

**Escape Artists:  
Adventure and Isolation in Women's Writing at the *Fin de Siècle***

By  
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Doctoral Thesis

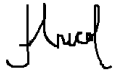
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Certificate of Originality

This is to certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own except as specified in footnotes, and that neither the thesis nor the original work contained within it has been submitted to this or any other institution for a degree.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'H. M. A.', written in a cursive style.

(Signed)

20. 06. 2017 (Date)

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## Abstract

Recent scholarship has examined the lived experience of unmarried women in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain, both in cities and in the countryside. Typically, scholarship in this field has focussed on women's social identity—whether spinster, widow or lesbian—and addressed how these 'types' of women were variously used in fiction and the press to contest or uphold the gendered status quo. This thesis problematises the distinct characterisation of these social identities by examining works which seek to unify female social identity at the *fin de siècle* through a common *modern* experience: the conflict between individual and collective life. All of the female subjects examined in this thesis—whether author, artist, or fictional character, and whether married, separated, unmarried, widowed, homosexual, or not easily identifiable either way—are solitary figures. Their movement within and interaction with their environments reveal the uneasy combination of separation and exposure experienced by working women of all classes at the *fin de siècle*.

This thesis examines the solitary female figure in works of British fiction produced between 1880 and 1922. It considers the pressures and implications of separation and exposure in relation to female celebrity and creative practices at the *fin de siècle*. My methodology involves examining the biography and auto/biographical works of Amy Levy (1861-1889), George Egerton (pseud. of Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright; 1859-1945), Sarah Grand (pseud. of Frances Elizabeth Bellenden McFall; 1854-1943) and Charlotte Mew (1869-1923), and drawing out aspects that speak to the desires for privacy and, conversely, publicity and/or companionship. I identify how their lived experience of this conflict—broadly, between society and solitude—affected the depiction of modern female consciousness in their literary works by examining their female characters' subjective interaction with three environments: the foreign landscape, the home, and the city. My aim is to identify how Levy, Egerton, Grand and Mew used their literary works to acknowledge and retaliate against the restrictions which continued to limit urban women's physical, social and psychological autonomy.

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‘If you were not handicapped by your need of loving you might be a glorious adventuress; as it is, you never will.’

— George Egerton, *The Wheel of God* (1898)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> George Egerton, *The Wheel of God* (London: Grant Richards, 1898), p. 190, in *Hathi Trust Digital Library* <<http://www.hathitrust.org>> [accessed 15 May 2014].



## Introduction: Society and Solitude

‘Give me the country to live in, with the sea in sight, and ample leisure. Give me the society of my fellow creatures to enrich my human nature; and give me hours of sacred solitude to strengthen that in me which is divine [...].’

— Sarah Grand, ‘The New Woman and the Old’ (1898)<sup>1</sup>

This thesis examines female solitariness in works of British fiction and visual art produced between 1880 and 1922.<sup>2</sup> Revealing the lived experiences that informed the production and content of these works is a guiding principle of this study and underpins its mutual focus on the role and representation of solitariness in both literary and autobiographical texts. Recent scholarship in the fields of nineteenth- and twentieth-century studies, such as Emma Liggins’ influential and important *Odd Women?*, has examined the lived experience of unmarried or ‘superfluous’ women in Britain but, typically, has focussed on distinct categories of female social identity—spinsters, widows or lesbians—and identified how these ‘types’ of women were variously used in fiction and the press to contest or uphold the hegemonic status quo.<sup>3</sup> Rather than being a literary device used for political ends or a means of identifying a particular ‘type’ of female deviance, the solitary women examined in this thesis represent and aim to assimilate many forms of female social-professional identity and, as a result, identify a shared lived experience: the conflict between individual and collective life. This conflict was acutely felt by women at the *fin de siècle*: the world was opening up by way of rail and road and so seemingly getting smaller, and yet the vast majority of British women were still constrained by the old laws which at best governed and at worst prevented their progression beyond the home. All of the solitary female subjects examined in this thesis—whether author, artist, or fictional character, and whether married, separated, unmarried, widowed, homosexual, or not easily identifiable under any of these terms—complain of both their isolation and their loneliness in the modern city. The way that they articulate, contend with, and, at times, embrace their

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘The New Woman and the Old’, *Lady’s Realm* (1898), pp. 466-70, repr. in *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, ed. by Ann Heilmann, 4 vols (London: Routledge, 2000), I, pp. 69-76 (p. 70).

<sup>2</sup> The majority of the literary works examined in this thesis were published between 1880 and 1900. The three stories by Sarah Grand discussed in chapter three were published between 1905 and 1922, although they were written much earlier and, as I will demonstrate, are inspired by the culture of the *fin de siècle*.

<sup>3</sup> Emma Liggins, *Odd Women?: Spinners, Lesbians and Widows in British Women’s Fiction, 1850s-1930s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014). For an earlier considerably influential study, see Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985).

solitariness offers an opportunity to examine an experience shared by working women of all classes at the *fin de siècle*.

The conflict between individual and collective life is borne out in the production of female literary identity at the *fin de siècle*. Periods of physical and psychological isolation are essential to both human wellbeing and to the creative process, and yet the process of coveting the favour of the reading public and literary communities is necessary for commercial success. This project uses biographical study and literary analysis to examine the pressures and implications of separation and exposure in relation to female celebrity and creative practices at the *fin de siècle*. My methodology involves examining the lives and biographical works of Amy Levy (1861-1889), George Egerton (pseudonym of Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright; 1859-1945), Sarah Grand (pseudonym of Frances Elizabeth Bellenden McFall *née* Clarke; 1854-1943) and Charlotte Mew (1869-1923) and drawing out aspects that suggest their desire for isolation: variably, the decision to live alone, to remain unmarried or seek marital separation, and to frequently seek respite from London in the countryside or abroad. I also examine signs that their desire for isolation was curtailed by an obligation to social structures. In order to establish themselves as professionals and achieve a level of financial autonomy outside of marriage, these women were required to assimilate themselves within urban society: whether in search of literary subjects, or to meet publishers and integrate themselves within creative networks.

The literary output of these writers speaks to the uneasy combination of separation and exposure that affected working women at the *fin de siècle*. In the four chapters of this thesis, I examine works of fiction by Levy, Egerton, Grand and Mew in which female subjects are shown to waiver, buckle under, and even retaliate against the restrictions which continued to limit their subjectivity and autonomous movement: the necessity of a chaperone when abroad and of living in shared accommodation, and the rules which still governed women's movement out of doors at night. These texts share the common aim of charting female subjectivity as it oscillates between the increasingly destabilised realms of street, home and working-quarters. For this reason, movement, its representation as well as its implication, is a key focus of my analysis. I identify how the conflict between the desires for society and solitude affected women's subjective interaction with and movement between/within three different spaces—the foreign landscape, the home, and the city—at the levels of perception, agency, and memory. I argue that the movement of the female characters in these works—whether imaginatively between alternate subjectivities or physically between known and unknown territories—are

forms of escape. They offer relief from the pressures of society, appease the need for isolation, and explore the territory between freedom and regulation.

This thesis is informed by the emergence of the New Woman in fiction and art at the end of the nineteenth century and the considerable body of scholarship that has contributed to the theorisation of these works since the 1990s. Sally Ledger's seminal work, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (1997), examined the representation of the New Woman figure in cultural discourses of the 1880s and 1890s, drawing a crucial link between female lived experience and the depiction of emancipated women in fiction at the *fin de siècle*. Ledger argues that 'textual configurations of the New Woman are as significant historically as the day-to-day lived experience of the feminist of the late-Victorian women's movement' and that 'what writers and readers [...] *thought* the New Woman was [...] is just as real and historically significant as what she *actually* was'.<sup>4</sup> In the same vein, this thesis proposes the solitary female figure as both a literary trope and a social reality.

The women writers and artists discussed across the four chapters of this thesis could all be considered either forerunners or models of the New Woman sensibility. Levy, Egerton, Grand and Mew pursued careers and independent incomes, invoking women's increased access to education and the literary profession as they moved beyond the home. Broadly speaking, they challenged the public/private (masculine/feminine) binary which sought to limit women to the hearth while their husbands and sons roamed the city. But these women are certainly not unusual in this regard. The divisions between public and private and what was considered masculine and feminine were rapidly dissolving towards the end of the nineteenth century. The separate spheres ideology was undercut in the latter-half of the century by the effects of expanding industrialisation and consumerism, with working-class women entering factories as industrial labourers and middle-class women entering department stores as consumers. Finally, as Rita Felski explains,

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<sup>4</sup> Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 3 [emphasis in original]. Ann Ardis and Gail Cunningham have analysed prevailing depictions of and responses to the New Woman in nineteenth-century literature and journalism: Ann Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Gail Cunningham, 'Reading Women: Male Responses to New Woman Novels', *Nineteenth-Century Feminisms*, 4 (2001), 23-34. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis's edited collection of essays examined the New Woman movement in the context of British proto-feminist thought in the 1880s and 1890s: *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, ed. by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). Iveta Jusová examines the New Woman in relation to imperialism and contemporary colonial discourse, identifying how the New Woman caused social unrest among British colonial subjects and was held accountable for the cultural and racial degeneration of 'the English "imperial race"': *The New Woman and the Empire* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2005). In *New Woman and Colonial Adventure Fiction in Victorian Britain: Gender, Genre and Empire* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), LeeAnne M. Richardson demonstrates how cultural concerns about gender and empire converged in colonial adventure stories.

late nineteenth-century feminists and social reformers provided one of the most visible and overtly political challenges to existing gender hierarchies. Asserting their rights to political and legal equality with men, they simultaneously appealed to a distinctively feminine moral authority as a justification for their occupation of the public sphere.<sup>5</sup>

As the century wore on, images of femininity being enacted in the public sphere increasingly shaped prevailing anxieties, fears and hopes for the ‘modern age’.

Because most new educational and professional opportunities for women were located in the city, the New Woman has traditionally been understood in an urban context. Ledger described the New Woman as an ‘urban phenomenon’ and a ‘significant presence in the city landscapes of the second half of the nineteenth century’.<sup>6</sup> Even if we understand the women artists and female literary characters discussed in this thesis not as New Women but as *modern* women, it is crucial to note that the specifically ‘modern’ sensibility is also most often attributed to the city.<sup>7</sup> Janet Wolff ties the emergence of modern subjectivity to ‘the fleeting, ephemeral, impersonal nature of [...] the urban environment’, whilst, similarly, Marshall Berman sees modernity as the ‘intimate unity of the modern self and the modern environment’ by which ‘the modernization of the city at once inspires and enforces the modernization of its citizens’ souls’.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps most pertinent to the focus of this thesis, however, is Fran Tonkiss’ description of the modern social condition as ‘the uneasy relation between individuality and collective life, [which is] played out more vividly than anywhere else in the lonely and crowded spaces of the city’.<sup>9</sup>

The unease to which Tonkiss refers often manifests as loneliness. Daniel Perlman and Letitia Anne Peplau assert that all definitions of loneliness share three points of agreement: first, it occurs from a mismatch between ‘a person’s actual social relationships’ and their ‘needs or desires for social contact’; second, ‘the experience itself is aversive’; third, it is a subjective experience.<sup>10</sup> Regarding the latter point, Perlman and Peplau explain, ‘people can be alone

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<sup>5</sup> Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (London: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> I am drawing a distinction here between the New Woman ‘type’, as she was defined in the *fin-de-siècle* press and theorised thereafter in scholarship, and modern women, such as Grand, who rejected the ‘New Woman’ term and its connotations despite holding and/or pursuing non-traditional ideas about women’s social roles.

<sup>8</sup> Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 35; Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 132, 147.

<sup>9</sup> Fran Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory: Social Relations and Urban Forms* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 113.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Perlman and Letitia Anne Peplau, ‘Loneliness Research: a Survey of Empirical Findings’, in *Preventing the Harmful Consequences of Severe and Persistent Loneliness*, ed. by Letitia Anne Peplau and Stephen E. Goldston (Rockville: National Institute of Mental Health, 1984), pp. 12-46 (pp. 15-16).

without being lonely, or lonely in a crowd'.<sup>11</sup> As Olivia Laing reflects in her recent study of urban loneliness and creativity, *The Lonely City*, to feel alone and yet surrounded by unfamiliar people is a modern phenomenon:

One might think [that loneliness] was antithetical to urban living, to the massed presence of other human beings, and yet physical proximity is not enough to dispel a sense of internal isolation. It's possible – easy, even – to feel desolate and unfrequented in oneself while living cheek by jowl with others. Cities can be lonely places, and in admitting this we see that loneliness doesn't necessarily require physical solitude, but rather an absence or paucity of connection, closeness, kinship: an inability, for one reason or another, to find as much intimacy as is desired.<sup>12</sup>

The unfulfilled desire for intimacy (as opposed to company), then, is the crux of urban loneliness. It is also, Adrienne Rich argues, at the heart of 'the impulse to create'.<sup>13</sup> Less than two weeks before the publication of *A Room of One's Own*, a paean to the affiliation between solitariness and creative production, Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary about her experience of feeling alone in London:

These October days are to me a little strained and surrounded with silence. What I mean by this last word I don't quite know, since I have never stopped "seeing" people [...]. No, it's not physical silence; it's some inner loneliness [...]. To give an example, I was walking up Bedford Place [...]—the straight street with all the boarding houses this afternoon—and I said to myself spontaneously, something like this. How I suffer. And no one knows how I suffer, walking up this street, engaged with my anguish [...]. And when I come indoors it is all so silent—I am not carrying a great rush of wheels in my head—yet I am writing [...] and this celebrity business is quite chronic—and I am richer than I have ever been—and bought a pair of earrings today—and for all this, there is vacancy and silence somewhere in the machine. [...] If I could catch the feeling, I would; the feeling of the singing of the real world, as one is driven by loneliness and silence from the habitable world.<sup>14</sup>

The uneasy relationship between self, city and creativity that Woolf, Tonkiss and Laing all describe is antithetical to Berman's notion of the 'intimate unity of the modern self and the modern environment'.<sup>15</sup> But Rich argues that the experience of living and working in the city is historically different for 'women and other marginalised subjects' and that the inability to fully

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<sup>11</sup> Perlman and Peplau, 'Loneliness Research: a Survey of Empirical Findings' (p. 16).

<sup>12</sup> Olivia Laing, *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2016), pp. 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> Adrienne Rich argues that 'certainly for women and other marginalized subjects and for disempowered and colonized peoples generally, but ultimately for all who practice any art at its deeper levels [...] the impulse to create begins—often terribly and fearfully—in a tunnel of silence.' *Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations* (London and New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 150.

<sup>14</sup> Virginia Woolf, diary entry, 11 October 1929, in *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Leonard Woolf (London: Harcourt, 1982), p. 144.

<sup>15</sup> Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, p. 132.

or comfortably assimilate oneself into their environment is an extension of their sense of disempowerment.<sup>16</sup>

As their biographies and autobiographical works attest, the authors discussed in this thesis were familiar with urban loneliness and ultimately had ambivalent relationships with the city. Levy and Mew were born in London and were registered as residents of the city for their entire lives. Egerton and Grand were born abroad (in Australia and Ireland, respectively) but lived in London at the heights of their careers. Although diverse in terms of their social background and nationality, Levy, Egerton, Grand and Mew all made London their base for all or parts of their careers because they understood it to be central to modes of Western cultural production at the time. However, their personal writings and correspondence show that they struggled to assimilate self and city, individuality and collective life: they all refer to being psychologically and physically unsuited to the social demands of city life and frequently sought respite in the countryside or abroad. For Levy, Egerton and Grand, especially, their constant movement between London and either rural or foreign urban landscapes is suggestive of the psychological homelessness specific to the working woman at the end of the Victorian period and in the first decades of the twentieth century. These writers were no longer tethered to the home by the demands of domesticity, and yet they struggled to locate another, alternate space in which they felt ‘at home’. In their fictional and non-fictional writing there are also clear signs that they were familiar with the sensation of urban loneliness, and of longing for intimacy to punctuate the periods of writing and courting public affection.

The literary focus of this thesis examines the various and often similar ways that Levy, Egerton, Grand and Mew charted the uneasy relation between individuality and collective life in their work; how they rendered the loneliness of city life and interrogated the limitations of urban subjectivity in their fiction. My aim is to show how the depictions of the city in these works were influenced by the authors’ lived experiences; how Levy, Egerton, Grand and Mew reconstructed the culture of the *fin de siècle* and rendered its affect upon the individual in their writing. It is not my intention to argue that the texts are straight-forwardly autobiographical, but rather that they are, to borrow Grand’s oft-used phrase, ‘studies from life’.<sup>17</sup> Grand argued that

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<sup>16</sup> Rich, *Arts of the Possible*, p. 150.

<sup>17</sup> Grand identified this aim in the titles of many of her works, including *Ideala: A Study from Life* (1888), the short story collection *Our Manifold Nature: Stories from Life* (1894), and *The Beth Book: Being a Study of the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure, a Woman of Genius* (1897). Grand also underscored the importance of this notion in her preface to *Our Manifold Nature*, in which she claimed that her short stories ‘are simply what they profess to be—studies from life’: *Our Manifold Nature* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1894), p. iii.

‘to be true to life should be the first aim of an author’.<sup>18</sup> The fiction texts examined in this thesis reveal an important commonality between the lived experiences of urban working women from all walks of life.

The interaction between lived experience and literature in this project is concerned chiefly with reconstructing personal histories using experiential writing, rather than, as has been the focus of previous scholarship, constructing an overarching social-political history. There are already considerable important bodies of work that address the nineteenth-century migration of women from the home to the public sphere by way of travel or employment, and the role played by literature in affecting this socio-cultural shift.<sup>19</sup> The works that I examine in this thesis show women responding to these new freedoms and exploring new territories between regulation and freedom, as opposed to explicitly trying to bring about change. By their very nature as works by marginalised subjects, these texts provoke further progressiveness. As Joan W. Scott points out in the context of experiential writing, ‘experience is at once already an interpretation *and* in need of interpretation; [...] it is always contested, always therefore political’.<sup>20</sup> The texts that I examine do interrogate contemporary sexual discourse with use of the solitary female figure, however I consider them to be ultimately *of their time* because they suggest that female subjectivity and sexuality is utterly and, at times, hopelessly at odds with the restrictions and demands of urban life. Nonetheless, the progressiveness of these works lies in their self-reflexivity.

This thesis reflects a new commercial interest in exploring the confluence between personal history and experiential and landscape writing in the context of femininity, which is demonstrated by recent works, such as Laing’s *To the River: A Journey Beneath the Surface* (2011) and *The Lonely City* (2016), and Rebecca Solnit’s cultural-historical study *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2001) and essay ‘Woolf’s Darkness: Embracing the Inexplicable’ (2009). In ‘Woolf’s Darkness’, Solnit examines the ‘uses of wandering, getting lost, anonymity, immersion, uncertainty, and the unknown’ in Woolf’s memoirs and essays, including ‘A Sketch of the Past’ and ‘Street Haunting: A London Adventure’. Solnit describes

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<sup>18</sup> Grand argued in an interview in 1896 that ‘to be true to life should be the first aim of an author’: quoted in Sarah A. Tooley, ‘The Woman’s Question: An Interview with Madame Sarah Grand’, *Humanitarian* (1896), repr. in *Sex Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, pp. 220-9 (p. 220).

<sup>19</sup> Of these studies, Vicinus’ *Independent Women* has arguably been the most influential.

<sup>20</sup> Joan W. Scott, ‘Experience’, in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), pp. 22-40 (p. 37).

the female subject who seeks anonymity in the street and freedom through movement as an ‘escape artist’, an idea that informs the thematic focus of this thesis.<sup>21</sup>

Solnit’s *Wanderlust*, her later work *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2006), Matthew Beaumont’s *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London* (2015) and Vybarr Cregan-Reid’s *Footnotes: How Running Makes Us Human* (2016) also speak to an increased interest in the social history of physical movement. Like these works, this thesis examines the affect of history—its accretions and effacements—on an individual’s notion of their place in the wider world. Beaumont and Cregan-Reid’s studies of walking and running, respectively, focus primarily on the male subject and masculinity in the contexts of environment and movement. The same is also true of Berman’s study of urban subjectivity, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, quoted earlier. Female subjectivity is, in these works, a peripheral concern. Lauren Elkin’s *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City* (2016) redresses this balance; it examines women writers and artists who found personal freedom and creative inspiration, who chose to ‘show [themselves] against the city’, when walking alone around London, Paris, New York, Tokyo, and Venice.<sup>22</sup>

There is a wealth of twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship which examines subjectivity in relation to the urban landscape at the *fin de siècle*, beginning with Georg Simmel’s influential essay ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’ (1903), which proposed that the modern individual had adapted to city-life by favouring rational over emotional responses to external stimuli. Simmel argued that the urban man or woman had developed a protective ‘organ’, or buffer, which prevented emotional overstimulation in the fast-paced and ever-changing urban environment.<sup>23</sup> By way of this buffer, the urban man or woman preserves their autonomy, their sanity, and their grip on reality, but at the expense of developing a ‘metropolitan blasé attitude’.<sup>24</sup> Simmel’s account of the subjective detachment of the metropolitan type influenced twentieth century discussions of the *flâneur*. Raymond Williams, in his influential study *The Country and the City* (1973), asserted that ‘the new qualities of the modern city had been associated, from the beginning, with a man walking, as if alone, in its streets’.<sup>25</sup> Williams’ connection between solitariness, masculinity, and the modern city came in

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Woolf’s Darkness: Embracing the Inexplicable’, comprised Solnit’s keynote lecture at the Nineteenth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf, which took place at Fordham University in 2009. It was reprinted in her essay collection, *Men Explain Things to Me* (London: Granta, 2014), pp. 85-106. All quotations are from p. 103 of this collection.

<sup>22</sup> Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, trans. by Kurt H. Wolff, in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (The Free Press, 1950), pp. 409-24 (p. 410).

<sup>24</sup> Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’ (p. 414).

<sup>25</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 233.



the same year as the first English translation of Walter Benjamin's study of the famous urban stroller, Charles Baudelaire.<sup>26</sup>

The notion of the solitary male stroller, the *flâneur*, as the herald of modernity has informed the focus of many works in the fields of urban and culture studies, but their gender-bias has also been the subject of interrogation. Felski's *The Gender of Modernity* (1995) sought to challenge the myth (which Felski attributes, first and foremost, to Berman) that 'the gender of modernity is indeed male'.<sup>27</sup> She identifies a 'long-standing tradition' in urban studies that 'reads modernity as an Oedipal revolt against the tyranny of authority' and, in so doing, '[draws on] metaphors of contestation and struggle grounded in an ideal of competitive masculinity' and 'fear of a dependency aligned with the feminine'.<sup>28</sup> Felski's work built upon Gail Finney's radical work, *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century* (1989), which argued that female psychology and sexuality was central to representations of modernity in the social imagination.<sup>29</sup> Finney and Felski both argue that the domestic sphere was radically implicated in patterns of modernisation and the construction of modern subjectivity. They claim that the feminisation of modern Western society is evident in the 'passive, hedonistic, and decentered nature of modern subjectivity', seen, for instance, in the process of introspection (central to *flânerie* and yet also aligned with domestic 'interiority') being played out in the public arena of the street.<sup>30</sup>

Works which aligned the emergence of modern consciousness with the male gender have instigated counter-studies of the presence and experience of women in the city. Since Felski's groundbreaking work, women's experience of modernity emerged as a fundamental concern within disciplines relating to nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, art, and urban culture. Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis' edited collection, *Women's Experience of Modernity: 1865-1945* (2003) was influenced by Felski's enquiry: 'what if feminine phenomena, often seen as having a secondary or marginal status, were given a central importance in the analysis of the culture of modernity? What *difference* would such a procedure

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<sup>26</sup> The English translation of Walter Benjamin's work, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, was released in the same year as two influential studies of urban subjectivity: Williams' *The Country and the City*, and H. J. Dyos' and Michael Wolff's edited collection, *The Victorian City*. This was noted by Ana Parejo Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism: Passengers of Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Gail Finney, *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

<sup>30</sup> Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, pp. 4-5.

make?’<sup>31</sup> Their collection identifies the differences between male and female experiences of urban cultural practices: shopping, selling, walking and networking, as well as violence, criminality, looking and being seen. The idea that modern subjectivity can shift and be decentred has also guided studies about women’s movement in Victorian Britain and abroad and its representation in literature, such as Deborah Epstein Nord’s *Walking the Victorian Streets* (1995), Deborah L. Parsons’ *Streetwalking the Metropolis* (2000), Ana Parejo Vadillo’s *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism* (2005), and Wendy Parkins’ *Mobility and Modernity in Women’s Novels, 1850s-1930s* (2009).<sup>32</sup> These works reveal an array of female experiences or patterns of behaviour in the city which had previously been considered either impossible or intrinsically deviant. Reflecting upon this change in 2005, Vadillo noted a critical shift from the conviction that the *flâneuse* ‘could not have been historically possible’ to critics who now ‘confidently use the term [...] to speak of women’s urban ramblings’.<sup>33</sup> Vadillo identifies a useful outcome of this shift: ‘the attention paid by critics to the conflict inherently posited by the gendered discourse of modernity [...] has turned into an important reflection upon the physical presence, and the social and cultural practices of women in cities’.<sup>34</sup>

These and other works have made considerable progress in the process of unearthing and reconstructing women’s involvement in urban artistic communities and the urban artistic tradition. They have recovered the lives, works and networks of women writers, artists, playwrights, and activists; they have brought these women in from the periphery and firmly repositioned them at the centre of cultural production; they have highlighted the interconnectedness of the city, urban subjects and modes of production. However, a trope which occurs throughout women’s writing at the *fin de siècle* and yet has not been the subject of significant enquiry is the desire for solitariness *in spite of* the new connectivity of modern life. This thesis examines the states of physical isolation and of psychological aloneness that are essential to the process of literary production. It identifies the oscillation between public life and solitariness, between separation and exposure, as another example of the constant state of flux that Walter Pater claimed was essential to modern subjectivity.<sup>35</sup> The texts examined in

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<sup>31</sup> Felski, quoted in Ann L. Ardis, ‘Introduction’, in *Women’s Experience of Modernity: 1865-1945*, ed. by Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 1-10 (p. 1).

<sup>32</sup> Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; repr. 2003); Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*; Wendy Parkins, *Mobility and Modernity in Women’s Novels, 1850s-1930s: Women Moving Dangerously* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1922), pp. 233-9. Pater characterised modern life and consciousness as ephemeral. He compared the processes of the body—‘the passage

this thesis are subjective responses to the conflict between society and solitude; highly-charged, visceral, emotive, and, at times, bubbling with pain, together they pose an indirect challenge to Simmel's notion of the 'metropolitan blasé attitude' which is central to his portrait of the metropolitan man.

### The Superfluous Woman

Although the desire for solitariness at the *fin de siècle* has not been the subject of significant enquiry, the single woman in the nineteenth century has been the focus of a recent study. Liggins' *Odd Women?* demonstrates how spinsters, lesbians and widows moved from the periphery of social consciousness to become key players in the late nineteenth-century discourses which sought to address (and sometimes to redefine) the idea of female 'normalcy'. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the lonely woman inhabited the margins of literature and culture as the widow or the 'old maid'. However after the 1851 census revealed that there were over half a million more women than men living in England and Wales, the single (unmarried) woman emerged as a talking point in cultural discourse and popular culture.<sup>36</sup> On one hand, marriage exponents questioned how Britain's many unmarried women could be kept in check in the absence of enough men to go around.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Liggins avers, the proliferation of single women popular discourse led to their 'diffus[ion] or integrat[ion] into alternative versions of the normal'.<sup>38</sup> The perceived eccentricity of the spinster was central to her transformation. As part of a larger narrative of social change, although often still stigmatised as 'abnormal, perverted [and] unnatural', the single woman was able to 'transgress the norms of female behaviour and to stretch the rules governing sexuality which hemmed in conventional wives and mothers'.<sup>39</sup>

Increasingly, through the representation of the single woman in literature, other possible forms of femininity were brought to the fore: the most acceptable being the working woman.

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of the blood, the waste and repairing of the lenses of the eye, the modification of the tissues of the brain'—to 'the inward world of thought and feeling' and the material world outside the body (p. 233-4). He describes the constant flux of modern consciousness thusly: 'those impressions of the individual mind [...] are in perpetual flight; [...] each of them is limited by time, and [...] as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is' (p. 235).

<sup>36</sup> Census statistics for 1851 are reprinted in Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 293. On account of this imbalance, Frances Power Cobbe claimed that as many as 30% of British women would never marry: 'What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?' *Frasers Magazine*, 66 (1862), 594-610 (p. 594).

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, W. R. Greg's article 'Why Are Women Redundant?', *National Review*, 15 (1862), 501-5. Greg suggested that, in order to restore the gender balance in Britain, half a million unmarried women should be exported to the colonies.

<sup>38</sup> Liggins, *Odd Women?*, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Liggins, *Odd Women?*, p. 1.

The presence of ‘so many superfluous females’, Deborah Anna Logan argues, ‘visibly challenged the culturewide pressure to domesticate women through marriage and motherhood’.<sup>40</sup> Egerton and Levy both wrote successful novels about single women who perused careers: *The Romance of a Shop* (1888) follows a group of sisters as they establish a photography studio in London, and *The Wheel of God* (1898) accounts for the transatlantic career of a female typist. Grand also spoke publicly in interviews and wrote articles about how her writing career profited from her separation from her husband. Despite her failed marriage, Grand was positioned by general illustrated magazines as the archetypal working woman and a role model to young female readers who may have similar aspirations. Along with male writers who depicted the working woman in their novels, such as George Gissing and Grant Allen, Levy, Egerton and Grand validated the ‘oddness’ of the spinster by aligning her with urbanism, productivity and, effectually, modernity.<sup>41</sup>

The 1880s saw the arrival of the ‘bachelor girl’ on the city scene. The difference between the bachelor girl and the spinster before her was the illusion of autonomy: the bachelor girl, it was often held, *chose* to go it alone in the big city. Liggins, Parsons and Martha Vicinus have attributed the arrival of the bachelor girl to the new subsidised housing and clubs for women which were established in large cities in the late 1880s.<sup>42</sup> By way of such establishments, Vicinus argues, ‘isolated working women’ were able to form friendships with other like-minded women.<sup>43</sup> These establishments would not (and could not) replace the importance of the family home because their emphasis was upon the ‘free movement’ of residents or club members, but they were the cornerstones of new female communities and offered ‘protection, convenience, and opportunities for a fuller social life’ to women who wished to remain unmarried.<sup>44</sup> The facilities aimed specifically at single women contributed to a continued rise in the number of unmarried women living and working in cities. By 1891, there were over two million unmarried women between twenty and forty-four years old living in England and Wales, an increase of nearly 800,000 from the 1851 census.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Deborah Anna Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women’s Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, Or Do Worse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), p. 193.

<sup>41</sup> George Gissing’s novel *The Odd Women* was published in 1893. Grant Allen published his novel *The Type-Writer Girl* in 1897 using the female pseudonym Olive Pratt Rayner.

<sup>42</sup> Liggins, *Odd Women?*, pp. 77-111; Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, pp. 111-16; Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 295.

<sup>43</sup> Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 295.

<sup>44</sup> Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 295.

<sup>45</sup> Census statistics reprinted in Vicinus, *Independent Women*, p. 293.

## The New Woman

In spring 1894, in response to the growing number of unmarried women in England and Wales, a pair of articles written by Grand and fellow-novelist Ouida (Maria Louise Ramé) for the *North American Review* brought the term ‘New Woman’ into popular usage.<sup>46</sup> In its original context, the term ‘New Woman’ was used to refer to women who were seen to be progressing beyond their traditional station: the New Woman, Grand explained, had found ‘what was wrong’ with the notion that ‘Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere’.<sup>47</sup> However, as Ledger has since observed, the New Woman-type appeared in popular discourse before she was assigned a definitive name. Ledger argues that the term New Woman replaced and united the guises of new womanhood which had come before: ‘the “wild woman”, the “glorified spinster”, the “advanced woman”, the “odd woman”, the “modern woman”, “Novissima”, the “shrieking sisterhood” [and] the “revolting daughters”’.<sup>48</sup> Because the term was serving so many purposes of description, the New Woman came to be used to broadly describe women who undermined the socio-political systems that sought to locate their bodies and aspirations within the home and in accordance with the traditional roles of wives and mothers. Accordingly, it was often used to describe women journalists, novelists, university graduates, social reformers and activists, exponents of aesthetic culture, and women who lived alone, as well as married women who were seen to be pursuing a career.

In her recent study, *In Search of the New Woman*, Gillian Sutherland challenges the popular notion that the proliferation of New Women in fiction and the popular press emboldened ordinary women to pursue opportunities beyond the home.<sup>49</sup> Sutherland argues

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<sup>46</sup> Grand used the term ‘new woman’ (without upper-case letters) to refer to a woman who was seen to be actively pursuing interests beyond the home in her article ‘The New Aspect of the Woman Question’, *North American Review*, 158 (March 1894), 270-276 (p. 271). Ouida selected this term from Grand’s article and used it for the title of her own: ‘The New Woman’, *North American Review*, 158 (May 1894), 610-19. Ouida’s article was a rebuttal to Grand’s claim that the ‘new woman’ was a sign of social progress. Recent studies have shown that the term ‘new woman’ was used before 1894. Michelle Elizabeth Tusan identifies an earlier reference to the ‘New Woman’ in an unattributed article titled ‘The Social Standing of the New Woman’, published in *The Woman’s Herald* in August 1893. More recently, William A. Davis has cited Mary Jeune’s article, ‘Women of To-Day, Yesterday, and To-Morrow’, *National Review*, published in December 1889, as the first use of the term. However, the fact remains that Grand and Ouida’s exchange in *North American Review* introduced the term ‘New Woman’ into popular usage. Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, ‘Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics during the *Fin-de-Siècle*’, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 31 (1998), 169-82; William A. Davis, ‘A New Date for the Victorian New Woman’ *Notes and Queries*, 61 (2014), 577-580.

<sup>47</sup> Grand, ‘The New Aspect of the Woman Question’, p. 271.

<sup>48</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>49</sup> Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 7. The idea that the New Woman inspired real women to pursue professional or education aspirations is described by Matthew Beaumont in ‘The New Women in Nowhere: Feminism and Utopianism at the *Fin-de-Siècle*’, in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, ed. by Richardson and

that, in fact, the economic and practical constraints on women hindered any such ambition. Female graduates, Sutherland stresses, were few, and ‘even fewer [...] were in employment and economically independent, whether in the closed world of [...] secondary and higher education, or [...] government service’.<sup>50</sup> Of this small pool of female graduates, those employed as teachers or civil servants were expected to be ‘impeccably conventional in their behaviour’, while the estimated 20,000 women employed full-time by charitable societies were more likely to be inspired by the image of the Lady Bountiful than by the New Woman.<sup>51</sup> The difference between the New Woman in fact and in fiction was a point of contention, and it was often cited in periodicals, fiction, art and theatre that the New Woman was a misrepresentation of female lived experience. *Vanity Fair*, for instance, declared in 1894 that ‘We do not believe in the New Woman’s existence. She is a caricature. We read of her in books, and we see her on stage. But we have not met her’.<sup>52</sup> This and other views which announced the fictitiousness of the New Woman demonstrate how far the term had been removed from its original definition of a woman who sought experiences—whether knowledge or pleasure—beyond the parameters of domesticity. As the census statistics show, there were, in fact, thousands of women who fit the New Woman mould in its proper sense.

The broad semantic field of the term ‘New Woman’ led to it becoming ‘a wildly skewed reductive media construct which did not represent the real lives and work of those people it purported to describe’.<sup>53</sup> The term originally used by Grand to describe the real women who were moving beyond the domestic sphere was enlarged into a rhetorical construct and in fiction, journalism and illustrations of the period the New Woman-type became a caricature, a site at which a number of acute ideas about the modern woman intersected. Cartoons in *Punch* and other periodicals typically depicted the New Woman as bespectacled and with short hair; she is often riding a bicycle, or else engaged in the male pursuits of hunting, smoking or debate; she is always shown to be confident and, sometimes, ugly or grotesque. George Du

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Willis, pp. 212-23 (p. 213), and Teresa Mangum in *Married, Middlebrow and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1998), p. 52.

<sup>50</sup> Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, p. 159.

<sup>51</sup> Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, p. 159-60. Louisa M. Hubbard and Angela Burdett-Coutts carried out a statistical survey of women in work in 1893. Their results showed that 20,000 women ‘supported themselves as “paid officials” in charitable societies’, but F. K. Prochaska points out that this figure did not include women who were employed by charitable societies on a part-time basis, or others who were volunteers: F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 224. The term ‘Lady Bountiful’ was often used in the nineteenth century to describe women who were engaged in philanthropic activities: see John R. Tyson, *In the Midst of Early Methodism: Lady Huntington and her Correspondence* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Vanity Fair* (1894), quoted in Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow and Militant*, p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> Talia Schaffer, “‘Nothing But Foolscape and Ink’: Inventing the New Woman”, in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, ed. by Richardson and Willis, pp. 39-52 (p. 49).

Maurier's cartoon 'A "New Woman"' (figure 1), which was printed in *Punch* in 1894, is a foremost example how the New Woman was depicted in the satirical press. The title subject is wearing a calf-length skirt, oversized jacket and flat cap, and has a hunting rifle tucked under her arm; she has one hand in her jacket pocket and her head is cocked to one side exposing a strong jaw. The New Woman's mannish sensibility and masculine dress is starkly contrasted with her companion, the 'Vicar's wife', who stands obelisk-like, wearing a long, black dress and a worrisome expression, a monument to Victorian conservative femininity. Du Maurier's cartoon, as with many representations of the New Woman, depicted new and old forms of femininity as inextricably different.



Figure 1: George Du Maurier, 'A "New Woman"', *Punch*, 8 September 1894, p. 111

### 'The New Woman and the Old'

Grand looked to challenge the idea, invoked by Du Maurier in his cartoon, that the New Woman was a species apart from her feminine forebears. In 1898, in an article titled 'The New

Woman and the Old' for *Lady's Realm*, Grand harnesses her authority as someone intimately involved in the invention of the New Woman in order to re-establish the parameters of the term. The aims of Grand's article are to overturn the popular idea that the New Woman was sexless and grotesque, and that she was an impossible construct or (as *Vanity Fair* describes her) a 'caricature'. Grand appeals to her reader: 'Where is this New Woman, this epicene creature [?] [...] [W]here is she to be found, if she exists at all?'<sup>54</sup> In lieu of directly answering her question, she offers a rhetorical account of an encounter with a New Woman:

I saw a lady the other day standing beside a bicycle in a county lane. She was a young creature, slender, elegant, admirably built, her figure, set off the best advantage by the new cycling costume, being evidently undeformed by compression of any kind. Judging by what the papers say of the effect of this costume on the female character, I really should have been afraid to accost her. However, she spoke to me, very courteously asking her way, which she had lost. I directed her, and then she prepared to mount [her bicycle].

Grand then goes on to satirise the depiction of the New Woman as a pseudomythical and sexless being:

"Oh! Wait one moment," I exclaimed emboldened by the charm of her manner. "Do pardon me for asking, but are you *the* New Woman?"

"I'm sure I don't know", she answered, laughing. "I only know that I enjoy every hour of my life, and that is a new thing for a woman. But pray excuse me. I am hurrying home to put my baby to bed, and get my husband's tea."<sup>55</sup>

Grand's (new) woman is a synthesis of masculine and feminine markers: she is 'slender', 'elegant' and 'admirably built', speaks 'courteously' and with 'charm', but wears Rational Dress, possesses her own mode of transportation (a bicycle), and travels alone. Similarly, she is a wife and mother and also a lady cyclist, terms which were usually deemed mutually exclusive by the idea, which was popular at the time, that cycling was detrimental to women's reproductive health.<sup>56</sup>

Grand's vignette encourages the synthesis of new and traditional, strange and usual elements of femininity. She also combines accepted and *possible* forms of female ability. Grand argues that the new freedoms available to women, such as bicycling and wearing practical, unrestrictive clothing, are not necessarily incompatible with traditional roles of wife and mother. On the contrary, she makes a radical suggestion: the (new) woman is more capable

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<sup>54</sup> Grand, 'The New Woman and the Old', p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> Grand, 'The New Woman and the Old', p. 69 [my emphasis].

<sup>56</sup> For an example of the popular misgivings about the impact of bicycling upon women's reproductive health, see 'The New Woman', *The Monthly Packet* (1895), repr. in *Victorian Women's Magazines: An Anthology*, ed. by Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 79-80.



of fulfilling her domestic duties because finding enjoyment beyond the home has contributed to her personal wellbeing. At the end of her vignette, Grand underpins her belief that the New Woman need not represent a complete and irrevocable departure from traditional notions of womanhood and femininity. After watching the woman ‘whir[l] away’ on her bicycle, Grand considers ‘that, of course, [the woman she had encountered] could not be the New Woman’, but this thought is quickly replaced by an epiphany: ‘I felt pretty sure that she was—the New Woman and the Old too’.<sup>57</sup>

Although she argues that it is possible (and profitable) to synthesise old and new elements of femininity, Grand goes on to infer that they are conserved by different means. To this end, she outlines the ‘prayer’ of the New Woman:

“Give me the country to live in, with the sea in sight, and ample leisure. Give me the society of my fellow creatures to enrich my human nature; and give me hours of sacred solitude to strengthen that in me which is divine [...].”<sup>58</sup>

In her ‘prayer’ of the New Woman, Grand identifies ‘the society’ of others and ‘solitude’, both, as fundamental to the healthy advancement of women in the modern age. Crucially, because society and solitude are diametrically opposed, she also identifies modern female subjectivity as a site of conflict.

### In Search of Society and Solitude

Grand’s ‘prayer’ of the New Woman articulates the New Woman sensibility. Fiction, art and journalism at the *fin de siècle* were full of images and symbols which invoked the necessity of balancing society and solitude in order to protect an emerging female consciousness. The bicycle and the latchkey were two such symbols. Sarah Wintle describes the bicycle as a ‘herald[d] of a new age’.<sup>59</sup> Grand and other exponents of female emancipation were often photographed standing proudly alongside their bicycles, their favoured mode of transportation, and spoke publicly about the positive effects of cycling on health and wellbeing, citing its role in the advancement of women.<sup>60</sup> In both a literal and a metaphorical sense, and in fiction and

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<sup>57</sup> Grand, ‘The New Woman and the Old’, p. 70.

<sup>58</sup> Grand, ‘The New Woman and the Old’, p. 70.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah Wintle, ‘Horses, Bikes and Automobiles: New Woman on the Move’, in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, ed. by Richardson and Willis, pp. 66-73 (p. 71).

<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the most famous is R. W. Thomas’ photograph of Grand standing alongside her bicycle outside her home in Kensington. The photograph was featured in *The Cycling World Illustrated* in April in 1896 and reprinted the following year in *The Young Woman*. Grand was outspoken about the health benefits of cycling in an interview for *The Hub*, but she also noted that she refrained from cycling when in London because ‘it makes my menfolk so nervous’: Grand, quoted in ‘Women of Note in the Cycling World: A Chat with Madame Sarah Grand *The Hub*

real life, the bicycle is representative of the balance between society and solitude. When riding their bicycles around cities or towns, women cyclists were able to witness and play a part in modern life whilst also ensuring a physical remove from other people. Atop their bicycles, as they moved with the road traffic, women cyclists were integrated within the urban panorama, and yet removed from the criminal and decorous activity and moral dissolution that was often associated with the urban crowd. Moreover, cycling permitted women the freedom to roam as they pleased; the route of a bicycle was subject primarily to the whims of its rider, unlike, for instance, the fixed route of an omnibus. Through the ‘simple agency of the bicycle’, Wintle notes, women cyclists celebrated their ‘solitary and autonomous enjoyment of the open road’.<sup>61</sup> In this sense, it is plain to see why Grand used the bicycle to accompany her depiction of the modern woman who endeavours to achieve balance between ‘the society of [her] fellow creatures’ and ‘hours of sacred solitude’.

The use of the bicycle as a symbol for female autonomy has been well documented in New Woman scholarship. The four chapters of this thesis explore the ways that women writers approached, interrogated, and sometimes successfully tackled the subject of women’s urban agency through other means. The temporal focus of this study (1880-1922) facilitates an exploration of the continuities and differences between *fin-de-siècle* and modernist texts and their representation of female consciousness in an urban context. Grand and Egerton both lived until the 1940s. They were amongst the hoards of women who moved to London to pursue their careers in the 1890s, and they also saw the normalisation of this way of life from the turn of the century.<sup>62</sup> Their personal writings and recorded conversations with friends show that they oscillated between public life and solitariness, between separation and exposure, both at the heights of their careers and in the later parts of their lives. Grand’s modernist ghost stories, published in 1922 and examined in chapter three demonstrate that she embraced new literary forms in order to render an enduring problem: how a woman might struggle to balance the desires for autonomy and companionship. The structure of this follows generic change in British literary culture: it begins with the Romantic tradition of travel writing, moves through to Victorian realism in chapter two, then modernism in chapter three, and ends with a focus on impressionism. This structure sees Egerton and Grand swap their usual places in the genealogy

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(1896), repr. in *Sex Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, pp. 234-6 (p. 235).

<sup>61</sup> Wintle, ‘Horses, Bikes and Automobiles’, p. 73.

<sup>62</sup> The emergence of vast numbers of working women in London is noted by Ledger in *The New Woman*, pp. 150-6. Vicinus also notes that some women may have migrated to the city because it provided many opportunities for communal living, an arrangement which was vastly cheaper than living alone. The influx of women into the city led Janet E. Hogarth (1897) to describe London as being overwhelmed by a ‘monstrous regiment of women’: quoted in Ledger, *The New Woman*, p. 152.

of proto-feminist women's writing. Egerton is often described as a proto-modernist writer, but chapter two considers her depiction of female solitariness in line with the aims of Victorian realism. Conversely, scholarship on Grand has typically focussed on her didactic writings, but chapter three examines three short stories which are inspired by emerging modernist trends. In this way, this thesis offers new contexts in which to consider totemic feminist writers.

The first chapter of this thesis extracts the modern woman from her usual habitat: London. Levy was born in London in 1861 and was officially registered as living there with her parents until her death (again, in London) in 1889. Her life and work have most often been discussed in the context of London, its spaces and social networks. Chapter one draws out a conflict in Levy's biography which is yet to be the subject of extensive discussion: she self-identified as an urban poet with 'an urban muse' but chose to spend a large portion of her career away from her native city.<sup>63</sup> I use biographical information, personal correspondence between Levy and her friends, and descriptions in her literary work of the foreign places that she visited in order to extend our understanding of Levy's relationship with travel and the world beyond London. Levy's frequent escapes from London were attributable to two new and complementary freedoms for women at the *fin de siècle*: the possibility of establishing themselves as literary professionals, and social and technological advancements which allowed young, unmarried British women to travel widely. I identify how Levy's relationship with two periodicals, *London Society* and *Cambridge Review*, allowed her to harness a considerable degree of personal autonomy: the fees received from publishing 'light fiction' in these periodicals allowed her to extend her trips to Continental Europe, and to pursue educational and artistic opportunities—to broaden her literary education—beyond London. My engagement with Levy's literary work demonstrates how she used the medium of travel-writing to (remotely) critique aspects of Victorian culture which restricted female subjectivity and to account for the conflict between society and solitude: her female travellers invariably strive for subjectivity but are limited by social conventions which demand their attachment (and deferral) to others—whether female chaperone, guidebook, or male companion. By exploring Levy's relationship with travel and the unfamiliar places that she encountered and used in her work, this chapter offers a global rather than just an urban context in which to consider the central themes of her oeuvre.

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<sup>63</sup> Levy prefaced *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse* (1889), her final and posthumously published collection of poetry, with an epigraph taken from Austin Dobson's poem 'On London Stones' (1876): 'Mine is an urban Muse, and bound/ By some strange law to paven ground'. I examine Levy's use of this epigraph in chapter one.

Chapter two examines Egerton's semi-autobiographical novel, *The Wheel of God* (1898).<sup>64</sup> It examines the same conflict—between the pressures of society and the individual desire for solitude—and its role in the social-subjective development of Egerton's working-class protagonist, Mary Desmond. The fundamental difference between Levy's array of female travellers and Egerton's protagonist is their class, and this is borne out in their relationships with the wider world. Levy's travel stories depict middle-class women trying to engage with their foreign surroundings, whereas Mary is shown to be physically and geographically limited to familiar spaces by routine and financial necessity. Before her marriage, Mary spends most of her time either at work, at home, or moving between working and domestic environments and, as a result, is restricted to engaging with the wider world primarily through her imagination. Like her author, Mary has an ambivalent relationship with the city: it offers the best chance of securing work and financial independence, and yet she frequently acknowledges her distaste for city-life. Mary's search for employment takes her from Dublin, to London, to New York, but 'the need to work and the sense of loneliness' remains the same.<sup>65</sup> Despite her acknowledged sense of loneliness, Mary also frequently voices a desire for solitude: she 'long[s] for quiet sometimes; quiet to listen to the dreams in herself' but finds that 'there was never any quiet [in the city]'.<sup>66</sup> Egerton suggests that Mary's inability to achieve subjective autonomy is a result of her class: Mary reflects that 'the greatest differentiation between the classes and the masses' was 'the possibility of solitude'.<sup>67</sup> This chapter identifies a shortfall of Grand's claim that society and solitude are attainable aspects of new womanhood: Egerton's working-class woman is powerless to choose at any given time between personal solitude and the society of others.

Chapter three examines a short story trilogy by Grand which has been historically neglected in favour of her more didactic literary works.<sup>68</sup> The three 'Josepha' stories, 'The Man

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<sup>64</sup> Egerton's nephew, Terence De Vere White noted the similarities between Egerton's biography and the life of her protagonist, Mary Desmond, describing *The Wheel of God* as 'a novel in form but autobiography in fact'. White also claims that Egerton's husband at the time interpreted her depiction of Mary's husband, Cess, as a thinly-veiled attack on his character: *A Leaf from the Yellow Book: The Correspondence of George Egerton* (London: The Richards Press, 1958), pp. 43-4. Ledger's interprets *The Wheel of God* similarly, claiming that it 'contains a good deal of autobiographical detail': 'Introduction', in *Keynotes and Discords* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. ix. Similarly, Tina O'Toole argues that the novel 'draws on episodes from the author's own life': *The Irish New Woman* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 140. *The Wheel of God* is described as either an 'autobiographical' or a 'semi-autobiographical' novel in numerous other sources: see, for instance, Carolyn Christensen Nelson, *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles and Drama of the 1890s* (Letchworth and Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), p. 7, and Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 159.

<sup>65</sup> George Egerton, *The Wheel of God* (London: Grand Richards, 1898), p. 185, in *Hathi Trust Digital Library* <<http://www.hathitrust.org>> [accessed 15 May 2014].

<sup>66</sup> Egerton, *The Wheel of God*, p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> Egerton, *The Wheel of God*, p. 170.

<sup>68</sup> Chapter three joins a scholarly tradition of grouping Grand's fiction into trilogies; for instance, the 'New Woman trilogy', which is comprised of *Ideala* (1888), *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897).

in the Scented Coat' (1904), 'Josepha Recalls a Remarkable Experience', and 'I Can't Explain It—' (both 1922), feature the same New Woman protagonist and invoke the warring desires for autonomy and companionship that shape her search for new experiences beyond the home.<sup>69</sup> With this chapter the thesis moves from the belligerent, hostile spaces that comprise Egerton's urban working-class world to join Grand's middle-class bachelor girl, Josepha, in her West End stomping ground and in a series of her own homes. As is the case in chapters one and two, my focus is on the representation of movement, subjectivity and autonomy in relation to the female adventurer: I examine Josepha's oscillation between the domestic and public spheres, her subjective transformation of these spaces, and the implicit limitations on female autonomy. Because the chapter focuses on works published after the turn of the century and eighteen years apart, it also examines generic modifications or transformations in Grand's depiction of modern female subjectivity. I examine the influence of the adventure genre and *fin-de-siècle* sexual politics on 'The Man in the Scented Coat' and the influence of the modernist supernatural genre in relation to 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' and 'I Can't Explain It—'. I also present evidence that the stories were drawn from Grand's lived experience and so could be considered three further examples of her 'studies from life'. When considered together and in relation to Grand's biography, the 'Josepha' trilogy delineates Grand's stylistic progression, her socio-political constancy, and her desire to stay abreast of shifting literary trends. The trilogy invokes the normalisation of the single woman after the turn of the century, but it also recalls the sustained conflict between society and solitude that continued to affect women's interaction with both the city and her home.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis examines works, published in *The Yellow Book* between 1894 and 1897, which challenged the notion that a woman's solitariness undermined her femininity.<sup>70</sup> The chapter is split into three parts. The first part examines *The Yellow Book's* association with the New Woman and the contribution of women writers and

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Lauren Simek has averred that the tendency to group Grand's other works into trilogies is due, in part, to the fact that many of Grand's works 'share characters and settings', and, in the case of her New Woman trilogy, show a 'linear progression [...] in their development of a powerful model of moral agency for women': Lauren Simek, 'Feminist "Cant" and Narrative Selflessness in Sarah Grand's New Woman Trilogy', *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 67 (2012), 337-365 (p. 337). My use of the term 'trilogy' to define the three stories about Josepha is informed by the same notion.

<sup>69</sup> Sarah Grand, 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience', and 'I Can't Explain It', in *Variety* (London: Heinemann, 1922), repr. in *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. by Ann Heilmann, 4 vols (London: Routledge, 2000), IV, pp. 319-34 and pp. 291-316.

<sup>70</sup> My analyses of 'A Lost Masterpiece' and 'Passed' stories are informed by Nord's claim that walking alone was a radical act for a woman at the *fin de siècle* because it inserts a female subject into 'a cultural and literary tradition that habitually relegates her to the position of object, symbol, and marker, [...] unsettle[s] her domestic and private identity' and, above all, 'threatens her respectability, her chastity, her very femininity'. Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, p. 117.

artists to its literary and visual aesthetic. The second part analyses the role and representation of *flânerie* and the solitary walking woman in two short stories: ‘A Lost Masterpiece: A City Mood ‘93’ by Egerton, and ‘Passed’ by Mew. I consider the act of *flânerie* as a manifestation of the antithetical desires for society and solitude. Baudelaire alludes to this conflict in his essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ (1863): according to Baudelaire, the diffuse aims of the *flâneur* are ‘[t]o be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world’.<sup>71</sup> I identify how Egerton and Mew use the *flâneuse*, the act of *flânerie*, and techniques aligned with literary impressionism to invoke gendered crises of consciousness and affect the dissolution of key Victorian ideals: separate spheres and the symbolic resonance of ‘home’; the female-object/male-subject paradigm and the ascendancy of the male gaze. The third part of chapter four examines two works of art, also published in *The Yellow Book*, which depict solitary women: ‘A Dream’ by Margaret Macdonald, and ‘Ill Omen’ by her sister, Frances Macdonald. I use Christa Zorn’s notion of ‘mythical modes of thinking’, developed in her study of Vernon Lee’s supernatural stories, to compare the solitary women in ‘A Dream’ and ‘Ill Omen’ with Grand’s New-Woman-and-Old conglomerate. Using Zorn’s definition of ‘mythical modes of thinking’, I suggest that the Macdonald sisters’ artworks utilise mythic and natural allusions in order to invoke the *possibility* of harmony between culturally separated images and, within this, harmony between accepted and *possible* forms of femininity.<sup>72</sup> By encouraging the synthesis of rational and (seemingly) irrational elements of the self and other, the Macdonald sisters’ artworks endeavour to lift the modern woman out of her conflicted subjectivity.

The restrictions of this thesis, in terms of space and scope, mean that I have selected only a small portion of relevant primary material for use. There is, in truth, enough to be said on each of these writers’ relationships with the city to fill four respective volumes and, indeed, the problematic relationship between self and society has been the focus of many single-author studies of their male contemporaries.<sup>73</sup> But my aim is to show the universality and continuance of the uneasy relation between individuality and collective life experienced by the emancipated

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<sup>71</sup> Charles Baudelaire, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. by Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), pp. 1-40 (p. 9).

<sup>72</sup> Christa Zorn, *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2003), pp. 144-57.

<sup>73</sup> Dickens’ relationship with the city and the urban environment, for instance, has been the subject of many scholarly studies. See, for instance, Wolf Mankowitz, *Dickens of London* (Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1976); F. S. Schwarzbach, *Dickens and the City* (London: Bloomsbury, 1979); Julian Wolfreys, *Dickens’s London: Perception, Subjectivity and Phenomenal Urban Multiplicity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002); Jeremy Tambling, *Going Astray: Dickens and London* (Edinburgh: Pearson, 2009); Ruth Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse: Oliver Twist and the London Poor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

woman before the dawn of modernism, as well as to draw out the various economic influences and socio-cultural implications on women's relationships with the city.

I have used primary materials which point explicitly to the authors' personal ambivalence towards London and which correspond with the period under consideration (1880-1922). Grand wrote dozens of articles and sat for many interviews for general illustrated magazines between 1893 and 1928. A great deal of these sources contain a wealth of references to her time spent in London but, given the scope of this thesis and the focus of chapter three, I have selected only those which were published while she was living in the city or shortly thereafter. The shift—from confidence to paranoia—that is perceivable in these writings is underpinned by Grand's personal correspondence, items of which were either published in Ann Heilmann and Stephanie Forward's edited collection, *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Selected Letters*, or obtained from Bath Central Library.

In terms of Egerton's personal correspondence, I have been limited to using two secondary sources: a collection by Terence De Vere White (Egerton's nephew), which is spliced with De Vere's (often emotionally-guided) commentary, and Margaret Stetz's unpublished literary biography, 'George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties', which, although excellent and comprehensive, quotes only small sections from Egerton's letters. I have made every attempt to cross reference these works where possible. A scholarly edition of Egerton's correspondence (in the same vein as Heilmann and Forward's collection of Grand's letters) would benefit future investigations into her life and the trajectory of her career. My research into Mew's relationship with London was conducted primarily using Penelope Fitzgerald's biography, *Charlotte Mew and her Friends*, and Mary C. Davidow's unpublished thesis, 'Charlotte Mew: Biography and Criticism'. Fitzgerald's work, especially, underpins the need for a published biography on Egerton.

The research conducted for chapters one and four of this thesis expose two disparate experiences of the twenty-first century researcher. As has been the experience of previous scholars, it has proven immensely difficult to obtain access to the surviving collection of Levy's personal papers, which is privately owned by Camellia Plc.<sup>74</sup> For this reason, in chapter one I primarily use transcriptions from the archive made by Linda Hunt Beckman and Christine Pullen before Camellia closed the collection to scholars. In the absence of any other primary materials besides Levy's published writings, scholarship on Levy will only begin to gather pace

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<sup>74</sup> I am grateful to the former curator of the Camellia collection, Lindsay Stainton, for giving me access to Levy's British Museum notebook.

and interest once accessibility to this collection is improved. Conversely, my work on *The Yellow Book* has benefitted from the inexhaustible primary and secondary resources made freely available by *The Yellow Nineties Online*, edited by Dennis Denisoff and Lorraine Janzen Kooistra (Ryerson University).

The aim of these four chapters is to demonstrate the ways that women writers and artists at the *fin de siècle* used the lone female figure to challenge the hegemony which pushed female consciousness to the periphery of modern urban experience. The writers discussed in this thesis, though diverse in terms of their social background, nationality, and levels of success experienced during their lifetime, are united by common aims as well as common difficulties. They all expressed a desire to succeed as professional writers and to achieve a level of financial autonomy, and they all understood the city's role in their ability to achieve this aim. Yet, as these chapters will show, Levy, Egerton, Grand and Mew frequently referred to being unsuited to the demands of life in London. The various ways that they looked to extract themselves from the city—whether by travelling abroad or to the countryside, or by enforcing a rhetorical distance between themselves and the masses—speaks to the uneasy combination of separation and exposure experienced by the working woman at the *fin de siècle*. This thesis considers the necessity of solitariness to the creative process, but it also shows how the uneasy relation between individual and collective life experienced by these writers came to inform the representation of the lonely or solitary woman in their fiction.



‘Behold me in my village retreat!’: Amy Levy’s travel writing and her retreats from London

‘Genuine Cockney as I am, I began to

“Loathe the squares and streets  
And the faces that one meets”

— Amy Levy, ‘Out of the World’ (1886)<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary scholarship on Amy Levy has most often examined her life and professional writings in light of her lived experience as a Jew, a woman, a lesbian, and a depressive. In the literary canon, as in nineteenth-century British society, these categories of identification are marginal; they signal a literary voice isolated from or not conforming to the dominant ‘mainstream’ culture.<sup>2</sup> The tendency to read Levy’s work in light of her marginality does, however, reflect the general interest of modern literary biography, described by Richard D. Altick as relaying ‘the inner spectacle of the mind and feelings’.<sup>3</sup> The chief appeal of modern literary biography, Altick notes, resides in its recital of ‘the experience of a sensitive and self-aware’ individual, rather than their ‘adventures in the world’.<sup>4</sup> Levy’s tendency toward depression and the circumstances of her death—she committed suicide at the age of 27—appeal to the modern scholarly interest in interiority and the marginalised subject. Levy’s marginality extends beyond her non-conformity to a dominant social group, however. Biographical studies generally portray her as an individual incapable of (or unwilling to) fully integrate herself within any specific minority group either. As such, she is depicted as a figure trapped in a network of conflicting marginal identities; she was a British-born Jew who was critical of the Anglo-Jewish community, a woman with homosexual tendencies, a friend of socialists without a staunch political affiliation, and a depressive with a rich and varied social life.

Notions of Levy’s triple-marginality have given rise to important examinations of her biography and literary output and these, in turn have contributed to a sharpened understanding of the relationship between gender, sexuality, race and aesthetic culture in *fin-de-siècle*

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Levy, ‘Out of the World’, *London Society*, January 1886, pp. 53-6 (p. 53).

<sup>2</sup> Linda Hunt Beckman argues that Levy spent adolescence and adulthood ‘in negotiation with her discordant experiences as a member of various groups, all of them marginal’: *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Altick, *Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America* (New York: Knopf, 1965), p. xi.

<sup>4</sup> Altick, *Lives and Letters*, p. xi.

Britain.<sup>5</sup> A vast body of this scholarship considers Levy's residence in London as pivotal to her professional and personal development. It is true that the city played an important role in shaping her social identity and the trajectory of her literary career. Recent studies have contributed to a detailed portrait of Levy as an urban subject; invaluable work by Susan David Bernstein, Elizabeth F. Evans, Alex Goody, Deborah Epstein Nord, Ana Parejo Vadillo, and Levy's biographers, Linda Hunt Beckman and Christine Pullen, has recovered Levy's work from the margins of nineteenth-century literature and culture and firmly repositioned her within ranks of middle-class, emancipated women residing in London in the 1880s. The aim of these works, broadly speaking, is to demonstrate Levy's affiliation with urban life and culture, either by way of an urban literary heritage, sensibility, or a specific social network.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, many of the (marginal) identity markers attached to Levy emanate from her personal affiliation with London: her lesbian tendencies are seen to be contingent on her being part of a large network of young, emancipated women; notions of her socialist tendencies stem from her close friendship with male and female socialist activists; her 'Jewish self-hatred' is often seen to be affected by her experience of West London's Jewish community.<sup>7</sup>

The scholarly focus on integrating Levy within London has led to her relationship with the city being understood in positive terms. Nord describes Levy's last collection of poetry, *A London Plane Tree* (1889), as a 'celebrat[ion] [of] urban life', whilst Beckman considers Levy's 'participation in London life' to be a 'professional and personal asset to her'.<sup>8</sup> Early representations (and misrepresentations, which will be discussed later) of Levy's life closely align her with the city. Levy's lived experiences beyond London are rarely the subject of consideration and there are few discussions of the instances in which she looked to escape the

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<sup>5</sup> Two works which consider these interconnections were published in 2010, in the only collection of essays on Levy's life and work: *Amy Levy: Critical Essays*, ed. by Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010). In "'Mongrel Words": Amy Levy's Jewish Vulgarity' Susan David Bernstein identifies a 'diasporic' voice in Levy's work. She argues that Levy identifies a privilege of the cultural minority, celebrating what she called "mongrel words"—terms that gentiles will recognize only as proper English, but that carry a secondary meaning intelligible only to Jewish hearers (pp. 136, 142). Alex Goody's essay in the same collection, 'Passing in the City: the Liminal Spaces of Amy Levy's Late Work', reads Levy's last volume of poetry, *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse* (1889), within the tradition of African-American 'passing' literature (pp. 157-79).

<sup>6</sup> For the influence of French symbolism on Levy's poetry, see Linda Hunt Beckman, 'Amy Levy: Urban Poetry, Poetic Innovation, and the *Fin-de-Siècle* Woman Poet', in *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s*, ed. by Joseph Bristow (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), pp. 207-30.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the essays by Bernstein and Goody referenced in n. 5, see: Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, pp. 181-206; Susan David Bernstein, 'Leaving the Tribal Duckpond: Amy Levy, Jewish Self-Hatred, and Jewish Identity', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27 (1999), 185-201; Alex Goody, 'Murder in Mile End: Amy Levy, Jewishness and the City', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 24 (2006), 461-79.

<sup>8</sup> Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 197-8; Beckman, 'Amy Levy: Urban Poetry, Poetic Innovation, and the *Fin-de-Siècle* Woman Poet', (pp. 207-8).

city in reality and in her work.<sup>9</sup> In recent criticism, her relationship with the rural landscape has been broadly and unreasonably dismissed. William Sharpe, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of London*, stated that Levy's poetry 'identifies the city with love, promise and beauty, while the countryside holds no lasting attractions'.<sup>10</sup> The process of bringing Levy in from the margins of nineteenth-century life and literature has, therefore, seen her legacy confined to the city.

This chapter examines Levy's lived experience beyond London. I use information made available by Beckman and Pullen in their biographies, personal correspondence between Levy and her friends, and descriptions in Levy's literary work of the foreign places she visited in order to broaden the understanding of her relationship with travel and the world beyond London.<sup>11</sup> My aim is to draw out a conflict in Levy's biography which is yet to be the subject of extensive discussion: she self-identified as an urban poet with 'an urban muse' but spent a large portion of her career *away* from her native city.<sup>12</sup> In her personal correspondence, Levy attests to this conflict—between the pressures of society and the desire for personal solitude—with great clarity. But I argue that it is also borne out, albeit with a greater degree of nuance, in Levy's publishing history because it was during her spells away from London that she produced a great deal of new material for publication.

As we shall see, Levy's lived experience outside of London had a considerable impact on her creative and professional development. Although two of Levy's novels and many of her poems are situated in London, she spent most of her adolescence and large parts of adulthood away from the city. She received her secondary education at a boarding school in Brighton, and then lived for two years in Cambridge as a student at Newnham College. After leaving Newnham in 1881 before sitting her Tripos, she embarked for Germany and spent the next four years travelling extensively around Europe. First she went to Dresden, where she embraced a cosmopolitan existence: she went to the theatre, joined reading groups, studied Greek and

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<sup>9</sup> Three notable and recent exceptions are Luke Devine, "'The Ghetto at Florence': Reading Jewish Identity in Amy Levy's Early Poetry, 1880–86", *Prooftexts*, 31 (2012), 1–30; Richa Dwor "'Poor Old Palace-Prison": Jewish Urban Memory in Amy Levy's "The Ghetto at Florence (1886)"', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 13 (2015), 155–169; Linda K. Hughes, "'Phantoms of Delight": Amy Levy and Romantic Men', in *Decadent Romanticism: 1780–1914*, ed. by Kostas Boyiopoulos and Mark Sandy (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 161–75 (p. 162).

<sup>10</sup> William Sharpe, 'London and Nineteenth-Century Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of London*, ed. by Lawrence Manley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 119–41 (p. 136).

<sup>11</sup> Christine Pullen, *The Woman Who Dared: A Biography of Amy Levy* (Kingston Upon Thames: Kingston University Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Hughes briefly alludes to this in her examination of Levy's last collection of poetry, *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse*. Although many of the poems in this collection foreground the city, Hughes notes that the section titled 'Minds and Thoughts' 'descentres the urban landscape, exchanging it for Tuscany, Cambridge, the River Wye, and various interior zones': "'Phantoms of Delight": Amy Levy and Romantic Men' (p. 162).

German languages, and continued to write in the city's public libraries. Levy remained in Dresden for 6-7 months, from around September 1881 until April 1882, but the letters that she wrote to her mother indicate that she wanted to remain there for longer: she found two German male tutees and arranged to deliver English lessons, but her mother forbade this course of employment. From Dresden, Levy travelled to Lucerne, Switzerland, where she wrote to her mother about seeking 'regular work'; once again, she reveals an intention to remain on the Continent. Her mother must have forbidden this course of action too because Levy shortly returned to London. Levy left London for Dresden again in 1883, and then travelled on to Alsace and Baden. Between late-1885 and spring 1886, she was in Florence and residing with Clementina Black at Casa Guidi, the apartment in which Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning (who was one of Levy's favoured male writers) had once lived. It was also in Florence that she met the aesthete writer and philosopher, Vernon Lee, who became a source of creative inspiration for the rest of her life. Levy returned to Florence again in 1888, around the same time that her second novel, *Reuben Sachs*, was published. As well as spending extensive time on the Continent, Levy also retreated frequently to coastal towns around England with female friends. She rented a cottage with friends in Dorking in 1889 where she also met Grant Allen, made repeated trips to Hastings and, in the final weeks of her life, took two holidays with Olive Schreiner: the first was to a series of resorts on the south coast of England (including St. Leonards-on-sea and St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe), and the last to St. Albans.

