighs society for her support, returning disease and mental and emotional disintegration for what she consumes, does not yet so immediately affect the next generation as the kept wife, or kept mistress, who impresses her effete image indelibly on the generations succeeding. (1911: 109)

In Schreiner's analysis, passivity is granted the status of a contagious disease to be transmitted to the future generations by mimesis. The perception of an idle mother — Schreiner seems to suggest — could have terrible consequences in the “plastic” mind of an infant whose natural tendency is to mime the behaviour of its nurturer. The writer is firm on this particular point and insists that in “such cases, it is the nurse and not the mother who is the most important laborer” (1911: 109). The animadversion exhibited against the denaturalised mother who entrusts her duties to those in a lower rank frames that dreadful image of “the parasitic woman in her couch”, “the deathbed of human evolution” (1911: 134). Schreiner's interest in eugenics thus tinged her thesis on women's rights with the language of

evolution. Darwinistic Victorian science tried to explain gender difference by means of male and female biology. Darwin's reflections in *The Descent of Man* (1871) implied that women were less completely evolved than men, and more akin to children. Herbert Spencer insisted in his *Principles of Biology* (1867) and *Principles of Society* (1876) that the degree of differentiation between both sex roles was indicative of social development, and predicated women's superior task to produce healthy offspring in their subjugation. Women's abilities had to be necessarily limited for the sake of the race and human progress. Karl Pearson, the social Darwinist and leading eugenicist thus wrote in 1885: "If childbearing women be intellectually handicapped, then the penalty to be paid for race predominance is the subjection of women" (Lewis, 1984: 84). Schreiner is then strategically using an essentially antifeminist argument (the importance attached to racial motherhood) in order to argue for economic independence and education for women.

It is important to emphasise that all the reasons discussed in *Woman and Labor* to account for the undesirability of the phenomena above described have an explicitly materialistic nature. The paths followed by capital before it reaches female hands constitute a crucial point in Schreiner's debate. Laboured versus unlaboured-for wealth is the key issue around which the present text weaves a moral fabric directly addressing both public and individual responsibility:

It is wholly untrue that fifty pounds, or two thousand, earned by the male as the result of his physical or mental toil, if part of it be spent by him in supporting non-laboring females, whether as prostitutes, wives, or mistresses, is the same thing to the female or to the race as though that sum had been earned by her own exertion, either directly as wages or indirectly by toiling for the man whose wages supported her [...]; ultimately, intellectually, morally, and even physically, the difference in the effect upon her as an individual and on the race is the difference between advance and degradation, between life and death. (1911: 118-119)

### 3.3.2. Lyndall's Views on Marriage

The defence of celibacy as a dignified personal choice constitutes one of the crucial points in Lyndall's discourse on the marriage debate. Making reference to the lack of options open to women, Lyndall claims that it is only knowledge, culture and earnest labour that can set women free. Her sympathetic portrait of old maidenhood is in this sense embedded within a larger attack against the ideology that perpetuated women's social, economic and political disabilities: 'Is it easy to bear through life a name that in itself signifies defeat? [...] Is it easy to look forward to an old age without honour, without the reward of useful labour, without love?' (*African Farm*: 160). Society's reluctance to provide for different alternatives with regard to single women had turned marriage into a compulsory reaction, a compulsive behaviour into which they were necessarily led. Celibacy was, by all means, not to be made a pleasant or profitable expectation for middle-class women, and the system of gender segregation that maintained them away from the higher professions was serving the clear purpose of turning marriage into a necessity.

As William Rathbone Greg had warned from his influential article "Why Are Women Redundant?", published in *National Review* in 1862: "Celibacy [...] is one of the surest and most menacing symptoms of something gravely and radically wrong. [...] [T]hose efforts [...] to render single life as easy, attractive, and as lucrative to women [...] are efforts in the wrong direction" (Horowitz, 1982: 54). W. Greg was thus charging against political and social

reformers such as J. S. Mill or Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, who insisted on their “ardent[ ] desire that women should not make *love* their profession”,<sup>63</sup> an alarming suggestion that opened new paths for those who wanted to become independent of men.

Lyndall mocks the untenable stance of those who claim that woman is free to engage in the marriage career at will: ‘Yes — and a cat set afloat in a pond is free to sit in the tub till it dies there, it is under no obligation to wet its feet; and a drowning man may catch a straw or not, just as he likes — it is a glorious liberty!’ (160). The choice between marriage or social death and paralysis is not such, as she makes quite visible. Hence women who might otherwise lead perfectly happy single lives are bound to discard the unwed state out of fear of becoming poverty stricken or of suffering the ostracism that the name *old maid* carried with it.<sup>64</sup> It is the fact that most middle-class women jettison the plan of not marrying at all that triggers Lyndall’s interest to explore the most widely available subject position reserved for the female within wedlock. In spite of her decided partiality for women’s autonomy, Lyndall shows a troubling fascination for the master-slave relationship, which, as we shall see, ultimately clashes against her new womanly ideals.

Just as Schreiner’s political writing makes a point of the ways in which the males of “the dominant class or race” (which in *Woman and Labor* are distinctly associated with being British, wealthy middle class, and white) have managed to absorb power as a natural endowment both justifying and granting female idleness — her fiction appears to move beyond the narrow borders there outlined and give a further twist to the economy of gender asymmetry that explains parasitism. To this respect, Lyndall’s audacious account of the sadomasochistic relationship that pervades the marriage bond for the less privileged classes, the Black colonised, has important implications in her strategy to divest marriage of its most obvious allures:

‘There [...] goes a kaffir; he has nothing on but a blanket; he is a splendid fellow — he is going [...] I suppose to kick his wife with his beautiful legs when he gets home. He has a right to; he bought her for two oxen. There is a lean dog going after him, to whom I suppose he never gives more than a bone from which he has sucked the marrow; but his dog loves him, as his wife does. There is something of the master about him in spite of his blackness and wool. See how he brandishes his stick and holds up his head!’ (194)

According to Lyndall’s rationale, the logic of the male master and the female slave enacted in marriage is easily analysed in categorical economic terms daringly transcending both race and class boundaries. Since man has bought woman, he is entitled to treat her as the commodity she has become in the transaction. Her sharp observations are locating the control of women’s bodies and sexuality right at the centre of the marriage institution — whether that control should be exercised in terms of chivalric attention or violent abuse was a matter entirely up to the male’s understanding. This explicit reference to the symbolic force of

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara L. S. Bodichon’s *Women and Work* (1856), quoted in Horowitz Murray, 1982, p. 269. This important feminist carried out relevant work for suffrage and reform of the laws for married women. She was the co-founder of the first feminist magazine in England, the *Englishwomen’s Journal*.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Taylor’s impassioned rebuttal of W. Greg’s diatribe on female redundancy objected that “the phrase redundant women really means starving women very often, and almost always women whose means have fallen so much below their position that they are miserably poor”. *The First Duty of Women*, published in 1870, appeared also in *Victoria Magazine* in June of the same year (see Horowitz Murray, 1982: 58).

*ukulobolo*,<sup>65</sup> — or marriage exchange, the effective means to transform women’s work into male power — is instrumental in Lyndall’s establishment of the economic basis of women’s oppression.

The bold association of capitalist methods of production with moral debasement was a fundamental point in the essays of the socialist feminist Eleanor Marx,<sup>66</sup> for whom: “Society is morally bankrupt, and in nothing does this gruesome moral bankruptcy come out with a more hideous distinctness than in the relation between men and women” (Marx-Aveling, 1886: 288). Just like in Lyndall’s last portrait, woman was characterised as the ultimate slave of the male slave,<sup>67</sup> Eleanor Marx concluded in the same vein that “The truth [...] is that she, like the labour-classes, is in an oppressed condition; that her position, like theirs, is one of merciless degradation. Women are the creatures of an organized tyranny of men, as the workers are the creatures of an organized tyranny of idlers” (288). In an effort to undo the moral abasement to which women are therefore subjected — implied in that mighty image of the black wife willing to be battered by her master-husband — Lyndall decides to play a game of identities by dramatising a reversal in the plot of courtship in which she intends to masquerade as a female master. Her plan is simple enough: by marrying Gregory Rose, the impossible hero, she is able to perform a new marriage formula whereby the distribution of gender roles and power is altered in order to suit her desire to experiment with new subject positions as a female.

The adoption of her role of dominatrix enables Lyndall to make a first petition: ‘You could serve me by giving me your name’ (199). Schreiner’s protagonist had already remarked the importance of names in her speech on old maidism, which was socially identified with personal defeat. On this occasion, she entertains the idea of becoming Lyndall Rose: ‘What I am saying is plain, matter-of-factual business. If you are willing to give me your name with in three weeks time, I am willing to marry you; if not, well. I want nothing more than your name’ (199) — and in so doing, she is in fact defying the apparently immutable laws of gender. On a previous encounter, Lyndall had pointed out what she perceived to be Gregory Rose’s true gender identity: ‘There [...] goes a true woman — one born for the sphere that some women have to fill without being born for it. How happy he would be sewing frills into his little girl’s frocks, and how pretty he would look sitting in a parlour, with a rough man making love to him!’ (164). Lyndall’s fantasy becomes in this light a game of sex role exchanging, and as Kate Millet has pointed out, “sex role is sex rank” (Millet, 1969: 343). It

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<sup>65</sup> Anne McClintock has established that the fight to control the regulation of marriage in colonial Africa was the effective means to control the power base of the economy. The moralising discourse of racial degeneracy wielded by missionaries and colonists alike with regard to polygyny was in fact trying to hide an economic anxiety since the “excess labor that a black man controlled through his wives was seen as a direct and deadly threat to the profits of the settlers” (McClintock, 1995: 256). H. Rider Haggard’s narratives are particularly permeated by a concern with polygyny which is indirectly acknowledged to be at the heart of black male power. The exploitation of women’s labour thus allowed men to join freely the army, as may be inferred from the invitation made by the king of the Kukuanas (Zulus) to the white treasure seekers in *King Solomon’s Mines*: ‘and if ye do stand by my side in battle, if I win the day ye shall go with me to victory and honour. *I will give you oxen and wives, and ye shall take place of all the regiments*’ (Haggard, 1885: 156). Once the colonial treasury managed to divert the profits of female labour from black to white male hands by means of heavy hut and marriage taxes the scruples surrounding the issue of polygyny ceased to be a source of alarm.

<sup>66</sup> The youngest daughter of Karl Marx, a translator of Ibsen and Flaubert, was a close friend of Olive Schreiner, with whom she took part in the Men and Women’s Club. See, for instance, the article published in *The Adelphi* by Havelock Ellis, “Eleanor Marx” (1935), pp. 342-52. See also Holmes, 2014.

<sup>67</sup> Similarly, one of the arguments wielded by marriage reformers in the late 1860s was that it was “a relic of the days of slavery, and the legal position of married women was exactly that of the slaves, dependent upon masters and deprived of property rights” (Holcombe, 1977: 15).

is the fact that shifts in gender and, therefore, in hierarchy are indeed possible that the New Woman is trying to highlight. The scenes of transvestism in which Gregory theatrically becomes a woman in the perfect fulfilment of his role as Lyndall's nurse and, most importantly, his final re-adoption of a masculine role as Em's husband at the end of the novel seem to imply that there is "an ontological 'savage free thing', a third sex beyond gender" and that "no one, male or female, can or should be confined to an uni-form, a single form of self" (Gilbert, 1980: 416, 394).

The marriage of gender misrule that Lyndall has envisaged can only be validated upon Gregory's compliance with a basic predicament which involves his unconditional disavowal of all attempt to possess her either mentally or physically: 'You wish to serve me, and to have nothing in return! — you shall have what you wish' (199). Her language of the imperative acquires a particularly pungent tone as she explains to Gregory that by marrying him she is in fact precluding the kind of physical intimacy that marital love would justify:<sup>68</sup>

She held out her fingers for Doss to lick. 'Do you see this dog? He licks my hand because I love him, and I allow him to. Where I do not love I do not allow it. I believe you love me; I too could love so, that to lie under the foot of the thing I loved would be more heaven than to lie in the breast of another' (199).

By rescuing the image of the grateful dog she had carefully included in the previous picture of black male dominance, Lyndall exacts a novel privilege within her experiment of gender disorder whereby woman remains in utter control of her sexuality. The fear expressed by Schreiner's protagonist that women lose their power to restrain the unwelcome sexual gratification of their husbands is immersed in a larger feminist debate concerning the dangers involved in male sexual excess. The actress and writer Cicely Hamilton thus warned in her *Marriage as Trade* (1909) that wedlock was a means of enforcing obligatory sexual intercourse on the woman, suggesting that men's dislike of spinsters derived from their being living proof of the "fact that sexual intercourse was not for every woman an absolute necessity" (Bland, 1986: 137).

Lyndall's new womanly creed, however, appears to be flawed by a distressing source of conflict that threatens to erode her dreams of freedom. Her explicit understanding of sexual intercourse in terms of love features a disturbing contradiction, which shall prove to be the germ of her own self-destruction; as Rachel Blau Duplessis has put it, "in Lyndall, Schreiner has made a character who must fight against herself within herself" (1985: 27). Thus, her idealised conception of love as complete submission to one's object of devotion, that lying "under the foot of the thing" woman loves proves Lyndall's inescapable adherence to the ideology of self denial prescribed by the dominant discourse on womanliness which she has purported to dismantle. J. S. Mill had explained in *The Subjection of Women* that one of the "great means of influence over the minds of women" of which men availed themselves in order to hold them in subjection was the representation of female "meekness, submissiveness, and resignation of all individual will into the hands of a man, as an essential part of sexual attractiveness" (Mill, 1869: 131). Acknowledgement of the pleasure involved in yielding to her own sexual needs becomes in this light evidence of the struggle Schreiner's protagonist must take up in order to remain consistent with her feminist ideals.

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<sup>68</sup> One of the issues that gathered greater concern from feminist reformers was that of marital rape. By virtue of the marriage contract the husband's "right to sexual intercourse with his wife was absolute, superseding even the right of woman to protect herself or her unborn children from disease" (Kent, 1987: 93)

The weakness spotted in Lyndall's discourse may indeed contravene her portrait as a seamless New Woman of unbending commitments, but it is also a token of her construction as a desiring female subject who fluctuates between competing discourses on love. The kind of union between man and woman consistently promoted by outstanding feminist advocates was epitomised by J. S. Mill's conception of the ideal marriage of individuals "between whom there exists that best kind of equality, similarity of powers and capacities with reciprocal superiority in them — so that each can enjoy the luxury of looking up to the other, and can have alternately the pleasure of leading and of being led in the path of development". Mill's sentiment came to contradict Ruskin's model of the separate and complementary roles of the sexes that was based in a hierarchical dependence of male dominance and female subordination, a vision which was central to the question of imperial representations of gender "influencing many future leaders of empire" such as Cecil Rhodes (Callaway, 1987: 34). Lyndall's understanding of an ideal union certainly merges into Mill's notion of companionship as she illustrates marriage for love — "the beautifullest external symbol of the union of souls" (156) — with an idealised picture taken directly from animal life. Nature offers examples of different bird species in which both genders take over parenting roles, as in the case of the ostrich which has left her nest while the cock broods on the eggs: 'Let us wait at this camp and watch the birds [...] I like these birds, [...] they share each other's work, and are companions' (153). Lyndall's illustration thus argues against the social norm that dictated the gendered division of labour. Drawing on the language of biology, she resorts to the authoritative example of nature, empirical knowledge and "experience",<sup>69</sup> in order to elicit agreement. In this instance she is in fact appropriating the tactics employed by the dominant ideology of Empire with its strategic use of science, to show her dissent and defend an alternative vision of the possible balance between the sexes.

The contradictions that Schreiner's protagonist is bound to face originate in the consciousness of her difficulties to cope with the incontrovertible allures of womanly thralldom. Lyndall's unnamed stranger, the manly man that comes from her past in order to prevent her marrying Gregory Rose proves to be an enigmatic, rascal-like male predator. The reasons produced by the New Woman to reject his second marriage proposal evidence a painful awareness of the battle fought within herself: 'Because if once you have me you could hold me fast. I shall never be free again' (203) — her assertion of independence would be jeopardised by becoming irremediably linked to a man who can only satisfy her sexual desire: 'it is all madness. You call into activity one part of my nature; there is a higher part that 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 sometimes' (204). Lyndall's understanding of the shortcomings her "precipitous infatuation" involves is instrumental in the foresight of future marital problems that she has designed to prevent. Her perception is in this sense very much in keeping with a large part of the nineteenth-century fiction that functioned as a "prudent warning against the perils" derived from "unsuitable alliances" (Gay, 1986: 151).

Emboldened by a clear discernment of his advantageous position as a male, Lyndall's lover dares to protest: 'I should not have believed it possible that I could have brought myself twice to ask any woman to be my wife, more specifically one without wealth, without position, and who — [as the New Woman promptly adds] 'Yes — go on. Do not grow sorry

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<sup>69</sup> Raymond Williams has explained that the term "experience" is indeed "the most common form of ideology". It is "the second natural", implying all the things that go without saying. (Williams, 1981: 63)

for me. Say what you were going to — who has put herself into my power, and who has lost the right of meeting me on equal terms' (204-205). A decided rejection of the manly suitor becomes in this light the only means available for Lyndall to exercise a power that should not be underestimated — precisely because of the presumption of sexual intercourse which makes all the difference. For her rejection is not only a way to validate her freedom but, most importantly, it is the means to go against both the logic of the expected social narrative on fallen womanhood and the cultural myth of chivalry and male generosity.<sup>70</sup> Redrawing the trace of the hierarchical relationship between man and woman that the mechanism of chivalry aimed to erase, her decision transcends a personal ambition to resist appropriation, immersed as it is in the realm of the new-womanly possible, the feminist uncertain but nevertheless conceivable utopia. Foolish as her standpoint may appear from the perspective of more traditional fictions, Schreiner's "weak, selfish, erring" protagonist dares effectively to lift the veil that posited the English gentleman and the violent male Kaffir as opposite extremes in the spectrum of masculinity and civilisation (247). With her realisation of the spurious aim lurking behind her stranger's chivalrous rescue offer — the aim of relocating her in the disabling position of helpless fallen womanhood — Lyndall manages to bring both ends together.

In a desperate attempt to flee from the unequal relationship with a man so different in rank, fortune and character, and boldly defying the idealised notion of inequality that hid behind chivalric altruism, Lyndall determines the conditions of a new sexual contract whereby she can indulge her female desire and retain personal freedom: 'if you wish, you may take me away with you, and take care of me; then when we do not love any more we can say good-bye' (206). A free union and an immediate departure to a remote space, the Transvaal, become the alternative formula devised to eschew social imperatives and have things her own way.

Olive Schreiner was one of the few feminists who had dared to insist on the fact that women's sexual needs were as real and could be as impetuous as those taken for granted in men.<sup>71</sup> Her rejection of marriage as a 'barbaric relic of the past', however, was a direct and specific attack on the contemporary conception of the institution and she was always perplexed by her misrepresentation as "an advocate of free love or radical promiscuity" (McClintock, 1995: 286). The South-African thinker tried to promote a sound vision of sexuality based on the "spontaneous affection of the woman for the man", implying that the

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<sup>70</sup> In her study of imperial representations of gender roles Helen Callaway has explained that the "central unifying assumption behind" the various discourses wielded by the dominant ruling group in Britain in order to maintain its power and interests was "the acceptance, often unstated and unconsciously held, of the natural superiority of the English gentleman", — a concept that "drew its imagery and imaginative strength from the myths of chivalry", becoming "a dominant theme in Victorian poetry and novels, [...] dramatised in popular boys' fiction, internalised by generations of public schoolboys and embodied in ideals of service to the Empire" (1987: 31, 40).

<sup>71</sup> The debate on the differences concerning male and female sexual needs animated many discussions at the Men and Women's Club during the 1880s. An idea that pervaded the discourse of many women members and associates of the Club, including Schreiner, Annie Besant and Henrietta Muller, was that "it was not so much that women were *less* sexual than men, but that their experience of sexual intercourse and its consequences were generally far less pleasant" (Bland, 1986: 128). According to Schreiner, "[t]he physical creation of human life, which, as far as the male is concerned, consists in a few moments of physical pleasure, to the female must always signify months of pressure and physical endurance, crowned with danger to life. To the male, the giving of life is a laugh; to the female, blood, anguish, and sometimes death" (Schreiner, 1911: 180-81). Schreiner's concern with the question of female sexual pleasure did not follow the guidelines of mainstream feminism in the 1880s, which found in the doctrine of female passionlessness a means to defend women's rights and "validate a new social role for [them] outside the heterosexual family" (Walkowitz, 1982: 86).

enfranchisement of sexual love was dependent on “the economic freedom and social independence of the woman” (Schreiner, 1911: 258). The confrontation of Lyndall’s formula of the free union against Schreiner’s conception of a sanctioned female sexuality reveals the pleasures and the punitive dangers involved in non-marital love. A turning point in the story, the protagonist’s escape into the Transvaal initiates an unusual downfall and — if we continue to follow the teachings of extended novel reading — a predictably gloomy end for Schreiner’s heroine. What she is gaining in self-assertion, her empowering adherence to what is morally, politically and ethically right, according to her New Woman’s creed, must be inevitably counterbalanced by all that she is giving up and losing for ever, namely, the possibility of enjoying the privileges that only the position of a married woman in the late 1860s could bestow.<sup>72</sup>

Lyndall’s free union, however, constitutes an act of feminine transgression in the last analysis. It represents a symbolic projection of the collective anxieties of a society undergoing profound transformations, particularly the anxieties concerning sex, capital and their relation with marriage as a social contract. Despite all her mistakes and the bitter end that Schreiner’s protagonist finds in this tale of revolt, her accomplishments were of the lasting kind, as they opened new paths for women to reaffirm the material possibility to dissent and act in a different way from that expected. Her legacy for new heroines to come was her brave struggle to live her life freely, and to achieve social autonomy, but not at the cost of sacrificing her sexual desire.

### 3.4. CONCLUSIONS

*The Story of an African Farm* inaugurates not only a new genre, the New Woman novel, but also Olive Schreiner’s new method of representation, which she referred to as “the method of the life we all lead”, characterised by a lack of certainties and the rupture with the traditional expectations of the English realist *Bildungsroman*. In this chapter I have drawn attention to the relationship between the novel’s new realist form and the new political content it advances. Infused with John Stuart Mill’s conception of qualitative value, the renunciation of the satisfactions guaranteed by well-established literary conventions is instrumental in the forging of a new, more troubling, intellectual space where political change may be possible, though deferred. The possibility of an accurate representation of “the real”, in the artist’s pursuit of Truth, is predicated on the reader’s willingness to suspend all certitude and remain somehow dissatisfied, with a certain sense of incompleteness or frustration.

In order to produce an aesthetic analysis of Schreiner’s feminist protagonist, I have established an analogy between the challenge posed in the preface against conventional realism and the idea of a normative female body, which is equally questioned by the New Woman. In this pioneer feminist fiction the beautiful feminine body is a continuous source of political insights. The material body is the canvas in which the political discourse is developed by the protagonist. The aesthetic conceptualisation of the New Woman’s physique

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<sup>72</sup> One of the major achievements of nineteenth-century feminism was the reform of the common law regarding married women’s property. The 1861 census had revealed that one-third of the labour force was female and on these working women, nearly one-fourth were married. The reality shown by official statistics helped to spur the demands of an organised feminist movement in the later 1860s, which would ultimately lead to the Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882. The 1882 Act guaranteed an equitable marriage settlement for all women who, thereby, obtained a legal identity apart from that of their husbands and acquired the same legal rights over property as unmarried women. Eighteen Married Women’s Property Bills were introduced in Parliament between 1857 and 1882 (Holcombe, 1977: 3-28; Griffin, 2012: 82-96).

in terms of the eternal feminine — with the recurrent images of Lyndall as a sleeping beauty and of her dainty little limbs — is instrumental in the textual promotion of the feminist pioneer, which proves to be problematic on two different levels as her beauty is defined in stark opposition with other female bodies — variously construed as either grotesque or racially inferior — and a diegetic tension is created between her perfect Victorian beauty and the protagonist's resistance to being reduced to an object of contemplation.

Drawing on Foucault, I have interpreted Lyndall's fetishised body as a deviation whereby its apparent meaning, semiotically charged with the connotations of an angel in the house, clashes against the process of identity formation of the heroine as a feminist rebel. I have argued that Lyndall's eurythmic portrait produces a dislocation of the hegemonic aesthetic prejudice against advanced women, mostly circulated by the conservative press, by ascribing monstrosity away from the feminist woman onto the discursively regressive female characters in *African Farm*. Such a narrative strategy raises important questions on the complex intersection of discourses on race, class and gender in Schreiner's novel.

The novel mobilises the sleeping beauty myth as an occasion for the protagonist to disrupt conventional expectations on the love plot. Sleeping is presented as a self-induced evasion from woman's oppression. Metaphorically cancelling all questioning, sleeping is construed as a mechanism of avoidance which enables the feminist dream in which a utopia of political change is envisioned for womanhood. Thus, I have argued that the aesthetic abstraction of Lyndall's fetishised body and the mythopoeic construction of the heroine as a sleeping beauty provide the narrative means to propose the feminist dream as a "precondition of political action", in Christa Knellwolf's phrase. Disrupting the rationale of Perrault's fairy tale, the new heroine conceives of the dream as a temporary salvation from oppression, a strategic evasion which shall be re-enacted by the Egertonian heroines in *Keynotes* and *Discords* in the 1890s.

One of the most politically enabling realisations of *African Farm*'s new heroine, directly springing from her own aesthetic conceptualisation, is the anti-essentialist maxim that gender is constructed, that femininity is performed. Lyndall's reflections before the looking glass unleash a discourse on power, gender and identity saturated with references to work and knowledge as the only means to liberate women from their shackles. Ultimately, woman must fight for herself. Still an adolescent heroine, Schreiner's protagonist interweaves knowledge, wealth and fancy dress in a fantasy of female power which makes compatible her yearnings for jewellery and sartorial excess with her demand for greater access to work and educational opportunities.

The ambitions of the new heroine, checked by her disappointing educational experience abroad, furnish the protagonist with a new opportunity to address major mechanisms embedded within the dominant gender ideology. Tropes such as the looking glass or Lyndall's oversized diamond ring are strategically exploited in order to interfere in the patriarchal symbolic order by assaulting some of its foundational premises. The dismantling of such premises involves a triple resistance mounted via (a) a discourse against marriage as parasitism in an effort to discriminate the dignified posture of the New Woman against the prostitute, (b) an attack on the pedestal theory as a cultural fallacy which keeps women in an artificial position of superiority so as to prevent them from a real access to power, and (c) a disclosure of the fact that the idealisation of women is inextricably linked to the male aversion of becoming one. *African Farm* suggests gender exchange as the ultimate ontological venture.

In the middle section of this chapter I have undertaken a discursive analysis of the novel. I have studied the construction of the feminist protagonist's subjectivity by examining the clashes between antagonistic discourses in *African Farm*. The first part of the novel shows a mostly silent protagonist whilst the second part, coinciding with Lyndall's return from the English boarding school, is characterised by her political speeches and disquisitions on the woman question. Part I shows a new heroine modelling a discourse which is reactive against both feminine masochistic language and against the brutally oppressive speech of those adults who abuse their power at the farm.

The dialectical confrontation with stereotyped characters such as the Irish impostor, Bonaparte Blenkins, or the Boer woman, Tant' Sannie, is instrumental in the configuration of her linguistic stance as a New Woman. The moral and intellectual construction of Schreiner's protagonist as a powerful and, almost infallible, rational subject contributes to the perception of Lyndall as an allegorical character with a mission to accomplish in the novel. In his double role of instructor and religious leader, Blenkins represents coercion as a means to exert control over the farm. His unimaginative discourse, his inability to engage in real communication and his dismissal of language help vertebrate the new heroine's reaction to lying, to non-factuality, her immunity to coercion, as well as her indefatigable search for truth. In order to support the New Woman's standpoint, Schreiner's novel shows the vulnerability of certain human groups in cross-cultural environments when they are not equipped with the necessary linguistic tools to question the imposing other. Language is a continuous source of conflict for Tant' Sannie, whose defective understanding is as idiosyncratic as her adherence to prevalent opinions. Violence, superstition, and irrational prejudice are trademarks of the Dutch woman's linguistic utterances whose access to other discourses is always mediated by poor translations performed by the Hottentot maid. *African Farm* presents certain female characters — the Boer woman, the Hottentot maid and the Kaffir servants — as incapable of true introspection and reproducing — in their brutal speech or in their satisfaction to see violence exerted against others — the oppression exerted against the colonised. Schreiner's novel thus identified the New Woman's speech with specific race and class coordinates, whiteness and Englishness, which constitutes a problematic aspect to deal with from the point of view of feminist criticism.

Lyndall's discourse, in this light, emerges as a beacon of rationality in the farm. An advocate of J. S. Mill's "free discussion", she engages in rational conversation with Waldo, her male alter-ego in the novel. I have attempted to identify the most relevant stances adopted by the new heroine: a) a rejection of coarse language as a token of her intolerance towards the tyrannical practices in the farm, b) perseverance and active resistance as a female individual to adopt the discursive role of victim, c) a debarment of mortification and self-denial as valid linguistic stances since they justify patriarchy in its misconceived authority against women, d) a pragmatic search for effectiveness, e) a predilection for free discussion, whose main elements are revealed in the debating society created by Lyndall and Waldo, to wit: provocative interrogations, dissections of arguments and diverse sides of an issue, careful examination and contrast with antagonistic discourses and a zeal for analytic acuteness in the exposition; f) a yearning for certainties, g) the enforcement of a secularised vision of society as a result of an irretrievable loss of faith; the new heroine is a religious dissident, h) an assumption of responsibility for our actions, our dreams and our own disabilities as human beings, i) a belief in the possibility of change and revolution grounded in g) and h) above.

I have connected the new heroine's dismantling of the naturalisation of women's disabilities and their alleged consent to their domination with J. S. Mill's notion of "fatality of birth", which excluded women from the education and the professions open to them, and the post-structuralist, feminist focus on the access to knowledge as a key political issue. Lyndall's speech is overtly political; it is replete with loquacious examples and counterexamples, with daring speculations and challenges of conventional discursive positions aimed at maintaining women in their subordinate roles. *African Farm* shows that the New Woman is conformed through language, through the constant revision and rethinking of hegemonic discourses and through her struggle against inertia and homogenisation. By proposing language as the most effective site of political change, the novel manages to design a heroine with a multilayered identity. Aesthetically inflected as a beautiful bourgeois woman ("angel in the house") and discursively qualified as a pioneer feminist ("platform speaker"), the rhetorical portrait of the new heroine is further problematised by her construction as a desiring subject ultimately doomed by sexual emotion ("fallen woman").

Following Patricia Murphy's studies on the subversion of temporality in Schreiner's fiction, I have claimed that the novel's iconoclastic narrative structure is in keeping with its ideological project to undo univocal gender roles and the traditional separate spheres. Schreiner's narrative fosters the notion of uncertainty as a vehicle to expand gender semiotics and the hermeneutic possibilities of the New Woman in the colonies.

In the final section I have addressed the debate on marriage in *African Farm*, particularly as it occupies a prominent space in the heroine's discourse as well as in Schreiner's non-fictional work, *Woman and Labor*. The following are the most significant views and strategies advanced by Schreiner's emancipatory texts around this debate:

a) a decided rejection of the marriage career as a means to gain financial security. Such a conception of marriage is identified with woman's ultimate disempowerment, for it implies the utter subjection to man and the cumbersome prospects of motherhood

b) a new notion of partnership, based on an idealisation of the equality between the sexes, is produced in opposition to the debased notion of marriage held by other characters, notably the voracious Boer woman,

c) in its present state, the marriage institution is the epitome of female degradation,

d) an identification is made between marriage and woman's "legal prostitution", a comparison already established by Daniel Defoe and Mary Wollstonecraft,

e) the figure of the legal prostitute represented by the immoral wife in Lyndall's discourse is conspicuously similar in her ambitions to Elizabeth Lynn Linton's "Girl of the Period", particularly as they exhibit an identical penchant for pleasure and idleness. By juxtaposing the ideas put forward by Wollstonecraft, Linton and Schreiner, I have tried to show the conflation of antagonistic discourses on womanhood in their struggle to take control of the processes of signification and make them suit their own political interests,

f) the parallel notions of prostitution and "female parasitism", inferred in Lyndall's diatribe against woman's role within wedlock, is present both in *African Farm* and in Schreiner's socio-political essay, *Woman and Labor* (1911). I have shown that the notions of illness, degeneration, and unfitness for the moral standard of the British race that the prostitute incarnated were problematically mobilised in both texts as instances of the New Woman writer's complicity with the imperial project and her resistance against the constrictions of gender roles imposed by the former,

g) by granting women access to the higher professions, they would cease to be financially dependent on men and modern civilization would recover the true value of half its body through their useful labour. This is the political remedy that in Schreiner's rationale would both heal the sick modern females and restore the welfare of the nation,

h) the mobilisation of concepts such as "the mercenary wife", and "germinal inheritance" in the context of evolutionary and eugenic discourses allows the New Woman writer to utilise an essentially antifeminist argument — the importance attached to racial motherhood — to explain women's necessity to gain economic independence and access to a full education.

With regard to Lyndall's views on marriage in *African Farm*, I have focused on the following main points:

a) a defence of celibacy, work and knowledge as liberating forces for womanhood, in an attempt to prevent women from taking up love as their profession,

b) the master-slave relationship enacted in marriage is analysed in economic terms which transcend both race and class boundaries; explicit references to the symbolic force of ukulobolo — or marriage exchange as the effective means to transform women's work into male power — are instrumental in Lyndall's establishment of the economic basis of women's oppression,

c) in an attempt to reverse the gendered logic of the master-slave relationship, Lyndall conceives of a marriage bond in which she can masquerade as female master; by marrying Gregory Rose (an impossible hero and a true woman), the New Woman may adopt the role of dominatrix and acquire a name. Addressing the possible dissolution of gender and class boundaries, Lyndall's fantasy implies that both hierarchy and gender roles can be effectively exchanged,

d) the loss of women's power to restrain the unwelcome sexual gratification of men as obligatory sexual intercourse could be enforced on married women,

e) Lyndall's intimate conception of love in terms of complete submission to the object of devotion reveals a contradiction with her own discourse against woman's self-denial and with the union between equals of similar powers endorsed by most feminist advocates of the times. It is a harbinger of her self-destruction in the novel. I have argued that this flaw in Lyndall's portrait impedes the notion of a seamless New Woman of unbending commitments and that it is a token of her construction as a desiring subject who fluctuates between competing discourses on love,

f) her determination to resist appropriation; by eschewing marriage Lyndall aims to claim her right to choose her own destiny, limited as her choices are as a single pregnant woman of scarce financial resources. She devises a sexual contract in the form of a free union where by she can satisfy her sexual emotion and retain personal freedom,

g) while the South African writer tried to promote a sound vision of female sexuality based on her spontaneous affection and financial independence, the confrontation of the new heroine's formula of the free union against Schreiner's conception reveals the punitive nature of non-marital love in Victorian times.

It is easy to understand the allure of *African Farm*'s heroine. Her feminine transgressions represent a symbolic projection of collective anxieties during times of profound transformations, and her brave struggle to live her life freely served as an example of revolt and stamina in face of hardship.

## 4 KEYNOTES & DISCORDS: GEORGE EGERTON'S CENTRIFUGAL NEW WOMAN

It is my purpose in the pages that follow to trace George Egerton's contribution to the characterisation of the New Woman through an in-depth analysis of two groups of stories published under the titles of *Keynotes* and *Discords*<sup>1</sup> in the first half of the eighteen nineties. Mary Chavelita Dunne (1859-1945)<sup>2</sup> chose George Egerton as her pen name in an attempt to evade the expectations of gentility and sentimentalism traditionally ascribed to female Victorian authors. Her courageous portraits of empowered females making the most of their talents shocked contemporary readers as conspicuous challenges to well-established discourses on female passivity and passionlessness (McCulloch, 1996: 206). This Australian-born writer achieved an immense popularity during the eighteen nineties,<sup>3</sup> only to sink into oblivion ever since, thus coming to enlarge the lists of much underread Victorian fiction for the most part of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Keynotes*. London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane (1893), *Discords*. London: John Lane at the Bodley Head (1894). I have handled the 1983, Virago's joined edition of the stories, from which I shall be quoting: *Keynotes and Discords*. Introduction by Martha Vicinus. London: Virago Press, 1983. Vicinus provides information of the critical reception of the stories by their contemporaries, as well as a general overview of Egerton's major themes and her anticipation of the modern short story (vii-xix). One of the stories in *Discords*, "Wedlock", is also reprinted in *Short Stories of the 'Nineties: A Biographical Anthology*. Ed. Derek Stanford. New York: Roy Publishing, Inc. 1968: 141-162. Stanford includes a discussion on short story fiction from the 'nineties as well as some biographical data on the mostly neglected authors featured in the book.

<sup>2</sup> Despite being born in Melbourne, Australia, as a child she spent much time in Ireland with her Irish father. Her Welsh mother died when Mary Chavelita was fourteen years of age. She was also schooled in Germany and tried nursing in London. Later, she spent two years in New York and returned to England. She moved to Norway as a result of her affair with the bigamous Henry Higginson, who turned out to be a violent and alcoholic partner and died two years later. Her first husband was George Egerton Clairmonte, a young novelist whom she married in 1891. Three years later she moved to London from their home in County Cork, had a son named George and got divorced in 1901. That same year she met and married a theatre agent fifteen years her junior, Reginald Golding Bright. Her work comprises story collections, *Keynotes* (1893), *Discords* (1894), *Symphonies* (1897); *Fantasias* (1898); one novel, *The Wheel of God* (1898); prose fiction, *Rosa Amorosa* (1901), *Flies in Amber* (1905); and the plays, *His Wife's Family* (1907), *The Backsliders* (1910) and *Camilla States Her Case* (1925). For an extension of Egerton's biographical details see Terence de Vere White's *A Leaf from the Yellow Book. The Correspondence of George Egerton* (1958) and Margaret D. Stetz's unpublished dissertation, '*George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties*' (1982), which contains extended information on Egerton's life and a comprehensive study of her work. See also Venegas, 2013:12-21.

<sup>3</sup> Selling up to 6,000 copies in its first year of publication, *Keynotes* had gone into its eighth printing by the end of 1898, it had been translated into seven languages and it featured as only second to Rudyard Kipling's short stories in America's sales ranking (Stetz, 1999: 34). For a discussion of publication issues and the contemporary response to *Keynotes* see also Rosie Miles's "George Egerton, Bitextuality and Cultural (Re)production in the 1890s", in *Women's Writing*, 3 (1996), pp. 243-60 (Miles studies the interconnections between the textual and the visual in Egerton's illustrated first edition of *Keynotes*), and Venegas's introduction to her Spanish edition of Egerton's *Tónicas y Disonancias*, 2013: 28-37.

<sup>4</sup> The renewal of interest in New Woman fiction begins, however, in the 1970s with the emergence of feminist studies and the pioneering work of Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Patricia Stubbs, *Feminism and the Novel: Women and Fiction, 1880-1920* (1979). Committed to "gynocriticism", both works treat New Woman writings, and Egerton's production in particular, with great condescension, in their aim to reproduce the aesthetic of high modernism as standard of literary value. Subsequent studies in the work of George Egerton include: Wendell V. Harris, "Egerton: Forgotten Realist" (1983), (an article that aims to rescue the New Woman writer from the obscurity of past decades and also explores Egerton's narrative techniques); Martha Vicinus has equally contributed to rescue Egerton's work from oblivion with her article "Rediscovering the 'New Woman' of the 1890s: The Stories of 'George Egerton'" (in *Feminist Re-visions: What Has Been and Might Be*. Eds. Patraha, V. and Tilly, 1983. pp. 12-25); Ann L. Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (1990), (Ardis discusses the relationship between the feminist literary movement in the 1880s and 1890s,

and modernism, offers interesting information of publishing details and of the critical reception of Egerton's work and briefly deals with the controversy on female sexuality emerged from stories like "A Cross Line" in *Keynotes*; Lynn Pykett, *The "Improper" Feminine. The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*, (Part III. "Breaking the Bounds: The Improper Feminine and the Fiction of the New Woman" contains relevant discussions on Egerton's stories that deal with woman's 'affectability', marriage and motherhood questions. See pp. 137-209); Rita S. Kranidis, *Subversive Discourse* (1995), (this study includes a discussion on Egerton's relation to feminism, as part of its larger aim to investigate the tensions between feminist and mainstream literature); Laura Chrisman, "Empire, 'Race' and Feminism at the *fin de siècle*: the Work of George Egerton and Olive Schreiner" (1995), examines the short stories of both writers and the way they use hierarchical notions of cultural difference to rather different ends; Kate McCulloch, "Mapping the Terra 'Incognita' of Women: George Egerton's *Keynotes* (1893) and New Woman Fiction" (1996) (this essay analyses the impact of *Keynotes* on women's literature in the 1880s and 1890s, dealing with the subjects of the fallen woman, female desire, and motherhood, present in Egerton's stories); Margaret D. Stetz, "Keynotes: A New Woman, Her Publisher, and Her Material" (1997), (an article focusing on a special copy of *Keynotes* featured in a Sotheby and Company auction in 1925, it also contains some information on Egerton's biography and comments on her ideas on sexuality); Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (1997) (Ledger studies Egerton's feminist aesthetics and its relation to modernism, her sexual radicalism as well as her feminine mode of writing. Brief discussions of "A Cross Line", "Virgin Soil" and "Wedlock" are also included. See, above all, pp. 187-198); Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (2000), (Heilmann discusses Egerton's rejection of feminism and her role as a late Victorian female writer in a book that deals with New Woman fiction as an instrument of political change); Nicole M. Fluhr, "Figuring the New Woman: Writers and Mothers in George Egerton's Early Stories" (2001), (Fluhr provides an analysis of the concerns with female authors and mothers sparked by the advent of New Woman writing, and the challenge these topics posed to pre-existent notions of female modesty and selflessness); Richardson and Willis (eds.), *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact. Fin de Siècle Feminisms* (2001), (a collection of articles exploring the range and complexity of the New Woman icon and briefly addressing Egerton's short stories); Charlotte Rich, "Reconsidering the Awakening: The Literary Sisterhood of Kate Chopin and George Egerton" (Spring 2003): pp. 121-36, (Rich has observed striking similarities with regard to both themes and style in the work of the Anglo-Irish and the American authors and claims that Chopin must have been acquainted with the New Woman fiction in England); for a study of the reconfiguration of the short story by George Egerton, see C. Bretones Martínez's "El relato en la narrativa femenina anglosajona finisecular (1880-1895): George Egerton, Kate Chopin y Charlotte Perkins Gilman" (2015: 79-95); Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenic in the Late-Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (2003), (linking the projects of Victorian feminism to the notion of rational reproduction, Richardson addresses the work of Egerton and other feminist writers to investigate their defence of biological responsibility and free marital choices as the only means to accomplish national regeneration. See particularly Chapter 7, "George Egerton and Eugenic Morality", pp. 156-178); Iveta Jusová has studied Egerton's work from a postcolonial perspective and stressed the necessity to reassess the relation between the New Woman and the imperialist project in "George Egerton and the Project of British Colonialism" (2000a); Lisa Hager has studied the ways in which Egerton's upper middle-class heroines negotiate agency and take the reins of their own lives while recognising both class and ethnic otherness (see "A Community of Women: Women's Agency and Sexuality in George Egerton's *Keynotes* and *Discords*" [2006]: 26 paragraphs); Shanta Dutta, "Redefining 'Woman' in Victorian Patriarchy", (2010) (by focusing on the heroines in *Keynotes*, Dutta highlights the Egertonian penchant for sex antagonism and female bonding through the experience of maternity in the stories); Tina O'Toole's "The Transnational New Woman" studies George Egerton's production of a new translocational subject in her semi-autobiographical novel *The Wheel of God* from the point of view of migration and diaspora studies (in *The Irish New Woman. Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture* (2013, pp. 129-48). See, by the same author, "Keynotes from Millstreet, Co. Cork: George Egerton's Transgressive Fictions" (2000: pp. 145-56), and "The New Woman Flâneuse or Streetwalker? George Egerton's Urban Aestheticism" (2016), which highlight the transitional quality of Egerton's work as a *fin-de-siècle* writer as well as her innovative ways to tackle the dilemmas posed by Irish urban modernity. O'Toole has also addressed the notion of exile in Egerton's protagonists, whom she regards as destabilising outsiders in "Unregenerate Spirits: the Counter-Cultural Experiments of George Egerton and Elizabeth Bowen" (2010). Likewise, Kate Krueger Henderson has explored the changing landscape of the city, the breakdown of class and gender borders and urban mobility as key elements in the formation of the gendered, modern consciousness in New Woman short fiction ("Mobility and Modern Consciousness in George Egerton's and Charlotte Mew's *Yellow Book Stories*" (*English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*. 54:2. 2011, pp. 185-211). More recently, Elke D'hoker has argued for the inclusion of Egerton's experimental fiction as one of the starting points of the modern Irish short story (see "Mothers of the Irish Short Story: George Egerton and Somerville and Ross" (2016: pp. 21-50). Whitney Standlee's "George Egerton, James Joyce and the Irish *Künstlerroman*" (2010) has claimed the importance to inscribe Egerton's fiction within an Irish literary tradition and draws comparisons between her novel *The Wheel of God* and James Joyce's works; M<sup>a</sup> Luisa Venegas Lagüéns has studied Egerton's style in *K & D* in comparison with Joyce's *Ulysses*, particularly with regard to modes of referencing, images and diverse experimental narrative techniques (see her "George Egerton, James Joyce and the New Woman", *Papers on Joyce* 19/20 (2013-2014): 137-169; Brooke Cameron has focused on the hunger experienced by the Egertonian female protagonists as a token of their libidinal desires and individuality (see "George Egerton's *Keynotes*: Food and Feminism at the *Fin de Siècle*" (2018: 309-330) and Alexandra Gray has studied in *Self-Harm in New Woman Writing* (2018) Egerton's drunken and self-mutilating females (see, especially, 139-150; 177-184; 187-194); Miriam Borham-Puyal has recently focused on female life in the margins in her "Construyendo la *New Woman*: Voces femeninas exocanónicas y sororidad en la ficción de George Egerton" (2020).

The project of this chapter is to analyse the complex interweaving of desire and identification processes which is at stake in the stories' production of female subjectivities. Since psychoanalysis has devoted considerable efforts to the explorations of mind, body, language and their inner dependencies, it is only befitting that I draw on some concepts advanced by theorists such as Freud, Lacan, Irigaray, Kristeva or Cixous, in my attempt to clarify the ways in which Egerton's stories construct female identity.

The notion of identity is never treated as a steady position of individual stillness, but rather as an endless process that "neither begins nor ends at a point of total immobility, draws its very lifeblood from the restless operations of identification" and "can never be isolated from [...] the institutions of identification that work to produce them in the first place" (Fuss, 1992: 93). The methodology implied in my analysis of George Egerton's heroines is thus infused with Lacanian psychoanalytic theory<sup>5</sup> in so far as I underscore the importance of specularity and the processes of identification through which these late Victorian female subjects are vertebrated. Liberally following Diana Fuss's post-structuralist studies on fashion photography, I will argue that the array of different images-categories presented to Egerton's new women function as a sort of "post-mirror phase" figures that charm those heroines through a cultural performance of "pre-mirror phase fantasies" which stand for an essential womanhood. The unflinching summons of a female primitivism in the stories, which is specifically constructed as prehistoric and untainted by civilisation, provides the illusion of a pure past and directs the heroine's gaze "solipsistically back to [her] own specular and fictive origins" (Fuss, 1992: 93).

Egerton's stories tend to construe the unstable category of woman within a large framework of complex identifications with more or less fixed groups such as the witch, the devil, the exotic dancer or the gypsy, conveniently hailed in order to suit and project the desired image of femaleness that constitutes the major ideological undertaking of these narratives. As Diana Fuss has explained, identity "draws its very lifeblood from the restless operations of identification, one of the most powerful but least understood mechanisms of cultural self-fashioning" (Fuss, 1992: 93).

