



Male Perspectives on the New Woman in works of Bernard Shaw, Grant Allen and George Gissing

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Abstract

The New Woman was a late nineteenth century product of the proto-feminists who tried to raise awareness and make political and social changes in Victorian society. The stereotypical New Woman was well-educated, anti-marriage, anti-motherhood and possessed unfeminine traits like cigar smoking or bicycle riding. Both men and women supported and critiqued this phenomenon in public debate but also in literature, art and theatre. Researchers have mainly researched New Women literature written by female authors or a combination of female and male authors. In this thesis, I examine exclusively New Women works by male authors, namely Bernard Shaw's play *Mrs Warren's Profession*, Grant Allen's novel *The Woman Who Did* and George Gissing's novel *The Odd Women*, and focus on the aspects of marriage and profession. Shaw was an ardent supporter of the woman's cause, which is evident in the play. Yet, it also shows Shaw biggest concern, namely her attitude towards romance and rigid emotions. Allen's novel is an ode to free love unions and written in favour of New Woman who still saw motherhood as their natural duty. However, the tragic fate of the New Woman and the ambiguous ending of the novel has caused a lot of critique by feminists. Gissing also openly supported the woman's cause, and his novel shows the reader a realistic image of the contemporary hardships of women. According to him, a marriage for love or becoming financially independent through training were women's best options.

Keywords: New Woman, Bernard Shaw, Grant Allen, George Gissing, Mrs Warren's Profession, The Woman Who Did, The Odd Women, feminism, nineteenth century, late Victorian England, women, gender roles.

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Introduction

“The quiet joys of home, the love of husband and children, the constant thought of them and their welfare, to the absolute effacement of herself, will return with all the delight of novelty, and she will be at peace” (561). Thus Mary Jeune argued in her essay “Women of To-day, Yesterday, and To-morrow”, that was published in the *National Review* in 1889, that even though education for women had improved, and it increased their freedom, women would always find their way back home in order to care for their husband and children. She was the first author to use the term ‘new woman’, although it was in lower case. It took five more years before the term was popularised and used with upper case. Pro-feminist writer Sarah Grand and anti-feminist writer Ouida, pseudonym for the novelist Marie Louis de la Ramee, used the term extensively in their exchange in the *North American Review* in 1894. In Grand’s articles, in which she attacks men and states that new women “proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's Sphere” (270). But it was Ouida, who replied to her severe attack on men, stated that “The Workingman and the Woman, the New Woman, be it remembered, meet us at every page of literature written in the English tongue” (610).

The New Woman was free-spirited and independent, educated and uninterested in marriage and children, and she threatened conventional ideas about ideal Victorian womanhood (Buzwell); or, as Elaine Showalter describes her, the New Woman, was “challenging the institution of marriage and blurring the borders of the sexes” (169). Like in any debate, some people were for and some were against this phenomenon. The New Woman’s advocates presented an idealized image of an emancipated woman that was used in, for instance, literature, popular culture and art. As Jennifer Hedgecock states: “The New Woman is an agent of social and political transformation” (19) who reflected upon “inequality

in marriage and professional life” (Hellman 2); issues that early feminists had fought for since the late eighteenth century.

This thesis will examine representations of the New Woman, especially regarding marriage and profession, in Bernard Shaw’s *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (1894), Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* (1895) and George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893). New Woman literature has mainly been researched by looking at female authors, who have dominated this field. In 2004, Anne Hellman published *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, and Mona Caird*, in which she focuses on female New Woman writers. The same applies to Diane Nicola Thompson’s work *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, published in 2000, which discusses the works by Margaret Oliphant, Charlotte Mary Yonge, Mary Ward, Marie Corelli and Ouida among others. As such, it appears that extensive research exclusively focusing on New Woman male writers has not been done yet. For this reason, this thesis will look at male authors and compare their views on the New Woman by examining their works.

As mentioned before, the idea of the New Woman was a threat to the idea of the Victorian ideal womanhood, also known as “the Angel in the House”. The term “Angel in the House” was coined by Victorian poet Coventry Patmore, used in his poem of the same title, and published in 1854. The following excerpt shows what image of the ideal woman is represented in his poem:

Man must be pleased; but him to please
 Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
 Of his condoled necessities
 She casts her best, she flings herself.
 How often flings for nought, and yokes
 Her heart to an icicle or whim,

Whose each impatient word provokes
 Another, not from her, but him;
 While she, too gentle even to force
 His penitence by kind replies,
 Waits by, expecting his remorse,
 With pardon in her pitying eyes; (75)

His poem is an ode to his wife who was, according to him, the perfect Victorian wife. The angel was supposed to be passive, weak, graceful, self-sacrificing “and above all—pure” (Melani, par. 1). However, many definitions of Victorian ideal womanhood can be found. In this thesis Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble’s definition will be taken as the main description: “the virtuous wife-mother, centre of hearth and home, repository of the conscience of the bourgeois industrialist state, devoted to the domestic crafts, entirely without sexual impulses” (11). In order to understand why women advocated gender equality and how this image of a conventional woman differs from the New Woman, it is necessary to realise what the difference was between the rights and roles of men and women in the Early Victorian era, and how the New Woman attempted to make a difference. For this reason, a brief lay-out of the Woman Question in the late nineteenth century will be provided in the next chapter.

This research will be placed in a theoretical framework based on feminist criticism by Elaine Showalter, and the texts will be situated in their social-cultural context. Through a close reading of the three texts in which I will focus on marriage and profession in relation to the female characters, I will examine how the New Woman is represented in these works and how the female roles in the novels compare to each other. In the second chapter, I will carry out a close reading of Bernard Shaw’s *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* and focus on marriage and profession, especially regarding the female characters in the play. In chapters three and four I

will conduct a similar analysis as in chapter two, focusing on Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* in chapter three and George Gissing's *The Odd Women* in chapter four respectively.

Chapter One: The Rise of the New Woman

Since the end of the eighteenth century, critique about the position of woman in society has been expressed, marking the beginning of a public debate which eventually led up to the emergence of the New Woman. This public debate, also called the Woman Question, was first raised in England by Mary Wollstonecraft in her pamphlet *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792. She compared the relationship between men and women to that between masters and their slaves: “Would men but generously snap our [women’s] chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens” (150). She argued against the claims that women were not rational and therefore had no right to proper education, declaring that, if women were educated properly, they would develop their rational qualities. According to her, education for women was not incompatible with the role of women as mothers or wives; in fact, she argued that “To be a good mother—a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Meek wives are, in general, foolish mothers” (227).

Gender inequality was seen in almost all aspects of life, for instance, education, voting rights or the right to own property. The notion that women were the ‘weaker’ sex and therefore had to be controlled by men, can be traced back to the Bible. Jeanette King states in her work *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (2005), that Christianity has been one the most important influences in defining the role of women. The Bible introduced Eve and the Virgin Mary as two role models of female vice and virtue. Eve was disobedient because she was leading man away from God, and the Virgin Mary “represented the obedience to God’s wishes” (10). The Virgin Mary formed the base for

female virtues that the ideal Victorian woman had to embody. In her work *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (2013), Deborah Gorham defines the ideal Victorian woman as follows: “She would be innocent, pure, gentle and self-sacrificing. Possessing no ambitious striving, she would be free of any trace of anger or hostility. More emotional than man, she was also more capable of self-renunciation” (4-5). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar elaborate on these cardinal virtues in their renowned study *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). They state that in literature by men, female characters were generally identified as either angels or monsters. Gilbert and Gubar explain that “a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of ‘angel’ and ‘monster’ which male authors have generated for her” (17). It was for this reason that women had difficulty deviating from these extreme images entrenched in Victorian society.

The difference between the two sexes was not only viewed as anatomical and physiological, but men and women were also classified in relation to separate spheres; men belonged to the public sphere and women were confined to the private sphere. This made the gap between the sexes even larger. As Barbara Welter explains: “men were supposed to be the movers, the doers, and actors in public life, women were defined accordingly as the passive, submissive responders” (Welter 159). The virtues explained by Welter and Gorham were prevalent in literature in the second half of the nineteenth century, as becomes clear from Coventry Patmore’s earlier cited poem “The Angel in the House” (1854) and John Ruskin’s lecture “Sesame and Lilies: of Queens Gardens” (1864). It was also in the second half of the nineteenth century that male and female writers started to offer increasing resistance to these feminine virtues. This is, for instance, the case in John Stuart Mill’s “The Subjection of Women” (1869), which entails the claim to gender equality:

[T]he legal subordination of one sex to another – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a system of perfect equality, admitting no power and privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other. (Mill 1)

Similarly, Florence Nightingale's "Cassandra" (1852) expressed women's inner struggle and challenged conventional gender norms: "Why have women passion, intellect, moral activity – these three – in a place in society where no one of the three can be exercised?" (37).

According to Angela J. Smallwood and Janine Utell, the central concerns of women's rights activists had gone through changes. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, education for girls was their main focus. Next to that they found change in consciousness to be more important than social or political change (7). Several decades later, in the 1850s and 1860s, Janine Utell states in her article "The Woman Question", women were "cause-driven and reform-based, focusing on issues of particular material concern to women: marriage, property, employment, education" (par. 4). Social and political change had become very important during these decades. It is also around the same time that women movements were formatted and started organizing campaigns against female oppression. The movements were led by middle-class and liberal women; women who had the liberty to do so financially.