This chapter examines a selection of Levy's literary works that were either inspired by or composed during her many retreats from London. First, I examine three documents that led to Levy's literary legacy and social identity being bound to London: a letter written by her close friend, Clementina Black, which was published in the *Athenaeum* a month after her death; an article by Warwick James Price, which was one of the first twentieth-century accounts of Levy's life; and Levy's highly-anthologised poem 'A London Plane-Tree', which was published posthumously in *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse* (1889). The rest of the chapter examines Levy's works of fiction which are set in or informed by the foreign places that she visited, and examines her use of the travel-writing medium to critique aspects of Victorian culture which restricted female subjectivity at home and abroad. I argue that travel-writing was, for Levy, a means of escape and adventure: it supplemented her income and allowed her to harness a level of freedom far from the reaches of London and her family.

## 'Inner spectacle' and the city in Levy's biography

Altrick's account of the shift in modern literary biography from action to interiority helps to explain why early biographical accounts about Levy, including obituaries and friends' memoirs, focussed on her mental health. Although they invariably aim to render Levy's state of mind toward the end of her life, these accounts can be divided into two camps: those which describe Levy engaged (albeit melancholically) in social activities in the months before her death, and those which describe her determined and prolonged retreat from public life.<sup>13</sup> The latter type had the greatest influence on inaugural biographical sketches and arguably followed the lead of Levy's close friend, Clementina Black. A month after Levy's death, Black wrote a letter to the *Athenaeum* in order to refute the 'exaggerated and wholly untrue' accounts of Levy's vigorous social life.<sup>14</sup> In her letter, which was published by the *Athenaeum* in October 1889, Black positioned Levy squarely and safely in the domestic space: she states that 'it is not true that [Levy] ever left her father's house otherwise than on visits to friends or holiday journeys'.<sup>15</sup>

Studies of Levy's personal effects, namely the 1889 calendar she updated until her death, as well as the correspondence and diaries of friends, reveal an entirely different picture of her social life. These documents show that, contrary to Black's claim, Levy frequently left her father's house for the purposes of entertainment, study, and exercise. Beckman finds in Levy's 1889 calendar 'a surprisingly busy schedule' of events and appointments.<sup>16</sup> In the last year of her life, Levy attended meetings of the University Women's Club (of which she was a member), attended the first meeting of the Women Writers Club and a dinner organised by the Society of Authors. She worked in the British Museum, played tennis in the city's parks, walked with friends, attended private salons and parties, and visited the Philharmonic, art galleries and theatres.<sup>17</sup> She also often visited Industrial Hall in Bloomsbury where Black, secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, had an office.<sup>18</sup> Although Black vaguely mentions Levy taking 'holiday journeys', she does not communicate the frequency or considerable length of her friend's trips abroad, nor does she refer to the fact that Levy sought

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<sup>13</sup> W. B. Yeats gave a notable account of Levy's melancholic involvement in London society. He writes, 'I saw Amy Levy no long while before her death [in July]. She was talkative, good-looking in a way and full of the restlessness of the unhappy': quoted in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 183.

<sup>14</sup> Clementina Black [untitled letter], *Athenaeum*, 5th October 1889, p. 457.

<sup>15</sup> Black [untitled letter], *Athenaeum*, p. 457.

<sup>16</sup> Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> Details of Levy's 1889 calendar are from Beckman, 'Amy Levy: Urban Poetry, Poetic Innovation, and the *Fin-de-Siècle* Woman Poet' (p. 207).

<sup>18</sup> The Women's Protective and Provident League changed its name to the Women's Trade Union League in 1888. Black was made honorary secretary in 1887.

respite from the city in the final weeks of her life by travelling to the south coast with Olive Schreiner.

Beckman has argued that Black's letter to the *Athenaeum* may have been a gallant attempt to limit damage to Levy's public reputation following her suicide.<sup>19</sup> Lyssa Randolph similarly concludes that Black 'chose, in the context of the conservative *Athenaeum*, to defend Levy as properly feminine' and signal 'her intellectual identity as one fostered outside the damaging, public arena'.<sup>20</sup> Black established her authority on the subject of Levy's life and death by describing herself as 'a close friend of Miss Levy for many years', and her 'testimony [...] that of personal knowledge'.<sup>21</sup> Levy bequeathed all of her papers to Black upon her death, but Black's decision (made with members of Levy's family) to destroy parts of the collection has made it difficult for scholars to completely overturn the inaccuracies of her account of Levy's last year.<sup>22</sup> To the same end, the small collection of Levy's surviving papers has, since the 1920s, been passed down through private collections to which scholars have had little access.<sup>23</sup> With few primary sources at their disposal and little verifiable information from those who best knew her, early commentators on Levy's life fabricated lies which, in some cases, have promulgated through decades of research.

The twentieth century saw many misrepresentations of Levy's life. These accounts either focussed on Levy's mental health, portrayed her as a recluse, or sought to bind her, body and soul, to her native city. In his article 'Three Forgotten Poetesses' (1912), Warwick James Price fabricated a working-class existence for Levy. He claimed that she was a 'Clapham factory girl' who was 'shut off from living her real [social] life' by the need to earn a wage.<sup>24</sup> Gratifying the modern appetite for biographical interiority, Price explains that Levy's life was 'slight [...] in incident': she 'lived in her thoughts' and 'read vicariously even at her loom'.<sup>25</sup> He describes her 'look[ing] through her squinting, cob-webbed garret panes and see[ing] nothing [outside] but a world which knew her not'.<sup>26</sup> Price ties Levy to London through her (supposed)

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<sup>19</sup> Beckman views Black's claim as 'an attempt to bolster Levy's reputation in the face of a "sordid" end': *Amy Levy*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Lyssa Randolph, 'Verse or Vitality? Biological Economies and the New Woman Poet', in *Amy Levy: Critical Essays*, ed. by Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman, pp. 198-220 (p. 211).

<sup>21</sup> Black, [untitled letter], *Athenaeum*, p. 457.

<sup>22</sup> Liselotte Glage notes that Black assented to the destruction of 'some of' the papers that were bequeathed to her: *Clementina Black: A Study in Social History and Literature* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1981), p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Beth Zion Abrahams owned Levy's surviving papers for most of the twentieth century. They were given to her by Levy's younger sister, Ella, after the two women met in the 1920s when conducting charitable work in London's East End. When Abrahams died in 1990, the collection was bought at auction by Camellia Plc, a private company based in Kent, UK.

<sup>24</sup> Warwick James Price, 'Three Forgotten Poetesses', *Forum*, 47 (1912), 361-76 (pp. 367-8).

<sup>25</sup> Price, 'Three Forgotten Poetesses' (p. 367).

<sup>26</sup> Price, 'Three Forgotten Poetesses' (p. 367).

poverty and vocation. However, he, like Black, suggests that Levy's intellectual identity was fostered outside the public arena. By describing Levy 'reading at her loom', Price aligns her more closely with a long line of mythological female weavers than with the emancipated and formally-educated New Woman.

The difficulty of researching and writing an accurate account of Levy's life persisted even seventy years later. In his twentieth-century reappraisal of prominent Jewish women, Edward Wagenknecht proudly overturned Price's incorrect account of Levy's working-class existence, but went on to make his own erroneous claims.<sup>27</sup> Wagenknecht mistakenly identifies Levy and her father as secretary and president, respectively, of the Beaumont Trust, a charitable foundation which was 'soliciting funds to erect a "People's Palace for East London"'.<sup>28</sup> As a result, he incorrectly identified Levy as an active participant in London's social reform movements. Wagenknecht readily admitted to mining Levy's poetry and fiction for biographical details, blaming the necessity of this process on the destruction of Levy's personal papers and the inaccuracies of first-hand accounts. He states that '[s]o little has been recorded of [Levy's] life that [...] we are dependent for our knowledge of her personality almost wholly upon what she reveals or what can be inferred from her own writings'.<sup>29</sup> Wagenknecht admits to the limitations of his methodology (it is 'a method of procedure which leaves us with more questions than answers') but, nonetheless, proceeded to mine Levy's poetry for clues to her socialist politics.<sup>30</sup>

Price and Wagenknecht's biographies invoke two very different portraits of Victorian womanhood: the factory girl, and the social reformer. Despite their differences, both accounts have had significant influence on subsequent scholarship. Beckman notes a number of twentieth-century sources which propagate Price's claim: *The Oxford Guide to British Women Writers* (both 1993 and 1994 editions), for instance, states that Levy 'may have worked in a factory [and] lived in a garret'.<sup>31</sup> The myth, generated by Wagenknecht, that Levy was actively involved in social reform movements also had tenacity. In their anthology of Victorian women

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Wagenknecht, *Daughters of the Covenant: Portraits of Six Jewish Women* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1983), p. 178, n. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Wagenknecht, *Daughters of the Covenant*, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> Wagenknecht, *Daughters of the Covenant*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>30</sup> Wagenknecht, *Daughters of the Covenant*, p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> Joanne Shattock (ed.), *The Oxford Guide to British Women Writers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993; repr. 1994), p. 265. For further evidence of the tenacity of Price's claims, see Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 4, and p. 284, n. 12.

poets, Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds describe Levy as a social reformer and repeat Wagenknecht's claim that she was secretary of the Beaumont Trust.<sup>32</sup>

The 'garret-pane' and the 'square': urban entrapment in 'A London Plane-Tree' (1889)

It is highly likely that Price, like Wagenknecht, looked to Levy's literary work for clues to her life. The influence of Levy's poetry on Price's biography is apparent when we note that he uses the term 'garret pane' to describe the hypothetical factory window.<sup>33</sup> The speaker in Levy's poem 'A London Plane-Tree' (1889) accounts for her window in the same way:

Here from my garret-pane, I mark  
The plane-tree bud and blow,  
Shed her recuperative bark,  
And spread her shade below.<sup>34</sup>

The image of a woman observing the city from her window influenced accounts of Levy's life because it corresponded with an idea that perpetuated in the years after her death: Levy was an 'urban poet' and so artistically bound to the city, but was isolated from public life. Most critics read 'A London Plane-Tree' in line with this notion: they interpret the garret as a watch-tower which provides an inimitable perspective from which to observe, record, and celebrate city life, and yet permit the speaker a level of detachment and, thus, objectivity.<sup>35</sup> Nord, for instance, argues that the central image of a woman 'behind the "garret-pane"' is evidence of Levy's own 'untiring enjoyment of seeing the human pageant unfold' below.<sup>36</sup>

The image of a woman stood at a window recurs throughout Levy's oeuvre, but it is rarely used to invoke a straight-forward 'celebration of urban life' as Nord suggests.<sup>37</sup> In Levy's first novel, *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), Phyllis Lorimer complains that '[i]t is a little dull [...] to look at life from a top-floor window'.<sup>38</sup> Phyllis' sister, Lucy, meanwhile, alludes to the more sinister prospect of the open window undermining their privacy: 'any one

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<sup>32</sup> Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 589.

<sup>33</sup> Beckman makes this point in *Amy Levy*, p. 284 n. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Amy Levy, 'A London Plane-Tree', in *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889), p. 17 (lines 5-8). Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses.

<sup>35</sup> In Victorian literature and art, the garret is often portrayed as the residence of an artist. The literal distance of the garret from the city streets was frequently coupled with signs of the artist-inhabitant's destitution, and used to convey their objectivity. Claire Pettitt has noted the import of this notion on nineteenth-century legislature, such as copyright laws: 'Legal Subject, Legal Objects: The Law and Victorian Fiction', in *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 71-90 (p. 77).

<sup>36</sup> Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, pp. 197-8.

<sup>37</sup> Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, pp. 197-8.

<sup>38</sup> Amy Levy, *The Romance of a Shop*, ed. by Susan David Bernstein (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006), p. 106.



can see right into the room', she objects.<sup>39</sup> In this brief exchange between sisters, Levy evokes the limitations or, worse, the perversity, of observing city-life from a window. In this and other ways, Levy undermines Nord's claim that a woman's place at a window is straight-forwardly representative of their 'untiring enjoyment' of city-life. In the final pages of *Reuben Sachs* (1888), Judith Quixano sits before an open window and contemplates the 'living, solid reality' of the street-scene: 'in the roadway the ceaseless stream of carriages moved east and west. On the pavement the people gathered, thicker and thicker. A pair of lovers moved along slowly, close against the park railings, beneath the shadow of the trees'.<sup>40</sup> Judith's description of the scene beyond her window evokes the city's enormity, monstrousness and inhumanity: the traffic is ceaseless, the crowds grow ever-thicker, green spaces are nipped in by railings, and individuals become unrecognisable as they disappear into crowds and in the shadows of trees.

Lucy and Judith do not celebrate the city, but consider its potential to incarcerate and overwhelm the individual. A clue to the accuracy of this idea for Levy is to be found in the small collection of her surviving papers. On the front cover of a notebook that she used when studying at the British Museum, Levy sketched an image of a woman or girl sat at a window (figure 2). The woman's hands are folded on the ledge in front of her and her chin rests on top of her hands as she looks outside.<sup>41</sup> Susan David Bernstein claims that Levy's sketch and its place on her British Museum Notebook speaks to 'a new exteriority' for women, wherein 'watching the world and rewriting it converge'.<sup>42</sup> However, by claiming that Levy's sketch is entirely celebratory, Bernstein overlooks other details beyond the woman's outward-facing position. Levy sketched in detail the brickwork of the casement and surrounding wall. The woman's expression, meanwhile, is sullen and is unquestionably indicative of her discontent. It is also important to note that the woman is not shown to be occupied with writing; instead, she traps her hands beneath her chin. When we take into account these details—the austere brickwork, the woman's sullen expression and her enforced inactivity—the sketch shifts from a representation of a woman looking *out* of a window to a representation of a woman *enclosed* behind a wall.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Levy, *The Romance of a Shop*, p. 105.

<sup>40</sup> Amy Levy, *Reuben Sachs* (London: Persephone, 2001), p. 146.

<sup>41</sup> Levy's British Museum notebook is part of the small collection of her surviving papers which is privately owned by Camellia Plc. I am thankful to their former archivist, Lindsay Stainton, for sending me a copy of Levy's 'British Museum notebook'.

<sup>42</sup> Susan David Bernstein, *Roomscape: Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 84.

<sup>43</sup> It is ironic that Levy drew an image of an incarcerated woman on the notebook that she set aside for her literary endeavours in the British Museum. Whilst the Museum's Reading Rooms were of the few quasi-public spaces in the city in which women and men were able to mix, converse, think and observe in a coeducational state, Levy's

*Image has been redacted due to copyright restrictions.*

Figure 2: The front cover of Amy Levy's British Museum notebook (privately owned by Camellia Plc.).

Since Nord's description of 'A London Plane-Tree' as a 'celebration' of the city, scholarship has considered alternative meanings of the poem. For the most part, these readings align more closely with Levy's sketch on her British Museum notebook and Phyllis Lorimer's complaint in *The Romance of a Shop*. Vadillo interprets the speaker's place behind the 'garret-pane' in 'A London Plane-Tree' as a form of 'physical incarceration'.<sup>44</sup> She argues that the poem's subject (the woman behind the window) and its object (the plane-tree) are 'mirror images of each other' because they are both 'squarely constrained': the woman is framed (or

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short story 'The Recent Telepathic Occurrence at the British Museum' (1888) demonstrates that she was aware that women were not always welcome.

<sup>44</sup> Ana Parejo Vadillo, 'Phenomena in Flux: The Aesthetics and Politics of Traveling in Modernity', in *Women's Experience of Modernity 1875-1945*, ed. by Ann L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003) pp. 205-20 (p. 214).

constrained) by the window, and the plane-tree by the square in which it stands.<sup>45</sup> As well as framing her subject and object in a way that makes them immediately comparable, Levy emphasises their similarity through empathy and metaphor:

Among her branches, in and out,  
The city breezes play;  
The dun fog wraps her round about;  
Above, the smoke curls grey. (lines 9-12)

Vadillo argues that Levy uses empathy and metaphor to show her speaker's love for the city and her desire to be immersed in urban life:

the woman in the poem identifies so powerfully with the plane-tree that she seems to participate in its physical sensations. She is so absorbed in contemplating the plane-tree that she becomes what she contemplates—hence the feminization of the plane-tree. [...] In the poem, [the speaker's] love for the city metaphorically *takes* her to the square where the tree is situated, *merging* with the subject of her love. By merging with the plane-tree, the woman is metaphorically transported [from the window] to the center of urban experience.<sup>46</sup>

To a similar end, Beckman notes that Levy's use of a female pronoun in reference to the tree is suggestive of the 'correspondence between the observer and the observed'.<sup>47</sup> Vadillo and Beckman both claim that the correspondence between subject and object infers their shared 'preference for urban life', that the poem articulates the speaker's love for the city, and that the speaker looks to the tree's place on the street as an ideal form of urban integration.<sup>48</sup>

However, there are indications in the text that the square-framing of woman and plane-tree may be meant with ironic effect. At this point, it is useful to consider the possibility that subject and object are similarly framed not to imply their likeness, but in order to highlight their difference. Unlike the woman at the window, the plane-tree is a participant in urban life because it affects and is affected by its environment. The speaker watches

The plane-tree bud and blow,  
Shed her recuperative bark,  
And spread her shade below. (lines 6-8)

But the city also shapes and changes the appearance of the tree:

Among her branches, in and out,  
The city breezes play;  
The dun fog wraps her round about;  
Above, the smoke curls grey. (lines 9-12)

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<sup>45</sup> Vadillo, 'Phenomena in Flux' (pp. 214).

<sup>46</sup> Vadillo, 'Phenomena in Flux' (pp. 214-5) [emphasis in original].

<sup>47</sup> Beckman, 'Amy Levy: Urban Poetry, Poetic Innovation, and the *Fin-de-Siècle* Woman Poet' (p. 217).

<sup>48</sup> Beckman, 'Amy Levy: Urban Poetry, Poetic Innovation, and the *Fin-de-Siècle* Woman Poet' (p. 217).

Unlike the tree, which is in a constant state of transformation, the speaker appears to be in a form of stasis at her window. As the seasons pass, the woman watches, as if hypnotised, as the tree is affected by and affects change in its environment.

An alternative reading of the poem, which places subject and object in ironic opposition, is tenable if we consider the possibility that Levy intended to depict the *city*, rather than the window or square, as the thing that incarcerates. The couplet that Levy chose to preface *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse* suggests that urban incarceration may have been a guiding idea behind some of the collection. Levy takes her epigraph from Austin Dobson's rondeau 'On London Stones' (1876):

Mine is an urban Muse, and bound  
By some strange law to paven ground.<sup>49</sup>

Parsons has claimed that Levy re-appropriates Dobson's couplet for a feminist context, arguing that Levy subverts the traditional iconography of the male urban poet in order to empower the female poetic voice.<sup>50</sup> Although Levy's epigraph suggest that she self-identified as an urban poet, it is not necessarily also true that she (like Dobson) celebrated the implied bond between mind and environment. In Dobson's poem, the couplet comes after a period of significant action. Dobson's speaker embarks for the countryside but, upon reaching his destination, finds his creative impulse to be lacking; thus, he concludes that his muse must be 'bound' to the city. In this context, the word 'bound' has connotations of fate and destiny, as well as alluding to the speaker's movement between places: he is first 'bound for' the country, and then for the city. The speaker's movement—from city, to country, and back to the city—demonstrates that he is free to explore alternatives before concluding that his creative inspiration is best drawn from the urban environment.

It is significant that Levy chose to extract only the couplet from Dobson's poem for her epigraph. When taken out of its original context, the couplet's form and rhyme suggests, not movement, but the muse's absolute confinement. Rhyming couplets encourage semantic connections between rhyme-words. In Levy's epigraph, the words 'bound' and 'ground' are emphasised because they each fall on stressed syllables of an iambic foot; at the crux of the rhyme is the image of being 'bound' to the 'ground'. By redacting the to-ing and fro-ing of Dobson's poem, Levy encourages the reader to consider the wider implications of the rhyme and the shared connotations of the rhyming words. When appropriated in this way, the connection between 'ground' and 'bound' alludes to the poet's bondage and lack of agency: the

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<sup>49</sup> Austin Dobson, 'On London Stones', in *Collected Poems*, 2 vols (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1895), I, p. 225.

<sup>50</sup> Deborah L. Parsons, *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; repr. 2003), p. 89.

poet is tied (bound) to the city by a ‘strange law’ which, because of its indistinctness, is impossible to overcome or undo; the verb ‘ground’ also carries connotations of submission (as in ‘ground down’). Without the movement of Dobson’s poem, Levy’s epigraph subverts the positive relationship between muse and the city, and between subject and environment. Instead, her epigraph shows the city acting in restraint of the poet’s personal liberty.

‘A London Plane-Tree’ is the first poem in the collection *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse*. True to the collection’s epigraph, the subject and object of the poem are both bound to restrictive spaces in the city: the plane-tree is literally bound to the city by its roots, while the speaker is bound to the aperture of her window by something akin to the ‘strange law’ of the epigraph. The regular structure and rhyme (quatrain stanzas rhyming *abab*) evoke the squares in which subject and object are contained and thus reinforce their incarceration in the textual space of the poem. Levy underpins their shared incarceration—their being bound to rather than thriving within the city—by highlighting their incongruousness. The plane-tree is a foreign import and hybrid of two trees from different continents: the American sycamore and the Oriental plane.<sup>51</sup> Although the plane-tree is seen to be thriving in the square as its neighbouring native trees brown and fade, Levy undermines what could have been a triumph by marking the tree’s incongruity: it has been planted in a man-made patch of space, the name and square-shape of which self-references its artificiality. The woman’s description of her home is also incongruous in its urban setting if we consider the broad semantic field of the word ‘garret’: especially, the turret of a castle.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the incarceration in the city of both subject and object, there are allusions throughout the poem to places and people beyond London. Most obvious are references to the countryside (‘country air’, line 3), but it is also inferred in the plane-tree’s hybridity and, lastly, in the poem’s final quatrain:

Others the country take for choice,  
And hold the town in scorn;  
But she has listened to the voice  
On city breezes borne. (lines 13-16)

The closing lines of the poem describe the speaker listening for a now-absent voice. Critics who describe ‘A London Plane-Tree’ as a celebration of urban life have overlooked the significance of this image, especially its place in the final stanza. Drawing out allusions to the

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Concise Biography* (London: Vintage, 2000; repr. 2012), pp. 363-4.

<sup>52</sup> The Modern English noun ‘garret’ is polysemic and occupies a broad semantic field: the ‘scope’ of the word has increased to include the original meaning (a turret used as a defensive watch-tower), an Early Modern meaning (a room on the uppermost floor of a house) and a Late Modern meaning (the head).

speaker's physical and mental incarceration offers an appropriate context in which to consider this image.

In her analysis of the poem, Vadillo claims that the feminization of the plane-tree is representative of the merging of subject and object: to this end, she suggests that they are merged from the poem's seventh line when a first-person female pronoun is first used to describe the tree shedding its bark. There is an alternative way of interpreting the role and nature of empathy in this context, however. There is a shift in the final stanza whereby the speaker moves from using a personal pronoun to describe the natural processes of the tree's lifecycle (budding blossom, shedding bark) and the affect of the elements (the breeze plays 'among her branches', the fog 'wraps her round about') to suggesting that the tree is *sentient* ('she has listened'). At this point, the subject and object of the poem merge with the suggestion of their shared percipience and it becomes impossible to determine whether the speaker is using a personal pronoun to refer to the tree, or referring to herself using a third person pronoun. By blurring the boundary between vision and reality, and between subject and object in this way, Levy suggests that both tree and woman are engaged in the same act: listening. Moreover, the use of present perfect tense ('she has listened') indicates a past action continuing into the *present*: the act of listening is continuous, but the voice is recalled from the *past*. The implication is that the owner of the voice was once close by, but has since been lost, either to the city, or beyond. This image has the capacity to alter our understanding of the speaker's place at the window: she is unable to sever her ties to the city or tear her gaze from the tree; there she must stand to await the return of the voice. At this point, the speaker projects her consciousness onto the tree and it joins her in silent vigil.

#### 'In Switzerland' (1884): bringing Levy's travel poetry in from the cold

*A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse* has been subject to the most critical attention of Levy's poetry collections. This is partly because the collection was published after her suicide and, therefore, has been at the centre of speculation about her mental health. Poems featured in the collection, including 'A London Plane-Tree', are often held as evidence of Levy's positive relationship with the city and, partly because of this, are amongst the most widely anthologised of her poetic works. Noting the scholarly interest in Levy's life and work in the context of the city, Vadillo claimed in 2005 that Levy had been 'elevated back into the literary canon' after 'a century of critical demotion'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism*, p. 38.

It is certainly the case that Levy's major works are more readily available to readers in the twenty-first century than they had been in the century after her death. All of Levy's three poetry collections—*Xantippe and Other Verse* (1881), *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* (1884) and *A London Plane-Tree*—have been reprinted at least once since 2000.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, selected poems from these collections have been reprinted in recent anthologies of Victorian poetry: Judith Wilson includes over sixty in her anthology, *Out of My Borrowed Books* (2006).<sup>55</sup> Indiana University's Victorian Women Writers Project has also made the entirety of Levy's poetry collections and the posthumously published 'A Ballad of Religion and Marriage' (1915) freely available to read online.<sup>56</sup> Levy's novels have experienced a similar reappraisal in the twenty-first century. Two of her three novels, *Reuben Sachs* (1888) and *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), have been reprinted in scholarly editions since 2000, and both have also been digitised by the British Library.<sup>57</sup>

Although a significant portion of Levy's poetry and prose is available in modern critical editions, commercial reprints, anthologies, biographies, and online, her travel writing is still relatively neglected. Her third and final novel, *Miss Meredith*, is set primarily in Italy and, unlike *Reuben Sachs* and *The Romance of a Shop* (which are both set in London), is yet to be reprinted in a standalone volume since its 1889 debut.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, poems such as 'A London Plane-Tree', which lend themselves to discussions of the city and urban poetics, have received significantly more scholarly attention than those which are set in or inspired by settings outside of the city. The increased attention on Levy's urban poems has led to one of her travel poems falling entirely out of print. 'In Switzerland' was first printed in Britain in July 1884 in *London Society*, and in the United States of America in 1887 in *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*.<sup>59</sup> However, the poem has been overlooked by both Beckman and Pullen's biographies (including the appendix to Beckman's biography, 'A Publishing History of Amy Levy's Writings'), and is not included in Melvyn New's anthology of Levy's work. As is to be expected, the poem has

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<sup>54</sup> *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* and *London Plane Tree and Other Verse* and *Xantippe and Other Verse* were both republished by Dodo Press in 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Judith Wilson (ed.), *Out of my Borrowed Books: Poems by Augusta Webster, Mathilde Blind and Amy Levy* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006).

<sup>56</sup> *Victorian Women Writers Project*, Indiana University Digital Library Program <<http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/>>

<sup>57</sup> *Reuben Sachs* was republished by Persephone in 2001, and *The Romance of a Shop* was republished by Broadview in 2006. The British Library's digitised versions of the texts are available to view remotely via their online catalogue: <<http://explore.bl.uk>> [accessed 6 May 2016].

<sup>58</sup> *Miss Meredith* was serialised in *British Weekly* (19 April-28 June 1889). It was published in a single volume later in 1889 by Hodder and Stoughton. *Miss Meredith* was included alongside *Reuben Sachs* and *The Romance of a Shop* in *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy: 1861-1899*, ed. by Melvyn New (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993).

<sup>59</sup> Amy Levy, 'In Switzerland', *London Society*, July 1884, p. 120; *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, January 1887, p. 571. Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses and refer to its first publication.

not been examined, either in isolation or in relation to her other poetic works. The inclusion of 'In Switzerland' in the appendix to this thesis is the first time that it has been reprinted since the 1880s.

While 'A London Plane-Tree' portrays an ambivalent relationship between the speaker and the city, 'In Switzerland' describes a simpler relationship with the natural environment. The first eight lines of 'In Switzerland' describe the cohesion of the natural environment, and allude to the speaker's place at its centre: the mountains 'all around [...] rise' to meet the sky 'above [her] head'; the hue of the sky matches the lake in the distance. The overall impression is of the interconnectedness and alliance of nature, which is sustained through sensory imagery: 'all the air' smells of the pine trees, and it carries 'whispers' back and forth between the rustling trees and the lapping water (1-3). Levy achieves two effects by this description: she harmonises the different aspects of the environment in order to present it as an organic whole and also emphasises the speaker's smallness in comparison to the tall mountains and the expansive sky. The speaker does not resist or challenge the contrast between the landscape's infiniteness and her smallness. Her pose—'stretched, prone and passive, I recline'—shows that she neither wishes to conquer the scene by scaling the looming mountains, nor be physically subsumed by swimming in the lake (line 8). Instead, she is content to lie down and allow the environment to mingle with her consciousness; she inhales the 'warm sweet air' and listens to 'The sound/That Nature whispers soft around' (lines 21-2).

The sexual connotations of the speaker's position, face-down in the 'soft moss', signal the consummation of her union with the landscape. In this way, the relationship between speaker and her surroundings corresponds with Barbara Claire Freeman's notion of the feminine sublime: the speaker embraces and finds *jouissance* in the 'incalculable otherness' of her surroundings.<sup>60</sup> The speaker's encounter with nature is comparable to Mary Shelley's and, by extension, contrasts with the male romantic tradition which emphasises the overwhelming grandeur of the natural world. Like Shelley, the speaker in 'In Switzerland' describes 'beautiful

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<sup>60</sup> Freeman contrasts the 'feminine sublime' with traditional, patriarchal notions of the sublime posed by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Kant, Burke, *et al.* Freeman argues that, 'in contrast to Wordsworth's "I am everything" and Coleridge's "I am nothing", the feminine sublime neither celebrates self-presence and the self's capacity to master the other nor consecrates the immediacy of its absence'. Freeman uses Luce Irigaray's calculation of the female self in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985): 'the self neither possesses nor merges with the other but attests to a relation with it'. On her use of the term 'feminine' Freeman explains: 'I employ "feminine" as that which contests binaries and indicates a position of resistance with respect to the patriarchal order, whether it is perpetuated and sustained by biological women or by men': Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 9-11.



tranquillity’, rather than ‘sublime exhilaration’.<sup>61</sup> Anne K. Mellor’s examination of Shelley’s invocation of the feminine sublime in her travel writing is pertinent to the analysis of Levy’s poem: the harmony between different aspects of the natural world becomes a ‘metaphor [...] for the highest human pleasure, a peaceful interdependence between the self and nature’.<sup>62</sup>

Textual evidence from the poem strongly indicates that ‘In Switzerland’ was inspired by Levy’s time spent in Seelisberg, between 1882 and 1884.<sup>63</sup> The poem’s language and imagery closely recalls a letter that Levy wrote to her mother when she first arrived in the Swiss town:

Today the weather has been all that could be wished; a cloudless blue sky, lots of sun and a gentle breeze. This morning we started on an exploring party—to find out a good place for working. We lighted upon a small rocky pine-grown peninsula jutting over a small secluded blue lake, lying in the midst of the mountains. It is to be our permanent camping out place, indeed I am at present writing this letter stretched out on a rug over a moss grown rock with a wonderful view of blue lake & green hills & blue sky stretching before me. So please excuse any indistinctness of handwriting. [...] ‘This morning we had a most exciting time making tea in Miss Croft’s “Ætna” [a portable stove] [...]. The sheep bells are sounding as I write but I can’t see any sheep—the sky is blue as it can be and there is sun all over the place; and the best of all we are the only human feature of the landscape.’<sup>64</sup>

Levy’s letter to her mother and her poem share points of reference. They both repeatedly recall the colours blue and green, and describe the same geographic features—the close proximity of a lake, the adjacent pine trees and mountains, and moss underfoot. Poem and letter also both describe having equipment on hand to make tea. The similarities between Levy’s letter and her poem suggest that they were either written around the same time and in the same location, or that the poem was written retrospectively about the place described in the letter. Nevertheless,

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<sup>61</sup> Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York and London; Routledge, 1988; repr. 1989), p. 26.

<sup>62</sup> Mellor, *Mary Shelley*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>63</sup> Levy wrote letters to her family while she was travelling, but many are undated. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain the exact course of Levy’s travels through Europe and the length of her stay in each destination. Levy annotated her personal copy of *A Minor Poet and Other Verse* with an outline of where and when each poem in the collection was composed. With this document Beckman charts Levy’s journey from Dresden to Lucerne in 1882: Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 77. However, Beckman acknowledges that this method of tracing Levy’s travels is not without its problems. There are a few discrepancies between Levy’s annotations in *A Minor Poet*, the letters that she sent while travelling, and the chronology of her publications. In a letter to Black written in Lucerne, Levy states that she has finished writing ‘Medea’, and then asks Black to help her find a publisher for *A Minor Poet*. Levy notes in her copy of *A Minor Poet* that she wrote ‘Medea’ whilst in Lucerne. As a result, Beckman tentatively dates the letters from Switzerland to 1882. However, Beckman points out that it is ‘surprising’ that Levy would have asked Black to look for a publisher for *A Minor Poet* in 1882 because the collection was not published until 1884 and, ‘indeed, some of the poems that appear in the volume had not yet been composed at the time the letter was penned [if it was written in 1882]’: Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 239. Noting this discrepancy, Pullen points out that Levy annotated her copy of *A Minor Poet* in hindsight; there could, therefore, have been mistakes in her recollection of what year each poem was composed. Alternatively, Levy may have visited Lucerne twice in her lifetime: once in 1882 and again in 1884.

<sup>64</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Isabelle Levy [no date], quoted in Pullen, *The Woman Who Dared*, p. 60.

Levy's letter describes her enjoyment of the natural landscape, and underpins the *joie de vivre* of 'In Switzerland'.

While there is little doubt that 'In Switzerland' was inspired by Levy's time spent in Lucerne, there are additional signs which suggest that it directly recounts an episode from her trip. The most obvious indication is the name and scholarly preoccupation of the speaker's companion, 'Ellen'. It was not unusual for Levy to directly name her friends and family members in her poetry.<sup>65</sup> The studious Ellen in 'In Switzerland' is very likely Ellen Wordsworth Crofts, a former student (1874-7) and lecturer (1878-83) in English literature at Newnham College, whom Pullen identifies as the subject of another of Levy's poems, 'To E.'<sup>66</sup> Crofts resigned from her teaching post at Newnham in September 1883 when she married Sir Francis Darwin (Charles Darwin's son), but in the summer before her wedding she joined John Rawlinson Ford and his wife Helen at the Hotel Sonnenberg in Seelisberg, where Levy was also a guest at the time.<sup>67</sup> If Levy and Crofts were not already acquainted after their time at Newnham then they would certainly have been drawn to one another when they met in Switzerland: they had mutual friends, a shared interest in literature, a similar academic background, and a disregard for religious convention which set them apart from their peers.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Levy's poem 'A Game of Lawn Tennis' describes one of the many tennis matches that she played with friends in Regents Park. In this poem, she uses the names of her friends 'Pauline' (Meyerstein), and 'Jenny' (Jennette de Pass). Most often, the names of Levy's friends appear in the titles and dedications of her poems. *A London Plane Tree and Other Verse* is dedicated to Black by way of a poem, 'To Clementina Black', which precedes the contents page. Many of the poems in the collection are dedicated to other friends: 'In the Nower' is prefixed with a dedication to 'J. De P.' (Jennette de Pass); 'The End of the Day' is dedicated 'to B. T.' (Bertha Thomas); 'The Village Garden' is dedicated 'to E. M. S.' (Euphemia, or 'Effie', Malder Stevens). Beckman uses Levy's 1889 calendar and her personal correspondence to identify these individuals: *Amy Levy*, p. 247 n. 6; pp. 114-5; p. 264 n. 3; p. 259 n. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Pullen identifies Ellen Wordsworth Crofts as the subject of 'To E.' in *The Woman Who Dared*, p. 61. Details about Croft's career at Newnham College are from Annabel Robinson, *The Life and Work of Jane Ellen Harrison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 41.

<sup>67</sup> Pullen notes that Crofts had been friends since childhood with John Rawlinson Ford's sister, Isabella. Pullen places Crofts in Lucerne at the same time as Levy, although she does not provide any evidence to support this claim: *The Woman Who Dared*, p. 57. Crofts certainly made at least two trips to Switzerland in her lifetime. A letter to her cousin, Henry Sidgwick, shows that she was in Switzerland in 1900. However, the same letter also offers evidence overlooked by Pullen which may support her hypothesis that Crofts had been in Switzerland in the 1880s. Crofts' letter alludes to a previous visit to Switzerland: she writes that she hopes Sidgwick is not bored by her letters from Switzerland 'as Frank's [Francis Darwin's] mother [and her mother-in-law] always was'. Crofts must have made an earlier visit to Switzerland before Emma Darwin's death in 1896: Ellen Darwin, letter to Henry Sidgwick, 17 August 1900, in Papers of Henry Sidgwick, Trinity College Library, Cambridge, Add.Ms.c.93/104.

<sup>68</sup> Pullen notes that Levy and Crofts shared a friend in Alice Lloyd, Levy's former classmate: *The Woman Who Dared*, p. 57. Crofts' friend and colleague, Jane Harrison, explained that Crofts was 'not popular' at Newnham because 'her utter lack of spiritual conventions made many people [...] uncomfortable with her': Jane Ellen Harrison, letter to Lady Mary Murray, quoted in Pullen, *The Woman Who Dared*, p. 58. Oscar Wilde described Levy similarly as having abandoned 'the orthodox doctrines of her nation, [but] retaining, however, a strong race feeling': 'Amy Levy', *Woman's World*, 3 (1890), 51-2. There are other indications that Levy and Crofts were well acquainted. In 1890, Crofts (then Darwin) reviewed *A London Plane-Tree* for *The Cambridge Review*. Although she does not explicitly claim Levy as a friend, she does describe Levy's temperament and mental health with a

Levy refers three times to ‘Miss Crofts’ and once to ‘E. C.’ in letters from the Hotel Sonnenberg to friends and family members back in London. Her first reference to Crofts is in the aforementioned letter to her mother, in which she describes brewing tea on Crofts’ portable stove. Her description of their outdoor tea party continues: ‘we drank [tea] out of a tooth glass, & ‘milked’ with Swiss milk out of a tin wh. we had to break open on a stone’.<sup>69</sup> In another letter, this time to Black, Levy describes ‘Miss Crofts’ as ‘simply delightful; she makes one feel utterly mean & dirty, she is so simple & clean & strong & very charming withal’.<sup>70</sup> She refers again to Crofts in a letter to her sister which describes the hotel’s other guests:

Among the English people are Miss and Mr. Cross (George Eliot’s [sister-in-law and] husband); Miss Crofts and the Fords knew them a little to start with & the friendship is on the ripen. [...] I am writing on the verandah & opposite me is E. C. [Crofts] being sketched by Miss Cross, to whom I am also going to sit.<sup>71</sup>

This series of correspondence shows Levy revelling in the new relationships and new experiences available beyond London’s social spaces and networks. Crofts’ central role in these tableaux and her appearance in Levy’s published poetry suggest that her friendship was important to Levy at this time.

As mentioned earlier, Pullen has noted Crofts’ appearance in ‘To E.’, which was first published in *London Society* in 1886 (two years after ‘In Switzerland’), and subsequently reprinted in *A London Plane-Tree* in 1889.<sup>72</sup> Although ‘In Switzerland’ and ‘To E.’ were likely written some time apart, textual evidence suggests that they were inspired by the same experience. Their tone, however, is markedly different. The poems take opposing stances on the importance of companionship in foreign places. Comparing ‘In Switzerland’ and ‘To E.’ goes some way to revealing more about the nature of Levy’s attachment to Crofts, and changes in her attitudes to travel, solitude, and companionship.

#### Social alienation versus the alliance of nature in ‘To E.’ (1886) and ‘In Switzerland’

‘To E.’ and ‘In Switzerland’ are immediately comparable in terms of their imagery, language and use of allusion. Levy begins ‘To E.’ with a description of the landscape which

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considerable degree of familiarity: Ellen Darwin, ‘The Poems of Amy Levy’, *Cambridge Review*, January 1890, pp. 158.

<sup>69</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Isabelle Levy [no date] quoted in Pullen, *The Woman Who Dared*, p. 60.

<sup>70</sup> Levy, letter to Clementina Black [no date], in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, pp. 239-40.

<sup>71</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Katie Levy, 18 July [no year], in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, pp. 241-2.

<sup>72</sup> ‘To E.’ was first published in *London Society*, May 1886, p. 447. Levy chose to include ‘To E.’ in *A London Plane-Tree*, along with other poems which she had published in magazines and journals in previous years. It is likely that she chose to include only one of her Switzerland poems in the collection because she was aware of their obvious similarities.

emphasises the cohesion of the natural world. As is the case with ‘In Switzerland’, she achieves this through repeated reference to the colour blue and the concise layering of imagery:

The mountains in fantastic lines  
Sweep, blue-white, to the sky, which shines  
Blue as blue gems; athwart the pines  
The lake gleams blue.<sup>73</sup>

In this stanza, Levy suggests that the different aspects of the landscape are joined in alliance: the mountains sweep up to meet the sky; light from the sky sparks from the lake; the gleam of the light-dappled lake reaches the eye through gaps in the trees. This is markedly similar to ‘In Switzerland’, wherein sky, lake, mountains and pine trees are depicted as one harmonious and organic whole. The topography of the landscape in ‘To E.’ is also comparable to that which is described in ‘In Switzerland’: in both poems, Levy accounts for mountains, pine trees, and a lake. Given their similar use of language to describe a near-identical landscape, it is likely that Levy had ‘In Switzerland’ to hand or in mind when she wrote ‘To E.’. Besides their imagery, other similarities between the two poems suggest that their composition was inspired by the same event: both refer to the work of Christopher Marlow, the processes of writing and studying, and a companion with a name that begins with ‘E’.

The obvious similarities between ‘In Switzerland’ and ‘To E.’ have not been the subject of scholarly study. This is primarily a result of ‘In Switzerland’ falling out of print after the late-1880s, but the general lack of interest in Levy’s lived experiences beyond London has also been a contributing factor. The shortfall of interest in Levy’s travel writings is evident when we consider the fact that ‘To E.’ is widely available in print and online, yet few critics besides Pullen and Beckman have commented on the influence of travel on its composition. Examinations of ‘To E.’ have focussed primarily on the poem’s place in *A London Plane-Tree*. Early commentators have ascribed significance to the poem’s place at the end of the collection; they tie the poem to Levy’s final bout of depression and, thus, her last days in London. The poem’s ominous closing lines (‘on me/ The cloud descends’) led New, for instance, to argue that ‘To E.’ reveals Levy’s state of mind before her suicide: he describes these lines as her ‘last lyric utterance’.<sup>74</sup> With this, however, New overlooks the fact that ‘To E.’ was first published in 1886 and so written at least three years before Levy’s death.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Amy Levy, ‘To E.’, in *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889), pp. 92-4, lines 37-40. I have reproduced the formatting of this extract in accordance with how it appeared in both *London Society* and *A London Plane-Tree*. Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses.

<sup>74</sup> New, ‘Introduction’, in *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, p. 38.

<sup>75</sup> Beckman makes this point in *Amy Levy*, p. 95.

Like New, Pullen uses ‘To E.’ to help explain Levy’s suicide. Pullen attributes the closing lines (and Levy’s death) to a failed relationship between Levy and the male ‘Poet’ who features in the poem.<sup>76</sup> Conversely, Beckman suggests that ‘To E.’ may depict a failed romantic relationship between two women. Beckman observes the Sapphic form of ‘To E.’ and notes that the homoeroticism of Sappho’s lyrics had become known in England with the publication of Henry Thornton Wharton’s *Sappho: Memoir, Text Selected Renderings and a Literal Translation* in 1885, a year before Levy’s poem was published.<sup>77</sup> If Levy wrote ‘To E.’ after she had returned from Switzerland, in 1885 or early 1886, Beckman claims, she would likely have been aware of the implications of using Sapphic meter. Levy’s homosexuality has been argued elsewhere, but the lack of archival evidence in this case means it is problematic to suggest that Levy and Crofts’ relationship was homosexual in nature.<sup>78</sup> Equally, the use of Sapphic meter in ‘To E.’ does not necessarily tie the poem to a homosexual relationship. Marion Thain has noted that Sappho, as the late-Victorians understood her, was not unequivocally homosexual. Thain explains that ‘to the educated reader, up-to-date with the developments in Greek scholarship’ (which evidence suggests that Levy was), Sappho represented ‘a sexual ambivalence’; her lyrics, rather than an ‘articulation of a unified, homoerotic passion [...] invoke[d] a multifaceted, amorphous desire’.<sup>79</sup>

Rather than to describe a romantic attachment to Crofts, Levy uses Sapphic meter in ‘To E.’ to underpin the speaker’s alienation and the limitations of seeking guidance and self-worth in the society of others. The staging of Levy’s poem, specifically, is demonstrative of these points. ‘To E.’ describes the relationship between three figures: the speaker, a woman, and a man. Sappho’s ‘Second Ode’ has been traditionally understood to describe a similar dynamic. Lawrence Lipking explains that, ‘[e]ver since Catullus, Sappho’s [Second] [O]de has been staged as [...] a playlet with three characters: the girl, the man, and the poet’.<sup>80</sup> The relationships and characterisation of the three characters in Levy’s ‘To E.’ and Sappho’s ‘Second Ode’ are also comparable. Lipkin describes a popular staging of ‘Second Ode’ which

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<sup>76</sup> Pullen claims that the ‘Poet’ described in ‘To E.’ is Karl Pearson, but this has since been challenged by Beckman. See the dialogue between Pullen and Beckman in ‘Featured New Women’, *The Latchkey*, 3 (2011) <<http://www.oscholars.com/Latchkey>> [accessed 5 January 2016].

<sup>77</sup> Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 299, n. 55. Wharton’s translation of Sappho’s verses was the first to accurately use the female pronoun. Levy may have read Wharton’s book between its publication 1885 and early 1886 when she sent ‘To E.’ to *London Society*.

<sup>78</sup> See, for instance: Ledger, *The New Woman*, p. 126; Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 312; Emma Francis, ‘Amy Levy: Contradictions?—Feminism and Semitic Discourse’, in *Women’s Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre, 1830-1900*, ed. by Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 183-204.

<sup>79</sup> Marion Thain, *Michael Field: Poetry, Aestheticism and the fin de siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 53.

<sup>80</sup> Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988), p. 60.

sees the three characters (the girl, the man, and the poet) forming a ‘triangle’: ‘at the short end the girl and man sit together, intent on each other; and far away, at degree zero, the poet watches and suffers’.<sup>81</sup> In ‘To E.’, Levy evokes the ‘triangle’ dynamic described by Lipking:

We three were here, there years gone by;  
Our poet, with fine-frenzied-eye,  
You, steeped in learned lore, and I,

A poet too.

(lines 4-8)<sup>82</sup>

She alludes to the closeness of the male ‘poet’ and Ellen by positioning them in her text one atop the other: references ‘our poet’ and ‘you’ are at the beginning of consecutive lines. The speaker, however, is positioned as far as possible from them both. Reference to herself—‘I’—is at the opposite end of the line from ‘You’, while her qualification—‘a poet too’—is set apart from the rest of the text entirely. In this way, Levy traces a triangle in her text between the poem’s main character—‘our poet’, ‘you’, and ‘I’—which resonates with the foremost staging of Sappho’s ‘Second Ode’.<sup>83</sup>

In her analysis of ‘To E.’, Pullen identifies another literary allusion which, like the poem’s staging, undermines the unity between speaker, poet, and ‘E.’. Pullen points out that the ‘trio of lakeside friends’ depicted in ‘To E.’ calls to mind the elopement in 1814 of Percy Bysshe Shelley with his lover, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and her half-sister, Claire Clairmont.<sup>84</sup> Levy’s allusion is deeply-rooted in Switzerland. After their six-week journey through mainland Europe, Shelley, Godwin and Clairmont settled at Brunen which, Pullen explains, is ‘sited on the northern shore of Lake Lucerne [and] directly opposite Seelisberg’.<sup>85</sup> Godwin wrote about her stay in Brunen in *History of a Six Weeks’ Tour* (1817); she describes sitting with Shelley and her sister on the bank of Lake Lucerne ‘conversing, enjoying the rising breeze, and contemplating with feelings of exquisite delight the divine objects that surrounded us’.<sup>86</sup> When sitting on the Seelisberg bank of Lake Lucerne, Levy’s three characters overlook the site where the Shelley party had sat sixty years prior. Although she notes the likely significance of this allusion, Pullen stops short of analysis. I suggest that Levy’s allusion to the

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<sup>81</sup> Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition*, p. 60.

<sup>82</sup> The formatting of ‘To E.’ is the same in *London Society* and *A London Plane-Tree*, but the Dodo Press reprint of *A London Plane-Tree* does not retain this formatting.

<sup>83</sup> The speaker’s description of herself as ‘a poet too’ complicates the respective roles of Ellen (the girl), the man, and the poet’ (line 8). This has resulted in Beckman and Pullen’s conflicting conclusions about the focus of the speaker’s affection.

<sup>84</sup> Pullen, *The Woman Who Dared*, p. 61.

<sup>85</sup> Pullen, *The Woman Who Dared*, p. 61.

<sup>86</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *History of a Six Weeks’ Tour* (London: T. Hookham, 1817), pp. 50-1.

Shelley party in 'To E.' is important because it allows her to ridicule and undermine the relationship between the poem's three characters. Dramatic irony arises from their conviction (voiced by the speaker) that 'No folk, we deemed, had been before /So wise and free!' and the likelihood that the Shelley party had thought similarly of themselves when sitting alongside Lake Lucerne (lines 31-2).

Levy also uses the poem's temporality to undermine the friendship between her three characters. The speaker in 'To E.' explains that 'three years' have passed since the events described took place and, with the passing of time, their declaration of 'platonic friendship', which was once made 'o'er and o'er', is now riddled with irony (line 30). The arrogance of youth and the greatest of expectations have given way to circumstances which have pushed each of the trio onto a separate path:

On you the sun is shining free;  
Our Poet sleeps in Italy,  
Beneath the alien sod; on me

The cloud descends.

(lines 37-40)

Levy repeats the technique of tracing a triangle between the three characters to allude to their relative distance from one another: she evokes the deceased poet's burial below the earth by placing 'our poet' beneath 'you' ('E.'), while the speaker is set apart from both as if in a state of limbo. The speaker now sees only 'dead love' and 'dead ambition' in regard to their earlier declaration of 'platonic friendship' made 'o'er and o'er' (line 34). The speaker has failed to find enduring sanctuary in the society of others.

Like 'To E.', 'In Switzerland' describes a three-way relationship between the speaker, 'Ellen', and 'our dead men' (male poets). Between this broadly similar 'cast', Levy also evokes the 'triangle' described by Lipking: Ellen is absorbed in studying the works of Christopher Marlow while the speaker sits apart. Unlike the sky, lake and trees that surround them, Ellen and the speaker do not present an allied front. Levy underpins the implied psychological distance between the two women in her description of Ellen 'walled round with tomes of ponderous size' (line 13). This image, which is also the only allusion to the city in the poem, recalls the woman incarcerated behind her window in 'A London Plane-Tree'. Whilst Ellen is walled-in by books and immersed in writing about 'dead men's stuff', the speaker is lying on her front with her head to the ground (line 16). She is listening to, watching, and absorbing the subtle changes in her surroundings. Although they occupy the same space alongside Lake Lucerne, the women's mental preoccupations are diametrically opposed: the speaker's thoughts

are in the present, whereas Ellen's are in the past; the speaker finds freedom through an affinity with nature, while Ellen is, ironically, walled-in by the process of learning.

'In Switzerland' and 'To E.' are both evidence that Levy found creative inspiration outside of the city. Along with the letters that she sent home, the poems show that she built significant relationships (at least in terms of providing creative inspiration) with people beyond London's social networks and spaces. The fact that the poems were published three years apart is also important. Levy was still writing about her time in Switzerland three years after her trip, and this throws into relief the shortcomings of Sharpe's claim that the natural environment held no lasting attractions for her.<sup>87</sup> Nonetheless, the differences in content and tone of the poems suggest that Levy's attitude to her travels changed over time. When compared to 'A London Plane-Tree', 'In Switzerland' tells of the comparative ease with which it is possible to derive pleasure from the natural landscape. Written three years later, 'To E.' offers the hindsight and distance that 'In Switzerland' lacks; with this hindsight comes a shift in Levy's attitude to the relationships she formed while travelling, and her time spent in Switzerland more generally.<sup>88</sup> 'To E.' reflects on the futile process of tying yourself to another person in order to legitimise a lived experience. Together, the poems can be read as critiques of the Victorian insistence that a woman's worldly experience was anchored to and mediated by another person—in this case, a travelling companion—when they moved beyond the family circle. In her letter to her mother, Levy rejoiced in the fact that the secluded spot above Lake Lucerne was removed from the hotel's other guests: 'the best of all *we* are the only human feature of the landscape', she wrote.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, she suggests in 'To E.' and 'In Switzerland' that greater long-term benefit is to be found in travelling alone; the unity of the natural landscape is not marred by the influence of disparate subjectivities and crumbling friendships.

#### Subjectivity and companionship in 'The Diary of a Plain Girl' (1883) and 'Another Morning in Florence' (1886)

The letters that Levy wrote to her friends and family back in London show her to be striving for independence—both financially and subjectively—while travelling. However, Levy rarely travelled alone. Her letters account for only two instances in which she travelled without a female companion. The first was in 1884: she travelled alone through the Black Forest, from Titisee to Saig, and took a room of her own at the Gasthof zum Ochsen. From Saig, she wrote a

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<sup>87</sup> Sharpe, 'London and Nineteenth-Century Poetry' (p. 136).

<sup>88</sup> The speaker states that the events depicted took place 'three years [ago]' (line 5).

<sup>89</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Isabelle Levy [no date], quoted in Pullen, *The Woman Who Dared*, p. 60. [My emphasis]



letter to her sister in which she celebrates a new and unfamiliar sense of independence: ‘Behold me in my village retreat! I am living in a state of naked impropriety—absolutely unchaperoned’.<sup>90</sup> Levy’s sketch of the guesthouse at the top of her letter (figure 3) emphasises its remoteness: it is nested alone in between a network of valleys and hills and Levy has redacted the other dwellings that were situated nearby.<sup>91</sup> But her letter also shows that, as a solitary woman travelling alone, she was keenly aware of her vulnerability to sexual assault. She describes her sleepless first night at the guesthouse:

My first night of exile was a failure. [...] When I came back fr. supper [...] a sort of funk seized me [and] I bolted my room & put chairs against an inner door [...] & I tried to settle down with my books. Presently a knock came. I opened the door & beheld a tall figure in a cossack, candle in hand, grinning & chuckling in a way wh. [...] was grim to the extreme. He kept on repeating “Ich behalte Sie so lange als Sie wolle” [“I will look at you as long as you want me to”] so often & with so much fervour & coming so close [...]. I was quite at his mercy. I had a grim night; kept on remembering that all the villains in German tales are priests.<sup>92</sup>

Other evidence from Levy’s correspondence, which I discuss later in this chapter, shows that Levy’s mother steadfastly encouraged her daughters to uphold mid-Victorian codes of propriety, especially their being properly accompanied by a chaperone when in unfamiliar company. Levy’s mother would have objected to her daughter travelling alone through the Black Forest, not least because, as the rest of Levy’s letter to her sister shows, it led her into the unmediated and unknown company of foreign men. ‘I have to go in to *table d’hôte* alone & created much surprise at first. [...] Yr. hair wd. have stood on end to have seen me last night, after dinner, sitting at the table with no less than three German mashers engaged in animated converse’, she writes.<sup>93</sup> This letter reveals Levy and her sister to be conspiring against their mother’s Victorian conservatism, and Levy revelling in describing the experiences of the solitary female traveller.

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<sup>90</sup> Levy, letter [unknown recipient and date], in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 249-50, p. 249. Beckman judges by its tone that the letter is addressed to Levy’s sister.

<sup>91</sup> Nineteenth-century postcards show that the Gasthof zum Ochsen was situated in a valley, but was close to other small dwellings.

<sup>92</sup> Levy, letter [unknown recipient and date], in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, pp. 249-50. Beckman translates the priest’s words from German to English.

<sup>93</sup> Levy, letter [unknown recipient and date], in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 250. In her accompanying notes, Beckman defines ‘mashers’ as ‘flirts or people who make sexual advances’, but this definition relates to the American usage. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a ‘masher’ as ‘a fashionable young man of the late Victorian or Edwardian era, [especially] one fond of the company of women; a dandy’.

*Image has been redacted due to copyright restrictions.*

Figure 3: Amy Levy's letter from the Gasthof zum Ochsen [c. 1884], reprinted in Pullen, *The Woman Who Dared*, p. 104.

A trip to Milan in late-1885 was the second time that Levy travelled alone. However, she was alone in the city for only a short time before she met Black and they travelled together on to Florence. It transpires from Black's correspondence that Levy had travelled to Italy partly as a way of recuperating from a depressive episode. Towards the end of their stay in Florence, in spring 1886, Black wrote to her friend, Richard Garnett:

'I have not written much since I came here [...] and Miss Levy may without injustice be said to have done nothing—except indeed that she has done the great work of getting better. Her health seems entirely rested; she looks a different creature to what she was when she met me at Milan.'<sup>94</sup>

Although Black claims that Levy did next to no writing while in Florence, Levy's publishing history shows otherwise. During this time she wrote 'The Ghetto at Florence', which was an

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<sup>94</sup> Black, letter to Richard Garnett [c. 1886], quoted in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, pp. 116-7.

account of her visit to the Jewish ghettos in the city, and was to be the first of five articles that she published in the *Jewish Chronicle*. She also wrote at least one short story, 'Another Morning in Florence', which was published in the periodical *London Society* in April 1886.<sup>95</sup>

The presence or absence of a chaperone is a feature that divides Levy's published work about travel. In all but one of Levy's travel writings, the female protagonist is accompanied by a travelling chaperone or companion: 'In Retreat' (1884), 'In the Black Forest' (1884) and 'Easter-Tide at Tunbridge Wells' (1885) are epistolary accounts written from the perspective of Melissa as she travels around Europe and England with a female companion; 'Another Morning in Florence' (1886) is a short story about Melissa's visit to Santa Maria Novella with her friend, Hannamoria; 'In Holiday Humour' (1884) describes Marian and Olivia's visit to Switzerland; 'The Diary of a Plain Girl' (1883) features a group day-trip from London to Leatherhead during which Milly, the 'plain girl' of the story's title, secures a fiancé and, in so doing, defies her own expectations as well as those of her sister/travelling-companion. The most overtly critical of these works are 'Another Morning in Florence' and 'The Diary of a Plain Girl': both critique the Victorian insistence that women's interaction with the world should be anchored to, mediated, and so legitimised by another person's will and consciousness.

In 'Another Morning in Florence', the mode of Victorian conservatism which pushed female experience to the periphery is represented by the male-authored guidebook. The story begins with two female travellers, Melissa and Hannamoria, leaving their lodgings in Florence on a wet morning. They discuss their best options for an afternoon of sightseeing. They had intended to visit the Basilica of Santa Croce. However, Melissa refers to her trusty copy of John Ruskin's guidebook of the city, *Mornings in Florence*, and concludes that the weather is unsuited to such an excursion:

Melissa, looking out from the tall old house opposite the Pitti Palace, sees damp pavements, damp roofs, and a forest of damp green umbrellas rising up from the cabs on the cabstand opposite. "It is positively too dark for Santa Croce. Ruskin says we must have sunlight", cries Melissa, in her most pessimistic tone. (386)

Instead, Hannamoria suggests that they explore the fourteenth century Basilica of Santa Maria Novella and visit Giotto's painting 'The Annunciation to St. Anne'. At this point, she also mocks Melissa's proven dependence on Ruskin's word:

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<sup>95</sup> Amy Levy, 'Another Morning in Florence', *London Society*, April 1886, pp. 386-90. Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses.

“I confess I tremble”, says Hannamoria, who loves her jest. “What is it your Ruskin says of St. Anna? ‘If you can be pleased with this, you can see Florence; but if not, you can never see it.’ Are you prepared to go home if you don’t like it?” (386).

The guidebook in question, Ruskin’s *Mornings in Florence*, was published in 1881.<sup>96</sup> The book was divided into six parts, with each giving instructions for a morning of visiting works of Christian art in the city. The guidebook was intended as a protest against John Murray’s popular *Handbook for Travellers on the Continent*. Ruskin wrote in his diary in August 1874 that the night before he had ‘[lain] long awake dividing days, and planning attack on Mr. Murray’s guides’.<sup>97</sup> However, Lori Brister argues that Ruskin’s attack on contemporary travel guides was largely a failure because he was ‘too closely engaged with the discourse of guidebooks to avoid using the same forms and methods he abhors’.<sup>98</sup> As a result, Ruskin’s *Mornings in Florence* is another ‘beaten-track itinerary’ with details of places that a traveller *ought* to visit.<sup>99</sup>

We know that Levy’s narrative takes place on Melissa and Hannamoria’s first day in Florence because Melissa is set on following Ruskin’s instructions for the Santa Croce, which comprises the first chapter of his guidebook. But the rain means that the women must skip to the second chapter in the book and follow Ruskin’s guide to the Santa Maria Novella. In this and other ways, the women are seen to (quite involuntarily) undermine Ruskin’s authority. Ruskin instructs his readers to approach the Santa Maria Novella by the Via Tornabuoni and ‘Do not let anything in the way of acquaintance, sacristan, or chance sight, stop you in doing what I tell you’.<sup>100</sup> But Melissa and Hannamoria defy Ruskin’s order:

[A]s they cross the bridge to the Via Tornabuoni—that terribly sophisticated thoroughfare, with its cosmopolitan shops and polygot shopmen [...] Melissa forgets her artistic enthusiasm, and lingers at every step; now at a jeweller’s, now at a photographer’s, now at a tempting old book-stall. (386)

When the women finally reach the Santa Maria Novella, Melissa ‘immediately open[s] her copy of *Mornings in Florence*’ (387). She reads Ruskin’s instructions for exploring the church’s interior and summarises them aloud for her companion to hear: ““We are to “walk

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<sup>96</sup> John Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence: Simple Studies of Christian Art for English Travellers* (Orpington: George Allen, 1881).

<sup>97</sup> John Ruskin, *The Diaries of John Ruskin: 1874-1889*, ed. by Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), III, p. 808.

<sup>98</sup> Lori Brister, ‘The Precise and the Subjective: The Guidebook Industry and Women’s Travel Writing in Late Nineteenth-Century Europe and North Africa’, in *Women, Travel Writing and Truth*, ed. by Clare Broome Saunders (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 61-76 (p. 63).

<sup>99</sup> Brister, ‘The Precise and the Subjective’ (p. 63).

<sup>100</sup> Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence*, p. 25.

straight up the church”, she announces in a loud whisper, “and go in behind the great marble alter” (387). It is dark behind the alter and the myopic Hannamoria complains that she cannot see the frescoes, but Melissa announces that ““It doesn’t matter much”” and, following Ruskin’s advice, explains, ““We are only to look at them because they are rather vulgar and make a good contrast to the Giotto’s. Now we must ask the sacristan to take us to the Green Cloisters”” (387). Despite their best intentions, the women are, once again, unable to follow Ruskin’s advice to the letter. They cannot locate the sacristan, and so fall on a caretaker to show them the way to the tombs.

After being let into the tombs by the caretaker, the women are left alone. The door closes behind them with ‘a sound that calls forth a perfect orchestra of echoes’, and the rain begins to ‘pou[r] steadily on to the [...] central solitary tomb of grey marble’. (387) The women immediately feel uncomfortable in their isolation:

“I don’t like this place”, says Melissa [...].

“We must turn off into this little passage on the right”, Hannamoria observes [...] “and ‘ask for the tomb of the Marchesa Stiozzi Ridolfi””

“There is no one to ask” comes [Melissa’s] faint response. (387)

When the women finally locate the Ridolfi tomb and encounter ‘the famous Giotto’s’, ‘Melissa whips out [*Mornings in Florence*] again, and vibrates between page and picture as she looks at Giotto alternately with her own eyes and her author’s’ (388). It is clear that, when it comes to engaging with the artwork, the women are still entirely dependent on Ruskin for instruction. However, because they acknowledge that their experience of the place varies significantly from Ruskin’s, they struggle to reconcile their subjectivity with his gaze. Ruskin states in his guidebook that the Ridolfi tomb is best observed in ‘excellent light’ and on a ‘fine day’, but the women have visited on a dark and rainy day.<sup>101</sup> As if to compound their suffering, a group of stray cats, ‘swollen and bloated’, begin to wander into the tomb in search of shelter from the rain (389). The sound of the rain and the cats’ ‘miawing’ are unceasing reminders to the women that they have transgressed from Ruskin’s ideal: his space of quiet reflection is their dark and watery prison chamber.

Repulsed by their surroundings and convinced that their experience falls short of Ruskin’s, the women turn to leave the tomb; but the door is locked. The women raise a handkerchief, a sign of defeat, from an upper aperture, but no rescue party arrives. Melissa

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<sup>101</sup> Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence*, p. 28.

‘sinks down in despair [...] and buries her face in her handkerchief’ (388). They remain this way for two hours until the caretaker finally releases them. The women are quick to leave the church and walk away across the piazza with ‘a sense of freedom known only to those who have not always been free’ (390). They place the blame for their unfortunate experience squarely on their male guide: “‘It was all Ruskin’s fault”, Melissa observes irreverently’ (390). Levy supports her heroines’ accusation: she dedicated her story with, ironic affect, to ‘Mr. Ruskin’.

Levy’s ‘Another Morning in Florence’ invokes the aims of contemporary female-authored travelogues. Brister has argued that female travel writers, including Amelia Edwards, Edith Wharton and Vernon Lee, rejected the ‘authentic “truth”’ that the traditional, male-authored guidebook purported to offer.<sup>102</sup> Levy met Lee in Florence in 1886. It is possible that she heard first-hand Lee’s objections to conventional ‘by-the-book’ travel and, from this, derived inspiration for ‘Another Morning in Florence’. Lee notes in *The Sentimental Traveller* that she was taught from childhood to ‘despise persons who travelled in order to “sight-see”. We never saw any sights [...] of such things, at least, as are registered in guidebooks’.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, Lee’s travel writing reflects a shift from the ‘precision’ and (supposed) objectivity often celebrated by male-authored guidebooks, in favour of personal, subjective experience. Commenting on this shift, Brister explains that women travel writers at the *fin de siècle* were increasingly

question[ing] the masculine, empiricist definition of truth as located in observable facts, along with a scepticism about text itself: even as they write their own travel narratives, these women are aware of the limitations of language in accurately describing place; therefore traditional concepts of “truth” and “honesty” become increasingly slippery, as each writer presents only what she saw and felt at a given time and place.<sup>104</sup>

‘Another Morning in Florence’ offers a counter-narrative to the male-authored guidebook—to the empiricist tradition which aligned ‘truth’ with objectivity, and then tied objectivity to the male gaze. The story stresses the importance of personal, subjective experience in women’s writing about new spaces. It also highlights a conflict between the new freedoms for unmarried women which enabled them to travel and the endurance of traditional ideals which subordinated female worldly experience to the male gaze.

‘The Diary of a Plain Girl’, another of Levy’s stories for *London Society*, also uses the theme of travel to critique the suppression of female agency.<sup>105</sup> In the story’s pivotal ‘episode’,

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<sup>102</sup> Brister, ‘The Precise and the Subjective’, p. 61.

<sup>103</sup> Vernon Lee, *The Sentimental Traveller* (London: John Lane, 1908), pp. 7-8.

<sup>104</sup> Brister, ‘The Precise and the Subjective’, p. 62.

<sup>105</sup> Amy Levy, ‘The Diary of a Plain Girl’, *London Society*, September 1883, pp. 295-304. Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses.

a group of young people and their chaperones travel by train from Waterloo station to Box Hill, in Surrey, for a picnic. At a superficial level, the narrative appears to uphold the usual trappings of the romance genre: Milly, the plain and self-conscious heroine, is rewarded with an unexpected marriage proposal and, as a result, is rescued from becoming like ‘those gray, sad women one sees everywhere about, [...] unnoticed sort of creatures, sitting wearily in the world’s corners’ (303). Despite the reward of marriage, Gail Cunningham notes that Milly, like Levy’s other ‘love-seeking female figures’, is portrayed as a ‘passive, victi[m] of a struggle in which [her] fate is determined by others’.<sup>106</sup> Milly’s romantic union is brought about by the will and actions of others, and the picnic expedition is important in this regard. Milly does not want to join the picnic, but is induced to do so by her elder sister, who requires a chaperone. Milly reflects, ‘If there’s a thing I hate, it’s a picnic. [...] The best hope that a picnic holds out to people like me is to get mixed up with the chaperones, and even they would rather be without [me]’ (299-300). When the party reaches the picnic site, Milly’s fears are actualised: feeling at a loose-end, she ‘roved about aimlessly’ and away from the group (301). The rest of the group fails to notice Milly’s absence and leaves the site without her. Milly soon realises her abandonment, and her monologue directly references her lack of agency: ‘I had been forgotten! [...] “O, why can’t I stay here and die, like the Children in the Wood? [...] Why must I always go where I am not wanted?”’ (301).<sup>107</sup> Soon Milly is ‘rescued’ from spending a night alone and exposed in the countryside by the man who later becomes her husband. In the story’s concluding moments, she describes their union in fatalistic terms: ‘it seems [...] as though we had belonged to one another from the beginning of all time’ (304). In this way, Levy uses travel to critique the Victorian conservatism which guided the contemporary marriage market and encouraged women to pin their hopes to and claim sanctuary in male subjectivity/activity.

#### Between urban memory and rural reality in ‘Out of the World’ (1886)

‘Out of the World’ (1886) is the only one of Levy’s published travelogues which features a woman who has chosen to travel alone. In terms of style, ‘Out of the World’ is similar to ‘In Retreat’, ‘In the Black Forest’, and ‘Easter-Tide at Tunbridge Wells’: all four are epistolary texts written from the perspective of Melissa and describe a holiday away from London. As with most of Levy’s travel writing, these four texts have had little critical attention. Moreover,

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<sup>106</sup> Gail Cunningham, ‘Between Two Stools: Exclusion and Unfitness in Amy Levy’s Short Stories’, in *Amy Levy: Critical Essays*, ed. by Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), pp. 70-89 (p. 79).