These are problem narratives staging the drama of their heroines' grappling with the mysteries of femininity, bringing their natural instincts into conflict with established notions of authority, and inhabited by female somnambulists "bus[ying themselves] with questioning" (*Keynotes*: 21), interrogating their capacity to exert some power in that search for "what it is we [women] need to complete us" (*Discords*: 198, in Pyckett: 165).

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Lacan has explained that the subject comes into being by means of several identificatory mechanisms — narcissism, aggressivity, misrecognition, and objectification — that are in constant struggle at several stages in the child's psychical development and also in adulthood. Reinterpreting the work of Freud, Lacan utilises the concept of the "mirror stage" as a fundamental process in which infants achieve a mental representation of an "I" by means of external images of the body (their own mirror reflection or their mother's body). The identification process is thus started but that image of a unified body does not correspond to the experience of the infant's vulnerable physicality and, as a result, the external image becomes an Ideal-I to which the subject will always aspire. The three psychoanalytic orders of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary were developed by Lacan in a series of lectures in the 1950's. The Real order is prior to both the symbolic and the imaginary, it is the pre-mirror stage which resists representation; thus, the real is ended by the appearance of language and consciousness. The Symbolic order corresponds to the mirror stage, in which an image of coherence is created within the individual; it is the first experience of subjectivity, and closely related to the interpellation of subjectivity in Althusserian ideology — as culturally coherent images are hailed by the various Ideological State Apparatuses. The symbolic thus involves consciousness, as well as the creation of signifiers and language, it is the "determining order of the subject" (Miller, 1981: 279). The Imaginary order is associated with language and corresponds to the internalised "Ideal-I", which is whole and coherent, the relation "between the ego and its images" (Miller, 1981: 280). For an in-depth analysis of Lacanian concepts see, for example, Mellard's *Using Lacan, Reading Fiction* (1991). My aim in this chapter is to situate Egerton's female protagonists immersed in a process of subjectivity formation which is highly dependent on a system of perception and dialogue with their external and internal worlds, as I intend to demonstrate in the sections that follow.

By means of a complex and often contradictory interweaving of opposing discourses on woman, George Egerton's stories project a span of female identities that resist simplifications, posing at times challenges to major nineteenth century visions such as Weininger's welcomed ideas on women as basically inconsequential individuals, incapable of genuinely ethical behaviour, and unable to recognise the importance of moral laws (Ciplijauskaitė, 1984: 124). The vast number of woman types actually portrayed in *Keynotes* and *Discords* contributes to the polyphonic conception of identity suggested in both volumes. Her hypersensitive heroines may either brandish the flag of carnal pleasure or turn away from eroticism, but they generally disdain marriage and claim that love is not woman's major life project. In *Keynotes* there are idle smokers; jewelled readers of daring fiction; wealthy globe trotters who travel the world "without male assistance" (*K*: 43); women who give up religious observance and church going; anorexic protagonists who suffer from truncated love fantasies; "manlike" library goers who read in Russian and "lady dentist[s]" who refuse marriage proposals (*K*: 74, 72); "childless" professional writers with a "physical disgust to men" (*K*: 79, 81); divorced sportswomen; frustrated wives stuck in conventional marriages to lesser men; there are also mothers who forsake their illegitimate children; pious, consumptive housemaids and Bible readers; story tellers and widows liberated from abusive drunkards, to name just a few. *Discords* portrays highly sensitive girls fighting repression; adolescents involved in same-sex relationships; anaemic-looking heroines blackmailed into adultery; cyclists; alcoholic women travellers and fascinating young actresses; maiden sisters and women writers; drunken landladies; disillusioned newly-wed females who desert debauched husbands and idle widows — an astonishingly varied array of females, for sure, but the overall impression is that Egertonian heroines challenge respectability and freely choose their errors.

Egerton's heroines spend most of their time in out-of-door settings, enraptured by sudden epiphanies of the self: the Irish hills, the Norwegian fjords, or the English countryside are favourite surroundings, while the suffocating atmosphere of boarding-house bedrooms is the chosen space for realistic portraits of loveless marriages.

With regard to the major plots of the stories, *Keynotes* is first introduced by "A Cross Line", a story featuring female adultery in Ireland that is resolved with the protagonist's jilting of her lover and her final embracing of the joys of maternity. "Now Spring Has Come" narrates the delusive love story between a wealthy reader and a novelist, the transformation of her ingenuous love into a feminist avowal against the fetters of marriage. "The Spell of the White Elf" deals with the growing friendship between the orphan narrator and a sterile woman who decides to adopt a white elf. "A Little Grey Glove" is concerned with the possibility of second chances in love, suggested by the hopeful encounter between a "sex-shy" male narrator and a captivating, divorced heroine. "An Empty Frame" is a devastating portrait of a conventional married woman who has relinquished the possibility of entering a free union with her real soul mate. "Under Northern Sky" is a naturalist story in three parts featuring an impressive array of violent drunkards and dwelling respectively on the healing powers of motherhood to overcome male brutality (I. "How Marie Larsen Exorcised a Demon"), a wife's desire to liberate herself from the marriage bond and fulfil her dreams of gipsy freedom (II. "A Shadow's Slant"), and widowhood as a mechanism of emancipation from abuse (III. "An Ebb Tide").

*Discords* is also comprised of six stories. The first one is "A Psychological Moment in Three Parts" and it illustrates Egerton's adaptation of Knut Hamsun's accounts of fluctuating mental states in hypersensitive females: from the developing inner consciousness of childhood and the awakening sexual instinct in adolescence, to the conflicts derived from illicit relationships in maturity. "Her Share" narrates the fortuitous encounter between a

recently engaged woman and a middle-aged philologist who delves nostalgically in her own past. “Gone Under” is the tragic story of a fallen woman who ends up her days consumed by the evils of prostitution, phthisis and drink. “Wedlock” conforms a naturalistic narrative of counterbalanced females, the struggling, reserved woman writer and her drunken landlady, a single mother precipitated into an unsuitable marriage. “Virgin Soil” depicts the transformation from innocent bride into spokeswoman of an embittered discourse against marriage under its present circumstances. “The Regeneration of Two” is the final story in *Discords* and it fittingly constitutes Egerton’s most convincing utopia of female reinvention.

I have organised the present chapter in three main parts. The first one, “Celebrating the Feminine”, constitutes an exploration of two major premises which I have found embedded in the construction of female identity in the stories: the intertwining of seduction and enigma as mechanisms that make possible Egerton’s particular rendering of womanhood. The second part, “Narratives of Desire”, is the result of a close analysis of language, understood in its broadest sense, as a central focus in the narratives and of how it may be working in complicity with the ideological project of femininity fostered by George Egerton’s work. The third and final part, “Utopia Envisaged”, is a study of the ways in which female dissatisfaction may be transformed into a positive device in order to move beyond convention and reinvent female identity.

#### 4.1 CELEBRATING THE FEMININE

##### 4.1.1. Her own Seductress: The Homoerotic Dance in “A Cross Line”

In the present analysis I intend to explore some of the images and identifications embedded in one of the most revealing texts in *Keynotes*. The fragment is taken from “A Cross Line” (*K*, 1-36) and its significance as foundational specular image for Egerton’s heroines throughout the stories in both collections justifies quotation at length:

She fancies herself in Arabia on the back of a swift steed. Flashing eyes set in dark faces surround her, and she can see the clouds of sand swirl, and feel the swing under her of his rushing stride. Her thoughts shape themselves into a wild song, a song to her steed of flowing mane and satin skin; an uncouth rhythmical jingle with a feverish beat; a song to the untamed spirit that dwells in her. Then she fancies she is on the stage of an ancient theatre out in the open air, with hundreds of faces upturned towards her. She is gauze-clad in a cobweb garment of wondrous tissue. Her arms are clasped by jewelled snakes, and one with quivering diamond fangs coils round her hips. Her hair floats loosely, and her feet are sandal-clad, and the delicate breath of vines and the salt freshness of an incoming sea seems to fill her nostrils. She bounds forward and dances, bends her lissom waist, and curves her slender arms, and gives to the soul of each man what he craves, be it good or evil. And she can feel now, lying here in the shade of Irish hills with her head resting on her scarlet shawl and her eyes closed, the grand intoxicating power of swaying all these human souls to wonder and applause. She can see herself with parted lips and panting, rounded breasts, and a dancing devil in each glowing eye, sway voluptuously to the wild music that rises, now slow, now fast, now deliriously wild, seductive, intoxicating, with a human note of passion in its strain. She can feel the answering shiver of feeling that quivers up to her from the dense audience, spellbound by the motion of her glancing feet, and she flies swifter and swifter, and lighter and lighter, till the very serpents seem alive with jewelled scintillations. One quivering, gleaming, daring bound, and she stands with outstretched arms and passion-filled eyes, poised on one slender foot, asking a supreme note to finish her

dream of motion. And the men rise to a man and answer her, and cheer, cheer till the echoes shout from the surrounding hills and tumble wildly down the crags. The clouds have sailed away, leaving long feathery streaks in their wake. Her eyes have an inseeing look, and she is tremulous with excitement. She can hear yet that last grand shout, and the strain of that old-time music that she has never heard in this life of hers, save as an inner accompaniment to the memory of hidden things, born with her, not of this time. (Keynotes, 19-21)

This is part of the fourth sketch in the story of “A Cross Line”, immediately following the amorous exchanges between the female protagonist and her husband. The abrupt juxtaposition of that previous sketch, in which their sexual complicity was overtly exposed, with this new section permits a careful re-examination of that intimacy. Penetrating into this woman’s thoughts, into her exploitation of an orientalised version of herself,<sup>6</sup> the narrative focuses on the central issue of vital dissatisfaction as well as on the female drive to lift the bans of conventional morality.

The complicated process of secondary identifications enacted in the stories is in this way started with the display of the image of the exotic dancer with its references to a mythic past, an old time that connects the female subject with “the untamed spirit that dwells in her” (“A Cross Line”: 19). This representation of the female body would appear to be furnished as a renewed performance of that instant which stands for the female subject’s primeval awareness of the self. By creating a specular image of her body and inscribing it in a remote setting, the heroine in “A Cross Line” satisfies her drive to authenticate herself and to critically discern all her bodily parts. The endless verification of her arms, hair, feet, nostrils, waist, eyes, lips, breasts, sounds exhaustive and yet manages to convey an impression of disturbing incompleteness, which is corroborated by the protagonist’s feeling in “Now Spring Has Come” of “being totted up. Item, so much colour, item, so much flesh” (60). The narcissistic recreation of a fragmented body serves then as a fictive platform from which it is conceivable to grasp the whole image of her primitive self, “that old-time music that she has never heard in this life of hers, save as an inner accompaniment to the memory of hidden things, born with her, not of this time” (21).

Imagining herself in the guise of an oriental seductress, the protagonist performs the dance of a Salome<sup>7</sup> craving to quench her thirst for applause, and her “presence [...] is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire” — as Walter Pater had tellingly observed in his influential analysis of *La Gioconda*, two decades before the publication of *Keynotes* (Pater, 1873: 118).<sup>8</sup> The minute description of her imaginary dance

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Said has studied the recurrent tendency to vertebrate the Orient and sexuality as co-referential constructs and found it characteristic in the Western discourse of Orientalism. (*Orientalism*, 1979).

<sup>7</sup> Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé* was originally published in French in 1893, the same year that *Keynotes* saw the light. The coalescence of eroticism and orientalism enacted by the dance of Salomé is an important part of the fantasy dream in “A Cross Line”, where sensuality is intertwined with a sense of the transcendental and the eternal that Egerton finds inscribed in the myth of the eternal feminine. For a study concerned with the relationship between the Wildean character and the New Woman see Jane Marcus, “Salomé: The Jewish Princess Was a New Woman”, *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 78 (Autumn 1974): 95-113.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Pater’s description of “Leonardo’s masterpiece”, as he regarded the famous portrait, constitutes a conspicuous example of a blending of the femme fatale and the eternal feminine:

It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle age with its

inspires her sexual arousal anaesthetised as she is by the intense perfumes of the waning Irish summer, while it triggers what Rilke had explained as “an ever more desperate search for visible correlations of the *inwardly seen*”.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to explore this image as a troubling site of conflict since this fabrication of female power — which Egerton’s stories typically understand as the power to allure and to mesmerise the onlookers — may be in fact construed upon shifting sands.

In order to account for the discords interwoven in this particular sketch I would like to draw on Diana Fuss’s psychoanalytical theories with regard to women’s fashion photography,<sup>10</sup> hoping that they may shed some light in my own reading. Thus, there are several layers of conflict apparent to me in this sketch. On the one hand, and on the most obvious level, there is the distressing idea of a wife — the image of her last sexual intercourse above on the same page still lingers in our minds — indulging herself in a fantasy of indiscriminate desire, notably an appetite that was expected to be absent from proper femininity. On the other hand, and perhaps more interestingly, Egerton’s construction of a woman protagonist who plays the double role of viewing subject and object of the gaze<sup>11</sup> poses a problematic question within the obvious concern to produce a female subject who desires to be desired by men. “Scopophilically” posing as a “sexually irresistible” dancer, the protagonist in “A Cross Line” is not merely inviting her fictive male spectatorship to wallow in the sight, particularly as that audience is entirely fictitious. It is my contention that part of this sketch’s ideological project, the construction of the category of woman along the axis of heterosexuality — revealed in the explicit ambition shown by the female subject to occupy all male attention — is in fact hiding a tension with a latent aspiration that could be perhaps less readily admitted: by identifying with the prostitute, the promiscuous dancer of enticing charms, she is creating an “eroticized image[s] of the female body for the explicit appreciation and consumption by a female audience” (Fuss, 1992: 90). This is how the emblematic female protagonist in “A Cross Line” “might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy” but also,

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spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly, Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea. (Pater, 1873: 118-119)

The ancient quality of this female, who seems to personify “both prehistory [...] and history” (Gilbert & Gubar, 1989: 5), her evocateness, her musicality and a certain metamorphic otherness are just a few of the elements I have found later subsumed and reformulated by George Egerton in her myth of womanhood.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in McFarlane’s introduction to Henrik Ibsen’s major plays, p. xiv. Rilke’s remark was distinctly applied to Ibsen’s dramas and the subtleties found in his prose dialogues, in which a new system of communication was created that was able to convey the nuances and profundities hitherto veiled by the truisms of everyday speech (McFarlane, 1981: xiii, xiv).

<sup>10</sup> Fuss’s influential article on “Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look” originally appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Summer 1992). I shall be quoting from its reprint in Appiah & Gates’ *Identities* (1995).

<sup>11</sup> As in the dance of Wilde’s *Salomé*, whose description was deliberately excluded from the text — “the real dangers [...] are [...] those posed by her threatening the invidious distinction between the object of the gaze and the disembodied voice” (Koritz, 1992: 255). By appropriating the use of the word in her negotiation to obtain the head of Iokanaan, Wilde’s *Salomé* is moving beyond the category of sexual object. I am arguing that this Egertonian protagonist manages to carry out a similar dislocation and thus fuel a new anxiety into the cultural presuppositions surrounding the stereotype of the *femme fatale*.

because of the tensions interwoven in her homoeroticised pose, may well suggest Egerton's "symbol of the modern idea" (Pater, 1873: 119).

The exhibitionism of this protagonist as well as the lengthy descriptions of a quasi-orgasmic hallucination displayed without stint would appear to show that the particular image of woman introduced in this opening story is at the service of a double purpose: (a) setting the tone of femininity, or rather its keynote, for the following stories and (b) erecting this keynote as both a site of desire and identification for a female audience which includes the text's protagonist in her double quality of visual image and producer of the visualised object — as we are reminded by that feminine "odd feeling" of the heroine in "Now Spring Has Come" "that I am out of myself, watching myself" (*Keynotes*, 44). The present sketch constitutes in this sense an attempt to "decode the complicated operations of identification and desire, of being and having, that are at work in the social production of female spectatorial subjectivity" (Fuss, 1992: 93).

A further troubling question, from the point of view of a feminist reading of Egerton's text, is its exploitation of a cultural myth — "the exotic" — invariably identified with the Orient and interwoven in this first narrative from its opening paragraphs where the female protagonist was absorbed in her reading of "a little sketch [. . .] of a fountain scene in Tanagra, and her vivid imagination has made it real to her" (*Keynotes*: 1-2). From this first reference, the process of identification between this female and the realm of the exotic continues to build up until the final apotheosis of her dream vision as an oriental dancer. A significant instance of homoerotic consumption of sensual female images is found in the protagonist's relish for the aesthetic pose which the narrator pauses to underscore: "The slim, graceful maids grouped around [the fountain] filling their exquisitely-formed earthen jars, the dainty poise of their classic heads, and the flowing folds of their draperies have been actually present with her" (2). Almost an anticipation of the homospectatorial look she is to develop later on in the narrative, the text begins to weave female subjectivity in the unclear borders between dream and reality through a subtle backstitching of visual desire for other women — a device which is here introduced as evidence of female hypersensitiveness, and invoked in other scenes as in the protagonist's entranced contemplation of the tinted ivory Aphrodite in the first story of *Discords*.<sup>12</sup>

The image of the exotic dancer also establishes an immediate link between the story's main female portrayal and a well-known type, the *femme fatale*, thus described by Gustave Flaubert in his influential *La Première Éducation sentimentale* (1843-1845):

[...] cette race de filles d'Ève venues pour perdre les hommes, à ces femmes magiques qui se jouent avec les serpents, s'enlacent le corps dans leurs anneaux et les apaisent en leur parlant, à ces maîtresses de rois qui causent les calamités publiques, créatures perfides et toujours aimées qui vous trahissent dans un baiser, vous vendent pour des bijoux et vous offrent le poison tout en riant, au milieu de la fête, en se jouant sur vos genoux. (1843-1845a, chapter XV: 142-143)<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Same-sex relationships are perceived as subversive inclinations which are conveniently censured and castigated by the repressive forces of convention in, for example, "A Psychological Moment at Three Periods": "Tête-a-têtes are strictly forbidden; friendships are discouraged; two girls seen together a few times are warned sharply, if necessary separated in all recreations. Perhaps this adds to the piquancy of a flirtation with a chum of one's own sex. [...] The worst trouble is with the girls from fourteen up; if they fall in love with a 'sister'" (*Discords*, 12). A different example of lesbian attraction may be found in "Gone Under", where the girl actress asks the sensual fallen woman for a kiss during their transatlantic journey (*Discords*, 105).

<sup>13</sup> Confront the English translation: "In some vague way she made one think of that race of daughters of Eve sent into the world for man's undoing, of those magical women who play with snakes, winding their coils around their bodies and soothing them by talking to them, of those royal mistresses who are responsible for public calamities, perfidious but beloved

The description was applied to Lucinda, the actress with whom Jules falls desperately in love; in due time Lucinda becomes an odious character that will teach the meaning of life and love to Jules. He becomes greatly indebted in his vain zeal to satisfy the thirst for pleasure and luxury of this unscrupulous, heartless woman who ends up abandoning him. This powerful image of female debauchery endowed with almost supernatural powers, intense pleasures, and that threatening ability to cause major public upheavals by virtue of her sex is recuperated in Egerton's text as a referential point in the protagonist's exploration of her own femininity.

Deeply connected to the image of the dancing female is the idea of the musicality involved in the narrative process. Walter Pater's famous remark in "The School of Giorgione" on the constant aspiration of all arts to the condition of music appears to reverberate in Egerton's story as an attempt to achieve the inseparability of content and form that is found in music (Bloom, 1974). The Paterian idea would therefore be developed in the image of the woman-dancer whose rhythmic movement cannot be isolated from her — "How can we know the dancer from the dance?"<sup>14</sup> and who personifies an intricate collection of associated ideas in "A Cross Line". By situating unfathomable womanhood at the centre of her poetics, George Egerton was partaking of a tradition which her fiction, nevertheless, further tried to reformulate. Her exploitation of an old identification trope for the maladjusted female, the femme fatale, encapsulated a change in perspective, a determining feminisation, which was enforced on the different angles — as well as engraved on all facets — of the represented image. In charge of both the creative and hermeneutic processes, the Egertonian heroine assumes a triple role of creator, artistic object — the orientalisised image of self-enticing womanhood — and exegete, an ontological blending which allows for her being "out of [her]self, watching [her]self". Egerton's notion of womanhood is endowed with the old attributes of the eternal feminine evoked in Walter Pater's analysis of La Gioconda but it is filtered through a gendered lens which is compulsorily feminine. The modernity of these late Victorian fictions was not only symbolised, incarnated in woman as object of desire but in woman as subject who owns the gaze; and as interpreter of the female sign she becomes mistress of herself, a privileged beholder furnished with the ultimate gift, the key to interpretation and to woman's inner psyche. George Egerton's notorious stories are, therefore, not merely executing a painting of the femme fatale. The female protagonist, conspicuously the one in "A Cross Line", is shown in the act of creation, lost in reverie, as she is both producing a self-portrait and posing as a sort of *fin-de-siècle* Gioconda, while interpreting her artistic product in the triple condition of

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creatures who will betray you for a kiss, sell you for a gift of jewels, and, in the midst of feasting, sit on your lap and offer you poison with a smile on their lips" (1843-1845b: 94).

<sup>14</sup> The famous line corresponds to the last stanza in the poem "Amongst School Children", which appeared in the collection *The Tower*, in 1928:

O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance? (Yeats, 1928 : 224)

Yeats — whom, according to Egerton's biographer, she "dismissed as a *poseur*" — introduced her to Havelock Ellis and Arthur Symons, who were "very anxious to meet" the author of *Keynotes* (see the only two letters from W. B. Yeats to George Egerton in Terence de Vere White, 1958: 34) Interestingly, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have remarked, Yeats included a versified version of Walter Pater's celebrated reverie of La Gioconda as the opening poem in his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, thus suggesting that, for him, "the first modern poem was not a work in verse by Swinburne or Rossetti, Hardy or Housman. Instead, it was a prose passage about a femme fatale" (Gilbert and Gubar, 1989: 3-4). It is my contention that Egerton's fiction both responded and anticipated Yeats's ontological question, which poses an impossibility: there is no differentiating between the artistic image and the creator / beholder.

creator, work of art and beholder. In so doing, her fiction was in part adopting a Wildean aesthetics which extolled the function of “the highest criticism”: “It is the only civilised form of autobiography, as it deals not with the events, but with the thoughts of one’s life; not with life’s physical accidents of deed or circumstance, but with the spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the mind” (Wilde, 1884: 126-27).

The sensuality of this pagan Aphrodite that aspires to absolute power over male desire is completed in the attendant vision of “self-sufficiency” produced by the heroine, in her fashioning as an eroticised goddess: “I am a creature of moments. [. . .] People have needed me more than I them. I have given freely whatever they craved from me in the way of understanding or love. I have touched sore places they showed me and healed them, but they never got at me. I have been for myself, and helped myself, and borne the burden of my own mistakes” (*Keynotes* : 24). The fantasy of a woman who can incarnate the power to satiate and exhaust male desire is also reminiscent of the all-mighty goddess depicted in Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887)—and the necessity to nurture her narcissism through the male gaze in which she appears to search for identity is equally present in both texts:

There, sit so, and tell me, for in truth I desire praises — tell me, am I not beautiful? Nay, speak not so hastily; consider well the point; take me feature by feature, forgetting not my form, and my hands and feet, and my hair, and the whiteness of my skin, and then tell me truly, hast thou ever known a woman who [...] is justified to hold a lamp before my loveliness? Now, my waist! Perhaps thou thinkest it too large, but of a truth it is not so; it is this golden snake that is too large, and doth not bind it as it should. It is a wise snake, and knoweth it that is ill to tie in my waist. But see, give me thy hands — so — now press them round me, there, with but a little force, thy fingers touch, O Holly! (Chapter XVII: 143)

The climactic moment pursued by Egerton’s triumphant Aphrodite is the sight of the inner self, the inward look into the most profound nature. Egerton is thus rewriting the eternal feminine incorporating a significant tradition of body cult by means of the voluptuous attention her dreamer pays to her physique, which echoes in turn similar celebrations by conspicuous adulteresses in nineteenth-century fiction, such as Emma Bovary or Ana Ozores.

As in the myth of the Fatal Woman, into which the exotic and the mystic are jointly written, the dream vision of this Egertonian heroine starts from a “sensual basis” which is somewhat displaced, “transfer[ring] the fulfillment of [...] desire[s] to an ideal” (Praz, 1970: 210). In the case of the present story that ideal is represented by the evasion into motherhood. Thus, “A Cross Line” manages to conform a contradictory transformation from the emblem of non-purposive sexuality that the oriental dancer represents towards the entirely opposite goal of reproduction, condensed in the story’s ending with its shift towards maternal bliss.

#### **4.1.2. Enigmatic Females: The Gendered Game of Introspection and The Mechanism of Lying**

George Egerton’s late Victorian short stories make liberal use of an existing cultural myth — that of “woman as enigma” — which is conveniently exploited as part of a larger endeavour to produce a consistent notion of empowered femininity. The analysis that follows responds to my own attempt to explore the ways in which such a myth is utilised in these narratives, and to assess its efficiency as a guarantee of female power.

Freud had identified female sexuality with a dark continent which was resistant to being penetrated and examined, a construct that would continue to be utilised almost a century later by the French feminists in their calls to “write” the female body:

The Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. — It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable. And because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monuments to Lack. (Cixous, 1975: 341)

Egerton's stories mobilise the same notion via the exaltation of those impenetrable female signs, and the persistent image of the frustrated male taxonomist that inevitably accompanies them all. Thus, most narratives comprised under *Keynotes* and *Discords* introduce the posture of the tantalised male, both fascinated and tormented by his faulty ability to make sense of Egerton's enigmatic, "inscrutable" women ("A Shadow's Slant": 148). Immersed in persistent studies of the "female animal", his painstaking efforts to classify her are presented as a ludicrous attempt to attain the impossible ("A Cross Line": 3), or as a neurotic compulsion to heal a feeble masculine personality burdened with an inferiority complex ("The Little Grey Glove"). The male anxiety to discover the exact functioning of female psychology is presented as an obsessive project to dictate how it should work; this masculine endeavour to interpret feminine semiotics becomes, however, necessarily thwarted as it is entirely dependent on a premise that is discursively infeasible: the unveiling of a sign, the female, that discourse has previously created as essentially obscure and encrypted:

And she laughs, laughs softly to herself because the denseness of man, his chivalrous conservative devotion to the female idea he has created blinds him, perhaps happily, to the problems of her complex nature. Ay, she mutters musingly, the wisest of them can only say we are enigmas. Each one of them sets about solving the riddle of the ewig weibliche — and well it is that the workings of our hearts are closed to them, that we are cunning enough or great enough to seem to be what they would have us, rather than be what we are. But few of them have had the insight to find out the key to our seeming contradictions. ("A Cross Line": 21 - 22)

The exploitation of such a metaphor, the *terra incognita* that is always yet to be explored, and that is by definition non-decipherable, would seem to be at odds with the central claim underlying all the stories, to wit: the idea that female sexuality is likely to be apparent in a woman's text. Or perhaps it is not so, for Egerton leans on the tactics of impressions and intuitions to highlight the idea that women's presence is tenable only through minor details, through their perfume, through the slight tone of their voices; "the rustling of trailing skirts [...], and waving hair, and a feel of women", as the narrator declares in "Under Northern Sky" is what confirms woman's nearness (130). It is the fragmented, fetishized observation of apparently irrelevant elements that is instrumental in the perception of woman; it is the side effects that matter, not the obvious aspects that refer to Identity (which would explain the omission of all the female protagonists' proper names); it is the elusive, ephemeral quality of those vibrating cords linking her women to Nature above all, and to a few privileged males, where Egerton's stories allow for short, evanescent glimpses of their real selves. "This is the reason why music is the perfect type of art", as Oscar Wilde remarked, for music "can never reveal its ultimate secret" ("The Critic as Artist": 134).

Seen in this light, both the ludicrous male efforts above described and the narratives themselves would emerge as parallel gendered projects sharing a common aim: the revelation of woman as she really is. Since grasping the exact nature of the thing described — the female sign — is the acknowledged purpose of both projects, the stances of the male taxonomist and

the female subject / object thus enacted in “A Cross Line” would appear to illustrate the tension between an Arnoldian male exertion to comprehend woman “as in [her]self [she] really is” on the one hand, and a Paterian female concern with impressionistic detail, the particulars of woman, and her resistance to being made sense of, on the other.<sup>15</sup>

Luce Irigaray has argued that femininity is characterised by multiplicity and abundance, claiming that woman’s pleasure both in language and in sexuality is not univocal or readily apprehensible by male consciousness: “‘she’ sets off in all directions leaving ‘him’ unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words [...] inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand” (Irigaray, 1977: 353). The linearity of masculine language thus eschews the capturing of woman back into a wholeness, a singularity that can be seized and owned. For the compulsive taxonomist of woman it is impossible to distinguish and penetrate into female experience as Egerton’s heroine boasts: “I read people easily, I am written in black letter to most —” since for him, as in the myth of Don Juan, all women fulfil an identical function (“A Cross Line”: 24). By the same token, and in a double rejection of such notions as “unicity” and “ownership” that Irigaray deems alien to femininity, the French feminist argues for the efficiency of a different target: woman’s “nearness” to herself, an idea — that of proximity, the “prob[ing] a little nearer into the real me” (“A Cross Line”: 26) — which Egerton’s women found equally alluring and posed as a desirable, and perhaps more attainable, project.

The desperate realisation of the male lover in “A Cross Line” — “It is not one grain of sand in the desert that stretches between you and me, and you are as impenetrable as a sphinx at the end of it” — sounds especially frustrating. Physical proximity and intimacy does not secure apprehension of woman’s psychology, which remains a masculine chimera in the story. As the female character remarks, man must be content with simply not misunderstanding her, that “is much” already (*Keynotes*, 25). One must ask, however, what is at stake in the construction of woman as an inaccessible site of alleged unpredictability. For Egerton’s narratives seem to claim that accessibility to the woman sign is a gender privilege in so far as it is denied to the male and almost automatically granted to the female.<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> The 1890s were fascinated by the split between physical life and the “inward world of thought and feeling” that Walter Pater had predicated. It was the era of the early psychoanalysts and the idea of a concealed reality existing beyond the realm of consciousness exerted an alluring influence on writers and artists. Arthur Symons explained that Symbolism aimed precisely to express that hidden reality, while the ideal of Decadence achieved by Verlaine was “to fix the last final shade, the quintessence of things; to fix it fleetingly” (“The Decadent Movement in Literature”, *Harper’s*, 1893). Matthew Arnold had concluded in his study *On Translating Homer* (1861) that “of the literature of France and Germany, as of the intellect in Europe in general, the main effort, for now many years, has been a critical effort; the endeavour in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is”. Walter Pater expanded in *The Renaissance* Arnold’s proclamation claiming that “in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly” (Cited in Thornton and Thain’s Introduction to the *Poetry of the 1890s*, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii. Thornton and Thain try to avoid the simplistic, however common, rendering of the decade as a period dominated by Decadence and Anti-decadence by exploring the multiple dimensions of the nineties’ aesthetic directions, and particularly by including in the second edition a whole section on New Woman poetry written by new women such as Constance Naden, A. Mary F. Robinson, Edith Nesbit, May Kendall, Michael Field, May Probyn or Mathilde Blind.)

It is this method of particularisation and fixation of the impression that I find present in the narrative techniques George Egerton’s stories deploy in order to represent woman as she is, from the point of view of woman herself.

<sup>16</sup> The idea of woman’s “epistemic privilege” on account of her alleged closer proximity to nature has been subject of debate amongst ecofeminists. For Uma Narayan, who has theorised in defence of the so-called “standpoint theory”, “[t]he claim of ‘epistemic privilege’ amounts to claiming that members of an oppressed group have a more immediate, subtle and critical knowledge about the nature of their oppression than the people who are nonmembers of the oppressed group”. Although an advocate of standpoint theory (together with Sandra Harding, bell hooks, Uma Narayan, Donna Haraway, or Patricia Hill Collins), Narayan differentiates between having awareness of the oppression and having a critical understanding of the forces at work and the dynamics of that oppression. Other ecofeminist theorists, however, reject the idea of epistemic privilege on account of its essentialism, and of its substituting “one authoritative vantage point or ‘Truth’ with another

apparent empowering effect this formula has for women is thus inevitably paired with the imposition of a terrible impediment on which the former is predicated — holding the reins of signification protracts the system of gender asymmetry that eschews the construction of a male partner worthy of standing side by side to woman.

The revelation of that asymmetry causes woman's laughter, but her chuckle is infused with frustration. The sudden disruption of the heroine's expectations regarding her husband's ability to get closer to her inner self, triggered by his reflective gaze, is evidence enough: "What are you thinking of?" she asks, "[t]here is a look of expectation in her quivering nervous little face", but the assurance that he is in fact absorbed by the potential utility of "lob-worms" confirms male utter incompetence in the process of introspection: "A strange look of disappointment flits across her face and is lost in a hysterical peal of laughter" (*Keynotes*:13-14). It is an inadequacy that is best epitomised in the protagonist's perhaps most terrible reprimand: 'You don't tell me anything about myself' (*Keynotes*:16).

There appears to be a discrepancy embedded in the implicit Egertonian assertion of a woman's essence out of male reach, and its ulterior refraction into an irregular polyhedron of hybrid faces. The transition from a female basic nature towards the politically more enabling concept of hybridity<sup>17</sup> is, to say the least, a difficult one — in the ultimate analysis it is evidence of the coexistence of competing discourses on womanhood, but also of the multiplicity and abundance displayed by these modern heroines and of the instability shown by their New Woman identities:

What half creatures we are, we women! Hermaphrodite by force of circumstances.  
Deformed results of a fight of centuries between physical suppression and natural  
impulse to fulfil our own destiny. (40-41)

This is the startling categorising furnished by the protagonist in "Now Spring Has Come" (*Keynotes*, 37-67); strongly relying in the notion of mixed gender identities, the image of a hybrid sexuality is here brought forward as a negativeness, the emblem of women's crippled circumstances. The picture of the "hermaphrodite" becomes the inevitable outcome of a new adjustment in the uneven distribution of social competence alongside gender, an ensuing identity born in the interstices of a cultural system that artificially incapacitates its female members.

Interestingly, this power of adaptation to an adverse environment is elsewhere produced as one of woman's most precious qualifications. The "subtle magnetism" exerted by Egerton's women is closely connected with their eroticism and with their proud awareness of being sexually attractive, but perhaps one of the self-proclaimed features that is most proudly brandished is precisely their plasticity, their ability to vary and to exhibit those "tantalising

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equally hegemonic 'Truth' that is 'Woman's'" (Slicer, 1998: 50, 51). Egerton's construction of woman's epistemological vantage point, albeit deeply essentialist, needs also be acknowledged as a literary effort consistent with a feminist agenda which rightfully aimed to valorise women's experiences by presenting them as non-transferrable narratives. For the Egertonian heroine, the telling is never a delegable duty.

<sup>17</sup> The profitability and effectiveness of the concept of "hybridity" continues to be manifest in critical writings on the New Woman, as in the case of Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham's (2004), *New Women Hybridities. Femininity, feminism and international consumer culture, 1880-1930*, which analyses the New Woman topic as a "transatlantic phenomenon" moving across cultures and different nations (243). The term "hybridity" has been particularly used in postcolonial theory to suggest a new type of identity which emerges within those communities arising in new places as a result of migration movements (see Homi Bhabha 1994). The construction of the new identity takes place in the contested spaces left between old categories of race, gender and class which are necessarily destabilised in the process of cross-breeding. I seek to explore the ways in which Egerton's stories exploit an old gender identity, epitomised in the eternal feminine, to proceed to an unsettling of such a fixed view of femininity in order to create a modern heroine who incarnates both the traditional and the new as they vie with each other in stamina.

changes” (“A Cross Line”: 17), the “most puzzling varieties” that result from “a tantalising blending of several qualities” (“A Little Grey Glove”: 93). Flexibility, ductility, are qualities featured by these heroines “made of gutta percha” (14), closer to a fantasised, precultural state evoked in O. Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* by Lyndall’s appeals to an idyllic, pregendered stage of multiple possibilities: ‘We all enter the world *little plastic beings*, with so much natural force, [...] but for the rest — blank; and the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us by the ends it sets before us [...] and so the world makes men and women’ (Schreiner, 1883: 154). Somehow, Egerton’s heroines have managed to preserve an appearance of that uncivilised elasticity which precedes cultural modifications and, in evitably, woman’s wrongs.

The heroine thus reflects on social resistance to accept her flexible identity, which is here explained through the notion of change and variability: “Some have chafed at my self-sufficiency and have called me fickle — not understanding that they gave me nothing, and that when I had served them, their moment was ended, and I was to pass on” (“A Cross Line”: 24). Fickleness brings with it the censure of inconstancy, particularly as it applies to the scope of female sexuality, but it is dismissed as an unfit criticism by this heroine who claims for a space within “the new”, distanced from the fixed identity categories of old times past. Once more her misunderstood femininity yields to the reification of woman as incomprehensible sign.

### Forceful Lying Caused by Male Interest

Regarding the stories’ construction of woman’s wildness as the primitive token where female strength allegedly resides, it may be interesting to explore a parallel mechanism at work in the complicated forging of female subjectivity, the backward falsification of female identity through compulsory lying:

‘But it is there, sure enough, and each woman is conscious of it in her truth-telling hours of quiet self-scrutiny — and each woman in God’s wide world will deny it, and each woman will help another to conceal it — for the woman who tells the truth and is not a liar about these things is untrue to her sex and abhorrent to man, for he has fashioned a model on imaginary lines, and he has said, ‘so I would have you’, and every woman is an unconscious liar, for so man loves her. And when a Strindberg or a Nietzsche arises and peers into the recesses of her nature and dissects her ruthlessly, the men shriek out louder than the women, because the truth is at all times unpalatable, and the gods they have set up are dear to them. . . .’ (“A Cross Line”: 22-23)

One of the most powerful ideas circulating in the second half of the nineteenth century with regard to women’s natural inclination to lying had been distributed by Arthur Schopenhauer, for whom “Sie als die schwächeren sind von der Natur nicht auf die Kraft, sondern auf die List angewiesen: daher ihre instinktartige Verschlagenheit und ihr unvertilgbarer Hang zum Lügen [...] Die Verstellung ist ihm daher angeboren”.<sup>18</sup> According to the German philosopher, women’s weakness naturally enforced their reliance on pretence and deception, a premise that allowed him to proclaim an instinctive female duplicity and an equally inborn inclination towards lying. This innate propensity to pretend is both called into question and reabsorbed by Egerton’s device of female primary wildness as woman’s governing principle. Thus, while the trope of a savage femininity claims to situate the origin of dishonesty on the opposite pole

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<sup>18</sup> Cited in Ciplijauskaitė, 1984: 29.

of fragility — where Schopenhauer's creed had placed it — it does not cease to propagate the germ of anti-feminism, imbued as it is with the misogynist stance of female corruption.

The leading character in "A Cross Line" is in fact reifying an important piece of the dominant discourse on womanhood by asserting the impossibility of a genuine relinquishment of the very source of women's power: her untamed wildness. Deception becomes, in this sense, a socially compulsory action in order to hide this "at all times unpalatable" "truth". The Egertonian re-examination of the sexual contract determines its foundation on a basic female falsification that therefore permits the construction of a society contained by (female) impostors and credulous (male) beholders.

The main actors in the recreation of this late-Victorian society are accordingly assigned a set of functions and capacities strictly controlled by their respective gender interests. A retrospective deconstruction of such interests may be traced in this protagonist's speech on female duplicity, particularly as it coalesces with the discourse on woman as enigma. Thus, the male contribution to the sexual contract in force is explained as a gradual system of interlocking parts, its cornerstone being (a) the creation of a female "model" so as to guarantee masculine advantage. Such a foundation is immediately and painstakingly followed by (b) the erasure of the memory of its genesis; this grants (c) the belief in the model as a natural given, which in turn allows (d) the love of the female object as it is fashioned, under the guise of an unquestionable imposition.<sup>19</sup> Once this stage of specious completion is reached, Egerton's *fin-de-siècle*'s narratives persistently reveal a turning point in the process invariably occasioned by male confrontation of real women with their "seeming contradictions" (22). Such a confrontation discloses a process of mis-recognition which requires the creation of a new female image as riddle and indecipherable enigma. This new seizure of the woman sign is enforced by the fact that (b) above prevents de-codification, making impossible a backward movement in the process, as it would lay bare the foundational gender asymmetry of the contract.

Woman's active role in the development of the system is comparably displayed in her apparent compliance with that female sign modelled according to male needs, and with the implicit cultural request that she accept the man-created model as natural. Her fulfilment of the terms of the sexual contract thereby enacted consequently entails her tacit understanding that financial prosperity, male acceptance and social approval through marriage, are entirely dependent on that acquiescence. As a result, a highly sophisticated mechanism of deception (including self-deception) is implemented in order to guarantee personal progress. Given this general picture of a restrictive social model largely maintained by female complicit behaviour, this Egertonian heroine is predicating the existence of a hidden territory, a space in which women can give free rein to their witchcraft and strength, which are at the core of their perplexing performances. Hence the troubling contradiction in the stories from a feminist point of view. While the power of woman is said to inhere in that space outside culture which is the repository of her essence, the stories do not procure a dislocation of the poles centre-margin but rather divulge the maintenance of the present distribution of gender roles attached to those poles.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> According to this view, it is "men who are the dreamers. Once a girl or a woman is kissed out of the sleep of her ignorance by love or suffering — they are generally synonymous — she gets a grip on reality, she seizes the concrete in life" as the utopian heroine in "A Regeneration of Two" readily admits (*Discords*, 241).

<sup>20</sup> The identification of woman with nature is a frequent though problematic discursive practice of Egerton's females which somehow resembles current discussions in ecofeminist theory. Thus, some ecofeminists condemn the exploitation of woman/nature by patriarchy and assume such identification as an alternative strategy, while others interpret it as yet another trap laid by patriarchy so as to keep woman away from social and political power. Cassandra Kircher explains that "[t]hough ecofeminists tend to agree that the same patriarchal attitudes which degrade nature are responsible for the exploitation and

The mechanism of the lie is likewise invoked by the heroine in “Now Spring Has Come” in her particular account of the social organisation as a distinctively male contrivance:

‘Why it came about? Because men manufactured an artificial morality, made sins of things that were as clean in themselves as the pairing of birds on the wing; crushed nature, robbed it of its beauty and meaning, and established a system that means war, and always war, because it is a struggle between instinctive truths and cultivated lies’. (41)

She thus takes a firm stand against the idea of an orthodoxy that adulterates the vision of sexuality and the natural gratification of sexual instincts under the veil of corruption: “the untrue feminine is of man’s making, whilst the strong, the natural, the true womanly is of God’s making” (42) — the implication of an autonomous female sexual feeling was challenging the repressive hypothesis, the hegemonic discourse on woman’s passionlessness which Egerton’s narratives mostly claimed to be at odds with woman’s nature (Pyckett, 1992: 167).

## 4.2. NARRATIVES OF DESIRE

### 4.2.1. Language as Resistance

Different references to the capacity of speech of the main female characters in the stories abound on the idea of their variety and their multiplicity of meanings as if linguistic production were representative of the identity concept promoted by these narratives. The narrator of “A Cross Line” thus defines the timbre of the woman protagonist as opposed to that of her husband: “There is a singular monotony in his voice; the organ with which she replies is capable of more varied expression” (11). The idea of banality and dullness assigned to male speech comes to reinforce the story’s opening sentence with those “rather flat notes of a man’s voice float[ing] out into the clear air, singing the refrain of a popular music hall ditty”, polluting as it were with this “vulgar tune” the perfect “lovely freshness” of a beautiful spring day (1). Monotony may have a particularly unpleasant effect on female psyche as the narrator further remarks: “There is a tone in his voice [...] that jars on her, sensitive as she is to every inflection of a voice, with an intuition that is almost second sight” (7).

In a similar vein, the empowered female that features as main character in “A Cross Line” perseveres in a presentation of language alongside gender which is clearly dismissive of the term marked as masculine, on account of the latter’s lack of complexity and interest: “I am a creature of moments. Women have *told* me that I came into their lives just when they needed me. Men had no need to tell me, I felt it” (24; my italics). The badge of female solidarity is triumphantly worn by this woman who boasts about her role in meliorating women’s lives brandishing their telling as a necessary, albeit indisputable, token of mutual understanding.

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abuse of women’ (see Ariel Shalleh’s “Second Thoughts on Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics: A Dialectical Critique”, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. 1.2. 1993: 93-106; p. 98), they disagree about the usefulness and wisdom of equating women and nature. Whereas radical feminists, such as Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology*, reinforce the dichotomies by emphasizing the morally superior character of woman and nature in relation to the patriarchal culture that dominates them, most critics believe that this sort of valorization leads to problems. Equating nature with women, they say, objectifies women and ‘relegates them [nature and women] to a position of ‘otherness’, inferiority, and powerlessness relative to culture and male’ (see Maureen Devine’s *Woman and Nature*. Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1992; p. 1)” (Kircher, 1998: 161).

The importance attached to language, to verbal production, is at times emphasised in order to underscore the reflective temperament of the woman in “A Cross Line”, who smokes and “holds a mental debate in which she takes both sides of the question impartially”, a discursive style very much in keeping with Lyndall’s predilection for dissecting arguments<sup>21</sup> (13). The same protagonist demands later on greater attention from her loving husband by expressing thus her idea of a woman’s needs regarding the love experience:

‘Yes, perhaps I do [know that you love me]’, impatiently; ‘but I want to be told it. A woman doesn’t care a fig for a love as deep as the death-sea and as silent, she wants something that tells her it in little waves all the time. It isn’t the love, you know, it’s the being loved; it isn’t really the man, it’s his loving!’ (15-16)

It is, therefore, the telling that matters and not necessarily the male subject behind the telling. By ascribing a separate status to each element in the communication process, she manages to make her point: a ‘silent’ love equals no love at all, and the emphasis is once again laid in cadence, in the constant, rhythmic tide of the telling which transforms itself into the music that nurtures her femininity.

The necessity to invent for herself a language that renders possible the turning inside out of the woman signifier lies at the heart of these stories in which female speech interrupts the discourse of man, thus annihilating its specific sounds and rules. There are several instances of dislocation from within, as if female speech managed to sabotage conventional discourse and could explode in a myriad tones — as the recurrent melodies that haunt the female psyche in “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods” (*Discords*, 1-66) appear to suggest. Fittingly, “[f]lying is woman’s gesture — flying in language and making it fly” — writes Hélène Cixous, and as occurs with the favourite fishing technique developed by Egerton’s heroine, the image of the flight stands for that elusiveness, the fugitive rapture that allows for the transgression of conventional speech (1975: 343).

The instability of language as a code of communication is underscored in some of the stories as occurs in “The Spell of the White Elf” (*Keynotes*, 68-90). One of the central characters, the female writer and polyglot, reflects on her ability to ascertain “the date of a dialect” as a curious counterpoint to her ineptitude in talking to babies: ‘I could not reason out any system they go on in baby talk. I tried mixing up the tenses, but somehow it wasn’t right’. On the contrary, Belinda — one of those rare secondary characters that are endowed with a proper name in Egerton’s stories — ‘though she doesn’t know one language, not even her own, for she sows her h’s broadcast and picks them up at hazard, she *can* talk to a baby’ (84-85). The failure delineated by the mannish linguist with her rational approach to speech as an established code that can be predicted and systematised, functions in the story as a mechanism to destabilise language highlighting its occasional capriciousness. The reproduction of realistic, however meaningless and erratic, speech is in this context a characteristic device in the narratives: ‘Didsum was denn? Oo did! Was ums de prettiest itta sweetums denn? oo was. An’ did um put’em in a nasty shawl an’ joggle’em in an ole puff-puff, um did, was a shame! Hitchy cum, hitchy cum, hitchy cum hi, Chinaman no likey me!’ — this is Belinda’s effective utterance, her successful prattle with the baby (85). The construction of a speech that blatantly contravenes the rules of conventional language seems to fit into the scheme of semiotic liberation envisaged by Julia Kristeva, who rescued from psychoanalysis the notion of bodily

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<sup>21</sup> I have discussed Lyndall’s speech in the previous chapter, where I tracked her zeal for arguing both sides of an issue to the teachings Olive Schreiner had found in John Stuart Mill’s writings. See Chapter 3. Section 3.2.1. “Lyndall’s Freedom of Speech”.

impelling forces that resist cultural pressures to conform with the logic of a rational, paternal discourse (Jones, 1981: 358).<sup>22</sup>

The childish dialect used by Marie Larsen, the pious Norwegian housemaid in the first part of “Under Northern Sky”, constitutes an interesting example of healing through language, particularly as she mimics maternal speech when addressing some of the devastated adult characters that people the story: ‘There, Tulla, take naphtha drops, very good drops, you go sleep, good sleep, Marie mind him, Marie not afraid’ (*Keynotes*, 132). The deployment of a soothing discourse that aims to reproduce the voice of the mother pursues in the story a double purpose. On the one hand it emerges as a sign of female resistance against the absolute power of an enraged father-master, and it proves to be an antidote to the unleashed violence of his male discourse on the other. Her balmy language is perfectly intelligible — contrary to the code developed by Belinda in “The Spell of the White Elf” — it has merely managed to retain the cadence, the soothing music that is characteristic of an idealised mothers’ talk.