The acquisition of knowledge and increase of job opportunities was one of their central concerns, alongside the constitution of marriage and sexuality. The contemporary situation and general consensus for middle-class women, according to Holcombe, was that "marriage and motherhood were the careers marked out for women by nature" (3). This was also evident from the traditional orthodox view upon education, which entailed that it should be divided into masculine and feminine subjects. A woman was encouraged to study subjects that helped her become a good mother and wife, so she would take "practical subjects, summarized in the convenient term 'housewifery'" (Bayley 396). Both men and women were for and against this division in education and profession. Antifeminist Sarah Sewel was a firm

supporter of this division and against women taking masculine subjects, which is seen in her work *Women and the Times we Live in* (1868). She argued that “women who have stored their minds with Latin and Greek seldom have much knowledge of pies and puddings” (qtd. in Levine 26). Critic John Ruskin asserted in his lecture “Sesame and Lilies: of Queens Gardens” (1864), that women only need to have the necessary knowledge for her to “sympathise in her husband’s pleasures, and in those of his friends” (Ruskin 128). So, the purpose of women’s education was only to the advantage of men, so they could have intellectual conversations with their wives.

On the other hand, feminists Josephine Butler and John Stuart Mill were active supporters of women’s education and employment outside marriage and motherhood. In 1868 Butler published *The Education and Employment of Women* in which she stated that “the desire for education which is widely felt by English women springs from the conviction that for many women to get knowledge is the only way to get bread” (7-8). Next to that, John Stuart Mill published his work “The Subjection of Women” in 1869, in which he wrote that women, married or unmarried should be able to enjoy “the same free development of originality [...] which is possible to men” (47). Although marriage was the ultimate goal of life and a woman’s sole occupation, next to motherhood, Mill stated that in fact, “not all women did marry” (qtd. in Gorham 27). She had a couple options, next to staying with her parents. She could be placed in the household of a relative and be an unpaid servant, or if she turned to employment, “being a governess was the most acceptable occupation” (Gorham 27). Her possibilities were very few, partly because of her restricted access to education and, of course, because of society’s limitations.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, proto-feminists achieved success in improving education for women. Philippa Levine argued that although progress was partly consonant to reforming the secondary education for boys, it was also because of the efforts of

feminists that the government was “prompted to widen its concerns including girl’s education” (29). This resulted in the Education Act 1870 which made education for boys and girls in England and Wales up to 10 years old mandatory. There were now also private initiatives for opening schools and colleges for women. Dorothea Beale founded the Cheltenham Ladies College in 1858 which offered education to women; however, only to “daughters of independent gentlemen or professional men” (Levine 29). In 1862 Emily Davies tried to persuade London, Oxford and Cambridge University, to admit women. The University of Oxford refused to enrol women, but the University of Cambridge “agreed to conduct a trial run for girls”. (Levine 35). The results were impressive, which led to a demand for a permanent scheme for women at the university. It passed the Senate of the University “by a dangerously narrow majority of fifty-five to fifty-one” (Levine 36). This proved a major impetus to the improvement of women’s education.

As mentioned before, the constitution of marriage and sexuality were also central points in debates on the Woman Question. Women were prepared and educated for marriage and motherhood, and they were “expected to occupy themselves within the household of their parents until they married” (Gorham 27). Harriet Björk points out that marriage was seen as “merely a social contract” (118) which was controlled by the husband. The rights of married women were very limited. Any money earned or received by a woman, or her inheritance, became property of her husband upon matrimony (Smith 4). Barbara Leigh Smith was a women’s rights activist and published her work *A Brief Summary of the Laws in England Concerning Women: Together with a Few Observations Thereon* in 1854. In her work she listed a summary of the law that clearly shows the unequal position of women in the mid-Victorian era. She states, for example: “A woman’s body belongs to her husband; she is in his custody and he can enforce his right by a writ of *habeas corpus*” (4). But also concerning property after divorce, Leigh Smith mentions that husbands had complete control over the

division of their property. To make matters worse, husbands would also usually be assigned custody over their children. The publication of her pamphlet was very affordable and therefore it became widely distributed. Pam Hirsch mentions in her work *Bodichon, Barbara Leigh Smith (1827–1891)* (2004) that it was for this reason that and her clear and concise writing, that also the lower classes were able to read it. Consequently, it informed women of their inequality and the notion was later raised in parliament. After many years of advocating women's rights, it resulted in the Married Women's Property Act 1870, which allowed women to be able to own and keep the money they earned and property they inherited.

Although the term was coined in 1894, by feminist writer Sarah Grand and anti-feminist writer Ouida, the phenomenon of the New Woman was already widely known in the 1880s and gained popularity during the 1890s, led by the second generation feminists who benefited from the educational opportunities won by the proto-feminists of the sixties. It was the second generation “who endowed the New Woman with her hostility to men, her questioning of marriage, her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life, and her belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a financially self-sufficient, single, and yet fulfilling life” (Jordan 19). The law and society's moral principles did not allow women to have equal rights yet, but it was in the 1880s and 1890s that these women tried actively to break with tradition.

Writers of the early and mid-Victorian era tended to be more restrained and moderate in their claims, which is also what sets them apart from the New Woman writers. After Olive Schreiner published three allegories in 1887 in *The Fortnightly Review*, she was soon joined by others: “For the first time in England, leading feminists began to make overt attacks on the institution of marriage” (Jordan 19). In 1888, Mona Caird wrote an essay called “Marriage”, later published as part of her work of essays *The Morality of Marriage: And Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman* (1897), and also a series of columns for the *Daily Telegraph*

called “Is Marriage a Failure?”. In the first, she stated that marriage was a “vexatious failure” and that “the man who marries finds that his liberty has gone, and the woman exchanges one set of restrictions for another” (Caird 197). So women exchanged the Victorian social conventions for the restrictions that were put on them when they got married. In the latter series of columns, she argued that marriage is an institution based on the “economic dependence of the wife” and also “restricted the freedom of both sexes” (Showalter 39). Although the title of her columns is formulated as a question, she did not hesitate in stating that she found marriage to be a failure. In her work, *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, and Mona Caird* (2004), Anne Hellman remarks that Caird was “instrumental in introducing the concerns of the New Woman into the public arena” (67). She analysed the abuse of women by discussing “controversial subjects as undesired marital sex, birth control and unwanted pregnancy” (Hellman 67).

According to Ellen Jordan, Olive Schreiner’s novel *The Story of an African Farm*, published in 1893 under the pseudonym of Ralph Iron, marks the start of the “new breed of feminist” (Jordan 19) in fictional writing, previously referred to as the second generation feminists. The New Woman became a subject for fiction: many novels of the 1890s, particularly the years 1893-1895, explored to one extent or another the imaginative possibilities she opened up (Harsh 79). New Woman novelists were mainly female, like Schreiner, Sarah Grand (pseudonym of Frances Elizabeth Clarke) and George Egerton (pen-name of Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright). However, a few male authors also contributed to this genre, for instance: George Meredith, George Gissing, Grant Allen and Thomas Hardy.

New Women did not only critique the overall institution of marriage; a few feminists even lived by their beliefs and decided to boycott marriage. To enter an official union, even though the Married Women's Property Act 1870 was introduced, meant that women were still restricted by law. Feminist leader Christabel Pankhurst saw celibacy as a weapon to fight

gender inequality. Others, like Olive Schreiner and Eleanor Marx, believed that a marriage is demeaning, but that entering a free union would be the perfect solution. It is a union in which a man and a woman live in companionship, unmarried, but still have a sexual relationship. As we will read in chapter three, such free unions were not always successful.

Next to feminists who argued in favour of gender equality, there were also numerous traditionalists criticizing the claims for gender equality. For example, Eliza Lynn Linton published an anti-feminist article in the *Saturday Review* in 1868, “The Girl on the Period”, and in 1891 published “Wild Women as Politicians” in the periodical *Nineteenth Century*. In the latter she states that politics is a men’s environment:

There is in them a curious inversion of sex, which does not necessarily appear in the body, but is evident enough in the mind. Quite as disagreeable as the bearded chin, the bass voice, flat chest, and lean hips of a woman who has physically failed in her rightful development, the unfeminine ways and works of the wild women of politics and morals are even worse for the world in which they live. (79)

Linton lists some physical appearances that make women masculine and therefore unnatural. Next to that she finds a woman entering politics equally unnatural. Like Linton, many of her contemporaries, male and female, negatively portrayed the New Woman as a mannish, pipe-smoking, bicycle-riding, child-neglecting monster (Buzwell, par. 5). The British weekly magazine *Punch* and the quarterly periodical *The Yellow Book* also contributed to the battle against the New Woman. “Scarcely an issue of *Punch* appeared without a cartoon or parody of New Women” (Showalter 41). The magazine showed women undertaking masculine activities, smoking, and wearing masculine clothing, such as a tie (figure 1, see appendix). A caricature expressing fear of the increasing influence of the New Woman and the social and political shift that Victorian society was witnessing, was published by Strohmeyer & Wyman

in 1897 (figure 2, see appendix). In this picture the woman is also smoking a cigarette, but next to that, she is wearing knickerbockers, knee socks and male shoes. She is taking on the role of the man and leans on the chair, supervising the man who is wearing an apron and dress and who is doing the laundry, standing in a submissive position, while leaning over the tub.

