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New Perspectives on Old Questions: Ella Hepworth Dixon's *One Doubtful Hour*

Cheryl A. Wilson

- 1 During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the New Woman existed on a continuum. From the cartoonish masculine Amazons parading through the pages of *Punch* to the otherwise traditional Victorian woman who carried her own latchkey, definitions of femininity were becoming more fluid as multiple models for womanhood emerged at the turn of the century, appearing in both the popular press and the everyday lived experiences of individuals. For Ella Hepworth Dixon (1857-1932), as for many women writers and artists during this period, terms such as “feminist” and “New Woman” were vexed and seemed, perhaps, to limit their ability to define their own versions of femininity, particularly in the face of popular debates and satires about gender. In the short stories comprising the collection *One Doubtful Hour and Other Side-Lights on the Feminine Temperament* (1904), Dixon uses her art to address such issues of feminine identity, depicting the everyday struggles facing women at the end of the century and engaging topics such as employment and money, courtship and marriage, and the challenges of living in an increasingly global world. By collecting stories that address relatively prosaic subject matter and events from everyday life, Dixon can connect with women readers who may have been unwilling to label themselves feminists, but who, nonetheless, were receptive to models of femininity that could help them reconceptualize ideas of gender and patriarchy within their own lives.
- 2 The New Woman was everywhere in the periodical press and popular culture of the 1890s, yet individual women embracing elements of the “New Woman” lifestyle may have still felt isolated in their own homes and communities. Indeed, Talia Schaffer points out this contradiction, referring to “the unsexed, terrifying, violent Amazon ready to overturn the world” as a “media construct,” deployed for specific cultural and political purposes and distinct from the independent working women who walked through London on their own. She goes on to explain, “Today ‘New Woman’ has a

positive sense; in the 1890s, however, it generally referred to an exaggerated, parodic, grotesque version of feminism” (39, 49). Women writers during this period, much like contemporary feminists, had to work to reconcile these popular perceptions with their own individual ideologies. The dissemination of negative images of the New Woman, as Patricia Marks explains, took place largely in the periodical press. In *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*, Marks brings forward dozens of examples of the parodies and caricatures of the New Woman that reflect cultural anxieties about the definition of and relationship between the sexes as well as fears about the degeneration of the species. Nonetheless, she suggests, “even when they tried by caricature and satire to tame the rambunctious feminist spirit and return it to its domestic sphere, humor magazines in Britain and America contributed to popularizing the goals and manners of the New Woman” (2). What marked many of these caricatures and popular images of the New Woman was the fact that they were conglomerations of behaviors and stereotypes; that is, the women smoked, wore bloomers, carried latchkeys, intimidated men, and read philosophy *all at the same time*. In contrast Dixon’s women, in the stories collected in *One Doubtful Hour*, shared certain characteristics with the stereotypical New Woman, but they also danced, gossiped, cared for their children, and fell in love. Like many novelists, poets, and journalists now termed “New Woman writers,” Dixon attends to the everyday lives of individual women to make a feminist statement as well as to establish a community of women both within and beyond her text. Moreover, Dixon’s decision to present these previously-published stories in a collection of short fiction enables her to offer a variety of situations and multiple points of view to her readers within a single text.¹

- 3 As critics of Dixon have noted, the author herself might be surprised to be the subject of feminist critical attention—or she might not. Dixon’s balanced point of view, often infused with wit and humor, allowed her to both perceive and represent multiple perspectives on gender and the patriarchal structure in which she lived. In her 1930 memoir *As I Knew Them: Sketches of People I Have Met Along the Way*, Dixon describes a scene between herself and Edmund Gosse at the home of a bachelor friend, Sir Gilbert Parker:

In much pomp we approached an open door which was quite obviously our host’s bedroom. ‘No, no,’ exclaimed Edmund Gosse coyly: ‘I cannot take even ‘The New Woman’ in there!’ Why I should have been so called I never knew, except that I had always been in favour of the Women’s Franchise. (41)

- 4 This passage has often been cited as evidence of Dixon’s discomfort with the label “New Woman.” As Valerie Fehlbaum explains, Dixon’s account of the scene “emphasizes her own very different association of the New Woman with serious social and political concerns” (23). Indeed, Dixon often perceived a gap between her own views on women’s issues and popular opinions on this topic. Later in *As I Knew Them*, she reflects on her own experiences as a writer and the production of her novel *The Story of a Modern Woman*, published in 1894—the same year that Sarah Grand and Ouida were debating the term “New Woman” in the periodical press. Dixon describes her novel as “a somewhat gloomy study of the struggles of a girl alone in the world and earning her own living. To my great surprise, it caught on at once” (*As I Knew Them* 136). Again, a disjunction emerges between the realities of popular opinion and Dixon’s perceptions of the public in her surprise at the success of her novel. Such a disjunction may be expected, however, when we recall the myriad representations of and debates over the place of the New Woman—and women in general—in late-Victorian culture and society.