The development of this alternative discourse, the mimetic language of motherhood, reminds us of the importance of talking as a specifically female mechanism to challenge established power in the stories. Marie Larsen thus accompanies her linguistic creations with a taste for story telling and “tales that were human”, which she intermingles with her “Norwegian [...] sing-song recitative like the drowsy buzz of a fly on a pane” (*Keynotes*, 134, 135). The story’s final scene stages the actual “battle” between the male discourse of brutality led by the master-beast who keeps on drinking himself to death, and Marie Larsen’s curative narrative until “[h]is vocabulary is exhausted” and she changes “her lullaby into a quick hushoo” (138). The image of this beatific character is thus built and completed with her idealisation as the cardinal mother, the essential feminine bearing the primitive qualities of a nurturer.

There are other instances of alternative discourses intermingled in the stories, as it occurs with the few sentences uttered in Romany in “A Shadow’s Slant”: ‘Kan de rokra Ro many?’, this is the direct appeal made by the old gipsy woman to the story’s heroine, who is ostensibly tempted to enter the world outside discipline and civilisation that gipsy life represents (148). The Dublin accent recorded in the final part of “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods” provides another interesting example of linguistic variety in the stories, as the relaxed, working-class accent of the bricklayers does in “Wedlock” (*Discords*, 115-144).

#### 4.2.2. George Egerton: A Forerunner of the Modern Short Story

I would presently dwell on some considerations on literature that feature as metafictional devices inscribed within Egerton’s stories. Some of the protagonists in *Keynotes* and *Discords* are women readers, such as the main character in “A Cross Line” who clearly states her preference for daring readings as she makes the following commentary on the book she is handling: ‘Yes, it is a book that makes one think. It would be a greater book if it were not an Englishman. He’s afraid of shocking the big middle class’ (11). Openly addressing the burning issue of fiction, she complains about the prudery that was perceived to characterise much of the British literary production at the time. Interestingly enough, the female

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<sup>22</sup> This new construct which Kristeva calls “semiotic discourse” is, nevertheless, specifically applied to the language of several avant-garde male writers, notably Joyce, Mallarmé, and Artaud. According to the French critic, their language reveals an incestuous indulgence that is reminiscent of the childish union with the mother and therefore implies a direct challenge of the symbolic order. The revolutionary potential Kristeva specifically assigns to women resides more in their questioning of existing discourses, rather than in the development of a divergent communicative code: “If women have a role to play [...] it is only in assuming a *negative* function: reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning, in the existing state of society. Such an attitude places women on the side of the explosion of social codes: with revolutionary movements” (From an interview in *Tel Quel*, no. 58, Summer 1974; translated in Marks and Courtivron, 1980: 166-67).

protagonist erects herself as both partisan and mouthpiece of the type of fiction that the stories Egerton wrote would soon come to epitomise, as they partook in that favourite game of the 1890s: *épater le bourgeois*.<sup>23</sup> Another example is found in “Now Spring Has Come”, a story that somewhat recreates the epistolary relation Egerton established with Knut Hamsun (Vicinus, 1983: xiii). Its leading female role is incarnated by an avid reader with a literary taste for “the modern realistic school”, and the “*tendenz roman*”, a choice strongly disapproved by her bookseller and “condemned by the orthodox” (Keynotes, 39, 40). She discusses Tolstói’s “doctrine of celibacy, Ibsen’s Hedda”, “Strindberg’s view of the female animal”, and admits her preference for the figure of Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>24</sup> (63) — notably some of the literary influences<sup>25</sup> visible in the writings<sup>26</sup> of George Egerton (Vicinus, 1983: xii).

With regard to the fictional techniques developed in Egerton’s work, it is important to highlight the absence of a significant influence on her writings from the nineteenth-century tale, the traditional sketch that helped to set the scene prior to the development of the story’s major events (Harris, 1968: 1409). Once “causality is minimised”, the narratives become engaged in the psychological development of the central characters, achieving an “eloquent compression” whose aesthetic value, “one of the major achievements of the 1890’s”, was fully appreciated by most of the Bodley Head writers (Vicinus, 1983: xv-xvi; Harris, 1968: 1409). The “polyvocality and multi-perspective approach” adopted in these stories constitutes an example of the “proto-modernist” formula of some New Woman writers, which in the case of Egerton was instrumental in the problematisation of the category of woman (Pykett, 1992: 195; Venegas, 2013)<sup>27</sup>. There are also some striking elements with regard to the visual

<sup>23</sup> George Egerton’s contribution in April 1894 to the first volume of *The Yellow Book*, the publication begun by John Lane and Elkin Matthews, was instrumental in its establishment as a sensational symbol. Adopting the name and colour of the yellow-backed French novels, it opened a new space for artists and writers to deploy all sorts of outrageous attitudes. Shocking the bourgeois soon became a successful and profitable exercise as the popularity of some of its pieces attested. On the essential role played by this publication in the crystallisation of the nineties myth, see Thornton and Thain’s Introduction to the First Edition of the *Poetry of the 1890s*, pp: xxvii-xxix.

<sup>24</sup> In fact, *Keynotes* contains the first reference to Nietzsche in English, as George Egerton herself would indirectly acknowledge to Terence de Vere White in a letter dated May 19, 1939: “Holbrook Jackson says I was the first person to mention Nietzsche in print in England” (White, 1958: 18, 166). Iveta Jusová’s “George Egerton’s Nietzschean Feminism” claims that Egerton’s appropriation of Nietzsche’s concepts of evolution and ethics were instrumental in her subversion of the colonial project and bourgeois values (*The New Woman and the Empire*, 2005, Chapter 2: 49-88). In conjunction with the work of other new women, notably Sarah Grand, Amy Levy, and Elizabeth Robins, this book analyses Egerton’s treatment of Ireland as an English colonial property situating the writing on the New Woman in relation to colonial and evolutionary discourses. Daniel Brown has traced the references Egerton made to Nietzsche in *Keynotes*, which were also wielded against her work by some of her contemporaries (see “George Egerton’s *Keynotes*: Nietzschean Feminism and *Fin-de-Siècle* Fetishism”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*. 39:1; 2011: 143-66. Elke D’hoker has also studied Egerton’s debt to Nietzschean philosophy in her construction of the feminine ideal and the tensions that haunt it in “‘Half-Man’ or ‘Half-Doll’: George Egerton’s Response to Friedrich Nietzsche”, *Women’s Writing*. 18: 4; 2011: 524-46.

<sup>25</sup> Due in part to George Egerton’s three-year-long stay in Norway, she became largely influenced by the work of Scandinavian novelists such as Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Bjørnson and Knut Hamsun, whose ideas she absorbed. The latter, in particular, was the author of the successful *Hunger* (1890), which Egerton translated into English, a semi-autobiographical recreation of both mental and physical hardships later followed by new writings, including *The Growth of the Soil* (1917), that explored the human psyche in particularly vivid ways. Egerton dedicated her *Keynotes* to Hamsun ‘in memory of a day when the west wind and the rainbow met’.

<sup>26</sup> Although the subject of my critical analysis is limited to the collection of stories in *Keynotes* and *Discords*, George Egerton published other writings which include the following: *Symphonies*. London: John Lane at the Bodley Head, 1897; *Fantasias*. London: John Lane at the Bodley Head, 1898; *The Wheel of God*. London: Grant Richards, 1898; *Rosa Amorosa*. *The Love Letters of a Woman*. London: Grant Richards, 1901; *Flies in Amber*. London: Hutchinson, 1905; *A Leaf From the Yellow Book: The Correspondence of George Egerton*. Ed. Terence de Vere White. London: Richards, 1958. She also produced articles for *The Yellow Book*, such as “A Lost Masterpiece”, Vol. 1 (April 1894): 189-196, and “The Captain’s Book”, Vol. 6 (July 1895): 103-116.

<sup>27</sup> Venegas Lagüéns has carefully studied G. Egerton’s style and narrative techniques also in relation to her modernist successors. She has drawn attention to Egerton’s modes of referencing, the gradual reduction of stage directions in dialogues, the use of interior monologue, free indirect speech, ekphrasis, her perplexing use of punctuation, the deployment of a wide variety of idiolects, accents and archaic lexicon, amongst the most salient (2013: 79-91; see also Venegas, 2013-2014).

presentation of the stories. A noticeable aspect in their actual display on the pages is that of two different typographical occurrences: the use of the icon “\* \* \* \*” to separate sections and sketches within each story, and the inclusion of a staff at the beginning of the first story in *Discords*, “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods”, and at the beginning of the second part of “The Regeneration of Two”, the last story in the book. The use of the asterisk usually stands for the omission of certain parts of the narrative which the reader is tentatively compelled to reconstruct on her own. This breach of linearity carried out by means of the ellipsis is further substantiated with the appearance of the staff at the points above referred, conferring the stories with an aura of uncertainty and musicality that would appear to suit Julia Kristeva’s description of poetic language in *Desire in Language*:

In any poetic language, not only do the rhythmic constraints, for example, go so far as to violate certain grammatical rules of a national language [. . .] but in recent texts, these semiotic constraints (rhythm, vocalic timbres in Symbolist work, but also graphic disposition on the page) are accompanied by nonrecoverable syntactic elisions; it is impossible to reconstitute the particular elided syntactic category (object or verb), which makes the meaning of the utterance decidable. (1980: 134)

Were Egerton’s stories working to construct that “undecidability” which for Kristeva constitutes the “instinctual moment” and the “disruptive function” of language? (Butler, 1989: 83) The heroine in “A Cross Line” entertains herself drawing capricious words on her husband’s forehead, which remain uncertain: “‘Begin with a D’, and she traces imaginary letters across his forehead, and ending with a flick over his ear, says, ‘and that is the tail of the y!’” (15). Yet, despite all that textual vagueness, fiction itself is at times for this woman protagonist closer to fact than empirical reality itself — as the narrator confides in that initial portrait, in which the beautiful maids from her exotic reading “have been actually present with her” (2). These narratives introduce female readers engaged in the interpretation of fiction as actuality, “accept[ing] it as real” (“Now Spring Has Come”: 40) — in a similar vein as Lyndall, or Isabel Archer — but not as mere quixotic characters fleeing from the dullness of their existence. They delight in the mirage of a fiction brought to life as a method to explore the borders of truth, as a means to build up a space outside their social existence from which a new perspective is gained so as to ascertain its actual perimeter. The women in *Keynotes* and *Discords* conceive life as a circle within which they go round and round testing its contours and extension, but always with the suspicion that they must reject enclosure and resituate themselves beyond its confines.

The narrative method of the “inward vision” (“An Ebb Tide”: 169) suggests the possibility of a third reality beyond the apparent surface of language, and it describes a journey into the whirlpool of the self that is oftentimes initiated through “the subtle connection between perfume and memory” (“An Ebb Tide”: 173); it is a realm which writers like Maeterlinck had remarked as one of Ibsen’s greatest achievements: “Le poète a tenté de mêler dans une même expression le dialogue intérieur. Il règne dans ce drame somnambulique je ne sais quelles puissances nouvelles. Tout ce qui s’y dit cache et découvre à la fois les sources d’une vie inconnue”<sup>28</sup> (McFarlane, 1981: xiv). The narrator’s parenthetical incorporation of full dramatic annotations in her own diegesis testifies both an imperfect notion of language that constantly needs to be polished and specified, and an effort to reach

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<sup>28</sup> “The poet has tried to intermingle within just one expression the interior dialogue. There reign in this somnambulist drama certain new powers. All that is said both hides and discloses at a time the sources of an unknown life” (My translation).

out beyond the most obvious linguistic reality into the realm of the inner vision, which in Egerton's stories stands for a privileged site of observation.

Egerton's heroines abide at the borders of reverie and factuality, hence their constant presentation as "concentrated" women, inhabiting a blurred territory that they intermittently leave and enter until they are suddenly "roused to a sense of facts" ("A Cross Line": 10). The impression is given that these heroines are always above facts, as if they were doubled beings, both taking part and overlooking their own conversations, not entirely involved in them, distanced from event and yet tied up with it, — at times even preferring to inhabit that third dimension, as in the case of the nostalgic linguist of "Her Share", for whom: "the dream is always greater than the reality" (*Discords*, 81). The general movement described by these stories thus acquires a tidal effect, its progression being marked by the "waves", the "floods" and "outbursts" that characterise woman's response to the confrontation of her own desires (Cixous, 1975: 335). Making trouble, in a word, is part of her immersion in a self-seeking narrative as woman wrenches her turn to speak, which is precisely where "*the very possibility of change*" resides, as Cixous reminds us (1975: 337).

The recurrent motif of "greyness" is, likewise, an instance of Egerton's concern with the construction of a femininity that abides in the boundary realm of a perpetual shade that resists saturation with colour and with absolute definition. The figure of the "slight, grey-clad woman" in "A Little Grey Glove", whose "gown is of some soft grey stuff, and her grey leather belt is silver clasped", even "her grey cap" and grey smiling eyes — constitutes a clear example (99, 100, 101).<sup>29</sup> George Egerton's stories show an omnipresent partiality towards greyness as becomes evident from the choice of some of her titles and the attention her narratives pay to grey objects, such as the scanning "cold grey" eyes of the male taxonomist in "A Cross Line" (3). Mrs. Grey is the name, unusually recorded in the story of "Gone Under", for its protagonist; she is suitably portrayed as a puzzling mixture of different ages ranging from childhood to maturity, and her name is actually a construction of her own to blur her identity as a single woman (95).

A final significant element that emerges in the stories is their general concern with the apparently anecdotal, the little detail that is meticulously described, "a passion" that was specifically described at the turn of the nineteenth century as "the distinguishing mark of nearly every female novelist" (Courtney, 1904: x).<sup>30</sup> The implications of a gendered aesthetic of detail defined in terms of woman's nature appeared to suit Egerton's persistent focus on small things. As we are reminded from the very title of some stories, "A Little Grey Glove",

<sup>29</sup> Ernest Dowson — the Rhymer's Club poet and English singer of Verlaine's *chanson grise* — famous annotator and admirer of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, pointed out in his letters the significance of the grey colour that the South African writer had suggested from the preface to her novel (Dowling, 1979: 436). In her description of the new narrative method to be adopted — "the method of the life we all lead" — and dismissing the hackneyed romances of wild adventures set in Africa, Schreiner thus conducted the writers of the new fiction: "Those brilliant phases and shapes which the imagination sees in far-off lands are not for him to portray. Sadly he must squeeze the colour from his brush, and dip it into the *grey pigments* around him. He must paint what lies before him" (Schreiner, 1883: xxxix, xl). With regard to Verlaine's *chanson grise* (an adjective which in French has a double, blurred meaning: 'terne' and 'ivre' — 'grey' and 'intoxicated' respectively — *Dictionnaire des Synonymes*: 348), the Symbolist poet comprised several of his artistic creations under the heading of "chansons grises" which included: "Chanson d'Automne", "Tous deux", "L'allée est sans fin", "En sourdine", "L'heure exquise", "Paysage triste", "La Bonne chanson" — all of them with twilight connotations of mitigated colours.

<sup>30</sup> Lynn Pykett has studied the ways in which the economies of both the proper and improper feminine were associated with feeling and emotionalism throughout the nineteenth century, and "defined in terms of an over-reliance on detail" (1992: 27). The critical discourse on women's writing tended to view it either in terms of a limited aesthetic reduced to the representation of surfaces, or as a sensuous excess of emotion. Pykett explains that the correlation of female writers and a domestic realism concerned "with surfaces, detail and emotion, rather than with depth and significant pattern, persisted in to the 1890s, when realism had become more firmly established, more scientific and more masculinised" (27). See, particularly, pp. 26-29.

“An Empty Frame”, by analysing the most humble and seemingly irrelevant objects we may attempt to reach out for larger truths. Hence the slow-camera movement employed by the narrator to describe, for instance, the wanderings of female consciousness during a mourning period in “An Ebb Tide” (174), or at the beginning of “A Shadow’s Slant”, in her attempt to capture and record the most extreme subtleties of the protagonist’s face:

The red-brown eyes that gleam out of the small sallow face of the woman who sits on the left side of the phaeton close for a second; the delicate nostrils quiver, the lips tighten over a sigh — then the lids rise again, the eyes are darker, the pupils have a trick of dilating; a smile subtle in meaning, for much of mocking pain and bitterness is expressed in its brief passage, flits across her face. (141)

The sensitiveness of Egerton’s heroines towards “the psychometrical influence of things” (“A Psychological Moment at Three Periods”: 49) is a concurrent device that allows for the narrative “attention to details”, which is specifically constructed as a feminine faculty in “A Regeneration of Two” (*Discords*, 177). The contemplation of art is presented as a double source of nourishment that redeems an empty life from despair and is instrumental in connecting woman with her inner, freer self, as in “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods”: “She has found life a hard battle, but there have been beautiful books and beautiful pictures to worthen it, and, best of all, a free spirit and a free heart to fight the demons” (*Discords*, 24).

#### 4.2.3. Desire into Language: Egerton’s Resonating Fiction

One of the calls issued by George Egerton was the necessity to write womanhood from the point of view of woman herself. Egerton’s constitutes in this light one of the first attempts to sort out what was at stake in the double task of listening to whatever it was that woman’s body had to say on the one hand, and of translating it into a new language that could be identified and hailed as essentially feminine. The aim to write *as* a woman is accompanied by an equally overt attempt to write *for* woman, as the continuous addresses to an explicit female reader by the narrator-protagonist in “Now Spring Has Come” make manifest: “My dear woman, have you never dreamt, felt, had *intuitive experiences?*”, “You cannot understand me? Dearest woman, I do not pretend to understand the thing myself” (61, 63).

By expanding the debate on sexual difference into the realm of language Egerton was not simply highlighting the fact that gendered writing was a possible challenge, she was also charging against traditional Western polarisations of mind and body. This is precisely one of the first contradictions that may be inferred from the stories. Egerton wants to have it both ways for in her equation both terms are privileged, only at different times of the process. Thus, on a first move, it is the body that appears to be decisive in the identification of woman as woman, and therefore entitle woman to speak as such. Once the body has played its part in the becoming process, it is the mind, that elusive and primitively dark trope, which occupies the superior position in the hierarchy.

The celebration of the inner ties between woman and body as well as a fortified defence of the inseparability of body and mind, are some of the ways in which the authors of *l’écriture féminine* have tried to defy the privileging of the mind — and its traditional connotations of rationality, logic, and linearity associated with being male in Western society. The disturbing image of woman tied to her biological destiny, largely resisted by feminist politics, is nevertheless disingenuously promoted by the work of French feminists like Hélène Cixous in “The Laugh of the Medusa”, where it constitutes both an effort to valorise the feminine and a

stimulus to accept difference as an instrument of change — an agenda that Egerton might have shared at the end of the nineteenth century.

Thus, while her stories have a clear transformational impetus in their explicit aim, that is, urging women to make use of their female power to their own advantage, Egerton presents a notion of femininity inevitably burdened by at least two exceedingly problematic premises. The existence of an “essential” female sexuality which is posed as natural and not culturally constructed on the one hand, and the adoption of *woman* as a pre-given category, an overriding generalisation in which the coordinates of class, race and nationality are conveniently overlooked, on the other.<sup>31</sup> The grounds for establishing the discourse of feminine writing become manifest in Egerton’s explicit goal to envision what has hitherto been unforeseeable, and to rescue women from the darkness that has come to stand for their main attribute. It is this Egertonian “world of searching”, with its “passionate and precise interrogation of her [woman’s] erotogeneity” that constitutes the main vertebra for the structuring of these stories around specific moments of rapture, visions that inspire beautiful compositions of female desire (Cixous, 1975: 334, 335).

An outstanding difference between George Egerton’s heroines and those imagined by other *fin-de-siècle* women writers, such as Olive Schreiner or Charlotte Perkins Gilman, lies in their attitude towards desire, for they neither “suffer from [n]or repudiate the erotic”. The final rejection of sexuality exhibited by Schreiner’s Lyndall or by Gilman’s Herlanders, and the puritanical precept embraced by some New Women are evidence of the period’s diverse response to female erotic desire (Gilbert & Gubar, 1989: 83, 80). The stance adopted by late Victorian feminism with regard to female pleasure was multiple and oftentimes contradictory, ranging from the total rejection of free love expressed by many suffragists and the defence of celibacy by moderate feminists like Frances Power Cobbe to the overt celebration of the sexual infringements symbolised by the “fallen woman” — idealised into a symbol of transgression and radical social change by Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899).<sup>32</sup> Egerton’s defiance of received notions of Victorian femininity is evident from the deployment of her heroines’ new language on pleasure and the erotic, as significant instances of a modern female identity in the process of being constructed, which the following selection aims to clarify.

Thus, a significant example of female hedonism is that of the protagonist in “A Cross Line” who makes an issue of her confessed delight in having her hair fiddled with:

‘I divide all the people in the world’, she says, ‘into those who like their hair played with, and those who don’t. Having my hair brushed gives me more pleasure than anything else; it’s delicious. I’d *purr* if I knew how. I notice (meditatively) I am never in sympathy with those who don’t like it; I am with those who do. I always get on with them’. (*Keynotes*: 14-15)

This explicit construction of a discourse around the rightful satisfaction of her female bodily needs is suitably matched by the striking confidence of her having brought up the subject at stake in advance, among other people, and irrespective of their sex. This is how commendation of pleasure, as self-indulgence, comes to be introduced in the narrative as a

<sup>31</sup> Ann Rosalind Jones has cautioned feminism against these dangerous assumptions which she finds embedded in the work of four French feminist writers: Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Monique Wittig. See her “Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *l’Écriture Féminine*” (1981).

<sup>32</sup> Gilbert and Gubar have explored the image of the fallen woman and the topic of erotic desire in “The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin’s Fantasy of Desire”, *No Man’s Land*. Vol. 2, pages 83 – 119. Charlotte Rich has traced the possibilities of an influence of Egerton’s work in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* on account of their striking similarities both in subjects treated and in style (Rich, 2003).

defining characteristic of female identity, as well as a site of veritable identification with the others through their affinity for physical gratification.

A parallel idea that appears to transport this heroine into a world of unknown delectation is her sudden aspiration to change gender categories: 'I wish I were a man! I believe if I were a man, I'd be a disgrace to my family'. [...] 'I'd go on a jolly old spree!' (15). Fantasising with her incarnation into a man, the protagonist offers a disturbing prospect of a female unfettered by gender restrictions, or rather, enjoying the gender privileges bestowed on the opposite sex. It is precisely the prenatural number of drives confided by Egerton's heroines when they seize the occasion to speak, their female libidinal economy of excess, that is threatening the system of social conventions these narratives purport to question and ultimately undermine.

Hence the multiplying effect of the heroine's allegiance to desire, her homage to that "infernal want" that she must inescapably face, and the overlapping of various degrees of desire. The accumulation of scenes of marital seduction and extramarital flirtations that typically occur outside the domestic realm of the home<sup>33</sup> set in motion the view that female passion for self-fulfilment was concomitant with the satisfaction of other female forbidden passions, which contributed to the notoriety of Egerton's aesthetic morale. Venturing into the chambers of the erotic and its illicit pleasures, the bold doings of these heroines deviated significantly from the puritanical tenets of many New Women<sup>34</sup> and, interestingly, rendered the stories in *Keynotes* and *Discords* less morally acceptable than the radical politics of Schreiner's bestseller, *The Story of an African Farm* (Gilbert & Gubar, 1989: 86).

Quite fittingly, the idea of desire that was rather frivolously employed in those visions of eroticised female power, may at times be invoked as the very source of pain and existential anguish for the Egertonian heroine, as she confides to her lover in "A Cross Line": 'You have given me something — something to carry away with me — an infernal want. You ought to be satisfied. I am infernally miserable' (25). The expression of such insatiable fervour moments before deserting her extramarital relationship highlights the construction of female desire as a perennial craving that transcends the object of desire itself. By being the agent of abandonment, this modern heroine is asserting the ineptitude of male amorous devotion, unlawful or otherwise, to provide her with a sense of self-fulfilment: 'You can't help me. No man can. Don't think that it is because you are you that I cry' (26).<sup>35</sup>

The images of the protagonist in "Now Spring Has Come", "smiling from sheer delicious pleasure" in her first encounter with the male novelist as he approvingly examines her anatomy, the "charming" "sensation" and her "feeling of perfect well-being" when "the silken air caressed [her] face as the touch of cool soft fingers", provide more characteristic examples of the narrative concern with female delectation as physical response (48). Likewise, the protagonist of "A Shadow's Slant" shelters the "exultant expectation" of a kiss from her violent husband at the beginning of the story (*Keynotes* :142).

These stories often portray heroines carelessly engaged in amorous games with their husbands or lovers, as in "A Cross Line", where we witness the protagonist "rubbing her chin up and down his face", treating her husband to "a fierce little kiss", "biting his ear", "shut[ting] his eyes with kisses, and bit[ing] his chin and shak[ing] it like a terrier in her strong little teeth", boldly leading the pastime of preliminaries that precedes their sexual intercourse (15, 16, 17). Exposure of the most private scenes, the secrets that were meant to

<sup>33</sup> This particular aspect has been studied by Tony Tanner in his work, *Adultery in the Novel* (1979).

<sup>34</sup> Nancy Cott has studied the different views adopted by feminisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in their approach to female sexuality. See her *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (1987), pages 41-49, 150-152.

<sup>35</sup> A similar insight is produced by the narrator in "The Regeneration of Two": "She realises well that his love, no matter if it be his whole love, will not fill her life completely; [...] every woman chafes at the narrowness of the horizon that is simply confined to attending to one man's needs" (*Discords*, 248).

be kept under lock and key by the prescribed decorum in British fiction become here an instance of the tantalising nature of Egerton's seductress, her irresistible eroticism which makes "[h]is eyes dilate and his colour deepen[ ] as he crushes her soft little body to him and carries her off to her room" (17-18).

The naturalistic tone adopted by the enticed husband in "A Shadow's Slant" sounds particularly blunt, as he reproves his wife for not bestowing her favours:

'I love every inch of you. I'd kiss the ground under your feet. I know every turn of your little body, the slope of your shoulders, I that always liked women to have square shoulders — the swing of your hips when you walk. Hips! ha, ha! you haven't got any, you scrap! and yet, by the Lord, I'd *lick* you like a dog' (slower with emphasis), 'and *you* don't care for me'. (144)

His animalistic conception of the carnal privileges he has acquired through marriage over his wife's body is made clear in the embittered reproach: 'as if I hadn't bought you, as if I didn't own you, as if you were not my chattel, my thing to do what I please with; do you hear' (with fury) 'to degrade, to — to treat as *I please*' (145) — and is almost ranked as a manifesto of masculine frustration on account of the inability to control sexuality.

This was the interesting definition of the *érotique* that appeared in the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* of 1755: "[The erotic] is an epithet which is applied to everything with a connection to the love of the sexes; one employs it particularly to characterize delirium which is caused by a dissoluteness, an excess of bodily appetite [...] It is a kind of melancholic affliction, a real malady; it is that which Willis calls erotomania" (5: 909. Quoted in Cameron, 1991: 90). Quite fittingly for the purposes of my analysis of the relationship between the erotic and the musical in the stories, the medical definition also connected the erotic with the *chanson*, defined as the combination of love and gallantry in an ode.<sup>36</sup> It is this double connection with the realm of music and with the notion of unhealthy immoderation that I find still present in the formula deployed by Egerton's narrators to characterise their most powerful female protagonists, if only at the service of completely new ends.

Both *Keynotes* and *Discords* are a compilation of highly musical narratives; in terms of the attention paid to rhythm, the explicit concern with harmony, the inclusion of staves and musical notation or the mindless repetition of ditties and refrains by certain characters — all highlighted by numerous melodies which are tirelessly repeated — one might argue that these texts practically aspire to be interpreted as scores.

Thus, there is a male figure whistling "softly and all out of tune", incessantly repeating music-hall ditties in "A Cross Line" (1, 8); female inner consciousness is said to have a rhythm of its own, "an uncouth rhythmical jingle with a feverish beat; a song to the untamed spirit that dwells in her" ("A Cross Line": 19); the initial, Proust-like flashback in "Now Spring Has Come" is set in motion with a favourite "mocking-bird line" repeated by the nurse as she jogs the baby to the tune (37). The title itself of the story is explained cataphorically by means of this favourite Egertonian device of the structuring musical line which both

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<sup>36</sup> Vivian Cameron draws on Michel Foucault's analysis of power in order to account for certain visual images of the body in the French Revolution — particularly two anonymous illustrations entitled *Grand Débandement de l'armée anticonstitutionnelle* and *Ma Constitution*. The first one produces an army of women of well-known revolutionary sympathies showing their buttocks in order to disperse the royalist or anticonstitutional battalion, while the subject of the second illustration represents the sexual abuse, by a lover, of the queen's genitalia, conveniently labelled as *res publica*, pun intended. The confluence of eroticism and revolutionary pulses managed to persist in nineteenth-century representations of new womanhood.

anticipates and is reinserted at significant points of the narrative. Marie Larsen, the maternal housemaid in “Under Northern Sky”, exerts her healing powers by means of a favourite Norwegian song that she gradually transforms into a soothing lullaby as she puts the male beast to sleep. “Nature” is identified with a “symphony” at the beginning of “A Shadow’s Slant (140); these are all instances that confirm the narrative obsession with the artistic effect of music which provides occasional “retreats from language”.<sup>37</sup>

The account of musical beats and rhythms in “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods” acquires even greater relevance, particularly in that haunting polka ditty consistently repeated as if it were coming from the merry-go-round, or in the meticulous recording of multifarious sounds: the clinking of the bell-cows at the beginning of the story, the fluttering of flags, the jangling of bells, the creaking of the roundabout or the giggling and screaming of the girls — to name just a few. Perhaps the best image in the stories accounting for the role of music in Egerton’s narratives is contained in “A Regeneration of Two”, where the “sun-filled air, the music, water, all the thrumming sounds of summer seem to fuse into a gigantic, gold-green disc, that revolves first quickly, then with ever-slackening turns, around her, until she loses herself in the slow swirl” (*Discords*, 181). This powerful image explains the function of female skilled hearing as an added tool in the search of individual identity, and it contains the parallel metaphor of the whirlpool, that constant “spinning” — that liberates woman from monotony and satisfies her natural need of excitement — echoed from the last pages of this story in the labour of the fallen women living in harmony at the utopian community.

### 4.3. UTOPIA ENVISAGED

#### 4.3.1. Dreams of Evasion

The female desire of evasion from tedium, from the monotony of daily routines and a dull existence indoors, is repeatedly portrayed in *Keynotes* and *Discords*, and it adopts a variety of forms. Escapist experiments into realms of fantasised identities are stitched onto the heroines’ reveries, frequently serving the necessity to flee away from the domestic commonplace. The images of nebulous macrocosms invade and assuage the protagonists’ longings for new spaces in which their identity can be refashioned at will, hence the abundance of blurring images — such as the “flotilla of clouds”, those “clouds of sand swirl” that provide the framework for the heroine’s flight “away from the daily need of dinner getting and the recurring Monday with its washing; life with its tame duties and virtuous monotony” (“A Cross Line”: 18, 19; the same image reappears in “The Regeneration of Two”: 179, 187). The fictional journey towards foreign lands becomes an inward pilgrimage where female identity is fixed for a brief moment and immediately shaken away, avoiding stasis, with its endless spinning in the whirlpool of selfhood.

The sceptical evasion of systems effected by Egerton’s heroines through their dream visions and their aesthetic contemplation of nature misplaces the epicentre of the social order and establishes there an endless dialogue with the self. Those moments of retreat and estrangement, of losing contact with all that is perceived as alienating become precious spots of time in these *centrifugal*<sup>38</sup> narratives, ultimately depicting woman’s strife and constant

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<sup>37</sup> George Steiner has argued that the tendency “toward an ideal of musical form is a retreat from language and from the kinds of meaning most successfully conveyed by words” (1967: 29). Egerton’s occasional retreats from language are in this sense real attempts to fill in the gaps left by more traditional discursive tools; they constitute further evidence of the goal to reach at the deepest strata of female identity.

<sup>38</sup> The terms “centrifugal” and “centripetal” were used by Walter Pater in his *Greek Studies* (1895) to describe the opposing visions of Heraclitus and of Parmenides, respectively (Bloom, 1974: xxx). I have applied the term “centrifugal” to

change as well as a delectation in the perpetual flux of identity against the stagnation associated with domesticity and culture.

A significant form of evasion portrayed in the stories is that of adultery. An illustrative example of adulterous woman depicted in the stories is a high middle-class female (“A Cross Line”) that does not know how to occupy her idle time advantageously. She develops a discourse against monotony and life weariness, and typically indulges in all kinds of fantasies, thus raising the question of moral decadence as a direct consequence of insufficient training. This reasoning at least was being used by certain feminisms pursuing greater rights for women: it was much better to keep woman engaged in some productive task for the nation than to liberate the evil spirit of racial degeneration. However, George Egerton’s stories are not so overtly political in the manifestation of the heroines’ aspirations. The notion of the “liberation of the flesh” predicated by Saint Simon as well as the ideas introduced in Fourier’s *Théorie des quatre mouvements* (1808), according to which social progress depended on women’s projection towards liberty, had been popularised in the novels of George Sand. In England, John Stuart Mill with his groundbreaking *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Herbert Spencer’s influential and sharp distinction between men and women’s social scope epitomised in the poles of state and family, and Ruskin’s praise to woman’s moral superiority, emerged as the most prominent figures to defend conflicting roles for women in the second half of the nineteenth century (Ciplijauskaitė, 1984: 25).

Equally influential were the ideas established by Schopenhauer with regard to adultery in the second half of the nineteenth century, the decades when the novel of illicit liaisons flourished. For the German philosopher and reputed misogynist, man was naturally inclined towards inconstancy in love whereas woman was predisposed to faithfulness. Thus, he claimed that man’s love necessarily diminished once the satisfaction of his desire had been accomplished, his nature commanding his appetite for change and constant distraction. Conversely, woman’s love was thought to follow the opposite direction and therefore accounted for the assertion that conjugal fidelity was natural in woman and artificial in man. Needless to say, infidelity in woman was much more unjustifiable than in man precisely because it was supposed to violate her inner constitution (Ciplijauskaitė, 1984: 31-32). In the light of this view, George Egerton’s late Victorian portrayal of adulterous women would appear to disarrange gender categories in the allotment of constancy and desire for change, energetically ascribing the latter to a characteristically female drive. Her centrifugal heroines are women at ease, experimenting with the ductility of their own natures, capable of flagrantly disobeying marital convention as in “A Cross Line” and of changing the course of adultery back into orthodox motherhood — but they leave us wondering how close they get to the feeling of liberation in their journeys towards insubordination. In the last analysis, the claim to a permanent dissatisfaction, the “infernal want” that cannot be gratified, is not merely pointing to the *femme fatale*’s insatiability but, more interestingly, to the deferment of female fulfilment through her sensationalist erotic renunciation.<sup>39</sup> Egerton’s stories necessarily project desire into the future and, in so far as the expectation of having female needs satisfied

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Egerton’s narratives of becoming females to account for that Heraclitean Romanticism concerned with the notion of flux as a doctrine of constant change, which I find embedded in the stories.

<sup>39</sup> An interesting study of the idea of deferment is Kathleen Blake’s *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature. The Art of Self-Postponement* (1983). Blake’s free adaptation of William Michael Rossetti’s phrase, “self-postponement”, aims to emphasise the “temporal factor in women’s inhibition” from the love project as a chance to develop strategies of resistance (vii). I have found the idea of deferment as a particularly enabling device in New Woman fiction, since by transferring significance away from the desired object onto the waiting itself, these narratives manage to create a space for the heroine to reconsider the desirability of fulfilled passion as major life achievement.

remains a desideratum, they may be regarded as utopian narratives,<sup>40</sup> exploring the extent of women's power.

Some of the stories in *Keynotes* and *Discords* deserve inclusion in the genre of liberational narratives, as they portray heroines struggling to overcome their oppressive circumstances, and occasionally having glimpses of hope. It is the case of "An Ebb Tide", in which a mistreated wife suddenly freed from abuse by the death of her alcoholic husband manages "perchance" to await "a brighter dawn" (184). The first story in *Discords* portrays a fallen woman who has managed to flee from the slavery of her own adultery and is determined to seek "pity, help, friendship from no one" (61). Her decision to stand alone and face the world with its harsh criticisms encourages the heroine to begin an exemplary life and thus model a new identity that may serve other women: 'Do you think I fear? Not one whit. No power on earth, no social law, written or unwritten, is strong enough to make me tread a path on which I do not willingly set my own foot. [...] The world owes every man [...] or woman [...] work. [...] I can get a living and I mean to. I know more than the average woman, ay, more than the average man; and I have intuition — he hasn't' ("A Psychological Moment at Three Periods": 61) And the story fittingly ends in an optimistic note with the empowered, self-reliant heroine reflecting on her future prospects, "waiting quietly for the dawn to break, to take the first step of her new life's journey" (66) — thus utopia is envisioned as a transformed society in which women might make their way unfettered by their present inabilities which still bind them to depend on male approval and social authorisation.

#### 4.3.2. A Gipsy Gaze into Nature

The stories include the image of the gipsy as an emblem of arguable liberation for womanhood. The first reference to this quality is the narrator's comment in "A Cross Line" to the protagonist's "gipsy ease of attitude" that is immediately explained in terms of the carefree, unstudied sensuality she offers, "a scarlet shawl that has fallen from her shoulders forming an accentuative background to the slim roundness of her waist" (3). The ideas of freedom and sensuality traditionally associated with the gipsy are incorporated at this early stage of the narrative and they will be ambiguously mobilised throughout the stories in *Keynotes* and *Discords* to account for the elusiveness and resistance of Egerton's females to being reabsorbed by Victorian conventions. Rosi Braidotti has explained that there is a breach between how our lives develop in contemporary societies and the ways in which we represent our own lived existence in theoretical and discursive terms. Hence the need to redesign subjectivity by means of a conversion to what the Italian scholar calls "nomadism", following Deleuze, in figurative terms. Such a political and epistemological move would help deploy alternative subjectivities in its exploration of "the inner fibers of the self" and furnish a subject image which is neither unitary nor static, but rather dynamic, multilayered, and changing. Egerton's female protagonists seem to be a particularly apt case in point, as they set off to navigate through the tempestuous seas of the inner self by producing processes of identification with potentially subversive otherness. It is in this sense that they become nomadic subjects, absorbed as they are in the reflexive task of thinking themselves, immersed in the "productive relations of power, knowledge and desire" (Braidotti, 2011: 10, 17).

The motif of the gipsy is at times enforced by male characters as a hailing device that elicits self-recognition and identification in the female protagonist. Thus it is often a vocative with a capital letter: 'You seem amused, Gipsy!', ("A Cross Line", 14). There are constant invitations in the stories to over-identify with this image of insubordination which was so dear

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, Patricia Stubbs in her *Women and Fiction*, 1979: 111-112; or Martha Vicinus, for whom Egerton, "[u]nder the guise of the realistic, wrote utopian fiction", in her Introduction to *Keynotes and Discords* (1983): xvii.

to George Egerton's own conception of the self, as the writer would confess to Golding Bright, her young suitor, months before marrying him in 1901: "I have the gypsy traits in me, am artist to the finger-tips, vagabond not a little — but I am a woman and I need love as few women" (White, 1958: 60). At times it is the female protagonist who reveals her knowledge about gypsy philosophy, as in "A Little Grey Glove": "Do you know what the gypsies say? 'Never judge a woman or a ribbon by candle-light'. They might have said moonlight equally well" (103). Gypsy thought is here wielded as a didactic reference before her male suitor who keeps misinterpreting her age.

Female nearness to the world of gypsies is variously marked in the stories, but "A Shadow's Slant", the second part of "Under Northern Sky", provides the best account of that dangerous proximity. The first mention of the presence of a gypsy community is produced by the character of the violent husband as a chance to amuse his scornful wife. Interestingly, he refers to the necessity of a translator in order to make the necessary arrangements for attending their show. Gypsies are there "to play", and their close relation with music stands out as a prominent point in common with the Egertonian heroine (143). Invoked as a "queer little gypsy" by her brutal husband, she is endowed with an aura of freedom and spiritual evasiveness that mortifies his tortured masculinity.

Franz Liszt, the Hungarian composer who played a key role in the romantic movement, had described gypsies as a people

lead[ing] what is practically an animal existence; in the sense that it has neither any knowledge nor interest in anything beyond itself. [...] A race having neither any religion nor any law, any definite belief or any rule of conduct; [...] yet obstinately persisting, in spite of all degradations and deprivations, in keeping its tents and its rags, its hunger and its liberty. (*The Gypsy in Music*, 1859)<sup>41</sup>

The story's description of a gypsy festivity in a musical orgy of "curving wrists" and wild Zingari dances seizes the centre stage of the narrative; and the animality that Liszt observed is here evoked in stereotypical images that capture the narrator's eye: "[t]he grace of panthers and the charm of wild untamed natural things is revealed in every movement. Colour, vivacity, dirt, and rhythm" (146). This tableau vivant of gypsy life is introduced as an artifice that functions as a specular vision of the heroine's forming self. Physically identified with the archetypal gypsy, the silent female protagonist exhibits a permanent look as if she "were off in other lands", traversing distances that separate her from the present captivity her marriage entails. "Victorian society encouraged both physical and social mobility, individual development, and hard work [but] [t]hese liberal values were antithetical to the ideal of female behaviour — namely, the submission of self, voluntary labor, and a minimum of mobility outside the family circle" (Vicinus, 1985: 4-5). When seen in this light, this yearning for itinerancy becomes a distinctively subversive feature of the Egertonian heroine, who feels allured by the freedom of movement of the gypsies. But the proximity to the gypsies fuels in these females a desire for itinerancy which is not only physical but also spiritual, ontological. The enticing sight of those quivering bosoms in the excesses of the dance awake in her a

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<sup>41</sup> Cited in Trumpener's article "The Time of the Gypsies: A 'People without History' in the Narratives of the West", originally published in *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Summer, 1992), and reprinted in Appiah and Gates's *Identities* (1995: 338-379), p. 355, from which I am quoting. Trumpener opens up a space for both theoretical and literary inquiry of Western constructions of the "Gypsy Question", analysing the racism and Orientalism that surrounds such creations, as well as the two main currents of post-Enlightenment ideology on gypsy alterity "feared as deviance, idealised as autonomy", which are "played out simultaneously but separately" (349). Liszt construction, to this respect, mobilises a notion of anarchy and self-rule which deliberately disregards the constraints imposed by the laws of the gypsy community onto its own members.

desire of identification, similar to the one described in the fantasy of the oriental dancer in “A Cross Line”, and the narrator focalises on the husband’s threatened authority: “What does the music rouse inside that frail frame, what parts her lips and causes her eyes to glisten and the thin nostrils to quiver? Is there aught in common between that slight figure with its jewelled hands and its too heavy silken gown, and those tattered healthy Zingari vagabonds? . . . who knows?” (147). By rhetorically inquiring about the effects the viewing of the dance causes in this mesmerised wife, an indication of her apparent capitulation to gypsy seductions, the story appears to suggest the heroine’s sublimation of sexual desire towards her husband in favour of a narcissistic contemplation of a specular image of the utopian self.

The reference to the itinerant community as a “tribe” reinstalls the image of their strange exoticism, coupled with the invocation of a mythic Gypsy time of legend and curse in the fortune-teller’s prophecy: ‘A mole in your cheek, and a free Romany heart in your breast, your spirit fights to be free as the Romany chai’ (148). The drawing of the celebration is thus ended with a double focus on the static perception of the gypsies as visual spectacle and the prospect of the heroine’s potential involvement in the performance. The next sketch in the story presents the married couple in completely divergent situations mirroring these contradictory standpoints; it is a moon-lit night and the heroine is lost in her own meditations by the window as her husband sleeps. The “ghostlike” appearance of her face seems to enhance a transient state between her former self and a new identity in the process of becoming (150); the trope of the travelling gypsy going across cultures appears in this sense to serve as point of reference for the new woman’s temptation to traverse different female identities, and explore new frontiers. Gazing at the sea from the enclosed space of her bedroom window, she feels somewhat encouraged to trespass as she discovers in her vigil the gypsies’ tents: “How many more nights must she stand alone and watch the morning herald a new day of bondage? (150). Her desire to free herself from those fetters and join a life of self-sovereignty nourishes a fantasy to become a peripatetic journeywoman who can “follow the beck of [her] spirit” (151). However, the dream of evasion is never fulfilled in the story as a final irresolution complicates her departure, and so the Egertonian heroine — who like Lyndall, Schreiner’s feminist pioneer, “belong[s] of right to the moonlight” (Schreiner, 1883: 2) — is forced to remain an unsatisfied visionary: “Yes, I am a dreamer”, she seems to claim like Oscar Wilde’s theoriser in “The Critic as Artist”, “[f]or a dreamer is one who can only find [her] way by moonlight, and [her] punishment is that [s]he sees the dawn before the rest of the world” (Wilde, 1884: 195). Only the very last sketch in the narrative opens up the possibility of utopia as the heroine contemplates the insouciantly happy gypsies in their moment of departure and remembers the words of the fortune teller: ‘Six moons will rise, then you will be free!’ (154). “Nomadic and illiterate, they wander down an endless road, without a social contract or country to bind them, carrying their house with them, crossing borders at will” (Trumpener, 1992: 348). Interestingly, the dream is not given up but, rather, deferred.

More heroines appear to be haunted by gypsy legends, as the adulteress in “A Psychological Moment”; and the last heroine in *Discords* develops a penchant for vagabond life which is instrumental in her quasi-utopian achievements of female regeneration. The parallelism thus interwoven in “A Regeneration of Two” between these two corresponding figures — the female gypsy and the male vagabond — is confirmed by means of concurrent characteristics, such as the feeling of drowsy well-being found in a life of liberty surrounded by nature, the sense of belonging nowhere and everywhere at a time, and a new concept of value: “Poor in all the world counts of value, and yet I am rich in all she has of best — in myself — in freedom” (186).

The sense of freedom is underscored in the narratives by means of careful references to outdoor surroundings. The anonymous protagonists are always presented amid the context of Nature, against a natural setting that is minutely and almost infallibly described, and in which their femininity is perceived to harmonise on occasions to the point of absolute blending. It is difficult to differentiate the boundaries between the female body and the natural stage onto which the performance of femininity takes place. In George Egerton's short stories, this metaphor of continuity, the dissolution of borders between the natural and the feminine self, is exploited as an ontological platform from which to liberate and empower womanhood.<sup>42</sup>

These women love being in the open air, exposed to the scented benevolence of mother nature, practising favourite sports<sup>43</sup> like fly-fishing, which is said to “[put] people on a common footing” (5). Contrary to the beneficial effects that exercise and the play of sports allegedly have on the blurring of gender difference, which is here posed as a desirable consequence, the hegemonic discourse on womanhood proclaimed that such habits could lead only to the denaturalisation of woman — or so E. Lynn Linton warned: “Like certain ‘sports’ which develop hybrid characteristics, these insurgent wild women are in a sense unnatural” (Linton, 1891a: 79). Egerton's story would be making use of a similar argument in order to claim exactly the reverse, for it is the development of such hybridities which approximates woman to “her truer nature”, a construct that *Keynotes & Discords* painstakingly try to fabricate as a pre-given essence.