According to Elaine Showalter, doctors were also warning that the New Woman “was dangerous to society because her obsession with developing her brain starved the uterus” (40), which made it impossible for her to have children. Next to that they claimed that the New Woman was the instigator of “an epidemic of nervous disorders” (Showalter 40), such as anorexia, neurasthenia and hysteria. Even scientists presented arguments against the New Woman, as Geddes and Thomson warned that those women “have highly developed brains but most of them die young” (qtd. in Showalter 40). This is what most male critics focused on, trying to overrule the claims of gender inequality and attempting to justify the traditional role of women.

The phenomenon of the New Woman became more widespread in the 1890s, but as shown, both men and women had been questioning the role of women in England from as early as the late eighteenth century. First they focused on improving women’s education and a change in consciousness, after which they also addressed other concerns of gender inequality, like marriage, property and employment. The proto-feminists did make small progress in time, and because of their progress and mindset, it was the second generation of feminists who overtly attacked the feminine virtues, expectations and limitations. They managed to make actual changes by promoting legal change and reform of women’s education and by attempting to change people’s minds about the institution of marriage.

Chapter Two: New Women in *Mrs Warren's Profession*

Bernard Shaw's controversial play *Mrs Warren's Profession* was written in 1893, published in *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* in 1898, but due to British censorship, its public performance was banned until 1926. The Lord Chamberlain denounced the play as "immoral and otherwise improper for the stage" (qtd. in Peters 15). However, it was produced at a private performance in London by the Stage Society in 1902 (Ward 7). According to Ward, until the beginning of the twentieth century, the British theatre had been dominated by "unreality" both in topics and in the language of the plays (8). By unreality he means the sentimentalism and romance in its plays, instead of an engagement with more realistic and contemporary discussions in society. It was not until then that the theatre-going public came to accept and to become familiar with the change to more serious subjects such as politics and religion. In the section named *Author's Apology*, a preface Shaw later attached to his play, he states that he did not like to waste "[his] energies on 'pleasant plays' for the amusement of frivolous people" (Shaw 9). Additionally, he explains that he wrote the play to "draw attention to the truth that prostitution is caused, not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing, and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together" (Shaw 5). The play was mainly unconventional because one of the leading roles was a prostitute. It was very unusual for a prostitute to have a speaking part on the stage and have a chance to explain to the audience why she had turned to her trade.

Plays were increasingly focusing on subjects that were unconventional and shocking to the audience. The change in subjects in theatres was also the start of the genre of the New Drama. As Jan McDonald describes in his work "New Women in the New Drama" (1990), New Drama was a "reflection of the growing importance of the feminist movement" (31).

Leading male writers of the New Drama, such as Granville Barker, John Galsworthy, St. John Hankin, and John Masefield were aiming to engage with the Woman Question. Their plays covered topics that were subject to discussion, for example “the plight of the dependent single woman, the conditions experienced by women in the workplace, the potential contribution of women to public life, and the role of women as mothers” (McDonald 31). The famous Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, who was also known in England, wrote the New Drama play *A Doll's House* in 1879. It was very controversial in its view on marriage norms and motherhood, and therefore a good example of New Drama. The protagonist, Nora, leaves her husband and children in order to discover herself and therefore abandons her duties as a mother and wife. Ibsen stated that “[a] woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from a masculine standpoint” (qtd. in Meyer 321). *A Doll's House* is also a prominent play since “the New Woman first appears on stage” (Poplawski 268), struggling with the limitations that society imposed on her. A contemporary critic published a review after a performance of *A Doll's House* in *The Times* on 8 June 1889. This critic mentions the following: “Praiseworthy as Ibsen’s conclusions may be as to the position of woman in society, there will certainly be two opinions in this country as to his manner of enforcing them” (Novelty Theatre par. 3). When looking at *Mrs Warren's Profession*, it is clear that Shaw’s play fits perfectly in the New Drama genre because of its similarities to the parameters of the New Drama that McDonald describes. Furthermore, critics have called the two main female characters New Women. Beatrice Webb says in her contemporary review about Vivie that Shaw “put on the stage a real modern lady” (qtd. in Nasar 125), and in a more recent work Katie Regan Peel argues that: “Mrs. Warren likes to work and wants to work (just like Vivie and other New Woman)” (180). However, in what way are these New Women represented in Shaw’s Play?

Let us first examine the plot of the play. Mrs Warren and her daughter Vivie are the two main protagonists, who in the beginning of the play have a rare meeting. Due to Mrs Warren's profession as a brothel owner, for which she has to travel frequently, Vivie has not seen her mother often during childhood. Vivie is initially unaware of her mother's profession, and when she tries to find out who her father is, she ends up discovering that her mother was a prostitute. Thinking her mother quit prostitution she accepts her past, since Vivie realises it contributed to her privileged upbringing and education. George Crofts, Mrs Warren's business partner, informs Vivie, after Vivie rejects his proposal in marriage, that her mother is still working in prostitution and owns multiple brothels on the continent. Vivie, who graduated from Cambridge University, does not understand her mother's reasons for continuing to work in prostitution and she decides to sever the ties with her mother for good. As will be argued below, the two female characters possess New Woman features, but also features of the traditional woman, especially regarding profession and marriage.

Firstly, when looking at the title of the play, it is clear that Mrs Warren and her profession are an important focus. Because she was born in a lower class family with her sister and two half-sisters, raised by their single mother, seeking employment was a dire necessity. Mrs Warren asks Vivie, when explaining her situation to her daughter: "Do you think I was brought up like you? able to pick and choose my own way of life? Do you think I did what I did because I liked it, or thought it right, or wouldnt rather have gone to college and been a lady if I'd had the chance?" (Shaw 114). Next to the necessity to find a job, young women's choice in profession was very limited. One of Mrs Warren's half sisters worked in a white lead factory for low wages and died because of the poor circumstances: "She was only expected to get her hands paralyzed; but she died" (Shaw 116). Her other half-sister was told to be their role model for she "married a Government labourer in the Deptford victualling yard, and kept his room and the three children neat and tidy on eighteen shillings a week –

until he took to drink” (Shaw 116). The options for women’s work are thus presented as limited, dangerous and underpaid; and marriage is not a bed of roses either.

Katrina Honeyman’s work *Women, Gender and Industrialisation in England, 1700-1870* (2000) focuses on the working conditions of women. Before the Industrial Revolution, men were working in factories and women were to work in the home or in domestic workshops. After the start of the Industrial Revolution in England in the late eighteenth century, women were entering the public sphere and started to work in factories as well (12). Because women were paid less than men, eventually, more women were “positioned in ‘unskilled’ and dangerous occupations” (Long 57). Among these occupations was work in white-lead factories which constituted a dangerous and unhealthy environment. Workers developed “headaches and anaemia” (Long 58), but also more severe illnesses like “colic, blindness, ‘wrist drop’, a partial but disabling paralysis, and death from lead ingestion” (Long 58). In 1845 Friedrich Engels wrote a German book which was translated and published in England in 1891 as *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*. Basing himself on his experiences in Manchester, Engels argued that the Industrial Revolution worsened the conditions of workers in large cities like Manchester and Liverpool: “That the bad air of London, and especially of the working-people's districts, is in the highest degree favourable to the development of consumption, the hectic appearance of great numbers of persons sufficiently indicates” (98).

Mrs Warren explains to Vivie that at the start she was willing to take on any job, except a job in the lead factory due to its dangerous and unhealthy environment. She worked “as a scullery maid in a temperance restaurant”, “a waitress; and then I went to the bar at Waterloo station: fourteen hours a day serving drinks and washing glasses for four shillings a week and my board” (Shaw 117). When her sister Lizzie, who had gone missing a few years earlier, shows up at the bar, dressed “in a long fur cloak, elegant and comfortable, with a lot

of sovereigns in her purse” (Shaw 117), Mrs Warren is introduced into prostitution and able to save money for the first time: “all we had was our appearance and our turn for pleasing men” (Shaw 118-119). She chose not to be exploited in white lead factories or bars. For her, and a lot of other working class women, there was no other workable alternative. Mrs Warren openly criticizes society for its lack of job opportunities for women: “It’s far better than any other employment open to her. I always thought that oughtnt to be. It cant be right, Vivie, that there shouldnt be better opportunities for women. I stick to that; it’s wrong” (Shaw 120). Some prostitutes were fortunate and able to work for only a couple of years while saving up to get married, as a contemporary A.J. Munby mentioned in his diary regarding his findings on prostitute Sarah Tanner: “she had got tired of service, wanted to see life and be independent; & so she had become a prostitute. [She] enjoyed it very much, thought it might raise her & perhaps be profitable” (qtd. in Marwick 141). She eventually saved up money to become the landlady of a coffee-house. Likewise, Mrs Warren was able to accumulate wealth and climb the social ladder, which no other profession could have offered.