<sup>107</sup> Milly refers to the broadside ballad *The Children in the Wood*, c. 1740, which was reprinted in *The Children in the Wood* (London: Jennings and Chaplin, 1831).

the neglect of these texts has been compounded by critics' tendency to highlight their similarities, as opposed to their marked differences.<sup>108</sup> While the texts' similarities warrant discussion, their differences also bear out a temporal change in Melissa's attitude to London and travel. Melissa's decision to take a solitary break away from London in 'Out of the World', for instance, distinguishes this text from the other three because it indicates her growing malaise for both the city and society. This is supported by Melissa's poetic recital of an extract from Alfred Tennyson's 'Maud':

Genuine Cockney as I am, I began to  
    "Loathe the squares and the streets  
    And the faces that one meets" (53)

The absence of a chaperone in this text also has practical implications on the narrative. The narrative focus is squarely on Melissa's subjectivity, which means that Levy is able to portray, without mediation, the affects of the rural landscape and distance from London on Melissa's present state of mind. The resultant 'musings of a solitary' reveal significantly more about Melissa's ideas of her place in the world and the function of travel than the three other travelogues (56).

'Out of the World' accounts for Melissa's decision to leave London and her solitary stay at The Falcon Inn, in St Mawgan-in-Pydar, Cornwall. It is likely that Levy had herself been a guest at the inn.<sup>109</sup> In his introduction to the anthology of Levy's writing, New describes the text as an account of 'a pastoral vacation in Cornwall'.<sup>110</sup> New's description is ostensibly accurate; Melissa does provide some detailed descriptions of the Cornish landscape. However, by foregrounding the pastoral elements of the text, New overlooks its conspicuous focus on interiority. Cunningham argues that New's 'surface narrative' is misleading because although the story is 'written in a surface tone of breezy humour [it] is seeded throughout with

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<sup>108</sup> Most scholars who have referred to these works have described them as a collective. Beth Zion Lask described them as 'holiday sketches': 'Amy Levy', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, 11 (1924), 168-89 (p. 173). Audrey F. Horton refers to the works as 'a series of four epistolary travel sketches': 'Amy Levy', in *British Short Fiction Writers, 1880-1914: The Romantic Tradition*, ed. by William F. Naufftus (London and Detroit: Gale, 1996), pp. 210-5 (p. 213).

<sup>109</sup> Beckman and Pullen both state that Levy had been a guest at The Falcon Inn. There is no evidence in Levy's surviving papers that she had visited Cornwall before January 1886 when 'Out of the World' was published. However, Beckman locates an article, written by Harry Quilter after Levy's death, that strongly points to Levy having stayed at the inn that she describes in 'Out of the World'. Quilter recounts his own stay at The Falcon Inn and describes seeing a framed photograph of 'a small, dark girl, of unmistakably Jewish type' on the mantelpiece. The landlady of the inn explained to Quilter that the photograph was of Levy, who had been a guest at the inn. The landlady proceeded to tell Quilter that Levy had 'come down [to Cornwall] ill' and that she had "'nursed" her back to health'. Harry Quilter, 'Amy Levy: A Reminiscence and a Criticism', *The Universal Review*, 24 (1890), 492-507.

<sup>110</sup> New, 'Introduction', in *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, p. 35.



indications to the reader of a deep malaise that the narrator both reveals and conceals'.<sup>111</sup> Far from describing a pleasant holiday, Cunningham argues that 'Out of the World' 'resonates with Levy's recurring preoccupations with exclusion, unfitness, depression and suicide'.<sup>112</sup>

Cunningham points to three instances of intertextuality in 'Out of the World' which indicate Melissa's morbid preoccupations. Firstly, she traces the title of the story to Thomas Hood's poem 'The Bridge of Sighs' (1844), which describes the suicide of a woman by drowning:

Mad from life's history,  
Glad to death's mystery,  
Swift to be hurl'd—  
Anywhere, anywhere  
Out of the world!<sup>113</sup>

Melissa also quotes from Hood's poem in the main body of the story: her anguished cry—"Anywhere, anywhere out of the world"—echoes the imagined final ambition of Hood's drowned woman (54). The second literary reference is to A. C. Swinburne's 'Triumph of Time' (1866), which sustains the allusions to death and to drowning. The deserted lover of Swinburne's poem longs to be reunited with his beloved; when this is denied, he seeks oblivion in the sea's embrace. Melissa quotes from 'Triumph of Time' when she describes seeing the sea, as if unable to put her own feelings into words: 'This was no bathing pond for Cockneys, but the "great sweet mother, mother and lover of men, the sea," whose "sweet hard kisses are strong like wine," whose "large embraces are keen like pain."' (56) Lastly, Cunningham notes the significance of Melissa's reference at the close of the story to Robert Browning's 'Caliban in Setebos' (1864):

I am like Browning's "icy fish" in "Caliban"—do you remember?—who

"Longed to 'scape the rock stream where she lived  
And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine...  
Only she ever sickened, found repulse  
At the other kind of water..." (56)

References to the work of Hood, Browning and Swinburne, Cunningham argues, 'construct an underlying reading of a narrator who is as unfit to be out of the world—whether through simple escapism or suicidal impulse—as in it'.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, by returning to canonical texts in this

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<sup>111</sup> Cunningham, 'Between Two Stools' (pp. 75-6).

<sup>112</sup> Cunningham, 'Between Two Stools' (p. 76).

<sup>113</sup> Thomas Hood, 'The Bridge of Sighs', *Hood's Magazine*, May 1844, pp. 414-17, lines 67-71.

<sup>114</sup> Cunningham, 'Between Two Stools' (p. 77).

way, Levy evokes the ‘Freudian notion of the repetition-compulsion’; Melissa is, as Anne Whitehead describes, ‘subject to the plot of another(’s) story’.<sup>115</sup>

Cunningham’s analysis of ‘Out of the World’ is pertinent because it shows how Levy used recurrent images of exclusion and unfitness to render the interiority of her solitary female traveller. It also highlights Levy’s use of naturalised imagery, especially images pertaining to water. The crux of Cunningham’s analysis is Melissa’s *complete* exclusion: she argues that Melissa is portrayed as ‘biologically’ unfit for life in *both* the city and the country, and that her resultant sense of exclusion from ‘the world’ in general gives rise to her preoccupation with death. ‘Out of the World’ is certainly concerned with portraying Melissa’s unfitness. However, as I will suggest, Melissa’s unfitness is neither rendered as biological or complete. As I will demonstrate, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that Melissa feels excluded from both city and country in the same way or for the same reason.

Throughout the story, Melissa suggests that her past and her relationship with the city limit the extent to which she is able to integrate herself within her present surroundings. Although she has left the city, she explains that memories of its people and spaces continue to filter into her consciousness and puncture her present experience. This occurs during her walk through the village churchyard. The sight of a group of children playing by a brook and the sound of flock of geese chattering converge to summon an aural hallucination of a newsboy’s cry:

The sun was setting behind the tall elms; the children were playing by the gold-tinted brook; a company of geese was promenading the road, engaged in animated conversation [...]: nothing could have been more peaceful or rustic, but do you know what happened to me? I thought I heard a distant newsboy calling out Special Editions and terrible catastrophes! My case strikes me as more pathetic than that of poor Susan who imagined a river running through Cheapside! (55)

The cry of the newsboy is a recurring refrain in Levy’s oeuvre.<sup>116</sup> In ‘Ballad of a Special Edition’ he is characterised as a ‘Bird of ill omen’, a ‘Fiend’ and the face of ‘great catastrophe’.<sup>117</sup> The imagined newsboy in ‘Out of the World’ carries the same tragic symbolism. His disembodiment corresponds with the impossibility of Melissa’s complete (corporeal *and* psychological) assimilation in the countryside. The newsboy’s shout, incongruous in the country scene, also signals a rupture between past and present experiences which is suggestive of the affect of trauma. The newsboy ‘calling out [...] terrible catastrophes’ resonates in Melissa’s imagination in spite of actual and temporal distance and, in this way,

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<sup>115</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 85.

<sup>116</sup> For an examination of the newsboy’s recurrence in Levy’s oeuvre, see Rosie Miles, *Victorian Poetry in Context* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 126.

<sup>117</sup> Amy Levy, ‘Ballade of a Special Edition’, in *A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse*, pp. 23-4 (lines 2, 25, 23).

Levy evokes the haunting power of Melissa's traumatic past in London. Having recounted this experience in her letter, Melissa regretfully concludes: 'I know that my own place in among the struggling crowd of dwellers in cities' (56).

The tragic tone of Melissa's resignation is underpinned by her reference to William Wordsworth's 'The Reverie of Poor Susan' (1798). Wordsworth's poem recounts a moment in the life of a London woman as she thinks longingly of the countryside. As Sarah Webster Goodwin states, the poem features a 'familiar Wordsworthian moment: the city is inadequate to all that is noble and lovely, and the city-dweller must have recourse to memories of other places [...] [and an] unmediated relation to nature'.<sup>118</sup> In 'Out of the World' Levy inverts Poor Susan's situation; the insurgence of memories of the city are shown to affect Melissa's assimilation within the countryside and this, in turn, is shown to be detrimental to the processes of self-actualisation which are central to subjective adaptation and expression. Key to this allusion is Melissa's notion that her situation is 'more pathetic' than Poor Susan's. The latter's thoughts of the countryside are recourse to the strains of city-life, but Melissa's memories of the city induce moments of suffering. At the textual confluence between urban memory and rural reality, Levy demonstrates how the city may continue to incarcerate its inhabitants even after they muster the strength to leave its limits; in 'Out of the World', Melissa's past in the city contributes to her present exclusion from other ways of living.

The newsboy's shout demonstrates the interplay between memory and reality and its affect on Melissa's sense of exclusion. Memory also plays a role in the text's multiplicity. Through the nexus of memory and multiplicity, Levy offers another veiled allusion to the suppression of Melissa's subjectivity. Melissa refers to nine literary texts in her relatively short, four-page letter, and they underpin the majority of her key thoughts and ideas. Roland Barthes' description of a text's multiplicity—through 'citations, references, echoes, cultural languages [...] antecedent or contemporary [...], anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read'—is implicitly aligned with the act of memory.<sup>119</sup> Peter Middleton and Tim Woods also stress that the relation of a text to its intertexts resonates with the way that 'traces of the past emerge in the present' as 'echoes, determinations and directions'.<sup>120</sup> Regardless of how intertextual relations occur, act or behave in the text, Middleton and Woods stress that 'they all rely somehow on memory'.<sup>121</sup> Levy uses intertextual references to show Melissa's conditioned reliance on the

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<sup>118</sup> Sarah Webster Goodwin, 'Wordsworth and the Romantic Voice: The Poet's Song and the Prostitute's Cry', in *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, ed. by Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 65-80 (p. 74).

<sup>119</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), p. 160.

<sup>120</sup> Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, *Literatures of Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 84.

<sup>121</sup> Middleton and Woods, *Literatures of Memory*, p. 84.

words of others to describe her sense of self. The fact that these references are all to works by men is also significant. As is the case in ‘Another Morning in Florence’ and ‘The Diary of a Plain Girl’, Melissa is seen to uphold the authority of the male voice and, in so doing, suppress her subjectivity. Through the use of allusion, Levy demonstrates that Melissa’s exclusion is not grounded in her biology, but in social conditioning: her experience of life as a woman in the city has left Melissa psychologically unfit for a solitary life in the countryside.

#### ‘I have no particular desire to return home’: resisting familial control

The difficulty of maintaining agency and subjectivity while abroad is borne out in Levy’s letters. Levy travelled extensively around Europe from 1881, when she left Newnham, until the year before her death. The frequency with which she was away from London and the content of her letters both suggest that she enjoyed the experience of travel. In a letter written from Dresden, Levy explained to her sister that, ‘we [she and her friend, Maggie] continue to marvel at everything we see & hear’.<sup>122</sup> Levy’s letters from abroad also demonstrate that she maintained an active social life and that she continued to engage with the arts: she describes lively dinner scenes, playing parlour games, shopping, sitting for tableaux vivants, attending the theatre, dances, recitals and literary clubs, working in libraries, and visiting acquaintances (new and old) at home.

Levy did not limit herself to making the acquaintance of only British travellers: in Dresden she met and socialised with native Germans, as well as Americans. In fact, she appears to have enjoyed their company over that of the British: in a letter to her sister she describes her dismay at hearing that ‘three English girls are coming to our pension’.<sup>123</sup> Levy’s choice of accommodation in Dresden supports the notion, invoked by her letters, that she embraced a cosmopolitan existence and endeavoured to immerse herself in the city’s rich and varied culture. She took a room in a pension on Lüttichaustraße (now Hans-Dankner-Straße), which provided mid-price lodgings in the historic Seevorstadt West district. Due to its close proximity to Dresden’s central railway station, Lüttichaustraße was in the vicinity of a large number of other pensions, meaning that Levy was perfectly positioned to encounter travellers from across the world during her stay. As well as maintaining an active social life, Levy also continued to study and write: she describes reading at a library on the bank of the Elbe (likely the Royal

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<sup>122</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Katie Levy, 4 December 1881, in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 235.

<sup>123</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Katie Levy, 4 December 1881, in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 236

Library which was located at the Japanese Palace at the time), studying German and Greek, and writing new material for publication.<sup>124</sup>

The letters that Levy wrote from Dresden and Switzerland reveal a zest for life, but they also show her attempts to extricate herself from the control of her family. Levy's family appears to have been financially comfortable during her childhood, but her correspondence from Dresden and Switzerland (when she was in her early-twenties) reveal a decline in their financial situation.<sup>125</sup> In a letter written in Seelisberg to her sister, Levy asks: 'Are we to be in a very bad way financially all this winter?'.<sup>126</sup> Other letters suggest that Levy was anxious about the effect of her travels on the family's finances. These letters usually begin with a cheerful recital of her recent activities, but their tone inevitably changes when she acknowledges (as she so often does) that such activities are contingent on financial support from her family. In November 1881, she explains to her mother that she feels uncomfortable with the fact that her travels were depleting the family's finances: 'you know that I can't feel very happy about myself & the money I spend, in spite of all [of father's] kindness'.<sup>127</sup> These letters show that Levy struggled to reconcile the geographical remove from her family with the inexorable fact that she remained a financial dependent.

There is evidence in Levy's correspondence that she was determined to reduce her reliance on her family by attaining her own means of income. While in Dresden, she sent a letter to her mother outlining a solution which she hopes may absolve her of her dependent-status: 'I have some new pupils—two boys (15 & 16)—for English. [...] They will bring in 3/ a week, so I shall be earning 5 [shillings] a week', she explains.<sup>128</sup> The money earned was intended to go towards financing her own studies and interests: she suggests that she may spend her earnings on Greek tuition. However, a letter written a week later shows that this plan was promptly halted by Levy's mother. Levy writes to her mother:

I have given up the idea of teaching those boys, though I can't see the matter from your point of view. [...] [T]here wouldn't be any impropriety [...] in my teaching any number of young men. I have never excited in any-one a desire to "forget themselves" in any way, which has its advantages, especially in my present circumstances.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Details about Levy's activities in Dresden are from letters 13-16 in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, pp. 232-9.

<sup>125</sup> For an account of Levy's family's financial situation during her childhood, see Beckman, *Amy Levy*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>126</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Katie Levy, 18 July [no year], in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 242.

<sup>127</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Isabelle Levy, 27 November 1881, in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 234.

<sup>128</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Isabelle Levy, 27 November 1881, in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 233.

<sup>129</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Isabelle Levy, 2 December 1881, in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, pp. 234-5.

Another letter to her sister reveals the extent of Levy's frustration: '[...] I did secure those boys as pupils but was not allowed to teach them. Don't you call that simply absurd? But what can I do? So I go on fr. day to day consuming the paternal substance'.<sup>130</sup> The exchange between Levy, her mother, and her sister shows the altered ideas of propriety across two generations of women. Levy, a child of the late-Victorian period, sees little wrong with using her formal education to her financial advantage, with beginning a professional relationship with members of the opposite sex, or with being alone in their company. Her mother, a 'hostag[e] to Mrs Grundy', is a beacon of early-Victorian codes of conduct and plainly regards the situation as improper.<sup>131</sup>

Levy's financial dependence on her family in the early 1880s meant that, even with over six hundred miles of land and sea between them, she was still forced to abide by her mother's conservative values. Unable to reconcile her mother's expectations with her own aspirations, and still reliant on her family's approval in order to pay her board in Dresden, Levy acknowledges the psychological and physiological effect of being caught between the old world of Victorian sensibility and the new world of intellectual and professional freedoms for women. In the letter to her sister in which Levy bemoans her mother's outmoded notions of propriety, she goes on to describe the recent decline in her health:

I write to you out of the very depths of affliction brought on by a diseased body. God must love me awfully for he chasteneth me without cease; now alas! to my many woes of the spirit & flesh he has added a ceaseless neuralgia, not to speak of a sty-eye & an abscess beneath the arm, wh. had to be cut (ugh!). [...] I have resided in my apartment, cross and doing nothing but reading novels for a week [...]. With a maternal shawl bound round my classic head. [...] Really if this confounded neuralgia don't stop I shall have to hie to a chemist—no, not a chemist—a river; for the German chemist is alas! not permitted to retail the death-fraught drug to the chance customer.<sup>132</sup>

Levy's allusion to her 'classic head' being bound with 'a maternal shawl' is significant. In practical and symbolic terms, a shawl is associated with the maternal drive to protect a child and, in this sense, corresponds with a healthy relationship between mother and child. But the irony of Levy's next clause—'around my classic head'—alters the symbolism of the 'maternal shawl'; it shifts from a symbol of support and protection, to an implement of restraint. Further evidence from Levy's correspondence with her sister suggests a strained relationship between Levy and her mother. In a later letter written from Saig, Levy expresses in evolutionary terms

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<sup>130</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Katie Levy, 8 December 1881, in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, pp. 237-8 (p. 238).

<sup>131</sup> John Stewart Mill described women of the mid-Victorian era as 'hostages to Mrs. Grundy' in *The Subjection of Women* (1869; repr. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1870), p. 167.

<sup>132</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Katie Levy, 8 December 1881, in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, pp. 237-8 (p. 238).

her dread at returning to the family home: 'O, if I needn't go home & begin the old struggle for existence'.<sup>133</sup> Levy acknowledged that, in practice, her desire for autonomy often ran against her mother's ideas of female propriety.

Despite her early set-back in Dresden, Levy continued to seek out other avenues of income. In Seelisberg one year later, she described her intention to 'get regular work of some sort if I possibly can'.<sup>134</sup> The aim for 'regular work' suggests that Levy foresaw herself remaining in Seelisberg for some time; with her own income, she could set the terms of her movement and, moreover, she could not as easily be called upon by her parents to return to London. Given Seelisberg's small population and remote location, and her mother's previous objection to male tutees, Levy had limited options for employment. As a result, she began to send her literary work to Black who, it was agreed, would seek out publishers and suitable magazines.<sup>135</sup> Black had assisted Levy in this way in the past: having successfully helped to secure a publisher for *Xantippe*, she was charged, first and foremost, with the responsibility of finding a publisher for *A Minor Poet*.<sup>136</sup> It was also through these means that 'In Switzerland', along with other works that Levy wrote while away from London, found their way into British magazines and journals.

Levy's letters show that she was habitually engaged in either writing or editing material for publication while she was away from London.<sup>137</sup> Between 1882 and 1886, the period in which Levy was travelling to, from and around Continental Europe, she placed in excess of thirty essays, poems, and short stories in British magazines, newspapers and journals. She also published a play in 1883 and a translation of J. B. Pérès' *Historic and Other Doubts* in 1885.<sup>138</sup> With Black's assistance, *A Minor Poet* was published in 1884. Many of the poems in the collection were composed or edited in Dresden, and 'Medea' was completed in Lucerne. Noting Levy's considerable output while she was travelling, Beckman surmises that 'travel did not get in the way of Levy's writing'.<sup>139</sup> While Beckman's claim is ostensibly true, it undermines Levy's aim towards self-sufficiency and the role that travel played in helping her to

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<sup>133</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Katie Levy [no date], in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, pp. 249-51 (p. 250).

<sup>134</sup> Amy Levy, letter to Katie Levy, 18 July [no year], in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 242.

<sup>135</sup> Levy explains that she has a short story 'to the aged Clementina [Black] & asked her if she thinks it is any good from a magazine point of view': letter to Katie Levy, 18 July [no year], in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 242.

<sup>136</sup> Mary Cameron, 'Clementina Black: A Character Sketch', *The Young Woman*, 1 (1892), 315-16.

<sup>137</sup> From Seelisberg, Levy writes to Black: 'I have finished *Medea* after a fashion & suppose I shall begin on *Eustace* to-morrow': [no date] Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 239. Levy did not publish anything with the title *Eustace*, but may be referring to a novel which she later abandoned.

<sup>138</sup> Levy's play, *The Unhappy Princess: An Extravaganza* was published by Samuel French. Levy was posthumously named as the translator of Pérès' text by Richard Garnett, who had arranged for Levy to undertake the translation, in 1892 in an entry for the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>139</sup> Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 77.

achieve this aim. The final sections of this chapter seek to reposition travel as an integral part of Levy's professional development and to accurately define the role of the periodical press as a means through which it was possible for Levy to achieve self-sufficiency. I examine Levy's relationships with two publications during the years that she travelled: the literary magazine, *London Society*, and the journal of her alma mater, *The Cambridge Review*.

#### Publishing with *London Society* (1884-1886) and *Cambridge Review* (1880-1887)

In spite of its title, *London Society* was not solely concerned with representing life in London. The magazine published short articles, stories, and serialised fiction that addressed the broad theme of 'leisure' for a middle-class readership, including fiction and non-fiction about holidays and travel.<sup>140</sup> *London Society* held the work and perspectives of both genders in equal regard. Marianne Van Remoortel has demonstrated that the magazine had a long tradition of welcoming work from young female artists and paying them as much as their male counterparts.<sup>141</sup> *London Society* was a good fit for Levy in many ways: not only was she able to offer a middle-class female perspective on life and love in her short stories for the magazine, but her extensive experience of travel allowed her to harness a popular interest of its readers and, moreover, she would be paid on a par with male contributors.

Every contribution that Levy made to *London Society* features or makes reference to travel out of London. Including 'In Switzerland' and 'To E.', the magazine published eleven items by Levy between September 1883 and May 1886.<sup>142</sup> *Cambridge Review*, the journal of Levy's alma mater, was the only publication to debut more of Levy's work: at least sixteen poems and articles by Levy appeared in its pages between 1880 and 1887.<sup>143</sup> Levy's relationship with *London Society* and *Cambridge Review* is significant for another reason. Levy typically either wrote sporadically for a magazine or journal (she published one item in *Temple Bar* in 1880, 1883, 1884, 1888 and 1889), or went through short and intense periods of writing for others (she published six articles in *Jewish Chronicle* in 1886, and nothing thereafter). Levy's relationships with *Cambridge Review* and *London Society* were different, however,

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<sup>140</sup> Beth Palmer, 'London Society', in *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Gent and London: Academia Press and The British Library, 2009), pp. 376-7.

<sup>141</sup> Marianne Van Remoortel, *Women, Work and the Victorian Periodical Press: Living by the Press* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 100, 111.

<sup>142</sup> The items Levy published in *London Society* were 'The Diary of a Plain Girl' (September 1883), 'Olga's Valentine' (February 1884), 'In Switzerland' (July 1884), 'In Holiday Humour' (August 1884), 'In Retreat' (September 1884), 'In the Black Forest' (October 1884), 'Easter-Tide at Tunbridge Wells' (May 1885), 'Philosophy in the Ball-Room' (August 1885), 'Out of the World' (January 1886), 'To E.' (May 1886) and 'Another Morning in Florence' (April 1886).

<sup>143</sup> *Cambridge Review* occasionally published unattributed items, some of which many have been contributed by Levy.



because both magazines published high concentrations of her work over relatively long periods of her career. *London Society*'s eleven poems and short stories over three years, and *Cambridge Review*'s sixteen poems and articles over seven years, stand out in relation to her publications in *Lawn-Tennis* (two stories in 1886), *Academy* (two poems in 1886 and 1887), *Time* (one poem in 1888), *Star* (four poems in 1888), and *Spectator* (two poems in 1889). Her relationships with *London Society* and *Cambridge Review* were longer and resulted in more published material than her relationship with any other magazine, newspaper or journal.

Levy saw financial benefit in maintaining long-time relationships with *London Society* and *Cambridge Review*. Her loyalty to *Cambridge Review* would certainly have been rewarded. In order to ensure the high quality of content, the magazine's editors operated on a basis whereby contributors of literature and poetry received dividends from its profits.<sup>144</sup> Publishing her work in *Cambridge Review* meant that Levy was able to claim an annual wage, of sorts. Other aspects of *Cambridge Review*'s operation also indicate that its editors valued long-term contributors: for instance, writers who had contributed two or more items to the paper were invited to join its general committee.<sup>145</sup> Because of the editors' high regard for literature pieces and their efforts to retain long-term contributors of literature and poetry, it is likely that Levy's work was accepted for publication in *Cambridge Review* with few requests for editorial changes. The system of payment and the ease with which her pieces were accepted by *Cambridge Review* go some way to explain why Levy was still publishing her work in the journal long after she left Newnham College in 1881. For her contributions to *London Society*, the process of payment was typical of periodicals. Levy received a fee for every item she published in the magazine. The fees that Levy received over the four years that she contributed to *London Society* joined her annual dividend from *Cambridge Review*; together they formed a modest income.

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<sup>144</sup> George Nugent Banks, former editor of the *Cambridge Review*, described the journal's working practices in an article for the *Boston Evening Transcript*. Banks explains that the founding editors 'issued a carefully drawn-up prospectus, setting forth the object of the proposed journal, with especial reference to that of fostering the literary talent of the University, and, with a promise that all contributors of articles and poems should be considered shareholders in the undertaking, with a prospect of partaking whatever dividends should accrue therefrom. [...] A reserve fund was to be set by every year out of the profits of the publication, and what was left [...] was to form the above-mentioned dividend': 'Cambridge Journalists: University Newspapers', *Boston Evening Transcript*, 22 November 1890, p. 11.

<sup>145</sup> Individuals who in the course of the preceding year had contributed at least two items to *Cambridge Review* were invited to join the guarantors on the general committee as and when a committee member resigned from their post. Banks, 'Cambridge Journalists', p. 11.

Levy's relationship with *London Society* and *Cambridge Review* overlapped and coincided with the years that she spent travelling around Europe.<sup>146</sup> Beckman has described Levy's work for *London Society*, especially, as 'hackwork'.<sup>147</sup> Levy's correspondence certainly demonstrates that she saw the process of writing short travel fiction as a means of making money, rather than a serious creative outlet. There is also evidence that she used the money that she earned from her publications to help fund her travels and to pay for small luxuries (such as Greek tuition) while abroad. To her sister, Levy writes:

I have had 2.10 fr. *LS* [*London Society*] & the proofs of one of my potboilers [...]. I have been working, but O the novel is so bad—it's [a] no-go. [...] Fr. my point of view you are such a lucky beggar! Fixed income, good ears, loving friends, & a credit account with the Heavenly Powers!<sup>148</sup>

This letter, which was written in Baden, reveals that Levy was simultaneously engaged in two strands of production at the time: writing romantic fiction for magazines, and writing a novel. Her disparaging reference to her *London Society* stories as 'potboilers' suggests that she saw herself as a writer of 'light' fiction as result of necessity; she self-identified as a novelist and poet first and foremost. The letter also reveals that Levy had requested that her fees from *London Society* were sent directly to her pension (likely by way of Black), rather than to her permanent address in London. This arrangement suggests that she used the publication fees from her travel writing to help fund the cost of living abroad. Without these fees, she would wholly reliant on her parents for financial assistance and they, in turn, would be able to dictate the terms of her trips abroad. Levy's relationships with *London Society* and *Cambridge Review* were important, therefore, because they offered her a means of frequently making money no matter her location.

By examining the influence of travel on the content of Levy's work and her working practice, this chapter has addressed a shortfall in current scholarship. Although her legacy has been traditionally confined to her native city, Levy sought both the thrill of new experiences and isolation throughout her life; for these reasons, she enjoyed travelling but resented the burden it placed on her family. Diversifying her writing practices and style went some way to resolving this problem because the frequency with which she was able to write 'light' short travel fiction resulted in a steady, independent income. Travel writing was, therefore, a means

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<sup>146</sup> Levy's first trip to Europe was in 1881, and her last in 1888; she first published in *Cambridge Review* in 1880, and in *London Society* in 1884; her last publication for *Cambridge Review* was in 1887, and for *London Society* in 1886.

<sup>147</sup> Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 299, n. 62.

<sup>148</sup> Levy, letter [unknown recipient and date], in Beckman, *Amy Levy*, p. 249-50 (p. 250). Beckman judges by its tone that the letter is addressed to Levy's sister.

of achieving three things: disposable income, adventure, and distance from London. The content of Levy's travel writing reflects these concerns. Although she wrote disparagingly about her 'potboilers', such as 'Another Morning in Florence', they show her using the short story—still a relatively new literary form—to critique the disparagement of female experience in Victorian thought and culture. The publication of these works allowed Levy to set and abide by her own terms of movement, and, for this reason, her frequent retreats from London were both profitable and self-fulfilling.

The lonely working woman and fantasies of domestic emancipation in George Egerton's *The Wheel of God* (1898)

‘She longed for quiet sometimes; quiet to listen to the dreams in herself. There was never any quiet; there was something indelicate in this constant intimate contact with other human beings. [...] That was, after all, the great differentiation between the classes and the masses—the possibility of solitude.’

— George Egerton, *The Wheel of God* (1898)<sup>1</sup>

From the late-Victorian holiday, this chapter returns to the *fin-de-siècle* home, city and domestic routine. It examines the same conflict—between the pressures of society and the individual desire for solitude—and its role in female socio-subjective development as depicted in George Egerton's first novel, *The Wheel of God* (1898). Levy and Egerton both critique the limitations on female subjectivity in their work, but the women in Egerton's novel are shown to be restricted in other, often more tangible ways. This difference is partly due to class. Levy's female characters are, like her, middle-class; when travelling around Europe or Britain, they are harnessing a new freedom available to women of means. Egerton's protagonist, Mary Desmond, is born into a working-class family: before her marriage, she spends most of her time either at work, at home, or moving in between the working and domestic environments. Mary is depicted as physically and geographically confined by routine and financial necessity and, as a result, is limited to engaging with the world beyond her home and routine through another means: her imagination.

Mary has an ambivalent relationship with the city. As a working-class unmarried woman, living in the city is her best chance of securing work and financial independence. After her mother's death and the dissolution of the family's finances, Mary moves from Dublin, her native city, to New York City, and then to London in search of employment. In New York and London, she frequently acknowledges her distaste for urban life: New York's streets are full of ‘sordid ugliness’ and London is a ‘monster desert’ of ‘sordid squalor’.<sup>2</sup> Although Mary notes considerable differences between the cultures of the two cities, she claims that ‘one thing had

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<sup>1</sup> George Egerton, *The Wheel of God* (London: Grand Richards, 1898), pp. 150-1, in *Hathi Trust Digital Library* <<http://www.hathitrust.org>> [accessed 15 May 2014].

<sup>2</sup> Egerton, *The Wheel of God*, p. 104; p. 146; p. 135. Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses.

always been the same' in her experience: 'the need to work and the sense of loneliness' (185). Despite feeling lonely in the city, she also frequently voices a desire for solitude. In a boarding-house in London, Mary reflects that

[s]he longed for quiet sometimes; quiet to listen to the dreams in herself. There was never any quiet; there was something indelicate in this constant intimate contact with other human beings. [...] That was, after all, the greatest differentiation between the classes and the masses—the possibility of solitude. She dandled this thought as a newly discovered idea [and] was pleased with herself [...]. (170)

Mary's 'newly discovered idea' identifies the problem with living and working in the city as a working-class woman: she is powerless to choose at any given time between solitude and the society of others. Necessity dictates that she must board in a room with other women and work in an office alongside other typists. She must also travel between the domestic and working environments either on foot as part of 'the crowd of working women' or with other passengers aboard an omnibus (150).

In its depiction of the relationship between different bodies, *The Wheel of God* harnesses a central concern in the visual, literary and theatrical cultures of the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Susan Sidlauskas notes that the period was embroiled in negotiating 'the relation of body to place—still the measure of private identity—[...] through sometimes complementary, sometimes competing, interactions with yet another body, or bodies'.<sup>3</sup> In Edgar Degas' *Interior* (1868-9), for instance, Sidlauskas locates 'an anxiety about how the lived, sexual body was both exposed and constrained within its intimate world'.<sup>4</sup> Degas' *Interior* depicted a male body and a female body in conflict, but not all of the bodies in conflict in Victorian art and literature were necessarily of the opposite sex, nor were they always human. In *The Wheel of God*, the relation of Mary's body to place is exposed through its interactions with multiple metaphysical bodies—of time, and of space—as well as imagined and real human bodies. The novel examines how the female body and consciousness is both exposed and constrained by these interactions.

The experience and impulses of the lived, sexual body is a central focus in Egerton's oeuvre, but the body's relationship with time and space is often borne out in the female imagination. In his discussion of Egerton's debut collection of short stories, *Keynotes* (1893), J.

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Sidlauskas, 'Degas and the Sexuality of the Interior', in *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*, ed. by Barbara Miller Lane (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 178-97 (p. 178).

<sup>4</sup> Sidlauskas, 'Degas and the Sexuality of the Interior' (p. 178). Degas' *Interior* was completed in 1869, but was not put on exhibition until 1905.

W. Lambert identifies ‘independence of vision and submission of body’ as ‘dominant themes’.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Laura Marcus has argued that Egerton ‘hollows out the space of women’s interiority through fantasy’.<sup>6</sup> In *The Wheel of God*, Mary’s ‘independence of vision’, or interiority, habitually references the submission of her body. The novel depicts Mary submitting to the physical demands of work and domesticity, and yet she is frequently engaged in imagining alternatives to these experiences. One Christmas Day in New York, for instance, she decides to stay in bed, because she feels ‘too tired [and] too shabby to go out’ into the city; she begins reading a book of Norwegian folk tales and is ‘transported to the fjords’ and the company of ‘marvellous impossible peasants’ (99). The ability to escape reality through flights of fancy, although often triggered by aspects of her environment, is shown to be as essential to Mary’s survival as her ability to work. At other times, her body enacts the desire to escape the company of others and to achieve moments of physical solitude, however brief. She makes frequent escapes to the roof of her office building; from here, she imagines her increased proximity to the natural world. As she pictures ‘the sap rising in a hundred imagined trees’, she surmises that ‘she would not have held out a day longer, were it not for her visits to the roof’ (95). These moments of isolation are the focus of my analysis in this chapter.

In moments of isolation, Mary ascribes meaning to her environment which reflects her subjective incarceration, both at home and in the city. In this way, *The Wheel of God* shares many of its concerns with twentieth century feminist texts. Forty years after the publication of *The Wheel of God*, Virginia Woolf posited that women’s writing must be borne out of ‘physical conditions’: the female-authored novel, she wrote in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), ‘has somehow to be adapted to the body’.<sup>7</sup> Hélène Cixous extended Woolf’s claim in ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ (1975). Cixous states that ‘women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes’.<sup>8</sup> Throughout *The Wheel of God*, Mary reads her surroundings through her body. In the first chapter of the novel, when Mary is a child, she ascribes meaning to the contents and design of her nursery which supports her earliest notion of her social oppression. The iron bars at her window and the folding-screen decorated with images of tragic historical female figures

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<sup>5</sup> J. W. Lambert and Michael Ratcliffe, *The Bodley Head, 1887-1987* (London: The Bodley Head, 1987), p. 100.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 120.

<sup>7</sup> Virginia Woolf asserted that the male-dominated literary tradition was ‘unsuited to a woman’s use’. Instead, she argued that the woman writer’s work must ‘be adapted to the body’: ‘A Room of One’s Own’, in *A Room of One’s Own and Three Guineas*, ed. by Morag Shiach (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992; repr. 2000), pp. 1-150 (pp. 100-1).

<sup>8</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, trans. by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1 (1976), 875-93 (p. 886).

underpin her train of thought at the time: ‘what was this love [...] that made men set out on ventures bold; and women sit and weep at lonely casements[?]’ (3). By foregrounding the effect of the female gaze and showing the extent to which Mary’s body is both exposed and constrained within its intimate world, Egerton adapted the traditionally male-dominated novel form ‘to the body’ of her subject. Her novel charts the shaping of female subjectivity against the limitations and physical conditions of Victorian society and culture.

Under the female gaze, the Victorian home, city and body in *The Wheel of God* are in a constant state of flux. In just the space of a page in the novel’s opening chapter, the home is transformed from a safe place where Mary’s imagination reigns supreme to a prison cell that limits her movement, its contents referencing the historical oppression of women.<sup>9</sup> The fluidity of imagery and allusion in Egerton’s home-space recalls the disputed meaning of Levy’s sketch on her British Museum notebook of a woman sat at her window: is it a celebration of ‘a new exteriority’ for women, as Susan David Bernstein contends, or a reference to gendered oppression?<sup>10</sup> By foregrounding the affect of Mary’s imagination on her environment, Egerton’s novel, like her short stories, engages with contemporary essentialist discourse. Victorian culture generally considered the female body and the home in essentialist terms. Women’s bodies were governed by their biological capacity to bear children, while the traditional idea of the Victorian home, Mike Hepworth explains, was ‘a private retreat within which a personal life can be enjoyed in peace and security’.<sup>11</sup> The functions of the female body and the home, therefore, were considered perpetual: any fluctuation or change was a sign of deviance. In *The Wheel of God*, however, Egerton posits a constructionist model of home and, within this, a constructionist idea of the female body, wherein change and fluctuation are both naturalised.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Anthony Vidler interprets contemporary buildings and their role in the ‘unhomely’ modern condition in his collection of essays *The Architectural Uncanny*, arguing that the home, under the gaze of the ‘domestic cyborg’, can come to symbolise, reinforce, and transform the estrangement, alienation, and exile of its inhabitants. *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Susan David Bernstein, *Roomscape: Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 84.

<sup>11</sup> Mike Hepworth, ‘Privacy, Security and Respectability: The Ideal Victorian Home’, in *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*, ed. by Barbara Miller Lane (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 150-154 (p. 150).

<sup>12</sup> Essentialism and constructionism are systems of understanding how language ascribes meaning to an object or idea, and are traditionally held in opposition. For the essentialist, men’s and women’s bodies are pure, pre-social sites which are fixed and subject only to natural (rather than learned or socialised) processes which ascribe ‘essences’ (or characteristics). Constructionism, when articulated in opposition to essentialism, posits that ‘essence’ itself is a historical construct. The distinction between ‘man’ and ‘woman’ is understood by the constructionist to be the result of discursive processes which align different bodies with respective ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ attributes. Diana Fuss articulates the discrepancy between essentialism and constructionism thus:

This chapter examines the effect of Mary's imagination, specifically its negotiation between the female body, time and space, as a means of escaping (as well as recalling) the physical conditions endured by the working-class woman at the *fin de siècle*. It identifies Mary's body as an affective site which is, to quote Diana Fuss, "'always ready" to be culturally mapped', and the home as a permeable space marked by socio-cultural influence.<sup>13</sup> My analysis focuses on the sustained conflict between imagination and social convention/domestic routine which is established early in the novel: as a child, Mary explains that 'her perfunctory prayers' are often disturbed by 'daring, sceptical fancies' (7). I offer close readings of four extracts from the text: two from Mary's childhood (in her nursery, and in the city street) and three from Mary's adulthood (in the city street, in her boarding-house cubicle, and in her work-place). My analyses demonstrate the sustained effect of 'culture' on Mary's 'nature' throughout her adolescence and adulthood and that Mary is rarely able to perform domestic tasks without disquietude or direct opposition emanating from her imagination. For the purpose of this chapter, I examine divide Mary's actions into two categories: imaginative impulses (linked to Mary's subjectivity), and perfunctory tasks (linked to socio-cultural expectations and/or the domestic sphere). By showing Mary's imagination encroaching upon perfunctory tasks, Egerton critiques the division and control of female time and labour.<sup>14</sup>

Despite sharing many thematic concerns with Egerton's short stories, *The Wheel of God* has been the subject of considerably less scholarly attention. The inconsistent modern interest in Egerton's novel in comparison to her short stories reflects their respective contemporaneous reception. *Keynotes* and, to a lesser degree, the successive collection, *Discords* (1894), were commercial successes and have since been the subjects of respective levels of scholarly attention.<sup>15</sup> The modern focus on *Keynotes* and *Discords* has been integral to the process of positioning Egerton as a prominent woman of letters at the *fin de siècle*, but it has also been to

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'constructionists are concerned above all with the *production* and *organisation* of differences, and they therefore reject the idea that any essential or natural givens precede the processes of social determination'. As Fuss notes, the essentialist holds that an individual's natural attributes can be *repressed* as a result of socio-political influence, while the constructionist maintains that that an individual's attributes are *produced* by social-political influence. Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of this chapter, I examine divide Mary's actions into two categories: imaginative impulses (linked to Mary's subjectivity), and perfunctory tasks (linked to socio-cultural expectations and/or the domestic sphere). By showing Mary's imagination encroaching upon perfunctory tasks, Egerton critiques the division and control of female time and labour.

<sup>15</sup> *Keynotes* sold over six thousand copies in Britain its first six months and its sales in America were second only to Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894). It was printed eight times by 1898 and translated into seven languages. Comparably, *Discords* had moderate success. Although *Discords* received a good deal of attention when it appeared in December 1894 and reached a fourth printing within four months, demand soon slowed. The collection went into a fifth printing in the summer of 1896. Sally Ledger, 'Introduction', in *Keynotes and Discords* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. xii.



the detriment of her later works. Many early reappraisals of Egerton's work focussed solely on addressing the merits of *Keynotes* and *Discords* and either neglected or dismissed outright her later works, including *The Wheel of God*. In 1963, in one of the first scholarly evaluations of Egerton's oeuvre, Wendell V. Harris praised her short stories but disregarded *The Wheel of God*: he admitted that the works had shared aims, but claimed that the novel 'simply repeat[s] Egerton's earlier views and techniques in weakened form'.<sup>16</sup> Martha Vicinus, in her introduction to the collected edition *Keynotes and Discords* (1983), made a similar claim, arguing that Egerton 'could not develop' in her later work 'new themes with the daring and excitement of her first stories'.<sup>17</sup> Elaine Showalter, like Harris and Vicinus, found much to be admired in Egerton's early works but claimed that her 'literary territory [was] a small plot [...] which was soon exhausted'.<sup>18</sup> Scott McCracken's article 'A Novel from/on the Margins: George Egerton's *Wheel of God*' (1995) broke the trend which denigrated Egerton's later works by disputing the established view that Egerton had only a short spell of creativity in the early 1890s.<sup>19</sup> By this point, *The Wheel of God* had been out of print for nearly a century. In 2010, Whitney Standlee examined and redefined *The Wheel of God* as a pioneering Irish *Künstlerroman* which prefigured the work of James Joyce.<sup>20</sup> One year later, the first scholarly edition of *The Wheel of God* was published.<sup>21</sup> Paul March-Russell, in his introduction to the volume, put to rest the trend of dismissing Egerton's later works, arguing that Egerton's oeuvre, including *The Wheel of God*, invoked 'continuities that transverse the *fin de siècle*'.<sup>22</sup>

This chapter joins recent reappraisals of *The Wheel of God* by considering it to be a significant literary response to the social and sexual tumult of the *fin de siècle*. The chapter begins by examining the socio-historical, personal and professional conditions under which Egerton wrote her novel, focusing on her professional development in the context of four relationships: her (various) home(s), her readership, London, and her first publisher, John Lane. Egerton's response to the shifting nature of these relationships reveals anxieties about time,

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<sup>16</sup> Wendell V. Harris, 'Egerton: Forgotten Realist', *Victorian Newsletter*, 33 (1968), 33-35 (p. 35).

<sup>17</sup> Martha Vicinus, 'Introduction', in *Keynotes and Discords* (London: Virago 1983), pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>18</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the fin de siècle* (London: Virago, 1992), p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Scott McCracken, 'A Novel from/on the Margins: George Egerton's *Wheel of God*', in *Gender and Colonialism*, ed. by Timothy P. Foley, Lionel Pilkington, Sean Ryder and Elizabeth Tilley (Galway: Galway University Press, 1995), pp. 139-57. McCracken's choice of phrasing here recalls Showalter's earlier claim that Egerton had 'exhausted' her 'literary territory' after writing *Discords*.

<sup>20</sup> Whitney Standlee, 'George Egerton, James Joyce and the Irish *Künstlerroman*', *Irish Studies Review*, 18 (2010), 439-52.

<sup>21</sup> In 1983, Virago published *Keynotes and Discords* in a collected edition, with an introduction by Vicinus. This edition is now out of print. Continuum published both collections in a second collected volume in 2011, with an introduction by Sally Ledger.

<sup>22</sup> Paul March-Russell (ed.), 'Introduction', in *The Wheel of God*, *New Woman Fiction, 1881-1899*, 8 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011), p. vii.

space, legacy, morality and the body which are typical to the *fin de siècle*. The chapter then moves on to examine how these anxieties are reflected in the content of *The Wheel of God* by demonstrating how Mary's response to modern life is exposed or constrained by personal memories or abstract notions of the past, or else marked by imagined fellowships with foreign subjects and spaces. I argue that Mary's longing to transect the boundaries of time and place implies her personal displacement in Victorian society and corresponds with a growing awareness of global change. From this dual-awareness emerges the notion that 'other' spaces, such as the Orient, might better facilitate and support female self-expression. Although Mary's sense of displacement and concurrent longing to escape the confines of Victorian Britain are socially produced, Egerton suggests that the fulfilment of this longing—through fantasies of 'other' times, spaces and subjects—is founded on an essential, human capacity to imagine alternatives to existing ideas and conditions. The focus of this chapter thereby identifies Mary (and the advanced woman more generally) as an anomalous or liminal subject, who is simultaneously *out* of time, *beyond* time (eternal), and yet *of* her time.

#### Keeping her head above 'milk and water' (1895-7)

Egerton wrote *The Wheel of God* after a period of personal and professional upheaval. This was brought about, in part, by the disruption of her natural working practices due to significant changes in the socio-cultural and literary landscapes in the mid-1890s. The first significant change of this sort came with the arrest of Oscar Wilde in April 1895 for counts of indecency, and his ensuing conviction one month later. Wilde's arrest and subsequent trial had far-reaching effects on the publishing industry. In this case, it posed a significant challenge to Egerton's relationship with her publisher, John Lane, and, as I demonstrate, came to influence the conception, composition and publication of *The Wheel of God*.

In November 1896, Egerton wrote to Lane to express her dissatisfaction at the growing conservatism of his publishing house, The Bodley Head. In the three years prior, The Bodley Head had published *Keynotes* and *Discords*, but Egerton claimed that recent changes to its working practices were making it difficult for her to produce a third short story collection to the best of her ability. Egerton's letter was written the day after her manuscript for her third collection, *Symphonies*, was due at The Bodley Head's office and in response to Lane's request that significant changes be made to the collection's content. Egerton's letter tells of her frustration that Lane's requests had come so late in the process:

I was too upset to write before and explain why you did not get the M.S. of *Symphonies* on Monday. I felt in a measure unfairly treated. You did not say that you wished a “milk and water” book on entirely different lines to that which made the success of *Keynotes* when we made our autumn arrangements, and now on the eve of completing my book it comes as a back-hander. [...] I have had to change a good deal, out of concession to the new Bodley Head policy and this has necessitated much rewriting and rearrangement [...].<sup>23</sup>

Lane’s initial letter has not survived, but Tina O’Toole speculates from Egerton’s reply that he had attempted to suppress the sexual content of her stories.<sup>24</sup> *Keynotes* and *Discords* polarised reviewers but, nonetheless, most admitted that they were bold and audacious renderings of the female condition and the relationship between the sexes.<sup>25</sup> Egerton’s letter shows that she was concerned that Lane’s preferred “‘milk and water” book’ would lack the substance that had contributed to the success of her earlier work.

Egerton’s reservations proved to be well-founded. As Lambert observes, after *Keynotes* and *Discords* ‘[Egerton] could not hold the interest of the public. Book after book took her further down hill’.<sup>26</sup> The modest publishing histories of *Symphonies* and Egerton’s later works indicate a decline in public interest which correlates with Lane’s increased control over their content.<sup>27</sup> By the time that *Symphonies* was published in 1897, *Keynotes* had been reprinted eight times; *Symphonies*, however, did not make it past a second printing. Egerton’s fourth collection, *Fantasias* (1898), also made concessions to the demands of the Bodley Head and met a similar fate. Egerton’s correspondence with Lane also reveals a change in their relationship after the publication of *Discords*. Egerton’s great-nephew, Terence de Vere White, notes that ‘within a year [of *Discords*] the tone of [Egerton and Lane’s] correspondence shows

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<sup>23</sup> George Egerton, letter to John Lane, 10 November 1896, in Terence de Vere White (ed.), *A Leaf From the Yellow Book* (London: Richards Press, 1958), pp. 41-2 (p. 41).

<sup>24</sup> Tina O’Toole, ‘Keynotes from Millstreet, Co. Cork: George Egerton’s Transgressive Fictions’, *Colby Quarterly*, 36 (2000), 145-56 (p. 147).

<sup>25</sup> W.T. Stead, in his role as reader for the *Review of Reviews*, described *Keynotes* as ‘a very literary work’, explaining that ‘some woman has put her soul into this book [...] has crystallised her life’s dramas, has written down her soul upon the page’: ‘The Book of the Month: The Novel of the Modern Woman’, quoted in Ledger, ‘Introduction’, in *Keynotes and Discords*, p. xii.

<sup>26</sup> Lambert and Ratcliffe, *The Bodley Head*, p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that *Keynotes* did not go editorially unchallenged by Lane. The manuscript was returned to its author with reader’s queries regarding diction and the use of rural slang. Margaret D. Stetz claims that Egerton ‘defended adamantly her choice of phrases, especially those drawn from the slang of rural life, telling Richard Le Gallienne, “I desired my expression to remain, as it was older, better, more Saxon, and general, as every one who lived or stayed in [the] country intelligently was aware [*sic*]”’. There is no evidence to suggest that readers at The Bodley Head requested changes or revisions to the sexual content of the stories contained in *Keynotes*. Margaret D. Stetz, ‘George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Harvard University, 1982), p. 31.

a sad deterioration [...]. [T]he confidence of 1894, engendered by success, had changed to petulance'.<sup>28</sup>

Egerton and Lane's correspondence about the manuscript for *Symphonies* is indicative of the compromises that authors and publishers were compelled to make after Wilde's arrest, the impact of which was felt most keenly at The Bodley Head. Lane's publishing house had found itself tied to Wilde's disgrace by reports that Wilde had a 'yellow book' under his arm when he was escorted from the Cadogan Hotel by police officers after his arrest.<sup>29</sup> Lane's periodical, *The Yellow Book*, which had a yellow cover to match its name, had debuted the previous year and had immediately caused a stir in the literary world: as a result of its risqué form and content, it earned the reputation of a 'bombshell throw into the world of letters'.<sup>30</sup> Although Wilde had never published his work in *The Yellow Book* and, in fact, professed to dislike the periodical, he did have a professional connection to the periodical's art director, Aubrey Beardsley.<sup>31</sup> The Bodley Head had also published a number of Wilde's works before his arrest.<sup>32</sup> Arguably more damning, however, was the revelation that a Bodley Head clerk, Edward Shelley, was one of the youths involved in the case and later gave evidence against Wilde which amounted to their sexual relationship.<sup>33</sup> It was later revealed that the book Wilde was carrying when he was arrested was not *The Yellow Book*, The Bodley Head periodical, but 'a yellow book', likely *Aphrodite*, by Pierre Louÿs.<sup>34</sup> The damage, however, was done: Wilde's 'yellow book' was the defining link that duly connected his indiscretions with The Bodley Head.

On the evening of Wilde's arrest, a crowd of people gathered outside The Bodley Head's office on Vigo Street. They aired their grievances towards the publishing house by stoning its windows. Lane responded to this outcry by attempting to distance The Bodley Head and its authors from Wilde's public disgrace. Bowing to pressure from William Watson, Mary

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<sup>28</sup> Terence de Vere White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, p. 41.

<sup>29</sup> John Lane, who was in New York on business at the time, learned of Wilde's arrest by a newspaper article with the headline 'Arrest of Oscar Wilde, *Yellow Book* under his arm': Nicholas Freeman, *1895: Drama, Disaster and Disgrace in Late Victorian Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 103.

<sup>30</sup> Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of the Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1913), p. 54.

<sup>31</sup> Freeman and Albert Parry both note that Wilde disliked *The Yellow Book* and made no effort to publish his work in it: Freeman, *1895*, p. 103; Parry, *Garrets and Pretenders: Bohemian Life in America, from Poe to Kerouac* (1960; repr. New York: Dover, 2012), p. 129. Parry argues that Wilde's aversion to *The Yellow Book* stemmed from a personal dislike of Harland.

<sup>32</sup> Lane had published a number of works by Wilde, including *Poems* (1892), *The Sphinx* (1894) and *Salomé* (1894).

<sup>33</sup> For details of Shelley and Wilde's relationship see Neil McKenna, *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (London: Arrow, 2004), pp. 233-40.

<sup>34</sup> H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Dover, 1962), p. 154.

Augusta ('Mrs Humphrey') Ward and Wilfrid Meynell, Lane fired Beardsley as art editor of *The Yellow Book* and removed Wilde's past publications from The Bodley Head's listings.<sup>35</sup> As O'Toole explains, Lane then began an effort to avoid publishing 'anything that might bring opprobrium on The Bodley Head'.<sup>36</sup> Lane became, according to his former employee J. Lewis May, 'morbidly suspicious and discerned a pervert behind every tree'.<sup>37</sup> Egerton would have been aware of the reason for Lane's increased conservatism. He had described the situation in a letter to her written from Boston two weeks after Wilde's arrest: 'I have been terribly worried re Oscar-Beardsley-Yellow Book. I have had no peace since my arrival [in America], nothing but cables [...]. It is a most serious business for me. [...] My spirit is half broken. My enjoyment has been snatched from me'.<sup>38</sup> Lane asked that Egerton keep him abreast of 'the situation' in her reply.<sup>39</sup> In her capacity as mediator of news about the 'Oscar-Beardsley-Yellow Book' situation, Egerton was intimately aware of its impact on Lane and The Bodley Head.

Lane's request for significant alterations to *Symphonies* was, along with his decision to fire Beardsley, in line with his aim to distance the Bodley Head from charges of indecency. For Egerton, whose earliest and most successful works were intimately concerned with human sexuality, Lane's new insecurities had the potential to be highly damaging. Lane's request for extensive revisions to *Symphonies* not only affected the content of Egerton's succeeding works, but also forced her out of her natural working practice. Egerton spoke proudly of her ability to write short stories 'in droves'.<sup>40</sup> She claimed that she wrote the stories collected in *Keynotes* 'inside ten days'.<sup>41</sup> In a letter to Lane in 1894, she explained her short bursts of creativity in essentialist terms: 'The fact is I can not work to order. I am a woman and love to go my own way' [sic].<sup>42</sup> The 'rewriting and rearrangement' of *Symphonies* necessitated by Lane's editorial changes meant that its mode of production, as well as its content, was markedly different from *Keynotes*.<sup>43</sup> Egerton began work on *The Wheel of God* in 1897, in a publishing atmosphere charged with the conflict between nature and culture. The new pressures of writing 'to order'

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<sup>35</sup> Lane was in New York and Harland was in Paris when Wilde was arrested. Lane delegated the responsibility of firing Beardsley to The Bodley Head's office manager, Herbert Chapman. Katherine Lyon Mix explains that although Lane thought it unjust to punish Beardsley for Wilde's misdemeanours, he 'let Chapman take command and [...] toss overboard the first mate, an unwilling Jonah, to the whale of public opinion': *A Study in Yellow: The Yellow Book and its Contributors* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1960), p. 146.

<sup>36</sup> Tina O'Toole, 'Keynotes from Millstreet, Co. Cork' (p. 147).

<sup>37</sup> J. Lewis May, *John Lane and the Nineties* (London: John Lane, 1936), p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> John Lane, letter to Egerton, 21 April 1895, in White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, pp. 37-9 (p. 38).

<sup>39</sup> Lane, letter to Egerton, 21 April 1895, in White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book* (p. 38).

<sup>40</sup> George Egerton, 'A Keynote to *Keynotes*', in John Gawsworth (ed.), *Ten Contemporaries: Notes Towards their Definitive Bibliography* (London: Ernest Benn, 1932), pp. 57-60 (p. 59).

<sup>41</sup> Egerton, 'A Keynote to *Keynotes*', p. 58.

<sup>42</sup> Egerton, letter to Lane, 20 February 1894, in White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book* (p. 33).

<sup>43</sup> Egerton, letter to Lane, 10 November 1896, in White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, pp. 41-2 (p. 41).

and making concessions to The Bodley Head's growing conservatism brought about the end of Egerton's working relationship with Lane in the following year. The Bodley Head had been Egerton's professional home from the beginning of her literary career. The firm had agreed to publish *Keynotes* after it had been rebuffed by Heinemann and had then published all subsequent works. It had also named a series of books, the Keynotes Series, in her honour. Lane's publishing house had brought Egerton's name and work to the forefront of *fin-de-siècle* literary scene. Her decision to break from The Bodley Head, therefore, amounted to embracing, however briefly, a spell of professional homelessness and uncertainty. In this way, Egerton experienced a detrimental challenge to her sense of belonging in the few years before writing *The Wheel of God*.

#### A product of 'outward circumstances': realism and *The Wheel of God*

Egerton broke from The Bodley Head whilst *The Wheel of God* was still in production. The second edition of Egerton's fourth collection of short stories, *Fantasias*, which was published by The Bodley Head in 1897, carried an announcement of the novel under its working title: 'The Hazard of the Hill'.<sup>44</sup> This announcement shows that, as far as Lane was concerned, he would be publishing the novel imminently. Despite having made these arrangements, Egerton began to search for an alternative publisher for her novel in 1897. In August, she approached Grant Richards about the possibility of his involvement and arranged to send him the first half of her manuscript in the autumn.<sup>45</sup> Richards' publishing firm was in its first year of operation. Margaret Stetz suggests that this would have been an important factor in Egerton's decision because a publisher who was 'just starting out [...] could make use of a slightly daring book for its publicity value, as Lane had once used *Keynotes*'.<sup>46</sup>

Egerton pitched her novel to Richards as a 'study of a woman's life'; she told him that it would show '[the] development of her character through outward circumstances'.<sup>47</sup> Her short stories were limited to relaying only fragments of subjectivity, but with the novel came significantly more space and, with this, the opportunity to chart a woman's psychological development from childhood to late adulthood. Egerton also suggested to Richards that she intended that the novel have a sociological dimension: it would depict 'scenes of working

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<sup>44</sup> Due to a typographical error, the novel was advertised in the second edition of *Fantasias* (1898) as 'The Hazard of the Ill'.

<sup>45</sup> Stetz, 'George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties', p. 114.

<sup>46</sup> Stetz, 'George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties', p. 113.

<sup>47</sup> Egerton, letter to Grant Richards, 1 August 1897, quoted in Stetz, 'George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties', p. 114.

woman's life [...] and many studies of women in various callings'.<sup>48</sup> The additional space of the novel form allowed Egerton to show the *sustained* effect of society and work upon the individual, as well as to draw out the similar circumstances affecting different female characters. In these ways, Egerton's novel appeared to harness the content and form favoured by literary realism.

However, Egerton's focus in *The Wheel of God* is on *subjective*-reality, and this problematises any attempt to claim it as a realist novel. Although the novel's narrative accounts for the presence of real social structures and their inherent physical demands, greater detail is reserved for describing their effect upon Mary's subjectivity, rather than their wider implications. Egerton is concerned with showing how Mary sees and understands the world and her place within it; she is less interested than Sarah Grand, for instance, was in the effect of work and marriage on the health of the nation. Foregrounding female subjectivity in her portrait of '[a] working woman's life' allows Egerton to account for the sustained conflict between female imagination—which is fluid and affective—and the rigid, increasing demands of industry. By showing the discord between Mary's creative impulse and the demands of city life, Egerton presents a largely pessimistic portrait of modern womanhood.

In form, as well as content, *The Wheel of God* was a product of outward circumstances. As well as celebrating her tendency to write 'in droves', Egerton defined herself as 'a short story [writer]' and, 'at most, a long story writer'.<sup>49</sup> 'The long book was not my pigeon', she explained in 1932.<sup>50</sup> With *The Wheel of God*, however, she substituted her preferred short form with a novel. Egerton's decision to write a novel and to then arrange for its publication through a new publisher shows an astute interaction with and response to the shifting literary terrain at the *fin de siècle*. The new means through which Egerton composed and published *The Wheel of God* are evidence that she was able to adapt the way that she worked, thus undermining Showalter's claim that her 'literary territory [was] a small plot [...] which was soon exhausted'.<sup>51</sup> With *The Wheel of God*, Egerton is actively and pointedly excavating new ground.

#### 'The knocking about from house to house' (1893-8)

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<sup>48</sup> Egerton, letter to Grant Richards, 1 August 1897, quoted in Stetz, 'George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties', p. 114.

<sup>49</sup> Egerton, 'A Keynote to *Keynotes*', p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> Egerton, 'A Keynote to *Keynotes*', p. 59.

<sup>51</sup> Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, p. 66.

The repercussions of Wilde's conviction were only one of many factors that affected Egerton's ability to produce new writing 'in droves' after 1893. In the first substantial study of Egerton's life, Stetz argued that financial and marital instability and illness also disrupted Egerton's writing after *Keynotes*.<sup>52</sup> However, the pressures of frequently moving between countries and houses—as she did between the publications of *Keynotes* and *The Wheel of God*—arguably had the greatest impact on her health and, by extension, her ability to write new material.

Egerton's frequent movement between homes in her adult life was an extension of the manner in which she had spent her childhood. Egerton was born in Melbourne, Australia, but moved with her parents to Chile, New Zealand and Wales, and was schooled in Germany, before the family finally settled in Dublin, Ireland. In her adult life, she had lived for several years in New York (1884-7) and Norway (1887-1889) before returning to Ireland in 1892 and settling for a short time in County Cork with her first husband, George Egerton Clairmonte. The constant movement between countries impacted Egerton's social identity. By the time that Egerton had published *Keynotes* in 1893, Kate McCullough notes, she had 'already had thirty years' experience of standing outside the British status quo'.<sup>53</sup> Ethnically, too, she was between identities: her mother was Welsh, and her father was Irish. O'Toole argues that by virtue of her Irish, Catholic, nationalist background, Egerton was 'an outsider to the political and cultural hegemony of the late nineteenth century'.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Sally Ledger identifies Egerton as a claimant to 'an interstitial identity, one not readily absorbed by the mainstream culture' of the time.<sup>55</sup> McCullough, O'Toole and Ledger agree that in terms of her ethnicity and nationality Egerton 'never quite fit the norms of British life or propriety'.<sup>56</sup>

As well as spending most of her first thirty years of life beyond the reach of mainstream British culture, Egerton began her career at a considerable distance from London, its social tastes, currents and networks. When she composed *Keynotes*, she was newly-married to Clairmonte and living in a secluded cottage called 'Ardath', which was located approximately one mile from Millstreet, County Cork. Egerton wrote publicly only once about her life at Ardath. In 1932, in a short biographical note for John Gawsorth's two-volume bibliography,

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<sup>52</sup> Stetz, 'George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties', pp. 72-87.

<sup>53</sup> Kate McCullough, 'Mapping the "terra incognita" of Woman: George Egerton's *Keynotes* (1893) and New Woman Fiction', in *The New Nineteenth Century: Feminist Readings of Underread Victorian Fiction*, ed. by Barbara Leah Harman and Susan Meyer (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 205-23 (p. 206).

<sup>54</sup> Tina O'Toole, 'Ireland: the *Terra Incognita* of the New Woman Project', in *New Contexts: Re-Framing Nineteenth-Century Irish Women's Prose*, ed. by Heidi Hansson (Cork: Cork University Press, 2008), pp. 125-41 (p. 134).

<sup>55</sup> Ledger, 'Introduction', in *Keynotes and Discords*, p. ix.

<sup>56</sup> McCullough, 'Mapping the "terra incognita" of Woman' (p. 206).



*Ten Contemporaries*, Egerton described the cottage in idealistic terms and also emphasised its isolation:

We were living in a long, whitewashed, thatched cottage on a slope above the station 19 miles from Killarney. A neglected garden, unexpected flowers, a bán, and a stile of one's own to the botharin. Below in the valley a river with trout to whip, and pike to be speared with a carving fork whipped to a pea-stake. Holy Wells and a mile away Millstreet. Beyond that, stony slopes leading up to Ballyvourney with its miracle stone and scald headed crows and mountain fox.<sup>57</sup>

Although Egerton later depicted Ardath as a rural idyll, her correspondence from her time spent at the cottage reveals a different picture. In letters to her father, Egerton wrote that she 'despised' their indolent, impoverished lifestyle at Ardath; she complained that there was little cultural stimulation and that she was suffering from 'brain starvation'.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, as Stetz convincingly argues, Egerton's dissatisfaction at Ardath spurred her on to write: she explained to her father that she 'would rather die from overwork than vegetate here'.<sup>59</sup> From the necessity to busy herself with work came *Keynotes* and, when the time came to send the manuscript to The Bodley Head, she signed it 'Ardath', formally attributing it to her time spent in the cottage.<sup>60</sup> In every practical sense, *Keynotes* was the product of an isolated woman.

After the success of *Keynotes*, Egerton moved to London. Living in the city would facilitate meetings with agents and publishers and also bring her into contact with reviewers and influential readers of her work. But any worthy intentions were undermined by the fact that she was 'penniless' and her husband 'idle'.<sup>61</sup> The necessity of balancing their meagre joint finances with her desire to pursue a literary career led Egerton on an onerous search for affordable lodgings in the vicinity of London. Within months of moving to London, she and her husband moved from Battersea to Lavender Hill to Upper Woburn Place. They finally settled in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, in the winter of 1893, before then moving to Chesham, Buckinghamshire, in 1894.<sup>62</sup> Egerton recognised the effect that this was having on her health, complaining that 'it is the knocking about from house to house, [and] place to place, [that] robs

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<sup>57</sup> Egerton, 'A Keynote to *Keynotes*' (p. 57).

<sup>58</sup> Stetz, 'George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties', p. 26.

<sup>59</sup> Egerton, letter to Captain Dunne, 4 January 1893, quoted in Stetz, 'George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties', p. 26.

<sup>60</sup> White, *A Leaf From the Yellow Book*, p. 22.

<sup>61</sup> White, *A Leaf From the Yellow Book*, p. 19.

<sup>62</sup> Stetz, 'George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties', p. 30

me of strength and vitality'.<sup>63</sup> At the very beginning of her career, Egerton had experienced first-hand the veritable pressures faced by a poor, working woman in London.

#### Discord: Egerton's relationship with London

The conditions in which Egerton composed *Discords* were markedly different to the conditions at Ardath. Although moving to London had brought her closer to publishers and agents, her correspondence with Lane shows that she felt ill at ease in England and that this directly impacted her ability to write new material. In the spring of 1894, she wrote to Lane to explain that she felt she would be better able to finish *Discords* elsewhere: 'I think I would like to speak about book [sic]—I have made up my mind to leave England as soon as is feasible. I do not fit in with the [English] folk or their whimsies and I do not think I ever shall'.<sup>64</sup> Egerton hereby alludes to an essential difference between herself and English people, which inhibits her integration and keeps her from her writing.

Later in the same letter, Egerton reveals another reason for her present unhappiness. She reflects upon her obligation to maintain working relationships with critics and members of the press and compares her situation to one of slavery:

Clement Shorter attacked me rather brusquely—said I had treated him very badly, etc. I wrote him just now a mollifying letter, as I thought you would, from a publisher's point of view, prefer me to make concessions and keep him friendly. Verily I have sold myself into bondage and the last steps are worse than the first, and *Keynotes* was the key to fasten my soul into slavery. Perhaps I am too sensitive [...] but I have an infinite longing to run away from it all. *The Hub* says a writer ought to have the hide of a "hippo" [but] I can't change my skin.<sup>65</sup>

In her letter to Lane, Egerton makes two points: she sensed her personal liberty being revoked on account of her status as literary celebrity; this affected her ability to write new material. Egerton suggests that her 'sensitivity' is an essential difference that separates her. Her assertion that she 'can't change' her skin suggests that the difference is insurmountable and that she will suffer its effect for as long as she is in close proximity of London society.

Egerton's contentious relationship with London society spanned the duration of her career. In another letter to Lane, written from London in 1894, she explains that she is 'tired, [...], heart-tired, world-tired' and that her husband 'has determined to break up *at once* and

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<sup>63</sup> Egerton, letter to Reginald Golding Bright, 31 May 1901, quoted in Stetz, 'George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties', p. 139.