A significant contrast is established in the opening paragraph of the first story in *Keynotes* between an idealised image of Nature and what is conceived as the polluting atmosphere of the music hall, which is momentarily invading the beauty of the season: “There is something incongruous between the melody [a popular music-hall ditty] and the surroundings. It seems profane, indelicate, to bring this slangy, vulgar tune, and with it the mental picture of footlight and flare and fantastic dance into the lovely freshness of this perfect spring day” (1). The explicit association of the music-hall space to a male environment is paired with the corresponding match between the female and the natural surroundings in which she is resting, “sitting on an incline in the midst of a wilderness of trees” (2). This polarisation of civilisation *versus* nature alongside gender identities is also echoed in “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods”, and it is symbolically exploited in order to favour a natural law, which is presumably feminine, over a man-made law which stands for the convention and orthodoxy that bore woman so intensely.<sup>44</sup> The image of the male figure

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<sup>42</sup> Once more, this identification woman / nature is controversial from the point of view of ecofeminist literary criticism. As Karla Armbruster has observed, some currents within ecofeminist theory itself tend “to emphasize the connections or continuity between woman and nature at the expense of recognizing important differences between the two groups”, but “[e]cofeminism explicitly works to challenge dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy within Western culture that construct nature as separate from and inferior to human culture (and women as inferior to men)” (Armbruster, 1998: 98). Sherry Ortner has also explained in her essay “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” that the identification woman / nature is a cultural construct made possible by the belief that women establish a direct connection with nature through their own bodies and their reproductive function — an assumption that should be transcended in order to challenge harmful stereotypes (Ortner, 1974: 73). Egerton's fiction produces an effect of unbalance in the concomitant exacerbated difference it suggests with regard to each gender's capabilities and perceptive talents on the one hand, and the unproblematised identification it establishes between woman and nature on the other.

<sup>43</sup> Mary Chavelita Dunne, “Chav”, had been taught to fly-fish by her father with whom she shared a great fondness for this sport. Egerton's insistence on moving her characters outdoors, away from the stuffy chambers of civilised society, would respond to her design to show nature as a privileged environment for the expansion of the self. Although Egerton “did not equate Nature with woman's nature, [...] she saw the outdoors as a freeing agent, providing the space and climate for personal growth. Thus, Nature never simply reflects a character's emotions or symbolises states of mind; it is a place of possibilities, but individuals must make the most of their own opportunities” (Vicinus, 1983: xi).

<sup>44</sup> The polarised constructs of city as corruption and nature as the perfect setting for the development of the inner self is also operative in other stories such as “Gone Under”, which is split in two parts: the first one brings women together in a

whistling “softly and all out of tune” as he carries out some agricultural tasks comes to mind as an example of that polarity which presents man as if he were trespassing, assaulting a space where he does not belong (8). In this particular sense, George Egerton’s stories appear to construe nature as a potential site of freedom, away from the nuisance and discipline enforced by culture on woman, hence the homodiegetic narrator’s longing “to be up on a high mountain alone with my dream” in “Now Spring Has Come” (55) — a conception that reminds us of Mona Caird’s own explanation in her “Defence of the So-Called ‘Wild Women’”, a year before *Keynotes* was published: “The idea of the pilgrimage [to the hill-top] was to get away from the endless and nameless circumstances of everyday existence, which by degrees build a wall about the mind, so that it travels in a constantly narrowing circle” (Caird, 1892: 825).

Female evasion from the “[m]onotony of life” requires, therefore, a setting untainted by the laws of man, where the blending of her contradictions is both allowed and mirrored by the wilderness and peace, the beauty and disorder the text has previously attributed to nature — “where I live as a woman is to men a wilderness. But to me it is home”, as Ursula K. Le Guin would state almost a century after Egerton’s females.<sup>45</sup> An instance that appears to contradict this general statement is the episode of aversion experienced by the protagonist in “A Cross Line” as she catches sight of the little chicken trying to make their way into life out of their shells. The so-far idyllic relationship with mother Nature is brought to an unexpected halt in this particular scene where the heroine is forced to suppress “an exclamation of disgust” and to look instead “at his [lover’s] fresh-tinted skin” (9). The sight of offspring induces the thought of maternity and its immediate abhorrence in the light of her adultery.

Egerton’s heroines emerge as hypersensitive critics of the natural realm, ensnared as they are by the wholesome presence of the world out-of-doors. Their responses to the natural environment remind us of their alertness, their discerning capacity to observe, to become *aesthetes* in the original sense that Walter Pater meant to perpetuate.<sup>46</sup> It is precisely “this exaltation of seeing” through the complex operations of all bodily senses in their constant encounters with visible nature that distinguishes Egerton’s protagonists (Bloom, 1974: xi). Those privileged moments of clear-sightedness are sharpened by the alleged correspondence between the heroine’s mind and the natural setting that both mesmerises and predisposes her to the experience of anagnorisis — as the narrator in “Now Spring Has Come” confides: “I was [ . . . ] keenly alive to impressions. I felt as if my nerve-net was outside my skin, not under it, and that the exposure to the air and surrounding influences made it intensely, acutely sensitive. I seemed to see with my sense of feeling as well as my sight” (58). The heroine lost in reverie provides the impression of a fragile identity which is sustained and reduced to sensations, and whose completeness is entirely dependent on the network of pulses outside it.

A predilection for “gazing seawards” is a constant motif in the sketching of Egerton’s heroines, particularly at key moments in their life, as is the case of the wife in “A Shadow’s Slant” looking at the sea “with a silver sheen on its back” while she contemplates the idea of joining the gipsy community and flee away from the restrictions of her married life (150,

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communicative encounter during a journey across the Atlantic, whereas the second part concentrates on the utter degradation of the city as a scenario dominated by “leering, silk-hatted satyrs and flaunting nymphs of the pavement” (*Discords*, 109).

<sup>45</sup> The famous statement by Ursula K. Le Guin is taken from “Woman / Wilderness”, a talk she gave at the University of California at Davis in 1986 and published in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*. (1989). New York: Harper Perennial, 1991. 161-64. (Cited in Gaard and Murphy, 1998: 8).

<sup>46</sup> The word “aesthete” comes from the Greek *aisthetes* and it signifies “one who perceives”. According to Pater the aesthetic critic is merely the perceptive critic, and in his creed the terms “perception” and “sensation” as response to the former are crucial. The modern use of the word “aesthetic” is in fact due to Walter Pater’s emancipation of the term from the realm of philosophy in his “Preface” to *The Renaissance* (Harold Bloom, 1974: viii).

149). As Ruskin had insisted “in the Homeric strength of gazing upon the ocean and [in] seeing no emblem of continuity but only pure physical nature: ‘Black or clear, monstrous or violet-coloured, cold salt water it is always, and nothing but that’” (Bloom, 1974: xv). Likewise, Nature sometimes “bring[s] no message” in Egerton’s stories as in “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods” (20). Rapturously investing life to the object-world in a sort of pathetic fallacy, Egerton’s heroines unmistakably declare their bias towards the sea element: ‘I love it, it answers one’s moods’ (“A Cross Line”: 26).<sup>47</sup> The favourite movement of the tides, the constant flowing, are symbols of femininity, and nature is endowed by this heroine with typically humane attributes, such as feelings and the ability to establish communication, which may at times, and quite significantly, be denied to her male interlocutor.

#### 4.3.3. Feminist Discourses: A Few Insights into the Marriage Question

The textual project of accounting for the female psyche from the point of view of woman herself, though arguably feasible and riddled with disturbing associations to the so-called *écriture féminine*, constitutes nevertheless a bold claim to control the processes of signification, as well as a rightful determination to use such processes to woman’s benefit.

The projection of an alluring image of empowered womanhood inevitably sets in motion a mechanism of homodiegetic and heterodiegetic identifications both of the female actors in the text with a varied range of empowering categories (the witch, the wild woman, the devil, the gipsy, etc.), and of the larger female audience and readership with those female characters, respectively. An inevitable result of this strategy underlying the celebration of femininity is the generation of a “homospectatorial look”, in Diana Fuss’s terms, which renders problematic a steadfast adherence to the construct of the heterosexual woman as a seamless identity category.

One of the most decidedly feminist issues raised in the stories is the recurrent concern with “affection” as an insurmountable obstacle in the way to develop women’s potential. As the male taxonomist in “A Cross Line” puts it: “if a woman wasn’t handicapped by her affection, or need of it, the cleverest chap in Christendom would be just a bit of putty in her hands” (4). Even the mighty protagonist that leads the story feels bound to acknowledge her hopelessness in this particular respect: “‘Of course [...] I share’ (bitterly) ‘that crowing disability of my sex. But not willingly, I chafe under it. My God, if it were not for that, we women would master the world. I tell you men could be no match for us. At heart we care nothing for laws, nothing for systems. All your elaborately reasoned codes for controlling morals or man do not weigh a jot with us against an impulse, an instinct’” (27-28). Significantly, she completes her feminist argumentation emphasising the fact that the workings of affection and female “affectability”<sup>48</sup> do not respond to women’s natural temperament, but rather to a cultural ruse devised in order to restrain their exceptional aptitudes:

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<sup>47</sup> Explained as a “falseness in all our impressions of external things”, the phrase “pathetic fallacy” is a coinage of Ruskin, who had found it endemic in the “Reflective or Perceptive” order of poets represented by Wordsworth, Keats and Tennyson (Bloom, 1974: xii).

<sup>48</sup> Lynn Pykett makes use of this term in her analysis of a central contradiction she finds embedded in the nineteenth-century rhetoric on femininity and in late-Victorian popularisations of post-Darwinian theory, according to which “woman as feeling” was constructed as “either humanity in a state of nature, or nature in its most highly evolved form” (1992: 165). The stories in *Keynotes* and *Discords* construe feeling as a central notion to decipher the enigma of woman, a point which stands out in overt contrast with the claims of these heroines to be liberated from the shackles of affections.

It is a wise disposition of providence that this untameableness of ours is corrected by our affections. We forge our own chains in a moment of softness, [...] Bah! the qualities that go to make a Napoleon — superstition, want of honour, disregard of opinion and the eternal I — are oftener to be found in a woman than a man. Lucky for the world perhaps that all these attributes weigh as nothing in the balance with the need to love if she be a good woman, to be loved if she is of a coarser fibre. (28)

The reference to that favourite New Woman hero, Napoleon, echoes Lyndall's<sup>49</sup> elucidation of women's absence from positions of power within the official accounts of History, and questions the virtues of lovely womanhood that the hegemonic discourse on woman had claimed as natural and defining of female identity, the cherished ideal of the nurturing wife and mother "managing the family" and "regulating society" from "the home" — a home which "means peace. It means, too, love. Perhaps the two are synonymous" (Linton, 1891a: 81). The relationship of woman and feeling is a commonplace in the rhetoric of both feminist and antifeminist writers from the beginnings of the history of the novel itself,<sup>50</sup> but George Egerton's stories set in motion, at the height of the 1890s, a view of feminine affection as hindrance of woman's capacities, a resort devised by providence to compensate for the socio-political threat posed by her natural talents. Seen in this light, these narratives of enigmatic females draw our attention towards the problems issuing from the inhibitions set upon individual autonomy and self-fulfilment by the socio-political apparatus, the institutional forces of social hypocrisy, religious bigotry, and all the accumulated pressures of feminine affectivity, conventional morality and established authority. As the heroine in "Now Spring Has Come" concludes: "The man or woman who jeopardises a great talent, be it of writing, painting, or acting for marriage's sake, is bartering a precious birthright for a mess of pottage — mostly indifferent pottage" (63).

An important feminist issue brought up in the stories is that of female solidarity across the social spectrum, a kind of cross-class sorority regardless of other attributes:

And her thoughts go to other women she has known, women good and bad, school friends, casual acquaintances, women workers — joyless machines for grinding daily corn, unwilling maids grown old in the endeavour to get settled, patient wives who bear little ones to indifferent husbands until they wear out — a long array. She busies herself with questioning. Have they too, this thirst for excitement, for change, this restless craving for sun and love and motion? Stray words, half confidences, glimpses through soul-chinks of suppressed fires, actual outbreaks, domestic catastrophes, how the ghosts dance in the cells of her memory! (21)

Setting an interrogative mood to address the question of what women may have in common, the heroine in "A Cross Line" dares to contemplate a notion of femininity marked by the common lived experience of a perpetual desire which transcends age and class boundaries. It is a formula of bonding through a shared yearning which is implicitly evoked as grounds for female subversion across borders of class, confluent as it is with the frequent remonstrance against monotony: 'I can't for the life of me think how you, with that free gipsy nature of

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<sup>49</sup> See chapter 3, section 3.3.2., of this doctoral dissertation for Lyndall's adherence and feminisation of the historical figure of Napoleon as an opportunity to explain women's invisibility in their exercise of power.

<sup>50</sup> See Lynn Pycket's *The 'Improper' Feminine. The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*. Section 18, "Woman's 'affectability' and the literature of hysteria", pp. 164-176, delves in the complex and often contradictory discourses on women's affective nature in the fiction of the 1890s.

yours, could bind yourself to a monotonous country life, with no excitement, no change' — as the anonymous lover probingly remarks in “A Cross Line” (26). The inevitable inference was that the consuming sensual craving of Egerton’s heroines could be inextricably linked to a larger yearning to increase women’s scope of influence in the socio-political order.

“Now Spring Has Come” portrays a heroine with a decidedly feminist discourse that concentrates on the condemnation of false morality and the Christian conception of sin as major causes of the perpetuation of women’s disabilities. Her anticlericalism may well have been endorsed by Angelica Hamilton Wells, Sarah Grand’s *enfant terrible* in *The Heavenly Twins*:<sup>51</sup>

It seems as if all the religions, all the advancement, all the culture of the past, has only been a forging of chains to cripple posterity, a laborious building up of moral and legal prisons based on false conceptions of sin and shame, to cramp men’s minds and hearts and souls, not to speak of women’s. (40-41)

Female biological destiny may be at times contradicted by conspicuous examples in the stories, as is the case of the sterile woman writer in “The Spell of the White Elf”, who boasts about her special marital arrangement: ‘Positions are reversed, they often are now-a-days. My husband stays at home and grows good things to eat, and pretty things to look at, and I go out and win bread and butter. It is a matter not of who has most brains, but whose brains are more saleable. Fit in with the housekeeping? Oh yes’ (80). The notion of greater adequacy in the performance of tasks is judiciously brought forward as a challenge to the gendered distribution of labour promulgated by Victorian hegemonic discourses on the complementarity of the sexes. The possibility of relegating man to a secondary role within the household economy is reinforced by similar examples of women who desire to become mothers “without the horrid man or the shame” (80). The fantasy of female power embodied by a sort of hermaphrodite woman is subsequently reinforced by examples of females who harbour the hope of parthenogenesis as a result of their “smouldering enmity” and “physical disgust to men, [...] a kin-feeling to the race dislike of white men to black” (81) — a portrait which is completed in “A regeneration of Two”, the last story in *Discords*, with the words of the protagonist’s housemaid who “should hate” to have a husband, as she “just want[s] the children” (170).

“Gone Under” narrates the life-lesson taught to a fallen woman who has experienced the horrors of an abortion performed without her consent. Dwelling in the bitterness of the aftermath she explains the thoughtlessness of past decisions on account of her not having ‘learnt a single useful thing. I know how to attract men [. . .] that is all’ (*Discords*: 101). A similar protest is raised by the central character in “Virgin Soil”, who vents her animosity for having been reared “as a fool, an idiot, ignorant of everything I ought to have known” (*Discords*: 157). An embittered wife, blaming her mother for not teaching her the truths of matrimony, declares her express intention to desert her debauched husband for good: ‘as long as marriage is based on such unequal terms, as long as man demands from a wife as a right, what he must sue from a mistress as a favour; until marriage becomes for many women a legal prostitution, a nightly degradation, a hateful yoke under which they age, mere bearers of children conceived in a sense of duty, not love’ (*Discords*, 155). Almost adopting the tone of Mary Woolstonecraft — who had written in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* against those parents who treat their children “like slaves [...] [and] force them to break the most sacred

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<sup>51</sup> See Chapter 5, section 5.2.3, in this doctoral thesis for an analysis of the perspectives held on Religion and religious discourse by Sarah Grand’s most salient female characters.

ties, to do violence to a natural impulse, and run into legal prostitution to increase wealth or shun poverty” (1790: 52-53) — this angered, Lyndall-like charge against the institutions of marriage and lawful motherhood is interestingly exerted on account of their present circumstances, but not of their undesirability provided they are conveniently suited to include women’s individual needs.

The improper, candid allusions to the physical side of marriage, coupled with its criticism as a source of female corruption on the basis of the social demand that women “trade on male sexual desire to achieve security for themselves”, had gained for Egerton’s *Keynotes* the epithet of “decadent” in its first year of publication (Harris, 1968: 1407-08). Much of the curiosity aroused by Egerton’s volume of stories among the Victorian reading public can be explained in their discovery of what was beginning to be formulated as “the marriage problem”, which entailed a fictional shift of marriage away from the traditional ending into the central focus of these writings. The first instance of a married couple is shown in “A Cross Line”, where we encounter an adulterous wife defying the rules of wedlock despite her sexual compatibility with a husband who is lovingly devoted to her companion: ‘But you are good (kissing her), a real good chum! [...] Why (enthusiastically), being married to you is like chumming with a chap!’ (16-17). The double emphasis on companionship and sexual pleasure inferred from their interactions destabilises the idea that a marriage endowed with such characteristics could be a guarantee of fidelity on the part of woman. It appears that this female protagonist cannot be content with a marriage of peers because her desire is somehow in excess.

Excess of desire together with a gendered penchant for the constant renewal of excitement lie at the heart of female inability to conform with the conventions of the heterosexual contract, as the same woman confides to her lover moments before jilting him. ‘Can’t you understand where the spell lies? It is the freedom, the freshness, the vague danger, the unknown that has a witchery for me, ay, for every woman!’ (27). A similar explanation is produced to her husband in her hypothetical account of herself as a woman bound to transgress the laws of wedlock: ‘You are an awfully good old chap, it’s just men like you send women like me to the devil!’ (16). According to this Egertonian heroine, it is Charles Bovary’s complacent dullness, so to speak, that forces Emma to sin. Comradeship does not suffice, as this New Woman appears to suggest, to maintain woman’s allegiance to her own bondage. In this sense, this female character shares the Nietzschean protest against the bourgeois morale of the cattle and the socially imposed virtue, which are only satisfactory for the average man but plunge these late Victorian protagonists into the most absolute boredom and unrelieved tedium (Ciplijauskaitė, 1984: 45).

Introducing the idea that woman cannot find freedom nor full satisfaction within the framework of the heterosexual relationship — illicit or marital, purely carnal or romantic — reinforces the mechanism of continuous craving as the female search for the meaningful pulse of life outside the project of passion. In other words, it is the being tied to a man what the New Woman cannot suffer. Thus, her lover’s desperate attempt to tantalise her with his fairy-tale prevarication of a new liaison entirely fashioned to suit her tyrannical fantasies: ‘You would reign supreme; when your highness would deign to honour her servant I would come and humour your every whim. [...] And if you were angry you could vent your feelings on me, and I would give in and bow my head to your mood’ — manages only to elicit her indifference (26-27). When asked if she is pleased with his tale of enthralling romance in which she holds the key of abusive power, she merely retorts, much to his dismay, that what she does not like in the full picture is precisely him.

Significantly, once the protagonist decides to break up with her lover, the narrative does not register any of her meditations regarding her new life or how she gets ready for her return to marital harmony. Most importantly, there is no acknowledgement of her transgression, her illicit *intermezzo*, as if she were not concerned with the possible consequences it may have in her future life. The transition from adulteress to lawful mother is somehow abrupt and disturbing in this respect. An example of a female who is much more concerned with the negative implications of her “figur[ing] as an adulteress in every English-speaking newspaper” may be found in the heroine of “A Little Grey Glove”, whose husband has just divorced her (112). Socially placed in an extremely delicate situation, which many divorced women had to face, as is recorded in novels such as George Meredith’s *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), her determination to live first “as a free woman again” before considering a new marriage proposal impresses a distinctively feminist undertone to the story.

On other occasions the protagonists do not exhibit such a courageous attitude in their association with men and recoil from the pursuit of fulfilling love relationships, but only to find tedium in marriages gone awry. The frustrated wife in “An Empty Frame” is an example of feminine cowardliness and withdrawal from the chance to lead a more complete life next to a previous suitor, her true spiritual mate. The story portrays the consequences of her decision to marry a lesser man, the one “who seemed to need her most out of those who admired her”, instead of continuing her relation with a lover whose views on matrimony she fails to espouse; his declaration of eternal love comes with a firm determination that turns out to be dissuasive: ‘I cannot, will not bind myself to you by any legal or religious tie. I must be free and unfettered to follow that which I believe right for me’ (119).

The idea of ruined lives as a result of ill partner choices in the marriage venture emerges both from woman and man. While in “An Empty Frame” the wary wife regrets her bond to a dependent husband: “‘And I’ (with a catch of voice) ‘with a great man might have made a great woman — and now those who know and understand me’ (bitterly) ‘think of me as a great failure’” (122), the brutish alcoholic in the first part of “Under Northern Sky” (“How Marie Larsen Exorcised a Demon”) utters a similar lamentation: “‘Women, ay, women, man’s curse. [...] What a man I would have been’ (a rising growl) ‘if it hadn’t been for women’” (126). The second part (“A Shadow’s Slant”) features another example of a conflictive marriage doomed by a terrible mismatch between a violent husband and a discontented wife.

#### 4.3.4. The Birth of a New Woman: A Conclusive Story

In “A Regeneration of Two”, the first sketch of the story is full of allusions to the heroine’s “aesthetic appreciation” of her own specular image, infatuated as she is with the sight of her irregular but tantalising beauty, the hypnotic effect of her jewellery and her own attire (*Discords*, 164). Her condescension towards the work of lady philanthropists and “advanced women” who “go in for suffrage, social reformation, politics, all sorts of fatiguing things” contributes to the portrait of a decadent female egotistically centred in a rather sterile conception of the self (166). An idle widow, she celebrates the “exultant joy” of belonging to herself again and being spared the company of men for “one sees such a lot of animal in them when they are in love” (168). Inspired by the regenerating discourse of a male vagabond in vain pursuit of the perfect female, and his maxim that “[s]alvation lies with the women and the new race they are to mother” (192), she is able to change a meaningless life into an example of feminist useful labour. The degrading bartering of female bodies in the marriage market and the present situation of women as “the greatest bar to progress [that] the world holds” are some of the arguments put forward by the clear-sighted vagabond in his diatribe against social evils (197). She is thus enticed into a new mood that encourages her to shake

off the absurd emptiness of her former life without a mission to fulfil, and feels impelled to concentrate on “the new conception of life forming in her”, captivated by the idea of changing the route of female destiny (200). Performing a complete transformation in her appearance, from an old anaemic-looking image of female decadence to the vigorous impersonation of lushness and self-assurance, her metamorphosis is mediated by the reflective contemplation of vagabond life, which inevitably reminds us of the change in looks experienced by the fleeing heroine before the mirror, mesmerised by her specular image as a gypsy, at the end of the second sketch in “A Psychological Moment at Three Periods”.

Her espousal of women’s cause is materialised in the creation of an autonomous “colony of sinners”, a co-operative that houses single mothers of all sorts, regardless of their race and origin (208). Shocking the representatives of orthodoxy by giving admission to gypsy women with their newly-borns, she makes a point of her new religion of female solidarity and proudly declares to the community’s pastor that ‘your church has been closed since Sunday [...] mine is open every day, and all day, and my sinners laugh and sing, and find new hopes and self-reliance in measure as they better their work, and then chicks will grow up to be proud of their mothers’ (206).

The heroine is able to foresee that her liberation will imply the modification of power relations, and that her actions will manage to bring about an irretrievable change in human relations both in theory and in praxis. As she becomes militant she goes beyond the class struggle and rehearses a greater accomplishment: by impersonating change she poses as an example of the possible alteration in those power relations and in the production of individuals. And in this reformulation of herself as a community leader she makes use of all the feminine powers at her disposal, including her personal magnetism, her bewitching power to allure the men of the district and thus gain the funds she needs. Her personal recompense is the return of the poet-vagabond whom she nurtures back into health, and with whom she establishes a free union of equals, once she has completed her own fashioning as a “well-rounded individual”<sup>52</sup> within the patriarchal society.

The last story in *Discords* manages to subvert the personal as its heroine exerts her right to undo conventional laws on marriage and family unions, in her movement to lay bare the absurdity of both property and propriety codes. As H. Cixous has put it in her writings on woman, she has managed to overcome

the double stinginess of the masculine-conjugal subjective economy, which she doubly resists. On the one hand she has constituted herself necessarily as that “person” capable of losing a part of herself without losing her integrity. But secretly, silently, deep down inside, she grows and multiplies, for, on the other

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<sup>52</sup> Speculating on the “psychological action of the club upon the individual woman”, a writer for *The Arena* concluded that it “has made them more democratic — less narrow and exclusive. It has heightened their plane of thinking; [...] it has lifted them bodily from the pettiness and restraint of domestic drudgery. [...] Women, through club work, are learning the value of coöperation, the sacredness of friendship, the necessity for tolerance and charity, of magnanimity and considerateness. The club develops not merely a clever and versatile, but an expansive and harmonious, a well-rounded individual”. (Winnifred Harper Cooley, “The Eternal Feminine”. II. “The Future of the Woman’s Club”. *The Arena*. 27, 1902: 376). Similar virtues are derived from the useful work carried out in the patriarchal society developed by the heroine in Egerton’s story, thus contributing to her moral and physical wholesomeness. The urban institution of the women’s club flourished in England in the second half of the nineteenth century. Providing a socially acceptable opportunity for middle and upper-class women to become more independent and leave the domestic family circle, “[t]ens of thousands of women had joined clubs since the 1880s and a few daring individuals had done so as early as the 1860s. [...] For over half a century, roughly between the 1860s and the 1930s, thousands of women founded and joined clubs to satisfy their physical, economic, social, and political desires”. For a compelling account of women’s clubs, see Erika Diane Rappaport’s *Shopping for Pleasure. Women in the Making of London’s West End* (2000), particularly chapter 3, “Resting Places for Women Wayfarers”: Feminism and the Comforts of the Public Sphere”: 74-107 (74).

hand, she knows far more about living and about the relation between the economy of the drives and the management of the ego than any man. (1975: 344)

The protagonist's capacity to "deappropriate unselfishly" (Cixous, 1975: 344), incapacitates the Nietzschean systematic vision of woman<sup>53</sup> as a seductress who gives in order to take. An important element in the process of liberation is, in this sense, the heroine's overcoming of that point within the identificatory process enacted in "A Cross Line" and particularly in the first part of "A Regeneration of Two": the moment of primary narcissism, that sort of pre-mirror stage which this final narrative aims to reveal as an exhausted realm for the New Woman's present commitments and social pursuits. In keeping with Nora's feminist assertion in Ibsen's *A Doll House* (1879) and her desire to become emancipated from objecthood into subjecthood,<sup>54</sup> the story enacts woman's liberation from the body cult that constituted one of the major concerns in that first story of *Keynotes*. And thus utopia is envisaged as a realisable project in this last story of female becoming, as the random wanderings of gipsy dreams lead Egerton's heroines into the teleological path of feminist and political engagement.

#### 4.4. CONCLUSIONS

Inscribed in the large projects to fight a generalised sense of female dissatisfaction and openly dispute traditional notions of morality, the first story in *Keynotes* begins to unfold a narrative strategy of specularity, which is instrumental in the heroine's attempt to pose arguably more daring and liberating images of womanhood.

The display of the intricate process of secondary identifications in the stories is inaugurated by a narcissistic recreation of a fragmented sensual body to be relished under the guise of the oriental dancer. In its explicit goal to procure a greater proximity with an invoked female primitiveness, the text constructs this specular image as a specific device for woman to re-establish that lost umbilical cord with "the inwardly seen". I have suggested in this context that the modernity of Egerton's fiction inheres in its reformulation of a Paterian, Wildean aesthetics, as it concedes woman complete responsibility over the creative and hermeneutic processes. The Egertonian heroine plays the part of creator, artistic object and exegete, a striking ownership which allows for her being *out of herself, watching herself*. In this late Victorian feminised poetics it corresponds to the privileged woman observer to do the telling as well as to incarnate myth. Egerton's fiction thus prompts a singular aesthetic reflection in which woman is hailed to engage in an ontological specular game for her own sake.

It has been my contention that in the creation of the heroine's eroticised image of the self there are a number of conflictive aspects which clash with the alleged purposes of the image itself. I have found that by her own stylisation as erotic dancer the heroine is producing a dream vision for the explicit consumption of an imaginary male audience, which is in turn challenged by her own narcissistic delectation, thus allowing for a homoerotic reading of the specular image. Further connections with "the exotic" and the *femme fatale* contribute to present a problematic vision of femininity, since these categories appear to be difficult sites from which an effective liberation of women may be carried out.

By dwelling on the cultural convention of the enigmatic woman, these *fin-de-siècle* narratives purport to exploit the construct of female inscrutability as an occasion to justify woman's privileged standpoint in the complex pursuit of the keys to the identity riddle.

The concurrent depiction of a masculine defective perception of the female sign and a feminine natural competence as its opposite, ultimately responds to a double aim: the

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<sup>53</sup> Cixous charges against this masculine reduction of woman to the image of alluring temptress, incapable of being a giver, which the philosopher supported. See "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), p. 344 and note 9 (p. 349).

<sup>54</sup> The metaphor of women as dolls is in fact recorded in the story, see pp. 197 and 198.

deployment of a credible conception of gendered fiction on the one hand, and the revelation of woman's essence by means of a Paterian explosion of impressionistic detail on the other.

By drawing on notions of abundance and multiplicity which are central in the discourse of some twentieth-century French feminisms, I have sought to establish a correlation between the metaphor of female elusiveness mobilised throughout George Egerton's stories and the work of Luce Irigaray, while establishing the project of woman's proximity to herself as a pivotal design in the narratives.

I have also tried to show the problems encapsulated within the notion of enigma utilised by Egerton as it sustains a system of gender asymmetry that condemns woman to enjoy her privileged access to signification entirely by herself, frustrated by male ineptitude in the game of introspection, and gasping for the advent of a New Man.

One of the results of relying on the ubiquitous concept of "woman's essence" is the emergence of a conflict made apparent in the contradictory exploitation of that essence as both univocal and cohesive for all Egerton's heroines, and as a metaphor of blended qualities and hybrid characteristics at the same time. The construct of "hybridity" is alternatively invoked as convenient: either negatively, as a deformation of female truer impulses or, in a positive way, as an indication of woman's ability to retain a link to her uncivilised self.

I have explored a further twist of the woman's essence construct, which I have situated in the narrative device of female lying. By describing the adjustment of gender interests to the socio-political model in force, Egerton's heroines manage to claim the necessity of maintaining female deception, in which the equilibrium of the sexual contract, as it is presently conceived, is said to reside.

In the second part of this chapter I have focused on language and traced in the stories the idea of monotomy as a gendered construct which deliberately offers a polarised formula of male tedious utterances and an unpredictable female language of sabotage.

The occurrence of multifarious female speeches in the narratives, with their flexibility to be broken down by sudden tunes, by remembered childhood melodies or by haunting gipsy legends, establishes a concept of language that eludes static definitions, in its permanent flight from convention.

I have argued that the antagonism of conventional language enacted in the texts — by means of their careful reproduction of baby talk, the simulated maternal speech, or the various accents which are included as part of the characters' fashioning — may serve as an occasion to inscribe Egerton's linguistic alternatives within Julia Kristeva's logic of the semiotic discourse, as examples of effective resistance in the stories.

George Egerton's collection of short stories displays a series of metafictional devices and new narrative techniques which merit her characterisation as forerunner of the modern short story. By means of a pioneering use of these new fictional methods — the polyphonic array of narrative viewpoints, the frequent ellipses, the erasure of scene-settings, the eloquent compressions of event, the focus on fleeting moments of the mind and the development of complex psychological introspections — the stories in *Keynotes* and *Discords* manage to produce a breach of linearity, epitomised by the physical visibility of asteriks and the liberal use of the staff at the beginning of some tales.

The incursions of these modern stories into the realm of disorder is evidenced in the portrayals of heroines who abide at the borders of fiction and fact, and feel at ease dwelling in that grey domain of permanently blurring contours. The dream vision produces in turn the new narrative method of "the inwardly seen" also present in Ibsen's influential texts, which in Egerton's stories describes a tidal movement that Hélène Cixous has characterised as prototypically feminine.

I have also explained the stories' attention to detail as an instance of George Egerton's valorisation and complicity with a hegemonic gendered discourse on woman's fiction made manifest in its collusion with established notions of feminine realism in the nineteenth century.

Finally, I have attempted to inscribe George Egerton's aim to write *as* and *for* woman as an early exercise of *écriture féminine* which entailed the adoption of a singular narrative style stimulated by the following devices: (a) A reassessment of the feminine as a topos of value from which to capacitate woman with a language of her own, an effective instrument for change. (b) The development of a problematic discourse on essence which is nevertheless instrumental in the deployment of Egerton's transformational fictions. (c) The fostering of women's expression and exploitation of their own sexuality as a rightful endeavour, thus sparking the debate on women's sexuality as power, which still remains a hot-button feminist issue nowadays. (d) The construction of a female discourse on pleasure in explicitly physical terms, which triggers a narrative parallelism between woman's yearning for self-fulfilment and her desire for illicit gratifications. (e) Finally, the intertwining of the erotic and the musical is also put at the service of feminine writing; the studied effect of Egerton's musical texts echoes the song of woman as she is liberated from monotony into an ecstasy of endless stimulation.

In the third part of this chapter I have analysed the dreams of evasion of the Egertonian heroine as a landmark device in the construction of female identity. Escapism into fantasised otherness momentarily quenches the ambition for new domains to inhabit. Woman is shown refashioning herself at will, moving inside and outside the real and creating dynamic images in constant change in which identity is fixed for a brief moment, only to dive again into the endless whirlpool of selfhood. I have tried to demonstrate that the aesthetic contemplation of nature is construed in these stories as a narrative element which triggers those moments of retreat and estrangement from an alienating domesticity, and I have accordingly characterised them as centrifugal narratives depicting woman's strife and incessant transformation in order to account for the Heraclitean vision I have found ingrained in George Egerton's literary treatment of female identity.

The stories in *Keynotes* and *Discords* contravene hegemonic discourses on woman by showing inconstancy in love and a penchant for extramarital relationships as consistent feminine moves. Although the experience of motherhood is at times brought up as woman's best resolution, her claim of permanent discontentment pervades most of the stories. Although there are protagonists who manage to flee away from abusive husbands or enslaving adulterous relationships, satisfaction of female deep yearnings is inevitably deferred. Liberation lies ahead as these fictions stimulate utopias of self-fulfilment, but only in an unknown time yet to come.

These fictions mobilise powerful images of evasion which show a double identification of the Egertonian heroine with both human and non-human entities. Navigating the tempestuous seas of the inner self, these female protagonists are ubiquitously drawn towards nature, the outdoors, to moonlight and to the sea, and in their fascination for the natural element they variously identify with gypsies, oriental dancers, witches and vagabonds. The continuous projection of such identifications produces a dynamic, multilayered notion of female identity which is constantly in the process of becoming, constantly in flux. I have analysed these tropes as a token of the spiritual nomadism of the Egertonian heroine, for her fascination for the itinerancy of the gypsy is both physical and ontological. These are "nomadic subjects", fantasising with an unfettered utopian self, suggesting at times a controversial dissolution of borders between woman and nature. Egerton's notion of the

female self may rightfully be branded essentialist and, while her stories perpetuate the dualisms man / culture and woman / nature — which from a(n) (eco)feminist point of view need to be challenged — they successfully exploit such metaphors of continuity as platforms from which to envision an empowered womanhood.

Despite George Egerton's claim that she was no feminist, her writings are imbued with such a liberational aim that her fiction is inevitably registered within the history of literary feminisms. I have sought to delineate in the preceding pages the impetus of Egerton's feminism as it emerges in particularly contradictory or combative aspects summarised as follows.

The projection of an empowered view of femininity constitutes a major purpose of these late Victorian narratives, which instil women with a sense of enabling talents that they are encouraged to use at all costs.

The contradiction embedded in the heroine's presentation of feeling pervades Egerton's narratives. Thus, while woman's natural talents are first predicated on her privileged proximity to the domain of sensitivity, her "affectability", this fundamental want to either give or receive affection is invoked by male and female characters in the stories as the major obstacle in the development of women's potential. In this sense, these enigmatic females draw our attention towards the problems issuing from the inhibitions set upon woman's autonomy and self-fulfilment by the socio-political apparatus.

The notion of female bonding through the shared experience of women's great yearning is somewhat mobilised as a revolutionary construct that threatens to dilute age and class boundaries. The idea is introduced that women's permanent desire and protest against monotony may in fact find its parallelism in their need to see their scope of influence enlarged.

Finally, by paying special attention to several occurrences of alternative marital arrangements in the stories I have also tried to reveal the challenges posed by some heroines to hegemonic discourses on marriage. Thus, established notions such as the gendered distribution of labour or the complementarity of the sexes are effectively challenged in the stories. Harsh judgements are also passed with regard to the marriage institution, which is oftentimes invoked as both a source of tedium for Egerton's bewitching heroines, and as an emblem of an insufferable bondage. Ultimately, the portrait of carefree adulteresses conveys a sense that extramarital relationships were no antidote for the pervading monotony of the heterosexual contract.

I have chosen to close my discussion by focusing on the story entitled "A Regeneration of Two" in *Discords*, which best shows that transformation is possible for woman. A physical and spiritual metamorphosis is enacted by the Egertonian heroine, able to change an idle life into a fulfilling project of cross-class, cross-race female solidarity. Through the creation of a "colony of sinners", a colony of sisters, Egerton's New Woman sets up an outpost of progress and hoists the flag of a new religion of female liberation and female bonding. Emancipating herself from the cult of the body, the Egertonian heroine eventually "depropriates unselfishly", transcends her narcissism and engages in feminist and political pursuits.

## 5 THE HEAVENLY TWINS: SARAH GRAND AND THE BREAKING OF SILENCE

In 1890, at the age of thirty-six, Frances Elizabeth Bellenden Clarke (1854-1943) decided to leave her husband, Col. McFall, and change her name to Sarah Grand. Encouraged by the modest income she had received from the publication of *Ideala* (1888), Grand was determined to “give [her]self up entirely to literature” (Grand, 1899: 122). Under the new pseudonym and after coping with many adversities, her international bestseller, *The Heavenly Twins*, would finally appear in 1893.<sup>1</sup> With the novel’s “great success” (Montgomery, 1995: 178) Grand came to be regarded as “the genre’s foremost writer”<sup>2</sup> (Bonell, 1995: 123), despite the antagonism that the New Woman novel stirred at the time.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, two months after the publication in 1894 of her famous article in *The North American Review*, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” — in which Grand had revitalised the ‘New Woman’ for the mainstream press almost a year after its first capitalised appearance in the women’s press (Tusan, 1998: 170) —<sup>4</sup> the phrase had become “ubiquitous” (Nelson, 2000: ix). Grand’s contribution to late-Victorian feminism went beyond, however, the coinage of the befitting phrase and the creation of “perhaps the biggest New Woman blockbuster” (Dunst, 2014: 351). Despite her determined championing of the education of girls in sexual matters Grand did not sympathise with the school of New Woman writers known under the label of “neurotics” or “erotomaniacs”<sup>5</sup> — within which George Egerton was one of the best-known exemplars. On the contrary, the Irish-born author of *Ideala* and

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<sup>1</sup> Grand’s manuscript followed a tortuous path before its publication in 1893. Turned down by most London publishers (William Blackwood even threatened Grand to reject any work of hers if she persisted in her determination to publish *The Heavenly Twins*), it was finally accepted by William Heinemann, who first issued the novel as a three-decker in February 1893, and later as a single volume in 1894. (For more details on the publication history of the novel see Senf’s Introduction to *The Heavenly Twins*, the 1992 edition of Grand’s text from which I shall be quoting in the present chapter. See, particularly, pp. xvii, xxxi-xxxii. In her Foreword to Heinemann’s new edition of the text in 1923, Sarah Grand gave an account of the circumstances in which the novel originally appeared when she was already determined to publish it at her own expense, as she had previously done with *Ideala* in 1888).

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Grand continues to be considered one of the most prominent exponents of the New Woman genre by present-day literary critics. Beth Sutton-Ramspeck, however, has convincingly argued for a new categorisation of Grand, Mary Ward and Charlotte Perkins Gilman as “literary housekeepers” whom she calls “anomalies among their contemporaries”. Opposing them to the four distinguishable types of women writers from the period, “New Women, Aesthetes, domestic realists, and conservatives”, Sutton-Ramspeck claims that these three writers “reenvision housekeeping as representing responsibilities with enormous public impact: making the food supply safe, ‘cleaning up’ society, improving the human race through ‘public motherhood’”. Nevertheless, Grand’s “connection to the New Woman movement is indisputable” (Sutton-Ramspeck, 2004: 14, 3, 232).

<sup>3</sup> Studying the relationship of the New Woman with other cultural phenomena of the *fin de siècle*, in particular with the figure of the decadent, Sally Ledger has explained that “the fate of the New Woman of the 1890s was inextricably linked with the public disgracing of Oscar Wilde”. Only seven months after the two-year hard labour sentence “for committing acts of ‘gross indecency’ [...] *Punch* triumphantly announced ‘THE END OF THE NEW WOMAN — The crash has come at last’. The decline of popular New Woman fiction after 1895, hardly two years after Sarah Grand’s sensation novel, was only comparable to the success it had experienced in the first years of the same decade. (Ledger, 1995: 24)

<sup>4</sup> See also Ellen Jordan’s “The Christening of the New Woman: May 1894”, in *Victorian Newsletter* 48 (Spring 1983), pp. 19-21, for details about the emergence of the phrase: “the feminist Sarah Grand and the anti-feminist Ouida, acted as godmothers, while *Punch* played the role of officiating clergyman and performed the ceremony within its pages” (19).

<sup>5</sup> The derogatory terms were put in circulation by Hugh Stutfield in an article entitled “Tommyrotics” published in June 1895 in *Blackwood’s Magazine*.

*The Heavenly Twins*, with her steadfast approval of marriage,<sup>6</sup> sought to gain respect for the feminist cause following a divergent path from the one explored by Egerton or Iota (Kathleen Mannington Caffyn) and came to occupy the most prominent place within the so-called “purity school” of the genre. Combative against the principles of Aestheticism and naturalism, Grand devoted her talent to write in earnest about the social and political problems of her day, with an emphasis on the examination of the dominant sexual ideology that ruled late-Victorian society. According to Sally Ledger, “[h]istorically [...] [*The Heavenly Twins* in particular and, more broadly, the feminist fiction of the 1890s] represents a fictional expression of the general shift, [...] away from ‘class’ as a locus of social disruption towards a focus on gender as a battle site” (Ledger, 1997: 115).

The adoption of an ethical perspective in her works, the consciousness of writing “with a purpose”, made her produce novels that were meant to be clearly didactic, examples of the *roman à these*.<sup>7</sup> Grand managed to turn her ideological fiction, *The Heavenly Twins*, into “one of the most popular novels of the 1890s” (Taylor, 2003: 25) both in England and in the United States;<sup>8</sup> in fact, “[w]hilst *Tess of the D’Urvilles* was the best-selling novel of 1892, in 1893

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<sup>6</sup> Grand’s defence of a meliorated version of married life, however, was perfectly compatible with her support of the single woman. In *The Young Girl* (1898-9) she wrote: ‘Thinking for herself, the modern girl knows that a woman’s life is no longer considered a failure simply because she does not marry’. (Quoted in Bland, 1986: 125).

<sup>7</sup> Susan Ruin Suleiman has argued for the presence of a didactic aim at the origin of the novel itself, of which the *roman à these* would be an extreme example, “a tendency that theorists and practitioners of the modern ‘text’ have sought to suppress” (Suleiman, 1983: 19).

<sup>8</sup> The novel was reprinted up to six times by Heinemann in the first year, “selling nearly 20,000 copies in Britain, while Cassell’s sold five times as many copies of the American edition” (Mangum, 1998: 70). After decades of neglect, *The Heavenly Twins* regained critical attention in the 1970s with works such as Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), in which Grand is called the “matriarch of the feminist novelists”. Showalter gives relevant details on the publication history of the novel and its critical reception by contemporaries as well as on the creation of Grand’s persona as “the matriarch, the beautiful female prophet” (Showalter, 1977: 181, 204). Kathleen Blake, in *Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature*, included a brief analysis of Grand’s women in *The Heavenly Twins* concluding that the novel “explores the morbidity that sets in when women lose faith in love and separate themselves from men” (1983: 133-4). Ann Ardis, (in *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism*) though briefly mentions Grand’s work on a few scattered pages, registers William Heinemann’s ability (as explained in his memoir) to turn “a profit on the social controversies of the day” by taking over “an abominably printed three-volume novel that no one could read with comfort [...] [and] link[ing] it up with the cause of revolting women, an equal moral law for both sexes, social purity, the Contagious Diseases act and all that kind of stuff” (Ardis, 1990:39). Lyn Pykett, in *The ‘Improper’ Feminine. The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*, has studied Grand’s novel from the perspective of what she calls “woman’s ‘affectability’”, the celebration of “the feminine and/as feeling” as well as the figure of the female hysteric (Pykett, 1992: 164, 174). Kate Flint, in *The Woman Reader 1837-1914*, offers a careful analysis of Evadne’s readings and the use of fiction in *The Heavenly Twins*; for Flint “[a]mong the so-called ‘New Woman’ novelists, Sarah Grand made the most sustained use of reading as a topos” (Flint, 1993: 301). Lucy Bland, in her work *Banishing the Beast. Sexuality and the Early Feminists* (1995), singles out Grand’s figure and focuses on the impact of her novel in its exposure of marriage’s “iniquities” in late-Victorian England (see especially pp. 144-49). Carolyn Christensen Nelson includes a chapter dedicated to “Two New Woman Writers: Sarah Grand and George Egerton” in her *British Women Fiction Writers of the 1890s* (1996: 8-28). Sally Ledger’s essential *The New Woman. Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* analyses Grand’s novel under the lens of its connection with the social purity movement claiming that it is “a lot more than a narrowly political novel” (Ledger, 1997: 113. See especially pp. 111-18; see also Ledger’s “The New Woman and the Crisis of Victorianism”). Ann Heilmann has expanded the studies of the New Woman novel with substantial works: in *New Woman Fiction. Women Writing First-Wave Feminism*, offers a close reading of *The Heavenly Twins* by focusing on the subplot of Angelica and the Tenor in order to analyse “how effectively” the themes of cross-dressing and homosexuality “challenge[d] Victorian notions of gender and sexuality” (Heilmann, 2000: 129-36). In “Narrating the Hysteric: Fin de Siècle Medical Discourse and Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893)” Heilmann explores the “feminist conflation of hysteria and protest” as well as Grand’s interpretation of contemporary medical discourse as an instrument of patriarchy with a “destructive impact in female identity” (Richardson, 2001: 123). Heilmann revisits Grand’s texts in *New Woman Strategies. Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* where she offers an in-depth analysis of *The Heavenly Twins* focusing on the “limits of mimicry and masquerade” in the twins’ subplot as well as on “the New Woman as newly born hysteric” concluding that the novel “derived its greatest appeal from the fact that it reassured female and male, feminist and conventional readers alike” (Heilmann, 2004: 59, 66, 79. See especially pp. 44-79). Iveta Jusová’s *The New Woman and the Empire* (2005) offers a study of class, race, colonial and evolutionary discourses in Sarah Grand’s work, and her “Imperialist Feminism: Colonial Issues in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth*

*The Heavenly Twins* could make the same claim to literary fame” (Ledger, 1997: 113). Despite its incredible sales, or perhaps owing to them, the critical and popular reception of the novel got to extremes, focusing on its aesthetic and moral values<sup>9</sup>. But what most decidedly gave the book its notoriety and prevented its inclusion in the average family library<sup>10</sup> was Grand’s choice of themes. Male promiscuity, venereal disease, syphilis-induced dementia, the degeneration of offspring, cross-dressing, ambiguous same-sex relationships or suicidal attempts were prominent amongst the least palatable topics that Grand sought to explore, “questions which cannot be adequately discussed in *any* column of a journal with a mixed *clientele*” and which made her novel “a fine example of the *succes de scandale*”, as a reviewer in the *Spectator* complained (Senf, 1992: xx). Much more agreeable was, arguably, Grand’s emphasis on the importance of the education of girls, a concern which pervades her entire fiction<sup>11</sup> and which “she admitted derived from her own inadequate schooling” (Sutton-Ramspeck, 2004: 10). Her strategic decision to “speak the unspeakable, revealing the murky side of masculine sexuality in the Victorian age” (Ledger, 1995: 32) and to place the lack of educational opportunities afforded to women at the origin of all the abominable evils depicted in the novel allowed for a reinterpretation of Darwinian assumptions on the role of women in the evolution of the race, which Grand cleverly put at the service of her feminist agenda.