Not all women were as fortunate to gain fortune or change occupation. In her work *Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution* (1930), Ivy Pinchbeck mentions that in cities like London “unemployment among women was seen at its worst” (3), the result being that “crime and prostitution, and not infrequently starvation and suicide” (3) among women flourished. Contemporary feminist Josephine Butler, a New Woman and member of suffrage organizations, tried to help women out of prostitution by educating them. Butler wrote a pamphlet, “The Education and Employment of Women” (1868), in which she urged for better education for women and for women to be able to work more and receive equal wages. In a response to her pamphlet, Frederick Harrison wrote Butler a letter “stating his belief that women should be excluded from all industrial employment and looked after by their husbands” (Caine 48). Butler was “quite appalled by his letter” (Caine 48) and explained to

him in a letter that many women were also reliant on their own earnings and additionally, she described the difficulty women had to find work that paid sufficiently (Caine 48). In her letter to Harrison she states the following:

According to your theory of shutting them [women] out from all trades, and not suffering them to work at all for subsistence, you have two millions and a half of women for whom there is the alternative of starvation or prostitution.... You say the evils of admitting women to trades etc., are words than those of exclusion. Have you considered this evil, which is a direct result of shutting women out of every path in which she [*sic*] could honestly win her bread? ...here in Liverpool, there are 9,000 who follow this profession because there is none other open to them. I have gathered up and trained for a better profession some hundreds of fallen women, but such poor little efforts as mine are powerless against the prevalence such Godless theories as you hold. (qtd. in Caine 48)

As mentioned, Butler was a member of suffrage organisations, which were set up to address the issues of inequality and also to help women who were less fortunate. A lot of middle-class women joined suffrage organisation “after working with, knowing, or hearing from Josephine Butler” (Kingsley 9). For instance, movements like the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies and Ladies’ National Association. Like Butler, they educated women to prevent them from entering prostitution or educated prostitutes in order to give them the opportunity to change profession.

Vivie, after listening to her mother who explains under what circumstances she had to grow up, understands why her mother chose prostitution “from the business point of view” (Shaw 119). Later in the play, however, we find out that Mrs Warren is actually the co-owner of multiple brothels on the continent, alongside business partner George Crofts. Vivie assumed her mother was no longer involved in the business since it was financially no longer

a necessity: “Tell me why you continue your business now that you are independent of it. Your sister, you told me, has left all that behind her. Why dont you do the same?” (Shaw 172). The fact that her mother is still active in the business of prostitution and in charge of the exploitation of girls is what Vivie cannot accept. Mrs Warren tries to justify it, arguing that someone has to do it: “If I didnt do it somebody else would; so I dont do any real harm by it. And then it brings in money; and I like making money” (Shaw 172). Their difference in value system is too large to be reconciled according to Vivie and therefore she severs the ties: “We must part” (Shaw 173). Although Mrs Warren possesses New Woman features, because she chose her own path and decided not to work in white lead factories, she also differs from New Women since she continued to exploit women instead of helping them onto different courses of life, as many New Women did.

Mrs Warren’s view of the marriage institution is also very ambivalent. On the one hand, her view is very unconventional because she thinks marriage and prostitution are similar:

What is any respectable girl brought up to do but to catch some rich man’s fancy and get the benefit of his money by marrying him? – as if a marriage ceremony could make any difference in the right or wrong of the thing! Oh, the hypocrisy of the world makes me sick! (Shaw 119)

In her opinion, when a woman chooses to marry a man for his money, it is similar to earning money in prostitution. Whether selling your body in marriage or in prostitution, all is the same. On the other hand, Mrs Warren also pretends to be a widow by calling herself “Mrs”. By pretending to be a widow, she tries to justify her position as a traditional single working mother in Victorian society. This shows her traditional side which also comes up in her maternal actions when she wants Vivie to have a conventional life and she says “no good can come of keeping her unmarried” (Shaw 96).

Throughout the play, we get to experience the plot mostly from Vivie's point of view and therefore we do sympathise with her when she decides to cut relations with her mother. When looking at Vivie, one notices that she possesses many stereotypical New Woman features. For example, she has been able to enjoy a higher education, graduating from the University of Cambridge with honours in Mathematics. Additionally, multiple unfeminine objects and actions are described in relation to her that also fit the New Woman image, for example the "lady's bicycle" (Shaw 63) that is parked outside of Vivie's home. When meeting Praed, Vivie "proffers her hand and takes his with a resolute and hearty grip" (Shaw 65); and she states: "I like working and getting paid for it. When I'm tired of working, I like a comfortable chair, a cigar, a little whisky, and a novel with a good detective story in it" (Shaw 71). Next to that, Vivie ends up unmarried and working in an office in London. Vivie states in the beginning that she is not interested in romance:

PRAED. You make my blood run cold. Are you to have no romance, no beauty in your life?

VIVIE. I don't care for either, I assure you. (Shaw 71)

Even though she renounces men, which she states in the beginning and at the end of the play, it is suggested to the audience that Vivie has not made up her mind about romance after all. For example, when Frank nestles against Vivie in the privacy of his garden and she is "*rocking him like a nurse*" (Shaw 135). In other words, there is an ambivalent side to Vivie as a New Woman as well.

George Crofts is the unpleasant business partner of Mrs Warren and proposes to Vivie in a very businesslike manner. He admits he wants "to settle down with a Lady Crofts" (Shaw 138). She, however, refuses his offer that entails "the money, the position, L a d y C r o f t s and so on", and sharply says: "My no is final" (Shaw 138). When Crofts thinks that she

refuses him because of Frank, he reveals her mother's current situation as Madame and the possibility that she and Frank might be siblings: "Allow me, Mister Frank, to introduce you to your half-sister, the eldest daughter of the Reverend Samuel Gardner. Miss Vivie: you half-brother. Good morning!" (Shaw 146-47). In the final act, when Frank and Praed visit Vivie at her office in London, Frank indicates that he still would like to marry Vivie, but she refuses because she sees him as a brother rather than a lover: "I think brother and sister would be a very suitable relation for us" (Shaw 155). She states that she chooses work over romance: "I must be treated as a woman of business, permanently single (*to Frank*) and permanently unromantic (*to Praed*)" (Shaw 158). However, when Frank discovers Mrs Warren's current profession, he writes Vivie a note saying that he is no longer interested in marrying her. So far, Frank has not acted very conventionally, for example when he refused to listen to Mrs Warren about his intentions to marry Vivie: "Mrs Warren: I cannot give my Vivie up, even for your sake" (Shaw 98). However, when finding out about Mrs Warren's current situation, he cannot longer uphold his intentions for fear of his reputation, which suggests he is very conventional after all.

Very prominent elements in the play that strengthen Vivie's profile as a New Woman are rationality and cool responses, which come across as cold and masculine. During the play Mrs Warren has two emotional outbursts to which Vivie provides a very cool response. In the second act Mrs Warren is about to cry when Vivie demands to know more about her mother's background: "Everybody knows my reputation, my social standing, and the profession I intend to pursue. I know nothing about you" (Shaw 110). When Mrs Warren begins to whimper, Vivie says: "Now pray dont begin to cry. Anything but that. I really cannot stand whimpering. I will go out the room if you do" (Shaw 111). In the final act, when the climax of the play occurs as mother and daughter try to reconcile different value systems (Broder 105), Mrs Warren sobs and already foresees her daughter's reaction: "She'll be so angry if she sees

I've been crying" (Shaw 166). Vivie's coldness is also realised by Mrs Warren when comments that she has created a monster, a heartless daughter who turns on her mother because of the education that she paid for: "your head is full of ignorant ideas about me. What do the people that taught you know about life or about people like me? When did they ever meet me, or speak to me, or let anyone tell them about me? the fools! Would they ever have done anything for you if I hadn't paid them?" (Shaw 170). Additionally, Mrs Warren states what she would change if Vivie was a baby again: "I'd bring you up to be a real daughter to me, and not what you are now, with your pride and your prejudices and the college education you stole from me" (Shaw 174). Due to her profession, Mrs Warren was financially independent and Vivie could receive proper education, but consequently it also caused Vivie's rational responses and ultimately, their final goodbyes. Shaw has portrayed Vivie as very cold and unsympathetic to her mother's arguments, which may have caused the audience to find both female characters unappealing.

To conclude, both Vivie and Mrs Warren have conventional and unconventional features. One could argue that Mrs Warren starts out as a New Woman. Firstly, she chose her own path when she was young by working as a prostitute instead of in the white lead factory. Secondly, she is free in her relationships with men, and believes marriage and prostitution to be similar. And finally, she is an unmarried single mother who encouraged her daughter to enjoy education and find work. However, the audience gradually discovers that she also possesses traditional feminine features, such as her desire for Vivie to have a conventional life and to find a husband to support her. Additionally, she pretends to be a widow in order to justify her position in society. Next to that, in the end she turns out to be very sentimental and wants to be a warm mother after all. As to Vivie, her New Woman features tend to dominate her conventional features. She was able to go to Cambridge University and to work in an office in London, which marks her intellectual and financial independence. Furthermore, she

clearly chooses work over marriage and romance, and also her lack of sentiment is an unfeminine feature she possesses. During the play there seems to be one moment that she is longing for romance when she cradles Frank, but it quickly wears off. Ollevier concludes that “Vivie is a caricature of the New Woman” (31). This proves to be correct because of the fact that Vivie meets most stereotypical New Woman features, like riding the bicycle, smoking cigars, higher education, a dismissive attitude towards romance, and rigid emotions. Shaw’s representation of her as the New Woman comes across as a caricature also because she is very out of touch with reality, and therefore hard to relate to by the readers. This can also be traced back to the fact that all her knowledge about the world originates from books and she never knew any real hardships. As Vivie states in the end: “You can always depend on me for two things: not to cry and not to faint” (Shaw 162).