Indeed, as Sally Ledger notes, “The New Woman as a category was by no means stable: the relationship between the New Woman as a discursive construct and the New Woman as a representative of the women’s movement of the *fin de siècle* was complex, and by no means free of contradictions. The gap between ideological projection and social praxis was often considerable” (“New Woman” 23). It is in this gap, perhaps, that Dixon’s short fiction is best located, as she uses her writings, and the collection *One Doubtful Hour* in particular, to offer a version of feminism and femininity that is informed by the New Woman yet also challenges the stereotypes found in the press by focusing on everyday and/or domestic scenes and real-life issues such as courtship and marriage, money and work, and the imperialist agenda of the late-Victorian world. In doing so, she emphasizes how defining positive versions of femininity and challenging patriarchal ideals is the responsibility of all women—regardless of whether or not they identify with the New Woman. Indeed, she articulates this view in the postscript to *As I Knew Them*, writing “The revolution effected by the higher education of women, their admittance to citizenship along with men, is a change such as the world has not yet seen. May they prove worthy of their privileges” (n. p.). The duality that characterizes much of Dixon’s work is evident here as she makes a strong feminist statement and then follows it with a caveat that reminds readers of the ongoing work and individual responsibility required to maintain such change.

- 5 As a genre, the short story is particularly suited to Dixon’s endeavor in showcasing the influence of a feminist consciousness on the everyday lives of women. As Charles E. May explains in theorizing the genre: “The short story is short precisely because of the kind of experience or reality embodied in it, and the kind of experience we find in the short story reflects a mode of knowing which differs essentially from the mode of knowing we find in the novel” (328). In her stories, Dixon attends to the reality and experience of daily human interactions, offering the reader the experience of an individual woman as seen through the particular scene or moment of the story itself. Specifically, she offers a “window on marginalized identities,” which short fiction theorist Susan Lohafer identifies as a function of the genre (2). When collected, then, Dixon’s stories present multiple windows, reflecting temporality—the “doubtful hour” of the collection’s title—and standing as a composite of moments in which the individual (female) self is defined.
- 6 As the three-volume novel waned in popularity at the end of the nineteenth century, the short story flourished. In *The British Short Story*, Emma Liggins, Andrew Maunder, and Ruth Robbins consider the impact of late-Victorian social and cultural contexts upon the genre, pointing out that “The vogue for short fiction at the *fin de siècle* was in part due to the desire for novelty” (68). For New Women writers, that novelty included the opportunity to move away from the traditional courtship and marriage plot, drawn out over multiple volumes of a realist novel toward an exploration of brief, intense moments, “a dream, a journey on public transport or a key conversation between a modern couple” (Liggins, Maunder, and Robbins 90). The increasing pace of modern life, too, required writers to adapt their ideologies to a format that might occupy a reader for the duration of a single train journey rather than a month of evenings spent reading. Throughout her collection, then, Dixon takes elements of the traditional realist novel, shaping and sharpening them into moments that enable a focused examination of women’s individual and collective experience.

- 7 The publication of Dixon's stories in periodicals further establishes connections between her agenda and her chosen form. As Liggins, Maunder, and Robbins explain, the short story evolved from periodical "filler" to a featured element of many journals; thus, "romance and finance come together in the short story, perhaps even more acutely than they do in the novel, because the short story's ephemeral life in periodical publication makes that relationship much more immediate" (4). At the end of the nineteenth century, the periodical press was also a site for debates over gender in articles such as Eliza Lynn Linton's "The Girl of the Period" (*Saturday Review*, 1868) and Mona Caird's "Marriage" (*Westminster Review*, 1888). And, while she did publish one story in the aesthetic journal *The Yellow Book*—widely recognized as instrumental in promoting the late-Victorian short story—most of Dixon's short fiction was published in gender-specific journals, such as *The Ladies Pictorial*, *Woman's World*. These women's periodicals, most of which followed the model of *The Queen*, were relatively short-lived "perhaps because—as one of them explained—it was still difficult for ladies' papers to be accepted as 'real' newspapers" (Beetham 91-2). As Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston explain in *Gender and The Victorian Periodical*, "The periodical press was a major sphere for the working out of social attitudes towards women, a subject that received intense, even at times disproportionate attention by both supporters and attackers of women's rights" (169). Moreover, it was in the periodical press that the term "New Woman" emerged in an 1894 exchange between Sarah Grand and Ouida in the pages of *The North American Review*.² Publishing in periodicals, then, not only brought Dixon's stories into dialogue with the critical issues of the day, but it also allowed her to directly confront the negative stereotypes of the New Woman that filled their pages: "The battle against the New Woman was waged as intensely in the pages of *Punch*, *The Yellow Book*, and the circulating library as in the clinic" (Showalter 41). Alongside such negative images and heated debates, however, stood Ella Hepworth Dixon's fiction, inviting readers to consider how the theoretical ideas and political debates about gender, sexuality, and patriarchy could impact their own individual situations and those "doubtful hours" of the mind and heart.
- 8 In *The Woman Reader*, Kate Flint argues that a significant feature of New Woman Fiction was "the development of writers' perceptions about the relationship between fictional texts and the society of their readers, and the way in which readers could be invited to use similar techniques when approaching both novels and their lives" (315). Numerous issues of relevance for women readers arise over the course of the ten stories included in *One Doubtful Hour*—a situation that is reflected in the collection's subtitle, "Other Side-Lights on the Feminine Temperament." These "side-lights" may be understood as the various factors influencing individual women—factors that are shaped by gender and, more specifically, the gender politics of the late-nineteenth century. Three particular issues that emerge in multiple stories are courtship and marriage, money and work, and globalization and imperialism. With regard to marriage and work, Dixon creates characters who confront these issues directly as they struggle to find independence and identity. In contrast, imperialism, the expansion of the British Empire, and the implications for women back home in England is an issue that is on the margins of several stories in the collection. I include it here, however, because Dixon's attention to this context reveals her awareness of the multiple cultural and social forces tied to gender and her ability to extend the reach of her work to encompass the myriad forces influencing women's everyday lives.