As Lucy Bland has observed, “*The Heavenly Twins* is an immensely long and fascinating book composed of a number of interlocking narratives” (1995: 147). The seven-hundred-page-long novel comprises six books, all of which — except for Book II (“A Maltese Miscellany”) and the four last chapters in Book III (“Development and Arrest of Development”) that take place in Malta — are set in the cathedral city of Morningquest during the decade of the 1870s<sup>12</sup>. The main plot deals with Evadne Frayling, the central New Woman character in the story and the daughter of a conservative middle-class family. The

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*Book*” (*English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*. Volume 43, Number 3, 2000; pp. 298-315) focuses on Grand’s most notorious novel. Patricia Murphy has looked into the interrelationship of the cultural construct of time and gender in Sarah Grand’s fiction in which she finds a “complicity of temporal discourses in naturalizing sex-based presumptions of superiority and inferiority” (*Time is of the Essence. Temporality, Gender and the New Woman*, 2001: 2. See especially chapter 4 for an analysis of *The Heavenly Twins*). Maura Dunst, in her recent study — “He, Watching over Morningquest: The Chime’s Musical Performance in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*” — has analysed the choice of Mendelssohn’s oratorio, Elijah, and the function of the chime in Grand’s novel “as a litmus test of the characters’ acceptance of patriarchal values” (Dunst, 2014: 349). For a study on metaphors of confinement in Grand’s novels, see C. Bretones Martínez’s “Confinamiento y alienación en las heroínas de Sarah Grand” (2011). More recently, Alexandra Gray’s *Self-Harm in New Woman Writing* (2018) has approached the genre from a new angle and focused on self-starvation and anorexic heroines in the case of Sarah Grand’s novels (see particularly pp. 92-105).

<sup>9</sup> Most aesthetic issues the contemporary readership found fault with were related to “organization, style and character development”. *The Nation* thus described the novel as “a tangle of themes and counter-themes worked out to a tangle of conclusions” (Senf, 1992: 20) For an account of the variety of responses gathered by this fin-de-siècle narrative see, for example, Senf’s introduction to *THT*, particularly pp.: xviii-xxvi.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Flint writes that “Jane Panton, in *A Gentlewoman’s Home* (1896) is adamant that the library should not remain sacred to ‘the master of the house’ [...] [and] she feels it correct to have novels in the library. Additionally, she advises one never to put an embargo on any of the contents of the library so far as younger members of the family are concerned, reiterating the viewpoint which had so incensed Hardy, and others, that ‘if a book is not fit for the children it isn’t fit for us’”. Thus she would include *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, but keep out E. W. Benson’s *Dodo* and Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*” (J. E. Panton, *A Gentlewoman’s Home: The Whole Art of Building, Furnishing, and Beautifying the Home*, 1896: 220-4. Quoted in Flint, 1993: 103).

<sup>11</sup> Teresa Mangum has remarked that in Grand’s later work, noticeably in *The Winged Victory* (1916), she “turns her fictional attention to the problems of class struggles that remain at the margins of her earlier fiction” (Mangum, 1998, p. 209). See also Jusová, 2000b, 2005, for Grand’s interpretation of colonial and evolutionary discourses.

<sup>12</sup> The time span covered in the novel is never directly mentioned but it can be, nevertheless, ascertained retrospectively from the only precise date provided by the correspondence between Lady Adeline Hamilton-Wells and Doctor Galbraith in the last book of the novel (Chapter III: 564). The year mentioned is 1880 and at the end of chapter XIV we learn that Evadne is twenty five. Bearing in mind that the very first chapter in the novel focuses on nineteen-year-old Evadne (Chapter I: 3) the inception of the story would coincide with year 1874.

novel starts by giving an account of her early adolescence as an avid reader with intellectual capacities and a strict moral code. When she meets manly Colonel Colquhoun her sexual instincts are aroused for the first time and, knowing her parents' approval of the union, she consents to marry him under the delusion of his impeccable moral credentials. Barely a few hours after their wedding, Evadne discovers the profligate past of her husband and decides to leave him on the spot. Coerced by family and friends to rejoin him, Evadne agrees on the condition that her marriage be never consummated. But her unwavering decision to keep a chaste marriage and prevent the spread of the disease carried by syphilitic male bodies — though it saves her life, leads her into a dull existence trying to keep up appearances. Sexual repression, the denial of her maternal instinct and, most importantly, the promise exacted by her husband that she will never take an active part in politics and platform speaking inevitably bring about a gradual nervous breakdown, from which she never fully recovers. In the final book of the novel the devoted and sympathetic male doctor, George Galbraith, who has diagnosed her hysteria, ends up marrying her and fathering her two children while rescuing her from a spiral of depression and suicide attempts. In Grand's novel, men are held directly responsible for their sexual misdeeds and the impact of the latter in the social body but there is also a glimpse of the new man, the hope that "[t]he man of the future will be better" (Grand, 1894b: 272).

The secondary plot, concerned with the story of Edith Beale, the daughter of Morningquest's Bishop, serves as a reminder that Evadne's insurgence against male brutishness is morally justified as "the offences which rouse her wrath [...] are by no means products of her imagination [...] [t]hey have a very real and wide-spread existence".<sup>13</sup> The picture of old womanhood and Victorian virtue, Edith is kept in perfect ignorance of the dangers that threaten the female body as she accepts courtship and, much to Evadne's dismay, a marriage proposal from Sir Mosley Menteith, an officer of dubious sexual past from whom she contracts syphilis. The ordeal to which she is subjected after giving birth to a monstrous syphilitic child is evidenced in her own mental and physical degeneration, which will make her both mad and wise: "The same thing may happen now to any mother — to any daughter — and will happen so long as we refuse to know and resist" (304). Her final shriek in an effort to impose silence to the chime that comes from the cathedral of Morningquest sounds like actual apostasy, the defection from religious principles which she now clearly identifies as oppressive: Edith dies a new woman.

The horrific final scene in her death bed will haunt most female characters for the rest of the novel, particularly Angelica Hamilton Wells, the granddaughter of the Duke of Morningquest and heroine of the third central subplot. One of the "heavenly twins" alluded to in the title of the novel, her story allows Grand to continue exploring the influence of (lack of) formal education and home training in the creation of roles for women. Angelica and her twin brother, Diavolo, are rebellious, irreverent, hilarious and completely out of control, both to the same degree, up and until they leave childhood and society forces them to conform to appropriate gender patterns. Although she is clearly his intellectual superior, as Angelica reaches adulthood, it is Diavolo's mental abilities that are stimulated whilst hers are consistently curtailed. Asked by her uncle what it is that she wants out of life, she claims 'An object [...] Something! Something! Something beyond the mere getting-up in the morning and going to bed at night, with an interval of exercise between' (318). The awkward episode in which Book IV ("The Tenor and The Boy. — An Interlude") is exclusively engaged provides

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<sup>13</sup> Frederic M. Bird commenting on Grand's moral message in his review of the novel for *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. Quoted in Senf, 1992: xix.

an account of the harm the privation of intellectual stimulus and the monotony of (aristocratic and middle-class) women's lives could cause. Under the guise of the "Boy" Angelica takes to pay nocturnal visits to the cathedral choir's tenor to find out what it is like to enjoy the company of a man without his being conditioned by the constraints of gender propriety; when she is discovered she protests: 'Deplore it if you will, but don't wonder at it; it is the natural consequence of an unnatural state of things; and there will be more of it still, or I am much mistaken'. (454) The scene of the tragic anagnorisis involves a boating accident that eventually leads to the tenor's death, but readers are led to infer that it is the tenor's Platonic love for the "Boy" that triggers his romantic death once Angelica has been revealed as a woman. Full of remorse and guilt, Angelica finds relief in a conventional marriage to Mr Kilroy of Ilverthorpe, an obliging man, twenty years her senior whom she calls 'Daddy' and for whom she ends up writing speeches to deliver in Parliament.

Teresa Mangum has remarked that New Woman novels "forced their readers to question the biological essentialism at the heart of the ideal of womanhood", and that these novels "were one of the most powerful forms of resistance to this ideal" (Mangum, 1998: 2), but Sarah Grand's text, with its ideological appropriation of Victorian concerns with the future of the empire and the improvement of the race, its championing of motherhood and vehement support of social purity, seemed at times to enrol those heroines back into the ideal the New Woman genre was allegedly trying to oppose. "The truth has all along been in us, but we have cared more for man than for truth, and so the whole human race has suffered. [...] It is the woman's place and pride and pleasure to teach the child, and man is morally in his infancy" (Grand, 1894b: 272, 273). The new role Grand's new woman was being called to perform was perhaps not so new after all as it involved the deployment of one of the virtues traditionally associated with Ruskinian notions of femininity, namely, her maternal instinct. Despite those complicities with traditional discourses on womanhood and reductive, biologised notions of female moral superiority *The Heavenly Twins* stands out in the literary history of women's writing as a fiction that dared to break the silence and encouraged readers to think about such delicate issues as men's promiscuity, religion, gender politics or the public responsibility of women in the construction of a fairer society. Three decades after its first publication in 1893 Sarah Grand reflected on her achievement from the foreword to the new edition of her novel: "That this book accomplished the spade work it was designed to do is pretty generally acknowledged by sociologists of its generation who knew what the work was that had to be done, if women were ever to be freed from oppression. It has been said of it (with a questionable juxtaposition of metaphors) that it 'set the ball rolling by breaking taboo'" (1923: xiv).

I have organised the present chapter in three main parts. The first one, "The Proem to *The Heavenly Twins*", is an analysis of a much unexplored part of Grand's novel. By drawing attention to the major trope of the chime reverberating from Morningquest's cathedral tower I have tried to establish a relation between the novel's aesthetics, the conflictive discourses on religion set in motion from the allegorical proem and Grand's personal ethical project. The second part, "Changes in Perspective", constitutes an exploration of the narrative strategies deployed in the novel as these tend to reproduce the major aesthetic reflections set in motion by the trope of the chime in the proem. By focusing on structure and story-telling processes I shall argue that the novel's attempt to change the world was pursued both through narrative content and form. I will also contend that religion is a pivotal topic in Grand's novel, one which is surprisingly absent from most critical analyses of her fiction, for it provides a crucial lens with which to examine the construction of female characters in discourse. Finally, the third part, "Prescribing the Remedy", offers a close examination of the New Woman's

discursive tenets instantiated in the linguistic tactics developed by Grand's heroine, Evadne Frayling, as she struggles to establish her own language of authority against the dominant discourses on woman in the novel.

## 5.1. THE PROEM TO *THE HEAVENLY TWINS*

### 5.1.1. Reverberations of the Sublime: The Chime in the Novel

The frontispiece of Grand's novel is engraved with the musical notation of an excerpt from Mendelssohn's famous oratorio, *Elijah*, accompanied by its suggestive lyrics: "He, watch-ing o-ver Is-ra-el, slumbers not, nor sleeps", which the bells from the high cathedral tower persistently reverberate all over the city of Morningquest and the countryside. The actual musical notation is incorporated into the narrative on twelve occasions mostly coinciding with salient scenes of self-revelation in the process of character construction; such occasions are unevenly distributed throughout the novel as the Mendelssohnian dictum is chiselled twice in the proem, three times in Book I (once in Chapter XIV and twice in Chapter XX), once in Book III (Chapter VII), four times in Book IV (Chapters II, III, XIII and XIV) and twice again in Book V (Chapters IV and VII). The chime is logically absent from Book II, which takes place entirely in Malta, but rather conspicuously vanished from Book VI despite its being set within the area of influence of the cathedral. Apart from these instances in which the musical notation is transliterated there are at least twelve more occasions in the novel, dispersed through its second half (Books III, IV and V) where the deafening reverberation of the chime occupies centre stage. The narrator's insistence on the fact that "for the last half century" one of "the major influences at work in Morningquest" was "that of the chime, full fraught with spiritual suggestion" (252), as well as the presence of "seventy-five churches besides the cathedral within the city boundary, and a large sprinkling of religious sects of all denominations" (355) might serve as an indication of the central position Grand's narrative is bestowing on religion, a pivotal subject in *The Heavenly Twins*, as I would like to argue in section 5.3.2 of the present chapter, which nevertheless has been consistently neglected by literary critics.<sup>14</sup>

This major theme is present from the very start of *The Heavenly Twins'* proem, which focuses on the different interpretations of both the significance and meaning of the lines singled out from Mendelssohn's oratorio. It is "the mental state" of those who hear it, so we are told, that is decisive in the interpretation of the words and melody (p. xxxix). The allegorical proem thus elaborates on a symptomatic landscape of divergent mentalities according to the ways in which human beings react to the bell's toll. The double insistence on the inescapably subjective component involved in the process of deciphering the enigma the chime represents, as well as on the impressionistic nature of all human perception, is going to highlight an aesthetic reflection that Grand's narrative strategies will consistently echo, as I intend to show in section 5.3.1. of the present chapter: the elusiveness of the object and the futile quest for its apprehension. Most appropriately, the first of the six books which *The Heavenly Twins* comprises is furnished with a quotation from Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) which seems to

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<sup>14</sup> Most criticism has focused on the cross-dressing episode of Angelica in Book IV, and on Edith and Evadne's madness, as female *maladie*, in Books III and VI, respectively. Maura Dunst has recently drawn greater attention to the chime in Grand's novel as a crucial element which "functions as a litmus test of the characters' acceptance of patriarchal values and as a marker of an impending prophetic moment" (2014: 349). Dunst shows how, overall, the chime represents a warning for women "while to the men it is a promise; women's spirits are dampened by the presence of the chime, whereas men's are uplifted" (364).

connect the preface with the “Childhoods and Girlhoods” that are going to be the main narrative focus in Book I. Applying the psychological speculations of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume to aesthetics, Burke had managed to explain “beauty and sublimity purely in terms of the process of perception and its effects upon the perceiver” thus changing the course of English aesthetics by focusing for the first time on the reactions of the perceiving subject which were deemed much more important than the qualities of the “pleasing object” per se.<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, Sarah Grand’s contemporary, Oscar Wilde, claimed in his “The Critic as Artist”, almost a decade before the publication of *The Heavenly Twins*, that the “sole aim” of the literary critic was “to chronicle his own impressions. It is for him that pictures are painted, books are written, and marble hewn into form” (Wilde, 1884: 127)

The violence, emotion and terror involved in Burke’s conception of the sublime, as well as the awe it causes in the perceiving subject are of the essence in Grand’s strategic use of the chime as a trope of patriarchal values in the proem. Inconsistently associated with a melancholic or threatening presence (as evidenced by the explicit references to an intimidating God, and specifically to Jove) and with the idea of hope and “a promise of joy” depending on the hearers or even on the time of the day, “at midnight it had most power. It seemed to rise then to the last pitch of enthusiasm, sounding triumphant, like the special effort that finishes a strain” (xliv). The literary personification of the clock’s authoritarian presence is achieved by a narrative emphasis on its sound as an almost human voice. The timely inclusion of that final “strain” is particularly apt by virtue of its polysemy: the fused ideas of physical effort, muscular injury, fatiguing pressure and tension conjured up by the term are instrumental in the creation of an image charged with physiological resonance. For Edmund Burke “[f]ew things are more awful than the striking of a great clock, when the silence of the night prevents the attention from being too much dissipated” (Burke, 1757: “Suddenness” Part II, 19). Likewise, “[w]hatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime” (Burke, 1757: “Of the Sublime” Part I: 7). I would like to contend that the preface to the novel serves a double purpose as it establishes the chime as a trope of sublimity and a harbinger of horror while it draws the readers’ attention to the instability inherent in the interpretation of that image. Functioning as a lighthouse of far-reaching scope the preface is suggesting a Burkean perspective in so far as the chime is discussed in terms of its effects upon the perceiver. A concern with the subject who either enjoys the beauty or abhors the sublimity inherent in the tolling is going to pervade throughout the novel: “[musical notation of the chime] Slowly the big bell boomed forth ten strokes. Then came a pause; and then the chime rolled through the room, a deafening volume of sound, in long reverberations, from amidst which the constant message disentangled itself as it were, but distinctly, although to each listener with a different

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<sup>15</sup> See George P. Landow, 2015: 194-5. One of the fundamental aesthetic principles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, first in England and later in the Continent, established by means of *the sublime* the smallness of all things human against the grandiosity of nature. A rhetorical category in its origin derived from Aristotle, it appeared in the first century AD but it was reformulated with a general aesthetic dimension at the beginning of modern culture, soon turning into one of the elements that would give impetus to the emerging Romantic sensibility throughout Europe. According to Burke, whilst the idea of the beautiful stems from pleasure, the sublime is inextricably connected with pain, danger and terrible objects. The passion caused by objects of large proportions and by the sublime in nature is astonishment, awe, a horror-stricken suspension of movement. I find the physiological theory that enabled the Irish thinker to establish these two distinct aesthetic categories a helpful device to apply to Grand’s *fin-de-siècle* narrative. Thus, characters can be differentiated by means of their reaction to the chime in terms of the beautiful or the sublime. According to Burke, whilst the pleasure of beauty relaxes the fibres of the body, these fibres are tightened by the pain experienced when contemplating the sublime. (Burke, 1987: 94) Similarly, some characters are consistently comforted by the sedative music coming from the bell tower of Morninqwest, while others are physically tormented by its incessant tolling.

effect” (THT: 293) As Oscar Wilde had put it in “The Critic as Artist”: “Nay, it is the beholder who lends to the beautiful thing its myriad meanings, and makes it marvellous for us, and sets it in some new relation to the age, so that it becomes a vital portion of our lives, and a symbol of what we pray for, or perhaps of what, having prayed for, we fear that we may receive” (Wilde, 1884: 130).

Lack of agreement with regard to the material presence of the bell’s chime is continuously highlighted in the proem by an omniscient narrator who presents a variety of subjectivities ranging from those who doubt the regularity and scope of the hourly chime to those who can distinctly perceive it: “good men and true, who knew the music well, declared they had heard it, every note distinct” even by the sea, at a great distance from the cathedral, and for them “it sounded [...] like the voice of a tenor who sings to himself in soft murmurous monotonies” while others “ventured [...] to assert that the chime the people heard on those occasions was ringing in their own hearts” (p. xxxix); significantly, for some others it has the quality of an almost metaphysical a priori : “it would have been strange if those in whose mother’s ears it had rung before they were born, who knew it for one of their first sensations, and felt it to be, like a blood relation, a part of themselves, though having a separate existence, had not carried the memory of it with them wherever they went, ready to respond at any moment, like sensitive cords vibrating to a touch” (pp. xxxix-xl). The minute examination and exhaustive record of nuances in the different opinions evoked by the chime ultimately emphasise its baffling quality, an ungraspable essence that remains unaltered: some “people like the idea of the chime” more than its “arrangement” while “some maintained that it owed its power to that same regularity which suggested something permanent in this weary world of change” (xl). The proem, with its vague landscape of unnamed individuals reacting to “the chime, their most impressive monitor”, is in fact sketching a setting, designing a parable<sup>16</sup> by offering a succinct illustration of a principle which is going to govern the action described in Books I to V while Book VI will show the results (xli). The novel’s preface is, therefore, setting the mood for the stories to come, creating an atmosphere of unsteady half truths, an influential environment in which some groupings are prone to respond to the conflictive trope according to preconceived ideas which they take for granted and, most importantly, believe to be their own, oblivious to the fact that those beliefs have been gradually instilled in them prior to the appearance of conflict itself.

I have established that the action depicted in the novel takes place in the 1870s (roughly from 1874 to 1880); however, there is no direct allusion to the specific time in which the diverse epistemological debates registered in the proem take place, just a mentioning of a certain “Lancashier collier” whom readers will recognise, retrospectively, in Book IV, as the tenor in the cathedral’s choir when he was “a young lad” (xliv), and a reference in Book III to a vague past subjected to the sway of the chime: “for the last half century [...] one of the major influences at work in Morningquest” (252). The absence of precise temporal delimitations not only emphasises the function of the proem as initiator of parable space-time but also reinforces the atmosphere of stagnation and paralysis encapsulated in the tolling: “[a]nd so time passed. Change followed change, but the chime was immutable” (xlvi). In a world in continuous and scary change, especially after Darwin’s publication in 1859 (some fifteen years before the beginning of narrative time in Book I) of his *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* and the general spread of the evolutionary principle — whereby it was possible to explain the

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<sup>16</sup> Beth Sutton-Ramspeck has observed that Grand’s rejection of Aestheticism and modernism is best reflected in what she calls the author’s “parabolic approach” to literature. Grand’s method would “resemble[ ] a parable, teaching a moral in a metaphorical, elusive way and promising spiritual evolution typified by her superior heroines” (2004: 15).

development of living things without divine intervention — religious discourses anchored in the immutability of their principles continued to exert an alluring influence upon those individuals resistant to change, while they were increasingly seen as untenable by others.

### 5.1.2. *Morningquest in Crisis. Discursive Unrest*

The improbability of ever settling things, of making differing discourses coalesce and finding areas of agreement with regard to the points being discussed within the microcosm portrayed in the poem will resonate in the rest of the novel, as it is the background against which Grand's characters are going to insert their respective, competing discourses: "Probably, [...] anything is probable where the most absolute uncertainty prevails", as the Tenor dishearteningly sentences in Book IV (407). Significantly, the narrator reminds us that "everything in the world that is worth a thought becomes food for controversy sooner or later, and the chime was no exception to the rule" (p. xl); it is precisely that controversy that is going to animate and flourish in Grand's novel. The contention between fact and opinion is particularly stressed in the preface "with regard to the question whether a fish weighed heavier when it was dead than when it was alive — a question that would certainly have never been settled either, had it not happened, after a long time and much discussion, that someone accidentally weighed a fish, when it was found there was no difference" (p. xl). Making use of a similar argument the central heroine in the novel, Evadne Frayling, will contend in Book I that the same might be said of the situation of women and the reasons why they were being denied access to a higher education and to the professions: the best way to demonstrate their capability in those public areas from which they had been traditionally banned was in fact to allow it to happen; the outcome, so feminists would have it, would show that there was no difference between men and women either in that respect.

An apparently minor though equally controversial point discussed by the inhabitants of the novel's poem was that relative to the hypothetical change or variability, whether daily or seasonal, of the particular expression of the bell's announcement: "The question of expression, however, could not be decided in that way, expression being imponderable; and it was pretty generally acknowledged that the truth could not be ascertained and must therefore remain a matter of opinion. But that did not stop the talk. Once, indeed, someone declared positively that the state of a man's feelings at the moment would influence his perceptions, and make the chimes sound glad when he was glad, and mournful when he was melancholy; but nobody liked the solution" (p. xli). The fears and frustration experienced by individuals within this declining positivist society still seeking facts to reinforce their sense of security, control and belonging — "Let them wrangle as they might, however, citizens were proud of their chime" (xli) — even when facing that which allegedly cannot be assessed or measured, triggers discussion and appears to remain at the core of the citizens' preoccupations. Just like all religions, positivism had aimed at an explanation of all things. There was no question which could not be elucidated under the lens of this scientific philosophy founded by August Comte. It promised a world governed by the utopia of reason in which scientific principles would perfect human existence. Pierre-Simon Laplace, the most famous mathematician of his time and Napoleon's minister of internal affairs, had even claimed the possibility to predict human conduct and created a bizarre science he called "social physics".<sup>17</sup> The inevitable determinism was the new creed to embrace, one which left out the malleability of human movement and the exercise of free will. In other words, science became the only path to knowledge as it was substituted for the theological worlds of myth and ritual. The preface to

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<sup>17</sup> For an interesting account on the fallacy of Laplace's social physics see Jonah Lehrer's *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* (New York: Mariner Books, 2008). See, particularly, Chapter 2: "George Eliot. *The Biology of Freedom*", pp. 25-52.

Grand's novel is in fact depicting an old world coming to an end, particularly as it is about to confront change. The old city of Morningquest, in allegoric reference to Victorian society, is presented as an old state misgoverned by either religious or positivist creeds as it becomes destabilised. Although Grand's novel is also put at the service of truth in its re-examination of history (the history of privation and violence exerted upon women), personal freedom and the uncertainty of human behaviour are essential factors in the social equation suggested in her fiction.

The ideas of the discussion, the difference of opinion, the wrangle, the dispute and the controversy are crucial in the novel's preface where they are introduced for the first time: "the most persistent of all the questions which occupied their attention arose out of the involuntary but continuous effort of one generation after another to define with scientific accuracy and to everybody's satisfaction his [God's] exact nature and attributes, in consequence of which efforts there had come to be several but most distinct but quite contradictory ideas upon the subject" (xli). Several important themes are interwoven in the narrator's exegesis with an insistence in those a priori alluded to before, which characterise most of the citizens' approach to the melodious phrase that reverberates from the cathedral tower, "a phrase with a distinct idea in it which they understood as we understand a foreign language when we can read it without translating it" (p. xli). Such a formulaic, almost lethargic, response to the music that has induced a trance in citizenship is epitomised in one of the female characters that experience the greatest change in the novel; Mrs. Orton Beg, Evadne's perceptive aunt, and her mechanical repetition of the musical notation of the chime in Book I: "He, watch-ing o-ver Is-ra-el, slumbers not, nor sleeps [...] and then she awoke with a start to thought once more, and knew that she had been a long, long time alone" (71). As Maura Dunst observes, "[s]he fills the silent spaces with this message, leaving no room for contradictory ideas" (Dunst, 2014: 357). A comforting, ritualistic response to the chime is further emphasised by the reference made to one of the strategies deployed in religious discourse. The tiresome repetition of an idea turns it into a truth readily available for use and, thus, perseverance of the message determines its implantation in the mind of the subject almost as an always already while allowing exclusively for debate on marginalia concerning the message itself. The language deployed by Father Ricardo (the Duke of Morningquest's confessor who has managed to covert the twins' grandfather to Roman Catholicism in his old age) best illustrates the deficiencies Grand finds embedded in religious discourse: "The ways of the Lord are inscrutable [...] and it is presumptuous for mortals, however great their station, to attempt to fathom them" (145). The use of formulaic language in order to discourage deliberation resonates with Mrs. Fraying's "favourite [...] and most inclusive dictum alone, that 'everything is for the best, and all things work together for good'" (24). Such empty discourses designed to prevent any real discussion are also criticised by the narrator for whom Father Ricardo's "motives [were] sincerely disinterested in the interests of the Church, his method of gaining his ends unhampered by any sense of the need of extreme verbal accuracy" (143). The allowance for solely peripheral, non-essential polemics helps to reinforce the immutability of what has previously been installed as a truth as it creates the illusion of a real debate. This separation between the undisputable object of belief and its debatable expressions is thus emphasised: "they had it off pat enough as it stood, and they held it sacred, which is why they quarrelled so much about it, it being usual for men to quarrel about what they hold sacred, as if the thing could only be maintained by hot insistence—the things they hold sacred, that is—although they cannot be sure of them, like the forms of a religion which admit of controversy, as distinguished from the God they desire to worship about whom they have no doubt, and therefore never dispute" (p. xli). Religion eschews controversy or dispute

over its object of reverence by hailing it as sacred, the most efficient method to cancel out any debate over its truth.

The classification of four different groups of individuals within the community of Morningquest in terms of their shared phenomenological perception of God is carried out by a narrator who overtly adopts parameters taken from evolutionary discourse. Thus, the first group that obtains narrative attention is said to occupy the lowest position in evolution as they are described as “simple-minded folk to whom the chime typified a God essentially masculine, and like a man, hugely exaggerated, [...] this curious divinity [...] served only for a finish to their mental range as the sky was to their visual; a useful point at which to aim their rudimentary faculty of reverence”. The obvious intellectual limitations that characterise this group are directly predicated on their perception of a monolithic masculine deity, reinforcing the association of a primitive society monitored by an infantilised a god that “sat upon the throne day and night, looking down upon the earth, and never did anything else or felt it monotonous” (xli, xlii). Clearly associated with conservative Victorian religiosity, the fatal effects on women’s fates of this ideology characterised by bigotry and religious respectability are best exposed by Edith Beale’s subplot in Book III. The second group is said to possess “a different order of intelligence” and, therefore, has “passed beyond” that “rudimentary” “stage” of human evolution: they “saw in him more of a creature moving about in worlds not realized, very like Jove, but unmarried. He was both beneficent and jealous, and had to be propitiated by regular attendance at church [...] so long as the current of their lives ran smoothly on, they seldom troubled their heads about him at all” (xliii). Interestingly, in this second interpretation, although god is still understood as an arbitrary masculinised myth of immense power, the greater intelligence that this grouping exhibits is indirectly said to reside in its lesser dependency on the object of worship. But it is the third and fourth classifications that elicit more attention from the narrator in the poem. If the first two responses to deity were fundamentally those of fanaticism and moderate estrangement, the third one is based on opportunism:

There were deeper natures [...] [who] gradually discovered in him every attribute, good, bad, or indifferent which they found in themselves, [...] he was still a great shape like a man, but a shape to be loved as well as feared; [...] a just God who condemned the innocent to suffer; [...] and they reserved to themselves the right of constantly adding to or slightly altering this picture [...] because there was money in it. Numbers of people lived by it, and made name and fame besides; and these kept it going by damaging anybody who ventured to question its beauty. For there is no faith that a man upholds so forcibly as the one by which he earns his livelihood, whether it be faith in the fetish he has helped to create, or in a particular kind of leather that sells quickest because it wears out so fast. (xlii-xliii)

Karl Marx had explained his concept of “commodity fetishism” in *Capital* (1867), quite interestingly, by making reference to the way religion works: “In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There, the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities” (Marx, 1977: 165). The mechanism allowed for a pretence of a direct relation between material objects and consumers, and not between people (producers of labour and consumers), whereby material objects (commodities) would adopt a subjective role

which in fact corresponds to people (producers of labour). Marx was in fact associating fetishism with a religious practice that consisted in the personification of objects to account for the way in which commodities are exchanged in capitalism. Going back to the novel's proem, the narrator is establishing a direct relationship between the deployment of that same strategy — anthropomorphising the deity — and the satisfaction of the interests of that third group of individuals which appears to dominate society as it holds the keys to the symbolic and transcendence while it exerts terror upon subjected individuals through the artifice of the fetish. In the same vein, though much more bluntly, Ideala, a feminist minor character in the novel, vents her discourse of anticlericalism in Book III as she charges against the Catholic church: “the Church never used its influence to make the hire worthy of the labourer; instead of that, it has always sought to grind the last penny out of the people, and then it pauperized them with alms”, “[a]h, the terrible mistake it has been, this making a paid profession of the doing of good!” (267). From her article in *The North American Review* Sarah Grand was formulating a similar complaint: “We have seen him set up Christ as an example for all men to follow. [...] He must be taught consistency. There are ideals for him which it is to be presumed that he tacitly agrees to accept when he keeps up an expensive establishment to teach them: let him live up to them. Man's faculty for shirking his own responsibility has been carried to such an extent in the past that [...] he imputed the whole consequence of his own misery-making peculiarities to God” (272, 273). Arguing for the feminisation of society in order to “set the human household in order” (276), Grand deemed important to expose the way in which masculine power, through its religious apparatus, had set in motion a shrewd device by which male gender was, paradoxically though effectively, assimilated to a superior deity while exempted from all accountability in social distress. Her goal to install a new moral law called for an inversion of gender roles, or rather, for the conversion of man into woman's superior moral qualities — “he set himself up as a sort of a god and required us to worship him, and, to our eternal shame be it said, we did so”, “but the new woman is a little above him” (272, 271). The new order of things, so it seemed, would be radically different though equally based on an essentialist vision of gender.

### 5.1.3. A Serious Threat to Male Supremacy

More in keeping with Grand's advocacy of a feminisation of society, the narrator takes note of a fourth group of citizens that stands out in the evolutionary classification presented:

In these latter days, however, it began to appear as if the supremacy of the great masculine idea was at last being seriously threatened, for even in Morningquest a new voice of extraordinary sweetness had already been heard, not *his*, the voice of man; but *theirs*, the collective voice of humanity, which declared that “He, watching”, was the all-pervading good, the great moral law, the spirit of pure love, Elohim, mistranslated in the book of Genesis as “He” only, but signifying the union to which all nature testifies, the male and female principles which together created the universe, the infinite father and mother, without whom, in perfect accord and exact equality, the best government of nations has always been crippled and abortive. (xlili)

The emerging fourth voice and final standpoint regarding the interpretation of the chime thus represents a menace not only to “the supremacy of the great masculine idea” that pervades all three former responses — which allegedly stand for less evolved, more “rudimentary” stages of human beings — but also to the status quo established by the opportunistic male appropriation of the fetishised god in the third response. The novelty of the fourth voice is

characterised in positive terms by the narrator on account of its “sweetness” and of its having substituted humanity for man. By means of this emphasis on the collective, encompassing both sexes, whereby the singular is turned into the plural, our attention is drawn to the idea of the primeval union of male and female principles as an almighty creating force. Quite suitably, the ideas of agreement and “equality” are also highlighted, as well as the fact that the due acknowledgement of such a union (which the novel ultimately advocates) has not always been present in the history of nations with the ensuing disastrous results. Grand’s proem partakes, in this manner, of this renewed ecumenical spirit which is prompting the advent of an untried ethical standard, a devotion that rests directly upon a shared gender ethics which is predicated on the assumption of its political convenience. The construction of the deity in this fourth interpretation becomes, therefore, a reflection of human progress; indeed, for the narrator it is a means to assess social evolution. Hence, the fourth group of citizens — allegedly the fittest, the most daring and evolved — are able to envisage gender coalition, almost fusion, in that double principle which is now conceived as primitive designing force. In the novel’s proem gender balance, the equality of the sexes, is posed as an antidote against social regression, a guarantee of both personal and collective welfare.

Subtly aligning the narrative voice with this fourth group of exceptional interpreters / hearers “who loved the chime most truly and [...] listened with that full-hearted pleasure which is the best praise and thanks”, the proem is stealthily introducing a eugenic agenda for which the subsequent events narrated in Grand’s fiction will provide extensive justification. The explicit allusion to the Romantic composer who created the oratorio of *Elijah*<sup>18</sup> and to a hypothetical emotional bond established between the former and these hyperaesthetic citizens — “Mendelssohn must have felt it [their full-hearted pleasure] when the melody first occurred to him, and the words had wedded themselves to the music in his soul!” — is instrumental in the support of the fourth interpretation of the chime as the privileged one within the evolutionary scale presented. In this sense, quite significantly, one of the conspicuous discursive poses induced by these citizens’ hyperaesthesia appears to be in perfect consonance with the effect that good music confessedly produced in the German artist himself: a stance of silence and a sense of the precariousness of language which are suggested by the narrative voice when commenting on the fact that they “reverenced it [the chime]; but they *did not speak about it much*: only when the message sounded they listened” (my italics). Felix Mendelssohn had embraced the aesthetic theology of sentimental immediacy so the expression of feeling was, accordingly, the aim of his direct music. In a famous letter written in 1842 he emphasised the precise, accurate nature of music as opposed to the confusing polysemy of words: “La gente piensa que la música posee demasiadas significaciones; creen que lo que escuchan suscita pensamientos extremadamente ambiguos, mientras que todo el mundo entiende la significación unívoca de las palabras. Para mí sucede exactamente lo

<sup>18</sup> Grand’s readership was familiar with the musical piece selected for her novel. *Elijah* had been performed for the first time at the Birmingham Festival in 1846, two years before the outbreak of the 1848 revolution, which would bring in its wake so much political upheaval in Europe. The oratorio was particularly well received in Victorian England since it “touched the emotional spring of Victorian religious respectability as no other work had done” and it was also “emblematic of the age of religious optimism” (See, respectively, Schima Kaufman’s *Mendelssohn: “A Second Elijah”* [New York: Tudor, 1934, p. 299], and Percy M. Young’s *Introduction to the Music of Mendelssohn* [London: Dennis Dobson, 1949, p. 45]. Both quoted in Dunst, 2014: 355). Prince Albert himself, Queen Victoria’s husband, was a devotee of Mendelssohn’s work. It was perfectly in tune with those pre-revolutionary times for its “conventionalism, sentimental affectivity, longing for respectability, characteristic of the taste of the bourgeoisie of the times” (Trías, 268, 265). However, in the last decades of the nineteenth century Mendelssohn’s religious music, including his two great oratorios *Paulus* and *Elijah*, declined in popularity as it came to be regarded as too conventional and lacking in natural spontaneity, especially since it was allegedly coming from a necessity to justify the composer’s conversion from Judaism to Christianity in its Lutheran version. Four years before *The Heavenly Twins* saw the light, George Bernard Shaw thus derided Mendelssohn and his music for “all his glove gentility, his conventional sentimentality, and his despicable oratorio mongering” (Quoted in Dunst, 2014: 355).

contrario. Y no sólo con referencia a la totalidad del discurso; también con los términos individuales” (Trías, 2007: 275, 276). A certain bent and adroitness in music help identify those central characters who support change and the advent of a new order of things more enthusiastically in the novel, as the twins’ “decided talent for music” and Evadne’s “further faculty” seem to indicate — particularly, the latter’s ability to analyse her environment “sensible to every tint and tone, sight and sound, distinguishing, deciphering, but yet perceiving all together as the trained ear of a musician does the parts played by every instrument in an orchestra, and takes cognizance of the whole effect as well” (30, 46). In the poem it is the anonymous fourth group of individuals who possess that superior talent, those who are best equipped to understand and respond to the chime: “Doubtless, the majority of those who had ears to hear in the big old city heard not, use having dulled their faculties; or if, perchance, the music reached them it conveyed no idea to their minds, and passed unheeded” (p. xliii). But the special gift with which Grand endowed Angelica and Evadne, their ability to both perceive and reach at higher truths beyond the understanding of most characters poses a conflict with the idea of gender equality that the fourth voice in the poem has resolved to rescue from a prelapsarian past. The superiority of certain female characters in their perceptive skills<sup>19</sup> — notably epitomised in Evadne’s insightful warning against Sir Mosley Menteith (“‘I don’t know anything about him, [but] [...] he is bad—thoroughly bad, [...] I feel—I have a consciousness which informs me of things my intellect cannot grasp. And I *do* know!’ ” (232) — is in fact revealing a bias in favour of female qualities over the male’s, particularly as the former are put to work in the precocious detection of male degeneracy. In this sense, when Grand thus urged her readers in the *North American Review*, “Let there be light”, her quotation of *Genesis* 1:3 was in fact arguing for a re-appropriation of the religious symbolic order in radically different gender terms. These would require the conversion of the fetishised male god into female superior morals, as for Grand “the new woman is a little above him” (Grand, 1894b: 276, 271). Once again, the biblical figure chosen by Mendelssohn for his oratorio suited Grand’s ethical summons. Just as Elijah was the new prophet who had come to his people in order to enlighten them and set them back in the path of virtue, so the visionary new woman could by analogy lead the way of the necessary conversion from darkness to light, from masculine dominance to the restoration of gender equality through the vigilant gaze of a superior female. Seen in this light, *The Heavenly Twins* constitutes an examination of how female social behaviour may impact the evolution of human society while blazing new trails in her effort to promote greater equality and opportunities for women.

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<sup>19</sup> Beth Sutton-Ramspeck has drawn attention to Grand’s “superior heroines” as examples of the trope of “woman of genius” in New Woman fiction and to Terry Lovell’s account of this trope as a paradoxical means to mobilise the argument for gender equality. Thus, despite the fact that this fiction overtly supports women’s access to both a full education and to the professions, the superiority of these heroines was both presented as the reason for that claim and as a characteristic which turned them into anomalies with respect to other women. Such a danger would explain the necessity to portray them as real women playing more traditional roles, choosing to become mothers or giving up their budding intellectual careers. Whereas for Lovell “the net effect of such plot resolutions was to backhandedly confirm what feminism denied: the naturalness of gender” (Lovell, 1987: 122), Sutton-Ramspeck contends that “Grand attempts to turn the potential conflict between domesticity and genius into an advantageous alliance in which art and housekeeping play complementary, not conflicting, roles” (Sutton-Ramspeck, 2004: 26).

## 5.2. CHANGES IN PERSPECTIVE

### 5.2.1. Prevailing Uncertainties. Grand's Narrative Strategies

In this section I intend to explore some of the narrative strategies deployed in the novel, particularly as they mirror the aesthetic reflections put forward in the proem with regard to the chime trope. These narrative strategies did not pass unheeded by Grand's contemporaries. Both the structure and style of *The Heavenly Twins* were, in fact, object of much criticism by reviewers who commented on the book's unmanageable length. Even favourable reviews such as the one in *New Outlook* observed that the novel was "very long", "a very much over-elaborated story. It is defective in proportion, perspective and construction, and the style is often labored and not easy to read". *The Nation* equally dismissed the book as a "tangle of themes and counter-themes worked out to a tangle of conclusions" showing "the tendency to what Disraeli calls anecdotage, the desultoriness, the quotations, the original poems", while for T. Baily Saunders "the book is a heterogenous conglomerate of interests which stand in no true or inevitable relation with one another", a defect which precluded any consideration of the novel "as a work of art [...] if, indeed, any serious person could be so rash as to make such a claim" (all cited in Senf, 1992: xx-xxi). The diagnosis of what was wrong with Grand's fiction was thus addressed not only to its infamous content but, most importantly, to the form in which such unpalatable topics as venereal disease or ambiguous same-sex relationships were being presented. However, what was deprecated as a careless, clumsy style denying Grand's novel all access to the exclusive department of literary works of art, might reveal, through a close analysis of the narrative methods applied in *The Heavenly Twins*, a conscious and deliberate decision to undermine traditional expectations regarding structure as a way to bring together form and content. If the novel's fundamental attempt was ultimately to change the world it found in this way, as I would like to argue, a double means to become effective: the blunt exposition of the physical and mental consequences, both for women and society at large, of continuing to overlook men's corrupted morals (as depicted in the actual events narrated) as well as, quite interestingly, the breakdown of traditional narrative structure, the disconnected, meandering style exhibited in the story-telling process. The novel's substance and form were thus equally perceived by Grand's critics as outrageous deviations from and direct threats to the established literature which buttressed, with its proper subject matter and normative structure, more conservative ideologies.

As I have tried to explain in the previous section the notion of relativism, the lack of absolute truths and the accompanying need to understand and define — however partially or inaccurately — the enigmas that are part of human experience, are strategically mobilised in the proem thanks to the mechanism set in motion by the chime trope. Throughout the rest of the novel characters and readers alike are reminded of such instabilities that inhere in human perception by virtue of a subtle but effective narrative strategy which involves a great deal of story retelling, self questioning and symptomatic interrogation, as I would like to show in the present section. There is, in fact, plenty of close, attentive scrutiny in *The Heavenly Twins*; inaugurated in the proem with the citizens' metaphysical accounts of the chime (appropriately renamed by Audrey Fessler as the "Inscrutable Other"),<sup>20</sup> other significant examples come to mind such as the Boy's close observation of the Tenor or Evadne's examination of Dr Galbraith, prior to the final book of the novel which constitutes in itself an interpretation of the novel's central female character from a masculine point of view.

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<sup>20</sup> See her "'The Boy Was a Girl': Reconstructing Gender and Class to Deconstruct Difference in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*". *Victorian Newsletter* 113, p. 41.

Evadne Frayling is certainly a character that generates a lot of interest throughout the novel and seems to be a favourite object of scrutiny. In a clear analogy with the futile efforts the community of Morningquest displays when making sense of the chime and trying to define with scientific accuracy and to everybody's satisfaction the exact nature and attributes of God, the omniscient narrator focuses in a proleptical leap in Book I on the divergent views and opinions to which Evadne's unprecedented course of action is going to give rise: "Some people in after life, who liked her views, said they saw the guiding hand of Providence directing her course from the first; but those who opposed her said it was the devil; and others again, in idleness or charity, or the calm neutrality of indifference, set it all down to the Inevitable, a fashionable first cause at this time, which is both comprehensive, convenient, and inoffensive, since it may mean anything, and so suits itself to everybody's prejudices" (20-21). Similarly, in a crucial moment for the female protagonist as she is about to depart on her wedding journey with Major Colquhoun (having just privately read the decisive letter informing her of her husband's profligate past), her change in countenance is variably and significantly misread by those present: "Her mother said the dear child was quite overwrought, but she saw only what she expected to see through her own tear-bedimmed eyes, and other people were differently impressed. They thought Evadne was cold and preoccupied when it came to the parting, and did not seem to feel leaving her friends at all" (63). A defective interpretation of Evadne's actual state of mind seems to continue in Book II during her temporary residence in Malta: "There was scarcely one, even amongst the most indulgent of her friends, who did not misunderstand her and blame her at times. She kept the pendulum of opinion swaying vehemently" (217). Just as the proem presented the community of Morningquest actively involved in the disentangling of the chime's constant message — unravelled as it was "although to each listener with a different effect" (293) — so is Evadne connotatively construed as a site of shifting, unsteady meanings whose elusiveness elicits debate and much of the characters' talk.

The Maltese society depicted in Book II is, likewise, energised by continuous gossip retailing and hearsay that find in the malicious Mrs. Guthrie Brimston a perfect mouthpiece; the story of the Clarences, an alleged runaway match and free union that, against all superficial evidence, turns out to be a lawfully married couple, is another instance of a micro-narrative interwoven in the novel that serves the pursued effect of highlighting the instability of truths. As the narrator confides, Evadne's efforts to deactivate the slanderous story and bring forward the facts are as ineffective as futile: "Those who chose to believe in the calumny continued to do so, and *vice versa*, the only difference being that Evadne's generous action in the matter brought blame upon herself" (214). The new woman's enthusiastic and earnest love of truth, accurate language and facts finds thus its nemesis in the stale atmosphere of Malta, dominated by the inertia of old prejudices. It is a society unwilling to change even in the face of fact as its lethargic, bigoted response to the Clarences manifests. In a similar vein, the unknown origins and family history of the admired and mysterious Tenor stir up the imagination of the parishioners who are prone to produce resourceful fabrications of his background in the first half of Book IV. Angelica herself, disguised as the Boy, confronts the Tenor by revealing the idle gossip gathered in town and her own speculations thus interrogating him: "Is it true that you are the son of an actress and a duke?"; the Tenor's bizarre answer — "Probably, [...] anything is probable where the most absolute uncertainty prevails" (407) — prompts Angelica's cross-examination: "Then you don't know who you are?" and her ultimate disbelief in the Tenor's claim not to have "the most remote idea" of his own identity (408). The dialogue between these two characters acquires a new significance when not much later on, in chapter XIII, the Tenor gives an account of his own life story

which carries us back, retrospectively, to the novel's proem, where he was first introduced as the unnamed collier lad who had fallen under the spell of the chime. The same story is therefore told a second time but from a different perspective, as on this occasion it is the protagonist who owns the telling. The omniscient narrator of the proem thus yields way in Book IV to the character protagonist who, as we have just seen, admits quite readily his own inability to ascertain the truth regarding his own self. There is a great deal of flashback, recollection and backward reconstruction of events in *The Heavenly Twins*, analepsis being one of the most prominent narrative devices in the novel as shall be demonstrated below; it is, for instance, the method chosen by the omniscient narrator to set forth Mornigquest's "pet tragedy" (358), the story of its first tenor, who ambitioning to become an opera singer had embezzled some money from the choir funds and finding himself unable to refund it eventually hanged himself in remorse.