Chapter Three: Subversive Femininity in *The Woman Who Did*

“[M]y line is to write what I think the public wish to buy, and not what I wish to say, or what I really think and feel” (Blathwayt 72). Thus spoke Grant Allen in an 1893 interview with Raymond Blathwayt about his authorship. A few years later, in 1895, he published his notorious novel *The Woman Who Did*, about a New Woman, with a plot “combining free-love and an anti-marriage message” (Warne 21). Not being an open supporter for the feminist cause was very unlikely for an author of a New Woman novel. Compared to New Woman authors like Sarah Grand and Olive Schreiner, whose message in their works were clearly in support of gender equality, Grant’s novel was however, considered to be very ambiguous. For instance, contemporary feminist Millicent Garrett Fawcett stated in her review that she was confused by Allen’s political message. She was unsure whether it was a serious representation or “an elaborately worked-up satire” (627). The ambiguity lies in the fact that the main female character does not want to get married in order to pursue her feminist beliefs, but after her daughter’s father dies and her daughter cannot accept her mother’s unconventional behaviour, she commits suicide. As such, the novel suggests that marriage is a “degradation”, but also that a man and woman living in free union could not achieve a happy ending. It was for this reason that feminists and traditionalists both critiqued the novel. Fawcett, as seen above, denounced the novel. She stated: “He purports to write in the interests of women, but there will be very few women who do not see that his little book belongs very much more to the unregenerate man than to women at all” (631). By contrast, a critic, Stead, called Allan’s book “an avowed defence of Free Love, and a direct attack upon the Christian view of marriage” (qtd. in Quiller-Couch 281).

In Allen's novel, Herminia, the main female character, considers marriage to be "vile slavery" (Allen 17). The narrator later explains that this form of slavery has prehistoric origins:

Based upon the primitive habit of felling the woman with a blow, stunning her by repeated strokes of the club or spear, and dragging her off by the hair of her head as a slave to her captor's hut or rock-shelter, this ugly and barbaric form of serfdom has come in our own time by some strange caprice to be regarded as of positively divine origin" (Allen 72)

She wants to avoid these barbaric notions that are the "hardest of all to eradicate in our midst" (Allen 72). Therefore, she wants to live in "free union" (Allen 26) with her lover Alan. Free union, also called "free love", "free marriage" or "free allegiance" (Koscher 86), is a sexual relationship out of wedlock, a union of choice instead of a legal union, which was introduced by New Women and like-minded men because of their anti-marriage beliefs. The Marriage Question coincided with the New Woman debate, when Mona Caird published her article "Marriage" in 1888. This text challenged the idea of marriage and the legal and literal ownership of men over women (Koscher 85). Like Shaw's Mrs Warren, many feminists believed marriage to be legalized prostitution. In 1894, W.T. Stead mentioned in his article "The Novel of the Modern Woman" that New Women were "fleeing from the monogamic prostitution of loveless marriage and the hideous outrage of enforced maternity" (qtd. in Forward). In order to prevent women from undergoing such ordeals, some New Women advocated free unions, while others proposed celibacy as a solution. As Elaine Showalter explains in her work *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1992), the socialist ideal of the free sexual union assumed men and women to be equal in the risks of the relationship. However, due to the problem of legitimacy and care of children, it put women at

much greater risk if abandoned or widowed (50). The risk of widowhood of a single mother is a central concern in Allen's novel, as will be discussed later.

Contemporary New Women who lived by their beliefs were, for example, Olive Schreiner and Eleanor Marx, daughter of Karl Marx. Eleanor lived in a free union with the critic Edward Aveling, who was still married, and his wife would not give him a divorce. She was very happy and wrote to her friend the following:

We have both felt that we were justified in setting aside all the false and really immoral bourgeois conventionalities, and I am happy to say we have received the only thing we really care about – the approbation of our friends and fellow-socialists. (qtd. in Showalter 54)

However, their free union had a tragic ending. Aveling turned out to be a liar who during their relationship “secretly married a much younger woman” (Showalter 54). After Marx had discovered this, she committed suicide by taking prussic acid. Remarkably, this is the same way in which Herminia dies in *The Woman Who Did*. For Olive Schreiner, the outcome of her open relationships with men did not end very well either. For instance, Havelock Ellis and Karl Pearson, “forced her to suppress and deny her own sexuality” (Showalter 55). She suffered from illnesses that she blamed on her sexual suppression. After Pearson married another woman she moved back to South-Africa and married a younger man (Showalter 55). Like Schreiner, fellow feminist Stella Browne spoke out in behalf of the naturalness of female sexual desire, stating: “Let us admit our joy and gratitude for the beauty and pleasure of sex (qtd. in Showalter 46). Although Schreiner's free unions did not have happy endings, she and a lot of other New Women believed that sexual desire was similar for both men and women.

However, even though some New Women believed that sexual restraint was unnatural, others thought it was the best way for women to stay true to their sex. Showalter mentions that feminists and suffragists saw celibacy as a “silent strike” against oppressive relations with

men (22). According to Christabel Pankhurst, the suffragette leader, it was a political response to men's corrupt sexual behaviour and widespread venereal infections. She wrote: "There can be no mating between the spiritually developed women of this new day and men who in thought and conduct with regard to sex matters are their inferiors" (qtd. in Marcus). In Allen's novel, Herminia chooses for a free union with her lover Alan, instead of celibacy, in order to fight the enslavement "to conventions" (Allen 5). She is convinced that she would be the first woman to act on her principles by not disdaining to succumb to the "degradation" of marriage (Allen 19). Their daughter, on the other hand, grows up to be a woman with conventional thoughts and needs. The two female characters of the novel are each other's opposites when it comes to their beliefs. What makes Herminia a New Woman and Dolores conventional, and in what way does Allen portray them in the novel?

The Woman Who Did is a novel that concerns three main characters, namely Herminia, Alan and Dolores. Herminia is a well-educated and working woman who meets Alan on her holiday in the countryside. Their ideas about gender equality are similar, and when Alan asks Herminia to marry her, she declines and explains her reservations about marriage and preference for a free union. Herminia has firm principles that she lives by and a mission that she wishes to complete. Her aim is to fight the enslavement of women in marriage. It is for that reason that she is unwilling to get married herself when Alan proposes to her: "My conscience won't let me [...] to accept the honourable marriage you offer me, as other women would call it; to be false to my sex, a traitor to my convictions; to sell my kind for a mess of pottage a name and a home" (Allen 17). Her mission is to be the first woman to live by her principles in this respect: "Yet unless one woman were prepared to lead the way, no freedom was possible" (Allen 35). Instead of being trapped in a legal marriage, she says: "I choose rather to be free" (Allen 19). She delivers her arguments to Alan for her choice to decline his marriage offer:

No fear of your scorn, no dread of your bigotry, no shrinking at your cruelty, shall prevent me from following the thorny path I know to be the right one. I seek no temporal end. I will not prove false to the future of my kind in order to protect myself from your hateful indignities. I know on what vile foundations your temple of wedlock is based and built, what pitiable victims languish and die in its sickening vaults; and I will not consent to enter it. Here, of my own free will, I take my stand for the right, and refuse your sanctions! No woman that I know of has ever yet done that. Other women have fallen, as men choose to put it in their odious dialect: no other has voluntarily risen as I propose to do. (Allen 19)

Alan has an inner conflict for Herminia's sake, and feels he must not "aid and abet that innocent soul in rushing blindfold over a cliff to her own destruction" (Allen 22). He wants to protect her from "these slippery moral precipices" (Allen 22). He tries reasoning with her: "It's for your sake, Herminia," he said again. "I can't bear to think of your making yourself a martyr. And I don't see how, if you act as you propose, you could escape martyrdom?" (Allen 18). In the end, she does not give in and Alan accepts their free union; also, because it dawns on him that "he could not have loved her so well, could not have admired her so profoundly, had she been other than she was, had she shared the common prejudices and preconceptions of women" (Allen 20). Herminia's unconventionality makes her his ideal partner and he cannot live without her, even if it means that they cannot be legally married. It is from then onwards that they are in a relationship, while still living separately and both working.