* * *

9 For many New Woman writers, the short story “offered an opportunity to explore new ways of being, sketches which both diagnosed the problems of femininity for their audiences and offered some alternatives to the marriage plot” (Liggins, Maunder, and Robbins 9). Indeed, Dixon questioned the continued relevance of traditional marriage and courtship plots in an 1899 article from *The Lady's Pictorial*: “It seems tolerably certain that whatever the novel of the next century is about, it will not concern itself with the gentle art of angling for husbands” (qtd. in Fehlbaum 35). In her work, Dixon frequently rewrites the courtship narrative of her predecessors, expressing a commitment to realism, as Ann Ardis explains in *New Women, New Novels*, that derives, in part, from “the existence of new audiences for fiction in the 1880s and 1890s and the democratization/feminization of the literary marketplace” (41). For example, in the title story “One Doubtful Hour,” Dixon depicts the plight of Effie Lauder who is attempting to cope with her status as a spinster and is disappointed when the man on whom she pins her last hopes of marriage, Colonel Simpson, rejects her. Following a flirtation with the Colonel en route to England from Bombay, Effie becomes convinced that he will propose to her: “Effie felt absolutely sure that he ‘meant something,’ he had been so devoted in a quiet, reserved way” (18). However, when they encounter one another in an English ballroom, the Colonel is struck by how the change in scene highlights Effie’s desperation: “She had, for all the world, the air of a lean and hungry huntress, and moreover, although he was too gallant to acknowledge it even to himself, that of a hungry huntress of men” (23). Marriage was serious business for nineteenth-century women, and while that seriousness often underlies the courtship narrative, Dixon brings the desperation to the forefront of “One Doubtful Hour” by offering the reader the perspectives of both Effie and Colonel Simpson.

10 Effie’s desperation grows stronger at the conclusion of the story when she realizes that the Colonel had never intended to marry her, and she is left alone with her own reflection:

An earthy-coloured mask with sunken eyes stared at her from the mirror. She was conscious of nothing now but a passionate pity for herself; always of a slightly morbid temperament, she allowed a wave of hypochondriasis to envelop her. She looked round the little room, with its damp-stained walls and shabby furniture, seeing a vista of drab years in which she would be only half alive. The little bed, too, in which she would wake up, morning after morning, year after year... How she hated that waking hour; usually she woke with a start, with a curious foreboding of something evil.... What if—what if—she went to sleep—and simply did not wake in the morning? (29-30)

11 Effie does not wake in the morning, choosing suicide over life as an impoverished spinster. Dixon depicts only two scenes from Effie’s life, yet, in doing so, she represents the struggles of many women who—try as they might—cannot shape their own lives into the idealized narrative of marriage and courtship established by patriarchal culture.

12 Dixon addresses the question of idealized versus real love again in “The Disenchantment of Diana” where the eponymous protagonist falls in love with the poet Astel Verlase, throwing over her faithful lover William Forsyth for a relationship that embodies the romantic ideal of courtship. However, when she relocates from the salons of London to Verlase’s country home in preparation for their marriage, Diana realizes

that the persona of the poet was just a performance and that the realities of life with Verlose are not only mundane but distasteful as well. At the end of the story, Dixon allows Diana a reprieve, and she reunites with William. Like Effie, Diana is forced to confront the difference between fantasy and reality, and she realizes that the prosaic love of William is both more substantial and more suitable than the empty façade of the poet Verlose. This realization develops, in part, during a shopping trip with Verlose during which, as Margaret D. Stetz explains, Diana comes to realize the value of her own perception through her views on art and furnishings: “Dixon and other feminist revisionists used fictions such as this not only to argue against patriarchal practices by their aesthetic contemporaries but also to argue for the recognition of women as aesthetes themselves” (“Debating Aestheticism” 34). Thus “rescued” by her own aestheticism, Diana can abandon the fantasy of the poet as lover and return to William.