The emphasis laid on the importance of point of view is similarly striking, particularly as it partakes of a Burkean aesthetics which focuses on the perceiving subject rather than on the qualities of the aesthetic object / narrated events per se. Sutton-Ramspeck has observed that Grand's experimentation with "point of view, unreliable narrators, dream sequences, and impressionistic descriptions" are evidence of the fact that her fiction was not so "overtly didactic" (2004: 32), assuming that the writer's aim to produce changes in the socio-political realm would have been perhaps best served by more traditional modes of narrating which spoke directly to her potential readership. Instead, I contend that Grand's deliberate choice of experimental narrative strategies responded to her conception of substance and form as a unity of purpose which could be all the more efficient by means of its double edge. The double dislocation produced in the time sequence by the recurrent use of analepsis and in the perspective over the narrated events by the constant change of point of view moves the focus away from the actual occurrences onto the effects they have on perceivers. An Angelica who has just taken off the Boy's clothes stresses the significance of her adoption of a masculine perspective in her impersonation of Diavolo before the Tenor: "I told you nothing that was not absolutely true, [...] from Diavolo's point of view. I assumed his manner and habits when I put these things on, imitated him in everything, tried to think his thoughts, and looked at myself from his point of view" (452) and then goes on retelling the story of her association with the Tenor from her own feminine viewpoint. Angelica's ability to shift subject positions and gender identities as well as her insistence in the necessity to apply different perspectives is further problematised in Book V where she explains for a second time her story with the Tenor to her husband, though as readers it is in fact the third version we are offered of it. Having thus assumed a third identity —Angelica has become Mrs. Kilroy of Ilverthorpe— she finds great relief in knowing that she is able "to talk it out" (479), "and all with her accustomed picturesqueness, speaking in the first person singular, and with such force and fluency that Mr. Kilroy was completely carried away, and declared, as on previous occasions, that she set the whole thing before him so vividly he found it impossible not to believe every word of it" (480). The fact that Mr. Kilroy encourages her to write the story down for him, in yet a fourth reconstruction of the past events, and his good-humoured remarks suggesting that she strive for an intimate friendship with the Tenor are enough evidence of his misinterpretation as he completely fails to grasp the true nature of his wife's interest in the choral singer. Fact and fiction are again distorted in the novel, and Angelica's compulsive retelling of her interlude with the Tenor proves to be as unavailing as Evadne's previous efforts to reveal the plain facts in the Clarendon micro-narrative.

Chapter IV in Book V constitutes as a whole an analepsis whereby we learn the details and circumstances of the Tenor's sudden death; in a revealing scene after the chime is heard

and the pneumonia progressed, “his mind, busy with many things, returned inevitably to the old weary theme, just as, at the same time, Angelica’s own was doing, but from the opposite point of view. Always, after a startling event, those who have been present as spectators, or taken some part in it, repeat their experiences, and make some remark upon them, again and again in exactly the same words, their minds working upon the subject like heat upon water that boils, forming it into bubbles which it bursts and re-forms incessantly” (503)— while, interestingly, the following chapter focuses on the same episode retold from the point of view of the Tenor’s housekeeper as she breaks the tragic news to an inconsolable Angelica. A third viewpoint is added in the backward process of constructing the identity of Julian, since the unexpected perspective of Lady Fulda is incorporated at the end of the chapter to account for the so-far untold friendship of the Tenor, Uncle Dawne, Dr. Galbraith and Lady Fulda herself, characters who were, so far for the reader, deemed to be worlds apart. Thus, by adding retroactively such a surprising piece of information to a story which has already been told and retold to us readers through the various narrative levels, the text manages to underscore the fragility of our assumptions, as well as the fragmentariness of our perception of reality. The consecutive juxtaposition of the three narrative perspectives corresponding to the angles of omniscience and the double homodiegesis of the housekeeper and Lady Fulda, shows the precariousness of the telling process as well as of our own ability to fully comprehend meaning and ultimately have access to truth, a concern shared by most characters in the novel who are at a loss when trying to interpret reality; even mothers do not know what to make of their own children as in the case of Lady Adeline with regard to her twins: ‘My whole life is one ache of anxiety on their account. I am always in doubt as to whether their unnatural acuteness portends vice or is promising’ (136). Thus the reiteration of similar accounts of the same story, the “incessant” addition of equally defective tellings and retellings of the same episode convey the actual means by which narrative strategies reproduce the aesthetic reflection generated by the trope of the chime in the proem: the elusiveness of the object and the futile quest for its apprehension.

Book VI is also an analepsis entirely narrated from the point of view of Dr. Galbraith focusing on his attempt to disentangle the riddle posed by Evadne: “Evadne puzzled me. As a rule, men of my profession, and more particularly specialists like myself, can class a woman’s character and gauge her propensities for good or evil while he is diagnosing her disease if she consult him, or more easily still during half an hour’s ordinary conversation if he happens to be alone with her. But even after I had seen Evadne many times, and felt broadly that I knew her salient points as well as such tricks of manner or habitual turns of expression as distinguished from other ladies, I was puzzled” (555). The starting point of the first chapter is problematic due to three main reasons: firstly, the implied author’s deliberate choice of a homodiegetic narrator and the corresponding desertion of omniscience which presided over the previous five books and proem, precisely in the last book of the novel where readers might traditionally expect to gain more certainties as the denouement of Evadne’s plot is approached; secondly, the specific choice of a first person narrator who is not sufficiently detached from Evadne to claim impartiality absorbed as he is by her conundrum — in fact by Chapter X he has fallen in love with the protagonist whom he eventually marries; finally, his defective memory (Dr. Galbraith is consistently unable to recall the first time he saw Evadne at Mrs. Orton Beg’s after the former’s evasion from her wedding trip in Chapter XV, Book I. He will be haunted by his sketchy recollection of a dormant Evadne throughout Book VI) and his confessed unreliability as a medical man and interpreter of female mental disease (made evident in Chapter IV in his own account of a case in which he was taken in by a patient who pretended to suffer a nervous disorder). It appears that Dr. Galbraith, in his triple status of

husband-doctor-narrator, is far from being a guarantor of accurate story-telling, especially if we take into account the fact that his ensuing narration does not bring us to the present as it is left in suspension on the last page of the novel. Hence we are left with a sense of wondering whether he has in fact managed to make Evadne's "life endurable" or whether, on the contrary, she has succumbed to hysteria (679). The disquieting ending of the novel, with Dr. Galbraith's far from reassuring words regarding his wife's future mental equilibrium, was interestingly criticised by a reviewer in the *Spectator* who linked the novel's conclusion to its alleged structural deficiencies: "the very flat and ineffective conclusion does nothing to bind the various details into a satisfying unity, but rather makes us feel more intensely how heterogenous and disjointed they are". In a similar vein, the *Athenaeum* found fault with the novel's "chaotic and haphazard arrangement" and "unsatisfactory ending" (Senf xx-xxi).

Just as there was no intrinsic meaning assigned to the musical phrase in the chime and it had to be constructed necessarily by the listener (Dunst 2014, 354), so is the reader invited to provide what is conspicuously missing in the narration, to fill in those gaps, break the silence and articulate that which the narrator has left unsaid. To Grand, the New Woman, like the chime —so it seems— might as well be "worth a thought" (xl).

### 5.2.2. "That Dreadful Cant of Obedience": Female Perspectives on Religious Discourse

The overwhelming presence of religion as a main authoritative discourse — contested or not — unfolded in the construction of the woman sign in *The Heavenly Twins* is too powerful to be ignored and justifies a closer examination of the treatment given to this pivotal topic in the novel. It is particularly interesting to see the way in which female characters reveal their credentials as they tend to occupy shifting positions which I have categorised in the pages that follow as "heedless submission", "purposeful complicity" or "dialectical confrontation" with the established religious discourse. The present section strings together a few selected passages with which I will try to illustrate my analysis of such positions at issue.

The first position I have designated as heedless submission to religious authority is perhaps best incarnated by Edith Beale and it is in keeping with the Rousseauian notion of ideal womanhood. Edith, the bishop's daughter and "a lovely specimen of a well-bred English girl" (155), lives in the palace of Morningquest, a former monastery, where she "had been born [...] and grown up [...], under the protection of the great cathedral, as it were, and the influence of its wonderful chime" (154), she prays passionately to be kept "from all knowledge of unholy things" and reads memoirs of religious women poets, her mind and manners being in perfect mimesis with the austerity of her bedroom—"sanctum", which "made you think of matters ecclesiastical" (157, 158). The very image of womanly docility, Edith follows unassumingly the rituals of her Christian faith and fulfils all expectations of pious, proper femininity: "[s]he knelt down for some minutes longer, with all articulate thought suspended; but by degrees there came to her that glow in the chest, that expansion of it which is the accompaniment of the exalted sentiment known to us as adoration, or love". In the same scene the daily ceremonial of her creed and the rituals of the dressing-table are tellingly juxtaposed as she moves away from prayer to self-contemplation: "holding up her long nightdress above her white feet with one hand that she might not trip, and standing before the mirror, [she] blushed at the beauty of her own reflection" (157). The careful, effective composition of Edith's religious fervour overlapping her budding womanhood in chapters XXI and XXII (Book I) is an indicator of how utterly her narrative fate is going to be dependent on her religious indoctrination and subsequent misconception of woman's mission. Mindlessly adhering to the tenets of religious rule and patriarchy Edith conflates the

masculine categories of God, master and husband, as a safeguard against all hypothetical evils<sup>21</sup>: “She called him by name caressingly: ‘Dear Lord!’ [...] She offered him the devotion of her life [...] calling him what she would have had her husband be: ‘Master!’ — the woman’s ideal of perfect bliss: ‘A strong support!’ ‘A sure refuge!’ — praying him to strengthen her, to make her wise, to keep her pure; to help, to guide, to comfort her! and finding in each repetition of familiar phrases the luxurious gladness of a great enthusiasm” (169).

Book II ends with Edith falling prey of her “power to love and trust” (187) and her inevitable engagement to Sir Mosley Menteith, the manly officer whose dissolute past is disclosed by Evadne in her vain effort to prevent what she expects will be a disastrous marriage similar to her own. The central chapters in Book III chronicle the terrible consequences of such a union, “a miserable example of the result of uniting the spiritual or better part of human nature with the essentially animal or most degraded side of it” (277). Edith’s change is radical; her adulterous husband has infected her and their child with syphilis and she gradually begins to feel “the fury of the rage within” (281). Having returned from Malta to Morningquest in order to recover from her mysterious illness, which shall remain unnamed throughout the novel, she has lost all trace of health and beauty. Disfigured, insane and tormented by suicidal thoughts admixed to her prayers Edith questions her mother directly, ‘God is a demon, isn’t he?’, and frowning as she listens to the chime she exclaims quite significantly: ‘I wish those bells could be stopped!’ ‘They deafen me!’ (285). The transformation — physical, moral and discursive — is now complete. As Edith loses her sanity she paradoxically gains consciousness and begins to experience the chime as an oppressive force. “[S]peaking wildly” and breaking “out into a stream of horrid imprecations” in her agonic sufferings (297) she manages to gather the bishop, Dr. Galbraith, and Sir Mosley Menteith by her death bed, the three main forces representing male authority, which she now clearly and unequivocally identifies as responsible for her degradation: ‘That is why I sent for you all, [...] to tell you, you who represent the arrangement of society which has made it possible for me and my child to be sacrificed in this way’ (300). Thus, the former trinomial category of a protective God-master-husband is now transfigured and much more tangibly confronted in the personae of the bishop-father, the doctor and the debauched husband. Interestingly, as Edith shifts her stance towards religious indoctrination — from heedless submission to enraged confrontation — she is able to perceive the power relations at work in the production of female passivity, as well as the necessary cooperation among the religious, medical<sup>22</sup> and marital discourses to that effect. Her last recognition that ‘Evadne was right!’ (303), and her tragic admonishment to her mother as she is consumed by infanticidal drives, ‘The same thing may happen now to any mother — to any daughter — and *will* happen so long as we refuse to know and resist’ (304), is a powerful reminder of the

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<sup>21</sup> This portrait of Victorian femininity characterised by the suspension of all consciousness is influenced by Rousseau’s rendering of Sophia as the perfect woman in *Emile*. For the Genevan philosopher “[a]s the conduct of a woman is subservient to the public opinion, her faith in matters of religion should, for that very reason, be subject to authority. [...] As they are not in a capacity to judge for themselves, they ought to abide by the decision of their fathers and husbands as confidently as by that of the church”. “As authority ought to regulate the religion of the women, it is not so needful to explain to them the reasons for their belief, as to lay down precisely the tenets they are to believe” (Wollstonecraft 1792: 209-210). Grand’s novel is going to suggest, particularly through the development of Edith’s plot, a reversal of the Rousseauian rationale according to which a woman’s self-preservation was guaranteed by her subjection to an unquestioned male authority on account of her inability to judge for herself. The argument of women’s alleged cognitive impairment is challenged and successfully deactivated by all Grand’s heroines in the novel.

<sup>22</sup> Edith indirectly blames Dr. Galbraith for his participation as a silent witness of her personal tragedy: ‘All his endeavour seems to be not to say what is the matter exactly’ (285) — particularly as Edith knows that the doctor has been taking care of a French dressmaker and her syphilitic child, former victims of her husband’s depravity. In fact, the terms “syphilis” or “venereal” are conspicuously absent from the text since Edith is never given a clear diagnosis of her illness.

possibility to move beyond the discursive limits imposed by patriarchal law and envision resistance, albeit its terrible cost.<sup>23</sup>

The second position female characters tend to occupy with regard to their attitude towards religious discourse is that of purposeful complicity, as I have proposed at the beginning of this section. Epitomised by the insightful but conforming Mrs. Orton Beg (Evadne Frayling's aunt), a feeling of numbness overcomes this female character whenever she listens to the cathedral's chime: "One, two, three, four, the round notes fell; then there was a pause [...] [chime notation] Mechanically Mrs. Orton Beg repeated the phrase with each note as it floated forth, filling the silent spaces; and then she awoke with a start to thought once more, and knew that she had been a long, long time alone" (71). The anaesthetic effect of the religious message encapsulated in the chime is gladly received by Evadne's aunt, who willingly submits to the trance its mellow tones induce: "I always try to keep my own mind in one attitude, to keep it filled for ever with holy and beautiful thoughts. When I am alone, I listen for the chime, and when I have repeated it to myself slowly — He, watching over Israel, slumbers not nor sleeps — my heart swells. I leave all that is inexplicable to Him, and thank him for the love and the hope with which he feeds my heart and keeps it from hardening" (81). Mrs. Orton Beg's mechanical repetition of the patriarchal tidings and her intense mystic absorption suggest an intentional compliance with religious power, an actively sought loss of consciousness. The mechanism of evasion at work, with its immediate gratification objectified in the suspension of all thought, is most mature women's strategic move in Grand's novel.<sup>24</sup> The logic of the exchange between religious power and the female subject continues to be the same as in the previous position of heedless submission: a benignant protection in exchange of conformity, the all-important difference being that in the posture of purposeful complicity there is an implied awareness of the advantages gained through the transaction as well as of the dangers that lurk in offering any resistance to it. Most importantly, such awareness is revealed in Mrs. Orton Beg's capacity to envision a different scenario from which the exchange is absent. Evadne's aunt is adamant in her debarment of such a frame of reference at this point of the novel in which her niece has decided to put an end to her marriage:

'I do not like to hear you talk so, Evadne. Every word you say seems to banish something — something from this room — something from my life to which I cling. I think it is my faith in love — and loving. You may be right, but yet — the consequences! the struggle, if we must resist! It is best to submit. It is better not to know'. [...] 'Don't make me think about it. Surely I must have suffered enough? Disagreeable to know! It is torture. If I ever let myself dwell on the horrible depravity that goes on unchecked, the depravity which you say we women license by ignoring it when we should face and unmask it, I should go out of my mind. I do know—we all know; how can we live and not know? But we don't think about it—we can't—we daren't. [...]' (80-81)

<sup>23</sup> Kate Flint has remarked that the line adopted by Sarah Grand in the on-going debate on how much knowledge regarding sexual relationships young girls should be provided was in keeping with the editorial policy of the liberal-feminist periodical *Shafts* (1892-9), for which "‘innocence’ was merely another word for ‘ignorance’, a state which rendered a girl vulnerable rather than sacrosanct". Margaret Sibthorp, the editor of the pioneering women's periodical and supporter of such readings as Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, was in complete agreement with the idea that "terror and loathing of sexual malpractices were a far better preserver of chastity than strict vestal vows" (Flint, 1993: 153).

<sup>24</sup> Lady Adeline Hamilton Wells, having abandoned the Church of England, is a conspicuous counterexample in the novel, as we learn from Angelica: 'Uncle Dawne, however, and Dr. Galbraith both maintain that mamma is admirable, because she doesn't trouble her head about churches and creeds any longer. She used to do so once, but now she thinks only of what is *morally* right or wrong' (264).

Against the resonance of the cathedral chime which is still lingering in the background Mrs. Orton Beg's drawing room has turned into a sort of unexpected confessional, and her rejoinder to Evadne's call to action sounds desperate. Confronted with the direness of her niece's situation as the latter presently refuses to live with her husband, whom she considers "a moral leper" (79), and with her direct accusations — '[W]hy didn't you warn me?', 'That is the mistake you good women all make', [...] 'You set a detestably bad example. So long as women like you will forgive anything, men will do anything' (77, 79) — Evadne's promptings to carry out "a more effectual plan" and "to sacrifice the man instead of the woman" seem too fearsome to contemplate (80). Such is the discursive context in which the somewhat reluctant confession takes place. The passage above displays an admittance which is crucial in this female character's submission to a relation of power in so far as it is precisely through her confession and subsequent devotion to the power of God — as I would like to argue — that Evadne's aunt constructs herself as a both compliant and complicit subject.<sup>25</sup> By wavering between the first person singular and plural subjects ('I do know — we all know') Mrs. Orton Beg manages to align herself with the interests of a larger group — notably the one represented in the novel by experienced women — while by offering her niece confirmation of what has been repressed as forbidden knowledge she is effectively creating the possibility to conceive a different frame of reference in which new routes of action might be travelled.<sup>26</sup> To confess, in short, is not simply to yield but also to resist in a way. Evadne's speech quite literally banishes the anaesthetic effect of the chime, her aunt's "faith in love — and loving" and it is that absence that triggers the need to conform: 'It is best to submit. It is better not to know. [...] I leave all that is inexplicable to Him'. Constructing herself thus as a devout female subject Mrs. Orton Beg reminds us of her belonging to the so-called "good women" — a rather stable grouping whose religious bond is instrumental in their process of finding a position of power, in so far as their goodness is deemed worthy of deference within the society they live in. The fact that later on in the novel Mrs. Orton Beg develops new strategies that enable her to become more sensitive to the feminist cause,<sup>27</sup> as other changes take place within Grand's narrative universe, reinforces the notion of precarious female subjects constantly reassessing their discursive positions and resisting, however forced by circumstances, the adoption of roles previously designed for them.

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<sup>25</sup> In *Discipline and Punish* (1979) Michel Foucault discussed "confessional discourse" in relation to disciplinary society, paying attention to the changes in the administration of punishment for violations of the law from the medieval times to the present. Foucault has argued that the confessional is one of the most effective means in the subduing of individuals by disciplinary structures, and that power is most clearly exhibited in its operation through this particular discourse: "The Christian West invented this astonishing constraint, which it imposed on everyone, to say everything in order to efface everything, to formulate even the least faults in an uninterrupted, desperate, exhaustive murmuring, from which nothing must escape" (Michel Foucault. 1979 "The Life of Infamous Men", in Morris, M. and Patton, P. [eds.] *Michel Foucault: Power / Truth / Strategy*. [Federal Publications, Sydney: 76-91; p. 84]. Quoted in Mills, 1997: 73). Feminist theorists, such as Dorothy Smith, have made use of Foucault's thought on the confessional in their analysis of conduct literature and women's religious writings problematising "the process of producing compliant subjects" (see Mills, 1997: 72-77).

<sup>26</sup> I am specifically following Mills in her discussion of the diverse ways in which feminist discourse theory has appropriated and extended Foucault's notion of confession for use in other contexts. I have found particularly interesting Mills' explanation that "whilst feminist theorists see the confessional as potentially an oppressive form of interaction, for example where women are classified as mentally ill by psychotherapists, there is a sense in which confession within particular politicised contexts may be empowering, setting stories of 'failure' and 'self-blame' into contexts where those same 'failings' can be seen to be structural problems within Western culture's demands on women" (Mills, 1997: 74-75).

<sup>27</sup> Mrs. Orton Beg's epistolary conversion takes place at the very end of Book III (Chapter XV) as she informs Evadne, who is still in her Maltese retirement, of Edith Beale's madness: 'I am telling you the state of the case exactly [...] because I did not agree with you when you were here. I had been so shielded from evil myself that I could not believe in the danger to which all women in their weakness are exposed. But I agree with you now, perfectly. We must alter all this, and we can' (348-349).

The third female discursive position I intend to analyse in this section is that of dialectical confrontation with religious power. Distinctly represented by Angelica Hamilton-Wells (the bishop's granddaughter and Diavolo's twin) and Ideala (a minor character of clear feminist adscription whose sporadic appearance in Chapter III, Book III, serves to complement Angelica's anticlericalism), this position is characteristically occupied by such female characters who do not accept (religious) authority as unarguable principle. A protestant "by education — and also, by nature", as the narrator reminds us (258), Angelica incarnates subversion in Grand's narrative at least until well into Book V. As a child she questions Father Ricardo (the Duke's personal chaplain and confessor) on the inconsistencies she detects within religious narratives of women saints whose call to holiness she finds paradoxically at odds with the doctrine of "Home" as "the woman's sphere" (144-145),<sup>28</sup> and even before she starts wearing long dresses she dodges conversion into Roman Catholicism by reading extensively books about other churches and discovering triumphantly what they all have in common: "They were all about the Church being the true church and that sort of thing" (263). Hyperbolic at times in her expression of religious fervour — she buys a "big drum" as she "said she couldn't express her feelings on any other instrument on a Sunday, her spiritual fervour was so excessive" (258) — she disrupts mass service by reading *Punch* or questions openly the tactics of the Catholic Church: 'But why do you always try to make out that it is our duty to be *miserable sinners*?', 'But why not let *us* be happy, and you raise money in some other way?' (267, 268).

Ideala's charges against the Catholic Church, her unmitigated attack on institutionalised religion and its repressive power serve as an inspiration for Angelica:

'I had a fit of Roman Catholicism once myself', [...] I enjoyed it very much while it lasted. But you do a great deal of harm, you clergy! In the first place you begin by setting up Christ as an ideal of perfect manhood, and then you proceed to demolish him as a possible example, by maintaining that he was not a man, but a God, and therefore a being whom it is beyond the power of man to imitate! Oh, you terrible, terrible clergy! You preach the parable of the buried talents, and side by side with that you have always insisted that women should put theirs away; and you have soothed their sensitive consciences with the dreadful cant of obedience—not obedience to the moral law, but obedience to the will of man; for what moral law could be affected by the higher education of women? (266)

Acting in this instance as the mouthpiece of one of the novel's ideological projects, Ideala is pinpointing the reason why women were being denied access to the higher education and the grounds on which certain dominant discourses in late Victorian society still found legitimisation to do so. By making religion—a specifically masculine religion created to serve male interest—directly responsible of women's disabilities and by extension of society's evils, Ideala is helping to identify the mechanisms at work within religious discourse, operating to guarantee its palatability amongst its feminine addressees and, as a result, its ultimate indoctrination. Religion is thus presented, from Ideala's feminist standpoint, as a system of power which generates its own narrative, designates its main actors and their

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<sup>28</sup> Angelica's habit to read sacred texts through the lens of scepticism inscribes her within the tradition of secularism imported from German higher criticism via important translations such as George Eliot's *Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* (1846), written ten years before by David Friedrich Strauss. As Peter Gay explains, the "impious idea that Holy Scripture is a book like any other, subject to critical examination like any other, was a legacy from the two previous centuries. A handful of rigorous seventeenth-century thinkers — with Spinoza, Hobbes, and Bayle only the most eminent — led the way toward skepticism with their contention that the Bible should enjoy no special privileges when it came to examining its text" (Gay, 2002: 159).

respective gender roles characterised by an imbalance which is of the essence. Man's rule is certain in so far as women internalise "the dreadful cant of obedience" effectively dictating both self-effacement and leniency towards men's faults. In this confrontation of religious discourse the constitution of the female subject is entirely dependent on her submissiveness to "the will of man", a notion Ideala brings to the fore in her criticism of religion and the crucial gender asymmetry whereby the system is both able to be exacting with women and benevolent with men. This way, Angelica's discredit of the Catholic priest for his inability to respond satisfactorily to her seditious questions is completed with Ideala's exposure of the fissures that made Christian faith intellectually untenable.

Embedded in Ideala's analysis of religion as a system of power engaged in the maintenance of that fundamental gender imbalance is the anticipation of a new order of things onto which, under the denomination of "the religion of the future", this feminist character projects her idealised vision of "disinterested love" (265). The religion of the present, so to speak, is conflated with the religion of the past, an old regulation which is all-encompassing in its permanent watch over the individuals it is meant to control, perfectly epitomised in the hypnotising lyrics of the chime — "He, watching over Israel, slumbers not, nor sleeps". Ideala's implied critique of its obsolescence, aspires to invalidate the exhausted discourse of the Church mostly by exhibiting its inevitable loss of persuasive power. The twins' laughter at the contradictions they discover in religion, much to the exasperation of Father Ricardo, connotes the failure of what is most consequential in any given discourse, namely its ability to remain convincing.<sup>29</sup> In this sense, Angelica's effortless dismantling of Roman Catholic principles seems performative. Throughout the first four books in the novel, coinciding with the periods of her childhood and adolescence, Angelica strives to locate herself somehow outside religious discourse, describing a trajectory of dissention, ironic detachment and effective deactivation of some of its tenets, but as this section intends to show, her trajectory is far from being a straight line into secularism. Prior to the memorable scene in which she throws a Bible at Sir Mosley Menteith's head to dramatise his definitive ousting from Edith's life, Angelica has a dream in which she contemptuously addresses the Pope of Rome and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to inform them that the position of privilege within the gender imbalance Ideala had brought to light is presently being modified: "Men are the muscle, the hard working material of the nation; women are the soul and spirit, the directing intelligence" (295). Virtuous women, in Angelica's dream, are busy "revising the moral laws" for "the true spirit of God" has been confided to them while religious authority is accordingly asked to retreat and to "let us [women] mind our own business" (296). Summoning courage from her own audacity, just before her awakening she poses under the guise of an upcoming saviour thus addressing a group of men, women and children:<sup>30</sup> 'Now I shall have time to

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<sup>29</sup> The suspension of religious belief which the twins' laughter inevitably makes possible is echoed in the response of the people of Morningquest to the duke's belated conversion to Catholicism: "But the people of Morningquest who had adopted his vices did not fear the flames themselves, and would have nothing to do with his piety. [...] the times were changing rapidly, and the influence which remained to the aristocracy was already only dominant so long as it went the way of popular feeling and was human; directly it retrograded to past privileges, ideas, superstitions, and tastes, the people laughed at it. They knew that the threatened rule of the priest was a far-fetched anachronism" (253).

<sup>30</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert has explained that like "latter-day Gnostics", some women saw "the transformation or annihilation of gender as theologically necessary". The idea of a woman saviour had already been contemplated by Florence Nightingale in *Cassandra* in 1852: "The next Christ will perhaps be a female Christ," she wrote; Olive Schreiner likewise wrote about a mystical encounter with a gender-ambiguous figure: "I asked God whether it was man or woman. God said, 'In the least Heaven sex reigns supreme, in the higher it is not noticed; but in the highest it does not exist'" (Both quoted in Gilbert, 1980: 413). The experience of intense suffering, as in the case of childbirth, is one of the interpretations that buttresses the identification of women with the Christ figure (Bynum, 1985), but in Grand's novel such a complex identification is instrumental in the exposure of the sacrifices imposed on women as may be inferred from Evadne's explanation of her suicide attempt to her husband, Dr. Galbraith: "You see, we have the divine example. Christ committed suicide to all intents

consider the state of the Sphere' [...] 'Just wait till I can come and teach you your duty'. [...] 'I am not Esther, most decidedly! But I am Judith. I am Jael. I am Vashti. I am Godiva. I am all the heroic women of all ages rolled into one, not for the shedding of blood, but for the saving of suffering. [...] I shall have to save you in spite of yourselves' (296). Practically metamorphosed into a late Victorian female preacher,<sup>31</sup> Angelica is quite appropriately awoken from her dream by Edith Beale's horrific cries, in direct allusion to the sort of evil her fantasised ministry would come to remedy. Her essentialist fantasy of an almighty heroic woman-saviour reveals Angelica's strategy to claim authority on the basis of women's alleged moral purity and superiority.<sup>32</sup> Ideala's words five chapters earlier come to mind:

'[The true spirit of God] is in us *women*. *We* have preserved it, and handed it down from one generation to another out of our own sex unsullied; and very soon we shall be called upon to prove the possession of it, for already' — she turned to Father Ricardo here, and specially addressed him, speaking always in gentle tones, without emphasis — 'already I — that is to say Woman — am a power in the land, while you — that is to say Priest — retain ever less and less even of the semblance of power'. (267)

This is the manoeuvre by which female anti-clericalism gets rewritten into a pastoral mission of large scope. Posing as irreligious, female disobedience is paradoxically revealed as essentially the opposite when the imminent coming of the woman saviour, the preacher of the new moral gospel, is announced. Angelica continues to feel oppressed by the chime in Book IV where, masquerading as the Boy, she claims to have given up praying while cheerfully admitting that she "used to believe in all the bogies at one time" (415). Still in shock by Edith's horrible death (s)he says: 'I am confirmed in my unbelief. [...] And oh!' — shaking his fist at the cathedral — 'I loathe the deeds of darkness that are done in the name of the Lord' (420). Angelica once again fluctuates in her attitude towards religion. The comic relief she brings into the narrative and with which she manages to cast doubt on the doctrines of the ruling religion is counterbalanced by a sternness which is unbecoming of a self-proclaimed unbeliever. As the plot unfolds and her friendship with the tenor is resolved with the latter's

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and purposes by deliberately putting himself into the hands of his executioners; but his motive makes *them* responsible for the crime; and my motive would place society in a similar position" (671).

<sup>31</sup> Female preaching first appeared in England in the late eighteenth century and it continued for more than half a century. Although female preachers of the Methodist sects were members of the labouring classes who were mostly concerned with the combined support of family and community (realms they felt under threat with the evolving industrial culture of early nineteenth-century England), they were commonly perceived as heretics and rebels since they publicly addressed members of both sexes and travelled alone, thus differing from other Victorian women typically engaged in philanthropic work and private piety. Female preachers, however, "remained silent on the subject of feminism, radical politics, and their political and social oppression in general" (Valenze, 1987: 31-32, 35). Leaving aside class differences, the aggressive image of these working-class women particularly suits Angelica's newly acquired role as female evangelists were fond "of face-to-face confrontations" and were "shockingly forthright, often violating polite codes of behaviour to earn reputations for inquisitorial zeal" (ibid: 37). Such a definition is perfectly in keeping with Angelica's character, only such vehemence is now being put at the service of the feminist cause.

<sup>32</sup> Alex Tyrrell has shown that the notion of women as superior moral agents is pretty much a nineteenth-century phenomenon, used both by feminists and by those who antagonised the political and educational emancipation of women. In 1851 Harriet and John Stuart Mill had described women as "a sort of sentimental priesthood" in clear reference to the expanding popular mythology of women's superior moral status, an image which was still in circulation towards the end of the century as Grand's novel and Sir Walter Besant's verses on the death of Eliza Lynn Linton in 1898 illustrate (Thompson, 1987: 74, 75):

She fought for Woman, and for all the gifts  
Which consecrate her priestess of mankind;  
Eternal priestess — she who leads and lifts  
The man, who, but for her, crept dark and blind.

discovery that she is not a boy but a married woman, his last words — ‘You will do some good in the world — you will be a good woman yet, I know — I know you will’ (462) — haunt a repentant Angelica: “Should she? was the question she now asked herself. Were the words prophetic? she wondered. [...] In this quiet hour of retrospect she was quite ready to confess her sins” (496), and for some time readers are led to think that she has put behind her previous abjuration discourse:

She could not be wholly without religion, because she found in herself a reverence for what was religion in others. And what after all is religion? An attitude of the mind which develops in us the power to love, reverence, and practise all that constitutes moral probity. But how to attain to this? By trying and trusting. Faith, that was it, faith in the power of goodness. [...] she became possessed by some idea of deathless love and longing [...] until both mind and hands together unconsciously assumed the attitude of prayer. (498)

only to return to her former stance of defiance after she has learnt about the tenor’s sudden death: “I saw for a moment the beauty of holiness, and the joy of it continued with me for a little [...] but now my heart is harder than ever, and I shall be worse than I was before” (536). Angelica’s reversals of direction, her wavering between heretic irreverence and saving belief, be it in the redemptory power of a woman saviour or in the traditional “power of goodness” and faith, attest the complex situation that late Victorian women faced in their relationship with religion as they struggled to construct their own faith while trying not to betray their sex.

### 5.3. PRESCRIBING THE REMEDY

#### 5.3.1. Discursive Tenets of the New Woman

In the present section I intend to focus on the discursive construction of the novel’s protagonist, Evadne Frayling. By paying attention to the specific ways in which this prominent female character addresses the problems that originate in discourse as she struggles to articulate her own voice I will try to establish the tenets of Grand’s portrayal of new womanhood Evadne instantiates. Identified by Mr. Price, the American male feminist we encounter in Malta in Book II, as “one of the new women, who are just appearing among us, with a higher ideal of duty than any which men have constructed for women” (193) — Evadne is clearly perceived as a representative individual within the large group of advanced women that made themselves increasingly visible in England in the eighteen nineties. But we must look into the first book of the novel to search for the decisive inflections at work in the making of this female character prior to her coming of age as a new woman.

The incipit of the first chapter gives due relevance to a thirst for knowledge which is going to be crucial in the forging of Grand’s protagonist:

At nineteen Evadne looked out of narrow eyes at an untried world enquiringly. She wanted to know. She found herself forced to put prejudice aside in order to see beneath it, deep down into the sacred heart of things, where the truth is, and the bewildering clash of human precept with human practice ceases to vex. And this not of design, but of necessity. It was a need of her nature to know. [...] Ages of education, ages of hereditary preparation had probably gone to the making of such a mind, and rendered its action inevitable. She had listened to instruction with interest and intelligence, and had apparently accepted every article of faith in God and man which had been offered for her guidance through life with unquestioning confidence; at least she had never been heard to object to any time-honoured

axiom. And she did, in fact, accept them all, but only provisionally. She wanted to know. Silent, sociable, sober, and sincere, she had walked over the course of her early education and gone far beyond it with such ease that those in authority over her never suspected the extent to which she had outstripped them" (3).

The novel's first pages, featuring Evadne's inevitable urge to acquire knowledge, undoubtedly provide Grand with an effective angle from which to start the creative process of character construction: they trigger anxieties regarding the exact nature and scope of suitable knowledge for young Victorian women, thus laying the ground for potential conflict, while they provide early confirmation of Evadne's perfect composure despite her predictable trespassing against the rules of normative readings. To a large extent Grand's novel, the light under which Evadne is going to approach narrative events and interact with the rest of the characters, constitutes an examination of the impact the acquisition of knowledge will have on her. As my analysis unfolds, I will be drawing on Foucault's understanding of knowledge (*savoir*) as the coming together of several factors "formed in a regular manner by a discursive practice" revealed in "the types of enunciation that it uses, the concepts that it manipulates, and the strategies that it employs". Interestingly, for the French philosopher, knowledge is "defined by the possibilities of use and appropriation offered by discourse [...] there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms" (Foucault, 1969: 182-3). The omnipresent concern in this late Victorian text with what may be established as both legitimate and useful knowledge for women in their formative years raises the issue of responsibility — both in the social and family realms — with regard to who has the authority to make such decisions. Additionally, the possibilities of accepting or challenging authority, under the guise of sanctioned knowledge, are simultaneously opened as dominant discourses try to accrue power by dictating what must be known and, by the same token, what must remain ignored. To borrow the words used by the narrator in Book I when discussing the limitations exerted upon a lady's "conventional education", an "impossible ignorance was the object aimed at, and so long as no word was spoken on either side it was supposed to be attained" (23). The employment of both strategies, ignorance and silence, acquires, as I shall intend to demonstrate, a crucial role in the narrative moulding of Evadne Frayling's discursive pose.

The process of female intellectual maturation, which the novel's first book depicts by focusing on Evadne's period of adolescence, shows the development of a few significant traits as they gradually turn into steady discursive strategies, internal rules that are not only specific to Evadne's own voice but to the interaction the latter establishes with other discourses. One of such prominent traits singled out for effect is the reverence for verbal accuracy instilled in the protagonist already at the age of twelve: 'Never say you *think*, my dear, about matters of fact'. [...] 'When it is possible to know it is your business to find out. [...] If the habit of inaccuracy became confirmed, your own character would deteriorate; and by leading people to suppose that you are as wise as themselves, you lose opportunities of obtaining useful information' (4). Mr. Frayling's preventive warning is branded on his daughter: "She understood from what her father had said that to know the facts of life exactly is a positive duty; which, in a limited sense, was what he had intended to teach her, but the extent to which she carried the precept would have surprised him" (4). What is interesting for the purposes of my argumentation in the present section is that the moral inflection of paternal discourse aimed at setting the boundaries of proper feminine utterances is specifically constructed in Grand's text as the origin and primary source of Evadne's future intellectual misdoings, "it was her father who struck the keynote to which the tune of her early intellectual life was set" (4), similarly, it "is a notable thing that in almost every

instance it was her father's influence which forced Evadne to draw conclusions in regard to life quite unlike any of his own" (11); the continued exposure to Mr. Frayling's "primitive theories about women and 'all they are good for', for one thing, which differed so materially from the facts as she observed them every day, formed a constant mental stimulus to which her busy brain was greatly indebted" (11). Thus, quite unwittingly, the conservative teachings of her father seem to have a counter effect by which Evadne's rational thinking is encouraged to run free rather than deterred, an unsought consequence which would have been zestfully subscribed by contemporary feminists whose discourses were in antagonistic relation with Mr. Frayling's.<sup>33</sup> This is the way in which the text suggests that specifically resistant-to-change discourses contain the possibility of "reverse discourses" that may or may not counteract the explicit or implicit agenda initially set forth by the former. In her explanation of Foucault's theory of discourse Chris Weedon observed that "the individuals whom social welfare policies seek to govern have available to them, at least potentially, the discursive means to resist the implications of existing social policies. Moreover, particular discourses themselves offer more than one subject position. While a discourse will offer a preferred form of subjectivity, its very organization will imply other subject positions and the possibility of reversal". Evadne's discourse of resistance or "reverse discourse" — to use Weedon's term (1987: 106) — is in this sense backfired by the misogyny with which her father's peripatetic lectures are imbued. I want to contend that the position adopted by Evadne as she locates herself in relation to the discourse of authority her father represents is twofold: it allows the female protagonist to develop a linguistic style that exhibits apparent conformity while at the same time it withholds belief ("she had never been heard to object to any time-honoured axiom. And she did, in fact, accept them all, but only provisionally").<sup>34</sup>

Evadne's careful selection of reading material is likewise decisive in the forging of her discourse as a new woman for "[s]he always had a solid book in hand, and some standard work of fiction"; the equipoise of fictional works, medical books on "anatomy and physiology", "pathology", "prophylactics and therapeutics" (23), and socio-political treatises — such as John Stuart Mill's *On the Subjection of Women*, in which "she had the satisfaction of finding confirmation strong" of "her own conclusions" regarding the treatment given to women in the picaresque novel (14) — is deliberately posing literature and non fiction as equally effective realms in which the young protagonist may seek answers to the questions the factual context of the impediments faced by women inevitably raises. "[R]eading as a topos" (Flint, 1993: 301) becomes a metafictional device in Grand's novel; the heroine's emerging voice is construed as a powerful reagent able to implement *resistant readings* (Fetterly, 1978) of *Roderick Ransom*, *Tom Jones* or *The Vicar of Wakefield* and move beyond the dominant

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<sup>33</sup> As Margaret Sibthorp, the editor of the feminist periodical *Shafts* (1892-9) proclaimed in its first issue: "Our object is to encourage thought". A rational approach to social analysis and women's vigilance on the double standard of morality and gender prejudices, including the use of sexist language and images were promoted amongst the periodical's target readership. (1892: 8)

<sup>34</sup> Evadne thus exploits the possibilities of use that the conservative discourse on woman offers and tries to appropriate for herself a new space, a different subject position. The self-sanctioned strategy whereby she is enabled to show conformity with the discourse of authority as well as to plan a manoeuvre to gain control of herself as an intellectual being replicate the smart tactics Kate Flint has observed with regard to "the politically articulate women's movement in the nineteenth century, and (...) women's writing for women. On the one hand, women can be seen entering into traditionally masculine structures of knowledge, most particularly within education and the sciences: not just learning men's factual knowledge, but, more particularly, taking on board their understanding of the structuring of authority and power. On the other, they are to be observed constructing and maintaining alternative discursive systems which emphasize their comprehension of social practice: in the fiction of Olive Schreiner or Sarah Grand, say; in the dramatic monologues of Augusta Webster; or in magazines like the *Woman's Signal* or *Shafts*. Sometimes these systems operated according to the dominant definitions of what should constitute women's roles, but with increasing frequency, they functioned as a powerful, and shared critique on these definitions" (Flint, 1993: 39-40).

cultural views that accounted for the lesser intelligence of women in order to challenge them. Evadne does not read for entertainment; self-taught to analyse critically fictional works, she takes to reading against the grain, writing down her points of view concerning literary characters and the power relations established alongside gender categories within those narratives, comparing them to her own acquaintance with the facts as experienced in her father's misogynistic discourse: "There is [...] one thing in the book [*The Vicar of Wakefield*] that strikes me first and foremost and above all others, which is that the men were educated and the women were ignorant. [...] I presume they were not allowed the educational advantages upon which the men prided themselves. The men must accordingly have withheld these advantages by main force, yet they do not scorn to sneer at the consequences of their injustice" (16-17). Evadne develops "an industrious habit of writing" her opinions "about the works she studied" which she gathers from the age of twelve to the age of nineteen under the title "Commonplace Book" (13), and it is precisely writing at which she excels, the discursive skill with which she becomes more audacious: 'I am always afraid to speak, but I dare write anything' (94). By showing that the new woman's discourse is nourished both by fiction and fact Grand's text was possibly seeking an interaction with the readership, effecting a subtle interpellation to mimic Evadne's reading habits and extrapolate a feminist agenda from narrative content. Access to knowledge in the novel, through the complementary activities of reading and writing, hence implied access to a "space in which a subject may take up a position and speak of the objects with which [s]he deals in h[er] discourse", understanding by subject "a position that may be filled in certain conditions by various individuals" (Foucault, 1969: 182, 115). Grand's text stresses the notion of a female reader / subject in building process, taking up various positions as she gains knowledge through reading and writing: "I do not remember what I wrote about it [*The Vicar of Wakefield*] the first time I read it, and I will not look to see until I have written what I think now, because I should like to know if I still agree with myself as I was then" (16). The fact that Evadne gives up book reading in the latter half of the novel is further evidence of the idea that "[t]he same texts may elicit complicity or resistance; the same reading subject, [...] cannot be relied upon to be a stable identity, responding in a predetermined way to each text that she encounters" (Flint, 1993: 40).

Interrogation, falling "insensibly into the habit of asking why" (13), is Evadne's early linguistic procedure deployed so as to keep under check the gender biases that she detects lurking in her father's system of belief: 'Then ordinary women have no brains, and cannot learn arithmetic?', 'Can men keep accounts who have never seen accounts kept?', 'Why are women such inferior beings?' (11, 12, 13) — these are some of the questions aimed at interpreting Mr. Frayling's hostility toward women who dare to position themselves outside the domestic sphere. Evadne's concern with the chiselling of her discursive procedures makes visible her focus on speech as power, a power which is predicated on truth and accuracy, her need to create her own discourse of authority, a female authoritative discourse, so to speak, if such a thing might be possible at all. Interrogation and cross-examination of her father's system of belief, however, with the inevitable exposure of the profound injustices the double standard of morality enacts, is only possible under the guise of feminine conformity Evadne displays. Such strategic poses are revealed as particularly effective as she manages to gather evidence of inaccuracy in Mr Frayling's discourse on women. Instructed as she has been to police her own speech and linguistic style, a still adolescent Evadne follows the motto '[w]hen it is possible to know it is your business to find out' and turns it into the guiding principle which will govern vital decisions in her process of maturation and self-assertion.

The aim of gaining knowledge is specifically interpreted in terms of the acquisition of new, precise lexicon. Thus, the early episode in which Evadne saves Diavolo's life by stopping a haemorrhage in his femoral artery registers the protagonist's zeal in augmenting her personal stock of words: "She had added the word "tourniquet" to her vocabulary during this time, and having looked it up in the dictionary, she requested the doctor to be so good as to teach her to make one. While doing so the doctor became interested in his silent, intelligent pupil, and it ended in his teaching her all that a young lady could learn of bandaging, of antidotes to poisons, of what to do in case of many possible accidents, and also of nursing, theoretically" (10-11).<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, the incorporation of linguistic knowledge, in this case of proper scientific vocabulary, is accompanied by a pragmatic interest in useful know-how. The final, relevant allusion to the profession of nursing implies that a simple gesture which was bound to remain confined within the realm of the strictly private and personal interest may acquire a potentially public dimension. Evadne's careful construction of her authoritative speech reveals that she is consciously learning with a purpose. Knowledge is presented here not as an end in and out of itself, but as a means rather to have access and take part in the public sphere, the best means to become useful. Social action rather than female passivity is thus inevitably encouraged by the acquaintance with facts, truths and by the familiarity with different areas of study, so does Grand's text seem to suggest in its overt utilitarian perspective on the feminist claim of full access to education for women.<sup>36</sup>

Evadne's earliest discursive attitude, the first pose adopted in the forging of her "discursive practice" in Foucauldian terms, mimics and closely resembles, as I will try to explain, that inaugurated by Saint Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century in so far as her initial approach to the doctrine of the woman's sphere in particular is that of *fides quaerens intellectum*.<sup>37</sup> "Faith seeking understanding" is at least the first discursive strategy Mrs. Frayling's "most satisfactory child" finds readily available as a young Victorian girl who "gather[s] silently, and store[s] with care, in her capacious memory any precept that might fall from [her father's] lips, to be taken out and tried as opportunity offered" (4). However, whereas the Christian philosopher and theologian sought to understand rationally what had been revealed by means of religious faith he did so in order to proclaim his love of God, not in an attempt to replace faith with understanding. As Evadne registers Mr. Frayling's "glaring" inaccuracies with regard to women's capacities she progressively distances herself

<sup>35</sup> The female narrator in Grand's short story "A Yellow Leaf" shows a similar penchant for verbal accuracy and knowledge of human anatomy as she dares to improve the vague, inaccurate language employed by the male physician who has been examining Evangelina's arm: "(...) I became deeply interested in his method of inquiring into the cause of the trouble; but he talked about 'the long bone of the arm', until at last, bored by the repetition, I ventured to vary the monotony for him by suggesting the word *humerus* aside to her". Such linguistic boldness is immediately reprehended by the doctor's disapproving look, which gives the narrator to understand "that I had sunk low in his estimation", as well as by her girlfriend's caution: "You really must be careful by what names you call things. You see, any indelicacy in a young lady shocks a refined and cultivated man". (...) 'We do not call things by their proper names' (Grand, 1894d: 88).

<sup>36</sup> Grand would inextricably link, in a letter written on 16 November 1897, this goal of the women's movement — "to strengthen ourselves in all womanly attributes by developing our intelligence, by enlarging our sympathies" — to the "evolutionary" aspirations of the movement: "an effort of the human race to advance a step higher in its development, a result which can only be attained by making the mothers finer creatures than they have been heretofore" (Heilmann and Forward, 2000, 2: 61-62). Her essay "Should Married Women Follow Professions?", published two years later in *Young Woman* similarly focused on the importance of early childhood education as well as on the necessity of women's independence and professionalism as a means to benefit the race and bring about "moral progress" which "has been checked for ages by the criminal repression of women" (*The Heavenly Twins*, 193).