<sup>64</sup> Egerton, letter to Lane, 8 July 1894, in White, *A Leaf From the Yellow Book*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>65</sup> Egerton, letter to Lane, 8 July 1894, in White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, p. 40. Clement Shorter was a literary critic and editor of *Illustrated London News* and the *English Illustrated Magazine* (both from 1891), and founder and editor of *The Sketch* (from 1892).

carry me and my books to some quiet place where I shall have a spell of rest from my writing'.<sup>66</sup> She also shared her fears about the pressure of city-life with others besides Lane. Le Gallienne alluded to their earlier conversation in a letter written in 1895: 'as you say, why should one work for the stupid, cruel mob that will crown us one minute and tear us to pieces the next [?]'.<sup>67</sup> The subject of finding peace in the city was the focus of intimate correspondence between Egerton and other writers who identified with the difficulty of balancing marriage, parenthood, celebrity, and the solitude necessary to creative production. Scottish poet John Davidson wrote to her in 1895: 'Intelligence, I begin to see is only possible in absolute solitude: even between two blood mates or two mind mates, or two mate united both in blood and mind, and in moments of the closest and most perfect intimacy, an edge is dulled, a mirror is breathed on'.<sup>68</sup> In Egerton, Davidson, found a fellow writer who shared his anxiety about the inherent problem of combining writing and celebrity. Davidson's biographer explains that the pressure of public life in the mid-1890s 'had badly affected his nerves [...] [and] he longed for solitude'.<sup>69</sup> Egerton's own mistrust of public life, the city and its people extended into the twentieth century and into her old age. Diary entries from her later life show that she rarely visited or received visits from friends. In 1935, when she was living alone in London, she frequently recorded her loneliness, desires to leave the city, and her regret at having stayed behind: 'Would like to go to the country if I had a car [...] Dislike the crowds. [...] To come to a certain age isolated in London is an argument against town living'.<sup>70</sup>

### Impossible solitude

In many ways, *The Wheel of God* is an argument against town living. Like Egerton, Mary has a contentious relationship with London. Mary's small income and the initial difficulty of securing employment contribute to her unhappiness in the city, and she frequently suggests that her class is detrimental to her social assimilation. During her search for work, 'It was conveyed to her in some subtle way that individuality, unless backed by wealth or interest, counted for less in this great, repellent prison of a city, where each man and woman looks with a certain distrust at every unknown person' (128). She habitually declares her disdain for the city's crowds of working women who made it ever more difficult to define herself as an individual:

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<sup>66</sup> Egerton, letter to Lane (29 April 1894), in White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, pp. 36-7. [Emphasis in original].

<sup>67</sup> Richard Le Gallienne, letter to Egerton, 28 April 1895, in White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, p. 51.

<sup>68</sup> John Davidson, letter to Egerton, 25 May 1895, quoted in John Sloan, *John Davidson, First of the Moderns: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 136.

<sup>69</sup> Sloan, *John Davidson, First of the Moderns*, p. 136.

<sup>70</sup> Egerton, diary extracts, 5 January 1935 and 20 January 1935, in White, *A Leaf from the Yellow Book*, pp. 114-5.

One never seemed to be able to escape from the people; they swarmed about one like flies. She ached for solitude. It seemed years since she used to long to mix with crowds; to find exhilaration in the sight of multitudes; to feel her pulses throb to the beat of all the myriad feet. The reality was different. [...] [T]he people in bulk repelled [her]. (135)

But, as well as recoiling from the city's crowds, Mary frequently recalls her loneliness and isolation. This is most notable when Mary arrives in London from New York and begins an arduous search for work in the West End:

She dragged slowly down Regent Street. This monster city, with its irregular streets, the slums elbowing the aristocratic squares, that made it so difficult to find one's way, bewildered her. Some of the adventurous spirit that has acted as an incentive in her first venture [to New York] was quelled. London seemed gray, repellent. It seemed to lack [...] colour [...]. It was lonely in New York, but it was beginning to grow on Mary that loneliness in London would be more cruelly absolute. (128)

The conflict between Mary's desire for solitude and the pressure of city life comes to the fore when she is running errands in the West End. Mary gets caught up in a crowd on a busy thoroughfare. Rather than allow herself to be swept up in the same tempestuous spirit she makes an effort to distance herself from the crowd, edging her way to its perimeter, and climbing some steps that lead to a doorway. From her elevated vantage point, she surveys the scene with horror:

She could see a policeman's helmet bobbing up and down in the crush. The traffic was stopped higher up by the ever-increasing curious crowd. How they swarmed, like hounds on a hot scent! [...] Oaths, cries, [...] made Mary pale. She felt the fierce excitement of the crowd communicate itself to her; their faces gleamed orange, and scarlet, and purple in the light of the lanterns. (134-5)

Mary's horror is not limited to the excitable members of crowd. She also watches with dismay as a group of working-class women, who had 'baskets on their arms, and were laughing and chatting', are pushed closer to her by the force of the crowd. The women 'went on with their gossip, too inured to scenes of the kind to mind' but, nonetheless, are 'thrust nearer' to Mary before, eventually, 'they stepped on to the lower step and continued [their conversation] calmly' alongside her (134-5). The women's conversation reaches Mary in snippets through the shouts and sobs of the crowd. They are discussing the birth of their friend's child and one of the women 'triumphantly' reminds the group that she has thirteen children of her own (134). Sound, allusion and image converge to underpin Mary's present fears. The sight and sound of the crowd, the backdrop to the women's conversation, form a microcosmic representation of London's swelling population. The idea that the city can barely contain its population is compounded by the image of the woman surrounded by her vast brood of children.

Mary eventually escapes the crowd and makes her way to her boarding-house on Gower Street. However, as the remainder of the chapter demonstrates, she is unable to completely escape the company of others. As she opens the door to the house, she is confronted with signs of its many occupants. In the hall, ‘mud-stained footmarks, in all stages of dryness, marked the dingy linoleum’ and ‘the hum of many voices echoed’ through the walls (136). Mary advances into the house and ‘a puff of hot, close air, the smell of over-crowded women, struck her as she opened the door to the sitting-room’ (136). The poor quality air within the sitting-room makes Mary ‘feel faint [and] flushed her face’ (136). In the sitting-room, groups of women are engaged in various activities:

The long table down one side of the room was crowded with girls mending garments [and] trimming hats [...]. They gossiped and laughed, whispered and giggled as they worked; another group talked in a corner by the piano; a quieter circle sat round the fire. [...] A big red-faced coarse woman [...] lay in an arm-chair, and slept heavily; she gave a half-snore every now and then. Her nether lip hung, and there was a subtle smell of some drug clinging to her. [...] A girl with a tousled head, who answered to the name of Ryan or Pat, sat down to the piano and “vamped” a waltz. The refrain—it was vulgar and rather stupid—was eagerly taken up by the noisy set at the head of the table. [...] (136-7)

The noise and activity in the sitting-room compounds the effect of the ‘hot, close air’ and makes ‘Mary’s head thro[b]’ (138). She wonders at the unusual crowdedness of the room and concludes sadly that ‘it is her first Saturday night in the house. [...] [O]n other evenings there were not so many girls’ (138).

Mary leaves the din of the sitting-room and retreats upstairs to her sleeping quarters. The upper-rooms are quiet at present but their layout attests to their many occupants and the commoditisation of space in the city: Mary’s room ‘was divided into squares by iron uprights and cross rods, with hanging curtains—four shillings a week for each cubicle. There were seven in this room’ (138). The curtains (dyed turkey-red), square-shape, and uniformity of the cubicles allude to their artificiality. Mary climbs inside her cubicle and from within reflects upon the difficulty of residing within such a space:

[s]he longed for quiet sometimes; quiet to listen to the dreams in herself. There was never any quiet; there was something indelicate in this constant intimate contact with other human beings. One breathed their aura [...] coarse or vulgar, or whatever its nature—one was only protected by a curtain of turkey-red. That was, after all, the greatest differentiation between the classes and the masses—the possibility of solitude. (170)

Egerton’s depiction of the boarding house does not comfortably align with the essentialised Victorian home: Mary’s cubicle is not ‘a private retreat within which a personal life can be

enjoyed in peace and security'.<sup>71</sup> The peace and security of Mary's cubicle is arbitrary rather than guaranteed; it varies according to the day of the week, as well as the number of occupied cubicles on any given day. Nevertheless, Mary feels 'protected' within the red curtained walls of her cubicle; it provides her with the closest semblance of solitude available to an unmarried woman who lives and works in the city (170).

### Residing and belonging at home

Throughout the novel, Mary acknowledges the conflicted sense of *belonging* to (as opposed to residing within) a rented space. The cubicles in the boarding-house are described in terms of their economic value and Mary and the other boarders are, by extension, consumers. Mary's relation to her cubicle and the practicality of achieving even a semblance of 'peace and security' are predicated solely on her ability to pay her board. Mary's childhood homes are also rented. In the opening chapters of *The Wheel of God* the Desmond family moves from one lodging-house in Dublin to another in the city's suburbs. It was not unusual for a working-class family, like the Desmond family, to rent, rather than own, their home. Simon Eliot points out that 'for most people for most of the nineteenth century, [...] renting houses or parts of houses was a common practice'.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the Desmond family's reliance on rented accommodation results in patrimonial disruption: Mary and her siblings cannot inherit these spaces, nor can they continue to reside in them beyond their parents' lifetimes.

A markedly modern aspect of *The Wheel of God* is the distinction it frequently draws between residing and belonging to a home-space and its allusions to the conditions and effect of nineteenth-century working-class rental culture. As an adolescent, Mary acknowledges that her attachment to her family home is limited: in one instance, she notes abstractedly that the room in which her family members were gathered 'was a lodging-house parlour, *but* it was home' (27; my emphasis). Although her relationships to both the lodging-house and the cubicle are governed by the same economic paradigm, Mary does not refer to her cubicle in the same way as she did the family's room in the lodging-house: it is not her 'home', but a 'turkey-red square allotted to her' (138).

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<sup>71</sup> Hepworth, 'Privacy, Security and Respectability: The Ideal Victorian Home', p. 150.

<sup>72</sup> Eliot also points out that 'until the expansion of building societies, even many middle-class families [...] did not own their own homes'. Simon Eliot, 'Books and their Readers', in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel: Realisms*, ed. by Delia da Sousa Correa (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 5-39 (pp. 25-6). The working-class renting culture was not substantially overturned until the middle of the twentieth-century.

The main difference between these rented spaces—that which defines one as ‘home’ and another not—is the presence or absence of familial occupants. The novel’s first chapter outlines the importance of familiarity and family to Mary’s notion of home. Mary is in bed at her grandmother’s house. Alone in an unfamiliar bed in a foreign house she experiences a sense of displacement which overwhelms even the senses:

She wished she were home with the little brown mother. [This] was not like home; it did not even smell like home. It was funny how different people smelt; there was a smell that belonged to her own mother, and father, and brothers, and sisters that stirred her to the very heart depths. The “home smell” she called it [...]. (9)

This is an essentialised description of a home: it is a pure, pre-social site which is fixed by and subject only to natural, primal processes (the body’s production of scent and its ability to discern between smells). When the Desmond family moves between rented spaces they take the ‘home smell’ with them, thus marking the new space as ‘home’. As well as defining her home by its smell, Mary also explains that, by her own reckoning, ‘in nine cases out of ten, the mother makes the home’ (27). Therefore, Mary is seen to define a space as ‘home’ by way of her family. When she leaves her family and native Ireland for New York and London, the spaces in which she resides are no longer easily defined by their familial occupants. Instead, she must co-habit with an ever-changing array of strangers.

Mary’s dissociation from the home-space is frequently recalled through reference to her few belongings. In her second childhood home, in one of Dublin’s coastal suburbs, her family’s few, ad-hoc possessions are contrasted with those belonging to the home-owners. In this way, Egerton alludes to the Desmond family’s transitory presence in and right to the space:

It was a curiously furnished house—every available inch of wall in the unused drawing-room upstairs was covered with choice water-colours, rare engravings, old miniatures, or fancies embroidered on silk. Two cabinets held stores of old china, [...] exquisite porcelain, [...] quaint seals, pouncet boxes, Chinese puzzles, ivory carvings, [...]—a veritable museum. [The house] had been let furnished. The deck chairs covered with striped rugs and ponchos, the furs and the books in the rooms downstairs, belonged to the tenants. (30-1)

By referring to the Desmond family as ‘the tenants’, Egerton underpins their dissociation from their home and alludes to the process that will see them soon replaced by another family, another set of tenants. The description of the cubicle in Gower Street as having been ‘allotted to’ Mary has largely the same effect: it implies a lack of agency on Mary’s part, and also alludes to the process which will see the same space re-allotted to another woman (138).

Mary's few possessions—'a narrow bed, a diminutive chest of drawers [...], a square of glass on a nail, and a chair'—reflects her transient and tentative right to a space of her own (138).

'As if in a dream of her own': liminality and self-reflexivity in moments of isolation

Although Mary frequently laments her place amongst the masses, Egerton strives to define her protagonist as 'different'. The characterisation of the New Woman protagonist as an anomalous subject was an ironic commonality in fiction of the genre. Anna Carrington's observation in Mona Caird's *The Pathway of the Gods* set the tone in this regard: 'We luckless beings of the transition period have to suffer the penalty of being out of line with the old conditions, before the new conditions have been formed with which we could have been harmonised'.<sup>73</sup> Throughout *The Wheel of God*, Egerton alludes to Mary's anomalousness through moments of solitude. This is most notable in scenes which take place during Mary's childhood. Although Mary is a member of a large family, her engagement with her siblings is rarely depicted. Instead, Egerton uses moments of isolation to focus on her subject's self-reflexivity. These moments are the focus of my analysis in the rest of this chapter.

The novel opens with a description of Mary alone in her darkened bed, the candle having burnt to the wick:

A little child was lying bathed in the moonlight. The eyes looked strangely deep and dark in the expressive face, sharpened by the white light. [...] She had been reading *Jane Eyre*, and was a-quiver with the strangeness of it. What was this love of which all the poets sang; that made men set out on ventures bold; and women sit and weep at lonely casements; that ran like a magic golden thread through every tale of romance and chivalry? (3)

Mary's essential difference is relayed through her appearance. The play of the moonlight upon her face makes her eyes appear 'strangely deep' and 'sharpened', and the allusion to being 'bathed' is suggestive of her anointment. The notion of Mary's difference extends beyond mystic allusion, however. It also underpins her interaction with the urban environment. The second chapter of *The Wheel of God* follows Mary, who has by now matured from a 'little child' to 'a little girl', as she moves beyond her nursery to the wider world. She is travelling alone from her family home to visit her father in the Marshalsea Prison. The journey takes her through the Liberties, one of Dublin's poorest districts:

One early, clear October forenoon a little girl was walking with a springing step through grimy Meath Street in Dublin. Her boots were daintily cut, little

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<sup>73</sup> Mona Caird, *The Pathway of the Gods* (London: Skeffington, 1898), p. 316.



flat-heeled French boots; the very fashion of her clothing, unconventional and simple in cut, but of exquisitely chosen material, would have individualised her, even if the resolute little face, poise of head, always thrown a little back, and fearless, easy carriage had not done so. (11)

Mary's irregularity in the Liberties is rendered both literally and metaphorically. The style of her clothing is 'unconventional' and her boots are recognisable as imports of foreign fashion. Her dissociation from the surrounding poverty is also suggested in the manner of her movement: the 'grime' on the street does not labour her 'springing step'; her 'resolute little face, [...] head [...] thrown a little back, and fearless, easy carriage' bespeak her confidence as she walks alone through the street.

Mary's difference runs deeper than her appearance. She is also shown to interact with her environment on her own terms. As she walks through the Liberties, Mary is unaffected by the fact that it 'was at its worst this soft, gray, Irish forenoon' (11). All around her is 'squalor and sordid poverty; slatternly, bedrabbled women; neglected, filthy children; yelping curs; yelling draymen driving waggons of "Guinness" thronged [the street]; whilst itinerant fishwomen bartered or "barged" in [Billingsgate Market]' (11) Despite these discordant distractions, Mary 'walked as if in a dream of her own' (11). Mary's dream-like state is not a sign of her disinterest. She is aware of the social-history of the area: she recognises 'the houses and courts where the Huguenots had lived [...] [and] the names of the long-vanished tenants of mansions' (12). She is also intimately familiar with 'every turn' of the streets, and 'every bit of stone carving, quaint gargoyle, or fountainhead to be found between Harold's Cross Bridge and Thomas Street' (12). Instead, her dream-state is induced by a particular ability: 'the power of selecting, of wiping out absolutely' aspects of her environment that 'she did not wish to retain'. (11) As a result, the 'coarseness in the natural facts of life [did] not touc[h] in any way the crystal case of her soul' (12). This process of subjective-preservation is described by Egerton as being Mary's 'second nature' (11).

The process of filtering urban stimuli is the subject of Georg Simmel's essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903). This process, Simmel claims, has evolved in modern, urban-dwellers as a means of 'accommodat[ing] the metropolitan rhythm' of city life.<sup>74</sup> Simmel begins by explaining that the 'deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of

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<sup>74</sup> Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903), trans. by Kurt H. Wolff, in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (The Free Press, 1950), pp. 409-24 (p. 410).

overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, [and] of external culture [...]'.<sup>75</sup> To protect against the 'threatening currents and discrepancies' of his external environment,

the metropolitan type of man [...] reacts with his head instead of his heart. [...] The reaction to metropolitan phenomena is shifted to that organ which is least sensitive and quite remote from the depth of the personality. Intellectuality is thus seen to preserve subjective life against the overwhelming power of metropolitan life, and intellectuality branches out in many directions and is integrated with numerous discrete phenomena.<sup>76</sup>

*The Wheel of God* pre-dates Simmel's essay by five years. Nevertheless, Egerton and Simmel offer analogous psychological portraits of the modern urban subject. Both describe the urban subject filtering extraneous or overwhelming external stimuli and argue that the limited integration—or subjective distance—of the urban subject within his or her environment is a necessary means of preserving their subjectivity. Like Simmel, Egerton also suggests that 'intellectuality' is central to this process; she describes Mary filtering out unwanted stimuli whilst also foregrounding her historical knowledge of the Liberties district.

Two aspects of Simmel's rendering of the modern urban subject are pertinent to Egerton's portrayal of Mary: firstly, the notion that 'the metropolitan type [...] reacts with his head instead of his heart'; secondly, the idea that an intellectual response to urban stimuli 'branches out in many directions and is integrated with numerous discrete phenomena'.<sup>77</sup> Mary certainly responds rationally, rather than emotionally, to external stimuli. The narrator explains that '[Mary] accepted life as she found it' and that intimate scenes played out on the street aroused 'no disgust' in her (12). Mary's response to one such scene is demonstrative of this point. From Meath Street she sees a woman combing a child's hair over a third-storey window-ledge and 'scattering largesse [lice] on the wayfarers beneath' (12). Instead of recoiling, Mary is reminded of 'a little [painting by Bartolomé Esteban] Murillo of the same subject [which] an artist had shown her some days before'.<sup>78</sup> Mary's response to the woman and her child corresponds with Simmel's description of the metropolitan 'type': she reacts with her 'head instead of [her] heart' and her intellectuality is shown to 'branc[h] out in many directions'.<sup>79</sup> Through this process, Mary subjectively aligns reality with art: she, like Murillo, takes 'the reality of poverty' as her imaginative cue, but refrains from then emphasising the unhappiness

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<sup>75</sup> Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (p. 409).

<sup>76</sup> Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (pp. 410-11).

<sup>77</sup> Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (pp. 410-11).

<sup>78</sup> It is most likely that Mary is recalling Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's oil on canvas painting, 'The Toilette' (c. 1670-75).

<sup>79</sup> Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (pp. 410-11).

of her subject(s).<sup>80</sup> By aligning Mary's way of viewing her surroundings with Murillo, Egerton contests the gender-bound parameters of *flânerie* and casts Mary as an active agent, rather than a passive subject, in the scene.

In the Meath Street scene, the sights and sounds of the city open up opportunities for creative expression. The process by which Mary ascribes subjective meaning to her surroundings allows for a lice-ridden child to be transformed into the subject of a Baroque painting. One aim of the ekphrastic system in the novel, Mack Smith contends, is to offer 'alternative world-making and fancy as a means of liberation'.<sup>81</sup> But the process of liberating Mary from her surroundings through 'alternative world-making' also obfuscates her social identity. Although Mary demonstrates an appreciation for the visual arts, she is neither an artist (that title belongs to the friend who first introduced her to Murillo's work), nor an educated woman (she has learned about art through conversation, rather than traditional schooling). Equally, the exquisite clothes and dainty boots which may otherwise identify her as a gentlewoman are at odds with the reason for her walk through Meath Street (she has been sent to Marshalsea Prison to beg her father for money). Mary's capacity to imagine alternatives to the working-class reality is the crux of her social liminality.<sup>82</sup>

In his seminal work, *The Ritual Process* (1969), Victor Turner describes the attributes of the liminal *personae*, or 'threshold person' as 'necessarily ambiguous'.<sup>83</sup> The characteristics of the 'threshold person' are structured in a recognisable binary: a 'blend' of 'lowliness and sacredness'.<sup>84</sup> A 'blend' of 'lowliness and sacredness' underpins the first description of Mary: she is at once symbolically anointed in the pool of light and yet referred to diminutively as 'a

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<sup>80</sup> Murillo's conciliatory treatment of poverty in Seville has been well documented. Most recently, Xavier Bray wrote of 'Three Boys' (1670): 'Although [Murillo] takes the reality of poverty as his cue, his artistic eye and sense of composition act as filters. [...] [D]espite the grubby feet thrust outwards towards the viewer and the grim-encrusted fingernails of his subjects, his paintings can in no way be construed as a realistic portrayal of vagrant life in Seville': *Murillo: at Dulwich Picture Gallery* (London: Phillip Wilson, 2013), p. 26.

<sup>81</sup> Mack Smith, *Literary Realism and the Ekphrastic Tradition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1995), p. 13. Smith defines the ekphrastic system as 'a descriptive scene within the novelistic text in which there is a representation of any work of art': p. 12.

<sup>82</sup> The term 'liminal' is derived from the Latin *limen* ('threshold'). It was first used by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep in *Les Rites de Passage* (1909) to describe the transition stage in his tripartite model of all 'rites of passage'. Van Gennep defined 'rites of passage' as the movement of an individual 'from one defined position to another which is equally well defined'; the liminal phase is the transitional state between two defined positions. *The Rights of Passage*, trans. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 3. After van Gennep's work was translated into English in 1960, Victor Turner developed this concept in his anthropological study *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969). For Turner, liminality is an intermediate state of being 'in between'. A liminal *personae*, having shed or been stripped of a recognised identity or status, stands on the cusp of a personal and/or social transformation. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 94-6.

<sup>83</sup> Turner argues that the liminal condition 'elude[s] or slip[s] through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space': *The Ritual Process*, p. 95.

<sup>84</sup> Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96.

little child' (3). She is characterised by the same lowly/sacred binary in the Meath Street scene. In reality, Mary is not far removed from the 'itinerant fishwomen' who barter and barge in nearby Billingsgate; she, too, is working-class, and must travel through the Liberties on foot and in pursuit of money. However, Mary's thoughts of Murillo also align her with a 'higher' plane associated with the arts. Thus positioned between separate social ('lowly') and imaginative ('sacred') states, she is, to borrow from Turner's definition of the liminal *personae*, 'betwixt and between all fixed points of classification'.<sup>85</sup>

### Writing the home through the body

Mary's opportunity for creative expression is not limited to the city. She also critically engages with her home-environment, ascribing meaning to her surroundings which recalls her gendered social and physical oppression. A four-fold screen that stands in Mary's nursery offers one such opportunity. The surface of the screen is decorated with 'aqua tints, woodcuts, and many cuttings' of a variety of historical male and female figures (4). The detailed description of the screen invites close analysis, not least because it is demonstrative of the way that Egerton uses the home-space to prompt or underpin ideas of female subjective-oppression.

The many male figures depicted on the folding-screen are active participants in state, national, and legal affairs: they are writers, playwrights, barristers and politicians. Many of the few women depicted, however, have earned a place in history (and on the folding-screen) by way of their *association with* these or other men of influence. Sarah Curran, 'Queen' Caroline of Brunswick, and Fanny Elssler were all linked by blood or marriage to powerful men.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, although Elssler was celebrated as one of the greatest ballerinas of her generation, she was also habitually sexualised by her audience.<sup>87</sup> Cuttings of images of 'beauties out of Lady Blessington's Journal [*The Book of Beauty*]' join these women on the screen (4). Unlike Elssler, Curran or Caroline of Brunswick, the nameless female models lack personal identities or histories, but their place in *The Book of Beauty* and on Mary's screen is concomitant with the

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<sup>85</sup> Turner refers to 'fixed points of classification' in 'Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas', in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 231-71 (p. 232). He defined a 'fixed point of classification' as 'any type of stable or recurrent condition that is culturally recognised' in *The Ritual Process*, p. 94

<sup>86</sup> Sarah Curran (1782-1808) was the daughter of an eminent Irish lawyer, John Philpott Curran, and lover of Robert Emmett, an Irish nationalist leader. 'Queen' Caroline of Brunswick (1768-1821) was the estranged wife of King George IV. At the age of seventeen, Fanny Elssler became the mistress of Prince Leopold of Salerno, and later bore his illegitimate child.

<sup>87</sup> The course of Elssler's adult life was also determined and her sexualised image was compounded by her relationship with Prince Leopold of Salerno. Her friend, Count Anton Prokesch described the Prince as 'Fanny's first purchaser, who had her body without touching her soul': Anton Prokesch, quoted in Ivor Guest, *Fanny Elssler* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1970), p. 25.

historical objectification of women. The elision of Ellen Scanlan's existence is also pertinent; Egerton does not refer explicitly to Scanlan, but alludes to her life (and death at the hands of her fiancé) *only* through reference to Gerald Griffin and Dion Boucicault who both appropriate Scanlan's death in their novel and play, respectively.<sup>88</sup> Through this array of images of men and women, Egerton alludes to the historical revision or erasure of women's lives in line with hegemonic masculinity.<sup>89</sup> The images of historical figures on the folding-screen undermine the essentialised notion of the Victorian home: rather than 'a private retreat' of 'personal [...] peace and security', this aspect of the home-space is shown to be irrevocably subject to socio-cultural influence and also highly provocative—Mary marks that she 'disliked greatly' some of the images (4).

The depiction of Scanlan, Curran, Queen Caroline and Elssler on the folding screen is contingent on their failed relationships with men and this, in turn, is suggestive of their liminality: they are neither wives, nor autonomous subjects, but *symbols* of failed femininity.<sup>90</sup> By way of their shared liminality, it is possible to understand the woman on the folding screen as an imagined community, or an existential *communitas*. Turner defines a *communitas* as 'an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated [...] communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders'.<sup>91</sup> But, as John Eric Killinger explains, a *communitas* can also be imaginatively realised: 'the ability to give free rein to imagination, entertain, and hold the doubts, mysteries and uncertainties of

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<sup>88</sup> Ellen Scanlan was murdered under the order of her fiancé in 1819. Scanlan's death inspired Gerald Griffin's novel *The Collegians* (1829) and Dion Boucicault's play *The Colleen Bawn* (1860). March-Russell notes the connection between Griffin, Boucicault (who are both referred to in the nursery scene in *The Wheel of God*), and Scanlan (who is not) in 'Introduction', *The Wheel of God*, p. 167, n. 4.

<sup>89</sup> The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' was first proposed by S. J. Kessler, D. J. Ashenden, R. W. Connell and G.W. Dowsett in their study of social inequality in Australian high schools, *Ockers and Disco-maniacs: Sex, Gender and Secondary Schooling* (Sydney: Inner City Education Center, 1982). The idea was later refined by T. Carrigan, R. W. Connell, and J. Lee in 'Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity', *Theory and Society*, 14 (1985), 551-604, and again by Connell in *Gender and Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987). The concept refers to the global dominance of men over women and was originally formulated in tandem with the concept of hegemonic, or 'emphasized', femininity. The distinction acknowledges the asymmetry of masculinities and femininities in a patriarchal gender order. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt have evaluated these terms more recently, and maintain their significance: 'gender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity': 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender and Society*, 19 (2005), 829-59 (p. 848).

<sup>90</sup> Curran was rejected by her father following his discovery of her affair with Emmett; she was forced to leave her father's home and take refuge in Cork. Caroline of Brunswick's marriage to King George defied the Royal Marriage Act and she was eventually rejected by her husband. Following the birth of their illegitimate child, Elssler and the Prince fell into estrangement. The female models from *The Book of Beauty* are the only exception to this commonality.

<sup>91</sup> Turner defines *communitas* as a society between liminal subjects based on relations of (in)equality and solidarity. A *communitas*, like the liminal subject, is a component of anti-structure. It is the opposite of a community defined and upheld by normative social structures. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96.

negative capability also provides the circumstances of and for *communitas*'.<sup>92</sup> As Mary looks around her nursery, she locates signs that suggest her negative capability and, thus, her affinity with the women on the screen. Before she turns to examine the folding-screen, Mary is reading *Jane Eyre*. She puts down the book and ponders the ideology that 'made men set out on ventures bold; and women sit and weep at lonely casements' (3). She then turns to scrutinise the 'great iron bars' which line the nursery's windows (3). From here, her thoughts turn to 'grim tales of dungeons' and 'of [Matthew] Lewis' *Monk*' (3). Mary does not refer explicitly to Agnes de Medina's confinement to an underground dungeon in Lewis' *Monk* but the purposeful elision of female punishment, here and in relation to Scanlan's murder, underpins the overall aim of the nursery scene.<sup>93</sup> By depicting an array of estranged and punished lovers and wives or, in the case of Scanlan and Agnes, conjuring ghosts that haunt the margins of the text, Egerton identifies marriage and heteronormativity as structures which ensure the subordinate social position of women and, in turn, directly contribute to their liminality. By way of her imagination, Mary re-positions herself from a solitary 'little girl' to a member of an imagined community of marginalised subjects.

#### 'Units out of place': Egerton's model of female duality

Elsewhere in her writing and in her correspondence, Egerton identified women at the *fin de siècle* as liminal subjects, 'betwixt and between all fixed points of classification'.<sup>94</sup> In a letter to Ernst Foerster in 1900, she declared 'our new women' to be 'units out of place'.<sup>95</sup> She argued that the 'industrial conditions of our time' had led exponents of female emancipation to focus on the *similarities* between the sexes and that emancipation theories (such as those which led to the conception of the New Woman in 1894) had contributed to the disarrangement of women's social identity.<sup>96</sup> This idea informs the characterisation of women in her fiction. In 'Now Spring Has Come', the first-person narrator declares modern women to be 'half-creatures' and 'Hermaphrodite by force of circumstances'.<sup>97</sup> A female journalist in *The Wheel of God* describes the New Woman as 'an atrophied animal, with a degenerate leaning to hybridism' (309). She claims that a sustained effort to draw out the similarities between the

<sup>92</sup> John Eric Killinger, 'Communitas', in *Encyclopaedia of Psychology and Religion*, ed. by David A. Leeming, Kathryn Madden, Stanton Marlan (New York and London: Springer, 2009), pp. 162-4 (p. 163).

<sup>93</sup> Agnes de Medina, a young nun in Lewis' novel, is ejected from the convent of St Clare and imprisoned in its dungeon after her sexual activity and resultant pregnancy is deemed inimical to the convent's morality.

<sup>94</sup> Turner, 'Passages, Margins, and Poverty' (p. 232).

<sup>95</sup> George Egerton, letter to Ernst Foerster, 1 July 1900, in Ann Heilmann (ed.), *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts*, 5 vols (London: Routledge, 2000), V, pp. 53-5 (p. 55).

<sup>96</sup> Egerton, letter to Foerster, 1 July 1900 (p. 55).

<sup>97</sup> George Egerton, 'Now Spring Has Come', *Keynotes and Discords*, ed. by Sally Ledger (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 16.

sexes would not contribute to the advancement of the female population but, instead, ‘lead to three sexes—man, half-man, and whatever is left over’ (309). To the same end, the female protagonist in Egerton’s epistolary novella, *Rosa Amorosa: the Love-Letters of a Woman* (1901), claims that ‘woman has given most of her energy to the development of masculine qualities’ and, in so doing, had neglected to ‘cultivat[e] the utmost of the best in herself—as a woman’.<sup>98</sup> Egerton apportioned some blame to her female contemporaries. In her letter to Foerster, she claimed that women writers, such as Grand and Caird, had taken to imitating men in both their writing and their professional identities: she recalls the dominant representation of the New Woman writer as having ‘donned breeches when wielding their pen’.<sup>99</sup> Egerton claimed that she was unlike Grand or Caird because her work aimed to expose the differences between, rather than equalise, men and women: ‘I never aim at any “equality” theory—because I hold that there is no inequality. [Men and women] are different animals, that is all’, she explained to Foerster.<sup>100</sup>

The notion of woman’s otherness underpins Egerton’s unique form of feminism. In the *Ludgate* in 1898, she described women as ‘exotic’ and suggested that they were impervious to the systems of ‘social, so-called educational, and political advancement’ which had been constructed by and for men.<sup>101</sup> Angelique Richardson argues that by foregrounding woman’s difference in her literary work, Egerton identified woman as ‘a natural enigma, closed to masculine scrutiny’ and, in so doing, ‘underlined the status of woman as *other*’.<sup>102</sup> McCullough agrees with Richardson’s claim, noting that Egerton’s journalistic writing and fiction frequently alludes to ‘[t]he tension between the essentialized, passionate woman and her cultural constraints’.<sup>103</sup>

Egerton describes the female consciousness as a site of tension in the short stories, ‘Now Spring Has Come’ (1893) and ‘The Regeneration of Two’ (1894), published in *Keynotes* and *Discords*, respectively. In ‘The Regeneration of Two’, the protagonist, Fruen, declares that she and other modern women ‘are merely [...] contradictions, leading a dual life’ (148). She goes on to claim that women’s duality has been brought about by social conditioning:

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<sup>98</sup> George Egerton, *Rosa Amorosa: The Love-Letters of a Woman* (London: Grant Richards, 1901), p. 80.

<sup>99</sup> Egerton, letter to Foerster, 1 July 1900 (p. 53).

<sup>100</sup> Egerton wrote: ‘To bracket me with Madame Sarah Grand or Mrs. Mona Caird is all right from the view of differentiation—wrong from any other.’ Egerton, letter to Foerster, 1 July 1900 (p. 54).

<sup>101</sup> George Egerton, ‘Women in the Queen’s Reign: Some Notable Opinions’, *Ludgate* (1898), quoted in Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 164-5.

<sup>102</sup> Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century*, p. 164. [Emphasis in original]

<sup>103</sup> McCullough, Mapping the “terra incognita” of Woman’, p. 207.

We have been taught to shrink from the honest expression of our wants and needs as violations of modesty, or at least good taste. We are always battling with some bottom layer of real womanhood that we may not reveal; the primary impulses of our original destiny keep shooting out mimosa-like threads of natural feeling through the outside husk of our artificial selves, producing complex creatures. [...] One layer in us reverts instinctively to the time when we were just the child-bearing half of humanity and no more, waging war with the new layers that go to make up the fragile latter-day product with the disinclination to burden itself with motherhood.<sup>104</sup>

The first-person narrator in 'Now Spring Has Come' joins Fruen in attacking the moral codes and social conventions that have restricted female self-expression. She argues that, '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 cram men's minds and hearts and souls, [and] not to speak of women's'.<sup>105</sup>

In 'The Regeneration of Two', Fruen describes a bipartite model of modern femininity. She accounts for an outer-'layer', which is conditioned by the hegemonic expectations of society, and an inner-'layer', which is largely governed by subjective sexual impulses. Her model is progressive because it accounts for the influence of sexual *and* maternal impulses on female subjectivity and thereby contests the established virgin/whore binary. It also challenges the usual representation of female sexuality in contemporary male-authored texts which, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out, was 'consistently equated with degeneration, disease, and death'.<sup>106</sup> Instead, Egerton identifies cultural pressures on female modesty (the expectation that a woman should 'shrink' from rather than express her sexuality) as detrimental to her psychological wellbeing.

By describing separate 'layers' of consciousness, Fruen's model draws on emergent ideas in Victorian psychology about the fragmented self. The unconscious mind in the mid-nineteenth century was largely regarded by both psychologists and laymen as 'knowable and predictable'. Michael Davis contends that 'the increasing professionalization of psychology from the late 1870s onward meant that many, though not all, scientists of the mind were interested in readily measurable aspects of mental life and so tended to ignore the wider possibilities of the self'.<sup>107</sup> Sally Shuttleworth argues that early nineteenth-century 'theories of moral management and the infinite malleability of the human psyche' were marked by 'brash

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<sup>104</sup> George Egerton, 'The Regeneration of Two', in *Keynotes and Discords*, ed. by Sally Ledger (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 135-69 (p. 148).

<sup>105</sup> Egerton, 'Now Spring Has Come' (p. 16).

<sup>106</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, 2nd edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 31.

<sup>107</sup> Michael Davis, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology: Exploring the Unmapped Country* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 18.



confidence' and 'optimism'.<sup>108</sup> Ideas relating to the presence of double, alternating and multiple personalities emerged later in the century as medical and psychological discourse began to consider the possibility that the human psyche was composed of many, overlapping selves. With the work of A. F. and F. H. W. Myers in the 1880s, the human psyche went from being defined as unitary and predictable to non-unitary, volatile and disorderly. Jill L. Matus has demonstrated that late nineteenth-century fiction not only reflected this shift, but in some cases contributed to the discourse of the non-unitary self.<sup>109</sup> From Robert Louis Stevenson's novella *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) surfaced the classic allegory of the 'devil within', for instance. Stevenson later described his work as 'a vehicle for that strong sense of a man's double being'.<sup>110</sup> In later years Egerton, like Stevenson, looked to identify her contribution to contemporary psychological discourse, explaining to Foerster that she saw her fiction as a vehicle for 'some freak, [...] hidden trait, some secret emotion' attributable to the 'bottom layer of real womanhood'.<sup>111</sup>

Egerton substantiates Fruen's notion of female duality in *The Wheel of God*. An important example occurs in the novel's opening chapter when Mary is alone in her nursery. The narrator describes two glass cases each protecting a tableau representing one half of the nature-culture dichotomy. The first case

sheltered a wonderful thatched cottage, fashioned of cardboard, had tiny windows with lace curtains, and a porch made of pillars of ingeniously rolled paper. Sprigs of moss and the most fairy-like roses climbed up the walls (5-6).

The model cottage emphasises the symbolic ascendancy of the home: its structure is reinforced by pillars and the roses that climb its exterior walls; lace curtains restrict the viewer from peering through the windows and finding its rooms (significantly) empty. The model's reinforced structure corresponds with the essentialist idea that the home was irreducible, private and orderly. Mary's response to the model aligns with this idea: she decides that it 'was in some way associated with her docile moments; when she sat and purred a seam in the dining-room' (6). Through this interaction, Egerton ties a linguistic entity ('home') and essentialist

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<sup>108</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 37.

<sup>109</sup> For instance, see Jill L. Matus' evaluation of the relationship between Robert Lewis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and A. T. Myers' article 'The Life-History of a Case of Double or Multiple Personality' which was published in the *Journal of Mental Science* in the same month: *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009), pp. 160-82.

<sup>110</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Chapter on Dreams', in *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, ed. by Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 126-38 (p. 136).

<sup>111</sup> Egerton, letter to Foerster, 1 July 1900 (p. 54).

notions of its role (protection and order) to a constructed *concept* (women are domestic subjects).

Beneath the second shade is a waxen model of a Circassian woman. The woman is

sitting cross-legged on a cushion; wide Turkish trousers fell in folds to her slim, fair ankles; her little bare feet reposed in turned-up silver slippers. She had dark, aquiline features, and sparkling black china eyes; a bird of paradise tail, of gorgeous spun glass, waved proudly from her crimson turban; her zouave jacket, of royal blue, was gold-embroidered, and clasped by a sparkling crescent over her chemisette of delicate lace. [...] she held a red and green bird one taper finger, and a rose in the other lily hand. (6)<sup>112</sup>

Images of Circassian women were not out of place in the nineteenth-century home or imagination.<sup>113</sup> Thomas Mclean notes that Europe's fascination with the Circassian subject increased in the 1830s, after Russia annexed Circassia and the coast of the Black Sea in (as Britain deemed it) direct violation of the 1829 Treaty of Adrianople.<sup>114</sup> The presence of Circassian women in British Victorian fiction, poetry and photography is an example of cultural penetration; it spoke to the European fantasy of infiltrating the harem and corresponds with the imperialist processes of domination and deracination of the 'other'. The wax model in Mary's nursery is a product of the same processes. The image of a Circassian woman has been deracinated and implanted in the home of an Irish family, but not before being aesthetically remastered to render her sexuality legible to the Western gaze: her ankles are exposed, but also slim and fair; her eyes are dark, but their sparkle suggests life; and she wears a lace chemisette under her zouave jacket.

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<sup>112</sup> Aspects of Egerton's description correspond with widely-disseminated images of Zalumma Agra, one of the first women to assume the role of a 'Circassian Beauty' in tours of the United States. Materials that promoted Agra's public appearances described her as the 'Star of the East' (comparable to the 'keynote to the East' in Egerton's text), and photographs show that she often incorporated a crescent moon icon, an emblem associated with Turkey, in her dress.

<sup>113</sup> Circassian women often feature in nineteenth-century literature, poetry, art and photography. The beauty of the Circassian woman was a familiar trope in poetry of the period: Samuel Taylor Coleridge drew on the notion in his ballad 'Lewti or the Circassian Love-Chaunt' (1798), as did Lord Byron in his poems 'The Giaour' (1816) and 'Don Juan' (1818-1824). Egerton's fellow Irishwoman, Frances Browne, also used the Circassian woman as the subject of her poem, 'The Star of Attéghéi' (1844). Rather than a racialised signifier of feminine beauty, Browne's Circassian woman is an iconoclastic figure; she refuses to be sold into a harem by her father and assumes a masculine role in relation to her male lover. Charles Eisenmann's photographs of Circassian women were published in British and American periodicals and chapbooks in the late-nineteenth century.

<sup>114</sup> David Urquhart, a British diplomat in Constantinople, visited Circassia in 1834 and encouraged support from home for the Circassian cause. Thomas Mclean explains that Russophobia feelings intensified in Britain when, two years later, Russian authorities seized the British ship *Vixen* when it attempted to dock at the Circassian port of Soudjouk-Kalé. Urquhart, along with J. A. Longworth, a *Times* correspondent, and James Stanislaus Bell, the owner of *Vixen*, used the incident to promote official British support for the Circassian people. Thomas Mclean, 'Arms and the Circassian Woman: Frances Browne's "The Star of Atteghéi"', *Victorian Poetry*, 41 (2003), 295-318 (p. 301).

As well as being marked by the effect of the male gaze, the model is fetishised by Mary.<sup>115</sup> She endows the model with attributes which create the illusion of its consciousness and this, in turn, proves seductive:

How the child admired her! she was the keynote to the East, the open sesame to realms of imagination—visions such as a good Mahomedan might have welcomed in Paradise. She appealed to the other half of her nature—the half that made her hold up the end of her nightgown and dance wild steps to strange tunes singing in herself. (6)

The model appears to be what it is not: an ‘independent bein[g] endowed with life’.<sup>116</sup> Mary’s social attachment to the model hinges on her imaginative ability to endow the model with characteristics that it does not intrinsically possess. By using a feminine personal pronoun (‘her’/‘she’), rather than the appropriate nominative neuter pronoun (‘it’), Mary endows the wax model with a gendered subjectivity. Similarly, her reference to the model as ‘the keynote to the East’ suggests its essentialist tie to a ‘native’ land. But even more significant is the fact that Mary understands the model to be an imaginative vessel: it is ‘the open sesame to realms of imagination’.

The waxen model is not intrinsically fantastic: it is not a literal portal to the East, and it is incapable of telepathically transmitting the ‘strange tunes’ that Mary hears ‘singing in herself’ (6). However, Mary has imaginatively transformed the model from a material product of labour into a fantastic object which is capable of stimulating the ‘other half of her nature’. In this capacity, the model acts as a ferment, or leaven; it ‘raises’ Mary to a transcendent state. Her ‘wild dance steps’, raised nightgown, and the internalisation of ‘strange tunes’ are held in direct contrast to the preceding image of docile, domestic servitude which was attributed to the cardboard cottage (6). Mary’s transformation—from docility to liberation—is demonstrative of two related ideas: the female imagination is capable of transforming the home into a site of fantasy; the home is capable of facilitating and supporting the impractical, ‘freak’-ish elements of expressive femininity.

### New Women and ‘psychic atavism’

Previous studies of spirituality and interiority in Egerton’s fiction have focussed primarily on the short stories collected in *Keynotes* and *Discords*. Marcus’ claim that Egerton ‘hollows

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<sup>115</sup> Marx described fetishism as the process by which ‘productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and ente[r] into relation both with one another and the human race’: ‘Capital’, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 665-672 (p. 667-8).

<sup>116</sup> Marx, ‘Capital’ (p. 667).

out the space of women's interiority through fantasy' effectively summarises past scholarship in this area.<sup>117</sup> However, the role and representation of dreams, reveries, trance and fantasy in *The Wheel of God* is still comparatively understudied. One aim of the final sections of this chapter is to show the continuance of the method described by Marcus across Egerton's oeuvre. To this end, I compare the use of fantasy in *The Wheel of God* with a short story that is often the focus of critical discussions of interiority and sexuality in Egerton's fiction: 'A Cross Line', which was published in *Keynotes* in 1893.<sup>118</sup> Fantasy is used in these works, as in other works of New Woman fiction, as a means of alluding to female characters' longing to escape the demands of Victorian society and its (public and private) spaces; it is suggestive of a desire to occupy an isolated and autonomous psychic-space. Egerton depicts her female characters fantasising about escape, rather than verbally or consciously admitting to this desire, because it was a necessary means of negating their perceived corruptivity. By removing the experiencing female character to an 'other' plane of thought, she imposes a metaphorical distance between them and other, supposedly easily corruptible, women. She compounds this distance by depicting her characters' fantasies taking place in isolated situations: in the middle of the night, or on a rooftop. The literal and metaphorical isolation of the experiencing character allows for the full exploration in the text of the impractical, 'freak'-ish elements of femininity without the need to show its impact on other (watching) women. The physical isolation of her female experiencing character allows Egerton to portray modern woman's spiritual proclivity and subjective autonomy as self-contained and, most importantly, non-destructive. In so doing, she challenges the depiction of the autonomous New Woman, posed by Eliza Lynn Linton, as a 'wild' 'social insurgent' set on 'obliterating the finer traits of civilisation' by preaching 'lawlessness and licence'.<sup>119</sup>

In the nursery scene, the collusion of subject (Mary) and object (Circassian model) is evoked through the 'strange tunes' which infiltrate Mary's consciousness and which she attributes to the Circassian model (6). The idea that a woman could be easily overcome by environmental influence corresponds with the nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific concept of female affectability. This concept was tenuously supported by medical studies which judged women more susceptible than men to debilitating states of nervous collapse, and also underlay contemporary scepticism about a woman's capacity to objectively manage money, property and

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<sup>117</sup> Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity*, p. 120.

<sup>118</sup> For scholarly examinations of the relationship between interiority and eroticism in 'A Cross Line', see: Gerd Bjørhovde, *Rebellious Structures: Women Writers and the Crisis of the Novel 1880-1900* (London: Norwegian University Press, 1987), p. 144; Lyn Pykett, *The Improper Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 170; Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 100.

<sup>119</sup> Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Wild Women as Social Insurgents', *Nineteenth Century*, 30 (1891), 596–605 (p. 596).

her body. Arguments against extending the franchise to women often cited female ‘nervousness’ or ‘suggestibility’; others went further by contending (somewhat contradictorily) that the extent to which women were affected by their environment implied a closer affiliation with ‘other’ worlds than with their own. In an article for the *Quarterly Review*, William Barry argued that there was a correlation between women’s ‘affectability’ and lack of political objectivity:

[T]o her immediate surroundings [a woman] is, and must be, susceptible; she has waking dreams and falls into trance or ecstasy where the less sensitive man escapes. [...] [Women’s] “psychic atavism” [...], their absorption in the single case, their attachment to the individual, and the coloured lens of “affectability” through which they look at most things, make them strikingly unfit to discourse in the abstract of justice, equity, and indifferent law.’<sup>120</sup>

Barry’s claims were based on a commonly-used metaphor, which Roger Luckhurst outlines thus: ‘males were [considered] active and katabolic, whilst females were passive and anabolic’; spiritual susceptibility ‘conformed to the passivity ascribed to the anabolic female’.<sup>121</sup> Without properly defined terms or parameters, Barry and others bent on proving women incapable of political objectivity commonly conflated female nervousness with spirituality. The results were generalised portraits of women as daydreamers and idealists, incapable of pursuing thoughts that were not intuitively triggered by their environments. The notion of ‘female atavism’ proliferated discussions of women’s social and political roles, as well as their professional identities. In the year before *The Wheel of God* was published, Hugh E. M. Stutfield undermined Egerton’s literary accomplishments by describing her writing as the product of ‘intuit[ion]’, rather than ‘intellect’ and her female characters as ‘quivering bundles of nerves’.<sup>122</sup>

The relationship between femininity, spirituality and essentialism in Egerton’s work is more complex than Stutfield would lead his readers to believe. Egerton’s female characters demonstrate spiritual proclivity, but their characterisation does not conform to the essentialist idea that female bodies and minds are passive receptacles of psychic energies. Like anti-enfranchisement campaigners, Egerton uses the idea of female impressionability rhetorically, but she presents the causes and consequences entirely differently; her female characters’ waking dreams and states of trance or ecstasy are not intended to endorse notions of female passivity but, instead, are used as a means of self- and social-examination. Egerton uses dreams

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<sup>120</sup> [William Barry] ‘The Strike of a Sex’, *Quarterly Review* (1894), repr. in Heilmann, *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question*, pp. 289-318 (pp. 303-16).

<sup>121</sup> Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 215, 218.

<sup>122</sup> Stutfield, ‘The Psychology of Feminism’, *Blackwood’s* (1897), repr. in *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, Drama of the 1890s*, ed. by Carolyn Christensen Nelson (Letchworth: Broadview, 2001), pp. 243-53 (p. 247).

and states of trance or ecstasy in order to show the effect of social constraints from *within*. In this way, she writes about female social displacement and oppression through the solitary female body.

Egerton considered herself to be a spiritual person and often wrote of her psychic experiences in letters to friends and family. In a letter to her second husband, she claimed that she was in touch with ‘other world[s]’.<sup>123</sup> She described her house in Rickmansworth matter-of-factly as ‘haunted’ and claimed to have witnessed the presence of ghosts and spirits.<sup>124</sup> Her religious convictions, she acknowledged, were ‘peculiar’.<sup>125</sup> Stetz surmises from Egerton’s correspondence that she was ‘neither [...] atheist nor an agnostic’.<sup>126</sup> Egerton rejected Roman Catholicism, of which she said, ‘I dislike it more than any form of belief I know’.<sup>127</sup> In its place, she

embraced an odd mixture of deism, spiritualism, and pan-theism. Thus, she spoke often of mystical experiences with nature and of being in touch with “other world” matters, especially while she was writing. Yet, when times were bad, she also slept with a brass crucifix tucked beneath her pillow.<sup>128</sup>

Both of Egerton’s husbands were indifferent to her psychic experiences, which means that she experienced first-hand the notion to which Victorian society largely subscribed: women were more attuned than men to the activities and influence of ‘other worlds’.<sup>129</sup>

Despite surmising her own psychic proclivity and her husbands’ lack thereof, Egerton’s portrayal of female spirituality in *The Wheel of God* does not conform absolutely to the essentialist binary which saw women defined as passive and anabolic and men as active and katabolic; had Egerton subscribed to this notion, Mary’s role in her psychic experiences would conform to the passivity ascribed to the ‘anabolic female’.<sup>130</sup> Mary’s dance before the Circassian model, the externalisation of her psychic experience, signals the integration and culmination of her separate (worldly and otherworldly) ‘states’ through a holistic and, thereby, anabolic process. However, Egerton figures the female body and mind as *active* agents in this process. With this latter point, it is important to note that Mary’s mesmerism is bound to an

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<sup>123</sup> Egerton, letter to Reginald Golding Bright, 8 June 1901, quoted in Stetz, ‘George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties’, p. 76.

<sup>124</sup> Stetz, ‘George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties’, pp. 76-8 and p. 157.

<sup>125</sup> Egerton, letter to Reginald Golding Bright [undated, c. 1896], in Stetz, ‘George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties’, p. 76.

<sup>126</sup> Stetz, ‘George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties’, p. 76.

<sup>127</sup> Egerton, letter to Golding Bright [undated, c. 1896], in Stetz, ‘George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties’, p. 76.

<sup>128</sup> Stetz, ‘George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties’, p. 76.

<sup>129</sup> See Stetz, ‘George Egerton: Woman and Writer of the Eighteen-Nineties’, p. 157.

<sup>130</sup> Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy*, p. 218.

object that *she* ascribes with fantastic powers. Her fantasy and its expression through the body are therefore directly attributable to her active imagination, rather than her ‘nervousness’.

The process which sees subject (Mary) and object (waxen model) united in a transcendent state recalls the nineteenth-century evolution of alchemy, which saw alchemical processes refigured as allegory for spiritual transcendence. Whereas the oldest form of alchemy was exoteric and ostensibly concerned with transmuting base metals into noble metals, the form of alchemy popular when Egerton wrote the *Wheel of God* was esoteric.<sup>131</sup> Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman explain that the esoteric or occultist school of alchemy understood the process as ‘an art of internal meditation or illumination rather than an external manipulation of apparatus and chemicals’.<sup>132</sup> The aim of alchemical practice as it was seen in the nineteenth century, therefore, was spiritual and subjective:

[...] occult writers claimed that the alchemists [...] used chemical language and terminology only to couch spiritual, moral, or mystical processes in allegorical guise. The alchemists’ important goals were supramundane. The transmutation of base metals into noble ones is thus to be read as a trope or allusive instruction for the transcendental transformation of the alchemist himself, or of all mankind through him, from a base, earthly state into a more noble, more spiritual, more moral, or more divine state.<sup>133</sup>

Egerton does not explicitly refer to either the exoteric tradition or the Victorian esoteric revival of alchemy in her description of Mary’s transcendental transformation. Instead, the process of esoteric (or spiritual) alchemy is implied through the use of hermetic symbols in the description of the Circassian model. The glass shade that encases the model is suggestive of a hermetic vessel, while the additional objects enclosed therein correspond with alchemical symbols relating to the final stage of the *Magnum Opus*.<sup>134</sup> In the glass vessel are a rose (which the model holds in one hand), a phoenix (perched on the end of her finger), a bird of paradise feather (made from spun glass and tucked into the model’s turban), and a crescent moon (in the form of a brooch). When these hermetic symbols of rebirth and regeneration are grouped under

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<sup>131</sup> In their historiography of alchemy, Lawrence M. Principe and William R. Newman note that it was commonplace in the early modern period to ‘build extended religious conceits on alchemical processes and to draw theological processes therefrom’. Alchemy resurged in popularity among occultists at the end of the nineteenth century. Principe and Newman claim that Victorians found relief from the materialism of modern chemistry in the bold speculation of alchemy: ‘Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy’, in *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001), pp. 385-432 (p. 388).

<sup>132</sup> Principe and Newman, ‘Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy’ (p. 388).

<sup>133</sup> Principe and Newman, ‘Some Problems with the Historiography of Alchemy’ (p. 388).

<sup>134</sup> C. G. Jung explains that ‘the *vas bene clausum* (well-sealed vessel) is a precautionary measure very frequently mentioned in alchemy’ and is used to ‘protect what is within from the intrusion and admixture of what is without, as well as to prevent it from escaping’. Used in this way, the hermetic vessel is ‘a kind of matrix or uterus from which the *filius philosophorum*, the miraculous [philosopher’s] stone, is to be born’ by way of *Magnum Opus*: ‘Psychology and Alchemy’, in *C. G. Jung: Collected Works*, ed. by Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler, trans. by R. F. C. Hull, 2nd edn, 20 vols (Hove: Routledge, 2014), xii, pp. 167, 237.

the glass vessel, they perform as would a Philosopher's stone: they lift Mary from a state of docility to a state of rapture which is freely articulated through bodily movement.

Fantasies of isolation and autonomy in *The Wheel of God* and 'A Cross Line' (1893)

Mary is an active agent in her fantasy of the Circassian model: she assumes the position of the alchemist, capable of finding divine inspiration in symbols. Egerton also challenges the accepted idea of female passivity in 'A Cross Line', in which she establishes the female protagonist's desire for sexual autonomy through an autoerotic fantasy. The protagonist, known only as 'Gypsy', is reclining alone alongside a stream in rural Ireland. Like Mary, Gypsy reads her surroundings through her body: in the clouds above, her eyes discern the outline of two ships and, with this, her thoughts 'somehow' move to 'Cleopatra sailing down [the Tiber] to meet Antony'; from here, 'a great longing fills her soul to sail off somewhere too – away from the [...] tame duties and virtuous monotony' of Victorian domesticity.<sup>135</sup> She imagines herself riding across the Arabian desert 'on the back of a swift steed' and then as Salomé, 'gauze-clad in a cobweb garment of wondrous tissue' and dancing 'on the stage of an ancient theatre' in front of an audience of men that cheers as she 'sway[s] voluptuously to the wild music'.<sup>136</sup> Ledger identifies in Gypsy's "dream of motion" [...] the cadences of sexual arousal'.<sup>137</sup> Gypsy's sexual climax is tempered by the blurring of subject and object, fantasy and reality, and Middle Eastern and Irish landscapes:

She can feel the answering shiver of feeling that quivers up to her from the dense audience, [...] 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 [of music] to finish her dream of motion. And the men [...] cheer, cheer till the echoes shout from the surrounding hills and tumble wildly down the crags.<sup>138</sup>

Male bodies are present in Gypsy's fantasy (Antony, the Arabic men who make up the audience), but her sexual pleasure is not derived from the idea of heteronormative physical contact. She is stimulated by the recognition of what her body can do, rather than what another body can do *to it*. The autoerotic nature of Gypsy's fantasy renders other bodies redundant; it challenges the dominant sexual economy which held the male body as essential to a woman's

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<sup>135</sup> Egerton, 'A Cross Line', in *Keynotes and Discords*, ed. by Sally Ledger (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 3-14 (p. 8).

<sup>136</sup> Egerton, 'A Cross Line' (pp. 8-9). Ledger notes the allusion to Salomé in her introduction to *Keynotes and Discords*, p. xx.

<sup>137</sup> Ledger, 'Introduction', p. xxiii.

<sup>138</sup> Egerton, 'A Cross Line', p. 9.



sexual pleasure and the female body as a passive receptacle. In 'A Cross Line', Gypsy's sexuality is realised by and through her physical autonomy.

A similar but comparatively understudied sequence occurs in *The Wheel of God*, in the novel's second chapter, 'The Blossom in the Bud'. Mary is living in New York and the chapter, as its title suggests, is concerned with charting her burgeoning sexual awareness. Egerton draws a distinction between women's natural, eternal sexuality and what O'Toole describes as 'the unnerving mechanized modernity of New York City'.<sup>139</sup> Mary is stood alone on the roof of her office building and looking at the city spread out below. It is April, but the cityscape lacks the usual signs of the spring; she discerns only the usual 'vigorous smack of brine' from the sea (95). Despite this, Mary reflects that it was 'strange' that 'she felt the wonder of the season more in the close city than ever before in the country' (95). From the top of an office block in the middle of New York City, Mary feels an affinity with the season because she *imagines* that the signs of spring are all around. She transposes a natural landscape over the city:

[s]he could hear the sap rising in a hundred imagined trees; see the buds and burgeons, and fronds uncurl and burst; [...] the birthing of lambs and springing of foals in the meadows. The very jiva of the earth seemed to stir in her senses, making her conscious of her womanhood in some subtle way, calling, calling, calling in her, whispering and luring in her, until her limbs ached with the stress of it, and her soul was thirsty. (95-6)

Mary recalls an incongruity between the concreteness of the urban environment and her developing sexual consciousness, which is in flux. She is 'thirsty' for the signs of spring which confirm the naturalness and value of change: the sap rising in trees, buds unfurling, and nascent meadows. Without the signs of spring, Mary's burgeoning sexuality seems deviant and discordant. Her imaginative 'escape' to the countryside is a means of overcoming this sense of displacement.

Mary continues to allude to her growing sexual awareness through reference to the changing seasons. She explains that '[s]he was frightened at herself sometimes, frightened at the spring. It seemed to call in the night, and to make her realise herself and the possibilities hidden in her' (96). In the ensuing fantasy sequence, Egerton suggests that Mary's 'fright' at the 'possibilities' of her body is socially-conditioned. After her imagined transportation from New York City to the countryside, Mary awakes in her boarding-house cubicle to find herself fully-dressed and her roommates asleep. It is the middle of the night and Mary should be asleep but, instead, she finds that she is in possession of that great rarity for a working-class woman: a chunk of free time. Sensing that this found-time comes with increased freedom, Mary undresses and examines her naked body in the mirror:

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<sup>139</sup> Tina O'Toole, 'George Egerton's Translocational Subjects', *Modernism/Modernity*, 21 (2014), 827-42 (p. 828).

How big one's eyes looked; how the light seemed to grow into them! She pulled down her hair in a loose, dark cloud about her ears. If she only had courage to wear it that way; how it threw the modelling of her temples into relief and helped her eyes! She peered into them, strange how little one knew of one's self! The more one looked, the stranger the soul looking back at one seemed to be. (96)

Her gaze moves from her face to the rest of her body: 'How white her shoulders were; how gently her breast rose, melting into the white—no, silver in that rare light—of her linen! And her arms, velvet-fine' (96). Mary is an active participant in the mapping of her body: she is both the focaliser and focalised, and the subject and object of desire. In Mary's darkened cubicle, the sole semblance of privacy in the city, the colour, touch and sight of her skin and the steady rise-and-fall of her breast are hers alone to observe and enjoy. As in 'A Cross Line', female sexuality is realised in a moment of isolation, rather than in contact with other bodies.

Until this point, Mary has understood her adult body as a site of labour. As a working-class woman in a foreign country, she is entirely dependent upon its healthy function for economic survival. As a result, Mary has been conditioned to see her body through the lens of pragmatism; her usual demeanour and dress correspond with the practical application of her body (and time) to work. When faced with her near-naked form in a mirror, however, the body's other possibilities emerge. Mary notes with surprise 'how little one knew of oneself!' (96). Her gaze refigures her body, previously a site of labour, into a site of pleasure. She extends her newfound autonomy through a celebratory dance:

She rubbed her cheek to her own shoulder, and the dance of the spring whispered again, and she moved to its beat, waved her arms around her head, and bent her body in lissom rhythm, until her feet followed, and she danced a quaint measure to her own fairness. (96-7)

Egerton again conveys Mary's personal transcendence through dance. However, whilst Gypsy imagines herself as Salomé, and young Mary imagined herself as the Circassian woman, Mary's dance in her cubicle is a celebration of the actual, palpable possibilities her own body, rather than the bodies of other women.

The sequences in Mary's nursery and in her boarding cubicle both use dance to challenge notions of female passivity: they chart the transformation of the female body and mind from stagnant primary states to divine secondary states which are freely articulated by bodily movement. Egerton suggests that space, free time, and solitariness are essential to this transformation. Mary is free to imagine and dance in her nursery because she sees it as 'a world of her own' (4). The nursery serves an essential function—it is self-contained space, free from immediate external dangers and, as such, the early chapters in the novel show Mary ascribing meaning to its contents which reflects her ever-changing whims and fancies. When Mary enters

adulthood, however, she is stripped of the right to time and a room of her own. Her small, square, sparsely-furnished cubicle falls short of breeding or facilitating her many imaginative whims. If 'home is the crystallisation of [woman]', as Mary's co-worker suggests, what of those women without homes of their own to define them? (161)

In order to support the change which saw increasing numbers of women rejecting marriage and the marital home in favour of entering the workplace and boarding in the city, Egerton contends that women needed to be granted the freedom to define and rule their own body as they would a home. Furthermore, they needed time in which to be alone. Although Mary's encounter with her reflection may be limited to a few stolen minutes in the middle of the night, it signals an important stage of her psycho-sexual development. The next morning she begins constructing a dress to replace her perfunctory work clothes. With the dress, she commemorates a changed relationship with her body, a sexual renaissance.

As well as underpinning notions of 'spiritual atavism', women's affectability was central to the cultural anxiety that they were easily corruptible. The retaliation against the politically, socially, and sexually active New Woman was partly informed by the conviction that female readers would begin to mimic their behaviour. In 1892, Linton prophesied that 'Wild Women' would together bring about 'an instance of national sickness, [...] [and] social disorder'.<sup>140</sup> However, Mary's and Gypsy's fantasies pose little corrupting or destructive external influence precisely because they occur during moments of isolation. The first of Mary's dances is performed while she is alone in her nursery; her sexual awakening is realised when she is alone on the roof of her office building and culminates in a second dance in her boarding-house cubicle while her roommates are asleep. Gypsy's fantasy occurs when she is alone by a stream in rural Ireland. In all of these cases, Egerton emphasises the experiencing woman's remove from society in order to mitigate their corruptivity: there are no young brothers or sisters in the room to witness young Mary's dance in front of the Circassian model, no roommates awake when she dances before her mirror, nor colleagues on the roof to witness her spiritual transcendence above the city. By showing her female characters pursuing their impulses away from society, Egerton challenges Linton's notion that female excesses of desire or nervousness were necessarily contagious.

As well as taking place away from society, the fantasies underpin the women's desire to escape their present obligations and surroundings. In this way, Egerton suggests their social displacement. In 'A Cross Line', Gypsy's sexual fulfilment hinges upon her capacity to imagine herself at a geographical and temporal remove from nineteenth-century Ireland. Hager

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<sup>140</sup> Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Partisans of the Wild Women', *Nineteenth Century*, 31 (1892), pp. 455-64.

notes that this sequence is ‘grounded in an eroticization of the colonized Other’ (Cleopatra, Salomé, the Arabic men).<sup>141</sup> But it also informed by Gypsy’s belief that they—the colonised subject ‘othered’ more by their geographical and cultural remove from Victorian England—enjoy a level of sexual and social autonomy that she—an Irish woman—is denied. By imagining herself dancing on the stage of an ancient open-air theatre in the Middle East, rather than London’s Globe, Rose or Curtain theatres, Gypsy acknowledges an incongruity between female autonomy and public space in Victorian Britain. A similar case can be made for Mary’s childhood fantasy. By describing the model of the Circassian woman, rather than that of the provincial cottage, as ‘the open sesame to realms of imagination [...] [and] Paradise’, Mary suggests that the Victorian home-space, too, is at odds with the desires for physical and psychological autonomy (6).

Although Egerton acknowledges the sensitivity of her female characters, she does not suggest that the images or ideas of far-off places are relayed telepathically. Mary and Gypsy’s flights of fancy to Circassia and the Arabian Desert, respectively, demonstrate their awareness of the recent achievements of female explorers. Egerton had never visited the Middle East or the Black Sea. Unlike Levy, who drew on her own experiences in her travel writings, Egerton is evoking foreign nations, races and landscapes with which she was personally unfamiliar. Nevertheless, Egerton’s evocation of colonial landscapes and subjects corresponds with the emerging popularity of female-authored travelogues in the second half of the nineteenth century. Female travellers’ reports of North Africa and the Middle East, such as Amelia B. Edwards’ illustrated *A Thousand Miles up the Nile* (1877), Isabella Bird Bishop’s ‘A Pilgrimage to Sinai’ (1886), and Gertrude Bell’s *Persian Pictures* (1894), conveyed the increasing frequency with which women were penetrating and filling the ‘blank spaces’ of the world.<sup>142</sup> Female-authored travelogues broadened the horizon of female experience and offered alternatives to the anabolic, passive female. In so doing, they offered portraits of ‘healthy’ women which were at odds with dominant British ideals.

Edwards’ *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* challenged Orientalist notions of the differences between ‘the familiar (Europe, West, “us”’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”’), by undermining Western ideals which bound an individual’s liberty and well-being their material

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<sup>141</sup> Lisa Hager, ‘A Community of Women: Women’s Agency and Sexuality in George Egerton’s *Keynotes* and *Discords*’, *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 2 (2006), p. 11 <<http://www.ncgsjournal.com>> [accessed 5 September 2014].

<sup>142</sup> Tim Youngs charts the notion of the East as a ‘blank space’ from Henry Morton Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent* (1878) to Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness* (1899): ‘Introduction: Filling the Blank Spaces’, in *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces*, ed. by Tim Youngs (London: Anthem Press, 2006), pp. 1-2.

wealth or social status.<sup>143</sup> Edwards contended that an Egyptian gentlewoman is ‘as much a prisoner as a bird in a cage’, whereas the ‘wives of the *fellahin* were in truth the happiest women in Egypt’; although ‘they work hard and are bitterly poor, [...] have the free use of their limbs, and [...] at least know the fresh air, the sunshine, and the open fields’.<sup>144</sup> In her distinction between Egyptian peasants and gentlewomen, Edwards directly attributes psychological well-being to bodily freedom and proximity to nature. This idea recurs throughout *The Wheel of God*, in Mary’s dances and her preference for the natural landscape. It also occurs in other works of New Woman fiction, such as Caird’s *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) and Grand’s *The Beth Book* (1897), which chart women’s progress towards self-realisation through physical movement, moments of isolation and an enjoyment of the natural landscape.<sup>145</sup> As the first written account of Egyptian history, *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* also defied essential ideas about the separate and opposing faculties of men and women. The histories of Greece and Rome had already been described and recounted by men, but *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* challenged the phallogocentric traditions of both travel writing and recorded history. The publication of Edwards’ work carried with it the notion that foreign spaces offered opportunities for self-realisation.

In *The Wheel of God* and ‘A Cross Line’, Egerton’s female characters seek liberation in colonised lands. The irony here is intentional and, as Iveta Jusová’s study, *The New Woman and the Empire*, has demonstrated, it is also informed by the aims of New Woman fiction.<sup>146</sup> In part, Egerton is alluding to the female body as a colonised site but, moreover, by transporting a Irish woman’s desire for self-fulfilment to a foreign space she undermines the contemporary nationalist discourse which coupled home with ‘pleasure’ and other spaces and races with ‘terror’.<sup>147</sup> Throughout *The Wheel of God*, Mary finds pleasure in ascribing subjective meaning to her immediate environment, whether home or street, and thus making the familiar *unfamiliar*. Escaping (or losing) time through reverie is, similarly, a means of resisting the

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<sup>143</sup> Edward W. Said defined Orientalism as ‘a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”): *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 43. Said argues that the myth of ‘the Oriental’ was perpetuated as a result of European political dominance of the Middle East and Asia. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Said claims that Orientalism was a situational product of unequal relations of power.