- 13 In “*Its Own Reward*,” Dixon uses the situation of two sisters to again demonstrate how traditional ideas of courtship no longer fit the needs of modern society. Each sister has an admirer who is introduced in Amy’s recollection of their late mother:

The late Mrs. Walton, indeed, had objected to Mr. Rosenberg from every point of view. She disliked him for being a foreigner, for driving showy ladies in his phaeton in the Park, for having a permanent stall at the Gaiety, and for going to Paris twice or thrice a year. “Why,” she argued, “couldn’t Lily choose some nice young fellow in Tea at the Kilburn Cinderellas, as Amy had done?” (61)

- 14 Mrs. Walton represents the traditional Victorian perspective on marriage and courtship, but as the story progresses, her opinions are shown to be erroneous. Amy’s “nice young fellow,” Frederick Johnson, rejects her when her financial situation is compromised, leaving her depressed and desperate. In contrast, Lily leaves home to pursue life on the stage, supported by Mr. Rosenberg. Amy is dismayed by her sister’s choices, and the narrative leads readers to suspect that Lily may be destined to join the ranks of Victorian “fallen women.” However, as Ann Ardis points out, many New Woman writers challenged such traditional dichotomies as they “rethink the orthodox Victorian opposition between the ‘pure’ and the ‘fallen’ woman” (61). Thus, both Amy and the reader are surprised when Lily returns as a respectable widow, having had small success on the stage and then marrying Mr. Rosenberg before he died. The story ends with the two sisters reunited and leaving England, which reflects Amy’s hard-won ability to finally move beyond her disappointing relationship with Frederick (whom she has been mildly stalking and harassing with letters and postcards). More important, however, the parallel trajectories of the sisters allow Dixon to demonstrate how courtship and marriage practices must change to accommodate the needs of modern women. The non-traditional relationship between Lily and Mr. Rosenberg works, in part, because of Lily’s individualism and commitment to her profession. Initially, Mr. Rosenberg is her patron and supporter, but as she gains success, she becomes less dependent on him so that their marriage can be one of love rather than an economic transaction. In contrast, the traditional courtship of Amy and Frederick locates all of the power with the man and leaves the woman in a completely vulnerable position when he decides to reject her.
- 15 Through these three stories, which open the volume, Dixon presents four distinct courtships with distinct endings: Effie’s suicide, Diana’s reunion with her lover, and Amy and Lily’s renewed companionship. Dixon draws on real-life concerns about aging, loss of independence, and financial security to underscore the plights of her heroines and make their stories relevant for everyday women who may not see their own

choices with regard to marriage and courtship in terms of gender politics. The juxtaposition of the stories, then, not only encourages readers to question their own individual perspectives on courtship and marriage but also offers a variety of options for those women who may, for whatever reason, choose to eschew “traditional” or “romantic” narratives. Moreover, the ordering of the stories moves from complete despair to a somewhat cautious optimism as Dixon reminds readers that, despite the challenges of their individual circumstances, they retain some degree of agency and choice, although they may need to look outside traditional social norms to find it.

- 16 Financial independence and employment was also a growing issue for many women at the turn of the century; nonetheless, as Patricia Marks explains, the backlash against working women remained quite strong: “Exactly those qualities said to make women excel at domestic obligations were also said to limit them in the workplace: their emotional, intuitive responses, their innocence, and their lack of education were inappropriate for a hard-bitten business world in which money, rather than personal relationship, was the goal” (55). For Dixon’s women, concerns about finances encompass both family inheritance and work/employment—neither of which proves to be easily obtained or fully reliable.
- 17 Effie Lauder in “One Doubtful Hour” is the daughter of a Colonel who “had died some ten years ago now, leaving behind him a widow, two boys, who had already passed for the army, and three girls. They had nothing particular to live on, but things were eked out as only the widows of officers know how” (4). Effie’s obligation within this family structure is to marry to support herself, and possibly her siblings, but she fails. Work is never presented as an option for Effie, who has even traveled to India in search of a husband, and her impending financial distress adds to the gravity of her situation and further impels her suicide.
- 18 The eponymous heroine of “The Fortune of Flora,” however, has a slightly better experience with family money. An American heiress, Flora marries the second son of an English peer. The match is mutually beneficial—Laurie gets money and Flora gets a title and social status. When her father loses his fortune, however, the couple is forced to renegotiate their lifestyle, and each, unbeknownst to the other, finds employment. Such behavior garners the approval of Laurie’s Aunt Charlotte, who leaves the couple a legacy when she dies “because they are plucky young people who know how to face ill-luck, who are not afraid to work, and who don’t go about whining” (134-5). This is the reward for their forbearance, and Dixon emphasizes how it is Flora’s own industry and fortitude, even when she mistakes a demanding customer for her husband’s mistress, that brings her success. Thus, the “fortune” of the title, which is invoked in the opening line “What was the fortune of Flora?” is not only the promised inheritance from Flora’s father and the realized inheritance from Aunt Charlotte, but, more important, it is the fate of Flora—a modern turn-of-the-century woman whose personal fortunes are inextricable from her financial situation (106).
- 19 “A Political Comedy” offers the most detailed portrait of a professional woman in *One Doubtful Hour*. “John Bathurst” is a woman journalist who approaches Wentworth Johnson, editor of *The Planet*, with a proposal for a publication on Free Trade. Johnson has set ideas about women journalists: “he objected, in the first place, to the presence of women in newspaper offices; their place, he used to say, was in the nursery, not in Fleet Street; and as a rule he got out of seeing them” (84). Such stereotypes were not uncommon and were certainly fueled by the press: “As the record shows, women who