<sup>37</sup> Saint Anselm's motto was addressing the relation between reason and faith in his search of a rational understanding of what had been revealed by religious faith. His attempt was not motivated by a desire to remove the mysteries of the dogma, but by a necessity to understand them as it was humanly possible while leaving intact his active love of God. See Williams, Thomas, "Saint Anselm", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/anselm/>>.

from belief, from faith in the dogma of women's ineptitude. The epistemological method of *fides quaerens intellectum* is thus used by Grand's young heroine with a very different effect for she withholds assent to sanctioned knowledge, those "time-honoured axiom[s]", in favour of rational insight. The strategic stance displayed constitutes an effective means both to find personal legitimization — "she once heard [her father] say to one of her brothers: 'Find out for yourself, and form your own opinions', a lesson which she had laid to heart also" (5) — and to insert her own inner voice in the ongoing discussion on woman's most suitable place in the socio-political order. The fact that in the intimacy of Evadne's private realm it is reason in the light of factual evidence that occupies the epistemically privileged position (as opposed to dogmatic assumptions regarding the role of women in society) is an indication of the extent to which Mr. Frayling's *perlocutionary* speech acts fail:<sup>38</sup>

But [...] she was not even conscious of the particular attention she paid to the subject. She had no foregone conclusion to arrive at, no wish to find evidence in favour of the woman which would prove the man wrong. Only, coming across so many sneers at the incapacity of women, she fell insensibly into the habit of asking why. The question to begin with was always: "Why are women such inferior beings?" But, by degrees, as her reading extended, it changed its form, and then she asked herself doubtfully: "Are women such inferior beings?" a position she carried in front of her father at once by a hundred years, and led her rapidly on to the final conclusion that women had originally no congenital defect of inferiority, and that, although they have still much way to make up, it now rests with themselves to be inferior or not, as they choose. (13)

The first form of linguistic injury Grand's heroine experiences is that of being indirectly called "inferior" by her own father in so far as she is understood to belong to the social group of "women". In his famous work "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", Louis Althusser has explained that name-calling, an example of what he denominates "*interpellation* or hailing", is one of the necessary conditions for the constitution of the subject in language. In fact, for the French Marxist philosopher, "all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (Althusser, 1971: 174, 171). The narrative focus in the extract above is on a constituent failure of the young female individual to validate recognition in the ideological interpellation Mr Frayling (as spokesperson of the dominant discourse on woman) is trying to perform. By avoiding recruitment into the demeaning subject position available — as highlighted in the repeated use of the word "women" in the third person — the text creates the illusion of a possibility: finding a place outside ideology where the protagonist may emerge unscathed and transformed into a full right subject "as [she] please[s]". The forging of Evadne as a female subject in language thus shows that her concerns are first rhetorical but, ultimately and quite inevitably, political too. The detailed process described above is implicitly related to the scientific method of the natural sciences in

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<sup>38</sup> J. L. Austin's distinction of two types of performative locutions (illocutionary and perlocutionary acts) is relevant for the purposes of my discussion. Speech acts can be of two kinds, *illocutionary* (those in which saying something is equivalent to doing something. They produce immediate effects and are assisted by linguistic and social conventions) and *perlocutionary* (those in which the saying brings about a set of consequences which are not simultaneous but temporally apart). Perlocutionary acts are "what we bring about or achieve by saying something" (Austin, 1962: 109). The types of enunciation and the concepts manipulated in Mr Frayling's discursive practice on women consistently position them in a subordinate role which tries to secure the notion of female inferiority in his young daughter. All interactions between father and daughter in Book I are occasions on which the ideology of gender hierarchy and male dominance is painstakingly inculcated in the young, impressionable protagonist. Evadne's rationally detached elucidation of her father's lectures cancels out, at least temporarily, the intended consequences that motivated his conservative rhetoric on woman in the first place, thus turning his speech acts into failed performatives.

its aspiration to establish truths: the insistence on the initial lack of prejudice, the reiterated questioning and inquiry into the actual origin of derogatory opinions on women, the necessary extensive reading and, finally, the arrival at a conclusion which was as unforeseen as it is now authorised and readily accepted as incontrovertible: women have “originally no congenital defect of inferiority”. Such a careful procedure in perfectly differentiated stages meticulously followed by young Evadne registers her efforts to “outline a discourse which tries to break with ideology, in order to dare to be the beginning of a scientific [...] discourse on ideology” (Althusser, 1971: 173). Consequently, it is also presented as narrative justification of the first relevant change in her discursive pose as she moves away from a stance of ‘faith seeking understanding’ into another linguistic position characterised by an increasingly politicised counter speech regarding women’s disabilities and roles in the late Victorian social order.

The fact that the young female heroine is able to backwardly interpret and mark out her father’s indoctrination as instances of misogynistic speech is fundamental in a double way. It allows her to understand that social positions occupied by women subjects are not necessarily static and that they stand in a hierarchical relation of subordination to those of men for a reason. Commenting on the work of Mari Matsuda, Judith Butler has observed that “hate speech is understood not only to *act upon* its listener (a perlocutionary scene), but to contribute to the social constitution of the one addressed (and, hence to become part of a process of social interpellation)”. What is most interesting for the present analysis is the possibility of failure Butler finds embedded in hate speech acts. In Grand’s text, Mr Frayling’s misogynist peroration, his first attempt to act upon his daughter is far from being “felicitous” or final, rather, it goes terribly wrong, it “misfires” (Butler, 1997: 18, 19): “His primitive theories about women and ‘all they are good for’, [...] which differed so materially from the facts as she observed them every day, formed a constant mental stimulus to which her busy brain was greatly indebted” (*Heavenly Twins*, 11). In absence of an open and “free discussion” with her family of the “self-interest and injustice of men, the fatal ignorance and slavish apathy of women” Evadne takes compulsively to clandestine reading and writing; these intellectual activities provide her with an opportunity to “set her mind off on a long and patient enquiry into the condition and capacity of women, and made her, in the end of the nineteenth century, essentially herself” (20, 13).

Grand promoted a definition of the “Advanced Woman” as “one who says little, and is constantly, yet unobtrusively, ameliorating the condition of her fellow mortals, be they men or women” (1894a: 204). Highlighting an image of conservative femininity that allowed for the reconciliation of the New Woman’s public and domestic lives, Grand was trying to avoid the cliché of female verbal aggressiveness so that old-fashioned readers of *Idler* could feel more at ease (Marks, 1990: 37). Paradoxically, it appeared that the only way which was advisable for women to develop their intellectual capacities was to do so in silence or, at least, not saying much. Deploying the strategic ability of saying “little” is one of Evadne Frayling’s fortes most clearly and repeatedly emphasised in *The Heavenly Twins*. She is consistently described in Book I as a quiet girl who listens “in such a silent way” that “she rarely if ever express[es] and opinion” (5, 16), and her recurrent unwillingness to talk, “afraid” as she is “of running the risk of uttering a word”, conveys the idea, as we approach the end of Evadne’s formative years, that “the quiet power of the girl” resides in fact in “[h]er talent for silence” (57, 10, 105).

Evadne’s plot is contained in Books I, II, chapters XII to XV in Book III, and in Book VI. Her tactics of linguistic reserve is predominant during her childhood and adolescence, up and until the fatal moment in which she discovers that Major Colquhoun, the man she has just wedded, is “a moral leper” (79). This major turning point in her life marks a reversal of such

tactics as Evadne exhibits her discursive gift venting her rage both verbally with Mrs. Orton Beg and in epistolary form with Mrs. Frayling, who, sunk into despair, blames her daughter for having ‘behaved outrageously [...] and written letters [she] should be ashamed of. Quoting Scripture too, for [her] own purposes’ (106). Determined not to live with her husband she speaks “with concentrated bitterness” (75), and “dare[s] to rebel” in order to “make life possible for those whom temperament compels to submit” (95). This burst of rebellious speech is a token of the new woman’s awakening, as Sarah Grand forewarned in “The New Aspect of the Woman Question”:

Both the cow-woman and the scum-woman are well within the range of the comprehension of the Bawling Brotherhood, but the new woman is a little above him, and he never even thought of looking up to where she has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman’s Sphere, and prescribed the remedy. (271)

After the first half of Book I Evadne’s years of “silent contemplation” seem to be over and her discursive coming of age as a new woman is enacted in her prescription of a bold “remedy”: ‘I would stop the imposition, approved of custom, connived at by parents, made possible by the state of ignorance in which we are carefully kept — the imposition upon a girl’s innocence and inexperience of a disreputable man for a husband’ (78). In so far as women “have it in [their] power to set up a high standard of excellence for men to reach in order to have the privilege of associating with [them]” so “punishing [men] for their depravity” must figure prominently in the socio-political agenda, since “there is no past in the matter of vice. The consequences become hereditary, and continue for generation to generation”. This is the heroine’s fundamental urge: “it is time we tried a more effectual plan. And I propose now to sacrifice the man instead of the woman” (80).

Evadne’s acceptance, under family pressure, to keep up appearances and avoid scandal signals the ebb of language as the heroine gradually draws back into a sexless marriage. The conflation of self-imposed silence and celibacy in the novel reveals not only the sacrifices she was willing to endure but also the extent to which the double privation of language and sex could undermine the legitimate aspirations of the new woman in Grand’s fiction. “Evadne’s disposition was essentially swift to act [...] and the only healthy minded happy state for her was the one in which thought instantly translated itself into action” (69). Not surprisingly, Colonel Colquhoun’s final demand that she “never take part publicly in any question of the day”, especially “in connection with measures of reform, and all that sort of thing”, ends up being decisive in the development of her mental instability (345).

Silence functions, as I would like to argue, as a backbone in the organization of narrative matter, for such a *privation*<sup>39</sup> or absence of speech articulates and projects the action from the first book in the novel. The plot thus moves forward by means of a narrative mechanism of parallel silences or, rather, silences than run parallel in both discourses; the old, mainstream discourse on a girl’s proper education featuring parental secrecy on sexual matters, and the young woman’s discourse of apparent assent with its meticulous suppression of rational insights on the woman question — which Evadne vents in written form in her volume, the “Commonplace Book”. The juxtaposed discourses on women’s education and their

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<sup>39</sup> In the second part of his influential aesthetic treatise Edmund Burke contended that “[a]ll *general* privations are great, because they are terrible” and he singled out “*Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude, and Silence*” as the most prominent absences in their capacity to cause horror (Burke, 1757, Part II: 7).

correspondent subdued areas are equally inadvertent of each other's force and magnitude, scope and relevance. Significantly, as readers, we have first access to Evadne's transformative silence and to what it entails through the omniscient narrator, her own writings in the "Commonplace Book" and her dialogues with Mr. Frayling; what the dominant discourse on woman silences shall be glaringly revealed at the end of Book I and in Book III with the denouement of Edith Beale's subplot the harsh way, just like real women found out, when it was already too late. The subsequent events in the book are a direct consequence of the collision of such silences, the matter upon which both discourses remain silent.

There is a narrative emphasis on the importance not "to waste words" so that the "sense of their value" is retained and "the force which they collect in the careful keeping of [...] silent folk" may be 'appreciate[d]'" (44). The narrator's reflection on the function of silence in the new woman's speech, quite paradoxically, makes possible a reading of the discursive strategy as an empowering device whereby the effects of the sudden, unexpected arrival of discourse would be magnified. From this point of view the impact of the new woman's speech is greater because of the silence that precedes it. The notion of an *intermitting* discourse that gathers momentum precisely because of the silences that interrupt it is very much in keeping with the Burkean aesthetics of the sublime:<sup>40</sup> "A sudden beginning or sudden cessation of sound [...] has the name power. The attention is roused by this; and the faculties are driven forward, [...] we have a perception of danger [...]. It may be observed that a single sound of some strength, though but of short duration, if repeated after intervals, has a grand effect" (Burke, 1757, Part II: 19). Such intermittence sets the pace of Evadne's discursive outbursts which strategically describe an unstable trajectory, almost a tidal movement of ebb and flow. Thus, there are three major points in the novel in which the new woman dares to break the silence: the first one occurs in the second half of Book I, as we have seen, following the discovery of Colonel Colquhoun's debauched past, and it signals the highest point of the discursive tide; the second one takes place during the Maltese exile in Book II while Evadne is acting the role of "devoted wife", and it shows the ebbing tide of speech: she "was celebrated at once for her silence and for what she had said. The weight of her occasional utterances told. [...] Generally, when she said anything cutting, it was so clearly incisive you hardly knew for a moment where you were injured" (207); finally, Book VI registers a withdrawal from language as an ill and demoralised Evadne after a married life of inaction is tormented by "[t]houghts of the suffering, the awful, needless suffering that there is in the world" (636).

Sarah Grand's decision to put an end to her novel with the disappointing remarks of a new woman who claims to "hate politics" and is determined "not to think" and "to live on the surface of life" (559, 672) pose a problematic contradiction to the feminist agenda and the ideological project her fiction was intended to serve in the first place. Theresa Mangun has written that "late-Victorian women writers contributed to the fight for women's rights by creating representations of women that confronted the self-abnegating, submissive, housebound image of middle-class Ideal Womanhood" (Mangun, 1999: 2), but Evadne's development of a morbid horror of reality, her suicidal attempt and her almost complete retreat from all intellectual endeavour challenge linear, simplistic interpretations of the role the new woman was called to perform in these *fin-de-siècle* narratives. Such a failure to fulfil the readers' expectations is inquiringly registered by a sympathetic Dr. Galbraith in the final book of the novel: "In looking back now, I am inclined to ask why we, Evadne's intimate friends, should always have expected more of her than we did of other people. That certainty was the case, and she disappointed us. We felt that she should have been a representative

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<sup>40</sup> Burke thus contended that a "low, tremulous, intermitting sound [...] is productive of the sublime" (Burke, 1757, Part II: 20).

woman such as the world wants at this period of its progress, making a name for herself and an impression on the age; and it was probably her objection, expressed with quite passionate earnestness, to play a part in which we gathered from many chance indications that she was eminently qualified to have excelled, that constituted the puzzle” (556). But despite the bleak (open) ending in Sarah Grand’s novel of Evadne Frayling’s plot her triumphant judgement “that [women’s] ignorance was not the consequence of incapacity” but a product of their oppression, as well as her critique of the social construction of gender, remain radical in the most strict sense, for they go to the root of the matter (17). In the last analysis, by construing Evadne’s resigned fate as a direct consequence of her evasion — her “deliberately chosen” avoidance of the questions of the day following the lifetime promise exacted by her husband not to get involved in public matters, “join societies, make speeches, or publish books [...] on the social subjects [she was] so fond of” (342) — *The Heavenly Twins* powerfully reminds us of the importance to pursue both personal and collective happiness as the heroine’s final remark suggests — “I no longer perceive the utility of self-sacrifice” (671) — and prescribe a new remedy in order to undo the logic of silence and “lash out unmercifully” “the gift of language” (225).

#### 5.4. CONCLUSIONS

I have drawn attention to the dominant presence of the bell’s chime in the allegorical proem to *The Heavenly Twins*, from where it expands onto the rest of the novel, as a major trope which reverberates over both narrative space and time. The relevance of the tolling accompanied by the suggestive lyrics of its Mendelssohnian dictum: “He watch-ing o-ver Is-ra-el, slumbers not, nor sleeps” has been surprisingly absent from most critical studies of the novel despite its pivotal function, as I would like to suggest, in the interpretation of subsequent narrative events. Depicting a symptomatic landscape of equally flawed subjectivities the proem and the literary construct of the chime introduce and highlight an aesthetic reflection later on echoed by Grand’s narrative strategies: the elusiveness of the object and the futile quest for its apprehension.

It is possible to trace Grand’s debt to a Burkean aesthetics by focusing on a double enquiry established in the proem whereby (a) there is a shift of emphasis away from the qualities of the aesthetic object per se onto the perceiving subject and (b) an effective phenomenological construction of the chime is advanced as an inconsistently awe-inspiring, violence-ridden trope, a repository of patriarchal values, a metaphor of *the sublime*.

When approaching the image of the chime in terms of its effects upon the perceivers the novel’s preamble highlights a diversity of subjectivities and discourses in conflict, in particular with regard to the metaphysical immutability of the tolling metaphor. Therefore, several functions may be ascribed to the proem: (a) it initiates the parable the novel effectively constitutes by sketching its setting, (b) it sets the mood for the stories to come and (c) by means of the epistemological debates that animate the society of Morningquest on the exact nature and qualities of the chime, it creates an opportunity for a conflation of images of horror, religion, patriarchy and violence that will consistently resonate in Grand’s novel.

The contention between fact and opinion reflects a declining society misgoverned by religion and positivism approaching a time of crisis as it is no longer able to ascertain truths. Relativism, controversy, dispute and wrangle are, accordingly, discursive anxieties found amongst the most relevant themes interwoven in the narrator’s exegesis. Such discursive unrest occasions the narrator’s analysis of two basic strategies deployed within religious discourse: (1) the constant reiteration of an idea effects its implantation as a truth into the mind of the believing subject where it adopts the form of an a priori, an always already, (2)

the separation between the undisputable object of belief and its debatable forms or expressions. By eschewing controversy over its object of reverence (which is hailed as sacred) any debate over its truth is effectively cancelled out. Comforting, formulaic responses to the chime are examples of this effectiveness.

There are four different responses typified in the poem with regard to the diverse experiential relations established between the citizens / observers and what they discern in the chime. Narrative focus on this issue allows the narrator in the poem to engage in a classification of the people of Morningquest alongside parameters taken directly from evolutionary discourse. The citizens are shown to belong, in ascending order within an evolutionary scale, to four groupings characterised by their different responses to the chime : (1) (fanaticism) the most primitive response interprets divinity as essentially masculine and establishes a relation of mindless subjection to the observed, (2) (moderate estrangement) the second interpretation comes from more evolved individuals and shows greater discernment in their observation of a still overtly masculinised god, (3) (opportunism) the third response implies an appropriation of the observed object, once again, in exclusively male terms while it exerts a self-interested manipulation of the deity through the mechanism of the fetish in order to maintain male economic and moral dominance. Sarah Grand herself gave visibility to this third response from her periodical writings as an instance to argue for the feminisation of society and the conversion of man into woman's alleged superior moral qualities.

The fourth response to the chime, (4) (summons to conversion), emerges as a threat to male supremacy. This new interpretation aspires to rescue the collective voice of humanity and the coalition of male and female principles as creating force. Its concern is political since the prosperity of the nation is at stake. The poem heralds the arrival of a new prophet who will bring a yet untried ethical standard, one which demands equal moral responsibility for both sexes, a guarantor of human progress and social evolution. The more highly evolved, this fourth grouping is posed as an antidote against social regression, a promise of both personal and collective welfare. Characterised by its hyperaesthesia, this group of individuals shows an exceptional capacity to perceive and to apprehend meaning manifested in their silent response to the chime and in their own penchant for music. Such unusual talent is associated with the central female characters in the novel and it poses a conflict with the idea of gender equality promoted by the fourth interpretation of the chime. Grand's bias in favour of female superior qualities ultimately reinforces gender difference as it justifies the re-appropriation of the religious symbolic order in explicitly female terms. Conversion of the fetishised male god into female superior morals was an admitted goal for Sarah Grand in her periodical writings. The new woman becomes in this light the new prophet who has come to Morningquest in order to facilitate that conversion from old-fashioned Victorian religiosity to the new order of gender equality in terms of equal moral and social responsibilities for both sexes.

In the middle section of this chapter I have also explored some of the narrative strategies deployed in the novel as a means to reproduce the major aesthetic reflections set in motion by the trope of the chime in the poem. I have argued that the novel's ultimate attempt to change the world was deliberately pursued both in narrative content and form, with its discussion of displeasing subject matter, its breakdown of traditional narrative structure and the disconnected, meandering style exhibited in the story-telling process. The fact that contemporary reviewers of Grand's book inseparably addressed their criticism to substance and structure reveals that their anxieties were equally fuelled by both.

There are three narrative devices which stand out in the construction of the novel: an incessant retelling of the same occurrences, the recurrent use of analepsis, and constant changes in point of view. The narrative method which involves an almost incessant reiteration

of the events narrated, self questioning and symptomatic interrogation responds to the characters' necessity to understand and define favourite objects of scrutiny, notably Evadne and the Tenor. By featuring mothers who are unable to understand the true nature of their offspring or characters who admit their inability to even know themselves, Grand's text overlaps different narrative levels as her characters engage in the incessant retelling of the same story, ultimately underscoring the fragility and fragmentariness of human perception as well as the precariousness of the telling process itself. Divergences of opinion, misreadings of events or defective interpretations contribute to highlight the failure of speech and the deficiencies of narration as they are the inevitable consequence of the elusiveness of the object and symptoms of the futile quest for its apprehension, which the chime symbolised in the proem. There is a great deal of flashback, recollection and backward reconstruction of events. Analepsis is, accordingly, the narrative device chosen to account for most puzzling occurrences in the novel, though always to emphasise the instability of truths, as the Tenor laments in his equivocal maxim: 'anything is probable where the most uncertainty prevails' (407).

The conflict between fact and opinion, between truth and prejudice buttressed by the inertia of habit is further stressed on those occasions when certain characters fail to acknowledge actuality even in presence of irrefutable evidence, as the Clareses' micro-narrative illustrates. The use of different points of view reminds us of the Burkean aesthetics depicted in the proem with its emphasis on the effects the occurrences narrated have on the perceiving subjects as story tellers rather than on the occurrences themselves. In the case of Angelica, her compulsive retelling of the interlude with the Tenor and her constant appropriation of new perspectives, including a masquerade as the opposite sex, show her ability to change subject positions and even gender identities. The overlapping of these narrative strategies generates several discursive levels that range from classic omniscience to the inclusion of unreliable, homodiegetic narrators with defective memories, as it occurs in the novel's last book. That sudden desertion of omniscience is yet another reminder of the lack of absolute, doctrinal truths and a final invitation for the reader to break the silence and fill in the gaps of the narrated events. It is Grand's summons to reflect, ponder and think about Evadne's destiny and the possibilities of change.

I have tried to demonstrate that religion is a pivotal topic in *The Heavenly Twins*, one which is surprisingly absent from most critical analyses of Grand's fiction. The authoritative rhetoric of religion is overwhelmingly present and it provides a lens to examine the ways in which female characters are construed in discourse. I have found that the shifting positions they tend to occupy with regard to the established religious discourse may be classified as: (a) heedless submission, (b) purposeful complicity and (c) dialectical confrontation. These positions are by no means stable as a close examination of the discursive development of female characters reveals.

Edith Beale, an emblem of the Rousseauian ideal of womanhood, best incarnates the first position of heedless submission to religious authority. The innocence of the bishop's daughter is predicated on her perfect docility, in which the instinctive suspension of all thought and the belief in a protective, benignant, masculinised god are tokens of her belonging to the least evolved group of citizens identified in the proem with a fanatic response to the chime. The construction of this female character as a compliant female subject is entirely dependent on her religious fervour — which conflates the categories of God, master and husband — and on her misconception of woman's mission as involving the reformation of man's degraded morals through love and endurance. Once her husband infects her with syphilis and Edith witnesses the effects of the illness on her own child she radically shifts

positions and directs her rage towards religious discourse. Edith's transformation is physical, moral and discursive. Going insane she gains consciousness and addresses her indictments to masculine power and to the cooperation of religious, medical and marital discourses to gain control of women subjects. Thus exposing the fallacy of the Rousseauian rationale according to which a woman's self-preservation was guaranteed by her subjection to religious authority, she shifts her stance towards religious indoctrination from heedless submission to enraged confrontation. The denouement of Edith's plot not only challenges the argument of women's cognitive impairment, which was held to be at the root of their subjection, but, most importantly, is Grand's reminder of the possibility of real change, of moving beyond the discursive limits imposed by patriarchy.

The second position adopted by most mature women in the novel is one of purposeful complicity with religious discourse, and it is best epitomised by Mrs. Orton Beg. Characterised by an actively sought loss of consciousness and a willing suspension of all thought, this position of evasion results from an opportunistic surrender, a conformity with masculine religious discourse. Confronted with Evadne's indictment of older women's cooperation with male power in the maintenance of young girls' ignorance, Mrs. Orton Beg admits, adopting a confessional style, her responsibility, thus revealing a conscious construction of the self as a both compliant and complicit subject. Confession is the first step towards resistance in Grand's novel, and while Evadne's aunt is still adamant in her defence of the position of power granted to the good women in society, she will later become more sensitive to the feminist cause, particularly as Edith's plot is exposed, reinforcing the notion of female identities in continuous construction, able to reassess their discursive positions and to adopt new roles.

Dialectical confrontation with religious authority is the third stance exhibited by female characters in the novel. Represented by the complementary discourses of Angelica and Ideala, this position aims to refute religious unarguable principles. Angelica's discourse is most subversive in her rebuttals of Catholic dogmatism, her secular analyses of sacred texts, or in her triumphant disclosure of religious tactics to keep subjects under surveillance. Ideala, with her attacks on institutionalised religion and its repressive power, becomes the mouthpiece of one of the novel's ideological projects as she points out the liability of masculine religious discourse for women's disabilities and most society's evils. The discourse of this feminist character denaturalises the notion of proper Victorian femininity as it reveals the double standard of morality and the orchestrated gender imbalance that dictates woman's self-effacement and submissiveness to man's will. Embedded in Ideala's critique of religion as an obsolete system of power which is losing its persuasive capacity over individuals is the anticipation of a new order of things from which religion is not absent but, rather, reformulated. Thus, while an adolescent Angelica strives to locate herself outside religious discourse through dissention, ironic detachment and effective deactivation of religious dogmatism, her discursive trajectory in the novel is not a straight line into secularism — as her fluctuating positions of heretic irreverence and reverential belief in the power of love and goodness reveal. Fantasising with a new moral law enforced by virtuous women, Angelica is metamorphosed in her dreams into a heroic woman saviour who will come in order to prevent (female) suffering. Hence, the irreligious pose of female anti-clericalism is rewritten in Grand's novel into woman's new pastoral mission: the conversion of man into women's superior moral qualities.

In the last section of this final chapter I have provided an analysis of Evadne Frayling as the character who rhetorically instantiates the New Woman in Grand's novel. I have focused, in particular, on the ways in which the feminist protagonist addresses the problems that

originate in discourse as she struggles to establish her own language of authority. Drawing on Foucault's understanding of knowledge (*savoir*), I have tried to identify the concepts manipulated and the strategies employed by Evadne's discursive practice. The forging of the female protagonist is thus inflected with a number of linguistic poses which come to characterise the novel's new woman, especially as they become established discursive strategies which define the interaction with other discourses:

(1) *A zeal for knowledge* and clandestine, extensive reading are instrumental in opening the discussion on the rightful educational goals for young women. Evadne's trespassing against normative readings enables her both to speak and write knowledgeably while it provides her with a unique perspective to interpret narrative events as well as the ideologies sustained by other discourses in the novel.

(2) *A reverence for verbal accuracy*. Instilled in the young protagonist by her father, Grand construes a morally-inflected paternal discourse aimed at setting the boundaries of proper feminine utterances as the main origin and source of Evadne's intellectual misdoings. Because the conservative discourse of the father paradoxically encourages Evadne's rational thinking to run free, *The Heavenly Twins* suggests that misogyny backfires as specifically resistant-to-change discourses are shown to contain the possibility of discourses of resistance or "reverse discourses", in Chris Weedon's terms. I have contended that Evadne's positioning within discourse requires the deployment of a double strategy: the exhibition of apparent conformity and the effectual withholding of belief.

(3) *A resistant reading of fictional works* is developed by young Evadne together with a habit of writing her most audacious opinions. Such discursive skills are shown to enable the emerging new woman to move beyond dominant cultural clichés on women's inferiority in order to challenge them. Both fictional and non-fictional works are posed as effective realms in which the reasons for the subordination of women might be explored and carefully analysed. The heroine's analytical reading becomes a metafictional device in Grand's novel, which draws attention to the fact that the new woman's discourse is nourished by fiction as well as by fact. The text might in this sense be appealing to readers to follow Evadne's example and, likewise, extrapolate a feminist agenda from narrative content. The notion of a female reader / subject in the process of becoming is central in the novel's first book as well as the idea of an identity which is unstable and always subject to change.

(4) *Interrogation and cross-examination of the system of belief* buttressed by conservative discourses on woman which persist in maintaining her disabilities in matters of education. This linguistic procedure is aimed at keeping under check the gender biases and the double standard of morality made visible in Mr. Frayling's speech. Evadne's concern with the chiselling of her discursive procedures shows not only the text's focus on speech as power but also her conscious exploitation of the possibilities opened by conservative discourse in her aim to appropriate for herself a new discursive space, a different subject position.

(5) *An interest in the acquisition of new, precise lexicon*. The text shows the public dimension of the new woman's construction of a speech of authority by making visible that Evadne is learning with a purpose. Knowledge is the key that shall open the doors of the public sphere. Social action rather than female passivity is inevitably encouraged by the acquaintance with facts, truths and by the familiarity with different areas of study.

(6) I have argued that Evadne's earliest discursive pose with regard to the way in which she confronts the doctrine of the woman's proper sphere resembles that of *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding"), adopted by Saint Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century. Evadne's effort to understand rationally the dogmas on women's ineptitude passed by her father enables her to withhold assent to sanctioned knowledge, which

progressively distances her from a position of submissiveness and passivity. Grand's text shows that the young woman's withholding of assent is essential in the legitimisation of her own inner voice as well as in the insertion of her own discourse in the socio-political arena. I have tried to demonstrate that Evadne's rationally detached elucidation of her father's lectures temporarily cancels out the intended consequences that motivated his conservative rhetoric on woman in the first place, which is an indication of the extent to which Mr. Fraylings perlocutionary speech acts fail.

(7) *A constituent failure of the young female individual to validate recognition in the ideological interpellation as an inferior being* the dominant discourse on woman is trying to perform. The forging of Evadne as a female subject in language shows that her concerns are first rhetorical but, ultimately and quite inevitably, political too. The novel shows the possibility of avoiding recruitment into the demeaning subject positions available for women while it registers the scientific approach adopted by Evadne in her search for truths: lack of prejudice, questioning and inquiry into the actual origin of misogynistic discourse, extensive reading and arrival at unforeseen conclusions. The dismantling of her father's discourse as an instance of hate speech against women allows the protagonist to understand that social positions occupied by women subjects are not static and that there is a reason for the hierarchical relation of subordination of women to men.

(8) *A stance of silence*. Deploying the strategic ability of saying little is one of Evadne's fortes most clearly emphasised throughout the novel. Whilst the burst of rebellious speech is a token of the new woman's awakening, her tactics of linguistic reserve is shown to counterbalance Evadne's gift of language. I have argued that a narrative mechanism of parallel silences also works as a backbone in the organization and development of the plot since the matter upon which the competing discourses on woman's education remain silent is going to precipitate the tragic events narrated.

The new woman's strategic rationing of linguistic utterances, with its tidal movement of ebb and flow, has the effect of an intermitting discourse that gathers momentum precisely because of the silences that both interrupt it and precede it. The effects of conflating Evadne's self-imposed silence and celibacy reveal the extent to which the double privation of sex and language could undermine the legitimate aspirations of the new woman in Grand's fiction. The bleak (open) ending of Evadne Frayling's plot poses a contradiction to the feminist agenda of Grand's fiction but, in the last analysis, shows a failure that might be reversed by breaking the silence and lashing out the gift of language.

## CONCLUSIONS

Just as more comprehensive and inclusive studies of women's fiction are indispensable in the exhumation of neglected texts and the opening of lines of inquiry, it has been my concern in this dissertation to show that more in-depth, critical analyses of those texts are also crucial for the opportunity of new paths of research to occur. My own research project in this dissertation has been primarily addressed to the iconic New Woman fictions produced by Henry James, Olive Schreiner, George Egerton and Sarah Grand in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. I have first and foremost focused on the literary aspect of texts which, I felt, have not been sufficiently examined in terms of the aesthetic and discursive configuration of late Victorian female subjectivity. The analytic tools which I have found most useful to tackle such broad a goal have been diverse and eclectic throughout this project as each text seemed to call for its own methodological lens. Partaking of a feminist revisionist endeavour, this thesis offers close readings of the work of four central figures in the genre in order "to reclaim New Woman fiction from the Woolfian category of moralistic, stuffy, sensually repressive and intellectually regressive Victorianism which continues to haunt modern criticism." (Heilmann, 2004: 2-3)

By providing a digest of the most relevant studies on the New Woman genre over the last five decades I have given evidence of the animated discussions that continue to both enliven and enlarge the scope of analysis on the topic. Engaging in the discussion on the precise origin in time of the phrase "New Woman" I have managed to locate at least two earlier occurrences of such a term, italicised and in the lower case, in the nineteenth-century Spanish realist novel — Eduardo López Bago's *La prostituta* (1884) and Emilia Pardo Bazán's *Una cristiana – La prueba* (1890-1891) — a finding which, not only resituates the appearance of the fictional subject at least ten years earlier than general scholarly opinion has it, but also invites further cross-cultural and transnational investigation into the *mujer nueva*.

The in-depth, textual examination of each of the four publishing successes that constitute the selected corpus of this dissertation — Henry James's *Daisy Miller* (1878), Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), George Egerton's *Keynotes & Discords* (1893-1894) and Sara Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) — has determined the need of both specific and more general methodological approaches. Some major premises on aesthetics and discourse analysis have informed this project. Rita Kranidis's studies on Victorian and feminist aesthetic ideologies in her *Subversive Discourse* (1995) have been very useful in the understanding of defiance and non-conformity as decisive aesthetic stances in the oppositional literature produced by women writers. Post-structuralist considerations on language as an unequalled site for the construction of meaning and gendered subjectivity (Weedon, 1987; Barret, 1986) triggered my research interest in the discourses produced by the New Woman heroines as they were built into the literary fabric of these late Victorian narratives. Judith Baxter's practical guide to feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis (*Positioning Gender in Discourse*, 2003) and Judith Butler's notion of the *performative* self (Butler, 1990) have equally been instrumental in my tackling of language production and the circulation of discourses in the corpus.

In my general aim to examine the aesthetic ideologies and discursive practices imbricated in the construction of the New Woman heroines under scrutiny in this dissertation I have

addressed the complex question of applying a feminist, post-structuralist methodological lens to a series of narratives which were deeply engaged in the essentialising project of producing female subjectivities. I have shown that such narratives both exploited and problematised the notion of an autonomous female / feminist self in the forging while producing kaleidoscopic images of alluring females conveniently stylised to dispel the fears instilled by the hideous modern woman fabricated by the conservative press. I have initiated my investigation of the New Woman's aesthetics and discourse by establishing an analogy between the late-Victorian modern woman's liminality and postmodern transgender identity by means of the trope of "the monster that speaks" (Preciado, 2020), which I have found present in all the narratives analysed in this doctoral thesis.

In Chapter 2, I have argued that despite the apparently frivolous canvas of the American girl abroad, Henry James constructs a heroine who deploys a firm resistance to the conservative discourses on woman that circulate within his *nouvelle*. Her characterisation, as I have claimed, is in keeping with that of the Bakhtinian fool, for her carnivalized configuration leads to the suspension of social discipline and the effective deactivation of coercive forces in the story. I have regarded Daisy Miller as a kaleidoscopic identity, a composite creation whose inadvertence and concurrent boldness are instrumental in the effective resistances mediated by the character. The American girl's performative insubordination blurs gender borders, class hierarchies, and bursts into a resonant laughter as it is met with overall disapproval. However, Daisy Miller's destabilising, aloof non-conformity with the European custom is individualistic, in stark opposition to the resistances of the other heroines analysed in this dissertation who are loud in their collective appeal to those women situated on the other side of the written pages. Nonetheless, I have found that the capacity of the female fool to remain firm in her own difference is politically enabling in this Jamesian tale of female dissidence. Her sartorial excess and the dislocations produced by her dismantling of the love project yield the transformation of Daisy Miller from passive object of the male gaze into a potentially rebellious identity of autonomous female desire.

In James's story the problem of perception focuses on the deficiencies of a faulty masculinity which takes in vain to decipher the conundrum posed by Daisy's startling womanhood. Male failure and compulsory attempt to impose old categories on the new womanhood helps James predicate female identity as a contested site of alterity in which the possibility to conceive of innovative ways to interpret the art object resides. I have considered the male crisis of seeing as a perception trauma of which Frederick Winterbourne's endless taxonomies of women are a symptom. The presentation of Daisy Miller as simultaneously powerless — as she is at times posited as an impenetrable sign and mere bearer of meanings imposed from the outside — and powerful — for she triggers the dislocation of dominant discourses on the maladjusted woman as they try to negotiate those meanings which no longer seem to fit — conveys an understanding of power as something which is fluctuating within discourse. By drawing attention to the inadequacies of obsolete conceptions of women, I have claimed that the arbitrariness of the culture-specific process of signification is revealed. The opportunity emerges therein for the American new woman to define herself in her own terms. In showing the ultimate inadequacy of the masculine, dualistic mind prone to rely on binary oppositions to make sense of woman, I have argued that James's story predicates man's perceptive trauma as a symptom of his lack of a Wildean temperament of receptivity. His failure to appreciate the challenges involved by a kaleidoscopic female identity is the measure of a rigid imagination which precludes the acknowledgement of beauty in that which has never been.

Daisy Miller's inflection of the *vox Americana* is a distinctive feature of her difference, as I have intended to show in my analysis. Her joyful personal accent, her language of

nonconformity, is explained as both cause and effect of her performative self. The occasional pungency of her humorous remarks, the rejection of formulaic feminine responses in linguistic interactions, her unpredictability and constant improvisation, all point toward an affirmation of her dissension. Ultimately, the Jamesian heroine's insurgent speech pursues the naturalisation of linguistic intercourse between men and women. In this sense, the deployment of humour in confrontation with monolithic discourses in the story is of the essence. In her constant pursuit of fun, Daisy's jocularity becomes transgressive as it effects a rupture of social expectations and all gendered logic. I have also tried to present the heroine's double resolution to have a public presence and an audible voice distinct from womanly convention, as instances of her disruptive excess, which Luce Irigaray has identified with the voice of gender itself. Daisy's identity is effectively construed as a verbal expression of her female desire. She is, so to speak, constituted in her language of revolt. In a reversal of Echo's speech problems, Daisy's determination to articulate her female urges and initiate the conversation constitute James's proposal of a female identity incarnated in her own language of self-affirmation. Similarly, the refusal to acknowledge authority — a recognisable trait of American women's speech, according to Henry James — is traceable in his construction of Daisy Miller. Her adamant rejection to be identified with other females in the story is a proclamation of independence, and her lack of fear and discursive bravery a major distinctive feature of the modern American woman — "her one great sign," in James's own words. Thus, an alternative interpretation of the story's tragic denouement is offered as an affirmation of the protagonist's legitimate pursuit of personal freedom, an outright rejection to be assimilated into prescriptive female conduct. Daisy's final death as an irreducible icon of autonomous behaviour discards all tragic notes of martyrdom as she remains, in Henry James's own words, "the woman in the world who is least afraid." (James, 1906, 1907: 59)

In Chapter 3, I have shown that one of the most important issues discussed in Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) is the large notion of progress through conflict, and how opposing discourses on gender, class and race both clashed against and fuelled the interests of the new imperialism. This dissertation offers an analysis of some of the contradictions that emerge from the dialogue established between the feminist agenda developed by Lyndall, the novel's protagonist, and the ideas Schreiner held in her most influential essays — *The South African Question* (1899) and *Woman and Labor* (1911). The textual relevance of the aesthetic construction of its heroine is revealed in the dialectical relationship established between her visual representation and her discursive practices. Drawing on aesthetic concepts of *eurythmia* and *kalokagathia*, as well as on the Foucauldian notion of fetishism and deviation, several narrative implications of the new heroine's magnificent physique are worthy of consideration.

*The Story of an African Farm* inaugurates not only a new genre, the New Woman novel, but also Olive Schreiner's new method of representation, which she referred to as "the method of the life we all lead", characterised by a lack of certainties and the rupture with the traditional expectations of the English realist *Bildungsroman*. I have drawn attention to the relationship between the novel's new realist form and the new political content it advances. Infused with John Stuart Mill's conception of qualitative value, the renunciation of the satisfactions guaranteed by well-established literary conventions is instrumental in the forging of a new, more troubling, intellectual space where political change may be possible, though deferred. The possibility of an accurate representation of "the real," in the artist's pursuit of Truth, is predicated on the reader's willingness to suspend all certitude and remain somehow dissatisfied, with a certain sense of incompleteness or frustration.

In order to produce an aesthetic analysis of Schreiner's feminist protagonist, I have established an analogy between the challenge posed in the preface against conventional realism and the idea of a normative female body, which is equally questioned by the New Woman. In this pioneer feminist fiction the beautiful feminine body is a continuous source of political insights. The material body is the canvas onto which the political discourse is developed by the protagonist. The aesthetic conceptualisation of the new woman's physique in terms of the eternal feminine — with the recurrent images of Lyndall as a sleeping beauty and of her dainty little limbs — is instrumental in the textual promotion of the feminist pioneer, which proves to be problematic on two different levels as her beauty is defined in stark opposition with other female bodies, variously construed as either grotesque or racially inferior, and a diegetic tension is created between her perfect Victorian beauty and the protagonist's resistance to being reduced to an object of contemplation.

Drawing on Foucault, I have interpreted Lyndall's fetishised body as a deviation whereby its apparent meaning — semiotically charged with the connotations of an angel in the house — clashes against the process of identity formation of the heroine as a feminist rebel. I have argued that Lyndall's eurythmic portrait produces a dislocation of the hegemonic aesthetic prejudice against advanced women, mostly circulated by the conservative press, by ascribing monstrosity away from the feminist woman onto the discursively regressive female characters in *African Farm*. Such a narrative strategy raises important questions on the complex intersection of discourses on race, class and gender in Schreiner's novel.

The novel mobilises the sleeping beauty myth as an occasion for the protagonist to disrupt conventional expectations on the love plot. As it occurs in George Egerton's short stories, sleeping is presented as a self-induced evasion from woman's oppression. Metaphorically cancelling all questioning, sleeping is construed as a mechanism of avoidance which enables the feminist dream in which a utopia of political change is envisioned for womanhood. Thus, I have argued that the aesthetic abstraction of Lyndall's fetishised body and the mythopoeic construction of the heroine as a sleeping beauty provide the narrative means to propose the feminist dream as a "precondition of political action," in Christa Knellwolf's phrase. Disrupting the rationale of Perrault's fairy tale, the new heroine conceives of the dream as a temporary salvation from oppression, a strategic evasion which shall be re-enacted by the Egertonian heroines in *Keynotes* and *Discords* in the 1890s.

One of the most politically enabling realisations of *African Farm*'s new heroine, directly springing from her own aesthetic conceptualisation, is the anti-essentialist maxim that gender is constructed, that femininity is performed. Lyndall's reflections before the looking glass unleash a discourse on power, gender and identity saturated with references to work and knowledge as the only means to liberate women from their shackles. Ultimately, woman must fight for herself. Still an adolescent heroine, Schreiner's protagonist interweaves knowledge, wealth and fancy dress in a fantasy of female power which makes compatible her yearnings for jewellery and sartorial excess with her demand for greater access to work and educational opportunities.

The ambitions of the new heroine, checked by her disappointing educational experience abroad, furnish the protagonist with a new opportunity to address major mechanisms embedded within the dominant gender ideology. Tropes such as the looking glass or Lyndall's oversize diamond ring are strategically exploited in order to interfere in the patriarchal symbolic order by assaulting some of its foundational premises. The dismantling of such premises involves a triple resistance mounted via (a) a discourse against marriage as parasitism in an effort to discriminate the dignified posture of the new woman against the prostitute, (b) an attack on the pedestal theory as a cultural fallacy which keeps women in an artificial position of superiority

so as to prevent them from a real access to power, and (c) a disclosure of the fact that the idealisation of women is inextricably linked to the male aversion of becoming one. *African Farm* suggests gender exchange as the ultimate ontological venture.

The discursive analysis of the novel allows us to examine the construction of the feminist protagonist's subjectivity by examining the clashes between antagonistic discourses in *African Farm*. The first part of the novel shows a mostly silent protagonist whilst the second part, coinciding with Lyndall's return from the English boarding school, is characterised by her political speeches and disquisitions on the woman question. Part I shows a new heroine modelling a discourse which is reactive against both feminine masochistic language and against the brutally oppressive speech of those adults who abuse their power at the farm.

The dialectical confrontation with stereotyped characters such as the Irish impostor, Bonaparte Blenkins, or the Boer woman, Tant' Sannie, is instrumental in the configuration of her linguistic stance as a New Woman. The moral and intellectual construction of Schreiner's protagonist as a powerful and, almost infallible, rational subject contributes to the perception of Lyndall as an allegorical character with a mission to accomplish in the novel. In his double role of instructor and religious leader, Blenkins represents coercion as a means to exert control over the farm. His unimaginative discourse, his inability to engage in real communication and his dismissal of language help vertebrate the new heroine's reaction to lying, to non-factuality, her immunity to coercion, as well as her indefatigable search for truth. In order to support the New Woman's standpoint, Schreiner's novel shows the vulnerability of certain human groups in cross-cultural environments when they are not equipped with the necessary linguistic tools to question the imposing other. Language is a continuous source of conflict for Tant' Sannie, whose defective understanding is as idiosyncratic as her adherence to prevalent opinions. Violence, superstition, and irrational prejudice are trademarks of the Dutch woman's linguistic utterances whose access to other discourses is always mediated by poor translations performed by the Hottentot maid. *African Farm* presents certain female characters — the Boer woman, the Hottentot maid and the Kaffir servants — as incapable of true introspection and reproducing — in their brutal speech or in their satisfaction to see violence exerted against others — the oppression exerted against the colonised. Schreiner's novel thus identified the New Woman's speech with specific race and class coordinates, whiteness and Englishness, which constitutes a problematic aspect to deal with from the point of view of feminist criticism.

Lyndall's discourse, in this light, emerges as a beacon of rationality in the farm. An advocate of J. S. Mill's "free discussion," she engages in rational conversation with Waldo, her male alter-ego in the novel. These are, summarised, the most relevant stances adopted by the new heroine: a) a rejection of coarse language as a token of her intolerance towards the tyrannical practices in the farm, b) perseverance and active resistance as a female individual to adopt the discursive role of victim, c) a debarment of mortification and self-denial as valid linguistic stances as they justify patriarchy in its misconceived authority against women, d) a pragmatic search for effectiveness, e) a predilection for free discussion, whose main elements are revealed in the debating society created by Lyndall and Waldo — which adumbrate the reflections in the proem to Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, to wit: provocative interrogations, dissections of arguments and diverse sides of an issue, careful examination and contrast with antagonistic discourses and a zeal for analytic acuteness in the exposition; f) a yearning for certainties, g) the enforcement of a secularised vision of society as a result of an irretrievable loss of faith; the new heroine is a religious dissident, h) an assumption of responsibility for our actions, our dreams and our own disabilities as human beings, i) a belief in the possibility of change and revolution grounded in g) and h) above.

I have connected the new heroine's dismantling of the naturalisation of women's disabilities and their alleged consent to their domination with J. S. Mill's notion of "fatality of birth," — which excluded women from the education and the professions open to them — and the post-structuralist, feminist focus on the access to knowledge as a key political issue. Lyndall's speech is overtly political; it is replete with loquacious examples and counterexamples, with daring speculations and challenges of conventional discursive positions aimed at maintaining women in their subordinate roles. *African Farm* shows that the New Woman is conformed through language, through the constant revision and rethinking of hegemonic discourses and through her struggle against inertia and homogenisation. By proposing language as the most effective site of political change, the novel manages to design a heroine with a multilayered identity. Aesthetically inflected as a beautiful bourgeois woman ("angel in the house") and discursively qualified as a pioneer feminist ("platform speaker"), the rhetorical portrait of the new heroine is further problematised by her construction as a desiring subject ultimately doomed by sexual emotion ("fallen woman").

Following Patricia Murphy's studies on the subversion of temporality in Schreiner's fiction, I have claimed that the novel's iconoclastic narrative structure is in keeping with its ideological project to undo univocal gender roles and the traditional separate spheres. Schreiner's narrative fosters the notion of uncertainty as a vehicle to expand gender semiotics and the hermeneutic possibilities of the New Woman in the colonies.