Education is also very important for Herminia, just like it was for New Women. Herminia enjoyed the privilege of education at Girton, which was part of University of Cambridge, but she did not graduate, since she felt that the education that she received was not what she had expected it to be. In her eyes, women's education was much needed but also

restricted, or as she called it “cramping”: “our girls were as enslaved to conventions as any girls elsewhere. The whole object of the training was to see just how far you could manage to push a woman's education without the faintest danger of her emancipation” (Allen 5). After she left Girton, she moved to London in order to become independent. Generally speaking, Victorian women were financially dependent on their father, but Herminia wants to be free from her father as well, and succeeds by supporting herself through teaching. “I felt that if women are ever to be free, they must first of all be independent. It is the dependence of women that has allowed men to make laws for them, socially and ethically” (Allen 7). Next to being financially independent, Herminia argues, women also need education for political reasons, so they would “become fit to use the vote” (Allen 6). However, she argues that it is the pressure of the social and ethical restrictions that “most weighs down women” (Allen 6). When Herminia gets pregnant, it is mainly because of these social restrictions that they decide to move to Perugia. Herminia and Alan want to avoid the “difficulties and inconveniences” in England (Allen 32). According to Herminia, people in London think that “what is usual is right; while any conscious striving to be better and nobler than the mass around one is regarded at once as either insane or criminal” (Allen 35). The reason for them to move to Perugia was to avoid these prejudices of the English people. However, Herminia’s purpose in life was to break with tradition and to set an example for other women. However, when the opportunity arises for her to stay in London and show society what is possible, Herminia and Alan nevertheless decide to move out of England. It must be noted, though, that the couple move to Perugia because it is Alan’s idea in the first place: “Alan had decided to take rooms for the summer at Perugia” (Allen 42). Herminia takes his decision as the best option, as she argues that a woman ought to listen to her man: “It is a woman's ancestral part to look up to the man; she is happiest in doing it, and must long remain so; and Herminia was not sorry to find herself in this so much a woman” (Allen 43). The fact that she depends on the man’s

opinion and thinks it is natural for women to idealise their male partners, is very conventional, and therefore not in line with her previous claims to be a free and independent woman.

There are several other more conventional sides to Herminia's character. On the one hand, Herminia is anti-marriage for she sees it as an enslavement of women; but on the other hand, Herminia sees motherhood as a natural duty for women. Her position on motherhood is atypical to New Women. She argues that "every good woman is by nature a mother, and finds best in maternity her social and moral salvation" (Allen 56). She thinks she will "be saved in child-bearing" (Allen 56). Thus, she is at odds with New Women who often believed otherwise:

[She] was far removed indeed from that blatant and decadent sect of 'advanced women' who talk as though motherhood were a disgrace and a burden, instead of being, as it is, the full realisation of woman's faculties, the natural outlet for woman's wealth of emotion. (Allen 56)

She also makes a bold statement against women who choose not to bear children and live in celibacy: "she still pitied the unhappy beings doomed to the cramped life and dwarfed heart of the old maid; pitied them as sincerely as she despised those unhealthy souls who would make of celibacy, wedded or unwedded, a sort of anti-natural religion for women" (Allen 56).

Allen's portrayal of Herminia is therefore very ambiguous when compared to the typical New Woman. Although Herminia takes an anti-marriage position, similar to New Women, she does promote motherhood as one of women's main duties in life. The latter is very conventional and therefore not in line with New Woman beliefs.

Additionally, Herminia is described in a very feminine fashion, in contrast with the typical masculine traits with which New Women, like Vivie Warren, were often identified. For example, we can read that "Herminia laughed lightly, -a ringing girlish laugh" (Allen 6), and that her cheeks look like "blush rose on white lily" (Allen 8). The way in which Alan

perceives her also stresses her femininity: “Alan thought as he looked at her he had never before seen anybody who appeared at all points so nearly to approach his ideal of womanhood. She was at once so high in type, so serene, so tranquil, and yet so purely womanly” (Allen 10). Furthermore, the way in which Herminia dresses is also very feminine: “in her simple white morning–dress, a mere ordinary English gown, without affectation of any sort, yet touched with some faint reminiscence of a flowing Greek chiton. [...] exactly suited the severe regularity of her pensive features and her graceful figure” (Allen 10). Or on “her bridal evening”, as the narrator describes: “She was dressed from head to foot in a simple white gown, as pure and sweet as the soul it covered. A white rose nestled in her glossy hair; three sprays of white lily decked a vase on the mantel–piece” (Allen 31). Even though they did not marry officially, the narrator calls it a bridal evening which is ambiguous since Herminia is explicitly represented as anti-marriage. Still, in this depiction of Herminia, which suggests chastity and pureness, Allen does not give the reader a stereotypical New Woman; though the emphasis on her innocent beauty may also be read as a more radical statement: the unmarried, sexually active woman is pure rather than immoral.

Moreover, although Herminia’s thoughts on motherhood are very conventional, she has an unusual notion of it: “She would give her children, should any come, the unique and glorious birthright of being the only human beings ever born into this world as the deliberate result of a free union, contracted on philosophical and ethical principles” (Allen 30). After Herminia and Alan agree to enter a free union, they find out Herminia is pregnant and move to Perugia. Tragically, before the baby is born, Alan dies of typhoid. Herminia decides to stay in Perugia until the birth of their baby girl, called Dolly, because this way they could be closer to the cemetery where Alan is buried. Herminia takes the opportunity to raise her as the true saviour of women: “The child who was born to free half the human race [...] from slavery” (Allen 63). She eventually moves back to London as an unmarried mother who is no longer

accepted by society. Because of financial necessity, she turns to teaching and journalism and is able to support herself and her daughter. Dolly is raised by her mother in the spirit of feminist beliefs, for she is “destined to regenerate humanity” (Alan 54).

Herminia’s dream to raise Dolly as a true saviour of women does not work out the way she has planned, however. When Dolly grows into “a tall, a graceful, an exquisitely beautiful woman”, Herminia is “dissatisfied with her daughter’s development” (Allen 73). Instead of becoming the woman of “so many hopes”, Dolly’s ideas and ideals “were essentially commonplace” (Allen 73). As Herminia explains: “[Dolly] showed her individuality only by evolving for herself all the threadbare platitudes of ordinary conventions” (Allen 73). Herminia hopes that it will pass when she gets older, but this is sadly not the case, for “Dolly’s whole mind was incurably and congenitally aristocratic or snobbish” (Allen 74). This, of course, is a great disappointment for Herminia since Dolly will fail to save half the world. All Dolly wants is to grow up in a conventional family and to be ordinary. Because her mother wanted to be financially independent and did not accept financial help from others, she did not have the financial means to offer Herminia a middle-class upbringing. However, she was able to go a middle-class school and therefore came into contact with middle-class girls who did have the right upbringing from society’s perspective. Since she has lessons with middle-class students, she also takes on their beliefs: “She accepted the beliefs and opinions of her schoolfellows because they were natural and congenial to her character” (Allen 73). They ultimately give her “what the world calls common-sense” (Allen 73). So, even though she has been brought up by Herminia’s feminist beliefs and she grows up with, as Dolly describes “pale abstractions of cultured humanity who attended the Fabian Society meetings or wrote things called articles in the London papers” (Allen 78), she still becomes a very traditional woman with Victorian values.

This comes to a climax when Dolly tells her mother about her fiancé Walter, a man she met and fell in love with. Dolly demands that her mother tell her about their mysterious past and her father. When it is revealed that Dolly “was born out of lawful wedlock” (Allen 82), she is in shock and “hot horror flooded her burning cheeks” (Allen 84). She shrieks “Born in shame and disgrace!” (Allen 84). Dolly tells her mother that she will do the right thing by not marrying Walter “while you live” (Allen 88). At this point, it is clear that Dolly is very conventional by refusing to marry Walter, mainly due to society’s restrictions and prejudices that she became familiar with through the people she meets at school and other acquaintances. It is her education that makes her the opposite of what Herminia wants her to be. Herminia’s notion of education is for women to amass knowledge and become independent. Dolly’s result of her education, therefore, clashes with Herminia’s expectations. The fact that Dolly indicates that she will not marry Walter while Herminia is alive, and on top of that her decision to move out, is heartbreaking for Herminia: “[She] could only utter the one word ‘Dolly!’ It was a heart–broken cry, the last despairing cry of a wounded and stricken creature” (Allen 88). Herminia starts writing a suicide note to Dolly: “By the time you read these words, I shall be no longer in the way, to interfere with your perfect freedom of action” (Allen 89). She does her last deed as a loving mother; by committing suicide she gives Dolly a chance to live her life as she planned, instead of the life that Herminia had planned for her.

‘My darling, I thought you would grow up to feel as I did; I thought you would thank me for leading you to see such things as the blind world is incapable of seeing. There I made a mistake; and sorely am I punished for it. Don't visit it upon my head in your recollections when I can no longer defend myself. (Allen 89)

Herminia writes her daughter a letter in which she tries to explain her actions. She has transformed from a strong, admirable and independent woman who did not let society influence her feminist actions, into a woman who sacrifices herself for her daughter so they both no longer have to deal with society's judgements. Grant Allen shows that such women "are destined for martyrdom" (Williams 42), because society will punish them for their beliefs. Even on her deathbed, she wears a "pure white dress, with two crushed white roses" (Allen 90), while she waits for Alan: "the only friend she had left in the world" (Allen 90). Her pure and "stainless" (Allen 90) soul has been sacrificed so her daughter could be happy. There are several interpretations of why Allen has portrayed her as pure. Firstly, purity was one of the highest notions in the ideal of womanhood. By Herminia's white dress and roses, and her ultimate Victorian sacrifice, Allen depicts her death as conventional and almost as a punishment for believing in the success of single-motherhood. Secondly, although she dies a conventional death, it can be argued that at the same time, Allen wants to show that she still is pure despite of her suicide. The latter interpretation suggests that perhaps Allen did not see Herminia as a failure.