endeavored to enter the professions fared poorly in terms of satirical attacks, the single step taken away from the hearth becoming a giant's step into public scrutiny" (Marks 80). John Bathurst, however, challenges Johnson's "somewhat antique collection of British prejudices" in both her attractive and decidedly feminine appearance as well as in the quality of her work (Dixon *ODH* 84). Indeed, after reading her material, Johnson fantasizes about seeing her again and is petulant when she keeps him waiting for several days before returning to discuss her work.

- 20 At the end of the story, Johnson learns that "John Bathurst" is actually the wife of a recently-elected MP who had been using Johnson and *The Planet* to get her husband elected: "It was he, and he alone, she said, who had got her husband in; if the *Planet* had not taken up her little book, and made such a feature of its arguments, the election would never, she declared, have gone the way that it had" (102). Johnson feels humiliated and used, yet Dixon ultimately reveals that he, too, is married although he had been carrying on a flirtation with John Bathurst as though he were single. "A Political Comedy" is thus ripe with gender inversions, including John Bathurst's male pseudonym and her manipulation of traditional male/female power dynamics to exploit Johnson. However, Dixon's commentary on women in the professions is complicated because she debunks the stereotypes of the professional "lady journalist," yet, at the same time, the character she empowers to challenge these stereotypes, "John Bathurst," is fictional in name, identity, and motivation. Moreover, in her role as Mrs. Colonel Blodgood, John Bathurst can be seen as simply promoting her husband's career, and any independence that she has gained in her performance as a journalist, disappears in the wake of the election, which has been their primary goal. In creating a character whose gender identity is so complex, Dixon reflects the complicated situation of women in professional roles who are forced to carve out an identity that draws on traditional male/female relationships while simultaneously challenging the gender politics of such relationships.
- 21 As noted above, for the Walton sisters in "Its Own Reward," money is tied to courtship and marriage. Frederick Johnson breaks off his engagement with Amy because, due to changed circumstances, his parents have withdrawn their consent. Lily decodes the actions of her sister's would-be beau, "'Their consent indeed!' cried Lily, on reading the letter; 'he means the £.s.d. He's a sweep!'" (60). In contrast, Lily's admirer, Mr. Rosenberg, is a "smart young stockbroker" who helps her launch her career as an actress (60). Dixon does not, however, portray Mr. Rosenberg as the typical parsimonious Jewish stereotype often found in Victorian literature; instead, he is generous and kind and, upon his death he leaves his fortune to Lily, who has recently become his wife. Due to their financial circumstances, both Amy and Lily must work. Lily is an actress, and Amy is at first a secretary for Happy Homes in Manitoba—a company that helps adventurous Britons relocate to Canada—and then must find work as a temp when Happy Homes closes. In addition to contrasting their respective courtships, Dixon also contrasts the work situations of Lily and Amy. Although nominally less "respectable," Lily's work as an actress is fulfilling for her, while Amy's work is both boring and a constant reminder of her unhappy state: "Amy sometimes wondered if it would be any use addressing one of the company's prospectuses to Fred: if he still cared enough for her to start a new life together in Canada" (67). Thus, by comparing the two sisters, Dixon emphasizes how it is essential for a woman to be

financially independent, yet she also shows how it is important to have meaningful work that will support oneself within, or beyond, other relationships.