In the final section I have addressed the debate on marriage in *African Farm*, particularly as it occupies a prominent space in the heroine's discourse and in *Woman and Labor*. The following are the most significant views and strategies advanced by Schreiner's emancipatory texts around this debate:

a) a decided rejection of the marriage career as a means to gain financial security. Such a conception of marriage is identified with woman's ultimate disempowerment, for it implies the utter subjection to man and the cumbersome prospects of motherhood

b) a new notion of partnership, based on an idealisation of the equality between the sexes, is produced in opposition to the debased notion of marriage held by other characters, notably the voracious Boer woman,

c) in its present state, the marriage institution is the epitome of female degradation,

d) an identification is made between marriage and woman's "legal prostitution" — a comparison already established by Daniel Defoe and Mary Wollstonecraft,

e) the figure of the legal prostitute represented by the immoral wife in Lyndall's discourse is conspicuously similar in her ambitions to Elizabeth Lynn Linton's "Girl of the Period", particularly as they exhibit an identical penchant for pleasure and idleness. By juxtaposing the ideas put forward by Wollstonecraft, Linton and Schreiner, I have tried to show the conflation of antagonistic discourses on womanhood in their struggle to take control of the processes of signification and make them suit their own political interests,

f) the parallel notions of prostitution and "female parasitism," inferred in Lyndall's diatribe against woman's role within wedlock, is present both in *African Farm* and in Schreiner's socio-political essay, *Woman and Labor* (1911). I have shown that the notions of illness, degeneration, and unfitness for the moral standard of the British race that the prostitute incarnated were problematically mobilised in both texts as instances of the New Woman writer's complicity with the imperial project and her resistance against the constrictions of gender roles imposed by the former,

g) by granting women access to the higher professions, they would cease to be financially dependent on men and modern civilization would recover the true value of half its body through

their useful labour. This is the political remedy that in Schreiner's rationale would both heal the sick modern females and restore the welfare of the nation,

h) the mobilisation of concepts such as "the mercenary wife" and "germinal inheritance" in the context of evolutionary and eugenic discourses allows the New Woman writer to utilise an essentially antifeminist argument — the importance attached to racial motherhood — to explain women's necessity to gain economic independence and access to a full education.

Lyndall's views on marriage in *African Farm* focus on several crucial aspects which are tentatively summarised as follows: A defence of celibacy, work and knowledge as liberating forces for womanhood, in an attempt to prevent women from taking up love as their profession; the master-slave relationship enacted in marriage is analysed in economic terms which transcend both race and class boundaries; explicit references to the symbolic force of ukulobolo — or marriage exchange as the effective means to transform women's work into male power — are instrumental in Lyndall's establishment of the economic basis of women's oppression. In an attempt to reverse the gendered logic of the master-slave relationship, Lyndall conceives of a marriage bond in which she can masquerade as female master; by marrying Gregory Rose (an impossible hero and a true woman), the New Woman may adopt the role of dominatrix and acquire a name. Addressing the possible dissolution of gender and class boundaries, Lyndall's fantasy implies that both hierarchy and gender roles can be effectively exchanged. The loss of women's power to restrain the unwelcome sexual gratification of men as obligatory sexual intercourse could be enforced on married women, as the new heroine warns. Lyndall's intimate conception of love in terms of complete submission to the object of devotion reveals a contradiction with her own discourse against woman's self-denial and with the union between equals of similar powers endorsed by most feminist advocates of the times. It is a harbinger of her self-destruction in the novel. I have argued that this flaw in Lyndall's portrait impedes the notion of a seamless New Woman of unbending commitments and that it is a token of her construction as a desiring subject who fluctuates between competing discourses on love.

Her determination to resist appropriation is adamant; by eschewing marriage Lyndall aims to claim her right to choose her own destiny, limited as her choices are as a single pregnant woman of scarce financial resources. She devises a sexual contract in the form of a free union whereby she can satisfy her sexual emotion and retain personal freedom. While the South African writer tried to promote a sound vision of female sexuality based on her spontaneous affection and financial independence, the confrontation of the new heroine's formula of the free union against Schreiner's conception reveals the punitive nature of non-marital love in Victorian times. It is easy to understand the allure of *African Farm*'s heroine. Her feminine transgressions represent a symbolic projection of collective anxieties during times of profound transformations, and her brave struggle to live her life freely served as an example of revolt and stamina in face of hardship.

In Chapter 4, I have examined George Egerton's *Keynotes* (1893) and *Discords* (1894), which show the complex interweaving of desire and identification processes at stake in the stories' production of female subjectivities. Psychoanalysis has devoted considerable efforts to the explorations of mind, body, language and their inner dependencies and I have accordingly drawn on some concepts advanced by theorists such as Freud, Lacan, Irigaray, Kristeva or Cixous to inform my analysis of the ways in which Egerton develops her notion of female identity.

The notion of identity is never treated as a steady position of individual stillness, but rather as an endless process that "neither begins nor ends at a point of total immobility, draws its very lifeblood from the restless operations of identification" and "can never be isolated from [. . .] the institutions of identification that work to produce them in the first place" (Fuss, 1992: 93).

The methodology implied in my analysis of George Egerton's heroines is thus infused with Lacanian psychoanalytic theory<sup>1</sup> in so far as I underscore the importance of specularity and the processes of identification through which these late Victorian female subjects are vertebrated. Liberally following Diana Fuss's post-structuralist studies on fashion photography, I will argue that the array of different images-categories presented to Egerton's new women function as a sort of "post-mirror phase" figures that charm those heroines through a cultural performance of "pre-mirror phase fantasies" which stand for an essential womanhood. The unflagging summons of a female primitivism in the stories, which is specifically constructed as prehistoric and untainted by civilisation provides the illusion of a pure past, and directs the heroine's gaze "solipsistically back to [her] own specular and fictive origins" (Fuss, 1992: 93).

Egerton's stories tend to construe the unstable category of woman within a large framework of complex identifications with more or less fixed groups such as the witch, the devil, the exotic dancer, the gypsy, conveniently hailed in order to suit and project the desired image of femaleness that constitutes the major ideological undertaking of these narratives. As Diana Fuss has explained, identity "draws its very lifeblood from the restless operations of identification, one of the most powerful but least understood mechanisms of cultural self-fashioning" (Fuss, 1992: 93).

These are problem narratives staging the drama of their heroines' grappling with the mysteries of femininity, bringing their natural instincts into conflict with established notions of authority, and inhabited by female somnambulists "bus[ying themselves] with questioning" (*Keynotes*: 21), interrogating their capacity to exert some power in that search for "what it is we [women] need to complete us" (*Discords*: 198, in Pyckett: 165).

Inscribed in the large projects to fight a generalised sense of female dissatisfaction and openly dispute traditional notions of morality, the first story in *Keynotes* begins to unfold a narrative strategy of specularity, which is instrumental in the heroine's attempt to pose arguably more daring and liberating images of womanhood.

The display of the intricate process of secondary identifications in the stories is inaugurated by a narcissistic recreation of a fragmented sensual body to be relished under the guise of the oriental dancer. In its explicit goal to procure a greater proximity with an invoked female primitiveness, the text constructs this specular image as a specific device for woman to re-establish that lost umbilical cord with "the inwardly seen". I have suggested in this context that the modernity of Egerton's fiction inheres in its reformulation of a Paterian, Wildean aesthetics, as it concedes woman complete responsibility over the creative and hermeneutic processes. The Egertonian heroine plays the part of creator, artistic object and exegete, a striking ownership which allows for her being *out of herself, watching herself*. In this late Victorian feminised poetics it corresponds to the privileged woman observer to do the telling as well as to incarnate myth. Egerton's fiction thus prompts a singular aesthetic reflection in which woman is hailed to engage in an ontological specular game for her own sake.

It has been my contention that in the creation of the heroine's eroticised image of the self there are a number of conflictive aspects which clash with the alleged purposes of the image itself. I have found that by her own stylisation as erotic dancer the heroine is producing a dream vision for the explicit consumption of an imaginary male audience, which is in turn challenged by her own narcissistic delectation, thus allowing for a homoerotic reading of the specular image. Further connections with "the exotic" and the *femme fatale* contribute to present a problematic vision of femininity, since these categories appear to be difficult sites from which an effective liberation of women may be carried out.

By dwelling on the cultural convention of the enigmatic woman, these *fin-de-siècle* narratives purport to exploit the construct of female inscrutability as an occasion to justify woman's privileged standpoint in the complex pursuit of the keys to the identity riddle.

The concurrent depiction of a masculine defective perception of the female sign and a feminine natural competence as its opposite, ultimately responds to a double aim: the deployment of a credible conception of gendered fiction on the one hand, and the revelation of woman's essence by means of a Paterian explosion of impressionistic detail on the other.

By drawing on notions of abundance and multiplicity which are central in the discourse of some twentieth-century French feminisms, I have sought to establish a correlation between the metaphor of female elusiveness mobilised throughout George Egerton's stories and the work of Luce Irigaray, while establishing the project of woman's proximity to herself as a pivotal design in the narratives.

I have also tried to show the problems encapsulated within the notion of enigma utilised by Egerton as it sustains a system of gender asymmetry that condemns woman to enjoy her privileged access to signification entirely by herself, frustrated by male ineptitude in the game of introspection, and gasping for the advent of a New Man.

One of the results of relying on the ubiquitous concept of "woman's essence" is the emergence of a conflict made apparent in the contradictory exploitation of that essence as both univocal and cohesive for all Egerton's heroines, and as a metaphor of blended qualities and hybrid characteristics at the same time. The construct of "hybridity" is alternatively invoked as convenient: either negatively, as a deformation of female truer impulses or, in a positive way, as an indication of woman's ability to retain a link to her uncivilised self.

I have explored a further twist of the woman's essence construct, which I have situated in the narrative device of female lying. By describing the adjustment of gender interests to the socio-political model in force, Egerton's heroines manage to claim the necessity of maintaining female deception, in which the equilibrium of the sexual contract, as it is presently conceived, is said to reside.

It is possible to trace in George Egerton's stories the idea of monotony as a gendered construct which deliberately offers a polarised formula of male tedious utterances and an unpredictable female language of sabotage.

The occurrence of multifarious female speeches in the narratives, with their flexibility to be broken down by sudden tunes, by remembered childhood melodies or by haunting gipsy legends, establishes a concept of language that eludes static definitions, in its permanent flight from convention. In this vein, the antagonism of conventional language enacted in the texts — by means of their careful reproduction of baby talk, the simulated maternal speech, or the various accents which are included as part of the characters' fashioning — may serve as an occasion to inscribe Egerton's linguistic alternatives within Julia Kristeva's logic of the semiotic discourse, as examples of effective resistance in the stories.

George Egerton's collection of short stories displays a series of metafictional devices and new narrative techniques which merit her characterisation as forerunner of the modern short story. By means of a pioneering use of these new fictional methods — the polyphonic array of narrative viewpoints, the frequent ellipses, the erasure of scene-settings, the eloquent compressions of event, the focus on fleeting moments of the mind and the development of complex psychological introspections — the stories in *Keynotes* and *Discords* manage to produce a breach of linearity, epitomised by the physical visibility of asteriks and the liberal use of the staff at the beginning of some tales.

The incursions of these modern stories into the realm of disorder is evidenced in the portrayals of heroines who abide at the borders of fiction and fact, and feel at ease dwelling in

that grey domain of permanently blurring contours. The dream vision produces in turn the new narrative method of “the inwardly seen” also present in Ibsen’s influential texts, which in Egerton’s stories describes a tidal movement that Hélène Cixous has characterised as prototypically feminine.

I have also explained the stories’ attention to detail as an instance of George Egerton’s valorisation and complicity with a hegemonic gendered discourse on woman’s fiction made manifest in its collusion with established notions of feminine realism in the nineteenth century.

Finally, I have attempted to inscribe George Egerton’s aim to write *as* and *for* woman as an early exercise of *écriture féminine* which entailed the adoption of a singular narrative style stimulated by the following devices: (a) A reassessment of the feminine as a topos of value from which to capacitate woman with a language of her own, an effective instrument for change. (b) The development of a problematic discourse on essence which is nevertheless instrumental in the deployment of Egerton’s transformational fictions. (c) The fostering of women’s expression and exploitation of their own sexuality as a rightful endeavour, thus sparking the debate on women’s sexuality as power, which still remains a hot-button feminist issue nowadays. (d) The construction of a female discourse on pleasure in explicitly physical terms, which triggers a narrative parallelism between woman’s yearning for self-fulfilment and her desire for illicit gratifications. (e) Finally, the intertwining of the erotic and the musical is also put at the service of feminine writing; the studied effect of Egerton’s musical texts echoes the song of woman as she is liberated from monotony into an ecstasy of endless stimulation.

An analysis of the dreams of evasion of the Egertonian heroine reveals them as a landmark device in the construction of female identity. Escapism into fantasised otherness momentarily quenches the ambition for new domains to inhabit. Woman is shown refashioning herself at will, moving inside and outside the real and creating dynamic images in constant change in which identity is fixed for a brief moment, only to dive again into the endless whirlpool of selfhood. I have tried to demonstrate that the aesthetic contemplation of nature is construed in these stories as a narrative element which triggers those moments of retreat and estrangement from an alienating domesticity, and I have accordingly characterised them as centrifugal narratives depicting woman’s strife and incessant transformation in order to account for the Heraclitean vision I have found ingrained in George Egerton’s literary treatment of female identity.

The stories in *Keynotes* and *Discords* contravene hegemonic discourses on woman by showing inconstancy in love and a penchant for extramarital relationships as consistent feminine moves. Although the experience of motherhood is at times brought up as woman’s best resolution, her claim of permanent discontentment pervades most of the stories. Although there are protagonists who manage to flee away from abusive husbands or enslaving adulterous relationships, satisfaction of female deep yearnings is inevitably deferred. Liberation lies ahead as these fictions stimulate utopias of self-fulfilment, but only in an unknown time yet to come.

These fictions mobilise powerful images of evasion which show a double identification of the Egertonian heroine with both human and non-human entities. Navigating the tempestuous seas of the inner self, these female protagonists are ubiquitously drawn towards nature, the outdoors, to moonlight and to the sea, and in their fascination for the natural element they variously identify with gipsies, oriental dancers, witches and vagabonds. The continuous projection of such identifications produces a dynamic, multilayered notion of female identity which is constantly in the process of becoming, constantly in flux. I have analysed these tropes as a token of the spiritual nomadism of the Egertonian heroine, for her fascination for the itinerancy of the gypsy is both physical and ontological. These are “nomadic subjects” (Braidotti, 2011), fantasising with an unfettered utopian self, suggesting at times a controversial

dissolution of borders between woman and nature. Egerton's notion of the female self may rightfully be branded essentialist and, while her stories perpetuate the dualisms man / culture and woman / nature — which from a(n) (eco)feminist point of view need to be challenged — they successfully exploit such metaphors of continuity as platforms from which to envision an empowered womanhood.

Despite George Egerton's claim that she was no feminist, her writings are imbued with such a liberational aim that her fiction is inevitably registered within the history of literary feminisms. I have sought to delineate in the preceding pages the impetus of Egerton's feminism as it emerges in particularly contradictory or combative aspects summarised as follows.

The projection of an empowered view of femininity constitutes a major purpose of these late Victorian narratives, which instil women with a sense of enabling talents that they are encouraged to use at all costs.

The contradiction embedded in the heroine's presentation of feeling pervades Egerton's narratives. Thus, while woman's natural talents are first predicated on her privileged proximity to the domain of sensitivity, her "affectability," this fundamental want to either give or receive affection is invoked by male and female characters in the stories as the major obstacle in the development of women's potential. In this sense, these enigmatic females draw our attention towards the problems issuing from the inhibitions set upon woman's autonomy and self-fulfilment by the socio-political apparatus.

The notion of female bonding through the shared experience of women's great yearning is somewhat mobilised as a revolutionary construct that threatens to dilute age and class boundaries. The idea is introduced that women's permanent desire and protest against monotony may in fact find its parallelism in their need to see their scope of influence enlarged.

Finally, by paying special attention to several occurrences of alternative marital arrangements in the stories I have also tried to reveal the challenges posed by some heroines to hegemonic discourses on marriage. Thus, established notions such as the gendered distribution of labour or the complementarity of the sexes are effectively challenged in the stories. Harsh judgements are also passed with regard to the marriage institution, which is oftentimes invoked as both a source of tedium for Egerton's bewitching heroines, and as an emblem of an insufferable bondage. Ultimately, the portrait of carefree adulteresses conveys a sense that extramarital relationships were no antidote for the pervading monotony of the heterosexual contract.

I have chosen to close my discussion by focusing on the story entitled "A Regeneration of Two" in *Discords*, which best shows that transformation is possible for woman. A physical and spiritual metamorphosis is enacted by the Egertonian heroine, able to change an idle life into a fulfilling project of cross-class, cross-race female solidarity. Through the creation of a "colony of sinners," a colony of sisters, Egerton's New Woman sets up an outpost of progress and hoists the flag of a new religion of female liberation and female bonding. Emancipating herself from the cult of the body, the Egertonian heroine eventually "depropriates unselfishly," transcends her narcissism and engages in feminist and political pursuits.

In Chapter 5, with regard to Sarah Grand's novel, I have drawn attention to the dominant presence of the bell's chime in the allegorical proem to *The Heavenly Twins*, from where it expands onto the rest of the novel, as a major trope which reverberates over both narrative space and time. The relevance of the tolling accompanied by the suggestive lyrics of its Mendelssohnian dictum: "He watch-ing o-ver Is-ra-el, slumbers not, nor sleeps" has been surprisingly absent from most critical studies of the novel despite its pivotal function, as I would like to suggest, in the interpretation of subsequent narrative events. Depicting a symptomatic landscape of equally flawed subjectivities the proem and the literary construct of the chime

introduce and highlight an aesthetic reflection later on echoed by Grand's narrative strategies: the elusiveness of the object and the futile quest for its apprehension.

It is possible to trace Grand's debt to a Burkean aesthetics by focusing on a double enquiry established in the proem whereby (a) there is a shift of emphasis away from the qualities of the aesthetic object per se onto the perceiving subject and (b) an effective phenomenological construction of the chime is advanced as an inconsistently awe-inspiring, violence-ridden trope, a repository of patriarchal values, a metaphor of *the sublime*.

When approaching the image of the chime in terms of its effects upon the perceivers the novel's preamble highlights a diversity of subjectivities and discourses in conflict, in particular with regard to the metaphysical immutability of the tolling metaphor. Therefore, several functions may be ascribed to the proem: (a) it initiates the parable the novel effectively constitutes by sketching its setting, (b) it sets the mood for the stories to come and (c) by means of the epistemological debates that animate the society of Morningquest on the exact nature and qualities of the chime, it creates an opportunity for a conflation of images of horror, religion, patriarchy and violence that will consistently resonate in Grand's novel.

The contention between fact and opinion reflects a declining society misgoverned by religion and positivism approaching a time of crisis as it is no longer able to ascertain truths. Relativism, controversy, dispute and wrangle are, accordingly, discursive anxieties found amongst the most relevant themes interwoven in the narrator's exegesis. Such discursive unrest occasions the narrator's analysis of two basic strategies deployed within religious discourse: (1) the constant reiteration of an idea effects its implantation as a truth into the mind of the believing subject where it adopts the form of an a priori, an always already, (2) the separation between the undisputable object of belief and its debatable forms or expressions. By eschewing controversy over its object of reverence (which is hailed as sacred) any debate over its truth is effectively cancelled out. Comforting, formulaic responses to the chime are examples of this effectiveness.

There are four different responses typified in the proem with regard to the diverse experiential relations established between the citizens / observers and what they discern in the chime. Narrative focus on this issue allows the narrator in the proem to engage in a classification of the people of Morningquest alongside parameters taken directly from evolutionary discourse. The citizens are shown to belong, in ascending order within an evolutionary scale, to four groupings characterised by their different responses to the chime : (1) (fanaticism) the most primitive response interprets divinity as essentially masculine and establishes a relation of mindless subjection to the observed, (2) (moderate estrangement) the second interpretation comes from more evolved individuals and shows greater discernment in their observation of a still overtly masculinised god, (3) (opportunism) the third response implies an appropriation of the observed object, once again, in exclusively male terms while it exerts a self-interested manipulation of the deity through the mechanism of the fetish in order to maintain male economic and moral dominance. Sarah Grand herself gave visibility to this third response from her periodical writings as an instance to argue for the feminisation of society and the conversion of man into woman's alleged superior moral qualities.

The fourth response to the chime, (4) (summons to conversion), emerges as a threat to male supremacy. This new interpretation aspires to rescue the collective voice of humanity and the coalition of male and female principles as creating force. Its concern is political since the prosperity of the nation is at stake. The proem heralds the arrival of a new prophet who will bring a yet untried ethical standard, one which demands equal moral responsibility for both sexes, a guarantor of human progress and social evolution. The more highly evolved, this fourth grouping is posed as an antidote against social regression, a promise of both personal and

collective welfare. Characterised by its hyperaesthesia, this group of individuals shows an exceptional capacity to perceive and to apprehend meaning manifested in their silent response to the chime and in their own penchant for music. Such unusual talent is associated with the central female characters in the novel and it poses a conflict with the idea of gender equality promoted by the fourth interpretation of the chime. Grand's bias in favour of female superior qualities ultimately reinforces gender difference as it justifies the re-appropriation of the religious symbolic order in explicitly female terms. Conversion of the fetishised male god into female superior morals was an admitted goal for Sarah Grand in her periodical writings. The new woman becomes in this light the new prophet who has come to Morningquest in order to facilitate that conversion from old-fashioned Victorian religiosity to the new order of gender equality in terms of equal moral and social responsibilities for both sexes.

I have also explored some of the narrative strategies deployed in the novel as a means to reproduce the major aesthetic reflections set in motion by the trope of the chime in the poem. I have argued that the novel's ultimate attempt to change the world was deliberately pursued both in narrative content and form, with its discussion of displeasing subject matter, its breakdown of traditional narrative structure and the disconnected, meandering style exhibited in the story-telling process. The fact that contemporary reviewers of Grand's book inseparably addressed their criticism to substance and structure reveals that their anxieties were equally fuelled by both.

There are three narrative devices which stand out in the construction of the novel: an incessant retelling of the same occurrences, the recurrent use of analepsis, and constant changes in point of view. The narrative method which involves an almost incessant reiteration of the events narrated, self-questioning and symptomatic interrogation responds to the characters' necessity to understand and define favourite objects of scrutiny, notably Evadne and the Tenor. By featuring mothers who are unable to understand the true nature of their offspring or characters who admit their inability to even know themselves, Grand's text overlaps different narrative levels as her characters engage in the incessant retelling of the same story, ultimately underscoring the fragility and fragmentariness of human perception as well as the precariousness of the telling process itself. Divergences of opinion, misreadings of events or defective interpretations contribute to highlight the failure of speech and the deficiencies of narration as they are the inevitable consequence of the elusiveness of the object and symptoms of the futile quest for its apprehension, which the chime symbolised in the poem. There is a great deal of flashback, recollection and backward reconstruction of events. Analepsis is, accordingly, the narrative device chosen to account for most puzzling occurrences in the novel, though always to emphasise the instability of truths, as the Tenor laments in his equivocal maxim: 'anything is probable where the most uncertainty prevails' (407).

The conflict between fact and opinion, between truth and prejudice buttressed by the inertia of habit is further stressed on those occasions when certain characters fail to acknowledge actuality even in presence of irrefutable evidence, as the Clarenses' micro-narrative illustrates. The use of different points of view reminds us of the Burkean aesthetics depicted in the poem with its emphasis on the effects the occurrences narrated have on the perceiving subjects as story tellers rather than on the occurrences themselves. In the case of Angelica, her compulsive retelling of the interlude with the Tenor and her constant appropriation of new perspectives, including a masquerade as the opposite sex, show her ability to change subject positions and even gender identities. The overlapping of these narrative strategies generates several discursive levels that range from classic omniscience to the inclusion of unreliable, homodiegetic narrators with defective memories, as it occurs in the novel's last book. That sudden desertion of omniscience is yet another reminder of the lack of absolute, doctrinal truths

and a final invitation for the reader to break the silence and fill in the gaps of the narrated events. It is Grand's summons to reflect, ponder and think about Evadne's destiny and the possibilities of change.

I have tried to demonstrate that religion is a pivotal topic in *The Heavenly Twins*, one which is surprisingly absent from most critical analyses of Grand's fiction. The authoritative rhetoric of religion is overwhelmingly present and it provides a lens to examine the ways in which female characters are construed in discourse. I have found that the shifting positions they tend to occupy with regard to the established religious discourse may be classified as: (a) heedless submission, (b) purposeful complicity and (c) dialectical confrontation. These positions are by no means stable as a close examination of the discursive development of female characters reveals.

Edith Beale, an emblem of the Rousseauian ideal of womanhood, best incarnates the first position of heedless submission to religious authority. The innocence of the bishop's daughter is predicated on her perfect docility, in which the instinctive suspension of all thought and the belief in a protective, benignant, masculinised god are tokens of her belonging to the least evolved group of citizens identified in the poem with a fanatic response to the chime. The construction of this female character as a compliant female subject is entirely dependent on her religious fervour — which conflates the categories of God, master and husband — and on her misconception of woman's mission as involving the reformation of man's degraded morals through love and endurance. Once her husband infects her with syphilis and Edith witnesses the effects of the illness on her own child she radically shifts positions and directs her rage towards religious discourse. Edith's transformation is physical, moral and discursive. Going insane she gains consciousness and addresses her indictments to masculine power and to the cooperation of religious, medical and marital discourses to gain control of women subjects. Thus exposing the fallacy of the Rousseauian rationale according to which a woman's self-preservation was guaranteed by her subjection to religious authority, she shifts her stance towards religious indoctrination from heedless submission to enraged confrontation. The denouement of Edith's plot not only challenges the argument of women's cognitive impairment, which was held to be at the root of their subjection, but, most importantly, is Grand's reminder of the possibility of real change, of moving beyond the discursive limits imposed by patriarchy.

The second position adopted by most mature women in the novel is one of purposeful complicity with religious discourse, and it is best epitomised by Mrs. Orton Beg. Characterised by an actively sought loss of consciousness and a willing suspension of all thought, this position of evasion results from an opportunistic surrender, a conformity with masculine religious discourse. Confronted with Evadne's indictment of older women's cooperation with male power in the maintenance of young girls' ignorance, Mrs. Orton Beg admits, adopting a confessional style, her responsibility, thus revealing a conscious construction of the self as a both compliant and complicit subject. Confession is the first step towards resistance in Grand's novel, and while Evadne's aunt is still adamant in her defence of the position of power granted to the good women in society, she will later become more sensitive to the feminist cause, particularly as Edith's plot is exposed, reinforcing the notion of female identities in continuous construction, able to reassess their discursive positions and to adopt new roles.

Dialectical confrontation with religious authority is the third stance exhibited by female characters in the novel. Represented by the complementary discourses of Angelica and Ideala, this position aims to refute religious unarguable principles. Angelica's discourse is most subversive in her rebuttals of Catholic dogmatism, her secular analyses of sacred texts, or in her triumphant disclosure of religious tactics to keep subjects under surveillance. Ideala, with her attacks on institutionalised religion and its repressive power, becomes the mouthpiece of

one of the novel's ideological projects as she points out the liability of masculine religious discourse for women's disabilities and most society's evils. The discourse of this feminist character denaturalises the notion of proper Victorian femininity as it reveals the double standard of morality and the orchestrated gender imbalance that dictates woman's self-effacement and submissiveness to man's will. Embedded in Ideala's critique of religion as an obsolete system of power which is losing its persuasive capacity over individuals is the anticipation of a new order of things from which religion is not absent but, rather, reformulated. Thus, while an adolescent Angelica strives to locate herself outside religious discourse through dissent, ironic detachment and effective deactivation of religious dogmatism, her discursive trajectory in the novel is not a straight line into secularism — as her fluctuating positions of heretic irreverence and reverential belief in the power of love and goodness reveal. Fantasising with a new moral law enforced by virtuous women, Angelica is metamorphosed in her dreams into a heroic woman saviour who will come in order to prevent (female) suffering. Hence, the irreligious pose of female anti-clericalism is rewritten in Grand's novel into woman's new pastoral mission: the conversion of man into women's superior moral qualities.

I have provided an analysis of Evadne Frayling as the character who rhetorically instantiates the New Woman in Grand's novel. I have focused, in particular, on the ways in which the feminist protagonist addresses the problems that originate in discourse as she struggles to establish her own language of authority. Drawing on Foucault's understanding of knowledge (*savoir*), I have tried to identify the concepts manipulated and the strategies employed by Evadne's discursive practice. The forging of the female protagonist is thus inflected with a number of linguistic poses which come to characterise the novel's new woman, especially as they become established discursive strategies which define the interaction with other discourses:

(1) *A zeal for knowledge* and clandestine, extensive reading are instrumental in opening the discussion on the rightful educational goals for young women. Evadne's trespassing against normative readings enables her both to speak and write knowledgeably while it provides her with a unique perspective to interpret narrative events as well as the ideologies sustained by other discourses in the novel.

(2) *A reverence for verbal accuracy*. Instilled in the young protagonist by her father, Grand construes a morally-inflected paternal discourse aimed at setting the boundaries of proper feminine utterances as the main origin and source of Evadne's intellectual misdoings. Because the conservative discourse of the father paradoxically encourages Evadne's rational thinking to run free, *The Heavenly Twins* suggests that misogyny backfires as specifically resistant-to-change discourses are shown to contain the possibility of discourses of resistance or "reverse discourses," in Chris Weedon's terms. I have contended that Evadne's positioning within discourse requires the deployment of a double strategy: the exhibition of apparent conformity and the effectual withholding of belief.

(3) *A resistant reading of fictional works* is developed by young Evadne together with a habit of writing her most audacious opinions. Such discursive skills are shown to enable the emerging new woman to move beyond dominant cultural clichés on women's inferiority in order to challenge them. Both fictional and non-fictional works are posed as effective realms in which the reasons for the subordination of women might be explored and carefully analysed. The heroine's analytical reading becomes a metafictional device in Grand's novel, which draws attention to the fact that the new woman's discourse is nourished by fiction as well as by fact. The text might in this sense be appealing to readers to follow Evadne's example and, likewise, extrapolate a feminist agenda from narrative content. The notion of a female reader / subject in

the process of becoming is central in the novel's first book as well as the idea of an identity which is unstable and always subject to change.

(4) *Interrogation and cross-examination of the system of belief* buttressed by conservative discourses on woman which persist in maintaining her disabilities in matters of education. This linguistic procedure is aimed at keeping under check the gender biases and the double standard of morality made visible in Mr. Frayling's speech. Evadne's concern with the chiselling of her discursive procedures shows not only the text's focus on speech as power but also her conscious exploitation of the possibilities opened by conservative discourse in her aim to appropriate for herself a new discursive space, a different subject position.

(5) *An interest in the acquisition of new, precise lexicon.* The text shows the public dimension of the new woman's construction of a speech of authority by making visible that Evadne is learning with a purpose. Knowledge is the key that shall open the doors of the public sphere. Social action rather than female passivity is inevitably encouraged by the acquaintance with facts, truths and by the familiarity with different areas of study.

(6) I have argued that Evadne's earliest discursive pose with regard to the way in which she confronts the doctrine of the woman's proper sphere resembles that of *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding"), adopted by Saint Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century. Evadne's effort to understand rationally the dogmas on women's ineptitude passed by her father enables her to withhold assent to sanctioned knowledge, which progressively distances her from a position of submissiveness and passivity. Grand's text shows that the young woman's withholding of assent is essential in the legitimisation of her own inner voice as well as in the insertion of her own discourse in the socio-political arena. I have tried to demonstrate that Evadne's rationally detached elucidation of her father's lectures temporarily cancels out the intended consequences that motivated his conservative rhetoric on woman in the first place, which is an indication of the extent to which Mr. Frayling's perlocutionary speech acts fail.

(7) *A constituent failure of the young female individual to validate recognition in the ideological interpellation as an inferior being* the dominant discourse on woman is trying to perform. The forging of Evadne as a female subject in language shows that her concerns are first rhetorical but, ultimately and quite inevitably, political too. The novel shows the possibility of avoiding recruitment into the demeaning subject positions available for women while it registers the scientific approach adopted by Evadne in her search for truths: lack of prejudice, questioning and inquiry into the actual origin of misogynistic discourse, extensive reading and arrival at unforeseen conclusions. The dismantling of her father's discourse as an instance of hate speech against women allows the protagonist to understand that social positions occupied by women subjects are not static and that there is a reason for the hierarchical relation of subordination of women to men.

(8) *A stance of silence.* Deploying the strategic ability of saying little is one of Evadne's fortes most clearly emphasised throughout the novel. Whilst the burst of rebellious speech is a token of the new woman's awakening, her tactics of linguistic reserve is shown to counterbalance Evadne's gift of language. I have argued that a narrative mechanism of parallel silences also works as a backbone in the organization and development of the plot since the matter upon which the competing discourses on woman's education remain silent is going to precipitate the tragic events narrated.

The new woman's strategic rationing of linguistic utterances, with its tidal movement of ebb and flow, has the effect of an intermitting discourse that gathers momentum precisely because of the silences that both interrupt it and precede it. The effects of conflating Evadne's self-imposed silence and celibacy reveal the extent to which the double privation of sex and

language could undermine the legitimate aspirations of the new woman in Grand's fiction. The bleak (open) ending of Evadne Frayling's plot poses a contradiction to the feminist agenda of Grand's fiction but, in the last analysis, shows a failure that might be reversed by breaking the silence and lashing out the gift of language.

This dissertation offers a chance to revisit some of the hopes, conflicts, demands, utopian dreams and desires the New Woman writers envisioned for their female protagonists and contemporary readers. The technical inventiveness and the reconception of language they deployed in the construction of their heroines' discursive practices was meant to be an effective device to help women gain a collective sense of the legitimacy of those needs and provoke a social and political shift as the nineteenth century was coming to a close. The anxieties the New Woman feminist writers fuelled and the opposition their narratives met amongst its most reactionary contemporaries are a token of their capacity to change oppressive power relations and a reminder of their enduring power.





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## RESUMO EN GALEGO

A escritura da ficción da New Woman constituíu unha parte crucial na loita liderada polo movemento feminista da Gran Bretaña nas derradeiras décadas do século dezanove, xusto antes que de a atención fose dirixida de maneira decisiva á acadar o sufraxio feminino. A nova ficción concentrou os seus esforzos na exhibición das limitacións inherentes á condición da muller na medida en que se a mantiña afastada das institucións públicas do poder político e social e se lle negaban as oportunidades educativas e financeiras das que dispoñían os seus coetáneos masculinos. A creación de heroínas poderosas que ousaron opoñerse ás inxustizas intrínsecas á orde social vitoriana foi determinante na campaña para facer avanzar os cambios que se xulgaban máis imperiosos. Ao desafiar os discursos vitorianos que naturalizaban os papeis tradicionais das mulleres e ao expoñer as asimetrías de xénero que xacían no fondo da ideoloxía dominante, estas narracións da New Woman foron instrumentais na forxa de novas identidades femininas no feito literario e na realidade histórica. O estudo crítico destas innovadoras heroínas e das súas subversións nos eidos estético e discursivo, fundamentalmente, constitúe o obxectivo máis amplo desta tese de doutoramento.

Do mesmo xeito que son necesarios os estudos máis inclusivos e que abranguen un número elevado de obras de ficción escritas por mulleres tamén se fan imprescindibles, tras a exhumación das mesmas, aqueles que dedican o seu esforzo investigador á análise crítica e minuciosa dese fitos literarios. A presente tese de doutoramento participa dese afán indagador que permite a apertura de novas vías de análise. Este proxecto de investigación dirixe a súa mirada fundamentalmente ás ficcións máis icónicas producidas en torno á figura da New Woman por un autor angloamericano, Henry James (1843-1916), e por tres autoras de lingua inglesa de diversa orixe transnacional: Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), de orixe sudafricana; George Egerton, (Mary Chavelita Dunne, 1859-1945) irlandesa de orixe australiana, e a norirlandesa Sara Grand (Frances Elizabeth Belenden Clarke, 1854-1943). O centro de atención será primordialmente o aspecto literario dos textos que non teñen sido suficientemente examinados en termos da configuración estética e discursiva do suxeito feminino tardovitoriano. As ferramentas analíticas que atopei máis valiosas para abordar un obxectivo tan amplo teñen sido eclécticas e diversas ao longo deste proxecto xa que cada texto parecía precisar un lente metodolóxico propio. Ao tempo que participa dun empeño revisionista feminista, esta tese ofrece lecturas detalladas da obra de catro figuras centrais do xénero co obxecto de “rescatar a ficción da New Woman da categoría woolfiana de vitorianismo intelectualmente regresivo, represor da sensualidade, moralista e estirado que segue a obsesionar á crítica moderna” (Heilmann, 2004: 2-3).

O primeiro capítulo desta tese é de carácter introdutor. Ao proporcionar un compendio dos estudos máis salientables sobre o xénero da New Woman publicados ao longo das últimas cinco décadas, este traballo aporta a evidencia do animado debate que continúa a alentar e a ensanchar o alcance das análises sobre o tema. Involucrándome no debate sobre a orixe precisa no tempo da frase “New Woman”, fun quen de atopar polo menos dúas aparicións do devandito termo, en cursiva e minúsculas (“*mujer nueva*”), na novela realista española do século dezanove — *La prostituta* (1884), de Eduardo López Bago e *Una cristiana – La prueba* (1890-1891), de Emilia Pardo Bazán — un achado que non só resitúa a chegada do suxeito ficcional como mínimo dez anos antes das datas que manexa a opinión académica xeralizada (Tusan, 1998; Ledger, 1997;

Ardis, 1990) se non que ademais invita á continuación da investigación intercultural e transnacional do fenómeno da *muller nova*.

O exame textual e minucioso dos catro enormes éxitos editoriais que constitúen o corpus seleccionado para esta tese — *Daisy Miller* (1878) de Henry James, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) de Olive Schreiner, *Keynotes* (1893) e *Discords* (1894) de George Egerton, e *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) de Sarah Grand — determinou a necesidade de aproximacións metodolóxicas xerais e máis concretas en cada un dos capítulos. Algunhas premisas fundamentais sobre estética e a análise do discurso teñen conformado este proxecto. Os estudos levados a cabo por Rita Kranidis sobre as ideoloxías estéticas feministas e vitorianas na súa obra *Subversive Discourse* (1995) foron moi valiosos na comprensión da resistencia desafiadora e o inconformismo como posturas estéticas decisivas que caracterizan a literatura de oposición escrita por mulleres. Outras consideracións post-estruturalistas sobre a linguaxe como sitio vantaxoso para a construción do significado e da subxectividade de xénero (Weedon, 1987; Barret, 1986) detonaron o meu interese indagador polos discursos producidos polas novas heroínas a medida que estas son construídas no tecido literario destas narracións tardo-vitorianas. Neste senso, o estudo de Judith Baxter, *Positioning Gender in Discourse* (2003), constituíu unha guía práctica para a análise post-estruturalista e feminista do discurso, e a noción do eu *performativo* de Judith Butler proposta en *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990a) ten sido igualmente instrumental na abordaxe da produción da linguaxe e a circulación dos discursos na escolla de textos xa referenciada.

Esta tese de doutoramento consta de cinco capítulos. O primeiro capítulo introdutorio ofrece unha presentación xeral do tema da New Woman na que inscribo a nova ficción coma unha creativa manobra feminista para axudar a avanzar o movemento de liberación das mulleres nas dúas décadas derradeiras do oitocentos vitoriano. Aténdese igualmente a un primeiro obxectivo nesta disertación de doutoramento que é o de ofrecer unha visión de conxunto dos estudos académicos producidos en torno á figura da muller nova desde a década dos anos setenta do século pasado. Inclúese unha xustificación do corpus seleccionado e explícanse as ferramentas metodolóxicas primarias que foron de maior axuda na análise dos textos. Por outra banda, abórdase a cuestión problemática de aplicar unha perspectiva feminista, post-estruturalista e anti-esencialista a unhas obras literarias producidas nun tempo no que os discursos sobre a autonomía da esencia individual e os procesos para acadar a consciencia seguían sendo operativos pero, ao mesmo tempo, de xeito paradoxal, volvíanse cada vez máis sospeitosos, como se argumenta na análise dos textos en cada un dos capítulos seguintes. Finalmente, considerouse pertinente incluír algúns exemplos das maneiras nas que a muller emancipada foi fabricada e estilizada de xeito antagónico polos seus defensores e detractores, tanto na ficción como fora dela, nun obxectivo amplo de mostrar a relevancia política que acadou a loita pola estética e a representación da New Woman. Partindo da miña propia análise da “Girl of the Period” — claro precedente da New Woman na prensa conservadora vitoriana do ano 1868, e creación da antifeminista furibunda Elizabeth Lynn Linton — como referente dunha feminidade patolóxica e atroz, sosteño na miña tese unha interpretación da New Woman (baseada nunha das protagonistas paradigmáticas de Sarah Grand) como “o monstro que vos fala”. De xeito paralelo, establécese unha analogía entre as nocións de monstrosidade transxénero postmoderna e a de liminaridade da muller nova finisecular, baseada nas insospetadas semellanzas que teño atopado en ambos os dous discursos de insubordinación contra ideoloxías hexemónicas de identidade de xénero, malia a aparente distancia temporal e cultural que as separa.

O segundo capítulo desta tese explora os discutibles aspectos fundacionais da New Woman que emerxe nas páxinas da obra de Henry James, *Daisy Miller* (1878), quen ten sido sinalado

como creador do concepto literario da muller nova (Smith-Roseberg, 1980). O rastreo dos exemplos máis relevantes da indisciplina feminina encarnada pola heroína epónima vértase en tres seccións. A miña análise comeza co retrato que fai James da masculinidade defectuosa que simboliza Frederick Winterbourne, a anomalía deste varón americano e as súas tendencias taxonómicas. Sosteo que as fallas nos seus intentos por recuperar unha posición perdida de autoridade sobre o signo feminino apuntan a unha carencia trágica, a dun temperamento da receptividade wildeano que melloraría a súa apreciación pola novidade que Daisy Miller representa. Unha segunda sección adicase á heroína jamesiana que é interpretada como un *fool* bakhtiniano, unha *improper lady* cuxa gargallada incontrolada fai visibles as inconsistencias do discurso dominante sobre a muller. O exhibicionismo de Daisy e as continuas infraccións da conduta e a propiedade femininas acadan poderosas consecuencias simbólicas na nova orde cultural que esta heroína parece inaugurar. Finalmente, o último aspecto tratado retoma a cuestión da linguaxe de desobediencia e a idiosincrasia da fala asertiva do desexo feminino que Daisy personifica. A descentralización do proxecto amoroso de clase media que consegue a conduta carnavalesca da protagonista coloca en última instancia o humor ao servizo da transgresión socio-política e da súa propia transformación nunha feminidade heteroxénea e caleidoscópica. A morte triunfante de Daisy como muller solteira, a súa derradeira afirmación da diferenza e do poder feminino descartan toda consideración de martirio trágico pois segue sendo, en palabras do propio James, “a muller do mundo que menos medo ten” (James, 1906, 1907: 59).

O terceiro capítulo céntrase na obra *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), de Olive Schreiner, e está organizada en tres apartados principais. O primeiro deles, “A construción estética da heroína de *African Farm*”, ofrece unha análise da representación visual de Lyndall, a heroína desta novela pioneira da New Woman. A relevancia textual concedida á aparencia física da protagonista xustifica a nosa atención, especialmente na medida en que establece unha relación dialéctica coas súas prácticas discursivas. Servíndome dos conceptos estéticos da *eurritmia* e a *kalokagatía*, así como das nocións foucauldianas de fetichismo e desviación, estúdanse as implicacións narrativas da espléndida fisionomía da nova heroína. O obxectivo da segunda sección, “Un análise discursivo da novela”, é o de investigar a construción da subxectividade feminina a través da linguaxe por medio do estudo dos actos de fala da protagonista e da súa confrontación dialéctica cos discursos hexemónicos na novela. O cotexo coas ideas contemporáneas postas en circulación na obra de John Stuart Mill e na obra non literaria de Olive Schreiner fornecen a infraestrutura das ideas que xorden na fala da protagonista. Finalmente, unha terceira sección afonda no “Debate sobre o matrimonio”, coma un medio particularmente axeitado para explorar o xeito en que a novela de Schreiner configura á súa heroína como un suxeito que desexa ao tempo que promove a axenda política da New Woman proteica.

O cuarto capítulo examina as dúas coleccións de relatos escritas por George Egerton, *Keynotes* (1893) e *Discords* (1894). A primeira parte, “Celebrando o feito feminino”, constitúe unha exploración de dúas premisas elementais imbricadas na construción da identidade feminina nas historias: o entretexido dos mecanismos da sedución e do enigma como medio que posibilita o retrato egertoniano da feminidade (*womanhood*). O meu propósito é o de situar as protagonistas femininas de Egerton inmersas nun proceso de formación da subxectividade que depende en grande medida dun sistema de percepción e diálogo cos seus mundos externos e internos. Sosteo que a modernidade da ficción de Egerton é inherente na súa reformulación das estéticas de Walter Pater e de Oscar Wilde, xa que concede á muller completa responsabilidade sobre os procesos hermenéuticos e creativos. A segunda parte, “Narracións do desexo”, é o resultado dunha análise minuciosa da linguaxe — entendida no sentido máis

amplo, como motivo central das narracións — e da súa posible complicidade co proxecto ideolóxico da feminidade propiciado pola obra de George Egerton. Os relatos de Egerton tenden a construír a inestable categoría de muller dentro dun marco máis amplo de complexas identificacións especulares con grupos diversos (a meiga, o demo, a bailarina exótica ou a xitana) que serven para interpelar ás protagonistas e para proxectar unha imaxe desexada de feminidade — o que constitúe un obxectivo ideolóxico fundamental destas historias *centrifugas*, tal e como as teño designado. A predilección polo escapismo cara unha identidade allea (*otherness*) fantaseada revela unha visión heraclitiana da identidade que, tal e como sosteño, é esencial na ficción de George Egerton. O terceiro e último apartado, “Concibindo a utopía”, é un estudo das formas nas que a insatisfacción feminina pode ser transformada co obxecto de superar as convencións e reinventar a identidade da muller.

O quinto e derradeiro capítulo aborda a monumental novela de Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (1893). A primeira parte, “O prefacio de *The Heavenly Twins*”, ofrece a análise dun aspecto amplamente esquecido e aínda por explorar na novela de Grand. Prestando atención ao tropo fundamental do repique das campás que reverbera desde a torre da catedral de Morningquest, establécese unha relación entre a ideoloxía estética da novela, os discursos en conflito sobre a relixión mobilizados desde o prefacio alegórico e o proxecto ético persoal de Sarah Grand. A segunda parte, “Cambios na perspectiva”, constitúe unha exploración das estratexias narrativas empregadas na novela na medida en que tenden a reproducir as grandes reflexións estéticas postas en movemento polo tropo do repique de campás no prefacio. Centrándome na estrutura e nos procesos de reconto das historias, sosteño que o intento novelesco de cambiar o mundo é perseguido a través da forma e do fondo narrativos por igual. Así mesmo, afirmase que a relixión é un asunto esencial en *The Heavenly Twins* — un que ten sido ignorado, de xeito sorprendente, pola inmensa maioría das análises críticas da obra de Grand — pois fornece un lente crucial co que examinar a construción das personaxes femininas no discurso. Finalmente, a terceira parte, “Prescribindo o remedio”, ofrece un exame detallado da heroína, Evadne Frayling, e da súa loita por establecer unha linguaxe de autoridade propia fronte aos discursos dominantes sobre a muller na novela.

Esta tese de doutoramento ofrece unha oportunidade para revisar algunhas das esperanzas, das esixencias, dos conflitos, soños utópicos e desexos que as escritoras da New Woman imaxinaron para as súas protagonistas femininas e para as lectoras contemporáneas. A inventiva técnica e a reconcepción da linguaxe que empregaron na construción das prácticas discursivas das novas heroínas tivo como propósito axudar ás mulleres a acadar un senso colectivo da lexitimidade das súas demandas e provocar un cambio político e social nas derradeiras décadas do oitocentos vitoriano. As ansiedades que avivaron as escritoras feministas da muller nova e a oposición que atoparon as súas ficcións entre os sectores máis reaccionarios son un símbolo da súa capacidade para mudar as relacións de poder opresivas e un recordatorio do seu valor imperecedeiro.