Looking at the way in which Allen has portrayed these two women, one can argue that his view upon the New Woman is very ambiguous. Because the novel is told by an omniscient narrator, the readers are likely to sympathise with all the characters. One comes to appreciate the struggles of Herminia when she chooses to live in free union and unexpectedly becomes an unwedded single mother. Next to that, we also understand and sympathise with Dolly when she finds out about her scandalous past. Grant Allen chooses Herminia to be the typical New Woman at the start of the novel, who "did it" and lived by her beliefs when she enters a free union with Alan. However, at the end of the novel we see how she sacrifices herself, like a typical Victorian heroine, in order for her daughter to live her conventional life. Dolly's dream of convention is at odds with what Herminia pictured her future to be as the saviour of

half the world. All in all, Allen has given us a New Woman with anti-marriage beliefs but who is pro motherhood, and who in the end chooses to live in free union due to her principles. However, in the end Herminia turns out to be destined for martyrdom. The latter is also what upset many feminists. In the same year as Allen's publication, two contemporary authors published novels as a response to his novel. *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, written by Adeline Kingscote under the pseudonym of Lucas Cleeve, is about a married couple who have a platonic relationship, but are tempted to deviate from the path of "faithful chastity" (Freeman 177). Victoria Cross's work, *The Woman Who Didn't*, revolves around a woman who did get married and is tempted to start an affair with a much younger man, but still decides to remain true to her adulterous husband, thereby showing the hardship of married life and what life could be if women do conform to Victorian ideals. In all three novels, Allen's included, the difficulties of societies conventions are the main criticism. For Allen, the New Woman was always destined for martyrdom, like Herminia says in her letter to Dolly: "Nothing now remains for me but the crown of martyrdom" (Allen 89).

Chapter Four: The New Woman in *The Odd Women*

“So many odd women—no making a pair with them. The pessimists call them useless, lost, futile lives” (44), says Rhoda in George Gissing’s *The Odd Woman* (1893) about women who could not marry. The abundance of unmarried women that existed since the 1860s is one of the main reasons the demand for gender equality came to its height in the Victorian era. This exact problem is what Gissing is discussing in his novel *The Odd Women*. The novel gives a realistic view on the contemporary struggles of women and on the subject of feminism, which means it is neither a pro- or anti-feminist novel, but it gives the reader an idea of the “interlocking contradictions” of the movement (David 119). Contemporary reviewers viewed the novel as outstanding; for instance *Pall Mall Gazette*’s review read: “His book represents the Woman question made flesh; his people live it instead of talking it; the most interesting novel of the year” (qtd. in Ingham xxiii). Additionally, a review in the *Glasgow Herald* stated that the novel was “a genuine work of art, remarkable among the novels of the day” (qtd. in Coustillas 215). The fact that his writing felt so real was due to his personal experiences as a writer living in poverty and struggling to earn a living. Next to that, the novel was praised for the “ordinariness and believability of its female characters” (Middleton 50). Compared to Allen Grant’s *The Woman Who Did*, whose female characters were often seen as caricatures, Gissing’s female characters were viewed as realistic and true. As Tim Middleton mentions in his work *Modernism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies, Volume 5* (2005), “Rhoda Nunn and her supervisor, Mary Barfoot, seem truly new and modern rather than reworked versions of old Victorian heroines” (50).

Gissing explained in a letter to his friend Eduard Bertz: “the title means ‘Les Femmes Superflues’ – the women who are *odd* in the sense that they do not make a match; as we say ‘an odd glove’” (Young 166). According to Elaine Showalter, it was the odd woman that

started the “sexual anarchy” by undermining the comfortable binary system of Victorian sexuality and gender roles (19). Since the 1860s, the surplus of unmarried women over men had increased, and it was William R. Greg who pointed this out in his essay “Why Are Women Redundant?” (1869). In his essay he states:

[T]hat there is an enormous and increasing number of single women in the nation, a number quite disproportionate and quite abnormal; a number which, positively and relatively is indicative of an unwholesome social state, and is both productive and prognostic of much wretchedness and wrong. (2)

It was partly because of the growing rate of single women that, according to sympathisers with women’s cause, the female sex needed a better education in order to find a suitable profession, since they could no longer count on finding a husband to financially support them. These women were seen as a social problem as they were rivalling with men over employment (Showalter 19). Greg also points out that instead of their natural duties as a wife and mother, these odd women had to “carve out artificial and painfully-sought occupations for themselves” (2). Next to that, he suggests that women were to emigrate to colonies where English women were a scarce commodity and where they might find a husband (Showalter 20). Feminists, however, took this opportunity to point out to society that the domestic role of women was obsolete and that “social policies which denied them higher education, alternative roles, professional opportunities, and votes were self-defeating and cruel” (Showalter 20). The main new goal should be for women to be educated and trained in order to become financially independent.

The luxury to be able to get a proper training or education was in most cases only possible for middle-class women because of financial reasons. As Showalter mentions, feminist reformers did acknowledge this issue, and they addressed the fact that working-class

women were facing different problems (20). An investigator of the Select Commission on the Shop Hours Regulation Bill reported in 1886 that “the majority of shop assistants look upon marriage as their one hope of release, and would, as one girl expressed it, ‘marry anybody to get out of the drapery business’” (qtd. in Showalter 20). This was mainly because of the poor working conditions that women had to endure. These poor conditions are also discussed in Gissing’s novel with regard to the female characters Virginia, Alice and Monica, who all accept a live-in position. Monica, for instance, works “thirteen hours and a half every weekday, and on Saturday for an average of sixteen” (Gissing 31). At the opposite end, Gissing introduces two female characters who train these odd women as a route to an alternative profession. These two characters are Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot, who both represent modern women in the novel, although Miss Barfoot is more moderate in her feminist beliefs than Rhoda, as will be explained later. In this chapter, I will examine how Gissing portrays these New Women.

The novel starts in 1872, when the six Madden sisters lose their father in an accident and they are left with no income or relatives. When fast forwarded to 1887, three Madden sisters have survived, namely Virginia, Alice and, the youngest and prettiest, Monica. All three are living in London and working for people who are barely above their social position. They have been traditionally raised by their father until his tragic death. The oldest sisters, Virginia and Alice, profit most from this, since they were educated to be ladies and therefore were able to find jobs as governesses. Monica, however, is only five years old when their father dies and consequently, does not get the education that the other sisters enjoyed and ends up working in a shop for many hours. Not long after, the Madden sisters meet Rhoda Nunn, whom they knew from the country, and who is a feminist in heart and soul. She works and lives with Miss Barfoot and runs a school where they train women for office work. Rhoda convinces Monica to leave her current job and join her school, so she can find a better job.

Regarding Monica's upbringing, Rhoda mentions to Miss Barfoot the following: "Her guardians dealt with her absurdly; they made her half a lady and half a shop-girl. I don't think she'll ever be good for much" (Gissing 121). At that moment, the only role that she is able to take on is that of a wife, as Rhoda states: "She's fit for nothing else, I'm afraid" (Gissing 121). Her other option would be to become a New Woman, that is, go to school in order to be financially independent. Staying single and working in a shop is not beneficial to her health: "We suffer a great deal. Some of us get diseases. A girl has just gone to hospital with varicose veins. [...] Sometimes, I lose all feeling in my feet; I have to stamp on the floor to be sure it's still under me." (Gissing 41). These poor conditions, under which Monica has to work, resemble Mrs Warren's unhealthy working environment in the lead factories. Both women did not have the proper education but still had to work and faced physical decline because of their necessity to earn money.

Rhoda and Mary are both helping odd women by training them for office work. Rhoda sees education as a way of making use of the abundance of women. As she says to Monica: "But do you know that there are half a million more women than men in this happy country of ours?" (Gissing 44). According to Rhoda, the surplus of women could be seen as a "great reserve" (Gissing 44). If a woman "vanishes" in matrimony, the reserve can take her place in the working force. Rhoda wants to help in training the reserve, to make them ready to substitute women who marry. So, from that respect, she seems to want what is best for them. However, she talks very clinically about these women and sees them as mere numbers instead of actual human lives. Her ideas are very extreme, as are her strategies to reach her goal, which is to reduce the surplus:

'And I wish it were harder. I wish girls fell down and died of hunger in the streets, instead of creeping to their garrets and the hospitals. I should like to see their dead bodies collected together in some open place for the crowd to stare at.'

Monica gazed at her with wide eyes.

‘You mean, I suppose, that people would try to reform things.’

‘Who knows? Perhaps they might only congratulate each other that a few of the superfluous females had been struck off.’ (Gissing 42)

Mary, on the other hand, is portrayed as a more moderate feminist, as she is not necessarily anti-marriage and also chooses not to be part of a movement: “She did not seek to become known as the leader of a ‘movement,’ yet her quiet work was probably more effectual than the public career of women who propagandize for female emancipation” (Gissing 63). This suggests that Gissing thought Mary to be a more agreeable feminist than Rhoda. Mary’s actions are more effective, but she is still able to keep her strong feminine character traits, for it is stated “that people who knew her best thought of her with as much tenderness as admiration” (Gissing 63). Additionally, Mary is a feminist because she believed that women are equal to men: “She held the conviction that whatever man could do, woman could do equally well—those tasks only excepted which demand great physical strength” (Gissing 63).