* * *

- 22 The *fin de siècle* world inhabited by Dixon's women was an increasingly-global world, marked by the expansion of the British Empire and an increase in international travel and tourism. Of course, Dixon was not the only writer of the period to acknowledge this context, as Laura Chrisman writes: "for many nineteenth-century English women writers, it was precisely through collusion with, and not in opposition to, hierarchical notions of ethnic and cultural difference, that feminist identity was articulated" (45). Dixon does not directly comment on the politics of colonialism or imperialism in her stories; however, she does attend to the influences of such movements on the lives of her characters, thereby reminding readers of the broader contexts in which they are living and demonstrating the relevance of these concerns for the everyday lives of individual women and their impact upon social situations and gender politics.
- 23 For example, in both "Mlle. Mankovitch" and "When Purfleet Went to the War" the backdrop of international affairs directly impacts the domestic drama of the stories. In the former, Lady St. Ambrose is convinced that her husband is carrying on an affair with the title character—a captivating woman of Eastern European descent. When she finds a check for £1000 written from her husband to Mlle. Mankovitch, Lady St. Ambrose believes that her suspicions have been confirmed: "It is just as I feared," she said, after a moment's silence. "This woman—oh, it is infamous!" (150). However, Lady St. Ambrose soon learns that the money was a donation to Mlle. Mankovitch's political cause—the liberation of her homeland, Rhodopia, from Ottoman rule: "It is January now, but when the first leaves uncurl in the valleys, then will the men of Rhodopia rise against the Ottoman. English money we have, and Bulgarian sympathy to back us" (152). Mlle. Mankovitch has something else as well; Lady St. Ambrose's friend Frank Chester is going to accompany Mlle. Mankovitch to join in the fight for freedom—following in the footsteps of other illustrious Britons, such as Lord Byron, who met his end in Messolonghi, Greece. Thus, Lady St. Ambrose retains her husband, but loses her friend, and it is the latter of whom she is thinking at the end of the story. The affair she feared has not destroyed Lady St. Ambrose's domestic bliss, but the international politics have invaded it, nonetheless, distracting her husband and captivating Frank.
- 24 Similarly, in "When Purfleet Went to the War," Dixon depicts the flirtations of Lady Purfleet while her husband is away fighting in South Africa: "She had to have her little court, a sufficiency of adorers to swing incense before her loveliness, a phalanx of solid worshippers to show that she was courted among women: this much she owed to herself" (187). None of these flirtations are serious, however, until Lady Purfleet meets Adrian Venn, Governor of the Semilina Islands and sometime poet. Like Astel Verlase in "The Disenchantment of Diana," Venn is courted by the public and becomes "the fashion," although he is only in England for a brief period. The relationship between Venn and Lady Purfleet reaches a crisis, and she has just decided to take their affair to the next level when news comes that her husband has been wounded in a heroic act. She is then expected to go to care for her husband in South Africa, and she meets this expectation—giving up Venn.

- 25 In both her fiction and non-fiction writings, Dixon's contemporary, essayist and novelist Mona Caird, argued for a complete reconceptualization of marriage—one that was better suited to the needs of individuals living at the turn of the century. Caird writes, "We shall never have a world really worth living in until men and women can show interest in one another, without being driven either to marry or to forego altogether the pleasure and profit of frequent meeting" (194). Dixon takes a somewhat more tempered stance in her work, arguing instead for marriages that are based on equality and are mutually beneficial and satisfying for both partners. "Mlle. Mankovitch" and "When Purfleet Went to the War," then, are more than just stories of potential infidelity among the upper classes of English society, they are also investigations of international relations and testaments to the potential of such relations to disrupt that bastion of English identity: the upper-class home.
- 26 Such potential disruption also hovers around the fringes of other stories, and Dixon appears to indirectly encourage her characters to adopt a broader worldview and reject the insular self-centeredness bred by Empire. Gender, of course, as Sally Ledger explains, was tied to a number of other social issues: "At the *fin de siècle*, the ideology of imperialism succeeded in incorporating large sections not only of the feminist but also of the socialist movements of the day" (*New Woman* 71). In *One Doubtful Hour*, Dixon takes England's relationship to the broader world in a matter-of-fact manner; that is, she refrains from overt commentary in favor of or against imperialism, but rather, presents it as an important—and perhaps unacknowledged—context for the development of individual feminine identities. In "One Doubtful Hour," Effie meets Colonel Simpson on a trip home from Bombay, in both "The Fortunes of Flora" and "The Kidnapping of Phil Altamore" the characters vacation in Russia, and in "The Fortunes of Flora" Aunt Charlotte travels to Africa. In each of these spaces, the rules and etiquette of English society are tempered, and the characters must negotiate on their own. Moreover, each of these stories has unconventional elements to the romance (or lack thereof) that appear to be fostered by their "exotic" locales. Flora and Laurie both work, and it is their affinity with the adventurous Aunt Charlotte that prompts her to leave them a legacy; Phil throws over his English betrothed for flirtations with Russian princesses; and Colonel Simpson takes liberties with Effie aboard the ship that he may not have ventured to do on English *terra firma*. Just as she does in her depictions of courtship and work, by depicting her characters' engagement with the global world, Dixon can argue for the importance of flexible and fluid gender identities that do not lock individuals into prescribed roles, but rather equip them with the tools of self-sufficiency and good sense—qualities that her successful heroines, such as Lily, Diana, and Flora either possess or grow into over the course of their respective stories.