<sup>144</sup> Amelia B. Edwards, *A Thousand Miles Up the Nile* (1877; repr. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1890), p. 480.

<sup>145</sup> For examinations of the role and representation of dance in Caird and Grand’s novels, see: Cheryl A. Wilson, ‘Mona Caird’s Dancing Daughters’, *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 8 (2012) <<http://www.ncgsjournal.com>> [accessed 10 July 2016]; Ann Heilmann, ‘Visionary Desires: Theosophy, Auto-Eroticism and the Seventh-Wave Artist in Sarah Grand’s *The Beth Book*’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 26 (2004), 29–46.

<sup>146</sup> Jusová examines how the New Woman project was constructed in relation to the late-nineteenth century colonial contest: *The New Woman and the Empire* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2005).

<sup>147</sup> Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), ‘Introduction: Narrating the Nation’, in *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 2

daily constraint of domestic routine: for Gypsy, one of the allures of ‘sailing off somewhere’ is the ‘escape from the daily need of dinner-getting and the recurring Monday with its washing’.<sup>148</sup> By showing her female characters defamiliarising their environments and stepping ‘beyond’ time, Egerton evokes their alienation from dominant, Western ideologies at the *fin de siècle*. Tenuously positioned between home and foreign environments, Mary and Gypsy recall her description of the modern woman as ‘units out of place’.

Like many works of fiction which charted women’s shifting psycho-social awareness at the *fin de siècle*, *The Wheel of God* continually alludes to the discordance between the heroine’s (essential) sense of self and culturally-propagated versions of ‘proper’ femininity. Egerton understood physical solitude to be essential to female subjective development, using solitude in *The Wheel of God* to relay significant moments of self-realisation. However, solitude is also shown to be at odds with the demands of city-life which ensured a working-class woman’s economic survival: menial work, commuting en-masse, and boarding cheaply with other women. Egerton charts the discordance between society and solitude through fantasy sequences which, I have shown, are both expressions of discontent and means of self-emancipation. Mary’s fantasies are typically body-centric: they invariably focus on bodily pleasure or (imagined) corporeal transformation. However, they also resonate with a desire to escape the familiar demands of working-class life and inhabit, however briefly, the ‘elsewhere’. Mary’s fantasies of escape are representative of an emerging female social consciousness: they identify her as an anomalous subject, caught between worlds old and new, real and imagined. By examining the dual-effect of nature and culture on Mary’s relationship with the city and domestic environments, the past and the present, this chapter has considered Mary’s fantasies of escape as products of both the constructionist self-recognition of gendered-oppression and the essential, human capacity to imagine alternatives to lived experience.

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<sup>148</sup> Egerton, ‘A Cross Line’, p. 8.

Agency, adventure and the New Woman in Sarah Grand's 'Josepha' trilogy (1904-1922)

'[My] London flat [...] was safe anchorage, a sheltered harbour after long buffeting on the open sea. My first night in it, when I went to bed, I fairly hugged myself, I was so thankful to be there—alone—with no one to interfere with me. I could come and go as I chose. My time was my own. I had nothing to fear. I was free!'

— Sarah Grand, 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' (1922)<sup>1</sup>

Chapters one and two of this thesis demonstrated how women writers in the late-nineteenth century used travel and fantasy to critique aspects of Victorian culture which restricted female subjectivity. The chapters have shown the centrality of 'other' spaces—whether imagined, colonial or, simply, foreign—in depictions of female subjectivity at the *fin de siècle*, and how women's relationships with these spaces can be affected by their class. Whilst chapter one focussed on unfamiliar spaces and experiences, chapter two examined how familiar spaces and routines can be 'othered' by the female imagination. Chapter three identifies how Sarah Grand used the adventure and supernatural genres to expand the horizons of her solitary female characters' interaction with the world. The stories examined in this chapter depart from traditional forms and ideas. Firstly, Grand's emancipated woman protagonist is shown to be enjoying London life more than the prevailing image of 'the deadly serious and morally high-toned' New Woman who was ridiculed by the satirical press.<sup>2</sup> In the stories' styles too—a self-conscious and highly experimental blend of realism, impressionism and symbolism—Grand moves beyond the Victorian moral tale with which she is typically associated, and anticipates the twentieth-century modernist vignette. Through its generic and thematic focus, this chapter extricates Grand from the realist and didactic contexts in which her work is usually examined.

With this chapter, the thesis moves from the belligerent, hostile spaces that comprise Egerton's urban working-class world to join Grand's middle-class bachelor girl, Josepha, in her West End stomping ground and in a home of her own. I examine the three critically neglected short stories in which Josepha features: 'The Man in the Scented Coat' (1904), 'Josepha

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Grand, 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience', in *Variety* (London: Heinemann, 1922), repr. in *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. by Ann Heilmann, 4 vols (London: Routledge, 2000), IV, pp. 319-34 (p. 324). Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses and refer to Heilmann's collection.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Heilmann, 'Preface', in *Dreams, Visions and Realities*, ed. by Stephanie Forward (Birmingham: Birmingham University Press, 2003), p. vii.

Recalls a Remarkable Experience’, and ‘I Can’t Explain It—’ (both 1922). Josepha’s search for new experiences is the driving force of the three narratives and a factor that unites them as a trilogy.<sup>3</sup> The search for new experiences takes Josepha (and the narrative) beyond the realm of the ordinary: it sees the possibilities of the home and street broadened by the effect of her imagination, taking on new meanings and serving new purposes as she moves through them. Josepha’s longing for new experiences and the fact that she is frequently depicted alone are what characterises her as a New Woman: she lives on her own and walks the city streets at night without an escort. I argue that Grand alludes to the warring desires for solitude and companionship in Josepha’s search for new experiences and her imaginative transformation of her familiar surroundings—whether at home, or on the street.

Grand’s biography, like Levy’s and Egerton’s, attests to the conflict between the desires for solitude and companionship which marked women’s lives at the *fin de siècle*. Grand lived in London for a relatively short period of time, between 1891 and 1897, at the height of her career. Nevertheless, her biographical writing reveals a contentious relationship with other residents of the city. Grand, like Egerton’s Mary Desmond, feared the effect of London’s growing population. However, Grand’s fears were not limited to the burgeoning working-classes. Grand saw herself as a ‘roadmaker’ towards female emancipation and argued that the women who followed suit—those who moved to London in the 1890s to write about and champion enlightenment and to lead emancipated lives—contributed to the decline in her popularity.<sup>4</sup> In this context, Grand referred to being ‘crowded out’ of the city in a letter to her friend and confidante, Gladys Singers-Bigger.<sup>5</sup> Although Grand showed signs of relief at leaving London in 1897, the city and its networks were integral to her literary success. Initially, at least, she also sought to integrate herself within the city’s growing ranks of enlightened women as a member of the Pioneer Club. As we shall see, the conflict between Grand’s desire for solitude and the importance of urban society to her success is borne out in the pages of the periodical press. ‘At home’ interviews depicted her as an enlightened woman who found her cause in the city, and yet revealed that she often desired to isolate or else remove herself completely from the city. Interviewers, critics and reviewers frequently alluded to Grand’s symbolic remove from urban society and, while this was often held as evidence of her

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<sup>3</sup> See pp. 20-21, n. 68 of this thesis for a brief discussion of the scholarly tradition of grouping Grand’s fiction works into trilogies, and an explanation for why I am choosing to discuss the ‘Josepha’ stories as a trilogy.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘Foreword to the Heavenly Twins’ (1923), repr. in *Sex Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, ed. by Ann Heilmann, 4 vols (London: Routledge, 2000), I, pp. 397-408 (p. 400).

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Grand, quoted in Gladys Singers-Bigger, diary entry, 3 September 1933, in ‘Ideala’s Gift: The Record of a Dear Friendship’, unpublished diary held by Bath Central Library, Bath.



objectivity—an essential trait of the professional writer at the time—I argue that it is suggestive of her unease in the city.

The three short stories examined in this chapter were published eighteen years apart. ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’ was first published in 1904 in the periodical the *Lady’s World* (and reprinted in 1908 in the short story collection *Emotional Moments*), and ‘Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience’ and ‘I Can’t Explain It—’ were both published in 1922 in the short story collection *Variety*. However, the stories have many similarities. Firstly, and most obviously, they share the same New Woman protagonist, Josepha. In one of the few examples of scholarship on the stories, Stephanie Forward notes that Grand must have been ‘fond’ of Josepha to feature her in three of her short stories.<sup>6</sup> In the most recent reference to the stories, Kathryn Anne Atkins convincingly argues that Grand returned to Josepha because it enabled her to ‘chart [...] the progress of the first part of the twentieth century through [one] protagonist’s eyes’.<sup>7</sup> By returning to Josepha in multiple stories and over a considerable period of time, Grand shows both her character’s maturation and the effects of social change over time. Josepha is, as Atkins points out, ‘consciously positioned within a fictional world orchestrated by an awareness of social change in the real world’.<sup>8</sup>

As well as sharing the same protagonist, the three stories are also all inspired by Grand’s lived experience. It was not uncommon for Grand to legitimise her creative output by claiming her characters’ experiences as her own. Throughout her career she insisted that her fiction, as much as her journalistic writings, were ‘studies from life’ and claimed that ‘to be true to life should be the first aim of an author’.<sup>9</sup> Grand also highlighted this aim in the titles of many of her works, including *Ideala: A Study from Life* (1888), the short story collection *Our Manifold Nature: Stories from Life* (1894), and *The Beth Book: Being a Study of the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure, a Woman of Genius* (1897). She underscored the realist aims of the stories in *Our Manifold Nature* by claiming that ‘these stories are simply what they profess to be—studies from life’.<sup>10</sup> By examining the conflict between society and solitude in Grand’s ‘Josepha’ trilogy alongside her autobiographical writings, this chapter builds on and extends

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<sup>6</sup> Stephanie Forward (ed.), ‘Introduction’, in *Dreams, Visions and Realities* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2003), p. xxi.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Anne Atkins, ‘Toward a Critical Edition of the Short Fiction of Sarah Grand’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of West England, 2014), p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> Atkins, ‘Toward a Critical Edition of the Short Fiction of Sarah Grand’, p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Grand, quoted in Sarah A. Tooley, ‘The Woman’s Question: An Interview with Madame Sarah Grand’, *Humanitarian* (1896), repr. in *Sex Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, pp. 220-9 (p. 220).

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘Preface’, in *Our Manifold Nature* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1894), p. iii.

scholarship which addresses the close connection between art, politics and lived experience in Grand's work.

### Success in London

Before her metamorphosis into Madame Sarah Grand, Frances Elizabeth McFall (née Clarke) was already a published author. In the 1870s and 1880s she published three short stories in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* and privately printed her first two novels, *Two Dear Little Feet* (1873) and *Ideala* (1888).<sup>11</sup> At this time, Frances (as she was then known) was married to a military surgeon and was stationed with him at barracks around the world. In addition to writing, she raised three boys: two step-sons (her husband's children from a previous marriage), and a biological son. There are signs in Frances' early work that she found her marriage unfulfilling: her title-character in *Ideala*, which she wrote while married to McFall, decries marriage to be 'a grievous waste of Me'.<sup>12</sup> In 1890, at the age of thirty-six and after twenty-one years of marriage, Frances made the decision to leave her husband, their nineteen year old son, and their temporary home at the barracks in Warrington. One year later, she became sole-resident of a flat in Kensington, West London. With this series of decisions, Frances traded the confinement of marriage for the freedom of emancipation, and the relative isolation of Warrington for the excitement of London and close contact with the city's many publishers. She marked the occasion by trading her married name for a self-given name: Madame Sarah Grand. It was by this name that she was henceforth known to friends, family, publishers, and the reading public.<sup>13</sup>

The breakdown of the McFalls' marriage was a product of the changing socio-political landscape which saw an improvement in women's legal rights. In the final years of the nineteenth century, Britain was entering a transitional state and the atmosphere, Holbrook Jackson reflected, was 'alert with new ideas which strove to find expression in the average national life'.<sup>14</sup> These new ideas were expressed by way of legal reforms (a contributory factor to Grand's marital separation was the Married Women's Property Act of 1882, which allowed her and other women to retain their own property after marriage) and in challenges to the traditional notion of 'duty'. Grand referred often to her 'duty' in personal letters and lectures.

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<sup>11</sup> Grand's short stories for *Aunt Judy's Magazine* are: 'Mamma's Music Lessons', June-July 1878, pp. 489-495, pp. 527-540; 'School Revisited', June 1880, pp. 473- 481; 'The Great Typhoon', April 1881, pp. 358- 370. Grand began writing *Ideala* in 1879; she published it in 1888 at her own expense.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Grand, *Ideala: A Study from Life* (Kansas City: Valancourt, 2008), p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> I use Grand's self-given name for the rest of this chapter.

<sup>14</sup> Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of the Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1913), p. 23.

However, her biographer, Gillian Kersley, argues that Grand's concept of the word was novel because it 'applied to herself first'.<sup>15</sup> For Grand, duty was related to personal integrity and autonomy; from privilege came the power to influence, inform, and better educate others.

Grand's decision to leave her husband and move to London marked a turning point in her career. From here began a series of professional successes. In 1891, the same year that she moved to London, *Temple Bar* ended a twenty year-long habit of rejecting her manuscripts by agreeing to publish two of her short stories. These stories were also printed concurrently in the American magazine, *Littel's Living Age*.<sup>16</sup> Grand's novels also began being accepted by publishers. In 1891, her third novel, *A Domestic Experiment*, was published by Blackwoods and two years later the same firm agreed to publish her fourth novel, *Singularly Deluded*. Finally, in 1893, three years after Grand's move to London, William Heinemann agreed to publish *The Heavenly Twins*. The novel would make her career and transform her into a household name.

Heinemann offered Grand £100 for her manuscript of *The Heavenly Twins* but his biographer, Frederic Whyte, notes that Heinemann found *The Heavenly Twins* to be 'a quite unlooked-for success'.<sup>17</sup> The novel was reprinted six times in its first year alone, sold nearly 20,000 copies in Britain and reportedly 'at least five times as many copies' in the United States of America.<sup>18</sup> It was described accordingly by W. T. Stead as 'a bomb of dynamite, which [...] exploded with wonderful results'.<sup>19</sup> Realising that *The Heavenly Twins* had outsold his expectations, Heinemann substituted his original writers' agreement with a new contract in which he promised Grand 'the most favoured authors' royalties'.<sup>20</sup> Heinemann met with Grand and gave her a cheque for £1200 which, Whyte explains, was the amount he owed her on the basis of the book's sales.<sup>21</sup> Grand maintained a positive relationship with Heinemann for most of her career. His publishing house reissued *Ideala* in 1893 and went on to publish all but one

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<sup>15</sup> Gillian Kersley, *Darling Madame: Sarah Grand and Devoted Friend* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 62.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Grand, 'Kane, A Soldier Servant', *Temple Bar*, July 1891, pp. 365-374, repr. in *Littel's Living Age*, 22 August 1891, pp. 465-469; 'Janey, A Humble Administrator', *Temple Bar*, October 1891, pp. 199-218, repr. in *Littel's Living Age*, 19 December 1891, pp. 721-31.

<sup>17</sup> Frederic Whyte, *William Heinemann: A Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), p. 104.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York: MacMillan, 1947), p. 182.

<sup>19</sup> W. T. Stead, 'The Novel of the Modern Woman', *Review of Reviews*, 10 (1894), 64-74 (p. 67).

<sup>20</sup> Whyte, *William Heinemann*, p. 104.

<sup>21</sup> Whyte, *William Heinemann*, p. 104. Whyte estimates that Grand received a total of £18,000 for *The Heavenly Twins* during her lifetime.

of her subsequent novels.<sup>22</sup> Heinemann also reissued *The Heavenly Twins* in 1923 with a new foreword by the author.<sup>23</sup>

Before Grand moved to London and formed her definitive relationship with Heinemann, she had experienced a series of professional failures. Carol A. Senf identifies a ‘seven-year period of rejection from 1883 to 1890’, during which Grand completed three novels (*The Heavenly Twins*, *Singularly Deluded* and *A Domestic Experiment*) and yet failed to secure the interests of a single publisher.<sup>24</sup> But Grand was familiar with the experience of rejection before this period. *Ideala*, for instance, was completed in the early 1880s but Grand noted that the manuscript lay untouched ‘in a drawer for seven years’ before she eventually decided to publish it anonymously and at her own expense.<sup>25</sup> Despite its eventual success in the hands of Heinemann, *The Heavenly Twins* was also widely rejected by other publishers.<sup>26</sup> Grand wrote about her experience of rejection in her foreword to the 1923 republication of *The Heavenly Twins*. She claimed that the conservative male attitudes which governed the publishing industry were incompatible with the shifting and growing needs and interests of the consumer. Specifically, Grand claims that the male publishers and their in-house readers underestimated her novel’s reception amongst a middle-brow female readership.

In her foreword to *The Heavenly Twins*, Grand copies an extract from a ‘thunderclap of a letter’ which she explains was ‘typical of the attitude of kindly, courteous, cultivated men of the world [...] towards women’ and their tendency to ‘think and speak [only] for themselves’.<sup>27</sup> The letter, it later emerged, comprised a rejection of *The Heavenly Twins* from William Blackwood:

the subject of the novel, and the tone [...] will cause great pain to the majority of novel readers; and even “advanced thinkers” who may be presumed to be in sympathy with your view of social subjects will in our opinion regard the book as too bold and daring an attempt to revolutionize established ideas of Marriage Relations. Our own experience of “advanced thinkers” has been that however latitudinarian they may be in theory, they are conservative enough in practice [...] and would probably be the first to repudiate their abstract views presented in such

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<sup>22</sup> *Babs the Impossible* was published in Britain by Hutchinson in 1900.

<sup>23</sup> William Heinemann died in October 1920, but his partner, Sydney Pawling, agreed to reissue *The Heavenly Twins* in 1923 and to publish Grand’s latest collection of stories, *Variety*, in 1922.

<sup>24</sup> Carol A. Senf, ‘Introduction’, in *The Heavenly Twins* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002), p. xxxi.

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Grand, quoted in Senf, ‘Introduction’, in *The Heavenly Twins* p. xxxi. Grand notes that *Ideala* was rejected ‘by most of the publishers’ in ‘In the Days of My Youth: My First Success’, *M.A.P [Mainly About People]* (1909), repr. in *Sex Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, pp. 200-4 (p. 203).

<sup>26</sup> Senf, ‘Introduction’, in *The Heavenly Twins*, p. xxxi.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘Foreword to *The Heavenly Twins*’ (1923), repr. in *Sex Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, pp. 397-408 (p. 405).

concrete form as is to be found in your novel. [...] I could not, and would not dare to place your work in the way of ladies, who compose so large a proportion of the novel-reading public.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than accept Blackwood's opinion, Grand set out to prove him wrong. She began by presenting parts of *The Heavenly Twins* to the largely female audience of the Pioneer Club. Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp was present at the meeting in which Grand presented the novel for the Club's consideration. She accounted for its reception amongst the Club's members in the feminist periodical, *Shafts*:

It is an inexpressible joy to a woman, to know that a woman's pen has done this deed of grace, [and] has given to society a work which even the most prudish may read and be greatly exalted. The refined purity of the mind and heart which has guided the fearless pen, is seen plainly by eyes that desire to see [...] even the most painful portions of this human tale.<sup>29</sup>

Grand received similar reviews from female readers after the novel's publication. In her foreword she recounts that '[a]gain and again has it been written or said to me: "you have put into words what I have always felt and longed to express but could not"'.<sup>30</sup> In an essay about her early literary successes, she wrote, 'I am often told, especially by women, that I have exactly expressed [in *The Heavenly Twins*] what they have always thought but could not express'.<sup>31</sup> Women's sympathy for the themes and content of *The Heavenly Twins* clearly outstripped Blackwood's anticipations. Grand offered a simple explanation for the support that she received from 'advanced women': they believed the novel had been written *for them*.<sup>32</sup> In *The Heavenly Twins*, Sibthorp and the women of the Pioneer Club found evidence that the author 'had learnt life's lessons' and so was qualified to depict 'human life as it is lived'.<sup>33</sup> Sibthorp claimed that the novel 'create[d] within us thoughts that breathe and burn [...] [and] grow'.<sup>34</sup> Her review is testament, not only to the conviction with which Grand crafted her

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<sup>28</sup> Heinemann, quoted in Grand, 'Foreword to *The Heavenly Twins*' (p. 405). Grand does not reveal the identity of the author of the letter, but Teresa Mangum has since identified the letter's author as William Blackwood: *Married, Middlebrow and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1998), p. 242, n. 8. Heinemann's house reader, Daniel Conner, also failed to anticipate the novel's appeal to a middlebrow, female audience. Although Conner's review was generally favourable, he recommended that 'the passages of medical detail ought to be cut or, at any rate, softened' in order to bring the novel in line with the taste of female readers. Daniel Conner, quoted in Mangum, p. 88.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp, 'Shafts Reviews', *Shafts*, 25 February 1893, repr. in *Sex Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, pp. 411-13 (pp. 411-12).

<sup>30</sup> Grand, 'Foreword to *The Heavenly Twins*' (p. 401).

<sup>31</sup> Grand, 'In the Days of My Youth: My First Success' (p. 204).

<sup>32</sup> In response to Blackwood's letter, Grand wrote: 'I have been urgently incited to write the book by other women'. Grand, letter to William Blackwood, 23 September 1891, quoted in Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow and Militant*, p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> Sibthorp, 'Shafts Reviews' (p. 411).

<sup>34</sup> Sibthorp, 'Shafts Reviews' (p. 411).

characters and rendered the aims of her text, but also to women's hunger for fiction that boldly critiqued the social condition and political position of their sex.

Although Grand wrote widely about her arduous period of rejection, it is difficult to determine exactly what brought about its end. It is unlikely to be a coincidence, however, that her sudden change of luck came at the same time as her move to London. As a single, working woman, Grand was emboldened by financial necessity to increase her literary output and to doggedly pursue publishers. It is also likely that she found it easier to find time to write new material and to meet with publishers without also having a husband and children to tend. Arguably, the factor that most contributed to Grand's sudden spell of successes was new evidence of the social value of her literary output and its ready readership.

Grand's move to London brought her into close contact with women who understood the feminist aims of her fiction, including leaders of the Emancipation of Women movement. Her regular attendance at the Pioneer Club's Thursday night debates introduced her to a network in excess of three hundred women, many of whom were active campaigners for women's rights. Amongst them were Emily Massingberd (the Club's founder and President), Lady Henry Somerset, Lady Elizabeth Cust, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Eleanor Marx, Constance Wilde, and Leonora Philipps.<sup>35</sup> Grand was popular at the Pioneer Club and was considered 'the most general favourite'.<sup>36</sup> Her celebrated place in the Club's membership stood in contrast to the company that she had kept during her marriage and before her move to London. In her foreword *The Heavenly Twins*, Grand describes her marginalised position amongst the military wives in the Warrington barracks, and within her husband's family:

[Before moving to London] I was living in a sense different from any that I had heretofore experienced. So far, I had not come into touch with people of advanced views. My own views had advanced of themselves, much to my discomfort; they so often clashed with those of the set into which I was born and had married. They made me feel alien and an outsider. Even my intimate friends held me suspect, principally because I "said such extraordinary things". What appeared to me to be God's truth was to them, as a rule, anathema.<sup>37</sup>

An article in the *Warrington Press* corroborates Grand's claims. It explains that she was 'quite a misunderstood personage in Warrington', and describes her as 'an exotic in a strictly

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<sup>35</sup> In 1893 the Pioneer Club's had 320 members. This figure had risen to 600 members by 1899.

<sup>36</sup> Jane T. Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand', *Woman at Home*, 3 (1895), 247-52 (p. 248).

<sup>37</sup> Grand, 'Foreword to *The Heavenly Twins*' (p. 402). The disparity between hers and her husband's political views was also the reason why Grand chose to change her name. In a letter to the editor of *Literary World*, Grand explained 'my husband had a great dislike to having his name associated with my ideas, and in order to save him the annoyance, I changed my name': Grand, letter to F. H. Fisher, 10 March 1898, repr. in *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Selected Letters*, ed. by Ann Heilmann and Stephanie Forward, 4 vols (London: Routledge, 2000), II, pp. 63-4 (p. 64).

mercantile atmosphere'.<sup>38</sup> In 1923, in her foreword to *The Heavenly Twins*, Grand describes with warmth her welcome transition to a community of like-minded women in London: 'With these new friends I was in a new world. To hear them talk was like having doors opened and light shed on all that was obscure to me'.<sup>39</sup> Sibthorp's review of *The Heavenly Twins* and Grand's celebrated position at the Pioneer Club show that London was full of women who appreciated the feminist aims of her fiction. The enthusiasm of these women contradicted the opinion of male publishers and this gave rise to Grand's optimism that her fiction could contribute in a significant way to the Emancipation movement.

### Woman at home?

Although Grand's integration within a community of like-minded middle-class women exposed her to a 'new world' of feminist thought and intellectual freedom, her reflections upon the four years she spent as a resident in London reveal a contentious relationship with the city more broadly. Specifically, they reveal that Grand, like Egerton, found it difficult to appease her desire for personal seclusion whilst living as a famous person in the city. This is borne out in Grand's journalistic work (in which I include her interviews) as much as her fiction. Grand was interviewed at her Kensington home a number of times by journalists Jane T. Stoddart, Helen C. Black, and Sarah A. Tooley. The interviews were published between 1894 and 1897 in magazines, including *Woman at Home* and *Young Woman*; both were aimed at a young, middle-class female readership. The focus of these interviews is Grand's successful foray into London's literary scene, but they also reveal her conscious resistance of urban mainstream influences. Moreover, they allude to a conflict between the process of writing and the demands of city-life; like Egerton, Grand frequently escaped from the city to the countryside in order to work. The effect of these interviews is to align Grand's aims and aspirations with the young, middle-class reader of the magazine, as well as evoke Grand's emotional and (often) physical distance from the city. In this way, Grand's interviews are comparable to the letter that Clementina Black wrote to the *Athenaeum* in the wake of Amy Levy's death. Black (in her capacity as Levy's friend), and Grand's three interviewers all claim that the intellectual identity of their subject was fostered outside the public arena. By evoking the writers' detachment from the city, they uphold traditional ideas about female creativity.

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<sup>38</sup> 'Novelists of Today—Madame Sarah Grand', *Warrington Press*, 3 May 1901, repr. in *Sex Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, pp. 289-91 (p. 289).

<sup>39</sup> Grand, quoted in Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow and Militant*, p. 89.

Grand was first interviewed by Stoddart for *Woman at Home* four years after she moved to London. Photographs of Grand's apartment in Sydney House, Kensington, were featured alongside the interview. The photographs show comfortable rooms, furnished with refinement and their composition reinforces the depiction of Grand as a female intellectual (by this time, four novels and a collection of short stories had established her as a major literary figure). Ann Heilmann notes that photographs balance the 'near-austere refinement' of the rooms with allusions to creative production; books and writing tools scattered across tables in the foreground 'hin[t] at the writing process going on in the background'.<sup>40</sup> Grand's interview and the accompanying photographs were well suited to the readership and overall aims of *Woman at Home*. Margaret Beetham points out that, under the charge of its lead contributor, Annie S. Swann, *Woman At Home* was largely (and, generally, successfully) engaged with reconciling the traditional forms of femininity with the new public interests of the 'advanced woman'.<sup>41</sup> As well as news, fashion, health and beauty advice, the content of the magazine addressed pertinent issues relating to the lifestyle of the professional woman: dealing with loneliness and, contrastingly, the necessity of space and time of one's own in which to work or write.<sup>42</sup> Swann noted that she was often beset with letters from female readers of the magazine who wanted to pursue a career as a writer: she reflected in the pages of the magazine that '[t]he bitter cry of the single woman without means or lucrative occupation seems to me one of the most pressing problems of the age'.<sup>43</sup> Grand's interview for *Woman at Home* and its corresponding photographs of her apartment stood out in the pages of the magazine as proof that it was possible to reconcile the seemingly opposing roles of 'woman at home' and 'professional writer'.

Stoddart's interview with Grand recalls the problem faced by many readers of *Woman at Home* who aspired to be writers: the difficulty of securing a suitable space and time of one's own in which to write. Stoddart begins her article by describing the location of Grand's Kensington home. Although she accurately describes its location at the heart of London's West End, Stoddart also consistently alludes to its remoteness. Sydney House, Stoddart explains, is accessible only by a 'private road' and Grand's apartment is located on its uppermost floor.<sup>44</sup> Stoddart builds upon the image of the isolated *creatrice* by revealing that Grand would prefer

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<sup>40</sup> Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner and Mona Caird* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 22-3.

<sup>41</sup> Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 165-70.

<sup>42</sup> Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>43</sup> Swann was responding to a letter received from a reader who wanted to pursue a career as a writer: quoted in Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own?*, p. 170.

<sup>44</sup> Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand' (p. 248).



an even greater remove from the city. Stoddart explains that, '[a]s we climbed the many steps leading to her door, Grand told her that 'although she finds a top[floor] flat an excellent workshop, she much prefers to write in the country'.<sup>45</sup> The implication here is that Grand uses her Kensington apartment as a stop-gap between other more remote places which better lend themselves to the writing process. To this same end, Stoddart notes that Grand had just returned from 'spending some weeks in the country, and was in London for a few days on her way to the Continent'.<sup>46</sup>

Stoddart's description of the apartment's interior also works to establish its urban location and yet imply its partial remove from the rest of the city. From inside the apartment, Stoddart describes her subject looking from her drawing-room window 'out on a sea of roofs and chimneys'.<sup>47</sup> This vista affords 'quaint glimpses of green in the foreground, and in the distance the solid mass of the [British] Museum'.<sup>48</sup> Stoddart figures Grand as the quintessential women writer alone in her garret; a descendent of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), she resides above the streets of London, 'serene and unafraid of solitude', working and watching the sunlight 'startle the slant roofs and chimney-pots/With splashes of fierce colour'.<sup>49</sup> Although the windows in Grand's apartment feature prominently in this description, there are, interestingly, no windows in any of the photographs (see figures 4 and 5). All of the photographs have been composed 'inwardly' to reveal in detail the contents of the rooms but redact the windows and the views of the city entirely. If they were taken out of the context in which they were published, it would be impossible to tell whether the photographs show the interior of a city flat or a country home. The inward composition of the photographs counterbalances the image of the woman looking out of her window. The interplay between text and image reconciles the process of production, a public- and outward-facing venture, with notions of feminine modesty and privacy.

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<sup>45</sup> Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand' (p. 248).

<sup>46</sup> Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand' (p. 248).

<sup>47</sup> Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand' (p. 249).

<sup>48</sup> Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand' (p. 249).

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 'Aurora Leigh', in *Aurora Leigh and Other Poems*, ed. by John Robert Glorney Bolton and Julia Bolton Holloway (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 72.

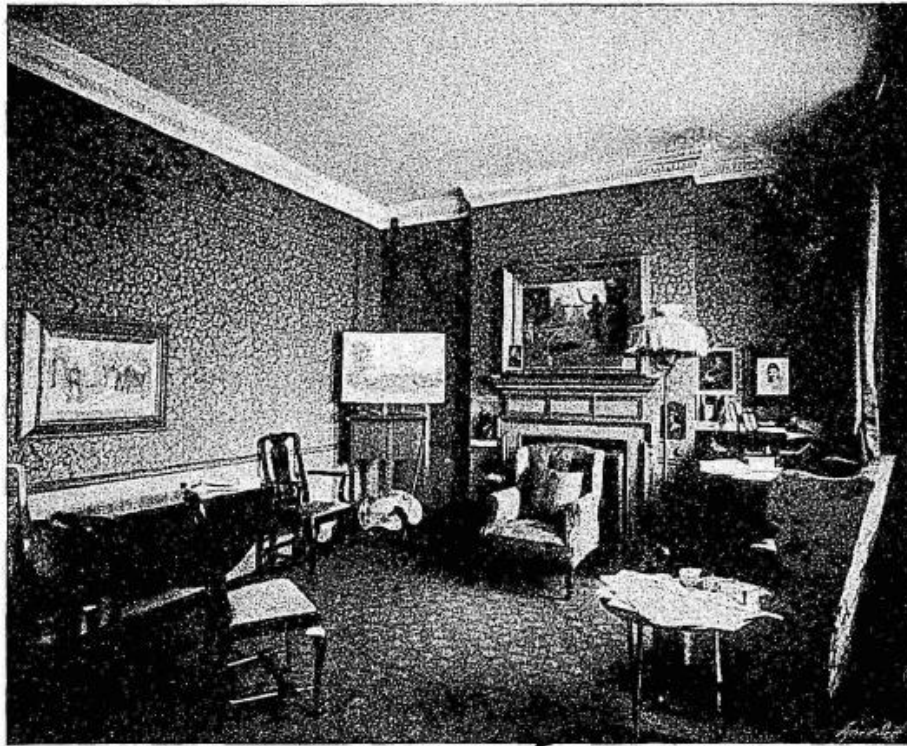


Figure 4: Photograph of Sarah Grand's apartment in Kensington. Published alongside Jane T. Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand', *Woman at Home*, 3 (1895), 247-52 (p. 259).



Figure 5: Photograph of Sarah Grand's apartment in Kensington. Published alongside Jane T. Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand', *Woman at Home*, 3 (1895), 247-52 (p. 248).

In her interview with Stoddart, Grand also argued that privacy and modesty are central to the maintenance of an impactful public profile, claiming that

the few women who scream and shout and keep themselves in the public eye are not really the most influential. [...] The true leaders of society are women whose names hardly ever appear in the newspapers, but who in their own spheres are [...] sowing the seed of the future.<sup>50</sup>

Grand distances herself and her work from invasive and aggressive exponents of the Women's Movement, arguing for the effectiveness of female reserve, as opposed perpetually seeking a place in the public eye. In this way, she seeks to depict herself as a detached, objective observer of city life and as an authority on the proper course of female professionalisation. She encouraged other women writers to follow her example by distancing themselves from public life. Netta Syrett's reflections on her early career reveal that she received advice from Grand to this effect: 'Don't dissipate yourself in society, my dear!', the older and more experienced Grand advised Syrett following the publication of her debut novel, *Nobody's Fault*, in 1896.<sup>51</sup> Grand's advice to Syrett reveals that she, like Egerton, was aware of the undesirable effects of female infamy, that she consciously and pointedly made an effort to distance herself from public life, and that she hoped that other women would follow her lead.

In another interview, this time with Helen Black, one year later, Grand maintains the importance of female modesty to the process of female emancipation. With 'every womanly grace and charm, a gentle, quiet manner, and a low, musical voice', Grand explains that "women who cultivate the best there is within themselves will do more with a word than the too combative with their insistence and arguments".<sup>52</sup> Black notes that Grand's flat in Sydney House is 'in complete harmony with her opinions'.<sup>53</sup> Like Stoddart, Black uses descriptions of Grand's home to underpin the author's objectivity and authority:

In one of the oldest roads of historic Kensington, there has lately been erected a gigantic block of buildings that stand well back from the noisy hum of traffic, and by reason of their great height ensure the peace and quiet so necessary to a student. At the top floor of the further end of these mansions, a door opens into a broad, carpeted hall the walls of which are decorated with spears, quaint old daggers, swords and other warlike implements sent to [Grand] by her soldier stepsons, from Africa and Abyssinia [...].<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Grand, quoted in Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand' (p. 251).

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Grand, quoted in Netta Syrett, *The Sheltering Tree* (London: G. Bles, 1939), p. 85.

<sup>52</sup> Sarah Grand, quoted in *Pen, Pencil, Baton and Mask: Biographical Sketches*, ed. by Helen C. Black (London: Spottiswoode, 1896), p. 71.

<sup>53</sup> Black, *Pen, Pencil, Baton and Mask*, p. 71.

<sup>54</sup> Black, *Pen, Pencil, Baton and Mask*, p. 72.

As was the case in Stoddart's interview, Black emphasises the remove of Grand's home from its urban environs: Sydney House stands 'well back from the noisy hum of traffic', and her apartment is on the 'top floor of the further end' of the building. Furthermore, by drawing attention to the unusual artefacts that line the walls, Black seeks to depict Grand's apartment as an anomaly amongst the many other apartments in the 'gigantic block'; there can be little doubt, Black suggests, that rooms bearing such unusual artefacts must belong to a person of distinction.

Further descriptions of the contents of Grand's apartment allude to the infiltration of the natural world:

Roses [are] everywhere in abundance [...]. [A] bumble bee drones and hums, filling the air with languorous sound [...] [and] a butterfly from the neighbouring gardens, attracted by the sweet breath of the flowers, has flown in and poises lightly with quivering wings on a fragrant bunch of mignonette.<sup>55</sup>

References to the natural world and Grand's sons underpin Black's depiction of Grand as a 'womanly woman', with a home that befits her femininity. But, again, the relative seclusion of Grand's city apartment and the infiltration of the natural world do not suffice. Black explains that Grand finds

the manifold interruptions and distractions of busy London [to be] very serious hindrances to steady work, so, disliking crowds and retaining her early love of outdoor life, she is apt occasionally to make a temporary retreat to some lovely spot, where, among picturesque surroundings, in pure air and under leafy trees, she can commune with nature and pursue her art in comparative solitude.<sup>56</sup>

Black, like Stoddart, identifies Grand's artistic impulse and mode of production as being at odds with city life.

In the same year that she was visited by Black, Grand was interviewed at home by Tooley. 'The Woman's Question: An Interview with Madame Sarah Grand' featured in the *Humanitarian* in March 1896. Tooley visited Grand again eighteen months later and the interview, 'Madame Sarah Grand at Home', was published in *Young Woman*. During their second meeting, Tooley notes a change in her subject: 'When I saw her some eighteen months ago, there was a tinge of sadness on her expressive face and a look of weariness in her eyes; but when meeting her just after her return from France, it seemed that she had undergone a

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<sup>55</sup> Black, *Pen, Pencil, Baton and Mask*, p. 72-3.

<sup>56</sup> Black, *Pen, Pencil, Baton and Mask*, p. 76.

complete transformation'.<sup>57</sup> Tooley remarks on her subject's 'happy peacefulness' and 'charming gaiety', to which Grand replies:

"I certainly do not feel like the same person since I have cut myself off from the hurry and bustle and "crushes" of London. I have been living a life of freedom and repose near the most charming of spot, the Forest of Montmorency. [...] I ought to be there at the present time, for my new book is waiting for the finishing touches; but I am just picnicking in my London flat to transact some business, and before long I shall return for a while to my quiet life in rural France."<sup>58</sup>

Once again, Grand conveys the necessity of solitude to the writing process, whilst also undermining the possibility of finding adequate solitude in the city. When Stoddart, Tooley and Black conducted their interviews, Grand was in possession of a home which, all interviewers agree, was as far removed from the bustle of city life as was possible. She had, therefore, a space of her own in which to work and write. However, Grand insists to her interviewers that distance from London outstrips any semblance of solitude that can be attained in the city.

The interviews with Stoddart, Black and Tooley all allude to a strained relationship between Grand and her adopted home. In her preface to the short story collection, *Emotional Moments*, Grand explicitly referred to her unease in the city. Contrary to Stoddart's, Tooley's and Black's descriptions of her flat in Sydney House, Grand claims that it occupies a 'conspicuous position'.<sup>59</sup> She also avers that the constant pressures of public life are felt most acutely when living there: 'people were always trying to look in [on her private life]. If I pulled down the blinds, they threw mud at the windows; if I left the blinds up, I saw far too much myself of a world that disheartened me'.<sup>60</sup> Grand's reference to 'pull[ing] down the blinds' in order to shut out the city and prevent public intrusion on her private identity could be understood as part of a broader aim towards individualism, but the rest of her preface suggests that it was other city-dwellers – specifically, the poor, and her fellow advanced women – whom she aimed to shut out.

In her preface to *Emotional Moments*, Grand describes her relationship with the city in Darwinian terms. But first, she stresses that her relationship with London had not always been fraught with conflict. To this end, she offers two deliberately contrasting images of the city. The first image is based on her earliest impression of London and is attributed to the occasions on which she travelled there in order to visit friends in the 1880s. It is a specifically middle-

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<sup>57</sup> Sarah A. Tooley, 'Madame Sarah Grand at Home', *Young Woman* (1897), repr. in *Sex Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, pp. 239-47 (p. 239).

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Grand, quoted in Tooley, 'Madame Sarah Grand at Home' (p. 239).

<sup>59</sup> Grand, 'Preface', in *Emotional Moments*, p. xx.

<sup>60</sup> Grand, 'Preface', in *Emotional Moments*, p. xx.

class rendering of the urban reality: ‘The London I knew in those days was a pleasant dream-region, delicately tinted in healthy colours, with every beauty accentuated, and all the ugliness successfully concealed. [...] There was no haste or fatigue in that lovely life’.<sup>61</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, Grand attributes her idea of the ethereal city to juvenile superficiality. ‘Every impression had been filtered through the happiest medium’, she explains, and, as a result, the effects of growing industry and the working classes were successfully concealed.<sup>62</sup> This early impression of London corresponds with Thomas Hardy’s notion of urban subjectivity at the time: in his diary in 1887, Hardy reflected that ‘each individual is conscious of himself, but nobody conscious of themselves collectively’.<sup>63</sup> With this, Hardy conveys the class-conscious desire for separation which affects Grand’s earliest relationship of London.

Grand attributes the second image of London to the time that she moved to Kensington. She explains that she found the city to have undergone a sudden transmogrification, from a bright, life-giving and otherworldly entity to a dark and barren wasteland, or mass-grave.

As from the centre of a circle I saw Society [...] all about me, piled up into a dense mass—a mass in which the more attractive attributes of human nature were obliterated [and] the more repulsive features forced into prominence [...] So little good comes of plunging into [that] vortex.<sup>64</sup>

Although Grand’s impression of London has changed significantly, it is still marked by a Darwinian sense of class-consciousness. The main difference between these two images of London is Grand’s proximity to members of the working-class. In her first description of London, Grand positions herself in a ‘dream region’ and at a remove from the ‘ugl[y]’ aspects of the modern city.<sup>65</sup> When she describes her experience as a resident of the city, however, she places herself at ‘the centre of a circle’, a ‘vortex’, around which the ‘dense mass’ of society is tightly coiled. Rather than celebrating her own emotional and physical integration within urban life, Grand uses this image to convey her horror at perceiving the city at close-quarters. With the second impression, she mourns the subjective-distance which allowed her to enjoy the city.

Although she insists that she is describing ‘society’ as a whole, Grand’s second description typifies the prevailing image of the urban poor at the turn of the century: they are ‘all about [her]’, and are crowdedly ‘piled up into a dense mass’ which only enlarges their ‘repulsive features’. This language was typical of accounts which used Darwinian language to

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<sup>61</sup> Grand, ‘Preface’, in *Emotional Moments*, p. xii.

<sup>62</sup> Grand, ‘Preface’, in *Emotional Moments*, p. xii.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Hardy, quoted in *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Michael Millgate (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 215.

<sup>64</sup> Grand, ‘Preface’, in *Emotional Moments*, p. xv.

<sup>65</sup> Grand, ‘Preface’, in *Emotional Moments*, p. xii-xv.

express displeasure and distaste at London's growing working-class population. Gareth Stedman Jones notes that the prevailing idea of London's East End at the time was of '[a] nursery of destitute poverty [...] and a political threat to the riches and civilisation of London and the Empire'.<sup>66</sup> At the time that Grand was living in London, the urban poor also began to emerge in works of New Woman fiction, primarily in reference to the threat of industry to the nation's health. Egerton's short story 'The Regeneration of Two' (1894) describes a set of factory doors opening and 'troops of [...] women and children, apologies for human beings, narrow-chested, stunted, with the pallor of lead-poisoning in their haggard faces' pouring out onto the street.<sup>67</sup> While Grand's Kensington home was some distance away from the East End, she was not ignorant of or unaffected by prevailing distaste for the working class population. In her 'Illustrated Interview', Stoddart notes that Grand made weekly visits to a Girls' Guild on Fetter Lane and had seen to providing the girls in attendance with 'very pretty uniforms for gymnastics'.<sup>68</sup> But even this act of philanthropy is marked by class-consciousness. Grand explains proudly to Stoddart that, on account of her assistance, one 'would hardly know [the Girl Guides] for the pale, pinched-looking London work-girl[s]' that they were.<sup>69</sup>

London's swelling population was the reason that Grand decided to leave the city permanently in 1897. Three decades later, in conversation with her friend and confidante, Singers-Bigger, she explained, 'I left London [...] [because] I was crowded out'.<sup>70</sup> Further evidence to this effect is contained in her prefaces to *Emotional Moments* and *The Heavenly Twins*. In her preface to *Emotional Moments*, she describes London as 'a terribly hustling, jostling, over-crowded world of people all intent on [...] pushing up [...] as close to the people who had the high places, as might be'.<sup>71</sup> This description of nepotism speaks to a form of over-crowding which is distinct from the growing working-class population. Instead, it suggests that Grand believed that she was 'crowded out' of the city by supporters of the Emancipation Movement and other women who shared her aims.

Grand maintains this idea in her foreword to *The Heavenly Twins*. She describes herself as 'one of the roadmakers' towards female emancipation and claims that hers was the

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<sup>66</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), pp. 15-16.

<sup>67</sup> George Egerton, 'The Regeneration of Two', in *Keynotes and Discords*, ed. by Sally Ledger (London: Continuum, 2003), pp. 135-169 (p. 146).

<sup>68</sup> Grand, quoted in Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand' (p. 248).

<sup>69</sup> Grand, quoted in Stoddart, 'Illustrated Interview: Sarah Grand' (p. 248).

<sup>70</sup> Sarah Grand, quoted in Singers-Bigger, diary entry, 3 September 1933, in 'Ideala's Gift: The Record of a Dear Friendship', unpublished diary held by Bath Central Library, Bath.

<sup>71</sup> Grand, 'Preface', in *Emotional Moments*, p. xiv.

‘impressionable brain’ which ‘announce[d] [...] first [...] the coming time’.<sup>72</sup> However, she explains that during her time in London she saw ‘all individuality [...] obliterated’ and a ‘dreadful monotony’ emerge ‘in the ranks of those striving towards the advancement of women’.<sup>73</sup> The ‘common object had produced a common attitude’: and so ‘everybody was bent in the same direction, so far as one could see, like trees in a prevailing wind.’<sup>74</sup> Her comment to Singers-Bigger and the accounts which preface *Emotional Moments* and *The Heavenly Twins* show that, rather than leaving the city solely on account of the encroaching working classes, Grand believed that she was, in fact, ‘crowded out’ of the city by other exponents of the emancipation movement. The crowd of ‘hysterical screamers’ that Grand had critiqued in *Woman at Home* was obstructing the path for female liberty that she had helped pave.<sup>75</sup> In turn, they also provoked her retreat from the city.

### Josepha’s contemporary reception and scholarly neglect

When Grand published ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’, the first of the ‘Josepha’ stories, in 1904, her fame was dwindling: her books were selling poorly and receiving largely apathetic reviews.<sup>76</sup> The story was republished in 1908 in *Emotional Moments*, and to a poor reception. The vast majority of reviewers saw little artistic relevance in the collection. *Saturday Review* attributed the stories to ‘impulse [rather] than art [...] [and] quite bad enough in an uninteresting way to damn the environment in which [the stories] were produced’.<sup>77</sup> The *Academy*’s literary critic found in ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’, specifically, only ‘laboured efforts with trivial results’.<sup>78</sup> The *Observer*’s critic attributed the collection’s failure to its author’s lack of (gendered) restraint, remarking that the stories ‘would have been more effective if painted in less violent hues’, and warning that ‘art must be modest, even if Nature is not’.<sup>79</sup> Whereas the female-orientated press positioned Grand as an authority on the Woman Question who was qualified to offer measured and practical advice to young readers, reviewers of *Emotional Moments* complained of the collection’s ‘extravagance’, its ‘violence’ and its depiction of the

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<sup>72</sup> Grand, ‘Foreword to *The Heavenly Twins*’ (p. 400).

<sup>73</sup> Grand, ‘Preface’, in *Emotional Moments*, p. xv.

<sup>74</sup> Grand, ‘Preface’, in *Emotional Moments*, p. xv.

<sup>75</sup> Grand, quoted in Stoddart, ‘Illustrated Interview’ (p. 251).

<sup>76</sup> William Heinemann frequently contacted Grand about the slow sale of her books and asking her permission to lower their retail price. In 1903, he wrote to Grand: ‘We have got a very heavy stock of *The Beth Book*, and a pretty good number also of *Our Manifold Nature*, which I fear will hardly sell out at 6s. Will you let me do them up at 2s[?]’. Grand assented in her reply. William Heinemann, letter to Sarah Grand, 4 December 1903, quoted in Atkins, ‘Towards a Critical Edition of the Short Fiction of Sarah Grand’, p. 190. For details pertaining to the sale of Grand’s books in the twentieth century, see Atkins, pp. 189-92.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Novels’, *Saturday Review*, 18 April 1908, p. 503.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Fiction’, *Academy*, 16 May 1908, p. 789.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Mme Sarah Grand’s New Book’, *Observer*, 19 April 1908, p. 4.



‘erotic’—in short, its impracticality.<sup>80</sup> In 1900, the *Review of Reviews* described Grand’s article ‘On Clubs and the Development of Intelligence’ as a ‘wholesome sermon to the feminine world’; eight years later, the *Observer* notes that the foremost failure of *Emotional Moments* emanates from Grand’s unwillingness (or inability) to offer sufficient solutions to the problems that she raises.<sup>81</sup> The *Observer* reviewer grieves for the reader who is left unguided in search of a proper conclusion and so drifts perilously down a ‘cul-de-sac of [...] emotions’.<sup>82</sup>

The two other ‘Josepha’ stories were published in *Variety* in 1922. Although the collection was largely dismissed or completely overlooked by critics, some stories were selected for individual praise: amongst them was ‘I Can’t Explain It’. The critic for the *Times Literary Supplement* commended the story’s affective capacity, claiming that it ‘is safest read in sunlight at noon’.<sup>83</sup> Other reviews of the collection noted the generic and thematic similarities between the two ‘Josepha’ stories: ‘I Can’t Explain It’ and ‘Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience’. The *Times Literary Supplement* refers to them collectively as ‘two ghost-stories’, and *The Times* selects for special mention ‘a tale of the uncanny [...] [and] another of the same kind’.<sup>84</sup>

Negative reviews of *Emotional Moments* and *Variety* shared a common complaint: the works were out of touch with the new century. The reviewer of *Emotional Moments* for the *Times Literary Supplement* complained that the collection’s focus—“the question of environment”, the lowness of modern ideals, the vulgarization of “society” and what not’—was banal and outmoded.<sup>85</sup> A review of *Variety*, also in the *Times Literary Supplement*, argued that the collection was ‘the remnant of a time when all life and character seemed simpler than it has come to seem in this confused world’ and that its author ‘caught the truth of a time and holds it up to us in a time very different’.<sup>86</sup>

As a result of their poor reception in the national press, *Emotional Moments* and *Variety* quickly fell out of print.<sup>87</sup> Neither collection has been reprinted in its entirety since its debut.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> ‘Mme Sarah Grand’s New Book’, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Madame Sarah Grand on Women and Their Clubs’, *Review of Reviews*, June 1900, p. 563; ‘Mme Sarah Grand’s New Book’, *Observer*, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Mme Sarah Grand’s New Book’, *Observer*, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Harold Child, ‘New Novels: *Variety*’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 September 1922, p. 568.

<sup>84</sup> Child, ‘New Novels’, p. 568; ‘Sarah Grand’s Stories’, *The Times*, 5 September 1922, p. 15.

<sup>85</sup> ‘New Books and Reprints’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 April 1908, p. 118.

<sup>86</sup> Child, ‘New Novels: *Variety*’, p. 568. Walter de la Mare’s review of Grand’s eighth novel, *Adnam’s Orchard*, argued that its depiction of ‘modern problems’ was ‘a little damaged by long service, [and] all the [previous] cries and causes’: ‘Adnam’s Orchard’ [Review], *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 October 1912, p. 464.

<sup>87</sup> By comparison, *Our Manifold Nature* (1894), Grand’s earlier collection of short stories has been reprinted three times since its initial publication; it was reprinted in English in 1894 and 1971, and translated into German in

However, some of the short stories contained in the collections have been the subject of attention in recent years. Heilmann and Forward reprinted seven stories from *Emotional Moments* and six stories from *Variety* in their multi-volume co-edited collection, *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand* (2000). Some stories from the collections have been published in anthologies as many as four times.<sup>89</sup> However, the ‘Josepha’ stories are of the few to have been reprinted only once since their debut. Heilmann and Forward have been integral to the process of exhuming these stories and considering them in line with Grand’s oeuvre and other *fin-de-siècle* works. In 2000, Heilmann included ‘I Can’t Explain It’ and ‘Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience’ in *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Selected Shorter Writings*. Two years later, Forward included ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’ in her multi-author short story anthology, *Dreams, Visions and Realities*.<sup>90</sup> However, despite their obvious similarities, the ‘Josepha’ stories have never been published in the same collection.

Primarily because the ‘Josepha’ stories have remained out of print for nearly a century, they have not amassed much in the way of published scholarship. Of the three stories, ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’ has received the most critical attention, but this is entirely confined to a short summary of the narrative in Forward’s introduction to her edited collection, *Dreams, Visions and Realities*. Forward’s summary is brief, but she makes two key points: she identifies Josepha as an ‘advanced’ woman who, like many of Grand’s other heroines, ‘revels in being outdoors’; she also claims that the man in the scented coat of the story’s title is Edward VII, the then Prince of Wales.<sup>91</sup> One year after Forward resurrected ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’, Heilmann briefly mentioned the existence of ‘two ghost stories’ by Grand. She describes the stories’ protagonist, Josepha, as ‘a woman artist’, but does not mention that she made her debut appearance in ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’.<sup>92</sup> Heilmann and Forward do not explain how they came to identify Josepha as an ‘artist’, or the man in the scented coat as the Prince of Wales. Nonetheless, these are the only references to the ‘Josepha’ stories in published scholarship. In 2015, Atkins discussed the ‘Josepha’ stories together for the first time. This is

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1907. The comparative lack of regard for *Emotional Moments* suggests that Grand had fallen out of favour with the British reading public during the first decade of the twentieth century.

<sup>88</sup> Atkins reprints all three of Grand’s short story collections in her thesis, ‘Towards a Critical Edition of the Short Fiction of Sarah Grand’ (2015), but this is, as yet, unpublished.

<sup>89</sup> For instance, ‘The Undefinable’ was reprinted four times between 1993 and 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’, in *Dreams, Visions and Realities* (Birmingham: Birmingham University Press, 2003), pp. 76-84. Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses and refer to this publication.

<sup>91</sup> Forward claims that ‘[i]t seems likely that the mysterious man is supposed to be the Prince of Wales, who lived a notoriously profligate life-style and was a keen gambler. Here the portrait [of the Prince] is of a self-indulgent idler, absorbed in trivial amusements’: Forward, ‘Introduction’, in *Dreams, Visions and Realities*, p. xxi.

<sup>92</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 101.

the most substantial body of scholarship on the stories to date, but it comprises a chapter of Atkins' doctoral thesis, which remains unpublished to date. Atkins does not offer a detailed critical analysis of the stories; instead, she focuses on the significance of the stories' reception and neglect in relation to Victorian and Modernist literary cultures. The rest of this chapter comprises the first substantial critical analyses of 'The Man in the Scented Coat', 'I Can't Explain It' and 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' since their first publications.

#### Middle-class agency in 'The Man in the Scented Coat' (1904)

There was an element of truth to critics' complaints that the 'Josepha' stories were outdated. Although Josepha first appeared in print in the twentieth century, she is unmistakable as a product of the 1890s. 'The Man in the Scented Coat' was first published in 1904 in the monthly illustrated magazine the *Lady's World*, but Grand states in her preface to *Emotional Moments* (in which the story was later collected) that it was composed when she was living in London between 1891 and 1897.<sup>93</sup> She writes that 'these little stories' were written during '[her] London days of hurry and hustle'.<sup>94</sup> It is accurate, therefore, to understand 'The Man in the Scented Coat' as a portrayal of urban life at the *fin de siècle*. The other two stories, 'I Can't Explain It' and 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience', were written after the turn of the century and published in 1922. They show the maturation of the New Woman character and the effect of thirty years of social and political progress. This is most obviously related through Josepha's increased mobility and security: at the *fin de siècle*, she was wandering aimlessly through the streets of London, but in the 1920s stories she is the owner of a car and a home of her own. Although the two later stories bear the mark of social change, they also feature frequent allusions to the 1890s. Rather than representing the new anxieties of the twentieth century, 'I Can't Explain It' and 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' attest to a sustained conflict in women's lives: between her search for solitariness and for companionship.

Earlier in the chapter, I examined Grand's preface to *Emotional Moments* as evidence of her desire for self-seclusion: Grand regrets her place in the 'vortex' of city life, and argues that the city is best appreciated at a distance. It is interesting, then, that 'The Man in the Scented Coat' enters the city at street-level. However, the story is not free from Grand's class-bias. Josepha is a typical Grandian heroine: she is young, intelligent, head-strong, and middle-class.

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<sup>93</sup> The story first appeared in *Lady's World* (June 1904), pp. 491-8.

<sup>94</sup> Grand, 'Preface', in *Emotional Moments*, p. xxi. There are some small differences between the story as it appeared in *Lady's World* and, later, *Emotional Moments*. Atkins notes Grand's revisions in her unpublished thesis, 'Towards a Critical Edition of the Short Fiction of Sarah Grand', pp. 198-205.

Josepha's class is crucial to the narrative; it underpins both her self-assurance—which leads her to make surprising decisions—and the nature of her relationships with other walkers. There were also two practical reasons for Grand's decision to use a middle-class protagonist: it made Josepha's solitary night-time walk more palatable for the broadly middle-class reader of the *Lady's World*, and it also allowed Grand to write about London from within the confines of her own experience. This latter point is underpinned by her preface to *Emotional Moments* which directly attributes the stories to her experience of living in London.<sup>95</sup> By prefacing 'The Man in the Scented Coat' with a point about its biographical inspiration, Grand positions it as another of her studies from life.

Josepha's search for a new experience takes her beyond the confines of the home and this is, for the most part, what characterises her as a New Woman (83). 'The Man in the Scented Coat' begins in a house on Portland Place in London's West End. Josepha steps out of the house and into a body of 'dense [...] sulphur-laden fog' which lies heavy over the street (76-7). The narrative then follows Josepha as she wanders the streets under cover of the fog and in search of adventure. At the start of her search Josepha is alone and a series of perilous events ensues: she falls from the curb and is then nearly hit by an omnibus before coming dangerously close to being swept up in a 'band of roughs' (77-8). Josepha soon realises the danger of being alone at night and in the fog, so begins stalking a couple of gentlemen—the man in the scented coat of the story's title and his companion, who Josepha assigns the moniker 'Colonel Perturbation'. The men head east from Portland Place and lead Josepha to a gambling den. Josepha infiltrates the den and joins the men in a game of poker, during which she loses all of the money and jewellery on her person. As Heilmann points out, Josepha's enjoyment of the city, her immersion in its illegal activities, and embrace of its 'shady' characters contrasts with the prevailing image of 'the deadly serious and morally high-toned' New Woman who was ruthlessly lampooned by *Punch*.<sup>96</sup>

Works of New Woman fiction often featured women engaging in and enjoying new experiences. However, they frequently aligned the New Woman's desires (or their fulfilment) with foreign places. The influence of the colonial narrative on New Woman fiction has been well documented by Iveta Jusová in her study, *The New Woman and the Empire* and, in chapter two of this thesis, I examined the relationship between colonial imagery and emerging female consciousness in the context of Egerton's *The Wheel of God*. Jusová's study examines the

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<sup>95</sup> Grand, 'Preface', in *Emotional Moments*, p. xxi.

<sup>96</sup> Heilmann, 'Preface', in *Dreams, Visions and Realities*, p. vii.

convergence of the appearance of the New Woman in British literature with a period in British political history of ‘aggressive territorial expansion and systematic imperial promotion’.<sup>97</sup> Jusová argues that the literary output of many New Woman writers ‘supported the British imperialist ideology and colonial practices’.<sup>98</sup> An ‘imperialist ideology’ arguably governs the New Woman’s (ill-fated) journey to India in Olive Schreiner’s short story, ‘The Buddhist Priest’s Wife’ (1891). Other New Women, including Egerton’s Gypsy in ‘A Cross Line’ (1893) and Kate Chopin’s protagonist in ‘An Egyptian Cigarette’ (1900), temporarily offset their physical confinement in Britain through psychological flights of fancy to far-off places.<sup>99</sup>

Other, non-colonised, foreign places were also depicted as arenas in which the New Woman could pursue self- and social-fulfilment. Mary Desmond travels to New York in pursuit of employment in *The Wheel of God*, and Grant Allen’s crime-fighting Girton Graduate, Lois Cayley, travels to Germany as a lady-companion in ‘The Adventure of the Cantankerous Old Lady’ (1898). ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’ is different to these and other New Woman adventure narratives which take place in, or feature allusions to, foreign places. Grand’s narrative is completely limited to London and there are no obvious allusions to foreign places. Moreover, Josepha’s physical confinement to London is seen to be *enforced* by the text. Her vision is sufficiently impaired by the fog so as to inhibit her free movement: this renders her incapable of reaching the Underground station, let alone leaving London entirely. So, while many other writers depicted their New Women seeking adventure and new experiences in foreign places, Grand limits her heroine to only a few streets in London.

Grand undermines Josepha’s agency and limits her movement throughout the narrative. She begins by alluding to Josepha’s subordinate role at her friend’s house on Portland Place. Josepha rises to leave her friend’s company ‘several times’ but ‘her friend was loath to lose her’ and so she is persuaded to stay longer than was her intention (76). As a result, ‘darkness had descended’ on the house by the time that Josepha is permitted to leave (76). Josepha explains to her friend that she intends to travel home by train as it is ‘the quickest and warmest way’ and the house is ‘only a step to the station’ (76). With this idea in mind, and keen to begin her journey, she runs down the stairs and into the hall. But her advance towards the front door is cut short by the footman’s announcement that ‘there is a dense fog’ outside (76). Once again, Josepha’s intentions have been thwarted. She attempts an authoritative response, but this is

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<sup>97</sup> Iveta Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>98</sup> Jusová, *The New Woman and the Empire*, p. 6.

<sup>99</sup> Chopin’s New Woman embarks upon an erotic hallucination after smoking a cigarette that had been imported from Cairo. The hallucination takes place in the Egyptian dessert and sees the woman transformed into a native.

undermined somewhat by her declarative question: ‘Let me see the fog?’ (76). The footman assents and opens the door, but he and Josepha are confronted by ‘what looked like a thundercloud filling up the aperture’ (76). Upon seeing the fog, Josepha promptly abandons her previous desire for a warm and speedy journey home, and instead decides to walk. The footman offers to hail her a cab, which she rejects; he argues that she will surely ‘lose [herself] in the first few yards, but Josepha dismisses this as ‘impossible’ (76). With a final, breathless exclamation—‘I never was out in anything like this before!’—Josepha steps across the threshold, runs down the steps, and is ‘instantly engulfed’ by the fog (76).

Atkins has claimed that ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’ is an adventure story.<sup>100</sup> However, Josepha’s lack of agency in the opening moments of the narrative suggests that this is an oversimplification. Although Josepha encounters an adventure of sorts after she leaves the house, she does not *actively* seek it out. Unlike Lois Cayley in Allen’s ‘The Adventure of the Cantankerous Old Lady’, Josepha does not begin her day in search of a ‘loophole for adventure’: there is very little about her plan for the day—to visit a friend, leave before dark, and catch a train home—that speaks to any great aims to this end.<sup>101</sup> Josepha is not an active agent in the rapidly unravelling adventure. Instead, as I will demonstrate, Grand positions her as a passive subject; adventure *finds Josepha* and she is incapable of resisting the embrace of the ‘new’.

A further clue to Josepha’s lack of agency lies in Grand’s description of the fog. By comparing the fog to ‘a thundercloud’, Grand imbues it with a malevolent potential (76). A thundercloud is a precursor to stormy weather and so it follows that, in this context, the fog is also a sign of brewing enmity. As the fog advances over the threshold of the house and into the hall, its potential energy is converted into furious activity. It defamiliarises the hall and induces a sense of unreality:

For a moment the mist seemed solid as a wall, but the heat of the house meeting it melted its density, frayed it at the edges, and released it, so that it came streaming into the hall, fast filling it with vapour, which rapidly spread itself over everything, gauzily, like a veil, bedimming the brilliant lamps, shrouding the luxurious furnishings, and adding to all that touch of mystery which dignifies commonplace ordinary elegance with interest. (76)

The fog’s residual vapour violates the domestic scene; it strokes the furniture with fraying fingers, defiles its ‘luxury’ and ‘brilliance’, and claims the space as its own. The malevolence

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<sup>100</sup> Atkins, ‘Towards a Critical Edition of the Short Fiction of Sarah Grand’, p. 75.

<sup>101</sup> Grant Allen, ‘The Adventure of the Cantankerous Old Lady’, *Strand* (1898), repr. in Michael Sims (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Victorian Women in Crime* (London: Penguin, 2011), pp. 213-31 (p. 215).

implied by the use of sexual imagery is underpinned by the manner in which the two bodies—Josepha and the fog—collide, and the aftermath:

[...] she ran down the steps, and it was as if she had plunged into space, she was so instantly engulfed. In reality she was only a few yards from the door, clinging to an area railing, gasping and giddy, trying to collect herself. [...] She was inclined to return to the house, but hesitated, and walked on a little way, guiding herself by the railing. Then she decided that she would go back, and turned about to do so. It was a fatal move, for she had no sooner let go of the railing than she lost it [...]. Whether she had [turned] round twice in her bewilderment, or come to a turn in the street, she could not tell; but [...] with outstretched hand, she moved cautiously sideways, expecting to come in contact with [the railing]. The next thing she did, however, was stumble off the curb into the roadway. (77)

Josepha's decision to enter the fog signals the complete dissolution of her agency and perception. Powerless to retrace her steps back to the safety of the house, she must advance toward the unknown.

The means through which Josepha moves away from the house is transgressive. Michel Foucault defines a transgression as the act of 'incessantly cross[ing] and recross[ing] a line [or a limit] which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration'.<sup>102</sup> Josepha's journey from the doorway to the street, and then through Marylebone, traces a transgressional pattern whereby limits are crossed and subsequently disappear behind her in short succession. The threshold between the home and the street is the first limit to be transgressed. In the hall, before crossing the threshold, Josepha inhabits a space that is coded 'safe' by way of the footman's presence and her physical remove above the street, but her movement over the threshold sees her leave the safety of the domestic space and enter the public arena. The narrator's claim that it was 'as if [Josepha] had plunged into space' emphasises that a limit has been crossed, while the immediate disappearance of the steps from her field of vision represents the 'closing up' of that limit (76).

The downwards direction of Josepha's movement also renders her progression away from the home a transgressive act. It is crucial to note that very few houses on Portland Place adjoin the street by a set of steps. Early engravings and nineteenth-century photographs show that the front doors of most buildings on Portland Place were (and still are) at street-level or, at most, separated from the street by a single step. By positioning the door at the top of a set of steps, Grand purposefully evokes two distinct and separate spaces: the private middle-class home with its human and material comforts, and the unfathomable and irrepressible dangers of the

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<sup>102</sup> Michel Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression', trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *Religion and Culture*, ed. by Jeremy R. Carrette (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 57-71 (p. 60).

public street. Once she is on the street, Josepha's next movements see her transgressing two further limits. First she relinquishes her hold on the iron railing that marks the boundary between privately-owned and public land. When she then stumbles off the curb and into the road she crosses a third limit and makes another literal and symbolic descent. Unable to see ahead or retrace her steps, Josepha is trapped in a paradigm which both forces and attests to her moral and physical transgression.

Judith Walkowitz, Deborah Epstein Nord and Deborah Parsons, amongst others, have outlined the dangers arising from and attributed to women's increased mobility in the city in the late-nineteenth century. They all stress the significance of the fact that a woman seen walking unchaperoned at night was usually, and often unduly, perceived to be a prostitute. At the very least, then, walking alone at night was perceived to be a morally dubious act. To this end, Nord explains that the solitary woman's 'occupation of public space does more than unsettle her domestic and private identity; it threatens her respectability, her chastity, her very femininity.'<sup>103</sup> Grand evokes these fears in her anthropomorphic and sexualised description of the fog, her allusions to Josepha's lack of agency and the transgressional pattern of her movement. However, with the use of the fog Grand also disrupts the symbolic relationship between a woman's solitariness and her lack of respectability; if Josepha cannot be *seen* by others as she walks alone then it follows that her morality cannot be disputed. The effect of the fog allows Josepha's walk to perform in the text in the same way as Mary's moments of imaginative isolation in *The Wheel of God*: if no one can see these women using their bodies in 'immoral' ways, then their private identity—their respectability, chastity, and femininity—cannot be called into question.

Whilst Josepha's occupation of public space does not necessarily correlate with her (lack of) respectability, her progress from the hall to the road *is* indicative of her affectability. Grand claims in her preface to *Emotional Moments* that 'The Man in the Scented Coat' aimed to show the effect of environment upon an individual's behaviour. She defines affectability (of which Josepha could be the Grandian poster-girl) in positive terms, arguing that it can be a sign of an individual's social and psychological advancement:

To be subject to the influences of [...] atmosphere is to have the inward eye open, to see, to feel, to know; to live the life by way of your perceptions; to enter into it

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<sup>103</sup> Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 117.



as though you were of it [...] is the only way to [...] gain in comprehension, and therein is great gain.<sup>104</sup>

She cites the same idea in her foreword to *The Heavenly Twins*, in which she described the ‘impressionable brain’—that which will ‘announce [...] first [...] the coming time’—as influenced by ‘certain ideas [...] in the air’.<sup>105</sup> The use of fog as a literary tool became fashionable with the rise of *fin-de-siècle* Decadence and Impressionism. Oscar Wilde noted in ‘The Decay of Lying’ (1891) that ‘at present people see fogs, not because they are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects’.<sup>106</sup> With her foreword and her story, Grand offers a context through which it is possible to fully realise and celebrate Josepha’s affectability; her foreword also supports Heilmann’s claim that Josepha is an ‘artist’ or, at the very least, in tune with artistic trends.<sup>107</sup> Like Mary Desmond, whose affectability feeds into moments of spiritual transcendence, Josepha’s affectability is pivotal to her relationship with the world outside the home and to her interaction with the unfamiliar.

#### Freedom to range in the ‘be-sooted city’

As well as a literary tool in Grand’s narrative, the fog is a literal waste product of London’s industry. Despite the smoke reduction acts for London, which were passed in 1853 and 1891, Bill Luckin explains that ‘great smoke fogs’ continued to ‘periodically paralys[e] the capital between the 1870s and the outbreak of the First World War’.<sup>108</sup> Luckin notes that the frequency of fogs increased as the century wore on. Nearly twice as many severe episodes of fog in London were recorded in the late 1880s than the early 1870s, and yet more ‘serious occurrences’ were recorded between 1882 and 1892.<sup>109</sup> The fogs were also becoming increasingly protracted: James Crichton-Browne records a ‘severe [...] fog [which] visited London at Christmas, 1891, [...] [and] lasted without intermission close upon a hundred hours’.<sup>110</sup> The long and frequent spells of fog had profound and enduring psychological and physical effects upon the urban population: ‘No one’, D. J. Russell Duncan wrote, ‘who has

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<sup>104</sup> Grand, ‘Preface’, *Emotional Moments*, pp. x-xi.

<sup>105</sup> Emerson, ‘Fate’, quoted in Grand, ‘Foreword to *The Heavenly Twins*’, p. 400

<sup>106</sup> Oscar Wilde, ‘The Decay of Lying’, in *The Decay of Lying and Other Essays*, ed. by Ian Small (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 1-37 (p. 28).

<sup>107</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 101.

<sup>108</sup> Bill Luckin, “‘The Heart and Home of Horror’: The Great London Fogs of the Late Nineteenth Century”, *Social History*, 28 (2003), 31-48 (p. 32).

<sup>109</sup> Luckin, “‘The Heart and Home of Horror’” (pp. 34-5).

<sup>110</sup> James Crichton-Browne, ‘The Dust Problem’, quoted in Luckin, “‘The Heart and Home of Horror’” (p. 35).

once experienced a bad fog in town is likely to forget the dense, heavy, oppressive feeling of the air, and the unnatural darkness at midday [...].'<sup>111</sup>

Grand moved to London in 1891 and so experienced first-hand the debilitating effects of the fog on the individual and social body. During her first two winters in London, two protracted fogs brought the city to a stand-still: in December 1891 a one-hundred-hour siege of fog descended upon the capital and this was followed one year later by a three-day fog which led to over one thousand deaths in the city.<sup>112</sup> The events depicted in 'The Man in the Scented Coat' closely align with those described by meteorologist L. C. W. Bonacina as commonplace during periods of fog: 'hansom cabs and other vehicles might find themselves on the footways, and [...] a pedestrian could easily spend the evening looking for his house round the corner'.<sup>113</sup> Josepha's actions in the narrative have been described by Atkins as 'iconoclastic'.<sup>114</sup> However, her actions seem less extraordinary if we consider the fact that they closely resemble the real and commonplace events described by Bonacina. In the context of Grand's lived experience, the fogs were simply another case 'from life' that Grand considered it her duty to relate to the readership of the *Lady's World*.

'The Man in the Scented Coat' joins a broad range of nineteenth-century literary works which invoked public concern about urban pollution. William DeLisle Hay's science-fiction novel, *The Doom of the Great City* (1880), was written after the fog of 1879-80.<sup>115</sup> The narrative takes place in 1942 and is narrated by the sole survivor of the fog, who returns to London to find it littered with suffocated bodies, including a member of the Royal family lying face-down outside Buckingham Palace. Robert Barr's short story 'The Doom of London' (1892-3) is also narrated from the perspective of a man who survived a suffocating London fog.<sup>116</sup> Alluding to the frequency of the fogs and accounting for the 'the unidentified thousands who were buried in unmarked graves', the narrator explains that

fogs were so common in London, especially in winter, that [...] they were merely looked upon as inconvenient annoyances, [...] but I doubt if anyone thought it

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<sup>111</sup> D. J. Russell Duncan, 'On Smoke Abatement', quoted in Luckin, "'The Heart and Home of Horror'" (p. 35).

<sup>112</sup> Peter Brimblecombe gives the approximate number of deaths per period of fog in 'Perceptions and Effects of Late Victorian Air Pollution', in *Smoke and Mirrors: The Politics and Culture of Air Pollution*, ed. by E. Melanie DuPuis (New York: New York University Press, 2004), pp. 15-26 (p. 23).

<sup>113</sup> L. C. W. Bonacina, 'London Fogs—Then and Now', *Weather*, 5 (1950), 91-3 (p. 91).

<sup>114</sup> Atkins, 'Towards a Critical Edition of the Short Fiction of Sarah Grand', p. 75.

<sup>115</sup> William DeLisle Hay, *The Doom of the Great City* (London: Newman and Co, 1880).

<sup>116</sup> Robert Barr, 'The Doom of London', *Idler*, November 1892, pp. 397-409, repr. *Idler*, March 1905, pp. 540-61. Subsequent references to this text refer to the 1892 publication.

possible for a fog to become one vast smothering mattress pressed down upon a whole metropolis, extinguishing life [...].<sup>117</sup>

‘The Doom of London’ was reprinted in *Idler* in 1905, more than a decade after its debut. Barr’s claim that his story was reprinted ‘on account of recent fogs’ demonstrates that they were still a source of considerable anxiety at the beginning of the twentieth-century.<sup>118</sup> Christine L. Corton argues that the decision to reprint Barr’s story was prompted by growing public and scientific interest in the causes of air pollution: ‘[w]ith every new week-long pea-souper, the column inches devoted to London fog in the press grew, and the debate about its causes intensified’, she explains.<sup>119</sup> Grand would have written ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’ around the time that Barr wrote and first published ‘The Doom of London’. She chose to eventually publish her story in 1904 for the same reason that Barr chose to republish his: she wished to tap into growing public and scientific interest in air pollution.<sup>120</sup>

Grand’s story intervenes in contemporary concerns about the psychological effects of the fog. Bonacina explains that long periods of fog were known to induce feelings of isolation and paranoia:

On occasions [...] when the natural sunlight could not get through, London [...] seemed a hideous monster [...]. I would sometimes slink away to one or other of the great railway termini with no more practical purpose than to see the hansoms lined up for the arrival of a long-distance express, and so reassure myself that there really were limits to the be-sooted city, beyond which lay the fair rural shires and all the beauty of the woods and hills.<sup>121</sup>

Bonacina accounts for the uneasiness with which London’s residents found themselves segregated from rest of the country. Grand evokes the isolating effect of the fog in ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’ but, rather than feeling oppressed, Josepha revels in her newfound solitude:

So far [Josepha] had not encountered a soul or heard a sound of traffic, and this silence in a neighbourhood usually teeming with life and movement, had a strange effect upon her—an effect, not exactly exhilarating, but certainly exciting. [...] It was as if she herself were the centre of a universe of frightful fog. (77-8)

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<sup>117</sup> Robert Barr, ‘The Doom of London’ (p. 399).

<sup>118</sup> Robert Barr, quoted in Christine L. Corton, *London Fog: The Biography* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 99.

<sup>119</sup> Corton, *London Fog*, p. 99.

<sup>120</sup> The stories also share some linguistic similarities. Grand and Barr both use pseudo-scientific vocabulary and cumulative verb phrases to describe the changing condition of the fog. For instance, Barr writes: ‘When a mass of white vapour arose in the night these clouds of smoke fell upon the fog, pressing it down, filtering slowly through it, and adding to its density’ (p. 400). Grand’s description of the fog is similar: ‘the heat of the house meeting [the fog] melted its density, frayed it at the edges [...] so that it came streaming into the hall, fast filling it with vapour’ (p. 76).

<sup>121</sup> Bonacina, ‘London Fogs—Then and Now’ (p. 92).

Josepha's isolation is two-fold: not only has the thickness of the fog deterred others from walking or driving around the city, but it has also ostensibly rendered her invisible to any person looking out of their window onto the street. Under the fog, she is emancipated from public opinion and social expectation. Her excitement at the newfound experience of walking alone at night is compounded by the realisation that no one is able to see and so question her integrity. This gives rise to a sense of empowerment: she realises that '[s]he might easily wander on all night, Heaven knew whither' (77). Josepha's positive emotional response to her isolation overrides the physical reality. She imagines herself in a powerful and commanding position at 'the centre of a universe', a distinct contrast to her actual, precarious position at the roadside.

### Finding fellowship in the fog

Although Josepha initially feels empowered by her solitariness and the idea that she might 'wander on all night', her journey through London's streets quickly becomes a search for companionship (77). At first, this search appears to be unaffected by class-bias: she considers the possibility that she might 'encounter people, desirable or undesirable, but interesting, at all events' (77). Her first encounter with another walker is, once again, induced by her affectability. Having come to a standstill in the street,

she suddenly found herself thinking of growing flowers [...]. It was the perfume of flowers which made her think of them. [...] The perfume had been quite strong when she first noticed it, but now she found it was growing gradually fainter, and [...] she began to walk on, [...] guiding herself by the sense of smell [...]. (78)

It is important to note that Josepha follows the scent of flowers because she believes that it belongs to a *person*. She wonders 'Who was the perfumed person? [...] and what should she do when she [encountered] her—or him? Ask the way, she supposed' (78). By following the scent, Josepha looks to terminate her isolation and by intending to ask for directions she overturns her initial aim to 'wander on all night'. At this point in the narrative, the conflict between the desires for solitude and companionship emerges as a significant influence on Josepha's actions.

Josepha soon discovers the source of the floral scent: it is emanating from two well-dressed men whom Josepha presumes to be 'gentlemen' (78). But her pursuit of the gentlemen also leads her to cross paths with a 'band of roughs' (78).<sup>122</sup> This situation gives rise to the first

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<sup>122</sup> *The Times* offers a nineteenth-century definition for 'roughs'. The newspaper characterised those involved in the Hyde Park riots of 1866 as 'roughs, [...] the usual slouching, shambling man-boys who constitute the mass of

decision over which Josepha has full agency. Josepha is just as likely to find adventure in the company of the ‘roughs’ as she is with the gentlemen; nevertheless, she describes the ‘roughs’ as ‘the enemy’ and the gentlemen as her ‘protect[ors]’.<sup>123</sup> By identifying the ‘roughs’ as ‘the enemy’ and the gentlemen as Josepha’s guardians, Grand insists upon the separation and isolation of the classes. She looks to justify this separation by describing the ‘roughs’ in animalistic terms and highlighting their essential difference from the gentlemen:

A band of roughs, carrying links, rushed out [...] from somewhere, howling a discordant chorus. By the light of the links Josepha now saw, with relief, that [the men ahead of her] were well-dressed [...], and presumably gentlemen [...]. [S]he would have claimed their protection could she have made herself heard; but this was impossible because of the din kept up by the roughs, who had surrounded all three, and were dancing about them, howling and jeering like fiends. The gentlemen [...] tried to break through the circle, now on this side and now on that, to the great delight of the louts, who [...] pressed closer and closer. (78-9)

The description of the roughs echoes the ‘vortex’ of the urban poor in Grand’s preface to *Emotional Moments*. As they dance, they form a circle around Josepha and the gentlemen, and so prevent their escape. Josepha, like Grand, does not see the close proximity of the urban poor as a sign of her successful integration within urban life. Her decision, made immediately and never recalled, to follow the gentlemen down the street is informed by a middle-class fear of the encroaching urban poor.

#### Sex and respectability: the politics of Portland Place

The story’s setting gives rise to other ways of considering the representation of bodies and boundaries, the identity of the scented gentlemen, and the nature of Josepha’s movement through the streets. Portland Place is a wide parade leading into the south entrance of Regent’s Park and an esteemed Marylebone address. In the nineteenth century it was considered ‘the handsomest [street] in London’ and home to some of the city’s wealthiest residents.<sup>124</sup> But Josepha does not linger for long in the relative safety of Portland Place. The fog inhibits Josepha’s sense of direction, but Grand offers clues which allow the reader to trace Josepha’s steps. The narrator explains that the house that Josepha leaves is ‘close to a turn’, that Josepha ‘round[s] [this] corner’ and walks ‘down another street’ (77). The southern end of Portland

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the ordinary London multitude’. ‘Mr Beales and his Friends’, *The Times*, 24 July 1866, p. 9. Grand’s use of the term corresponds with this definition.

<sup>123</sup> Josepha seeks to ‘clai[m] [the gentlemen’s] protection’, p. 78.

<sup>124</sup> Portland Place once counted the first Prime Minister of Hungary and Whig politician Edward Monckton amongst its residents. For details pertaining to the reputation of Portland Place in the nineteenth century, see: Thomas Smith, *A Topographical and Historical Account of the Parish of St. Marylebone* (London: John Smith, 1833), pp. 240-1.

Place bends to the east into Langham Place, which connects to Regent Street in the south. When Josepha ‘rounds the corner’ into Langham Place she moves in an easterly direction into a pocket of space between Portland Place and Tottenham Court Road which had been recently redefined in the public consciousness as a site of sexual and legal transgression.

The area between Portland Place and Tottenham Court Road was embroiled in a succession of sex scandals in the few years before Grand moved to London. The scandals instigated large-scale press attention on the West End which continued throughout Grand’s residency in the city. In 1889 a male brothel was discovered by police on Cleveland Street, a five-minute walk from Portland Place. A host of notable men stood accused of its patronage, including Lord Arthur Somerset and Prince Albert Victor, second-in-line to the throne.<sup>125</sup> Five years later, police raided an address in Fitzroy Square, adjacent to Cleveland Street. They arrested Alfred Taylor and Charles Parker, who later stood accused of taking part in ‘orgies of the most disgraceful kind’.<sup>126</sup> The national press was awash with reports of police raids on these and other ‘horrible den[s] of vice’ in the West End, and detailed accounts of the subsequent court proceedings.<sup>127</sup> Cultural historian Matt Cook avers that the considerable public interest in the West End sex scandals was underpinned by the salacious notion that ‘well-known and “respectable” sites’ had been ‘hideously compromised by [...] homosexual activity’.<sup>128</sup> The endemic use in the press of the word ‘den’ (‘a horrible den of vice’, ‘a den of infamy’) to describe the interior space in which homosexual activity occurred, for instance, is demonstrative of the perception that the West End sex scandals were cases of the illicit compromising the respectable; ‘vice’ and ‘infamy’ degraded the ‘den’ from a domestic space to an animal’s lair.<sup>129</sup> To the same end, the prosecution and, afterwards, the press frequently drew attention to the ‘dark curtain[ed]’ windows of Taylor’s home, set aglow with ‘different coloured lamps and candles’.<sup>130</sup> In this instance, the dimmed lighting, drawn curtains and spatial intimacy associated with a family den was used to signify the possibility of an illicit closeness between men in the domestic space, under the cover of darkness and away from prying eyes. These popular perceptions, Cook argues, figured homosexuality as ‘both outside but also dangerously within mainstream urban culture’ and encouraged the notion that ‘men

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<sup>125</sup> It is highly likely that the man in the scented coat is intended to be Prince Albert Victor. In the original publication of the story in *Lady’s World*, Josepha refers to him as ‘Mr Edwards’; the Prince was known to friends as ‘Eddy’.

<sup>126</sup> H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Dover, 1973), p. 173. For a report on the police raid that led to the arrests of Taylor and Parker, see ‘Fitzroy Square Raid’, *Star*, 20 August 1894, p. 3.

<sup>127</sup> ‘Lord Euston’s Case’, *Reynolds*, 9 January 1890, p. 4.

<sup>128</sup> Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 55.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Lord Euston’s Case’, *Reynolds*, p. 4.

<sup>130</sup> Montgomery Hyde, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde*, p. 178.

who had sex with other men [...] [were] creatures of their environment'.<sup>131</sup> The large-scale press attention on the West End sex-scandals, Cook avers, cultivated the idea that the space between Portland Place and Tottenham Court Road had been transformed by the homosexual body into a 'homosexual territory'.<sup>132</sup>

Josepha's movement away from Portland Place leads her directly into the 'territory' that had been recently compromised by the homosexual male body. Grand evokes this association by way of the gentlemen's perfume, which permeates Josepha's senses and further defamiliarises the street. Aytoun Ellis notes that up until the First World War, it was considered 'effeminate and the worst of taste for a man to use perfume' with 'the vast majority [of men] curtly refusing [...] even a dusting of scented talcum powder after shaving'.<sup>133</sup> The popular suspicion of perfumed men underpinned the revelation during Alfred Taylor's trial that he 'used to burn scent' in his room.<sup>134</sup> The idea that Taylor resided in a 'languorous atmosphere heavy with perfume', H. Montgomery Hyde avers, would 'no doubt have adversely influenced' the jurymen and readers of the newspaper reports.<sup>135</sup> Grand would most certainly have been aware of sex scandals that had occurred on and near Cleveland Street, but it is unlikely that she intended for the perfumed gentlemen in her story to be understood as homosexuals. Maurizia Boscagli points out that Oscar Wilde was able to 'pass' as heterosexual because his contemporaries decoded his effeminate dress and manner as 'signifier[s] of class rather than sexual dissidence'.<sup>136</sup> The floral scent of the gentleman's coat in Grand's story triggers the same response: upon noting that they could smell his perfume 'from a mile off', the roughs call him both 'a rosebud' and a 'blamed, expensive royal aristocra[t]' (79). Rather than homosexuals, it is more likely that Grand intended to portray two dandies: once Josepha pursues the men to their destination (a gambling den), they emerge as 'self-indulgent idlers, absorbed in trivial amusements'.<sup>137</sup>

Grand was deliberately evoking the sex scandals in order to comment upon the dangerous permeability of the city's public spaces.<sup>138</sup> By setting the story adjacent to the boundary

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<sup>131</sup> Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p. 55.

<sup>132</sup> Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality*, p. 55.

<sup>133</sup> Aytoun Ellis, *The Essence of Beauty: A History of Perfume and Cosmetics* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960), p. 195.

<sup>134</sup> Testimony of William Parker, quoted in H. Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde: A Biography* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1976), p. 242.

<sup>135</sup> Montgomery Hyde, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 235.

<sup>136</sup> Maurizia Boscagli, *Eye on the Flesh: Fashions of Masculinity in the Early Twentieth Century* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), p. 31.

<sup>137</sup> Forward, 'Introduction', in *Dreams, Visions and Realities*, p. xxi.

<sup>138</sup> Although most Victorian men did not wear perfume, Catherine Maxwell explains that 'those who identified as dandies certainly did and are likely to have worn [musky, powdery, floral and sweet] scents similar to those worn

between East and West End and in close proximity to the infamous ‘dens’ she demonstrates the permeability of space: just as the ‘band of rougths’ enter Portland Place from the east, so does our middle-class protagonist stray eastward; similarly, the fog creeps into the home as Josepha descends onto the street. With this permeability comes the possibility of transgression and the implication that morals, along with bodies, can be easily lost in the boundaries between West and East, the respectable and the illicit. This is a compromised space which compromises and, to this end, Grand uses a provocative word to describe Josepha’s movement toward Cleveland Street: the street forces her to ‘turn’ (77).

### ‘Queer visibility’ and the underground gambling den

In their effort to escape the gang of ‘rougths’, the perfumed gentlemen lead Josepha to a long and wide street which is flanked on both sides by closed shops. The men run towards ‘a narrow black door which seemed to be pinched for room between the shutters of two great shop windows’ (79). They bang on the door, which opens instantly, and then disappear inside. Josepha follows close behind and enters through the door soon after. She surprised to find that ‘no one is near’ the door to open it, and concludes that it must be operated remotely (79). Unfazed, she runs ‘intrepidly’ up a dimly-lit, ‘narrow, steep staircase between two walls’ (79). She finds the men at the top of the stairs ‘fumbling with [a] bookcase, which presently revolved as if on a pivot, disclosing an inner-room beyond’ (80). It quickly emerges that the inner-room is a secret gambling den, but Josepha stops the men before they pass through the door. They are startled and accuse Josepha of being ‘a spy’, but she rejoins this accusation by introducing herself ironically as ‘Alice in Wonderland’ (80). With this comparison Josepha acknowledges her disorientation and disbelief at the unreality of her surroundings and, by way of Alice’s journey ‘down the rabbit-hole’, alludes to the ‘underground’ purpose of the inner-room.<sup>139</sup> Josepha ventures into the gambling den and the men follow close behind, with the door shutting ‘noiselessly’ behind them (81).

Josepha appears to be significantly and immediately more comfortable in the strange inner-room, in an unfamiliar part of town and with the unknown gentleman, than she was in her friend’s house on Portland Place. She had compared the house on Portland Place to ‘a

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by women’: ‘Scents and Sensibility: The Fragrance of Decadence’, in *Decadent Poetics: Literature and Form at the British fin de siècle*, ed. by Jason David Hall and Alex Murray (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 201-25 (p. 208). Luca Turin identifies ‘the classic British masculine’ scent of the late Victorian period as ‘musky, powdery, floral, typically rather sweet’: quoted by Maxwell in ‘Scents and Sensibility’ (p. 208).

<sup>139</sup> The first chapter of Lewis Carroll’s novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was titled ‘Down the Rabbit-Hole’.



sarcophagus' and her frequent attempts to leave are an indication of her unease (76). However, after crossing the threshold into the gambling den, she 'threw herself into an easy chair, pillowed her head on the back of it, and looked up at the ceiling', sighing, "Oh, I am so glad to sit down!" (81). The den is dimly-lit and, although lavishly decorated, Josepha notes a lack of mirrors. She is comforted by the fact that the lack of light leaves the faces and identities of its occupants (including her own) shrouded in darkness and 'obscurity' (81). In the company of fellow transgressors, Josepha realises that she is safe from public opinion: both she and the men admit embarrassment at their situation, but also declare their mutual 'discretion' (80-1).

Although an element of unreality affects the description of the gambling den, it, like the fog, is inspired by a real part of urban culture. To an extent, the incognito aspect of the house and its hidden room resembles a typical nineteenth-century underground gentlemen's club. Barbara Black explains that 'by virtue of their [illegal] function, all clubs police[d] their borders'.<sup>140</sup> They did this in two ways: by reinforcing and defending the physical limit between club and the world beyond (with inconspicuous entranceways, for instance), and by protecting their members' identities. Black also notes that the anonymity of the gentlemen's club and the spatial and social intimacy of its members meant that 'club culture' could, in fact, 'engender a queer visibility'.<sup>141</sup> The gambling den in 'The Man in the Scented Coat' is, like the gentlemen's club in urban culture and the 'dens of vice' related to the sex scandals, separate, autonomous and a threat to the social order. The gentlemen's decision to abandon their names and adopt aliases—'The Man in the Scented Coat' and 'Colonel Perturbation'—in the presence of Josepha (an outsider) typifies the aims and practices of the underground gentlemen's club. The description of the gambling den straddles the line between public and private worlds: the front door to the house is located on a commercial street, and yet its 'inner room' is reachable only by way of a remotely-operated door and a revolving bookcase. Both within and outside urban normalcy, the unique aspect of the den facilitates an illicit closeness amongst male members and illegal activity, such as gambling. In this way, Grand uses urban counter-culture to comment upon the permeability of borders—between public and private, morality and immorality, normalcy and abnormality—which affects the conflict between society and solitude at the crux of urban identity.

Before the increase in number and popularity of women's clubs in the 1890s, club culture was largely gendered male. Sir John Gilbert's pen and ink drawing 'Mrs Bicknell's Plan for the

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<sup>140</sup> Barbara Black, *A Room of His Own: A Literary-Cultural Study of Victorian Clubland* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), p. 194.

<sup>141</sup> Black, *A Room of His Own*, p. 194.

Garrick Club Smoking Room' (1870) demonstrates that the possibility of female encroachment on gentlemen's clubs was a source of anxiety. Gilbert depicts with confessed 'feelings of terror, alarm and indignation' women drinking, smoking, reclining and playing billiards in the smoking room of a men's club.<sup>142</sup> He captions the drawing with a plea for 'gentlemen calling themselves MEN to sternly put this sort of thing down'.<sup>143</sup> Josepha's encroachment upon the gambling den is, the narrator rightfully points out, 'intrepid' (79). But Colonel Perturbation's verbalised affront at Josepha's presence is cut short by the Man in the Scented Coat who is 'delight[ed]' by her 'perfectly unaffected simple [and] cheerful' manner (81). Josepha's seamless and benign integration within the den overturns Gilbert's depiction of the female interloper; rather than provoking feelings of 'terror, alarm and indignation', Josepha's presence in the den radically improves the men's demeanour.<sup>144</sup> In this way, Grand suggests that the emergence of new ideals and increased freedom for women may also prove liberating and beneficial to men.

'I could be as solitary as I chose, [but] also as sociable': a 'sanctum' of one's own

Josepha's preference for interior spaces that are at a physical remove from urban society reflects Grand's own desire to maintain levels of (rhetorical and literal) detachment from city life. It is also a thematic concern of the final two stories in the 'Josepha' trilogy. 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' and 'I Can't Explain It', are comparable to Grand's interviews in general illustrated magazines because they all claim that a home of one's own is necessary to the single woman's psychological wellbeing, and her social and professional advancement. The stories show the progressive effect of social and legal change after the turn of the century in their depiction of the 'bachelor girl' and the 'spinster flat' (as Emma Liggins terms the single woman and her home).<sup>145</sup> This change is demonstrated in one significant difference between the first and later two stories: in 'The Man in the Scented Coat' Josepha is staggering aimlessly on foot along a public road and depicted as an interloper in a male-coded space; in 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' and 'I Can't Explain It', she is the owner of a motorcar and a home of her own. In this way, 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable

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<sup>142</sup> John Gilbert, 'Mrs Bicknell's Plans for the Garrick Club Smoking Room' (1870), repr. in *Sir John Gilbert: Art and Imagination in the Victorian Age*, ed. by Spike Bucklow and Sally Woodcock (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), p. 55.

<sup>143</sup> Gilbert, 'Mrs Bicknell's Plans for the Garrick Club Smoking Room'.

<sup>144</sup> Grand supports the integration of men and women in clubs in her article 'On Clubs and the Question of Intelligence', *Woman at Home*, 9 (June 1900), pp. 839-42.

<sup>145</sup> Liggins explains that the term 'bachelor girl' was probably an Americanism which filtered into British parlance through the press. Emma Liggins, *Odd Women? Spinsters, Lesbians and Widows in British Women's Fiction, 1850-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 84.

Experience' and 'I Can't Explain It' show the impact of twentieth-century advancements in technology and legal reform on female autonomy.

The latter two stories also feature allusions to the 1890s. 'A Remarkable Experience' begins with a description of Josepha 'stopp[ing] the motor' outside her home and 'let[ting] herself in with a latch-key' (319-20). In Josepha's approach to her home, Grand combines the motorcar, a symbol of modern freedom, with a latch-key, the defining symbol of the New Woman at the *fin de siècle*.<sup>146</sup> Grand refers to a 'latch-key' again in 'I Can't Explain It' when Josepha locks her house before visiting her friends.<sup>147</sup> Both are invitations to the reader to see Josepha as a former-New Woman and to consider the differences and continuances between the female lived experience at the *fin de siècle* and in the twentieth century.

The final sections of this chapter argue that the uniting focus of Grand's 'Josepha' trilogy is its sustained conflict between Josepha's desires for solitariness and companionship, which is borne out between her aim for personal autonomy and the longstanding propensity to find women's purpose in their social attachments. Josepha's personal autonomy is invoked in these stories by the fact she owns a car and a home of her own. She also explicitly celebrates the sense of freedom that comes with being unmarried and living alone. However, Josepha's autonomy is disrupted in both stories by the appearance of a male-gendered phantom: 'strange experiences' which both confuse and arouse her. My analysis of the stories focuses on the remote location of Josepha's homes and Grand's representation of spinsterhood. I also address the stories' male-gendered phantoms and their role in disrupting Josepha's self-imposed isolation.

In contrast to 'The Man in the Scented Coat', each of the later 'Josepha' stories takes place in one of Josepha's own homes. This reverses the beginning of 'The Man in The Scented Coat': in the later two stories Josepha occupies a space of her own. The setting of 'I Can't Explain It' is 'a cosy little upstairs sitting-room in Josepha's town house' (291). In 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience', however, she and her friend are engaged in 'an evening *tete-a-tete*' as they smoke and drink coffee by the fireside in Josepha's suburban mansion. It is not clear whether Josepha has simultaneous tenure/ ownership of the townhouse and the mansion, or whether some time has passed and she has relocated between the narratives. It is

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<sup>146</sup> The cartoon 'Donna Quixote', which became a prevailing image of the New Woman at the *fin de siècle*, depicts an enthroned woman holding a latchkey above her head: *Punch* 28 April 1894, p. 195.

<sup>147</sup> Sarah Grand, 'I Can't Explain It', in *Variety* (London: Heinemann, 1922), repr. in *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. by Ann Heilmann, 4 vols (London: Routledge, 2000), IV, pp. 291-316 (p. 306). Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses and refer to Heilmann's collection.

clear, nonetheless, that Josepha has occupied at least four homes in her adult life: from her mansion in 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' she regales her friend with a story from her time spent living in a flat in London and from her townhouse in 'I Can't Explain It' she recalls a story from her time spent living in a gated residential estate. Her companion in 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' notes that Josepha had lived in 'so many places' (320). Like Mary in *The Wheel of God*, Josepha's attachment to the domestic space is provisional; she moves between homes as her circumstances change and does not profess a long-standing emotional attachment to one home over another. Egerton and Grand both suggest that their protagonists have surpassed the 'essential' notion of their domestic attachment.

The four domestic settings described in 'I Can't Explain It' and 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' are all comparable to Grand's flat in Sydney House. Grand emphasises that all of Josepha's homes—town house, city flat, suburban mansion, and house in a gated community—are removed from the city, either by considerable geographical remove or small (but significant) physical remove. 'I Can't Explain It' begins with a description of Josepha's present residence: a sitting-room in an upper-storey of the house which, like Grand's flat in Sydney House, is at some remove from the street below. Josepha underpins the relative seclusion of her home by remarking to her companion that "'One has to get out of the crowd periodically to save one's soul alive'" (292). The description of Josepha's home in 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' also emphasises its seclusion. The story begins with a detailed description of the 'beautiful old' house: it is a 'secluded abode [...] embowered in a garden, sheltered by forest trees, [and] defended by high stone walls' (320-1). The high wall and surrounding trees screen from observation the house and Josepha's 'comings and goings' (320). Its seclusion also limits the likelihood of unexpected visitors. The fortress-like aspect of the house is highly affective: her friend claims that '[t]o step into this peaceful paradise was to step out of the world of strife' (319). But Grand enforces an even greater remove between Josepha and the world beyond—the narrative takes place in another 'inner room', a sitting-room which Josepha describes as her 'own sanctum' (320). The sitting-room is accessed by a method closely resembling that of the gambling den in 'The Man in the Scented Coat'. In order to reach it, Josepha and her companion must travel through an unassuming 'narrow door', along a 'dark, damp, underground passage', up 'a narrow stairway, and through a final door concealed 'behind some tapestry' (320). The narrator identifies 'an air of mystery in this approach', but Josepha claims that its purpose is "'Seclusion, if you like, not mystery'" and argues that it answers a psychological need: "'I require seclusion now'", she explains (320).

At variance with its foreboding forest trees and reassuring stone wall, it emerges that Josepha's mansion in 'Remarkable Experience' does not occupy a remote location. Although the narrator describes the house as a 'secluded abode', it is, in fact, located close to the city (319-20). In the sitting-room, the narrator remarks that '[n]o one would have suspected that a turbulent city crouched so near without, like a beast of prey' or that 'the world was all round about, washing up to the very gates [of the house]' (319-21). The city also looms close in 'I Can't Explain It'. In the story's opening moments the conversation between Josepha and her companion is interrupted by the sound of the 'city clocks' striking midnight (291). In these ways, Grand reminds her reader that the urban-vortex continues to churn and roar beyond the cosy domestic setting. She also positions the two spaces—the home and the city—in direct opposition.

Josepha has a history of preferring to live at a remove from the city. Her previous homes—the flat in London and the house in a gated community—are also isolated to varying degrees. In 'I Can't Explain It', she recalls having found an 'ideal retreat' in the form of a dilapidated eighteenth-century house in a gated community called 'the Enclosure'. Josepha explains that as a resident of the Enclosure she 'could be as solitary as [she] chose, [but] also as sociable'" (292). She refers to her home in the Enclosure as her 'backwater', and her description emphasises its remove from the influences of contemporary society:

at the top of a steep street of dilapidated old houses and queer little shops I spied a gateway. Battered heraldic beasts upholding their battered shields ramped on the tall stone gate-posts; handsome old wrought iron gates drooping from their hinges stood wide open [...]. The crumbling gateway, evidently a relic of departed splendour, was the outpost of what had once been a fine private demesne. (292-3)

An 'impenetrable hedge of holly twenty feet high' and a metal railing protect the Enclosure on three sides from intrusion, but Grand also underpins its isolation through defamiliarisation and anachronistic allusion:

I stopped to look in [through the gates to the Enclosure] and it was as if I were gazing into by-gone days through an opening in time, so old-world, formal, spacious, satisfying was what I saw; so exactly like the grounds of a mansion in an eighteenth century print, urn and weeping willow, dark cypresses, stone vases, and all. (293)

Like the embowered mansion in 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience', the solitude of the Enclosure is highly affective; its unhurried, languid, 'old-world' atmosphere induces a hypnotic state in which, Josepha explains, she 'dreamt in solitude, luxuriously, that first long warm summer'" (296).

In 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience', Grand recalls another former home and a further example of an ideal retreat for the single, modern woman. Josepha describes her former residence as 'an ordinary, comfortable, common-place London flat', but on the top floor of a 'very high' building (324-9). Josepha tells her friend of the 'pleasure' with which she 'took possession' of a space that so fully-satisfied her need for isolation (324). Reflecting upon the first night that she spent alone in the flat, Josepha explains:

To me it was safe anchorage, a sheltered harbour after long buffeting on the open sea. My first night in it, when I went to bed, I fairly hugged myself, I was so thankful to be there—alone—with no one to interfere with me. [...] I had nothing to fear. I was free! (324)<sup>148</sup>

The position of Josepha's flat above the city alludes to her separation from urban society and its broader influences and this compounds the sense of autonomy already derived from living there independently. She celebrates her autonomy by 'hugging' herself, an expression of self-love.

Elsewhere in her fiction Grand attributes a woman's sense of personal safety to her isolation. Josepha's recollection of her first night in her flat is markedly similar to the first night that Beth spends alone after the dissolution of her marriage in *The Beth Book*:

When Beth went to her room that night, she experienced a strange sense of satisfaction which she could not account for until she found herself alone, with no fear of being disturbed. It seemed to her then that she had never before known what comfort was, never slept in such a delightful bed, so fresh and cool and sweet. She was like one who has been bathed and perfumed after the defilements of a long, dusty journey, and is able to rest in peace. As she stretched herself beneath the sheets she experienced a blessed sensation of relief [...].<sup>149</sup>

The journey accounted for in *The Beth Book*, from family home and domestic routine to private space and bodily autonomy, reflects an important transitional moment in suffrage which is often borne out in feminist autobiographies of the period. Autobiographies by Evelyn Sharp (*Unfinished Adventure*, 1933) and Syrett (*The Sheltering Tree*, 1939) demonstrate that many women who could afford the luxury chose to live alone in the 1890s and early 1900s. Novels including *The Beth Book* and Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), which showed emancipated women leaving the family home and carving out a private sphere untouched by maternal and wifely duties, also unsettled Victorian notions of female dependency and women's essential ties to the home.

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<sup>148</sup> Kersley uses part of this quotation in her biography, *Darling Madame: Sarah Grand and Devoted Friend*, p. 66. However, Kersley erroneously and misleadingly frames the quotation as biographical evidence that Grand's flat in Kensington 'filled her with pleasure', rather than a quotation taken from Grand's fiction writing.

<sup>149</sup> Sarah Grand, *The Beth Book* (London: Virago, 1980), pp. 417-8.

In each of her four homes, at a remove from the city, its influences and its people, Josepha contends that she leads an autonomous existence. Unlike Mary Desmond, whose ‘own sanctum’ is a small cubicle located in a shared room in a busy boarding-house, Josepha ostensibly has full control over her home-space and its borders. She is able to admit those whom she chooses and to keep out all others. However, the distinction between Mary’s and Josepha’s ways of living unravels as the ‘Josepha’ stories develop. In both ‘I Can’t Explain It’ and ‘Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience’, Josepha’s autonomy and self-imposed isolation are disrupted when two phantoms permeate her home, affecting her relationship with the space and interfering with her sense of self. These ghostly manifestations—especially Josepha’s insistence that they are *male*—speak to a need for companionship which contradicts her self-imposed isolation. In these stories, Grand shows the modern spinster, the bachelor girl of the 1890s, grappling with an emerging sense of ‘incompleteness’.

#### The problem of the ‘modern spinster’

The 1890s saw the emergence of the ‘bachelor girl’ in fiction and in fact. This term, Liggins explains, applied to ‘young, independent female workers’, particularly those who were ‘employed in the [city’s] new shops and offices’ and those who ‘reaped the benefits of increased sexual freedom in a new heterosocial culture’.<sup>150</sup> The process which saw the ‘old maid’ recast as the ‘bachelor girl’ suggested that female independence was becoming more socially acceptable. The bachelor girl of the 1890s, unlike the ‘old maid’ before her, was fun-loving, sexually free and used in the periodical press as a sign of progress. Grand wrote of this shift in 1898 in an article for *Young Woman*. In ‘At What Age Should Girls Marry?’, she notes that the tradition of ‘jeering at “old maids”’ had had given way to ‘envy[ing]’ the ‘independence and varied interests’ of ““glorified spinsters””.<sup>151</sup> Approval of the bachelor girl grew with the turn of the century and celebratory articles by successful female journalists played a key role in the transformation of public opinion. Margaret Peterson, in her article ‘Bachelor Girls’, published in *Woman at Home* in 1915, explains that she is ‘very proud indeed to belong to [the] ranks’ of ‘bachelor girls’, and offers seasoned advice to women readers who were planning to enter the city as single working girls.<sup>152</sup>

Although she had celebrated the emergence of the bachelor girl in the 1890s, Grand later challenged the idea that she was a sign of progress. In 1913 she wrote ‘The Case of the Modern

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<sup>150</sup> Liggins, *Odd Women?*, p. 77.

<sup>151</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘At What Age Should Girls Marry?’, *Young Woman*, 7 (1898), pp. 161-4 (p. 163).

<sup>152</sup> Margaret Peterson, ‘Bachelor Girls’, *Woman at Home*, 12 (1915), pp. 432-3.

Spinster’, an article for *Pall Mall Magazine*. She outlines the veritable problem faced by the unmarried woman:

The single woman of means can live pretty much as she likes nowadays, but she too finds that there are drawbacks to her independence. [...] She may live luxuriously, she may make work for herself, make herself useful in some public capacity or in her private life. There are many “causes” to which she can devote herself, plenty of subjects to be mastered; she may even have talent of her own to cultivate. But from not one of these things does she derive full satisfaction.<sup>153</sup>

Grand outlines the cry of the modern spinster, which echoes the ‘prayer’ of the New Woman in ‘The New Woman and the Old’, published fifteen years earlier: “Let me be myself, let me stand alone!” That is her cry, and there she may stand if she likes, alone, but, as she soon discovers, [...] being alone, she is incomplete (143). Grand goes on to outline the importance of marital and maternal attachments to a woman’s wellbeing. She claims that without these attachments, the “delightful feeling of freedom” which comes with ‘be[ing] one’s own mistress’ ceases to exist and, in its place, ‘a sense of loss [...] grows’: the spinster finds that ‘[m]ateless, she is lonesome; childless, she is incomplete [...]’ (143-4)

Grand was not the only emancipated woman to declare the childless and unmarried woman to be ‘incomplete’. Anita Levy points out that the early twentieth century saw ‘the publication of countless articles, advice columns, short stories and novels, many of them authored by female intellectuals, representing [...] the domestic female as newly redundant.’<sup>154</sup> Lucy Bland suggests that negative portrayals of the bachelor girl and her lifestyle early in the twentieth century emanated from the imperialist challenge posed by Germany, Japan and the United States of America: the ‘new emphasis on breeding healthy children for the empire’ meant that ‘spinsters’ barrenness was unacceptable.<sup>155</sup> The myth of a ‘lost generation’ resonates in Vera Brittain’s poem ‘The Superfluous Woman’ (1920).<sup>156</sup> The speaker, the superfluous woman of the title, hurries home through the ‘city streets/ Grown dark and hot with eager multitudes’; ‘respite waits’ at home but, she wonders, ‘who will look for my coming?’,

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<sup>153</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘The Case of the Modern Spinster’, *Pall Mall Magazine* (1913), repr. in *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Journalistic Writings and Contemporary Reception*, pp. 138-45 (p. 143). Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses and refer to Heilmann’s collection.

<sup>154</sup> Anita Levy, ‘Gendered Labor, the Woman Writer and Dorothy Richardson’, *Novel*, 25 (1991), pp. 50-70 (p. 50). The 1851 census shows that there were 383,422 more women than men living in Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century: *Great Britain Historical GIS Project* (2004) <<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk>> [accessed 13 May 2015].

<sup>155</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke, 1995; repr. 2002), p. 171.

<sup>156</sup> Vera Brittain was bereaved of her fiancé in the First World War and scholars have described her poetry as speaking for the ‘the lost generation of women deprived of the chance to marry and have children’: Katherine Holden, ‘Imaginary Widows: Spinsters, Marriage, and the “Lost Generation” in Britain after the Great War’, *Journal of Family History*, 30 (2005), 388-409 (p. 403).



‘who will seek me at nightfall?’ and ‘who will give me my children?’.<sup>157</sup> Like Grand, Brittain’s literary works are often inflected by her own lived experience. It is not unreasonable to consider that Grand’s change of opinion about the spinster woman between 1898 and 1913 was a reflection of her growing loneliness in the decades after the dissolution of her marriage.

Certainly, the ‘Josepha’ stories are informed by the idea that the emancipated woman may suffer from a realisation of her own incompleteness. Although Josepha initially revels in her sense of freedom and isolation under cover of the fog in ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’, she still chooses to ‘claim protection’ from the two gentlemen. By allowing the men to set the course of her journey she terminates her autonomy and when she infiltrates the gambling den she must play by the club’s rules. A similar case can be made for ‘Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience’ and ‘I Can’t Explain It’. In both stories, Josepha initially sees her personal independence as a cause for celebration: she describes her situation as ‘free’ in ‘A Remarkable Experience’ and ‘safe’ in ‘I Can’t Explain It’ (324; 292). However, “‘that delightful feeling of freedom’” to which Grand refers in ‘The Case of the Modern Spinster’ is replaced over the course of the narratives by the overwhelming desire for companionship. In both stories this desire is answered by the male-gendered phantoms, which not only disrupt Josepha’s autonomy but also become ambiguous sources of pleasure.

#### The phantom footstep in ‘Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience’ (1922)

The phantom in ‘Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience’ does not ‘appear’ to Josepha in the form of an apparition. It exists only as a sound—a disembodied footstep ‘walking [...] up and down [...] interminably’ on the roof of Josepha’s flat (324). The sound begins on Josepha’s first night alone in the flat and it recurs at ‘irregular intervals’, always at night and when Josepha is in bed (325). Josepha cannot offer a reasonable explanation for the sound. She notes that she lives on the upper-most floor of the building and so concludes that the footstep cannot possibly belong to another of the building’s residents. Nor is the footstep a figment of Josepha’s imagination, because her brothers also hear and complain of the sound when they visit. Although she does not ‘see’ an apparition, Josepha genders the footstep as male. She explains that the footstep was ‘a kind of sentry-go step; stopping from time to time, as you see a sentry on duty stop at his post’ (324). In fact, the physical ‘conjuring’ of the phantom occurs solely in Josepha’s imagination: she ‘pictured him as he paced to and fro. [He

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<sup>157</sup> Vera Brittain, ‘The Superfluous Woman’, in *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (London: Virago, 1978), p. 535.

was] soldierly, I was sure [...]. A fine looking man, and well bred. Straight nose, moustache drooping at the corners of the mouth, like a Viking's' (324-5). Josepha admits that she 'felt attracted' to the image and decides that the sound is 'companionable' (325). Although she cannot explain the source of the footstep, she believes that it belongs to 'someone who was thinking about me—kindly' (325). The fact that Josepha genders the footstep male *and* ascribes 'soldiery' and 'kindly' characteristics suggests that the source of her attraction lies in the idea of being under *male* protection.

The footstep visits Josepha most nights when she is in bed and, as a result, her initial surprise at the sound gives way to expectation: she explains that 'I always listened for it, and I was disappointed when I did not hear it, [but] gladdened when I did' (325). When answered by the anticipated sound, the routine of listening culminates in Josepha's sexual arousal: she feels 'a strange expansion of the heart, a glow, wholly pleasurable' (325). By listening for the footstep Josepha relinquishes her autonomy and revises her sense of self. The pleasure that she first experienced when lying alone in her bed is replaced with the yearning for male companionship. She also figures herself as subordinate to the footstep, describing it as 'a conquering power' and her role as 'a kind of enslavement' (326). Josepha's description of her subordinate place in a master-slave relationship is suggestive of a sense of 'completeness' which comes from being anchored or bound to another. The troubling implications of this idea are rendered through an ironically aborted utterance: 'Yet, oh! but I was glad to be enslaved! He drew me, drew me, doting—' (326).

This unsuccessful attempt to fully explain her infatuation foreshadows the narrative's climax. The footstep visits Josepha less frequently as time goes on but, in spite of this, its influence continues to grow: Josepha explains that she 'missed him—not less but more as time passed' (330-1). The narrative's climax occurs during one of these long periods of absence. One night, Josepha claims,

I started broad awake. I was standing in the middle of the room in the dark. And I knew that, before I awoke, my intention had been to throw myself out of the window. [...] And what I felt [...] was exhilaration. It was as if I had anticipated, in the act, an ecstasy of sensation. (331)

The source of Josepha's attraction appears to have shifted: her attraction to the footstep becomes an unconscious inclination toward her bedroom window. Just as the footstep arouses sexual pleasure, Josepha believes she will achieve 'ecstasy' in the act of suicide. The climactic hypothetical image—of a woman falling from an upper-storey window to the street below—corresponds with the idea of Josepha's emotional free-fall throughout the narrative and

underpins her lack of agency. Josepha's inclination toward the window and its symbolic connotations resonate with the spinster's sense of 'incompleteness' and the overriding desire for companionship.

The 'strange neighbour' in 'I Can't Explain It' (1922)

Unlike the disembodied footstep in 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience', the phantom in 'I Can't Explain It' is a physical manifestation. Josepha sees a 'white face' looking out of an upper-storey window in a neighbouring house in the Enclosure (297). Josepha knows that the house is unoccupied and so, similarly to the footstep in 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience', she struggles to reasonably explain its presence. Josepha also becomes aware that other people, including the postman and a group of builders, have seen the same face at the same window. Keen for an explanation, she wonders if it might be 'an effect of the light' on the glass; however, she realises that the face is present regardless of whether she observes the suspicious window from the landing in her house, her front door, or her driveway (304). Even more puzzling is the fact that the face's 'expression' is not fixed, but changes. Although Josepha cannot reasonably explain the presence of the face, she nevertheless claims that its shifting expression 'was reassuring' (304). With this, Josepha and the face engage in a non-verbal exchange:

"Who am I to be cocksure that the dim confines of existence are not haunted by phantoms from another world?" I asked myself, and then I addressed the appearance: "At all events, let us be friends", I bargained. The eyes gleamed responsively an instant; then all that I could see in the window was shining glass reflecting the clouds. (304)

Josepha interprets the face's vague response as a treaty of friendship and, afterwards, it becomes a frequent feature at the window. As is the case in 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience', Josepha's initial surprise gives way to expectation. She explains that,

incessantly, from the staircase window or from the drive as I went and came, I saw my strange neighbour looking out at me. I became so used to him that I took his presence for granted. It was his occasional absences that surprised me and made me think about him [...]. I [...] took him for granted, as one takes any common object one is accustomed to see. (304-5)

Despite the fact that the face lacks any obvious markers of masculinity—it is described only as 'white' by everyone who sees it—Josepha chooses to gender it male. Accordingly, Josepha begins referring to the face using the masculine and corresponding possessive pronoun: 'the face' becomes 'him' or 'he', and 'the appearance' becomes 'his presence' (305).

Josepha insists that the face was ‘incessantly’ present in the neighbour’s window. However, Grand places emphasis on Josepha’s persistency, rather than that of the face. Josepha’s ‘surprise’ at the face’s ‘occasional absenc[e]’ implies that she is incessantly looking for the face; she is, in fact, looking for the face more often than it appears (305). Checking for the face becomes part of Josepha’s daily routine in much the same way as does listening for the footstep in ‘Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience’. However, the nature of her attachment to the face is more ambiguous than her attachment to the footstep: she admits to ‘doting’ on the footstep, but insists that she ‘neither liked nor disliked’ and ‘neither feared nor trusted’ the face at the window (305). At first, Josepha’s professed indifference seems to be supported by the fact that she forgets about the face when a friend’s daughter visits for the summer. When the child is in her care, Josepha finds that the face ‘ceased to appear at the window’ and just as suddenly ‘ceased to haunt my mind’ (306). The immediacy and dependence of a child draws Josepha’s attention from the face but, once the child leaves at the end of the summer, she finds herself ‘at a loose end’ and her attention (though not necessarily her affection) is transferred back to the face (306).

The transference of Josepha’s attention back to the face culminates in a perilous experience. Returning home in a rainstorm after visiting friends, Josepha finds that she has, somewhat symbolically, forgotten her key and is locked out of her house. She discovers that a window on the ground-floor of the neighbouring house is open and so, grateful for the promise of shelter, climbs into the house. In the ‘inky blackness’ of the house, however, her gratefulness is quickly overturned:

At the same instant something—clutched me from behind. [...] But “clutched” is not the right word. It was not hands that were laid upon me. It was [...] a force—something that acted as a magnet acts on a needle. What I felt was a tug—a sudden pull [...] into the house. (308)

Josepha suggests that she is physically pulled by an external force that exists within the house. Although she is clearly frightened by the effect of the force on her body, the feeling of ‘completeness’ and the idea that this may be a ‘natural inclination’ resonates in the image of a magnet acting on a needle.

Atkins has argued that the face at the window is a rhetorical device used to comment on the ‘significant advance in the education and perceptions of women and their roles since [...] the 1890s’.<sup>158</sup> Atkins claims that the face is ‘the ghost of the New Woman’s earlier struggle

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<sup>158</sup> Atkins, ‘Towards a Critical Edition of the Short Fiction of Sarah Grand’, p. 82.

against gendered double standards and sexual impurity'.<sup>159</sup> This analysis does not satisfactorily explain Josepha's attraction to the face, nor does it explain why others (notably, men) can also see it. Instead, I would argue that the significance of the face and, indeed, its attraction, lies in Josepha's decision to gender it as male. Josepha projects her desire for male companionship onto the face and uses it to counteract her sense of incompleteness on a daily basis. The debilitating power of this sense of incompleteness is evoked by images of destruction which conclude both narratives. Contrary to Atkins' argument, Grand suggests that very little has changed since the decades before; the emancipated woman still resembles a solitary, lonely figure.

### Grand's supernatural studies from life

Grand's use of the supernatural genre in the two later 'Josepha' stories reflects her personal life-long interest in spirituality and supernatural phenomena, which is revealed through her letters, fiction, and the personal memoirs of friends. Grand often discussed 'the realm of spiritualism' with Singers-Bigger.<sup>160</sup> Detailed accounts of these conversations in Singers-Bigger's diary show that Grand attended at least one séance (although she admits bitterly that her friend 'got all the answers'), believed that a friend 'possessed the gift of automatic writing', and expressed a keen interest in Rudolf Steiner's version of theosophy, Anthroposophy.<sup>161</sup> Heilmann's research has shown that there is no evidence of Grand ever having been a member of the Theosophical Society.<sup>162</sup> However, Grand met with Henry Steel Olcott, the co-founder and first President of the Society, in 1895.<sup>163</sup> She also took a keen interest in her granddaughter's supposed 'psychical powers'.<sup>164</sup> Beth, Grand's granddaughter, shared her grandmother's interest in the supernatural, but was arguably more self-assured in following and integrating herself within spiritual movements. Beth became a member of the Rudolf Steiner Society and Grand was shortly invited to join, but it is unclear if she accepted

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<sup>159</sup> Atkins, 'Towards a Critical Edition of the Short Fiction of Sarah Grand', p. 81.

<sup>160</sup> Singers-Bigger, diary entry, 3 June 1928, in 'Ideala's Gift', unpublished diary held by Bath Central Library, Bath.

<sup>161</sup> Singers-Bigger, diary entry, 3 June 1928. Singers-Bigger also recalls a conversation with Grand in which they discussed 'the realm of spiritualism': 'She told me she had attended a séance once [...] [and] that [a friend] had discovered she possessed the gift of automatic writing.'

<sup>162</sup> Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 101. Heilmann could not find Grand listed in the Theosophical Society's membership records under her pseudonym, maiden or married names. However, it is worth noting that the Society's records are incomplete for the period 1923/4 until the mid-1940s.

<sup>163</sup> In his memoir, Henry Steel Olcott records having met Grand in 1895 during his visit to London: *Old Diary Leaves, 1893-6: The Only Authentic History of the Theosophical Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1932; repr. 2011), p. 333.

<sup>164</sup> Grand, letter to Gladys Singers-Bigger, 25 April 1936, in *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand: Selected Letters*, p. 225; Singers-Bigger, diary entries, 23 March 1930 and 13 January 1931, in 'Ideala's Gift'.

the invitation. Although she may have been uncomfortable about joining a society, Grand pursued her interest in spiritualism in her own time: in 1936 she recorded having read ‘an approach to Rudolf Steiner by Miss Faulkner Jones, lectures by Rudolf Steiner [and] *Reincarnation* by [Friedrich] Rittelmeyer’.<sup>165</sup> She also experimented with the idea of reincarnation in *The Beth Book*.<sup>166</sup>

Singers-Bigger’s account of her conversation with Grand testifies to Grand having based her stories ‘I Can’t Explain It’ and ‘Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience’ on her own supernatural experiences. In May 1927, Singers-Bigger records in her diary a conversation with Grand, in which the latter directly attributes the events of ‘I Can’t Explain It’ to her own lived experience. Singers-Bigger writes,

I mentioned her short story ‘I Can’t Explain It—’, in the volume entitled “Variety” and how it had given me a nightmare! [Grand] laughed and told me that much of the story was true. She had actually seen the face at the window [...]. The dénouement was also true; when they had looked again there had been no window to be seen.<sup>167</sup>

This evidence from Singers-Bigger’s diary establishes a link between ‘I Can’t Explain It’ and Grand’s own supernatural experience. At the very least, it demonstrates that Grand sought to legitimise the supernatural content of her stories by aligning them with her ‘studies from life’.

*The Bath Herald* published an article in April 1925 which also establishes a link between Grand’s supernatural stories and her lived experience. The article reported that ‘a remarkable story is going the rounds just now concerning a strange experience of Madame Sarah Grand when she was living in a flat in the Kensington district of London’.<sup>168</sup> It goes on to explain that

Madame Grand [...] could never rid herself of the idea that there was someone else in the room where she was writing. One night she awoke with the feeling that she was being forced towards the window. [...] Madame Grand then made enquiries and found that a man and his wife had both thrown themselves out of the window [of the flat] and killed themselves.<sup>169</sup>

The reporter for *The Bath Herald* does not explicitly link reported events to Grand’s short story, ‘Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience’ but, nevertheless, the events described in the article bear a striking resemblance to the story’s narrative. It is not clear from the article as to the origin of the ‘remarkable story [...] going the rounds’, but it is entirely possible that it was a

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<sup>165</sup> Quoted in Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*, p. 258, n. 70.

<sup>166</sup> Beth believes that even if she were to drown ‘it wouldn’t be the end’. She explains to her friend, Alfred, ‘We have been here in this world before, you and I, and we shall come again’. *The Beth Book*, p. 93.

<sup>167</sup> Singers-Bigger, diary entry, 15 May 1927, in ‘Ideala’s Gift’.

<sup>168</sup> Mayoress & Her Haunted Flat: Weird London Experience’, *Bath Herald*, 3 April 1925 [n. p.].

<sup>169</sup> ‘Mayoress & Her Haunted Flat’, *Bath Herald*.

discreet promotional ploy on Grand's part, a way of harnessing current interest in the supernatural.

Evidence that 'I Can't Explain It' and 'A Remarkable Experience' were inspired by Grand's lived experience allows us to identify them, like 'The Man in the Scented Coat', as two further examples of her 'studies from life'. However, identifying two ghost stories as 'studies from life' seemingly problematises both genres, as well as the known aims of New Woman fiction. Grand and other New Woman writers claimed that the accurate depiction of women's lives was the main aim of their fiction, but to what extent can supernatural forces be represented in feminist texts without undermining the aim of representing the real lives of women? Most scholarship on New Woman literature, especially studies which engage with the political agenda of the genre, has focussed on its use of realism. However, as Hilary Grimes has recently averred, the parameters of being 'true to life' can be reasonably extended beyond realism to include the representation of a woman's 'inner-life'.<sup>170</sup> Grand's ghost stories are 'true to life' in both a practical and a symbolic sense. By charting the depletion of female agency in the presence of the male phantoms, Grand is able to allude to the deleterious effect of marriage on a woman's sense of self without the usual trappings of a romance narrative. The phantoms are also resonant metaphors for the spectral indeterminacy, or incompleteness, of the New Woman and, after her, the bachelor girl and the modern spinster.

The 'Josepha' stories depict a woman enjoying and actively seeking physical solitude, and yet yearning for companionship. The fog in 'The Man in the Scented Coat' and the male phantoms in 'I Can't Explain It' and 'Josepha Recounts a Remarkable Experience' serve largely the same purpose. By shielding her from view, the fog allows Josepha to evade public opinion; she is able to revel in a new experience without being completely and irrevocably judged by her actions. Grand thereby overturns gender-bound convention whilst also characterising the New Woman as non-threatening. Similarly, the male phantoms in 'I Can't Explain It' and 'A Remarkable Experience' allow Josepha to experience male companionship without resigning herself to the sexual, social, and political control of marriage or, alternatively, the charge of immorality that came with a free-marriage. The 'Josepha' stories depict the struggles of a woman who, although enjoying the new freedoms available to her sex, is acutely conditioned to understand her solitariness as an indication of her incompleteness.

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<sup>170</sup> Hilary Grimes, *The Late Victorian Gothic: Mental Science, the Uncanny, and Scenes of Writing* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 138.

*Flânerie and contested urban space in The Yellow Book (1894-7)*

‘One realizes the place much more [when] alone I think – it is all there – you don’t feel it through another mind [...]. I wonder if Art [...] is rather an inhuman thing?’

— Charlotte Mew (1914)<sup>1</sup>

This thesis has so far demonstrated the effect of physical and psychological solitariness on the modern urban literary subject. It has examined how Levy, Egerton and Grand grappled with the conflicting desires for solitude and society throughout their literary careers, and identified this conflict in their literary texts: all three authors show the limiting effect of society on female subjectivity and attest to the positive effect of physical and psychological isolation. Examining the distinction between public and private spaces and women’s movement within and between these spaces has been central to my analysis. I have shown that Egerton, Grand and Levy challenged the separate and opposing representations of public and private spaces by overturning essentialist notions of their (gendered) social purpose. Although Egerton and Grand both depict women entering public space in the city, they limit their capacity as observers and free-agents: Mary’s movement through London is obstructed by the city’s crowds and Josepha’s surroundings are shrouded by the fog. By undermining the agency of their women walkers, Egerton and Grand uphold their respectability.

This chapter examines what happens when a solitary woman occupies public, urban space and is given free-rein to walk, ramble and stroll as she pleases. I use the act of *flânerie* as a literal example of the concomitant desires for society and solitude: the *flâneur* is depicted as a solitary figure, and yet the act of *flânerie* calls for their sustained and (supposedly) objective awareness of other people. As Lauren Elkin points out, *flânerie* resonates with a conflict at the crux of the urban experience: is the *flâneur/flâneuse* an individual, or a part of the crowd? By extension, do they want to be conspicuous or to blend in, to attract or escape the gaze, be remarkable or unremarked-upon?<sup>2</sup> Charles Baudelaire alludes to this conflict in his essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’. He describes the contact between the *flâneur* and their environment in essential terms: the crowd is to the *flâneur* ‘as the air is [to] birds and water [to] fishes. His

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Mew, letter to Edith Oliver, 8 April 1914, quoted in Penelope Fitzgerald, *Charlotte Mew and Her Friends* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Lauren Elkin identifies these questions as indicative of ‘the key problem at the heart of the urban experience’: *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016), p. 2.



passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd'.<sup>3</sup> But Baudelaire also insists that the *flâneur* must maintain a level of quasi-detachment from the crowd: his aims are '[t]o be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world'.<sup>4</sup> Edgar Allan Poe's eponymous story of *flânerie* raises the question about the possibility of maintaining subjective agency in the city: is the protagonist of 'The Man of the Crowd' one who follows, or is followed?

Even for the male *flâneur*, *flânerie* does not signify pure and unadulterated freedom. As Elkin reminds us in relation to 'The Man of the Crowd', the words 'I am' and 'I follow' are identical in French: *je suis*.<sup>5</sup> To compound the problem for the female walker, *flânerie* is a male tradition. Deborah Epstein Nord, in her seminal work, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, accounts for the difficulty faced by the female walker, in both fiction and reality, at the turn of the century. She explains that the insertion of a female subject into 'a cultural and literary tradition that habitually relegates her to the position of object, symbol, and marker' does more than 'unsettle her domestic and private identity; it threatens her respectability, her chastity, her very femininity'.<sup>6</sup> Baudelaire's claim that the aim of *flânerie*—'[t]o be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home'—is especially contentious if we consider the problematic relationship, established in the previous three chapters, between women and 'home' at the *fin de siècle*. In 1888, Amy Levy went as far as to describe 'the *flâneuse* of St James Street, latch-key in pocket and eye-glasses on the nose' as 'a creature of the imagination'.<sup>7</sup> Levy was one of the first women to refer to the *flâneuse* in her writing, but she adheres to the conservative tendency of using the term to describe a female *equivalent* to the *flâneur*. Walking women were everywhere to be seen in London at the *fin de siècle*, and Levy was one of them; 'A London Plane-Tree' may depict a woman trapped behind a window, but her poetry collections, short stories and novels are full of descriptions of women walking around and observing the streets of London and other European cities. Elkin provides a progressive critique of Levy's statement, suggesting that to argue for the *flâneuse*'s non-existence is 'to limit the ways that women have interacted with the city to the way that *men* have interacted with the city'.<sup>8</sup> The *flâneuse* could not be and was not simply a male version of the *flâneur*. A woman's reasons for taking to the

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. by Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), pp. 1-40 (p. 9).

<sup>4</sup> Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life' (p. 9).

<sup>5</sup> Elkin, *Flâneuse*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Amy Levy, 'Women and Club Life', *Women's World* (1888), repr. in *The Complete Novels and Selected Writings of Amy Levy*, ed. by Melvyn New (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), pp. 532-8 (p. 536).

<sup>8</sup> Elkin, *Flâneuse*, p. 11.

streets, her aims, and the difficulties that she endured were entirely different to the *flâneur*'s. If it was difficult for men to control whether they were seen or not seen, subject or object of the street, it was nigh-on impossible for women to control the symbolic parameters of their own city wanderings.

This chapter examines short stories and artworks published in *The Yellow Book* (1894-7) which depict solitary women assuming the role of the *flâneuse*. It considers the extent to which these works use the *flâneuse* to invoke crises of female consciousness: how, by moving out into the street, these women are seen to be rejecting the traditional (domestic) home, the extent to which the walking woman is, instead, depicted as being 'at home' in the street, and whether their interrogation of and assimilation within the cityscape dissolves the female-object/male-subject paradigm. The overarching aim of this chapter is to consider the ways in which *Yellow Book* contributors used the lone female figure as a tool to undermine the male gaze, contest the gendered ownership of urban space, and challenge hegemonic ideals which pushed female consciousness to the periphery of modern urban experience.

I use *The Yellow Book* (1894-7) in its capacity as a 'cultural commentator' of the 1890s and a 'microcosm of the fin de siècle'.<sup>9</sup> *The Yellow Book* was published quarterly, with some of the period's most influential names in literature and art at its helm. English draughtsman Aubrey Beardsley was its art editor until he was forced from his post after Oscar Wilde's arrest in April 1895, and expatriate American novelist Henry Harland was its literary editor until it ceased publication in 1897. It was also published by John Lane at The Bodley Head, the man and publishing firm responsible for catapulting Egerton to fame with the publication of *Keynotes* in 1893. *The Yellow Book* carried fiction, poetry and artwork that explored a contemporary aesthetic shared by the other works considered throughout this thesis. Most often *The Yellow Book* offered multifarious depictions of urban life and the urban encounter: its short fiction, artwork and poetry showed bodies coming into contact with or considering the possibility of other bodies, often against the backdrop of the city. Mark W. Turner describes the urban encounter in many works of *Yellow Book* fiction as 'a fraught exchange, precisely because it breaks the rules of the city, forcing connection, rather than reinforcing separation'.<sup>10</sup> Somewhat differently, this chapter examines the role and implication of separateness in *The Yellow Book*'s representations of modern subjectivity.

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<sup>9</sup> Kate Krueger Henderson, 'Mobility and Modern Consciousness in George Egerton's and Charlotte Mew's *Yellow Book* Stories', *English Literature in Transition*, 54 (2011), 185-211 (p. 187); Simon Houfe, *Fin de Siècle: The Illustrators of the 'Nineties* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1992), p. 83.

<sup>10</sup> Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), p. 95.

Recent studies have averred that *The Yellow Book*'s significance—and, arguably, its biggest achievement—was its sense of balance. Although the quarterly aimed to showcase innovations in form and genre, it also strove to balance 'old' and 'new' representations of city life. In the pages of *The Yellow Book*, figures of 'new literature', such as Egerton, Max Beerbohm, Arthur Symons and George Moore, were joined by canonical writers, such as Henry James. Similarly, Richard Le Gallienne reflects that 'the shock' of artwork by Beardsley was tempered by the work of 'respectable' artists, such as Sir Frederic Leighton, and children's book illustrators, including Mabel Dearmer.<sup>11</sup> Turner argues that the periodical found its modern identity in its element of mix: 'there is no single urban vision offered in the pages of *The Yellow Book*', he explains, 'and it is this feature [...] that makes [it] appear so modern'.<sup>12</sup> This chapter considers how the periodical balanced representations of women-as-object with other works which explored female subjectivity and lived experience. The periodical's explicit invitation to experimental works of art and literature offered the opportunity for women writers and artists to 'show themselves' against the city. Many of the female-authored works published in *The Yellow Book* made use of new forms and techniques and offered non-traditional perspectives in order to undermine (or at least challenge) the hegemony which pushed the lived experience of women and other marginalised subjects to the periphery of 'collective' urban life. Over the course of this chapter, I assess the impact of woman as object, subject, and artist upon the periodical's profitability and reputation.

*The Yellow Book* played a significant role in bringing about the increased popularity of the short story form at the *fin de siècle*, as well as experimentalism in the genre. It also gave new and experimental writers, many of whom were women, the opportunity to write alternative literary responses to the city. 'A Lost Masterpiece': A City Mood '93', by Egerton (volume one), and 'Passed', by Mew (volume two), are evidence to this effect. An aim of this chapter is to show how Egerton and Mew used impressionistic formal techniques in their stories to facilitate their accounts of urban solitude: how they focussed on sensory details to render the feelings of claustrophobia, isolation, and fear. Kate Krueger has identified the stories' use of literary impressionism as a means of '[dissolving] spatial and social segregation' and recreating the city as 'a modern and potentially more egalitarian cosmopolitan space'.<sup>13</sup> Krueger argues that the stories redeploy impressionistic techniques to blur the distinction between self and

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Le Gallienne, *The Romantic '90s* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company 1925), pp. 228.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Turner, 'Urban Encounters and Visual Play in *The Yellow Book*', in *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*, ed. by Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 138-60 (p. 150).

<sup>13</sup> Kate Krueger, *British Women Writers and the Short Story, 1850-1930: Reclaiming Social Space* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 111.

other, subject and object, and the realms of the real, fantastic, rational and irrational, that they challenge—and, at best, dissolve—the hegemony of spectatorship which identified women as objects and men as subjects in the urban literary tradition. Whilst Krueger accounts for the use of impressionistic techniques throughout the stories, I focus specifically on their depiction of the solitary woman, arguing that Mew and Egerton used impressionistic techniques, firstly, to render the terror of city life, secondly, to underpin the female subject's isolation, and, thirdly, to open up an imaginary space between reality and unreality in which it was possible to construct modern, female consciousness in the contexts of her historical estrangement and exclusion, and her future emancipation.<sup>14</sup> The women in these works face the same problem as the *flâneur*: they want to see and to experience but, in turn, desire to be *seen* and *experienced* on their own terms. By exposing themselves to the city, by undermining the male gaze, and by seeking isolation, the female figures in this selection of *The Yellow Book* work disrupt the narrative which sought to make them eternally 'readable'.