* * *

- 27 The task of the short story, to enact "a creative transaction between brevity and complexity—the art of saying less but meaning more" both reflects the uniqueness of the genre and underscores its reliance on suggestion and allusion to enrich the narrative (Hunter 2). The stories included in *One Doubtful Hour* are highly intertextual in their awareness of other forms of literature and literary tropes. "The Disenchantment of Diana" and "When Purfleet Went to the War" feature male aesthetic poets whose view of gender, as Margaret D. Stetz notes, is wholly retrogressive: "Dixon would turn again to the theme of the politically unreliable male aesthete who conceals behind the

rhetoric of art and liberty a wholly retrograde sexism" ("Debating Aestheticism" 33). And painter M. Georges in "The Sweet O' The Year" certainly fits this mold as well, coming to appreciate his aging housekeeper only when he learns that she had been the muse of a famous painter in her youth.

- 28 Women's engagement with art and literature is somewhat different, however. In "the grim little tale" (Stetz, "Turning Points" 2) "The World's Slow Stain," Adela Butler marries a man who had jilted her years before, and their relationship is off to a promising start until—for a combination of spite and entertainment—Adela's friend Vincent gives her bridegroom a copy of the book she had written in the heat of her anger:

There was that bitter little story of hers which he had helped her to write, in which she had hit off Mellingham to the life; now that he knew Anthony, he saw how merciless the character-drawing was. And of course, like all amateurs, and most women-novelists, she had drawn on her own experience... It struck him suddenly, what a dramatic effect you could get by making a young husband read his bride's version of his life... If Vincent could only be there to see! Well, the sooner Mr. Anthony Mellingham knew, the better. (216)

- 29 Vincent does not act out of genuine concern for Mellingham, but rather out of spite toward Adela. Upon realizing what has happened, the newlyweds exchange a look that does not bode well for the future of their marriage: "No word was needed, for in that look there passed, like a sword-thrust, the vision of an eternal rancor" (220). Unlike Dixon's male poets and artists, who enjoy a self-centered celebrity that is divorced from real emotion and enables them to manipulate women, Adela, much like Mary Erle, the heroine of Dixon's *The Story of A Modern Woman*, treats writing as a catharsis and an opportunity to empower herself after a devastating romantic experience. Dixon's attitude toward fiction is mixed in her stories. Writing novels empowers Adela Butler, until Vincent uses her work against her to spoil her marriage. The jilted Amy Walton, however, is encouraged in her romantic delusions by novels, "In all the hundreds of novels she had read, it was always argued that—for a woman, at least—one love was sufficient for a lifetime" (67). Dixon's own stories seem to step into this gap—offering empowerment, reality, and practical romance to the reader who may see her own experiences reflected in their pages.
- 30 The short story genre is particularly suitable to the depiction of individual experiences and desires that may push the boundaries of social convention: "for many writers, the short story form has offered liberation from the formal restrictions of the novel, inviting experimentation and subversion of the norms of the mainstream" (Liggins, Maunder, and Robbins 16). The collection's title, *One Doubtful Hour*, immediately calls the reader's attention to time, and across the first nine stories, Dixon is highly conscious of time, jumping ahead and circling back often in an attempt to contextualize a particular moment. Each of these stories is broken into three sections with the section breaks marking the forward movement of time, which is sometimes accompanied by a change in narrative perspective. The somewhat fragmented treatment of time, then, reflects how short fiction often relies upon insinuation and implication rather than extended narrative. In the first nine stories of *One Doubtful Hour* Dixon employs a symmetry of form that demonstrates her commitment to connecting moments of time to reflect a condensed, yet cohesive, narrative.
- 31 The tenth and final story, "The Sweet O' The Year," stands apart from the others in both its structure and attitude toward time. This is the only story that is not broken

into sections; the action takes place in a single afternoon. Here, Dixon tells the story of M. Georges, a Parisian artist and his housekeeper, Virgine. In describing Virgine through M. Georges' eyes, Dixon writes, "Time, with his corroding finger, had seared and branded her out of all semblance of a woman. She represented nothing but the long, the inexorable degradation of life" (233). This heartbreaking description comes after M. Georges has learned that Virgine was once the muse for his own mentor and served as the model for one of the artist's most renowned works. The moment of connection between M. Georges and Virgine is broken, however, when his current love interest arrives to drag him off for an evening's entertainment. Left alone, Virgine returns to her work tidying the studio and reflecting on her increasing age. Unlike the other stories in the collection, "The Sweet O' The Year" does not investigate a single idea or situation through the depiction of a series of events; instead, it is an account of a single afternoon that evokes broader questions about art, gender, and history. In depicting that afternoon, Dixon provides enough context and allusion to enable the reader to fill in the pieces of Virgine's past and imagine the details of her story. Ultimately, the story is, as the title suggests, "sweet," rather than sad. Although Virgine is alone at the end, the opportunity to share her story with M. Georges has enlivened her and, more important, ensured that her past connection with the great artist will not be forgotten. Placing this story at the end of the collection is, perhaps, Dixon's attempt to encourage reflection among her own readers. Although time, at the turn of the century, is moving forward, reflection and the ability to maintain a connection to the past can be equally important and rewarding. This mediation between past and present also connects to Dixon's broader agenda in terms of depicting and recognizing the value in multiple models of femininity. Traditional gender roles are not completely eschewed by Dixon, but they must be brought into line with contemporary contexts and individual, personal desires.