#### New literature for new markets

Egerton and Mew harnessed the growing sense of 'fit' between short story, literary impressionism, and the periodical with their *flâneuse* narratives. The short story was still a relatively new genre. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Harold Orel notes, the novel was understood to be 'the central commodity' in the publishing marketplace, and short stories a 'by-product' of the novel-writing process.<sup>15</sup> The maligned status of the short story was underpinned by the fact that generic theorisation of the form failed to gather significant pace in the first half of the nineteenth century. Poe, who was widely regarded by post-war critics as the progenitor of the short story in Britain and the United States of America, was also, in a review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* in 1842, one of the first people to attempt an

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<sup>14</sup> The term 'literary impressionism' was first used by Ferdinand Brunetière in his article, 'L'Impressionnisme dans le Roman' (1879). Brunetière defined literary impressionism as 'a systematic transposition of the means of expression of an art, which is the art of painting, into the domain of another art, which is the art of writing': Ferdinand Brunetière, 'L'Impressionnisme dans le Roman', trans. by Melissa C. Reimer, 'Katherine Mansfield: A Colonial Impressionist' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Canterbury, 2010), p. 51, n. 106. Ninety-six years later, J. Theodore Johnson Jr. attempted a detailed extrapolation of the term: 'Literary Impressionism [...] consists of such aspects as a fresh, pictorial way of seeing and translating reality wherein a few elements serve to suggest a total impression': 'Literary Impressionism in France: A Survey of Criticism', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 13 (1973), 271-297 (p. 271). Recently, Krueger defined literary impressionism thus: '[it] rel[ies] on suggestions of atmosphere and mood, it subordinates plot, fragments form, and intensifies affective responses in order to evoke the "dynamic feeling [...] of life itself": Krueger, *British Women Writers and the Short Story*, p. 111.

<sup>15</sup> Harold Orel, *The Victorian Short Story: Development and Triumph of a Literary Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 2. Orel identifies Dickens's serialisation of 'The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club' (1836-7) as an example of a longer narrative being repackaged as a series of short stories which, when put together, formed an overarching narrative.

explanation of the unique aims and techniques of ‘the short prose narrative’.<sup>16</sup> The significance of Poe’s review was largely ignored by the British publishing industry for four decades until, in 1888, Henry James elucidated the aims of the short story in a review of Guy de Maupassant’s short fiction.

James claims that the success of de Maupassant’s short stories is attributable to the manner in which he ‘fixes a hard eye on some small spot of human life, usually some ugly, dreary, shabby, sordid one, takes up the particle and squeezes it either until it grimaces or until it bleeds’.<sup>17</sup> In briefer and less fanciful terms, James avers that a short story must be ‘direc[t] and resolut[e]’ in the treatment of its subject and achieve a ‘constant economy of means’ in its use of language.<sup>18</sup> James employed similar techniques in his own writing, leading Dean Baldwin to identify him as a pioneer of the short story genre in Britain. Taking his leave from Philip Horne and Adrian Hunter’s work on the subject, Baldwin claims that James turned the strict requirements of magazine fiction into a virtue: accepting ‘the requirements of magazines [...] forced James to confront the aesthetics and formal requirements of brevity’.<sup>19</sup> As Hunter had previously argued, James recognised that ‘the short story could be something more, something other than a cut-down novel’; his skill lay in his ability to ‘handle techniques of selection, distillation and suggestion’.<sup>20</sup> On account of James’ considerable success, other writers in Britain were, by the 1890s, beginning to ‘explore the art of writing “short”’ by following the formulae James set out in his reviews and demonstrated in his fiction.<sup>21</sup>

As the 1880s drew to a close, other signs indicated that the short story was posing a significant challenge to the supremacy of the novel. Baldwin explains that by the time James

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<sup>16</sup> Poe made a number of observations about the aesthetics of the ‘short prose narrative’ in his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Twice-Told Tales* for *Graham’s Magazine*. Poe’s review is reprinted in G.R. Thompson (ed.), *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), pp. 569-77.

<sup>17</sup> Henry James, ‘Guy de Maupassant’, *Fortnightly Review*, 49 (1888), 364-86 (p. 368). James’s review was republished later in the same year in *Partial Portraits* (London: Macmillan, 1888), pp. 243-90.

<sup>18</sup> James, ‘Guy de Maupassant’ (p. 375). Before James’ claim that a short story must achieve a ‘constant economy of means’, there was little to set apart the short story from a short novel. The three short stories written by George Eliot for *Blackwood’s* (January-November 1857) and later collected as *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), for instance, were each between 28,000 and 66,000 words long and divided into up to twenty-eight chapters. Despite their length, Charles Dickens referred to these works as ‘tales’ or ‘stories’: Dickens, letter to George Eliot, 18 January 1858, in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Jenny Hartley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 331-2.

<sup>19</sup> While Henry James showed British writers how they might take advantage of the restrictions on magazine fiction, Dean Baldwin suggests that Bret Harte, another expatriate American writer, can be credited with influencing the ‘exotic and “local colour” aspects’ that became popular with Rudyard Kipling and other British writers in the 1890s. *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story, 1880-1950* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), pp. 55-6.

<sup>20</sup> Adrian Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English*, p. 19.

published his review of de Maupassant's work in 1888, 'the number of magazines was increasing, the aesthetic problems [of short story genre] were on their way to being solved, the triple-decker novel was dying, and a new Modernist sensibility was arising in opposition to Victorian conventions and taboos'.<sup>22</sup> The founding of *The Strand Magazine* in 1891 finally gave the short story a platform of its own. When the *Strand* launched, it announced that it would not, under any circumstances, publish serialised novels; instead, it would publish only short stories.<sup>23</sup> In the first six months of operation, the *Strand* published the first six of Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories, thus securing the success of both the magazine (it reportedly sold 300,000 copies in an average month) and Conan Doyle, as well as contributing to the continued growth in popularity of the short story genre. The *Strand's* commercial success led to its unique format becoming highly imitated. Winnie Chan identifies *Pall Mall Magazine* (1893), *Windsor* (1895), and *Pearson's Weekly* (1896) as only a few examples of publications which rushed to duplicate the success of the *Strand* by publishing short stories alongside profuse illustrations.<sup>24</sup>

The *Strand's* success and the emergence of its imitators were in part responses to the increasing literacy of the British public. The Education Acts introduced between 1870 and 1890 made elementary education compulsory for all children and this, Emma Liggins, Andrew Maunder and Ruth Robbins point out, had the effect of 'prompting a flood of new cheap magazines and papers [...] which gave a central place to short fiction'.<sup>25</sup> The *Strand* and its imitators found economic sustainability in disseminating literature to the masses, cheaply and often. However, in the 1890s, the retaliation against the 'big' magazine mentality emerged in the form of 'the "little magazine" phenomenon', which is usually identified as beginning in 1894 with *The Yellow Book* and being bolstered two years later with the arrival of *The Savoy*.<sup>26</sup> The countervailing importance of 'little magazines' lay in their promotion of experimental and avant-garde literature and art and their explicit opposition to the working practises of big, established magazines such as the *Strand*.<sup>27</sup>

*The Yellow Book* was a reaction against the imposing restrictions of the British publishing industry which saw innovative content rejected by magazine editors in favour of content that

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<sup>22</sup> Baldwin, *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story*, p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> Emma Liggins, Andrew Maunder and Ruth Robbins, *The British Short Story* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> Winnie Chan, *The Economy of the Short Story in British Periodicals of the 1890s* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 48.

<sup>25</sup> Liggins, Maunder and Robbins, *The British Short Story*, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Baldwin, *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story*, p. 67.

<sup>27</sup> Baldwin, *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story*, p. 67.

appeared ‘popular’ taste. In an interview with the *New York Herald* in 1903, Harland described the circumstances which led to the birth of *The Yellow Book*. On New Year’s Day in 1894, he and Beardsley were sat discussing the recent difficulty they had both experienced in getting their work published in the ‘big’ magazines:

we declared, each to each, that we thought it quite a pity and a shame that London publishers should feel themselves longer under obligation to refuse any more of our good manuscripts [...]. “Tis monstrous, Aubrey”, I said. “Tis a public scandal”, said he. And then and there we decided to have a magazine of our own’.<sup>28</sup>

In the public announcement of *The Yellow Book*’s first volume, Lane made a point of condemning the current restrictions of the publishing industry which had seen Harland, Beardsley and others struggle to find a showcase for their work. He declared that *The Yellow Book* would ‘depart as far as may be from the bad old traditions of periodical literature and [...] [be] withal popular in the better sense of the word’.<sup>29</sup> Although Lane followed the *Strand*’s lead by advertising that *The Yellow Book* would not feature any serialised fiction and thus avoid the ‘tiresome “choppy” effect of so many magazines’, he invoked its difference by announcing that *Yellow Book* literary contributors would be at liberty to ‘employ a freer hand’ in their writing.<sup>30</sup> Lane summarised the aims of *The Yellow Book* with a reference to Thomas Hardy’s essay ‘Candour in English Fiction’: it ‘will have the courage of its modernness, and not tremble at the frown of Mrs Grundy’.<sup>31</sup> With this defiant cry, The Bodley Head launched its newest venture.

Writers responded to Lane’s announcement with fiction that was innovative in terms of form, themes and perspective. Krueger compares the formal techniques showcased by *The Yellow Book*’s fiction writers to those now commonly associated with literary impressionism. Much of *The Yellow Book*’s fiction, Krueger points out, aimed to ‘render and communicate perceptual moments’ of urban life by evoking a sensory awareness—or perception—of the

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<sup>28</sup> Henry Harland, ‘A Pinch from the Cardinal’s Snuff-Box’, *New York Herald*, 13 December 1903, quoted in Sabine Doran, *The Culture of Yellow: or, the Visual Politics of Late Modernity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 49.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Announcement: *The Yellow Book*’, p. 3, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <[http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV1\\_prospectus.pdf](http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV1_prospectus.pdf)> [accessed 25 July 2014].

<sup>30</sup> ‘Announcement: *The Yellow Book*’, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Announcement: *The Yellow Book*’, p. 4. Thomas Hardy denounced the increased involvement of editors in his essay ‘Candour in English Fiction’. The essay was intended as an attack on the publishing industry which had seen his novel, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, rejected by *Murray’s Magazine* and *Macmillan’s Magazine* on grounds of immorality. Hardy argued that the editors of periodicals and magazines—which he collectively described as ‘the Grundyist’—were contributing to the stagnation of British literature. He claimed that, by imposing restrictions on the vocabulary, themes and content of fiction and demanding tidy and ‘respectable’ conclusions, editors had encouraged the production of work that lacked honesty. By describing the publishing industry as ‘meretricious’, Hardy overturned the charges of immorality levelled at *Tess*. Thomas Hardy, ‘Candour in English Fiction’, *New Review*, 2 (1890), 15-21.

urban landscape.<sup>32</sup> The manner in which Harland considered manuscript submissions certainly aligns with the aim and vision of literary impressionism. Ethel Colburn Mayne, who acted as sub-editor of *The Yellow Book* in 1896 while Ella D'Arcy, her predecessor, was in France, offers a detailed picture of Harland's editorial role in her unpublished memoir, 'Reminiscences of Henry Harland'. Mayne explains that, when considering manuscripts for publication in *The Yellow Book*, Harland was 'looking out for [...] some sense of what words can say—or not say [...] a perception that penetrated beyond the surface of things and people [...] a theme that reached farther than the experience it transcribed'.<sup>33</sup> Under the aegis of Harland's editorship, the impressionistic short story became the chosen literary form in which to render the impulses of a modern, urban society and consciousness. Lane's public invitation to experimentation and Harland's preference for stylistic innovation permitted *Yellow Book* writers the opportunity to render rather than narrate—to show rather than tell of—the excitement and terror of life in the modern city. The characteristic *Yellow Book* story disoriented the reader in order to convey the modern, urban impulses of speed, volatility and transience: they typically focussed on episodes of isolated activity and dialogue, relayed detail through limited or shifting viewpoints, and often culminated in a premature or unconventional dénouement. The significance of comprehensive and panoramic depictions of the city, which readers earlier in the century would have expected from novels by Charles Dickens or Elizabeth Gaskell, was usurped by the sensory and quotidian experience rendered through the short story.

Unlike the *Savoy*, *The Yellow Book* was not intended to appeal to the literate masses. Instead, Lane and Harland presented their quarterly and the short stories contained therein as 'elite, aesthetic object[s]', carefully crafted and presented with the tastes of the middle-class reader in mind.<sup>34</sup> At 5s per volume, *The Yellow Book* was an expensive commodity at a time when books and magazines were becoming cheaper to buy, but the high price was also a way of differentiating *The Yellow Book* from other periodicals: its price suggested that it was an artefact worthy of preservation, rather than ephemera. *The Yellow Book* also overturned the editorial practices of big magazines which commonly subordinated artwork to the letterpress. The idea that *The Yellow Book* should present artwork independently of poetry or prose was contributed by D. S. MacColl, a watercolourist and art critic. MacColl noted the 'short-sighted

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<sup>32</sup> Krueger, *British Women Writers and the Short Story*, p. 13. Krueger's language is influenced by Ford Madox Ford's claim that 'if [a writer] wished to produce on [the reader] an effect of life [they] must not narrate but render...impressions': 'Techniques', *Southern Review*, 1 (1935), 20-35 (p. 31).

<sup>33</sup> Ethel Colburn Mayne, 'Reminiscences of Henry Harland' [c. 1927], unpublished manuscript, quoted in Margaret Stetz and Mark Samuels Lasner, *The Yellow Book: A Centenary Exhibition* (Cambridge: The Houghton Library, 1994), p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Liggins, Maunder and Robbins, *The British Short Story*, p. 33.



policy of artists' which allowed 'the Art magazines to publish their art gratuitously', and 'sketched out a periodical in which writing and drawings would be published side by side, independently'.<sup>35</sup> Presenting art in this way, MacColl claimed, would mean that 'artists like Beardsley [were] not induced to denature their talent to the bidding of the editorial shopwalker'.<sup>36</sup> By encouraging and embracing non-traditional and innovative works of fiction, presenting artwork independently to the letterpress, and foregoing the desires of the mass market, *The Yellow Book* was a rebuttal to the current trends of the magazine publishing industry.

Although Lane aimed to distance *The Yellow Book* from many of the 'old', 'bad' practices of populist magazines, there were also elements of the mass-market that Lane dared not ignore. As well as wanting *The Yellow Book* to be 'daring' and 'fresh', Lane was aware that, in order to secure a steady and loyal readership, he also needed it to be 'distinguished'.<sup>37</sup> The price of *The Yellow Book* positioned it at the higher end of the periodical market, but Lane sought to justify its cost by including work from canonical or popular writers. Richard Le Gallienne claimed that the inclusion of known writers was a 'compromise' between the 'shrewd' business-mind of Lane and the more adventurous ideas of his editors.<sup>38</sup> Le Gallienne explains that 'Lane was afraid to let [Harland and Beardsley] [...] be as daring as they wished to be' and so he instructed Harland to ensure that the literary content of every volume maintained a semblance of balance. As a result, each volume showcased impressionistic or otherwise innovative literary sketches by 'representatives of modernity' alongside more traditional, plot-driven contributions by "'respectable" writers' and household names.<sup>39</sup>

In terms of sales figures and attracting contributions from both new and familiar names in the literary world, *The Yellow Book* was an immediate success. Lane printed five thousand copies of the first volume, but these sold out in five days; a further four issues of the volume were subsequently released to satisfy public demand.<sup>40</sup> As well as ensuring that *The Yellow Book* secured an audience, Lane's technique of showcasing the new alongside the traditional effectively legitimised experimentalism within the short story genre. Thus, from its inception *The Yellow Book* was notoriously successful, both in the way that it encouraged collaboration

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<sup>35</sup> D. S. MacColl, 'The GROB' [c. 1927], unpublished manuscript, quoted in Stetz and Lasner, *The Yellow Book: A Centenary Exhibition*, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> MacColl, 'The GROB', p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> 'Announcement: *The Yellow Book*', pp. 3-4.

<sup>38</sup> Le Gallienne, *The Romantic '90s*, pp. 227-8.

<sup>39</sup> Le Gallienne, *The Romantic '90s*, p. 227.

<sup>40</sup> Stetz and Lasner, *The Yellow Book: A Centenary Exhibition*, p. 11.

across the boundaries of gender, discipline, and ideology, and, as Lorraine Janzen Kooistra and Dennis Denisoff argue, its ‘literary, artistic, and bibliographic innovations’.<sup>41</sup>

‘I break my barrier through’: escape, escapism and the female reader/writer

There were aspects of the mass-market magazine that Lane sought to replicate with *The Yellow Book*: notably, attracting a mixed readership. Laurel Brake has demonstrated that periodicals’ practice of publishing ‘political and literary discourse between the same covers’ resulted in female readership, which was traditionally associated with fiction, becoming ‘mixed with male readership, commonly associated with political topics and activity’.<sup>42</sup> The content of the mass-market periodical, therefore, was subject to the gaze of both male and female readers; a woman might pick up the January 1857 issue of *Blackwood’s Magazine* to read the first instalment of George Eliot’s ‘Scenes of Clerical Life’ or the eighth instalment of Margaret Oliphant’s ‘The Athelings’, but, in doing so, was exposed to the magazine’s entire content, including a twelve-page bulletin on European political relations. That this occurred at a period ‘when women were still excluded from the vote and public life’, Brake explains, was at best deemed radical and, at worst, regrettable.<sup>43</sup> *The Yellow Book*’s mixed readership, however, was an integral part of its business strategy.

In 1895, Lane commissioned an original artwork which celebrated and further encouraged the idea that the periodical was capable of appealing to both men and women. He published Gertrude D. Hammond’s painting ‘The Yellow Book’ in July 1895 in *The Yellow Book*’s sixth volume (figure 6). Hammond’s painting reveals the shape of Lane’s editorial policy post-Wilde trials as he sought to resituate the periodical within a palatable domestic context. ‘The Yellow Book’ depicts two upper-middle class figures in a drawing-room decorated in the aesthetic style. A seated man is holding out an open a book to a female companion; she eyes the book shyly, but with perceivable interest. The book at the centre of the image is subject to two different gazes and provokes different responses, respectively, but is nonetheless an object of interest. In case the reader should be in any doubt as to the identity of the book, Hammond titled her work ‘The Yellow Book’ and, through the fingers of the male figure, offers a glimpse of Beardsley’s iconic cover design for the second volume of *The Yellow Book*. Margaret Stetz and Mark Samuels Lasner note that the importance of Hammond’s

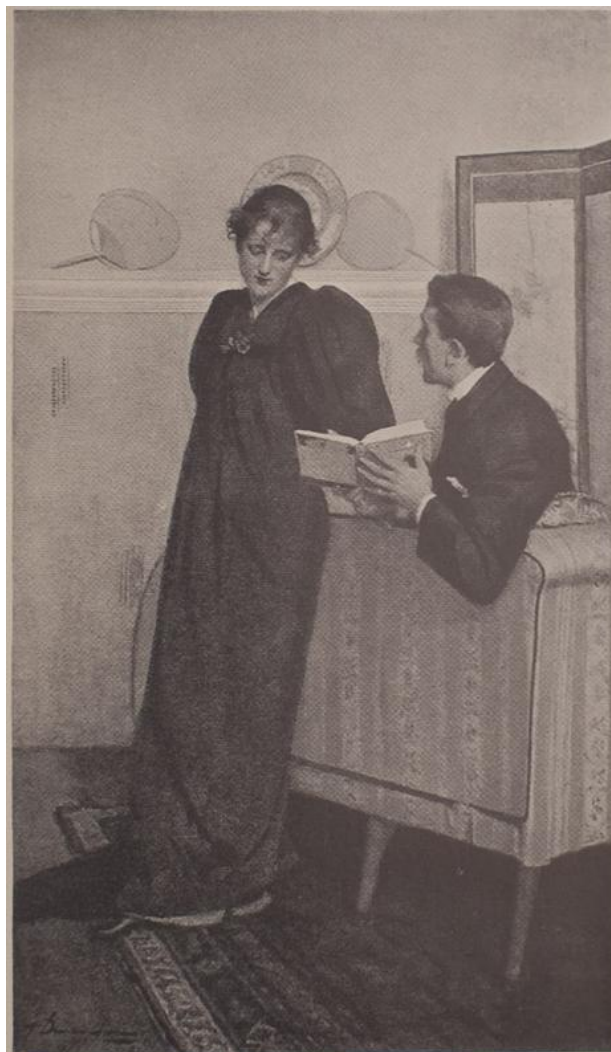
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<sup>41</sup> Lorraine Janzen Kooistra and Dennis Denisoff, ‘Introduction to Volume 1 of *The Yellow Book* (April 1894)’, p. 4, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <[http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV1\\_Intro.pdf](http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV1_Intro.pdf)> [accessed 10 June 2015].

<sup>42</sup> Laurel Brake, ‘Production of Meaning in Periodical Studies: Versions of the *English Review*’, *Victorian Periodicals Review* 24 (1991), 163-70 (p. 168).

<sup>43</sup> Brake, ‘Production of Meaning in Periodical Studies’ (p. 168).

painting lay in the contrast between its respectable, domestic setting and the covert reference to Beardsley. The implication, they argue, was that ‘even those who might consider the magazine daring would still find it fit to be placed in the most tasteful, distinguished, houses’.<sup>44</sup> Stetz and Lasner state that Lane commissioned the piece in order to ‘shape the public’s response’ to the periodical—to ‘teach consumers by example’ how to read, react to, and interact with its content.<sup>45</sup> As a sign of this, the painting pre-emptively and overturns charges of indecency: Hammond strategically places a decorative plate on the wall behind the woman’s head, a circular outline which is suggestive of a halo. Through religious iconography, Hammond upholds the woman’s respectability and, in turn, neutralises the supposed threat of *The Yellow Book*’s risqué content and reputation.



**Figure 6:** Gertrude D. Hammond, ‘The Yellow Book’, *The Yellow Book*, 6 (1895), 117, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <<http://www.1890s.ca>> [accessed 16 August 2016]

<sup>44</sup> Stetz and Lasner, *The Yellow Book: A Centenary Exhibition*, p. 29.

<sup>45</sup> Stetz and Lasner, *The Yellow Book: A Centenary Exhibition*, p. 29.

Because Hammond's painting was commissioned by Lane, it reveals a great deal about his aims for *The Yellow Book* after the Wilde trials. The fact that it hung on the wall of Lane's office on Vigo Street also suggests that he saw the work as representative of the future direction of the periodical. The objective of Hammond's painting—and presumably the idea that governed Lane's commission—was to show *The Yellow Book* bringing together men and women on a plane of shared cultural understanding. The back of the couch separates them, but the woman encroaches over this parameter by leaning backwards to view the book. The fact that the open book replaces the woman in the male-subject/female-object paradigm is arguably the most subversive aspect of the work; the woman's gaze is as integral to the production of meaning in the painting as the man's. The implication here is that her gaze is also integral to the production of meaning in the pages of *The Yellow Book*.

Hammond's painting is representative of *The Yellow Book's* aim to encourage and showcase a wide range of subject-positions. The painting both recalls the known aims of New Woman literature and suggests that *The Yellow Book* was well positioned to support the emancipation movement. *The Yellow Book's* association with the New Woman has been documented elsewhere. Bridget Elliot has argued that Beardsley played an important role in establishing *The Yellow Book's* association with the emancipated woman, noting that his ink drawing of an intimidating New Woman figure perusing an outside book stall was used on the cover of the prospectus for volume one.<sup>46</sup> Hammond's painting reinforces *The Yellow Book's* association with the female emancipation movement by celebrating and formally representing the role of the female gaze in the production of cultural meaning. As was typical of *The Yellow Book's* editorial practice, Hammond's painting was strategically positioned in volume 6 between two literary contributions by women which spoke to similar themes: it was preceded by Egerton's 'The Captain's Book', and followed by Dollie Radford's lyrical poem 'A Song'. By placing these works side by side, the editors brought to the fore their shared themes and allusions.

Radford's 'A Song' celebrates a woman's escape from known, domestic territory and its central image recalls the woman's interest in the open book in Hammond's painting. Radford's speaker recalls that she was once happily embowered in her garden, but now her thoughts turn to the 'fresh unfurrowed ground' which lies beyond 'the hedge of roses'.<sup>47</sup> The poem concludes

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<sup>46</sup> Bridget Elliott, 'New and Not So "New Women" on the London Stage: Aubrey Beardsley's *Yellow Book* Images of Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Réjane', *Victorian Studies*, 31 (1987), 33-57, p. 40.

<sup>47</sup> Dollie Radford, 'A Song', *The Yellow Book*, 6 (1895), 121-22, lines 1-4.

with the speaker venturing beyond her garden to follow her lover into ‘that strange land’ of intellectual freedom:

And bound no more by roses,  
I break my barrier through,  
And leave all it encloses,  
Dear one, to follow you.<sup>48</sup>

The celebratory tone and title of ‘A Song’ strives to identify the woman’s movement—which encouraged women’s movement beyond the known and domestic toward the new and ‘strange’—as positive and progressive. The poem brings together Romantic imagery with the feminist political agenda of New Woman literature as was typical of Radford’s poetry. Radford’s use of natural imagery had often obscured the radical implications of her work; contemporaries described her poetry as ‘charming’, ‘pretty’ or ‘feminine’ and, in so doing, wilfully denied its radical intent and implications.<sup>49</sup> However, the use of natural imagery in ‘A Song’ does not obscure the poem’s radical message primarily because its political implications are reinforced by its position between Hammond’s painting and Egerton’s story. As Kooistra and Denisoff point out, the subtle implication of this editorial sequencing ‘was to suggest that *The Yellow Book* could open new worlds to its women readers’.<sup>50</sup> Between Egerton’s story, Hammond’s painting, and Radford’s poem, the editors of *The Yellow Book* drew a link between the New Woman (Egerton), women readers (the female figure in Hammond’s painting), escape (Radford’s poem), and *The Yellow Book*. The sequencing of these contents alludes to the idea that *The Yellow Book* was well positioned to facilitate both the political emancipation and psychological escapism of its female readers.

#### Challenging the male gaze in George Egerton’s ‘A Lost Masterpiece’ (1894)

The relationship between *The Yellow Book* and the emancipated, advanced (or New) woman was initiated by Beardsley’s cover design for the periodical’s first prospectus: a tall woman, dressed fashionably, elaborately, and entirely in black, browses an outdoor bookstall at night-time whilst the disapproving vendor looks on. This relationship was cemented shortly thereafter by Lane and Harland’s decision to publish Egerton’s short story, ‘A Lost

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<sup>48</sup> Radford, ‘A Song’, lines 18-22.

<sup>49</sup> LeeAnn Marie Richardson, ‘Naturally Radical: the Subversive Poetics of Dollie Radford’, *Victorian Poetry*, 38 (2000), 109-24 (p. 109). W. B. Yeats, Bernard Shaw and Arthur Symons were amongst Radford’s contemporaries to describe her poetry in feminine terms.

<sup>50</sup> Lorraine Janzen Kooistra and Dennis Denisoff, ‘*The Yellow Book*: Introduction to Volume 6 (July 1895)’, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <[http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV6\\_Intro.pdf](http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV6_Intro.pdf)> [accessed 17 May 2016].

Masterpiece: A City Mood August '93', in the periodical's first volume.<sup>51</sup> Egerton's reputation at this point encapsulated Lane's vision for *The Yellow Book*: after the publication of *Keynotes* in the previous year, she was considered both 'daring' and 'fresh'; steady sales of the book indicated that she was also popular; and the emergence of the New Woman in popular discourse earlier in the year made her work ever more relevant.

Lane bolstered the relationship between Egerton and *The Yellow Book* (and, by extension, the professional woman and *The Yellow Book*) with another art commission: he asked E. A. Walton to produce a watercolour portrait of Egerton, which he published in the fifth volume as part of the 'Bodley Heads' series and also hung in his office alongside Hammond's 'The Yellow Book' (figure 7). Walton's portrait depicted Egerton with full lips, large eyes and feminine dress which, as Stetz claims, was intended to 'reassure conservative audiences that even writers who produced challenging feminist texts were conventionally attractive and feminine in appearance'.<sup>52</sup> Although Egerton appears at first to be drawn in line with the male gaze, the portrait also sought to challenge the male-subject/female-object paradigm. On a superficial level, Egerton is the object of Walton's painting, however she is also shown to be meeting his (and, by implication, the reader's) gaze: Walton and the reader look at Egerton, but she stares straight back at them both, her gaze sharpened by her characteristic pince-nez glasses.<sup>53</sup>

Egerton's short story 'A Lost Masterpiece' also challenges the authority of the male gaze. It features an encounter between a *flâneur* and a New Woman figure who is walking alone near Chancery Lane, and culminates in an overt challenge to the *flâneur/passante* hegemony. My analysis of 'A Lost Masterpiece' focuses on Egerton's ironic portrayal of the artist-observer, his implied conflict with the New Woman figure, and the dissolution of his agency. The solitary walking woman in Egerton's story is used as a means of reflecting upon contemporaneous anxieties about masculine literary and urban authority. She aligns with dominant portrayals of emancipated women taking advantage of increased professional and educational opportunities which allowed them to legitimately occupy the city's public spaces,

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<sup>51</sup> George Egerton, 'A Lost Masterpiece: A City Mood August '93', *The Yellow Book*, 1 (1894), 189-96, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <<http://www.1890s.ca>> [accessed 10 June 2014]. Subsequent references to this text are given in parentheses.

<sup>52</sup> Margaret D. Stetz, *Facing the Late Victorians: Portraits of Writers and Artists from the Mark Samuels Lasner Collection* (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2007), p. 48.

<sup>53</sup> In caricatures of the New Woman that circulated in the press, Egerton is often identifiable by way of her pince-nez. See, for instance, her portrayal as 'Donna Quixote' in *Punch*, which may have inspired Albert Morrow's depiction of the New Woman in his design of the playbill for Sydney Grundy's play *The New Woman*.

and her location corresponds with her iconoclasm: Chancery Lane and nearby Fleet Street were publishing and legal centres, respectively, and thus comprised a male territory.



Figure 7: E. A. Walton, 'Bodley Heads No. 3: George Egerton', *The Yellow Book*, 5 (1895), 9, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <<http://www.1890s.ca>> [accessed 16 August 2016].

While nineteenth-century discourse identified the New Woman as an anomalous figure (who was, nonetheless, striving towards equality), the *flâneur* inherently objectified the people and places that made up his surroundings: his intention, according to Baudelaire, lay in 'rendering and explaining [...] the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life' across the

urban landscape.<sup>54</sup> The essential conflict between these figures can be explained in simple terms: the New Woman typically evaded definition, while the *flâneur* aimed to define. Egerton acknowledged and represented the essential conflict between these two urban ‘types’ in her story. I also analyse the representations of other solitary women—real and imagined—in the text. Specifically, I examine the extent to which these depictions of women challenge the *flâneur/passante* hegemony and, within this, the notion of ‘urban harmony’ explicit in Baudelaire’s definition of *flânerie*.

‘A Lost Masterpiece’ is different to many of Egerton’s other short stories because the narrator-protagonist is not gendered female—at least not explicitly. Despite a marked lack of textual evidence pertaining to the narrator’s gender, a number of scholars have chosen to identify the narrator as female.<sup>55</sup> Bryony Randall expounds the reasoning behind these readings by explaining that scholarly interaction with Egerton’s oeuvre has traditionally sought to align her texts with women’s lived experience and perspective. Randall points out that Egerton’s preference for the female voice enables her to ‘state most vividly the critique of sexual politics that is at the heart of her literary project’.<sup>56</sup> Kate McCullough, for instance, has noted that many of the stories in *Keynotes* feature a double female-centric narrative: they are often structured around ‘one woman’s telling of her story to another sympathetic woman’, with one of these women acting as the narrator.<sup>57</sup> This gives rise to ‘a sense of sisterhood across class lines and at the same time puts women beyond the comprehension of men’.<sup>58</sup> Most recently, Randall has argued that ‘A Lost Masterpiece’ invites the reader to understand its narrator as male or, at the very least a ‘highly masculinised [woman]’.<sup>59</sup> However, Randall astutely notes that the ambiguity of the narrator’s gender is integral to the story’s purpose: Egerton deliberately ‘eschews any explicit identification of the narrator’s gender’ in order to make ‘a telling intervention into discourses of authority and writerliness’ at the *fin de siècle*.<sup>60</sup> My understanding of the ambiguously-gendered narrator in ‘A Lost Masterpiece’ aligns with Randall’s. I follow her lead by referring to the narrator as male in the course of this chapter but

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<sup>54</sup> Baudelaire, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ (pp. 9-11).

<sup>55</sup> See, for instance, Margaret Diane Stetz, ‘New Grub Street and the Woman Writer of the 1890s’, in *Transforming Genres: New Approaches to British Fiction of the 1890s*, ed. by Nikki Lee Manos and Meri-Jane Rochelson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), pp. 21-45 (p. 28), and Turner, *Backward Glances*, p. 92.

<sup>56</sup> Bryony Randall, ‘George Egerton’s “A Lost Masterpiece”’: Inspiration, Gender, and Cultural Authority at the *fin de siècle*, in *New Woman Writers, Authority and the Body*, ed. by Melissa Purdue and Stacey Floyd (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), pp. 1-18 (p. 1).

<sup>57</sup> Kate McCullough, ‘Mapping the “terra incognita” of Woman: George Egerton’s *Keynotes* (1893) and New Woman Fiction’, in *The New Nineteenth Century: Feminist Readings of Underread Victorian Fiction*, ed. by Barbara Leah Harman and Susan Meyer (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 205-23 (p. 207).

<sup>58</sup> McCullough, ‘Mapping the “terra incognita” of Woman’ (p. 207).

<sup>59</sup> Randall, ‘George Egerton’s “A Lost Masterpiece”’ (p. 2).

<sup>60</sup> Randall, ‘George Egerton’s “A Lost Masterpiece”’ (p. 3).



also invite the reader to see the male pronoun as if in ‘scare-quotes’ because, as Randall points out, Egerton’s refusal to ‘articulate her narrator’s gender [...] is a key element in her thoroughgoing problematisation of the concept of masculine literary authority’.<sup>61</sup> Referring to the narrator as male also throws into relief the gendered tension between New Woman and *flâneur* at the crux of Egerton’s narrative and my analysis.

‘A Lost Masterpiece’ is an account of the ambiguously-gendered narrator’s journey from his countryside home to London and culminates in his encounter with the New Woman figure. The story begins with an impulse towards adventure and a rejection of the home, an arc that also begins Sarah Grand’s ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’. Egerton’s narrator’s home is a ‘hillside cottage in a lonely ploughland’ (189). The landscape is characterised by the pervading ‘smell of turf’ and the ‘swish of scythes’ (189). Like Josepha in ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’, the narrator in ‘A Lost Masterpiece’ is prompted to leave the security of his home by a desire to immerse himself in the city: he wishes to ‘lay [an] ear once more to the heart of the world and listen to its life-throbs’ as might ‘a fairy prince in quest of adventures’ (189-92). He leaves his country home ‘in a glad mood’ and is ‘disposed to view the whole world with kindly eyes’ (189).

The distinction between domestic and public spaces in ‘A Lost Masterpiece’ and ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’ is also comparable. Josepha compared her friend’s townhouse to a ‘sarcophagus’, and Egerton’s narrator also alludes to the suffocating, stultifying affects of domestic familiarity.<sup>62</sup> In the first instance, the narrator’s visit to London appears to be informed by the desire to find artistic inspiration. The idea that the countryside holds little inspiration is reflected in the narrator’s description of his environment: ‘the upland hay, drought-parched, stretched thirstily up to the clouds that mustered upon the mountain-tops, and marched mockingly away, and held no rain’ (189). The parallel allusion to thirst, explicit in the image of bales of hay, but implicit in the narrator’s desire for artistic inspiration, compounds the shared isolation and suffering of both the drought-ridden landscape and the narrator. The city’s streets, meanwhile, are described as ‘Elysian fields’; bountiful, life-affirming, and paradisaical (189-90).

The narrator reaches London via a river steamer bound for London Bridge. Upon reaching the city he ‘sw[ings] from place to place in a happy, lightsome mood’ before shortly

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<sup>61</sup> Randall, ‘George Egerton’s “A Lost Masterpiece”’ (p. 4).

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Grand, ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’, in *Dreams, Visions and Realities* (Birmingham: Birmingham University Press, 2003), pp. 76-84 (p. 76).

boarding an omnibus (192). However, the narrator's use of public transport complicates his urban *rôle*. Ana Parejo Vadillo argues that the narrator's use of organised and mechanised transport systems means that he is more readily identifiable as a 'passenger' than a *flâneur*. Vadillo identifies four differences between the modes and methods in which passenger and *flâneur* move across the city:

The first difference is that the passenger does not use his or her legs [...]. His or her movements are produced by an organised [and mechanised] transport system [...]. This implies that passengers are not in control of their journeys: they can choose the line and the form of transport they want to use, but the journey is pre-determined by line and vehicle in which they travel. Secondly, the passenger's field of vision is framed by the vehicle in which he or she travels. For this reason, to travel becomes in essence the verb that best describes the urban epistemology of the passenger. Thirdly, passengers have to pay for their transport. This in effect means that passengers are consumers. And fourthly, travelling affects the passenger's perception as he or she is transported at speed across London. Unlike the *flâneur*, the passenger travels across the metropolis at a faster pace, a pace that is produced not by the passenger him or herself, but by the vehicle in which he or she is travelling.<sup>63</sup>

The narrator's journey through London is largely dependent upon the use of public transport. As a result, he is, to borrow Vadillo's use of the term, a 'passenger' of the city, and Egerton explicitly refers to the transaction which defines him as an urban consumer—'I took a 'bus and paid my penny' (194). The ensuing description of the narrator's journey also demonstrates that his 'field of vision' is 'framed' by the omnibus windows and the pace of his journey is dictated by the road traffic and the bus stopping to let passengers on and off:

It was near Chancery Lane that a foreign element cropped up and disturbed the rich flow of my fancy. I happened to glance at the side-walk. A woman, a little woman, was hurrying along in a most remarkable way. [...] Bother the jade! what business had she to thrust herself on my observation like that [...]? I closed my eyes to avoid seeing her; I could see her through the lids. [...] We stop—I look again—aye, there she is! [...] [A]s we outdistance her I fancy I can hear their decisive tap-tap above the thousand sounds of the street. [...] Jerk, jerk, jangle—stop.—Bother the bell! We pull up to drop some passengers, the idiots! and, as I live, she overtakes us! [...] Thank heaven, we are off again.... "Charing Cross, Army and Navy, V'toria!"—Stop! [...] Here she comes, elbows out, umbrella waning! I look back at her, I criticise her, I anathematise her, I *hate* her! [...] We can't escape her always we stop and let her overtake us [...]! (194-6)

The stream of consciousness style of this passage allows Egerton to effectively relay the perceptual experience of the urban passenger and the narrator's growing hostility and anxiety.

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<sup>63</sup> Ana Parejo Vadillo, *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism: Passengers of Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 24-5.

The narrator's use of public transport compounds his lack of agency and, in so doing, problematises both his role as a *flâneur* and his reason for visiting the city.

When he is aboard the river steamer and before the New Woman intrudes into his line of sight, the narrator claims a presiding position in relation to his surroundings. He does not take an objective stance but, instead, reveals that he is 'conscious [...] of a peculiar dual action of the brain and senses [...] [which] touch[ed] a hundred vagrant things with the magic of imagination' (191; my emphasis). He unequivocally aligns the 'dual action of his brain and senses' with impressionism: when aboard a river steamer bound for London Bridge, he sets to work 'recording fleeting impressions [of the city] with delicate sure brushwork for future use' (191).<sup>64</sup> The manner in which the narrator records his surroundings aligns closely with Jesse Matz's description of the form and function of impressionist fiction. Matz explains that

the Impressionist writer tends to cast him- or herself in the role of the intellectual, abstract mind; for his or her counterpart – for the sensuous, concrete element – the Impressionist tends to draw on cultural stereotypes. He or she singles out someone whose social role makes that person a likely source of material vitality. [...] These figures personify the attempt to have the impression's unity while holding onto old distinctions.<sup>65</sup>

As he travels along the River Thames, Egerton's narrator casts himself in the role of 'the intellectual, abstract mind': he acknowledges that 'the magic of [his] imagination' affects the processes by which he understands and records the finer details of city life.

The array of urban life—the 'sensuous, concrete element' that Matz describes—is comprised of 'cultural stereotypes' which either confirm or enhance the narrator's pre-formed idea of the city's social hierarchy and his place within it. To this end, he explains that 'the coarser touches of street-life, the oddities of accent, the idiosyncrasies of that most eccentric of city-dwellers, the Londoner, did not jar as at other times' but 'rather added a zest to enjoyment' (190). He is able to process the 'coarse touches of street-life', 'oddities of accent' and 'the idiosyncrasies of [...] the Londoner' because, firstly, they are *particular* to the London scene, and, secondly, they affirm his familiar class distinctions.<sup>66</sup> The narrator's interaction with his

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<sup>64</sup> The use of painterly rhetoric to describe literary impressionistic techniques recalls Brunetière's first definition of the term 'literary impressionism' as the 'systematic transposition of the means of expression [from painting] into the domain of another art [writing]'. See p. 164, n. 14.

<sup>65</sup> Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> The narrator's aspiration to write a novel to rival Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben* identifies him as a member (or supporter) of the bourgeoisie. *Soll und Haben* was published in 1855 and translated into English in 1857. Larry L. Ping describes the text as '[h]alf novel of business manners and half paean of praise to the German bourgeoisie'. He explains that Freytag presented 'the middle class as the protagonist of German history [...] who

surroundings suggests that his initial impulse to explore and record the cityscape is inflected by a desire to produce a picture of city life which appeases with his gaze, his familiar notion of city life. As Matz argues, the use of ‘cultural stereotypes’ in impressionist fiction ‘personif[ies] the attempt to have the impression’s unity while holding onto old distinctions’.<sup>67</sup> The narrator’s aim for a ‘unified’ picture of London is evoked by his circular route through London: his journey from Chelsea Embankment to London Bridge by ferry, to Chancery Lane by foot, to Victoria by omnibus reflects his aims towards an all-encompassing and uninterrupted experience of the city. By subjectively ‘reading’ his surroundings and then aligning this process with the work of the impressionists, Egerton’s narrator claims a space within artistic modes of production that is both self-realised and self-affirming: he knows that (and *what*) he creates, and seeks to legitimise his place within the city scene by way of this knowledge.

### The real and the imagined solitary women in Egerton’s cityscape

Although the narrator aims to record the city in its entirety—he claims that ‘no detail escaped my outer eyes’—he describes extensively (in more than thirty words) only one woman: the New Woman figure at the narrative’s climax. There are, of course, other women in sight as he sails, walks and rides through London, but the narrator offers only brief glimpses of them and these he invariably aligns with cultural and gendered stereotypes: the ‘anaemic city girl’; the female aesthete; the giggling young ladies aboard the river steamer; a working-class woman breastfeeding her child aboard a freight barge (192). The narrator’s reluctance to describe in detail any female city dwellers raises pertinent questions about his understanding of a woman’s urban *rôle*. The representation and function of these women has not been the subject of extensive consideration.<sup>68</sup> This section examines these women in line with Matz’s outline of literary impressionism: it considers the extent to which the women’s portrayal is affected by the narrator’s subjectivity. My aim is to demonstrate how the narrator uses these women to satisfy his role as ‘the intellectual, abstract mind’ or, conversely, how they challenge his understanding of the city.<sup>69</sup> All of the solitary women in the narrative fall into one of three categories: real

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must face the challenge of overcoming backwardness in all its political and social forms and leading Germany towards the future’ and that the novel ‘was an attempt to educate Germany in the view that the merchant [...] would be the creator of the modern, unified, progressive state’. Larry L. Ping, *Gustav Freytag and the Prussian Gospel: Novels, Liberalism and History* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 111-12.

<sup>67</sup> Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> In her article ‘George Egerton’s “A Lost Masterpiece”’, Randall analyses the role of the giggling young girls, the woman with green velveteen sleeves, the anaemic ‘city maid’ and the New Woman figure, but not the female harpist, the woman on the barge, or the imagined drowned woman.

<sup>69</sup> The key terms in quotation marks are from Matz’s description of literary impressionism which is quoted at length earlier in this chapter: *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*, p. 9.

women performing perfunctory and traditional roles; imagined women who, in their manifestations, are also metaphorically depicted as beyond the narrator's reach; real women who overturn the narrator's gaze and challenge his intentions.

The narrator records only one woman performing a perfunctory and traditional role: the mother breastfeeding her child aboard a barge. The discrepancy in this depiction—between an essential, domestic action and the public, commercial setting—is suggestive of a disorder between women's public and private identities. However, three elements limit the woman's implied 'threat' to the unity of the image: the barge is moving and so the woman lingers only briefly in the narrator's line of sight; she is contained on the barge as if on an island; and the act of breastfeeding is essentialist. For these reasons, the woman is described neutrally and integrated within the narrator's urban panorama. The unity between the woman and her surroundings is implied through aural allusion: the narrator evokes the sound of the baby's 'suckling' with the 'puff-puff'-sound of a nearby 'little tug [boat]' (191).

The imagined women are evidence that the narrator is shaping and transforming elements of the city to better fit with his idea of the space and its social hierarchy—in short, to invoke hegemonic cohesion. From aboard the river steamer, the narrator sees two boy buskers on a bridge: one 'scrapes a prelude on a thin-toned violin' and the other 'thrums an accompaniment on a harp' (191-2). The narrator recognises the harp as 'the wreck of a handsome instrument'; its 'gold is tarnished, its white is smirched, its stucco rose-wreaths sadly battered' (192). The violin is out of place and degraded by its place on the street, and so the narrator conjures up an alternative owner which befits its history and proper place: the 'whimsical idea' occurs to him that 'it once belonged to a lady with drooping ringlets and an embroidered spencer' (192). The imagined female violinist is an anomalous, half-realised ghost but, her manifestation gives the narrator a context in which he is better able to enjoy the music. He steps 'off the boat with the melody vibrating through the city sounds' (192).

The second imagined woman has drowned in the River Thames. As he travels along the river, the narrator explains that he 'feared to see a face or a hand wave through [the] dull amber [of the Thames]—for I always think of drowned creatures washing wearily in its murky depths' (190). The drowned woman, likely a fallen woman, belongs—in death as she did in life—to the city's underworld. Although she exists in the narrative as a projection of the narrator's imagination onto a body of water, she is not as out of place in the cityscape as the anachronistic harpist. L. J. Nicoletti explains that Victorian Londoners were 'inundated with images of

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drowned women [...]. Women's suicidal leaps were captured in illustrated newspapers, sold in one shilling books, presented in theatres, displayed at the Royal Academy of Art, and narrated in literature.<sup>70</sup> Most often, women were depicted committing suicide in public spaces, commonly jumping from a bridge into the murky depths of the Thames.<sup>71</sup> Nicoletti also points to a confluence between the proliferation of images of suicidal women and women's increased involvement in city life, arguing that the image of female suicide in the city became hegemonic: it inhibited positive ideas of female autonomy and venerated the domesticised women who had wisely chosen to stay at home. The female victim of suicide, Nicoletti argues, 'imputed that women were not able to handle the enticing spectacles afforded by the industrialized metropolis, [and] that the cacophony of sensory experience would fray their nerves and disorder their minds'.<sup>72</sup>

As if to confirm the essential difference between himself and the drowned woman, the narrator refuses to allow his imagination to be drawn into the murky depths of the Thames. After admitting that he often thought of 'the drowned creatures washing wearily in [the river's] murky depths', he quickly and pointedly moves his gaze upward to record the effect of the light on the 'great warehouses' and 'monster chimneys' that line the river's course through the city (190). Egerton relays the haste with which the narrator moves to (literally) brighter thoughts with the use of a single dash to separate his disparate thoughts. The chimneys are a more appropriate focus for the aspiring *flâneur*: they are phallic symbols of modernity in the industrial age and, moreover, their looming enormity over the river is a manifestation of his panoptic aims.

While the narrator asserts his authority through his imagination, he appears to be keenly aware of the fact that he is also an object of scrutiny. In the course of his journey he encounters four solitary women and one group of women who overturn his gaze and, in so doing, challenge his capacity as a *flâneur*. He is unable to determine the urban *rôle* of these women because they lack the 'transparency' that Estelle Murail argues is essential to the act of *flânerie*.<sup>73</sup> Instead of pursuing the object of his attention in the hope of gaining a greater understanding (like Poe's narrator in 'The Man of the Crowd'), Egerton's narrator chooses to

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<sup>70</sup> L. J. Nicoletti, 'Downward Mobility: Victorian Women, Suicide, and London's "Bridge of Sighs"', *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*, 2 (2004) <<http://www.literarylondon.org>> [accessed 23 February 2015] (para. 1 of 23).

<sup>71</sup> Images of female victims of suicide in art include George Frederic Watts' painting *Found Drowned* (1848-50), Thomas Hood's poem 'The Bridge of Sighs' (1844), W. T. Moncrieff's play *The Scamps of London* (1843) and Charles Selby's play *London by Night* (1844) which ran for forty years.

<sup>72</sup> Nicoletti, 'Downward Mobility' (para. 2).

<sup>73</sup> Estelle Murail, 'The *Flâneur*'s Scopic Power or the Victorian Dream of Transparency', *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, 77 (2013) <<http://cve.revues.org/252>> [accessed 10 June 2016].

re-code their lack of transparency as an indicator of their superficiality: he is unable to proffer more about their lives because there is little below the surface. Firstly, the narrator reduces the female aesthete who stands next to him on the deck of the river steamer to ‘the hideous green of [her] velveteen sleeves’ (190). Also aboard the steamer and to the same end, he accounts for the ‘supercilious giggle of the young ladies [...], who made audible remarks about my personal appearance’ (190). On dry land, the narrator encounters a third woman who overturns his gaze. The ‘pretty anaemic city girl’ returns his gaze with ‘an indignant look of affected affront’ (192). Unable to ‘read’ either the reason for the girl’s affront or the nature of its affectation, the narrator banishes her from the street and his mind in an ironically affected manner: ““Go thy way, little city maid, get thee to thy typing”” (193). The absurdity of the narrator’s cod-Spenserian response to the city girl and his misogynistic description of the other women who resist his hegemonic gaze, Randall avers, ‘reinforc[e] the distinction between the narrator and the implied author’.<sup>74</sup> By overturning or undermining the narrator’s gaze, the city girl, the female aesthete and the giggling girls collectively challenge the authority and authenticity of the *flâneur* and his engagement with the city. In this way, Egerton invokes the importance of the female body and emerging female consciousness to the process of challenging male-authored versions of city and broadening its possibilities.

#### The ‘foreign element’ of the New Woman

The fourth and final woman to overturn the narrator’s gaze is the New Woman figure. The narrator sees her from aboard the omnibus ‘hurrying along [the street] in a most remarkable way’ (194). His description of her is grotesque. She is

a little woman, [...] [with] square shoulders and a high bust, and a white gauze tie, like a snowy feather in the breast of a pouter pigeon. [...] She has great feet, too, in pointed shoes, and the heels are under her insteps. [...] Her black eyes stare boldly through her kohol-tinted lids, her face has a violet tint. She grips her gloves in one hand, her white-handled umbrella in the other, handle up, like a knobkerrie. [...] we stop and let her overtake us with her elbowing gait, and tight skirt shortened to show her great splay feet—ugh! (194-6)

By describing concurrently the woman’s square shoulders and high bust, and her large feet in pointed shoes, the narrator figures her body as a contradictory site of masculine and feminine features. To a similar end, her ‘black [...] kohol-tinted’ [sic] eyes and her umbrella held ‘handle up’ like a South African ‘knobkierrie’ hunting-club, suggest her otherness on the London street.

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<sup>74</sup> Randall, ‘George Egerton’s “A Lost Masterpiece”’ (p. 11)

The narrator makes further and more explicit attempts to ‘other’ the woman: he refers to her first as a ‘foreign element’ and goes on to wonder if she is ‘a feminine presentment of the wandering Jew, [or] a living embodiment of the ghoulish spirit that haunts the city [...]?’ (196). By defamiliarising the woman’s body and attempting to align her with the ‘living-dead’, the narrator evokes the New Woman’s liminal identity and, by extension, her anomalous presence in the city.

I have demonstrated how the narrator uses aural allusion to suggest the breastfeeding mother’s rightful place in the city-scene. He also uses aural allusion in his description of the New Woman figure, but to a different end. The narrator had explained at the story’s start that he wanted to visit the city in order to ‘lay [his] ear once more to the heart of the world and listen to its life-throbs’ (189). So far, the narrator has been successful in his aim: he has either successfully assimilated the sights and sounds of London within his preconceived idea of the city, or dismissed them as superficial and ignored them. However, with the appearance of the New Woman comes the sound of the ‘decisive tap-tap’ of her ‘hurrying’ footstep upon the pavement which reaches the narrator ‘above the thousand sounds of the street’ and pushes its way to the forefront of his consciousness: ‘[s]he pounds along untiringly. [...] What business had she, I ask, to come and thrust her white-handled umbrella into the delicate network of my nerves and untune their harmony?’ (194-6). The sound of the woman’s footsteps is a cacophonous and unquantifiable addition to the urban soundscape; it disturbs the pace of the city’s ‘life-throb’ and the narrator cannot fathom ‘why she was in such a desperate hurry’ (194). Unlike the other women—real and imagined—that he encounters during his journey the narrator is unable to either assimilate or disregard the New Woman. A ‘foreign element’, she refuses to be read and yet, by keeping pace with the omnibus, she also refuses to be left behind (‘We can’t escape her—always we stop and let her overtake us’; 196). By overturning the gaze that aims to comprehend and so control her, the New Woman walker challenges the authority of the narrator and the authenticity of his engagement with the city. The fact that she is able to keep pace on foot with the omnibus highlights their disparate engagement with the city: he, a passenger, is confined by the omnibus’ route and its structural parameters, but she may walk wherever she pleases.

Egerton looks to undermine the narrator (and invoke her authorial distance) by suggesting that the lone walking New Woman does rightfully belong in the modern urban panorama. She achieves this through dramatic irony. The narrator’s account is littered with references to raw materials gained by way of imperialism: the ‘Jagersfontein diamond’ and



‘Oriental pearls’ are used metaphorically to refer to the creative process (193-4). The city is also brimming with imperial commodities. When walking through the city the narrator ‘dodg[es] through the great waggons [sic] laden with wares from outer continents’ (193). In the text, the semantics of Imperialism relate to both the creative process and urban affluence, but the narrator also curses the New Woman using an Imperialist allusion—‘Bother the Jade!’ (194-6)—and the aspects of her appearance that he finds most troubling—her kohl-lined eyes and the umbrella-cum-South African hunting club—are imported fashions (194).<sup>75</sup> Significantly, then, by defamiliarising the woman in this way, the narrator unwittingly aligns her with Britain and British colonial interests; described thus, she is as much a product of her environment and its politics as the wagon that moves through London’s streets laden with goods from the colonies. The ironic distance between author and narrator is underpinned by the narrator’s reluctance to fully locate the New Woman within the scene, and metatextual evidence to the contrary.

In the first volume of *The Yellow Book*, ‘A Lost Masterpiece’ challenged traditional methods of both ‘reading’ and writing the city. Egerton offers an alternative to the hegemonic urban panorama which saw women located at the periphery of urban experience: she positions women’s bodies and female consciousness as fundamental to the creation of new literary and artistic depictions of the city. The next sections of this chapter show how in rewriting the act of *flânerie* Egerton provoked other alternative responses to the city from women writers.

#### The ‘entirely unknown’ voice of Charlotte Mew

The women writers and artists discussed in this chapter so far—Egerton, Radford and Hammond—were all relatively well-established in their fields before their involvement in *The Yellow Book*. The call for innovation in Lane’s prospectus for the first volume was also answered by new voices, especially in the field of short fiction. *The Yellow Book* was, for some female writers, the first step towards a writing career. In April 1894, after the first volume of *The Yellow Book* had been published, Harland wrote to Lane about a new short story submission by ‘an entirely unknown person, a Miss [Charlotte] Mew’.<sup>76</sup> Harland described Mew’s story as ‘one of the most remarkable [...] I have ever read’ and explained that it was

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<sup>75</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines ‘jade (noun. 1)’ as ‘a term of reprobation applied to a woman’. A nineteenth-century use of the term is from *The Times* (1 Jan 1883): ‘A procession of scamps and jades, who marched through Paris wearing in mockery vestments robbed from the churches.’ <<http://www.oed.com>> [accessed 25 January 2015].

<sup>76</sup> Henry Harland, letter to John Lane, April 1894, repr. in Karl Beckson and Mark Samuels Lasner, ‘*The Yellow Book* and Beyond: Selected Letters of Henry Harland and John Lane’, *English Literature in Transition*, 42 (1999), 401-32 (p. 408).

‘most subtle and imaginative, and done in a wonderful original style’.<sup>77</sup> He underpinned the strength of the story by aligning it with the output of established female writers, and yet also emphasised its originality, claiming that Mew was evidently ‘fully as remarkable as Ella D’Arcy, though in a totally different way’.<sup>78</sup> Harland declared Mew to be ‘a new *Y[ellow] B[ook]* discovery’ and published her story, ‘Passed’, three months later in the second volume of the periodical.<sup>79</sup>

Mew’s biographer, Penelope Fitzgerald, claims that it is most likely that Mew wrote her story after reading *The Yellow Book*’s opening number. This is not to say that Mew ‘was waiting to see what sort of [story] would suit’, Fitzgerald explains, but that perusing the content of the periodical’s first volume, including Egerton’s ‘A Lost Masterpiece’, ‘set her imagination free’.<sup>80</sup> As evidence, Fitzgerald points to the fact that ‘Passed’ ‘bears every sign of being written at top speed [...], hurrying along in distraught paragraphs, only just hanging on, for decency’s sake, to its rags of English grammar’.<sup>81</sup> If Mew did indeed write ‘Passed’ after reading the first volume of *The Yellow Book*, it is evidence that Lane’s strategy of showcasing new voices, styles and themes alongside the more traditional had achieved its aim of encouraging experimentation in short fiction. In addition to ‘A Lost Masterpiece’ two other short stories by women were published in the first volume of *The Yellow Book*: ‘Irremediable’, by Ella D’Arcy, and ‘The Fool’s Hour’, attributed jointly to John Oliver Hobbes (pseudonym of Pearl Craigie) and George Moore. All of the stories by women in the first volume, including Egerton’s, were provocative reflections on the relationship between sexes and questioned traditional representations of women—as wife, walker, and mother.

Mew was paid £10 for ‘Passed’.<sup>82</sup> This was certainly her first experience of earning money from her writing, but it was also most likely her first experience of earning a personal income of any kind. Considering the fact that Mew was as yet an unknown author, £10 was a remarkable sum to be paid for one story. D’Arcy, who was by this point an established writer (and a friend of Harland’s), received the same sum for ‘Poor Cousin Louis’, a story of similar length which was also published in *The Yellow Book*’s second volume. By contrast, Netta Syrett, who had only published one story previously, was paid significantly less than Mew and

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<sup>77</sup> Harland, letter to Lane, ‘*The Yellow Book and Beyond*’ (p. 408).

<sup>78</sup> Harland, letter to Lane, ‘*The Yellow Book and Beyond*’ (p. 408).

<sup>79</sup> Charlotte Mew, ‘Passed’, *The Yellow Book*, 2 (1894), 122-41, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <<http://www.1890s.ca>> [accessed 5 June 2014]. Mew’s manuscript was titled ‘Violets’ but this was changed to ‘Passed’ before publication, possibly at Harland’s recommendation. Fitzgerald, *Charlotte Mew and her Friends*, p. 56.

<sup>80</sup> Fitzgerald, *Charlotte Mew and her Friends*, p. 54.

<sup>81</sup> Fitzgerald, *Charlotte Mew and her Friends*, pp. 54-6.

<sup>82</sup> Harland, letter to Lane, 15 June 1894, repr. in Beckson and Lasner, ‘*The Yellow Book and Beyond*’ (p. 411).

D’Arcy for her story, ‘Thy Heart’s Desire’, which was also published in volume two. Syrett’s story was around one thousand words longer than Mew’s or D’Arcy’s stories, and yet she received around half their fee.<sup>83</sup> This evidence suggests that Harland’s payment process was largely subjective: he paid writers according to how much he liked their work. The fact that Harland asked Lane to pay D’Arcy and Mew equal sums for their work is, therefore, testament to his idea of Mew’s potential.<sup>84</sup>

Although Mew’s payment for her story was substantial, her correspondence with Harland reveals that she had hoped to receive the sum sooner than was The Bodley Head’s rule. Many of Mew’s letters to Harland have not survived, but Harland’s replies reveal a good deal about their content. One of Harland’s replies shows that Mew had asked him for an advance payment on her fee for ‘Passed’. In a letter that was written after he had accepted the story for publication, Harland explains: ‘I’m afraid our mode of payment is like that of all the other magazines—we pay on publication, not on acceptance’.<sup>85</sup> Harland’s reply brings to the fore Mew’s unfamiliarity with the working practices of magazines. It also recalls the financial precariousness of working women’s lives; if she were to pursue a career as a writer, Mew’s financial stability would forever be subject to the rules and whims of publishing houses.

It is likely that Mew sought an advance on her fee as a relief from financial hardship. Mew’s family had struggled financially for most of her life, but her biography shows that she and her family were experiencing increased financial pressure in the 1890s.<sup>86</sup> At the time that ‘Passed’ was accepted for publication, Mew was living with her parents and sister on Gordon Street in London, in a large house which the family could barely afford. Mew’s friend, Alida Monro, described the house in her memoir, wherein she also recalls the family’s precarious financial situation. She describes the house as ‘tall and narrow, dark and gaunt inside’, and explains that the family hid the fact that they let the upper part of the house to lodgers.<sup>87</sup> Mew’s family also experienced a considerable, if typically Victorian, loss of its members. Of a total

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<sup>83</sup> Harland, letter to Lane, in Beckson and Lasner (pp. 411-12). Harland stresses the similar length of Mew and D’Arcy’s stories in his letter. Before publishing in *The Yellow Book*, D’Arcy had contributed short stories to *Temple Bar*, *All the Year Round* and *Blackwood’s*. Syrett was paid £5:5s for ‘The Heart’s Desire’ and, before publishing in *The Yellow Book*, had published one story, ‘Sylvia’, in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in 1891.

<sup>84</sup> Harland, letter to Lane, in Beckson and Lasner (p. 411).

<sup>85</sup> Harland, letter to Charlotte Mew, 2 May 1894, repr. in Mary C. Davidow, ‘Charlotte Mew: Biography and Criticism’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Brown University, 1960), p. 276.

<sup>86</sup> Mew’s father, Frederick, inherited his father-in-law’s architectural firm when Mew was sixteen years old, but he was an inexperienced businessman and the firm was plagued with financial problems. After his father-in-law’s death in 1885, Frederick Mew completed just two projects, both of which were commissioned before he inherited the firm. Fitzgerald, *Charlotte Mew and her Friends*, pp. 31-44.

<sup>87</sup> Alida Monro, ‘A Memoir’, in *Charlotte Mew: Collected Poems* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1953), pp. viii-ix. Monro also explains that Mew’s father left his family ‘nothing’ upon his death in 1898, ‘having spent all his available capital on living’ and, presumably, propping up the family’s architectural business (p. ix).

seven pregnancies, Mew's mother saw only four children reach adulthood, and two of the surviving children, her eldest son and youngest daughter, were confined to private asylums in adolescence.<sup>88</sup> As the eldest child still at home, Mew was the natural replacement for her elder brother in the family hierarchy and, as a result, she also inherited worries about the family's financial insecurity. Mew and her remaining sister, Anne, responded to their family's dissolution and financial insecurity by pursuing the few avenues of income available to dispossessed gentlewomen: she wrote, and Anne painted.<sup>89</sup> Contrary to Fitzgerald's claim, it is possible that Mew wrote 'Passed' not necessarily because she had experienced a sudden bolt of creative inspiration after reading the first volume of *The Yellow Book*, but because she required money and thought that her work was more likely to be accepted by Lane's experimental quarterly than by the big, established magazines.

#### Dispossession and anxiety: representations of the home in Mew's poetry

The decline in both her family's finances and its numbers had a detrimental effect upon Mew's relationship with her home and personal sense of belonging. This is borne out in 'Passed', in which the female protagonist pointedly leaves and symbolically rejects the safety of her home, as well as her other works. Across Mew's oeuvre Nelljean Rice identifies an ancestral 'obsession' with 'homes, houses, living spaces, and what they represent' and argues that this 'evolves directly from her [maternal] background, of propriety and property'.<sup>90</sup> Rice argues that this is most evident in Mew's depiction of the city in her poem 'Not for that City' (1902).<sup>91</sup> Mew's maternal grandfather, Henry Edward Kendall, was a celebrated architect and had made his fortune building homes all over Britain—for school boarders, the insane, and the members of the aristocracy.<sup>92</sup> 'Not for that City', Rice argues, was inspired by her grandfather's *Composition Architecturale*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1851

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<sup>88</sup> Shortly after the family's move to Gordon Street in 1888, Henry Herne Mew (1865-1901) was diagnosed with *dementia praecox* and was committed to Peckham House Lunatic Asylum in London. He died of pneumonia in 1901, still a resident of the asylum. Freda Kendall (1879-1958) developed signs of mental illness soon after her brother and was admitted to the Isle of Wight County Mental Hospital. Nelljean McConeghey Rice, *A New Matrix for Modernism: A Study of the Lives and Poetry of Charlotte Mew and Anna Wickham* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>89</sup> Anne Mew trained at the Royal Female School of Art. The school was founded in 1842 to 'enable young women of the middle class to obtain an honourable and profitable income [...] [after being] unexpectedly compelled to gain their living': Thomas Punell, 'Woman and Art', *The Art-Journal*, 7 (1861), 107-8 (p. 108).

<sup>90</sup> Rice, *A New Matrix for Modernism*, pp. 25-6. The house in Gordon Street tied the Mew family ever closer to their proprietary heritage. Gordon Street was designed and built by Thomas Cubitt. He was the elder brother of Lewis Cubitt, who designed King's Cross Station and was Mew's great-uncle by marriage.

<sup>91</sup> Charlotte Mew, 'Not for that City', *Temple Bar*, 126 (1902), 600, line 2. The poem was reprinted posthumously in *The Rambling Sailor* (London: Poetry Bookshop, 1929).

<sup>92</sup> Kendall was celebrated in the *Builder* as the 'Nestor of Architects'. 'The Late Mr. Henry Edward Kendall, Architect' [Obit.], *Builder*, 20 June 1885, pp. 883-4.

and later hung above the fireplace in Mew's family home.<sup>93</sup> Kendall's *Composition Architecturale* depicted men and their designs working in industrious harmony: 'marble staircases, monuments, fleets at anchor and tiny people' were all securely ensconced within the city's 'golden gates'.<sup>94</sup> Monro remembers seeing the composition when she visited Mew, and recalls its 'airy lightness'.<sup>95</sup> However, Mew's poem alludes to the oppressiveness of life in the golden city.

In 'Not for that City' Mew depicts a city that never sleeps: the 'everlasting glare' from the 'level sun', 'golden streets' and 'glittering gates' gives rise to 'white nights, or nights and days that are as one'.<sup>96</sup> The eternal need to uphold the city's prosperity means that its inhabitants are not permitted to rest; they 'strain' their eyes and are 'weary, when all is said, all thought, all done'.<sup>97</sup> Rather than celebrate the city's industry and prosperity like Kendall's *Composition Architecturale*, Mew's poem foregrounds the subjectivity of the city's inhabitants and, in so doing, recalls their oppression:

And if for anything we greatly long,  
It is for some remote and quiet stair  
Which winds to silence and a space of sleep  
Too sound for waking and for dreams too deep.<sup>98</sup>

The clamour and activity of the city weighs heavy on the speaker, who longs for a 'space for sleep'. She considers a suitably isolated place, and her thoughts go to a 'quiet stair'. From here, she imagines with relief her physical and spiritual descent away from the glare of the white city and into silence and darkness. By moving away from the city in the pursuit of physical and mental isolation, the speaker wilfully disinherits herself. 'Not for that City' speaks to a gendered disconnect between the subject, her home, and the city.

The gendered disconnect between subject and home is borne out in many of Mew's poems and has been the subject of recent biographical studies. Rice argues that the disconnection between female subject and her home emanates from the fact that Mew was 'not

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<sup>93</sup> Monro recalls seeing Kendall's *Composition Architecturale*: 'I have a faint recollection of the *Architectural Composition* [...]. I feel sure Charlotte showed it to me on one of my first visits to [the Mew family home]. I think it hung over her mantelpiece'. Monro, quoted in F.W. Leakey, 'Baudelaire et Kendall', *Revue de Litterature Comparee*, 30 (1956), 53-63 (p. 62). Andrew Roberts and Betty Falkenberg believe that Kendall's *Composition* has since been lost: *Charlotte Mew Chronology* (2005) <<http://studymore.org.uk/ymew.ht>> [accessed 25 August 2014].

<sup>94</sup> Rice, *A New Matrix for Modernism*, p. 25

<sup>95</sup> Monro recalls: 'I remember an airy lightness in the picture but can't put more to it'. Quoted in Leakey, 'Baudelaire et Kendall' (p. 62).

<sup>96</sup> Mew, 'Not for that City', lines 9, 1, 2, 3 and 4.

<sup>97</sup> Mew, 'Not for that City', lines 5 and 6.

<sup>98</sup> Mew, 'Not for that City', lines 11-14

comfortable in [home] structures' because they asked her to perform a submissive form of femininity.<sup>99</sup> There is evidence to this end in Munro's memoir, wherein Mew is alleged to have blamed her small literary output on the 'constant interruptions' of domestic life.<sup>100</sup> Katharine Margaret McGowran has argued that the home in Mew's poetry is devoid of its usual 'connotations of security, origins and presence'; it survives in her work as 'a ghostly, hollow structure which serves only to frame and confirm [the speaker's] sense of homelessness'.<sup>101</sup> The female persona in Mew's poetry, McGowran argues, 'is not simply haunted, shut out, or dispossessed, but suffers a more fundamental sense of displacement'.<sup>102</sup> 'Not for that City' is representative of the way that Mew articulates this displacement through movement away from society and toward isolated spaces. The image of a woman descending and ascending stairs recurs in 'Song' (1902), 'Farmer's Bride' (1912) and 'The Changeling' (1913). Other forms of movement which allude to psychological or physical restlessness or unease frequent Mew's poetry: 'From a Window' (1929) and 'The Voice' (1912) both describe a woman imagining crossing the threshold of her home; in 'Changeling' (1913), a woman leaves her bed in the middle of the night, and in 'The Sunlit House' (1916) another woman paces up and down the garden path. Implicit within the women's movement is their restlessness. They do not leave their beds, walk up and down the stairs, or pace the garden path with any articulated or reasoned aim. Through the women's aimless movements around their homes, Mew suggests their unease in the domestic space—they are haunted by half-articulated ambitions beyond their families and homes.

Laura Mulvey's theorisation of the textual home-space is useful when considering the representation of women's relationships with their homes in Mew's literary work. The textual home-space, Mulvey argues, is defined by actual and rhetorical "'interiority'": the 'female sphere of domesticity' is also 'the psychic spac[e] of desire and anxiety' and, thus, constitutes 'a female sphere of emotion'.<sup>103</sup> For Mulvey, the distinction between the uses of inside- and outside-spaces in texts is determined by the connotations implicit in the masculine/feminine binary. She points out that 'emotion, immobility [...] and confinement' appear to 'reverberate' within the textual home-space, but outside-spaces permit 'adventure, movement and cathartic

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<sup>99</sup> Rice, *A New Matrix for Modernism*, p. 26.

<sup>100</sup> Munro, 'A Memoir', p. xviii.

<sup>101</sup> Katharine Margaret McGowran, 'House and Home in Late Victorian Women's Poetry' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Hull, 1996), p. 166.

<sup>102</sup> McGowran, 'House and Home in Late Victorian Women's Poetry', p. 166.

<sup>103</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Pandora: Topographies of the Mask and Curiosity', in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. by Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 53-72 (p. 55).

action'.<sup>104</sup> An important part of Mulvey's analysis which applies to my analysis of 'Passed' is the notion of emotions 'reverberating' around the home: the idea that emotion is cyclical when contained. Mulvey's definition asks that we imagine the emotions of 'anxiety' and 'desire' as if they are sounds which echo around the rooms of a house and are answered only by slightly altered versions of themselves.

Mulvey understands the textual rendering of a home-space to be inflected by the interiority of its female inhabitants. In the case of Mew's work, the home reverberates with anxiety relating to the demands of domesticity, and the desire for something more. In 'Passed', as in her poetry, these feelings inflect and defamiliarise the material objects that make up the female protagonist's surroundings. Just as Mew's verse is understood to disrupt its formal ties by 'defamiliarising [...] well established genre[s]', so too does the protagonist in 'Passed' exhibit a longing to escape her obligatory ties to family, propriety, gendered-roles and gendered-spaces.<sup>105</sup> In 'Passed', the conventional home-space is conspicuously absent. The contrast between an obsession in Mew's poetry with the home and its absence from her first published story invites three questions which my analysis of 'Passed' endeavours to answer: why is the physical home environment absent from the story; what are the literal and symbolic implications for the solitary, wandering woman; and is the literal home-space replaced by a sense of feeling 'at home' in the city's streets?

I examine how Mew used sensory techniques aimed at defamiliarisation and formal disruption to convey the experiential disconnectedness of her subject from both her home and the city and, in so doing, trace a series of failed encounters between the narrator and the urban landscape. Individually these events depict a woman looking for and failing to find an affinity with the city, but collectively they form a recurring pattern of exclusion and estrangement that runs throughout the narrative and which transects the city. 'Passed' breaks free from the woman/home/confinement paradigm to show a woman reflecting on her sense of confinement and exclusion while moving freely in an outside space. By overturning the exterior-male/interior-female binary, Mew draws attention to the gendered limitations of *flânerie* set out by Baudelaire: she asks how a woman is '[t]o be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home' when she rejects the home-space and is traditionally excluded from the

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<sup>104</sup> Mulvey, 'Pandora' (p. 55).

<sup>105</sup> Joseph Bristow, 'Charlotte Mew's Aftereffects', *Modernism/Modernity*, 16 (2009), 255-280 (p. 257).

city.<sup>106</sup> By depicting a female walker who is as ill-at-ease in the home as she is the city, the story invokes the psychological homelessness of the modern female subject at the *fin de siècle*.

#### Moving beyond domestic familiarity in Mew's 'Passed' (1894)

'Passed' begins as the sun sets over London, in the 'hour of pink twilight', in mid-December (121). An unnamed woman impulsively puts down her sewing and decides to leave her house. The woman's decision recalls her sense of confinement: a 'warmly passive afternoon' engaged in solitary, sedentary activity by the fireside has left her desirous of activity and cool air (121). Mew subverts the usual symbols of domestic security and comfort in her description of the woman's home. The fireside is defamiliarised so as to appear threatening and perfidious: in the 'tame glories of fire-light' the woman finds 'false charm' (121). The hearth survives in 'Passed' as a comfortless structure which serves only to frame and validate the protagonist's sense of unease. The function of Mew's exposition is similar to Grand's in 'The Man in the Scented Coat' and Egerton's in 'A Lost Masterpiece'. Mew, Grand and Egerton all suggest the debilitating capacity of the home on their protagonists' subjectivity. The decision to leave the house and enter the street also yields positive results in all three stories. The sense of exhilaration that Josepha experiences when she steps over the threshold of her friend's home is comparable to the 'immeasurable sense of gain' that Mew's protagonist experiences when she steps out of the stiflingly warm house and into the 'keen air outdoors' (121). Mew's narrator describes the 'cold of fierce frost' acting as a backdraught on 'her spirit', which is set 'dancing' like a flame, and her blood being 'stirred' as if ember (121). In this way, Mew and Grand both attest to the positive physiological effect of moving beyond familiarity and embracing the 'new' and foreground the iconoclasm of their characters' actions.

Mew, like Grand, charts the changes in the woman's outlook through character focalisation. Quickly after she steps out onto the street, the woman's first flush of excitement subsides and gives way to familiar levels of anxiety. Mew immediately focuses on sensory detail and blurs the line between subject and object in order to convey the woman's increasing anxiety. The dynamic feeling of walking alone at twilight is thus rendered through an accumulation of momentary sensations, rather than an objective account of material reality.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life' (p. 9).

<sup>107</sup> Julia van Gunsteren, in her study of the impressionistic elements of Katherine Mansfield's fiction, identifies 'the accumulative technique' as a 'major characteristic' of literary impressionism: *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), p. 62. Michele Birnbaum also describes 'accumulative description' as a form of 'impressionistic notetaking' in her study of race and anthropological portraiture in Kate



As a result, the woman and the objects that make up her surroundings lose their familiar shapes and forms; they are delineated, and bleed, not only into each other, but also into the atmosphere. In the early stages of the woman's journey, the effect is to emphasise her solitude and convey a sense of foreboding: the squares through which she travels are 'lonely' and the echoes of her footsteps stalk her 'from behind' (122). The narrator provides few concrete details of the street, but all that the woman sees, hears and smells emphasises its inhospitability. The woman inhales an 'evil smell' as 'dim trees', 'dingy enclosures' and 'flaring gas jets' give way to the 'heavy' but 'partially demolished' walls of Clerkenwell House of Detention which 'rear [...] darkly against the pale sky' (122).

By describing the Clerkenwell House of Detention in its partly-demolished state, Mew alludes to London's violent and politically fractured history: this was the scene of the infamous Clerkenwell explosion, which occurred in 1867, also around sunset and in mid-December. The attack was carried out by supporters of the Fenian movement in Ireland, an organisation dedicated to the establishment of an Irish Republic, who were attempting to free Richard O'Sullivan-Burke, a Fenian arms supplier, from the prison.<sup>108</sup> The explosion caused significant damage to the prison wall and completely destroyed many tenements on the street, but the Fenians were ultimately unsuccessful in their attempt to free their man.<sup>109</sup> The Clerkenwell explosion was the first of a number of attacks on London carried out by organisations campaigning for an Irish Republic throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Among the targets in London were Nelson's Column, Palace of Westminster, Tower of London, London Bridge, Scotland Yard, and several Underground stations.<sup>110</sup> Clerkenwell prison appears in Mew's story as a reminder of the recent attacks on the city and the enduring fear felt by many Londoners. There is no evidence that Mew sympathises with the attackers or the campaign for Irish home rule but, by setting her story at the same time of day and year as the Clerkenwell

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Chopin's novel *The Awakening* (1899): *Race, Work and Desire in American Literature 1860-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 81.

<sup>108</sup> The Clerkenwell Outrage, otherwise known as the Clerkenwell explosion, occurred on 13 December 1867. It is understood to be the most serious incident of terrorist action committed by Irish Republicans in Britain in the nineteenth century. The Fenians loaded a costermonger's barrow with explosives and positioned it next to the Prison wall, lighting the fuse when prison inmates were expected to be exercising in the yard on the other side. Twelve members of the public were killed by the explosion and many more suffered injuries of varying severity. Six men were charged with the attack but only one, Michael Barrett, was sentenced to hanging. Alfred Rosling Bennett offers a first-hand account of the incident in *London and Londoners in the Eighteen-Fifties and Sixties* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1924), p. 309.

<sup>109</sup> It was hoped that O'Sullivan-Burke would be able to escape through the demolished prison wall, but the attack did not go according to plan. Although a large section of the prison wall was destroyed, wardens at the prison had learned of a planned threat and confined the inmates in their cells when the explosion took place.

<sup>110</sup> For a chronology of attacks from Irish Republican organisations around the world, see Niall Whelehan, *The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World, 1867-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. xiii-xv.

explosion, she evokes the similarities between her narrator's escape from the home and O'Sullivan-Burke's attempted escape from the prison.<sup>111</sup>

The woman finds her way out of the prison's ominous shadow and navigates her way to Clerkenwell Green. She 'breathe[s] easily once more' as she surveys 'a roomy space, nearly square, bounded by three-storey dwellings, and transformed, as if by quick mechanism, with colours of sunset' (123). The narrator sets the scene with impressionistic fervour: 'Red and golden spots wavered in the panes of the low scattered houses round the bewildering expanse. Overhead a faint crimson sky was hung with violet clouds' (123). The effect of the sunset alters the reality of the scene and the woman explains that 'everything was transfigured in the illuminated twilight' (123). As a result, the 'three-storey buildings' which bound the Green are transformed into 'low scattered houses' and the 'roomy space' becomes a 'bewildering expanse'. The 'dying sun' also catches 'the rough edges of a girl's uncovered hair and [hangs] a faint nimbus round her poor desecrated face'; she appears as if transformed into a 'medieval saint' (123). Material reality melts away to make way for the woman's overarching impression of the space: expansiveness, and the colours red, gold and purple.

As the woman's eyes become accustomed to the growing darkness in Clerkenwell Green, she sees that 'dim figures [are] hurry[ing]' past her. The homogeneity of the 'dim figures' aligns with Francis Galton's definition of phantasmagoria: a vision of passing figures which provokes 'no curiosity or even awareness of their corporality or individuality'.<sup>112</sup> Despite now knowing that she is not alone, the woman continues to insist upon her solitude: in spite of the hurrying figures, she imagines that 'a stillness st[eals] on' (123). By emphasising that her narrator *imagines* that she is alone and that the world around her is static, Mew reminds her reader of two significant points moving forward: the woman's overarching aim is for isolation, and the narrative is a subjective rendering of the city. Mew makes clear that the material reality of the city and the reality of the narrative are being shaped and influenced by the woman's imagination.

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<sup>111</sup> The Clerkenwell explosion took place at approximately 3.45pm, around sunset, on 13 December 1867.

<sup>112</sup> David Skilton examines the impact of Galton's work on the representation of perceptual breaks in Victorian literature: "'When Dreams are Coming": Wordsworth, Jefferies and Visions of the London Crowd', in *A Mighty Mass of Brick and Smoke: Victorian and Edwardian Representations of London*, ed. by Lawrence Phillips (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 85-106 (p. 98).

## The urban crowd, personal agency and paranoia

Mew was not alone in considering the influence of the urban crowd upon interiority. At a time when cities were growing in size and becoming increasingly densely populated, suspicion and fear of the crowd was becoming more absolute. Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840) was the eponymous fictional account of an individual's encounter with a crowd of strangers. Whereas Mew's narrator is satisfied to resign the members of a crowd to the vague realm of 'dim figures' and Mary Desmond looks to extricate herself from its influence, Poe's observes intently every individual in the throng that passes him by; he presses his 'brow to the glass' of a coffee shop's window and 'scrutinis[es] the mob'.<sup>113</sup> His initial aim is to identify each member of the crowd in 'their aggregate relations', but he quickly 'descend[s] to details, and regard[s] with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance'.<sup>114</sup> Soon enough, the narrator's 'whole attention' is 'arrested and absorbed' by one member of the crowd: an old man whose 'absolute idiosyncrasy' means that he evades being easily identified as a member of one of the tribes of clerks, pickpockets, gamblers, dandies, military men, Jewish pedlars and beggars that file past the window.<sup>115</sup> Poe's narrator, determined to pin down the old man's urban *rôle*, leaves his post at the coffee shop window and pursues his subject through the bazaars and alleyways of London, thereby relinquishing the detachment of the *flâneur* and becoming, at least to all observing parties, just another member of the crowd.

Chapter two of this thesis charted Mary Desmond's desperate attempt to distance herself from a raucous crowd in *The Wheel of God*. Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) also features a terror-stricken encounter with the urban crowd. Conrad's Professor expresses feeling 'lost', 'miserable', and 'undersized' when attempting to navigate his way through a crowd of people.<sup>116</sup> Conrad underpins this intensely negative emotional rhetoric with metaphors that emphasise the power and fortitude of the crowd: they 'swarmed numerous like locusts, industrious like ants, thoughtless like a natural force, pushing on blind and orderly and absorbed, impervious to sentiment, to logic, to terror too perhaps'.<sup>117</sup> Unlike the woman in Mew's story who *insists* on her solitude despite all evidence to the contrary, Conrad's Professor and Poe's narrator fail to retain their agency during their encounters with the urban crowd.

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<sup>113</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Man of the Crowd', in *Thirty-Two Stories*, ed. by Stuart Levin and Susan F. Levine (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2000), pp. 120-9 (p. 125).

<sup>114</sup> Poe, 'The Man of the Crowd' (p. 122).

<sup>115</sup> Poe, 'The Man of the Crowd' (p. 125).

<sup>116</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 61.

<sup>117</sup> Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p. 61.

Although they all explore its different characteristics and contexts, ‘Passed’, ‘The Man of the Crowd’ and *The Secret Agent* collectively speak to a contemporary paranoia of the urban crowd. Fear of the urban crowd at the end of the nineteenth century was underpinned by an aversion to the connotations of individual bodies from all walks of life being brought together in close proximity to become a single mass. Jonathan Maximillian Gilbert avers that frequent references in nineteenth-century literature to ‘the apparently “liquid” nature [of crowds], comparable to slime or to the waves of the sea’, is suggestive of ‘the ability of the monstrous masses to transgress boundaries and the most basic ideas of order, differentiation and cohesion’.<sup>118</sup> In *The People of the Abyss*, for instance, Jack London compares the ‘fear of the crowd’ to ‘the fear of the sea’.<sup>119</sup> He explains that ‘the miserable multitudes, street upon street, seemed [like] so many waves of a vast and malodorous sea, lapping about me and threatening to well up and over me’.<sup>120</sup> Gilbert argues that that the fear of liquid, of “mud” and “slime”, ‘represents a fear of ego dissolution’ and points out that it was also often tied to immoral pleasures of the flesh.<sup>121</sup> In these contexts, the crowd was used in fiction to connote personal degradation.

As well as abstract ideas of social and sexual transgression, advances in personal and social psychology also looked to establish in scientific terms the psychological effect of the crowd upon an individual. Gustave Le Bon’s study of crowd psychology, *La Psychologie des Foules*, was published in 1895 and was translated into English in the following year.<sup>122</sup> The study and its prompt translation into English confirm that the effect of the crowd upon individual perception was a prominent concern for Mew’s contemporaries. Jonathan Crary describes Le Bon’s concept of the crowd as ‘a generalized site in which the accumulated dread and hope associated [...] with social insurrection collapse into an abstract contentless mass’.<sup>123</sup> Le Bon concludes that any individual who is absorbed into this ‘mass’ will find that their ‘faculty of observation and [...] critical spirit [...] at once disappea[r]’.<sup>124</sup> The crowd therefore

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<sup>118</sup> Jonathan Maximillian Gilbert, “‘The Horror, the Horror’: The Origins of a Genre in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain 1880-1914” (unpublished doctoral thesis, Rutgers, 2008), p. 247.

<sup>119</sup> Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (London: Macmillan, 1903), p. 8.

<sup>120</sup> London, *The People of the Abyss*, p. 8.

<sup>121</sup> Gilbert, “‘The Horror, the Horror’”, p. 267, n. 30.

<sup>122</sup> The English translation of Gustave Le Bon’s study was titled *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* and published by T. Fisher Unwin.

<sup>123</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001), p. 245.

<sup>124</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002), p. 17.

‘conditions the limits of [the individual’s] perceptual experience’.<sup>125</sup> He also insists that the condition is universal:

whoever be the individuals that compose [the crowd], however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation.<sup>126</sup>

Mew harnesses contemporary fears of the crowd and establishes her protagonist’s critical distance by showing her refusal to be swept up in the movement of people around her. She remains, adamantly, still and separate. Unlike the men in Poe and Conrad’s narratives, Mew’s protagonist’s perceptual experience is not limited by those around her.

There is evidence in Mew’s personal correspondence and poetry that she had considered the detrimental impact of the crowd (and urban life, more generally) on perceptual experience. In April 1914, Mew sought respite from London by travelling to Dieppe. From the Hôtel du Commerce, she wrote a letter to her friend, Ethel Oliver, in which she outlined the benefits of solitariness when looking to the environment for creative inspiration: ‘One realizes the place much more [when] alone I think – it is all there – you don’t feel it through another mind which mixes up things. I wonder if Art [...] is rather an inhuman thing?’<sup>127</sup> Mew also described the incapacitating effect of city life in her poem, ‘Fame’ (1914). The speaker describes a coarse and invasive crowd made up of people whose critical and perceptive faculties have failed:

I see myself among the crowd,  
Where no one fits the singer to his song,  
Or sifts the unpainted from the painted faces  
Of the people who are always on my stair[.]<sup>128</sup>

In the same poem, the speaker draws an ironic distinction between the critical incapacity of the crowd and the beautiful indifference of the natural world. She describes the ‘blind earth’s great silences and spaces’ and ‘the divine, wise trees that do not care’.<sup>129</sup>

There are clear similarities between Mew’s observations about city life and Le Bon’s theory of crowd psychology. Perhaps most salient is the fact that they both challenge Baudelaire’s definition of the *flâneur*. For Baudelaire, *flânerie* is predicated on physical contact

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<sup>125</sup> Crary, *Suspensions of Perception*, p. 245.

<sup>126</sup> Le Bon, *The Crowd*, p. 4.

<sup>127</sup> Mew, letter to Ethel Oliver, 8 April 1914, quoted in Fitzgerald, *Charlotte Mew and Her Friends*, p. 133.

<sup>128</sup> Charlotte Mew, ‘Fame’, in *Collected Poems and Prose*, ed. by Val Warner (Manchester: Carcanet, 1981), p. 3, lines 3-6.

<sup>129</sup> Mew, ‘Fame’, lines 7-15.

with the crowd: the *flâneur* must ‘become one flesh with the crowd’.<sup>130</sup> But he also insists that the *flâneur* must strive to maintain a level of detachment from his surroundings—to see, but not be seen. Mew and Le Bon (and, indeed, Poe and Conrad) contest Baudelaire’s claim that it is possible ‘to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world’.<sup>131</sup> Poe, Conrad and Le Bon describe the urban masses affecting the critical and creative capacities of the artist-observer and stripping him of his agency. Mew’s protagonist is more successful: she ‘see[s] the world’, and remains ‘hidden from the world’, but cannot bring herself to relinquish her body and soul in order to penetrate its ‘centre’. However, as a lone woman in the street at night, her presence at the edge of the crowd remains to be both unsettling and unstable. Enforcing a distance between herself and the crowd means that she is adrift and, unchaperoned, she is vulnerable. Without an appointment to attend or an errand to complete she is unlike the obscure ‘figures’ who hurry past her. Mew suggests that the solitary woman has more in common with the square’s ‘irregular lamps’ and anomalous ‘old stone pump’ than the people of the crowd.

#### Searching for spiritual affinity in the city

The narrator’s journey in ‘Passed’ is not governed by a desire to form social attachments. Instead, she looks to remove herself from urban society. When stood in Clerkenwell Green and surrounded by ‘hurrying’ members of urban society, her thoughts take flight to the countryside:

There is a street not far from [here], bearing a name that quickens life within one, by the vision it summons of a most peaceful countryside, where the broad roads are but pathways through green meadows, and your footstep keeps the time to a gentle music of pure streams. [...] Perhaps attracted by the incongruity, I took this way. (123-4)<sup>132</sup>

The woman’s desire to occupy a space with a semantic attachment to the countryside suggests her estrangement in the city and from urban society. Conversely, she understands the countryside to be a site of liberation. The artwork that preceded ‘Passed’ in volume 2 of *The Yellow Book* also figures the countryside as a delineated space of liberation. Alfred Thornton’s ‘A Landscape’ (figure 8) depicts two figures in a wooded area: one is seated on a rock, and the other is walking away from her and toward a path which seems to lead out of the woods and towards a hill in the background of the image.<sup>133</sup> The figures appear to be naked and, although

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<sup>130</sup> Baudelaire, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ (p. 9).

<sup>131</sup> Baudelaire, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ (p. 9).

<sup>132</sup> Streets neighbouring Clerkenwell Green that correspond with this description include Pear Tree Close, Bowling Green Lane, Wood Street and Vineyard Walk.

<sup>133</sup> Alfred Thornton, ‘A Landscape’, *The Yellow Book*, 2 (1894), 120.

they are not explicitly gendered, their shapes and long dark hair suggests that they are women. The impressionistic style of Thornton's landscape problematises the reality of the image. The tall, dark trees in his painting are mostly straight around their middle, but billow up in tall, uneven columns towards the top. Their shape is evocative of a line of chimneys topped with billowing smoke; standing side-by-side in the painting's middle ground, they evoke a city skyline. The convergence of both rural and urban imagery in Thornton's landscape reflects the convergence of city and country in the *fin-de-siècle* imagination which also governs the woman's thoughts in 'Passed'.



Figure 8: Alfred Thornton, 'A Landscape', *The Yellow Book*, 2 (1894), 120, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <<http://www.1890s.ca>> [accessed 16 August 2016].

Having chosen to isolate herself from urban society, Mew's narrator chooses instead to pursue spiritual affinity. She embarks upon a search for a newly consecrated church in the

neighbourhood, that of Our Holy Most Redeemer.<sup>134</sup> However, the woman finds that she is most keenly aware of her estrangement when inside the church. Her anxiety reverberates around the space, touching and inflecting her description of everything that she can (and cannot) see.

‘[The] forbidding exterior [of the Church] was hidden in the deep twilight and invited no consideration. I entered and swung back the inner door. [...]. Within the building, darkness again forbade examination. A few lamps hanging before the altar struggled with obscurity. I tried to identify some ugly details [...], and failing, turned toward the street again. [...] [T]he atmosphere of stuffy sanctity about the place, set me longing for space again, and woke a fine scorn for aught but air and sky.’

Here again, the darkness of the scene heightens the impressionistic style of the passage. The church’s exterior and its nave are too dark to permit thorough examination and, as a result, they overturn the woman’s gaze. Mew also uses pathetic fallacy, empathy and anthropomorphism to blur the line between subject and object: the dimly lit lamps hanging above the nave join the woman in her ‘struggle with obscurity’. Mew’s description of the church contests the conventional notion of the church as a place of comfort and light: its ‘stuffy sanctity’ not only elicits claustrophobia, but is also directly contrasted to the ‘air and sky’ beyond its walls. Because the woman is unable to make a meaningful connection with the building or the space within, the church extends the pattern of estrangement traced from the woman’s fireplace and through Clerkenwell. Having tried and failed to ‘identify some ugly details’ of its interior, the woman turns to exit back on to the street. (125)

But the woman is prevented from reaching the church doors by a ‘human presence’ (125). She deciphers through the gloom a girl clinging in ‘unquestionable despair’ to a chair at the back of the church (125). Their eyes meet; the girl grab’s the narrator’s hand and drags her ‘into the cold and noisy street’ (126). The girl leads the narrator on a long and dizzying route through London, ‘breathless and without explanation’ (126). Eventually, they reach an impoverished room in which another young woman, one of the city’s fallen, lies lifeless on the bed. The narrator casts her eyes over the contents of the room and concludes that the two young women were, like her, born gentlewomen:

Everywhere proofs of recent energy were visible. The bright panes reflecting back the low burnt candles, the wretched but shining furniture, and some odd bits of painted china, [...]. The [floor]boards were bare, and marks of extreme poverty

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<sup>134</sup> Given the narrator’s proximity to Clerkenwell House of Detention, it is likely that Mew is describing the Church of Our Most Holy Redeemer on Exmouth Street. The church was built by John Dando Sedding and consecrated in 1888, six years before ‘Passed’ was published.



distinguished the whole room. The destitution of her surroundings accorded ill with the girl's spotless person and well-tended hands, which were hanging tremulously down. Subsequently I realised that these deserted beings must have first fronted the world from a sumptuous stage. (127)

However, the narrator rejects the obvious commonality between herself and the two fallen women. She finds the desperation of the surviving woman as 'distasteful [...] an alien presence has ever repelled me' (128).

The narrator promptly rejects the woman's anguished pleas for help. Instead she flees the room in 'wild departure', slipping down the stairs in her haste (135). Opening the front door, she finds the street empty. She lingers on the threshold until she hears the 'drunken song' of a passing man:

At the first note I rushed towards him, pushing past him [...], and on till I reached the noisome and flaring thoroughfare, a haven where sweet safety smiled. Here I breathed joy, and sped away without memory of the two lifeless beings lying alone in that shrouded chamber of desolation, and with no instinct to return. (135-6)

In this instance, the narrator's decision to immerse herself in the crowd is representative of her moral degradation. The same can be argued of her decision to attend a dance that evening, an act of grim resolve to re-immersing herself in urban life. The following day, the woman tries to make amends. She attempts to re-trace her steps to the wretched room, but the city rejects her efforts. She, like Poe's man of the crowd, is thwarted by London's maze of streets, and returns home alone and unsatisfied.

The narrator's inability to navigate the streets, suggests that her estrangement from the city has been compounded by her decision to reject the community of other women. In fact, Mew suggests that the narrator is complicit in upholding the city's hegemony, the process which maligns and marginalises female subjectivity and lived experience. Months later, the narrator sees the impoverished woman in the street and realises that she has turned, in desperation, to prostitution. The narrator understands that she is culpable for the woman's social and sexual downfall: 'I knew my part then in the despoiled body' (141). The necessity and, yet, the impossibility of dealing with her 'part' in this process disturbs the narrator's libidinal relation to reality. It ruptures her means of self-preservation (her Freudian *reizschutz*) and this gives rise to a moment of mania: from her mouth escapes a 'laugh, mounting to a cry' (141). But, realising that she and the prostitute exist on the same plane of exclusion, the narrator is unable to determine whether the final 'mounting [...] cry' of despair emanates from the prostitute's mouth or her own (141). 'Passed' is an indictment of women's failure to

demonstrate solidarity and find commonality with women outside of their own social class. It is also a criticism of the aspect of *flânerie* which requires the artist-observer to occupy a space of uncommitted and apolitical detachment.

### Reacting against ‘The Yellow Book set’: Mew’s socialised prostitute

Following the publication of ‘Passed’ in *The Yellow Book*’s second volume, Mew joined ‘The Yellow Book set’.<sup>135</sup> Through this network of writers and artists, it is likely that she met Beardsley, D’Arcy, Syrett, Henry James, Arthur Symons, Max Beerbohm and George Moore.<sup>136</sup> It is striking, then, that Mew’s story about a solitary wandering woman afforded her with a place in one of the *fin de siècle*’s most renowned literary ‘families’. It is also ironic to consider that Mew may have written ‘Passed’ as a challenge to two works, by Beardsley and Symons, which were published in the first volume of the periodical. Mew’s ‘Passed’ can be read as a response to the portrayal of the prostitute in these works.

Beardsley’s ink drawing ‘Night Piece’ (figure 9) and Symons’ poem ‘Stella Maris’ are both representative of dominant, male-authored images of the street-walker, the eponymous lone walking woman at the *fin de siècle*.<sup>137</sup> Beardsley’s ‘Night Piece’, depicts a woman walking past Leicester Square’s Empire Theatre at night, a space that was notorious for the congregation of prostitutes in the 1890s.<sup>138</sup> The woman’s décolletage glows alluringly white against the inky blackness of the city. Symons’ poem, ‘Stella Maris’, also features a prostitute: the speaker recalls an erotic encounter in the city with a ‘Juliet of the night’; he knows that he is one of ‘many a Romeo’ but, nevertheless, enjoys her ‘delicious shame’ (lines 5, 6, 30). Symons uses mythological allusion to align the woman with a siren (‘And is that seaweed in your hair?’; line 26). The extended metaphor allows Symons to depict the woman playing a

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<sup>135</sup> In her memoir, Netta Syrett described the writers and artists who published in *The Yellow Book* and who socialised together at Harland and Beardsley’s homes (herself included) as ‘The Yellow Book set’: *The Sheltering Tree* (London: G. Bles, 1939), p. 78.

<sup>136</sup> Rice, *A New Matrix for Modernism*, pp. 12-13; Fitzgerald, *Charlotte Mew and her Friends*, p. 60; McGowran, ‘House and Home in Late Victorian Women’s Poetry’, p. 169.

<sup>137</sup> Aubrey Beardsley, ‘Night Piece’, *The Yellow Book*, 1 (1894), 127; Arthur Symons, ‘Stella Maris’, *The Yellow Book*, 1 (1894), 129-31. Subsequent references to Symons’ poem are given in parentheses

<sup>138</sup> Although Beardsley does not explicitly locate his walking woman in Leicester Square, he does offer clues to her location. The shape of the building behind the woman closely matches that of the Empire Theatre in Leicester Square. The building to its left is only partly shown in the drawing, but is occupied by a company with a name ending ‘-tle’. Photographs and advertisements confirm that Stagg & Mantle, a ladies’ dress shop and silk drapers, occupied the site next to the Empire Theatre until at least 1917. Given this evidence, it is highly likely that Beardsley’s woman is walking in Leicester Square. For further discussion of the Empire Theatre and its problem with prostitution, including the dispute put forward by Laura Ormiston Chant to the Music Halls Committee in October 1894, see Joseph Donohue, *Fantasies of Empire: The Empire Theatre of Varieties and the Licensing Controversy of 1894* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), and Nicholas Freeman, *1895: Drama, Disaster and Disgrace in Late Victorian Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 20-4.

dominant role in the union: the sound of her voice acts as would a siren-song; it lures him to her as she emerges from the crowd as if 'out of the sea' (line 24).

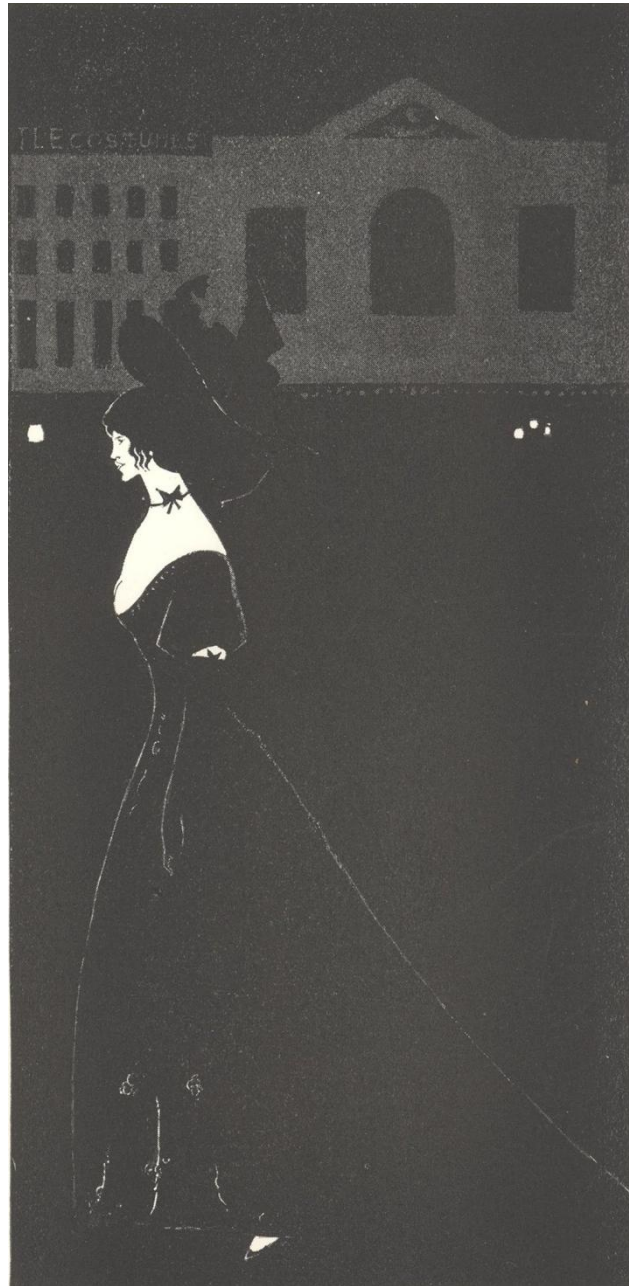


Figure 9: Aubrey Beardsley, 'Night Piece' *The Yellow Book*, 1 (1894), 127, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <<http://www.1890s.ca>> [accessed 16 August 2016].

Beardsley's 'Night Piece' and Symons' 'Stella Maris' were printed on consecutive pages in the first volume of *The Yellow Book*. The strategic positioning of these pieces draws attention to their considerable similarities. Firstly, the bodies of both women are marked by signs of their sexual corruption. Symons' speaker imagines his subject's hair to be matted with

seaweed, while the exposed neck and chest of Beardsley's streetwalker shines out like a beacon in the dark. These bodily markers also compound allusions to the women's unreality; Symons' prostitute is described as a 'wraith' and Beardsley's luminescent woman, who is walking toward the margin of the image, is similarly ghost-like. The contrast between the woman's white skin and the black background in Beardsley's drawing also recalls the light-beam emanating from the 'phantom [...] lighthouse' in 'Stella Maris' (line 18). But most striking is their shared allusion to the women being 'submerged' below the city. In Symons' poem, this idea is made explicit by the speaker imagining the prostitute arising from the sea ('Out of the empty night arise; [...] / Out of the night, out of the sea'; line 22). A similar idea is implied by Beardsley: the woman's white face and chest appear as if bobbing on top of a dark, inky surface. In both instances, the liquid imagery not only ties the women to essential ideas about the female body and female pleasure, but also emphasises their perceived otherworldliness.

'Stella Maris' and 'Night Piece' evoke the danger of the prostitute by alluding to her ability to transgress notions of order, differentiation and cohesion. The texts played to nineteenth-century anxieties about the artifice of femininity and to the fear that corrupt (and corrupting) women could be hiding in plain sight. This is underpinned in Beardsley's painting by the 'Costume' shop in the background (note the pun on the store's title: *Stagg and Mantle*).<sup>139</sup> Other descriptions of London's prostitutes also alluded to their unreality and their grave dissociation from the city. Like Symons and Beardsley, W. MacQueen-Pope distances the prostitute from the ordinary, the commonplace and, to some degree, the human. He describes the 'overwhelming allure' involved in 'watch[ing] the wicked ladies as they floated—none of them seemed to walk [...]—in and around the Empire Theatre.'<sup>140</sup> By rendering the prostitute in wicked and dehumanising terms, Symons, Beardsley and MacQueen-Pope all deny the accountability of the male gaze in the 'allure' of her body. MacQueen-Pope is 'overwhelmed' by her 'wickedness'; Symons' speaker is corrupted by her siren-song; and the implied-observer of Beardsley's streetwalker is drawn to her like a moth to a flame.

Mew's depiction of the prostitute came in the second volume of *The Yellow Book* and is an implicit challenge to 'Stella Maris' and 'Night Piece'.<sup>141</sup> Sally Ledger describes Mew's narrative as 'a socialised and moralised encounter' with two prostitutes. Mew uses the same techniques as Symons and Beardsley, but challenges their depiction of the prostitute as

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<sup>139</sup> I am grateful to Nick Freeman for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>140</sup> W. MacQueen-Pope, *Twenty Shillings in the Pound*, quoted in E. S. Turner, *Roads to Ruin: The Shocking History of Social Reform* (London: Penguin, 1966), pp. 232-3.

<sup>141</sup> For Mew's life-long interest in the figure of the prostitute see, Fitzgerald, *Charlotte Mew and her Friends*, pp. 13, 50, 56 and 126.

essentially sexualised, wicked, and subhuman. She uses bodily markers to render the ‘despoiled’ and poverty-stricken body of the living prostitute. ‘A timidly protesting fragrance’ of violets, a symbol of mortality, prefigures the appearance of the prostitute, who is ‘clothed, save for a large scarf of vehemently brilliant crimson, entirely in dull vermillion’ (140).<sup>142</sup> Mew’s description of the prostitute challenges Beardsley’s because it attests to the fruitlessness of the woman’s attempt to mask or ‘mantle’ the reality of her situation. The mix of ‘brilliant crimson’ and ‘dull vermillion’ in her dress explicates the slow, continuous and ultimately futile process of disguising her poverty: as a layer of bright clothing is added to her ensemble, another layer of red fades beneath.

### Visual representations of the solitary woman in *The Yellow Book*

This chapter so far has extrapolated the various ways that *Yellow Book* writers used the solitary female walker to challenge the supremacy of the male gaze. Notions of seeing and being seen have been central to my analyses. In the final section of this chapter I examine two highly impressionistic visual depictions of the solitary woman from volume ten of *The Yellow Book*: ‘A Dream’ by Margaret Macdonald, and ‘Ill Omen’ by her sister, Frances Macdonald. I compare the Macdonald sisters’ treatment of the solitary female body in these works to Vernon Lee’s in her short story, ‘Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady’, which was also published in volume 10 of *The Yellow Book*. Using Christa Zorn’s theory of ‘mythical modes of thinking’, developed in her study of Lee’s supernatural stories in *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual*, I demonstrate how these three works encourage the synthesis of rational and (seemingly) irrational elements of the self and other using the solitary female body and, as a result, destabilise the differences between accepted and *possible* forms of femininity.<sup>143</sup> In this way, I align the works with progressive depictions of the New Woman that were emerging at the time, epitomised by Grand’s ‘New Woman and the Old’.

When the Macdonald sisters made their *Yellow Book* debut in volume 10 of the periodical, men and women were contributing roughly equal quantities of visual art to its

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<sup>142</sup> Sally Ledger, ‘The New Woman and Feminist Fictions’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 153-68 (p. 167). In Renaissance art, the violet is often used as a symbol of the Virgin Mary’s humility. Examples include Leonardo da Vinci’s *Madonna and Child with Flowers* (c. 1475-1478) and Stefan Lochner’s *Madonna of the Violets* (c. 1435-1440). In ancient Rome, violets were used in mourning as a sign of affection for the dead. Hans-Josef Klauck explains that Romans are recorded to have decorated tombs with wreaths of violets: *Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Relations* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), p. 77.

<sup>143</sup> Christa Zorn, *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual* (Athens, O.H.: Ohio University Press, 2003), pp. 153-7.

contents. But this had not always been the case. Male artists dominated the earliest volumes of the periodical: the first three volumes did not feature any artwork by women; volume four contained one piece by Margaret L. Sumner; volume five, again, contained none. This amounts to one of a total eighty-four works of art in issues 1-5 being attributable to a woman. Women's contribution to *The Yellow Book's* visual aesthetic increased after its fifth volume, largely as a result of Lane's decision to fire Beardsley as art editor in April 1895. Up until this point, Beardsley had been central to *The Yellow Book's* visual aesthetic. As art editor he controlled which artworks made it into the quarterly, and which did not, but he was also the most prolific of *The Yellow Book's* artists, designing the covers and title pages and publishing seventeen of his own illustrations in volumes 1-4.<sup>144</sup> It was anticipated that the fifth volume of *The Yellow Book* would continue this trend; the prospectus announced a cover and title page designed by Beardsley, as well as four more of his original artworks.<sup>145</sup> However, after firing Beardsley in the wake of the Wilde scandal, with the assistance of Patten Wilson, Lane assumed responsibility for the visual contents of all future volumes of the periodical. As Stetz and Lasner explain, the visual contents from here on showed 'the mark of a new regime'.<sup>146</sup> By dismissing Beardsley from his post, Lane opened up an 'artistic vacuum' that was in need of being filled.<sup>147</sup> This space created professional opportunities for lesser-known illustrators, many of whom were women.<sup>148</sup> Volumes nine and ten of the quarterly, Kooistra and Denisoff point out, were 'the most balanced in gender representation' to date; six of the fourteen artists featured in volume nine were women and, by volume ten, women were contributing more than half of the artwork.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Stetz and Lasner claim that there is 'no doubt' that Beardsley had been responsible for the exclusion of women artists from *The Yellow Book* during his time as art editor. They point out that the *Savoy*, the next magazine that Beardsley edited, also featured notably few works of art by women. Stetz and Lasner, *The Yellow Book: A Centenary Exhibition*, p. 33.

<sup>145</sup> Lane dismissed Beardsley between the circulation of the advertisement of the fifth volume of *The Yellow Book* and its publication. The fifth volume retains Beardsley's pre-formatted designs for the back cover and spine, but his four illustrations were replaced with one illustration apiece by Sydney Adamson and Patten Wilson.

<sup>146</sup> Stetz and Lasner, *The Yellow Book: A Centenary Exhibition*, p. 33.

<sup>147</sup> Margaret D. Stetz and Mark Samuels Lasner, *England in the 1890s: Literary Publishing at the Bodley Head* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), pp. 57-8.

<sup>148</sup> The array of female artists published in volumes 6-10 stood in stark contrast to the single female artist featured in volumes 1-5. Volumes 6-13 of the quarterly produced artwork by Gertrude D. Hammond, Elizabeth Stanhope Forbes, Amelia Bauerle, Gertrude Prideaux-Brune, Caroline Yates Gotch, Ethel Reed, Mabel Dearmer, Mary J. Newill, Florence M. Rutland, Katherine Cameron, Georgina Gaskin, Evelyn Holden, Celia A. Levetus, H. Isabel Adams, sisters Frances and Margaret Macdonald and Nellie Syrett (sister of Netta), and others.

<sup>149</sup> The covers for volumes nine, eleven, twelve and thirteen were all designed by female artists (Mabel Dearmer, Nellie Syrett, Ethel Reed and Mabel Syrett, respectively) and so reflected the increased involvement of women to the periodical's overall aesthetic. Lorraine Janzen Kooistra and Dennis Denisoff, 'The Yellow Book: Introduction to Volume 9 (April 1896)', p. 3, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <[http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV9\\_Intro.pdf](http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV9_Intro.pdf)> [accessed 10 June 2016]. Women artists contributed seven of a total thirteen artworks to volume 10.

Moreover, just as it offered professional opportunities to new writers, such as Mew, *The Yellow Book* also featured work by female artists at the beginning of their career, such as Nellie Syrett (sister of Netta).<sup>150</sup> Lane and Wilson began to position them as members of artistic communities: Caroline Yates Gotch was showcased as a member of the Newlyn School in volume seven; Georgina Gaskin, Mary J. Newill, Isabel Adams, Florence M. Rutland, Celia A. Levetus, Evelyn Holden and Mabel Dearmer as members of the Birmingham School in volume nine; and the Macdonald sisters took their rightful place alongside other members of the Glasgow School in volume ten.<sup>151</sup> This method of showcasing the work of artistic communities legitimised the involvement of large numbers of female artists. Compared to Sumner, the lone female artist in volume four, whose work was contextualised only by her gender (she was listed as ‘Miss Sumner’ in the contents page), the women in volumes seven, nine and ten were positioned as professional, schooled artists and members of significant artistic communities.<sup>152</sup>

Although the gender demographic of *The Yellow Book*’s artists became increasingly balanced after Beardsley’s dismissal, the female subject continued as a mainstay. However, Stetz and Lasner identify a shift from ‘a periodical fixated on images of women created by men’, such as Beardsley’s ‘Night Piece’, discussed earlier in this chapter, to a periodical that allowed female artists ‘to speak for themselves’.<sup>153</sup> Women artists became part of a conversation—between fellow artists, writers, critics and the reading public—about the modern woman’s place and role in public life. Their work engages with significant contemporary discourses about gendered experiences of spaces, community, the dissolution of separate spheres, and the tension between female ambition (creative or otherwise) and the search for a ‘home’. Certainly in the case of the Macdonald sisters, this involved finding new ways of mapping and interpreting the female body, central to which were the use of impressionistic techniques, the amalgamation of natural and otherworldly imagery, and methods of blurring the distinctions between self and other, reality and unreality.

The discourse between visual and literary contributions, and between contributions from men and women, has been the subject of significant recent scholarship. In his study of

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<sup>150</sup> Two years before she launched her career as a children’s book illustrator, Nellie Syrett contributed a pen-and ink rendering, ‘The Five Sweet Symphonies’ to volume ten of *The Yellow Book*, and this was followed by the opportunity to design the cover and title page of volume eleven.

<sup>151</sup> Volume eight advertised the contribution from the Glasgow School of Art in its contents page. This was not the case for volume ten, but Madeline Sawyer points out that it featured a significant number of contributors from the Glasgow School of Art, including D. Y. Cameron and his sister, Katherine Cameron. Madeline Sawyer, ‘Editing the Images of Volume 10 of *The Yellow Book*: A Practicum Project’, p. 2, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <[http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV10\\_Sawyer\\_Practicum.pdf](http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV10_Sawyer_Practicum.pdf)> [accessed 15 June 2016].

<sup>152</sup> The names of male artists in the contents pages of this volume four are not prefixed with their title.

<sup>153</sup> Stetz and Lasner, *The Yellow Book: A Centenary Exhibition*, p. 44.

visual depictions of urban encounters, Turner avers that *The Yellow Book*'s artwork helped to establish its dominant discourses: sight, vision, and interpretation.<sup>154</sup> Earlier in this chapter I demonstrated how two lines of enquiry in Mew's 'Passed'—the convergence of city and country in the *fin-de-siècle* imagination, and the notion of the countryside as a delineated space of liberation—are also borne out in a neighbouring element, Thornton's 'A Landscape'. Parallel structures which reinforce themes and counter-narratives are also noticeable between three pieces published in volume 10: between the watercolours by the Macdonald sisters, and Lee's short story, 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady'.

Lee's short story charts a relationship between two living things: the adolescent prince of the story's title, and a grass snake which the prince genders as a trans-species female (hence its semantic transformation in the title into a 'Snake Lady'). The prince is 'not afraid' of the snake upon their first encounter 'for he knew nothing' about the cultural bias against them.<sup>155</sup> The 'icy cold' of the snake's body triggers pity, not fear, and he attempts to warm it in his pocket. For Zorn, the thinly-veiled eroticism of this scene 'intimates pleasure without anxiety'; as a result, the negative (cultural, biblical) symbolism of the snake is overwritten by way of the prince's affection.<sup>156</sup> The reader must accept the snake's new function as an object of platonic affection despite that fact that its body is traditionally encoded as a sign of deception and/or seduction. The prince's decision to gender the snake as female from their first encounter is significant, as is its eventual transformation into a woman in the final moments of the story. The shifting symbolism of the snake and its eventual transformation, Zorn argues, 'opens an imaginary space for the construction of "woman" beyond the definitions traditional history has offered to us'.<sup>157</sup> Lee suspends the difference between snake and boy, woman and snake, morality and immorality, and, in so doing, suggests the *possibility* of concord between culturally separated images in 'a sensual tableau of pleasure, love and beauty'.<sup>158</sup> Lee's

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<sup>154</sup> Turner, 'Urban Encounters and Visual Play in *The Yellow Book*' (p. 141).

<sup>155</sup> Vernon Lee, 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady', *The Yellow Book*, 10 (1896), 289-344 (p. 304), in *The Yellow Nineties Online* < [http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV10\\_lee\\_prince.pdf](http://www.1890s.ca/PDFs/YBV10_lee_prince.pdf) > [accessed 10 April 2015].

<sup>156</sup> Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p. 154. Lee did not believe that we *instinctually* fear things—living or otherwise—that make up our surroundings. She explores this notion in her epistolary essay 'To My Friend Carlo Placci' (1887), in which she claims that 'the danger of baseness, [...] comes [...] with the consciousness of imperfection and conflict, with the necessity of making a choice'. Vernon Lee, 'Juvenilia: To My Friend Carlo Placci', repr. in *The Woman Aesthetes: British Writers 1870-1900*, ed. by Sue Asbee, 3 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), III, pp. 35-41 (p. 36).

<sup>157</sup> Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p. 157.

<sup>158</sup> Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p. 154.



narrative, Zorn suggests, encourages a ‘mythical mode of thinking’ through which it is possible to synthesise rational and irrational elements of the self and other.<sup>159</sup>



Figure 10: Margaret Macdonald, ‘A Dream’, *The Yellow Book*, 10 (1896), 162, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <<http://www.1890s.ca>> [accessed 16 August 2016].

Margaret Macdonald’s ‘A Dream’ (figure 10) also looks to synthesise rational and irrational elements of female subjectivity. ‘A Dream’ depicts a woman walking alone in woodland and surrounded by tall, white flowers. The woman’s stance is suggestive of her confidence and ease: her shoulders are low and pushed back and her arms are straight and

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<sup>159</sup> For further examples of the ways in which Lee’s fiction opens up planes of mythical thinking, see Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, pp. 144-57.

extended away from the body, palms facing toward the viewer; her head is angled upward and her gaze rests on the horizon between the viewer and the sky. The woman's clothing is of the aesthetic style: she wears a long, unstructured white skirt and a dark, cropped jacket. The way that she wears her hair—centre-parted and tied up in the 'billowing' style favoured by Macdonald—is an indication that 'A Dream' may be a self-portrait.

The background of the painting stands in contradistinction to the woman's aesthetic dress but, nonetheless, Macdonald's composition suggests a spiritual and physical concord between the woman and the natural world. The emphasised vertical lines of the woman's body run in alignment with the trunks of the tall trees and stems of the flowers that surround her on all sides. Her long, white skirt mirrors the flowers' thin, downturned petals, and her hands, barely decipherable in the mesh of rough brush strokes, seem to disappear amongst the flower-heads in a similitude of white. Macdonald's painting, like Lee's story, is a harmonious tableau of culturally differentiated imagery: the woman, in fashionable *fin-de-siècle* dress, derives pleasure on the one hand from her solitude and the other from her affinity with wild and unruly nature. She is, to all intents and purposes, a modern, yet goddess-like woman at home in the woods. 'A Dream' was met with favourable reviews from critics. Despite synthesising conflicting imagery, Macdonald's painting upheld a relatively conservative sentiment: it aligned femininity with the natural world as opposed to, for instance, the world of industry and commerce. The central figure is also clearly gendered and her body/consciousness are 'readable' aspects of the image: it is clear that she is delighting in her situation.

Although 'A Dream' depicts a woman delighting in her solitude, its traditional pairing of woman and natural world, in addition to the readability of her body (and, by extension, her implied consciousness), meant that it sat relatively comfortably with Victorian art critics. Frances Macdonald's painting, 'Ill Omen' (figure 11), met a markedly different fate, and was described by the *National Observer* as 'the most wicked and hopelessly symbolic of bogies'.<sup>160</sup> From this and other scathing reviews, Janice Helland surmises that contemporary critics found Frances Macdonald's depiction of femininity hopelessly inaccessible: 'far from being a femme fatale, an accepted "outlaw" image of woman', it 'effectively shuts the viewer out'.<sup>161</sup> Although 'Ill Omen' also depicts women standing alone in a wooded area its tone is entirely different. 'A Dream' is a rapturous display of pleasure which, by her body language, the woman invites the viewer to bear witness. Conversely, Helland has described 'Ill Omen' as conveying 'a

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<sup>160</sup> 'Yellow and Green' [review], *National Observer*, 15 August 1896, p. 394.

<sup>161</sup> Janice Helland, *The Studios of Frances and Margaret Macdonald* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 80.

pervasive sense of distance, aloneness and aloofness'.<sup>162</sup> The composition of 'Ill Omen' is also considerably starker. The woman may be surrounded by trees but they are branchless, and there are no flowers at her feet. Whilst the background 'A Dream' is broken by the appearance of a pathway or stream in the middle-distance, the disquietude of 'Ill Omen' is furthered by the murky blackness of the woman's surroundings which seems to extend to infinity.



Figure 11: Frances Macdonald, 'Ill Omen' (1893), *The Yellow Book*, 10 (1896), 173, in *The Yellow Nineties Online* <<http://www.1890s.ca>> [accessed 16 August 2016].

The depictions of the women's bodies in the two paintings are also markedly different. In 'A Dream', the woman is walking forward with her arms extended to embrace the woodland and her eyes are turned upward in rapture. Conversely, the woman in 'Ill Omen' is stood still, with her large hands covering her pubic area, in a stance reminiscent of Sandro Botticelli's *The*

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<sup>162</sup> Helland, *The Studios of Frances and Margaret Macdonald*, p. 14.

*Birth of Venus*, although her face is turned downward and away from the viewer as though ashamed of her near-nakedness. Underpinning the difference between the two women is their states of dress. Margaret's woman is fully-clothed in fashionable *fin-de-siècle* style, whereas Frances chooses to drape her female figure in a pale, translucent dress which not only defies specific periodicity, but also hints at the angular, almost sexless body beneath. By draping her woman in a translucent dress, Helland argues, Macdonald 'lifts [her] out of Victorian Puritanism'.<sup>163</sup> The near-naked, lean, and angular figure in 'Ill Omen' is emphatically removed from the three categories of nineteenth-century womanhood: the Pre-Raphaelite beauty, the Victorian maiden, or the femme fatale.

Although the female figure in 'Ill Omen' may not be immediately comparable with either traditional or modern ideals of femininity, the painting does contain allusions to her affinity with the natural world. In this way, 'Ill Omen' and 'A Dream' are strikingly similar. Both Margaret and Frances Macdonald chose to mimic the stark columns of the tree trunks in the shapes of the women's bodies. But whilst the woman in 'A Dream' maintains the strong lines of her body as she walks, the woman in 'Ill Omen' stands with her feet together, as if rooted. Similarly, in 'A Dream' the woman's immersion in the natural world is evoked through the disappearance of her hands into the surrounding flowers, whereas the woman's affinity with the natural world is suggested in 'Ill Omen' through more fantastic means: her long hair is blown back from her shoulders to form a horizontal line that extends to the edge of the image and runs parallel to a formation of ravens in flight.

The bodies in 'A Dream' and 'Ill Omen' are tableaux of culturally differentiated imagery. Frances Macdonald presents the viewer with an angular, masculinised form, clothed in a pseudo-Grecian gown and posed classically but, nonetheless, evokes affinity with the natural world through fantastical imagery: her hair takes flight on the wind like an unkindness of ravens, and she appears rooted to the spot like the trees that surround her. Margaret and Frances Macdonald's paintings suspend the difference between woman and other, sexuality and modesty, earthly and ethereal and, in so doing, suggest the *possibility* of unity between culturally separated images. They are sensuous tableaux which convey the multifariousness of pleasure, love and beauty. Like Lee's 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady', they permit a 'mythical mode of thinking' through which it is possible to synthesise rational and irrational elements of the self and other. In a way that is comparable to Mew's 'Passed' and Egerton's 'A Lost Masterpiece' published in the periodical two years earlier, the artworks use the solitary

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<sup>163</sup> Helland, *The Studios of Frances and Margaret Macdonald*, pp. 36-7.

woman to explore the territory between regulation and freedom, tradition and novelty, and objectivity and subjectivity at the *fin de siècle*.

By blurring the lines between the realms of the real, the fantastic, the rational and the irrational in their work, Mew Egerton and the Macdonald sisters open up an imaginary space beyond traditional and essential notions of the feminine ideal for the re-construction of modern, female consciousness. Mew uses literary impressionism to invoke her protagonist's psychologically homelessness: it is central to her stylistic treatment of the woman's estrangement—from the city, her home, and other women. By describing a woman's aims towards adventure and then charting her subsequent estrangement, 'Passed' recalls the tension between female ambition and the necessary sense of belonging which also resonates throughout the fiction and autobiographical works discussed in chapters one, two and three of this thesis. Mew's woman cannot find a space in which she feels at ease in the city because its spaces and places are constant reminders of her incongruity. As if in answer to the problem that Mew poses in 'Passed', Margaret Macdonald's modern woman finds peace and rhapsody beyond the city, in rural solitude. The city has been constructed by men and is tightly woven with their histories, but the rural environment, Macdonald infers, is subject to constantly renewal and, therefore, 'readable' to the female gaze. Conversely, Egerton and Frances Macdonald used their solitary women as tools to challenge the ascendancy of the male gaze. Although the woman in 'Ill Omen' is far removed from Victorian female desirability, her symbolic ascendancy emanates from the sense that she exists in a 'world of her own', an autonomous and self-contained subject. The 'narratives' of Frances Macdonald's painting and Egerton's short story both rest on the shared notion that there is beauty to be found in new and/or 'unreadable' female bodies. The two short stories and two artworks examined in this chapter all present non-traditional images of woman, albeit to varying degrees, but their progressiveness lies in the way that they use the solitary woman and her environment to foreground the *possibility* of harmony between culturally separated ideals.

## Conclusion

In the context of what was expected of women in the nineteenth century, Amy Levy, George Egerton, Sarah Grand and Charlotte Mew all led solitary and iconoclastic lives: they chose, variably, to live alone, to reject marriage and the life of a home-maker, and to undermine or exonerate themselves of existing family ties. Their desire to establish themselves as literary professionals invokes and, yet, curtails their autonomy; a career was essential to financial and personal independence, but their success was concomitant on their assimilation within public life. The construction of female literary identity, then, occurred in the increasingly destabilised space between public and private worlds. In their endeavours to become professional writers, Levy, Egerton, Grand and Mew were required to expose themselves to the city and to public opinion.

This thesis identifies the assimilation of old and new literary forms and genres that Levy, Egerton, Grand and Mew used to render a prevailing socio-political issue: the uneasy relation between individuality and collective life that was felt most acutely by women who were living and working in the city. In their literary renderings of urban loneliness, Levy, Egerton, Grand and Mew tested the limitations of urban subjectivity, genre and form. They depicted female characters escaping the restrictions and inhibitions of everyday life—the necessity of a travelling chaperone and of living in shared accommodation, the encroachment of the urban crowd, and the rules which still policed women’s movement beyond the home—by charting their oscillation between alternate subjectivities and realities, as well as known and unknown territories. These types of movement are forms of escape because they offer respite from the pressures of society, appease the need for isolation, and permit a subjective excavation of the increasingly destabilised territory between freedom and regulation. They also decentre society and community, emphasising the importance of personal seclusion to human wellbeing and creativity. Female subjectivity is revealed in these texts to be in a constant state of flux, and therefore utterly at odds with the historical and unyielding demands of domesticity and work.

By focussing on the social and economic circumstances which governed their textual composition, the four chapters of this thesis have offered historicist readings of the solitary female body. Furthermore, by examining the influences on the working practices of Levy, Egerton and Grand, and their course of literary experimentation, chapters one, two and three have repositioned critically neglected texts within their oeuvres. In the adaptations they made to their working practices and literary style, these authors were recognising and answering

changes to the literary landscape at the *fin de siècle*: variably, a shift towards conservatism after April 1895, the growing prominence of the periodical, the short story genre, and travel writing as cultural mediums, and the influx of exponents of female emancipation to London in the final years of the 1890s and early twentieth century. Chapter four evaluates *The Yellow Book* as a medium which, by encouraging formal experimentation and depictions of woman-as-subject, facilitated and legitimised women's intervention in the urban literary tradition and presented new ways of reading and writing the solitary female body.

The focus on travel writing in chapter one extricated Levy from the urban environment and urban literary context which has traditionally guided scholarship. It offers a worldly, rather than just urban, context in which to consider Levy's lived experience, writing practices, published work and legacy. Levy's personal correspondence reveals that she actively sought ways out of London throughout her life, and that she found travelling to be a source of creative inspiration. Examining Levy's correspondence alongside a chronology of her periodical contributions reveals the interconnectedness of travel and writing in her biography, specifically its role in her professionalization and in fulfilling her desire to escape London, and provides a new context in which to understand her long relationships with *London Society* and *Cambridge Review*. In the process of researching Levy's literary activity and her relationship with *London Society* while she was travelling, I located one poem, 'In Switzerland', which has not been anthologised or received any scholarly attention since its debut despite its obvious similarities with one of Levy's most highly anthologised poems, 'To E.'. 'In Switzerland' reveals Levy's uncomplicated enthusiasm for the natural environment and her enjoyment of travel. Levy was by no means a solitary traveller. She moved around Southern Britain and Continental Europe with friends and, as her relationship with Vernon Lee attests, made new and lasting friendships along the way. However, her travel fiction recalls the modes of Victorian conservatism which continued to police and limit female lived experience. Levy used the short story—still a relatively new literary form—and the travel genre to critique the disparagement of female subjectivity in Victorian thought and culture at home and abroad, thereby demonstrating an acute awareness of the new opportunities that were opening up around the short story and the growing middle-class female readership. Although accounts of Levy's depressive episodes and her death have had a considerable and lasting effect on her legacy, her correspondence, publishing chronology, and previously neglected travel writings show that she was both commercially aware and incredibly shrewd. By financing her retreats from London and increasing her public exposure through the magazine marketplace, Levy's experience of travel and the fiction that it inspired allowed her to enjoy the benefits of both publicity and privacy.

Chapter two examined Egerton's *The Wheel of God* in the contexts of literary realism, the Woman Question, and *fin-de-siècle* arguments about the social aims of the woman writer. Previous scholarship has tended to position Egerton as a proto-modernist writer and identify the short story as her means of expression. By focusing on the 'moments of isolation' in *The Wheel of God*, this chapter demonstrates a commonality between Egerton's short stories and her novel: the dominant themes of 'independence of vision and submission of body'.<sup>1</sup> Mary is shown to be physically and geographically confined by routine and financial necessity and, as a result, is limited to interacting with the wider world through her imagination. The additional space of the novel allowed Egerton to render in finite detail the sustained effect of society and work upon female subjective development, whilst also allowing her to render the causes and effects of Mary's flights of fancy. Although the city provides Mary with the best chance of securing financial independence outside of marriage, the logistics of city-life for working-class women mean that she is unable to harness the solitude which, Egerton suggests, is essential to human wellbeing. By showing that the working-class urban subject is powerless to choose at any given time between solitude and the society of others, Egerton offers a portrait of psychological homelessness specific to the working woman at the *fin de siècle*.

Grand's biography, like Levy's and Egerton's, attests to the conflict between the desires for solitude and companionship which marked the lives of working women at the *fin de siècle*. Examining Grand's biography in the context of the society/solitude conflict gives rise to new ways of understanding the unique nature of Grand's celebrity. By analysing the critically neglected 'Josepha' trilogy in this context, chapter three 'liberated' Grand from the realist context which usually limits scholarly interaction with her work. In her 'Josepha' stories, Grand rendered the unease between individual and collective life by experimenting with the supernatural and adventure genres. But old habits die hard, and Grand sought to legitimise the thematic focus of her supernatural stories by aligning them with her 'studies from life'. Angelique Richardson has claimed that Grand's fiction and urban identity is marked by her 'superbly class-conscious sense of separation', but Grand's fear of the expanding city was also informed by the idea that exponents of female emancipation—women who had presumably found inspiration in Grand's earlier work—were saturating the feminist marketplace and contributing to the decline in her popularity.<sup>2</sup> It was in this context that Grand referred to being

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<sup>1</sup> J. W. Lambert and Michael Ratcliffe, *The Bodley Head 1887-1987* (London: The Bodley Head, 1987), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 133.



‘crowded out’ of the city in conversation with her friend, Gladys Singers-Bigger, years later.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, London’s creative and feminist networks were integral to Grand’s literary success. The conflict between Grand’s desire for personal solitude and the centrality of the city to her success saw her depicted in the periodical press as an objective commentator of urban life when, as we have seen, in actuality, the urban experience had a profound and lasting effect on her sense of self. Grand’s ‘Josepha’s trilogy reveals her endeavours to keep abreast of shifting literary trends.

The act of *flânerie* is a manifestation of the antithetical desires for society and solitude. Chapter four examined the use of impressionistic techniques in female-authored *flânerie* fiction published in *The Yellow Book*. Egerton and Mew used impressionistic literary techniques to render the fear and claustrophobia of urban life, and evoke the increasing destabilisation of both gendered subjectivities and spaces, against the backdrop of the city. My analyses of ‘Passed’ and ‘A Lost Masterpiece’ tested Nord’s claims that the female solitary walker in the nineteenth century was ‘habitually relegate[d] [...] to the position of object, symbol, and marker’, and that the act of walking alone ‘unsettle[d] her domestic and private identity’ and, above all, ‘threaten[ed] her respectability, her chastity, her very femininity’.<sup>4</sup> Egerton and Mew’s stories are examples of the challenges posed to this traditional paradigm in the pages of *The Yellow Book*. Along with Grand’s ‘The Man in the Scented Coat’, the stories depict solitary walking women disrupting the laws that govern the urban landscape. By leaving the house to walk the streets the women in these stories are playing active roles in the dissolution of separate spheres and the symbolic ascendancy of the home. Furthermore, by overturning the male gaze or exerting the influence of their own gaze the walking women in these texts offer new readings of the city which contest the gendering of urban space, urban experience, and urban literary traditions which pushed female subjectivity to the periphery. The progressiveness of these portraits of female solitariness emanates from the sense that they, like the Macdonald sisters’ women in the woods, are autonomous and desiring subjects.

The representations of city and urban subjectivity have been central to my analysis of primary material throughout this thesis. In chapters two, three and four, on Egerton, Grand and *The Yellow Book* stories, respectively, I have deliberately selected literary texts which foreground women reacting against the gendered regulation of urban space. In chapter one, I

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah Grand, quoted in Gladys Singers-Bigger, diary entry, 3 September 1933, in ‘Ideala’s Gift: The Record of a Dear Friendship’; unpublished diary held by Bath Central Library, Bath.

<sup>4</sup> Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 117.

have selected texts by Levy which depict a woman's relationship with or experience of foreign or rural space being inflected by a specifically urban state of mind. The restrictions of this thesis have limited any thorough exploration of the relationship between urban subjectivity and rural landscape at the *fin de siècle* beyond chapter one, although, as I have frequently indicated, this would certainly be a worthy and fruitful course of investigation. There is also a great deal of further research to be done and debate to be had regarding the assimilation of naturalised imagery in visual depictions of the solitary woman in *The Yellow Book*. Chapter four of this thesis has shown how visual and literary components in *The Yellow Book* worked together to underpin common aims and routes of enquiry. Further investigation into the contribution of female artists to *The Yellow Book*'s aesthetic and to the debate about the solitary, superfluous, unnatural and anomalous modern woman would underpin the periodical's contemporary reputation as a cultural commentator on life, in all of its variety, at the *fin de siècle*. Similarly, a thorough investigation into photographic depictions of women writer's/artist's city homes in general illustrated magazines (in the vein of my examination of Grand's 'At Home' interviews in chapter three), would identify the extent to which the femalestream rendered the conflict between individual and collective life through its illustrations and either assimilated or isolated the emancipated working woman from her urban environs. In these ways, scholarship may move towards a more fully realised portrait of solitary woman at the *fin de siècle*.

## Appendix

Amy Levy, 'In Switzerland', *London Society*, July 1884, p. 120.

Above my head the sky is blue  
Matching the rippling lake in hue.  
All round about the mountains rise.  
A green delight to weary eyes.  
Here, where the place is warm and fair,  
Where soft moss grows, where all the air  
Is sweet with pungent scent of pine,  
Stretched, prone and passive, I recline.  
Around me lie the books and rugs,  
The basket, boiler, teapot, mugs,  
And all the other things that we  
Have carried up for work and tea.  
Walled round with tomes of ponderous size,  
Her pen the busy Ellen plies.  
Kit Marlow is her theme. Enough  
I've had of all our dead men's stuff.  
Kit Marlow's dead since long ago,  
And I'm alive to-day, I know.  
Heigho! I kick my heels i' the sun!  
What matter if the work's undone?  
Give me the warm sweet air, the sound  
That Nature whispers soft around,  
The lights and shadows in the trees,  
And let them write their books that please.

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