- 32 In the first, and as of 2014 only, book-length study on Ella Hepworth Dixon, Valerie Fehlbaum writes,

In some ways, Ella Hepworth Dixon appears to have been consciously writing against stereotypes of various sorts, including that of the New Woman. [...] This might explain why, unlike many of her peers, although in her own way she was no less innovatory, she appears to have avoided attracting the corrosive criticism which was so copiously meted out to more prolific or more overtly polemical writers such as Mona Caird, George Egerton or Sarah Grand. (2-3)

- 33 I would also suggest that this may be why Dixon has not received the same critical attention as other New Woman writers whose agendas are more overtly feminist and fall more easily in line with contemporary feminist criticism. Nonetheless, it is in the everyday stories of "modern women" and the "doubtful hours" of their lives that Dixon's true genius emerges. Her writings highlight the feminist potential in every woman and argue for a shared responsibility in reconceptualizing ideas of gender and patriarchy, which, Dixon demonstrates, are inextricably linked to other social forces.
- 34 Of the more than thirty-five short stories that Dixon published in periodicals from 1886 to 1903, she collected ten into the volume *One Doubtful Hour*, thus, although not originally published as such, the volume does have its own integrity as a separate work, carefully constructed by the author. In *British Short Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century*, Tim Killick explains that during the nineteenth century the genre of short fiction was particularly suited to endeavors such as Dixon's: "short fiction began to share the novel's concerns with psychological and social realism, as well as its broader desire for

artistic and historical credibility" (6). Likewise, New Woman writers addressed myriad social concerns in their short fiction, novels, and critical writings, "Early and mid-Victorian ideas on progress, passion, morality, femininity, domesticity, development and evolution are replayed and reworked by New Women in the last decades of the century," and by collecting her short fiction, Dixon can present a variety of issues and perspectives to her readers (Richardson and Willis 3). In doing so, she foregrounds the individual experiences of women, calling attention not only to their trials and challenges but also to their triumphs and successes. Moreover, because *One Doubtful Hour* is a collection of short fiction, Dixon does not have to choose between celebrating her heroine's successes or hoping that her readers will learn from the heroine's mistakes; she can have it both ways. Indeed, having it both ways, in the best sense of the term, is typical of Ella Hepworth Dixon who had a clear feminist ideology, yet declined the label of New Woman; who wrote for the public, yet was surprised by her own success. By attending to audience and art, Dixon was able to bring the best of all possible worlds to her readers by both reflecting and shaping their everyday lives.

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NOTES

1. Valerie Fehlbauer includes full bibliographical information on the publication of Dixon's short fiction in Appendix 3 to her book *Ella Hepworth Dixon*. The stories collected in *One Doubtful Hour* were published between 1895 and 1902.
2. Following the publication of Grand's "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" in March 1894, in which she argues for equality between the sexes, Ouida published "The New Woman" (May 1894), claiming that so-called "New Women" wanted both the privileges of "the weaker sex" and the power of men: "She does almost nothing with the resources she possesses, because her whole energy is concentrated on desiring and demanding those she has not" (156).

ABSTRACTS

Pour Ella Hepworth Dixon (1857–1932), comme pour beaucoup d'autres femmes écrivains et artistes de le fin du dix-neuvième siècle, des termes comme « féministe » ou « New Woman » (littéralement, « Nouvelle Femme ») n'étaient pas anodins : ils leur donnaient peut-être l'impression de limiter leur capacité à définir leur propre version de la féminité, particulièrement dans le contexte des débats populaires ou des satires sur le genre. Dans son recueil *One Doubtful Hour and Other Side-Lights on the Feminine Temperament* (1904), Dixon utilise son don pour l'écriture pour parler de l'identité féminine et dépeindre les combats qu'affrontent les femmes dans leur vie quotidienne à la fin du siècle. Elle aborde aussi des sujets tels que travailler

et gagner de l'argent, rechercher un époux et se marier, et relever le défi que représente la vie dans une société de plus en plus ouverte sur le monde. Cet essai montre comment Dixon utilise le recueil de nouvelles pour atteindre des lectrices qui refusaient peut-être de se qualifier de féministes, mais qui étaient quand même sensibles à des modèles de féminité susceptibles de les aider à revoir leur conception personnelle du genre et du patriarcat. (*Résumé traduit par Emilie Piarou*)

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