Rhoda is not only clinical about the surplus of women, but also a radical New Woman because of her ideas on marriage. She believes that the only way for women to become equal to men is if women are celibate and see love and sex as weaknesses:

I am seriously convinced that before the female sex can be raised from its low level there will have to be a widespread revolt against sexual instinct. Christianity couldn’t spread over the world without help of the ascetic ideal, and this great movement for woman’s emancipation must also have its ascetics.’ (Gissing 70).

Since she is advocating celibacy and the “revolt against sexual instinct”, it is only fitting that her surname is “Nunn”. She argues that marriage should best be avoided and this is also the

message she would like to pass on to her pupils: "I would have girls taught that marriage is a thing to be avoided rather than hoped for. I would teach them that for the majority of women marriage means disgrace." (Gissing 112). These beliefs, however, are put to the test when she meets Everard Barfoot, Mary Barfoot's cousin. After their first meeting he is very surprised by her appearance and opinions: "Everard examined Miss Nunn's figure, which in its way was strong and shapely as his own" (Gissing 90). He describes her as having a mannish appearance, and he also sees her as a New Woman: "A strong character, of course. More decidedly one of the new women than you yourself-- isn't she?" (Gissing 95), he asked Mary, after which she replies: "Oh, I am a very old-fashioned woman. Women have thought as I do at any time in history. Miss Nunn has much more zeal for womanhood militant." (Gissing 95). He is intrigued by her and expresses to Mary "I must get to understand her line of thought" (Gissing 95). He sees Rhoda as a "challenge to his manhood" (Gissing 161) and starts courting her, even though he knows how she feels about marriage. He confesses his love for her: "now you are the one woman in the world" (Gissing 202-203). Yet, she denies and even mocks him for asking her: "'You are resolved never to marry?' 'I never shall,' Rhoda replied firmly" (Gissing 204). However, after she turns him down, it backfires, as it causes Rhoda to cherish feelings for Everard after all, and it unsettles her assumptions on marriage.

Later on, when she is on holiday in Northumberland, he proposes to enter a free union with her instead of a legal union: "If we cannot trust each other without legal bonds, any union between us would be unjustified." (Gissing 293). By this time, she no longer doubts their feelings for each other and has an inner conflict:

The temptation to yield was very strong, for it seemed to her an easier and a nobler thing to proclaim her emancipation from social statutes than to announce before her friends the simple news that she was about to marry. (Gissing 293)

She accepts his offer, but only if made official by law. Showing that even the most true feminist is able to love and abandon her beliefs for a man, is very anti-feminist, but it also gives the reader a realistic image of a woman. She may be the typical New Woman of the story, but she still has a weak moment in her life that only makes her more human.

Meanwhile, Monica, who is married to Edmund, meets handsome single Bevis and they fall in love. She tries to elope with him, but her extremely jealous husband hired a detective to follow her. She misguides the detective, letting him believe she is having an affair with Everard Barfoot. When Rhoda finds out through Mary about the alleged affair between Everard and Monica, Rhoda breaks off the engagement, for Everard is too stubborn to defend himself when Rhoda asks him to explain the situation: “No, I shan’t consent to be cross-examined,” replied Everard, with a disdainful smile. ‘As soon as you refuse to accept my word it’s folly to ask further questions. You don’t believe me. Say it honestly and let us understand each other” (Gissing 304). He sees them as equals but in the end is not willing to provide proof of his innocence: “‘I neither know nor care.’ ‘You must prove to me that you are not the cause of it.’ ‘I shall not make the slightest effort to do so”” (Gissing 307). She realises that his love for her is not genuine and they part ways.

To add another dimension to Rhoda’s story, when Monica dies after giving birth to a baby girl, the novel’s last scene shows Rhoda visiting Alice and holding the baby. Rhoda shows her maternal feelings by trying to calm the baby down using a motherly tone: “Rhoda, still nursing, sat down on a garden bench.[...] Rhoda’s vision grew dim; a sigh made her lips quiver, and once more she murmured, ‘Poor little child!’” (Gissing 371). This, of course, clashes with her initial idea that women ought not to marry or reproduce. Alice and Virginia end up raising the child and they intend to open a school to train other women. During her visit, Rhoda urges Alice to “make a brave woman of” Monica’s child, just like Alice and Virginia intend to accomplish with their future students (Gissing 370). Gissing shows the

reader that Rhoda has turned from a cold proto-feminist into a feminist with maternal feelings. His portrayal of the New Woman is one that is a firm supporter of women's cause but also capable of showing emotion rather than seeing people as mere numbers. At the start Mary Barfoot seems to be the more agreeable feminist, but in the end, Rhoda takes on feminine traits as well. Gissing reaches a compromise and shows that Rhoda, in combining feminine and feminist traits, is the ideal New Woman in the end of the novel.

Soon after Monica Madden starts her training at Miss Barfoot's school, Monica is proposed to by Edmund Widdowson whom she met in the park. He wrote a letter explaining his love for her and Monica says to her friend: "I am going to write now, and say that I will marry him" (Gissing 124). So, Monica chooses marriage over training as a typist, but did she make the right decision? Before she started her training and accepted the offer of Edmund Widdowson, she was also courted by Mr. Bullivant who worked at the shop as well. However, in this case, she used rational arguments to argue her way out of it:

'Then will you let me ask you a rude question?'

'Ask me any question, Miss Madden.'

'How would it be possible for you to support a wife?'

She flushed and smiled. Bullivant, dreadfully discomposed, did not move his eyes from her. 'It wouldn't be possible for some time,' he answered in a thick voice. 'I have nothing but my wretched salary. But every one hopes.' (Gissing 34)

She does not marry Mr Bullivant because he could not guarantee her financial support. This was also a contemporary problem for working-class man. They had difficulty earning enough money or saving up plenty in order to maintain a wife (Reynolds 68). Edmund Widdowson, however, has financial means. It is for this reason, and not love that she accepted his proposal in marriage. She reasoned that if Widdowson really loved her as much as he has indicated in

his letter, he would certainly be a good husband. She would rather marry than stay single, even if she could not return his love: “She felt no love in return; but between the prospect of a marriage of esteem and that of no marriage at all there was little room for hesitation” (Gissing 79). Nevertheless, Monica still marries Edmund and he turns out to be extremely jealous and controlling. Gissing shows the reader a good example of how a marriage could be corrupt and how their relationship is unnatural and forced. Widdowson forces Monica to caress him and asks her to express her love for him: “Say you love me! Put your arms round my neck--press closer to me” (Gissing 188). The “duties of wedlock” (Gissing 188) are not what Monica had expected. Widdowson appears to be very traditional and therefore is very dominant and controlling. It is due to this control of Monica mind and body that a comparison between marriage and prostitution is also applicable to their marriage, similarly to Mrs Warren’s idea of marriage. Monica later realises she is ambushed in a toxic marriage and finds herself trapped again, like she was when working in the shop. Widdowson argues that women ought to live in the domestic sphere, like any traditional man would think:

‘Woman’s sphere is the home, Monica. Unfortunately girls are often obliged to go out and earn their living, but this is unnatural, a necessity which advanced civilization will altogether abolish. You shall read John Ruskin; every word he says about women is good and precious. If a woman can neither have a home of her own, nor find occupation in any one else’s she is deeply to be pitied; her life is bound to be unhappy. I sincerely believe that an educated woman had better become a domestic servant than try to imitate the life of a man.’ (Gissing 171)

John Ruskin, as we know, saw women’s education only as an advantage to men, so they could have an intellectual conversation with their wives. It is only fitting that Edmund forces Monica to read Ruskin’s work, for he also believes that women should take on their

natural roles as a domestic servant. Edmund's extreme jealousy also causes problems, especially when Monica is tempted to elope with Bevis. However, she manages to fool the detective into thinking she has an affair with Everard Barfoot instead. When confronted by Edmund, she leaves him and moves in with her sisters, while still living on his expenses. Monica turns out to be pregnant by her husband but she does not want to reunite with Edmund. She does, however, tell Rhoda the truth about the alleged affair to ease her conscience. Gissing shows us by her storyline that if given the choice between education or a loveless marriage, education has more upsides than Monica's marriage has. It would have given her the financial freedom instead of choosing between two evils, namely working in a shop under terrible circumstances or entering a loveless marriage. The option to stay single and work like Alice and Virginia, is obviously not a bed of roses either. Virginia Madden, who is in between jobs, is physically suffering as she becomes an alcoholic. Next to that, at the start of the novel, one of the other sisters, who was working as a governess, commits suicide out of despair. Even though they were all born in a middle-class family, it was because of their father's death that they seemed doomed to suffer. This resembles the idea of literary naturalism which entails that "human beings exist entirely in the order of nature, [...] determined by two kinds of forces, hereditary and environment" (Wheeler, par. 13). The circumstances of the Madden sisters, and especially the fact that they were merely raised for marriage, had caused them to be in this hardship. Since, as the novel implies, it was the environment, in this case society, that pushes women to conform to Victorian conventions, that fails to fit women out for their future destinies, it indirectly appears to plea for women's professional development

To conclude, George Gissing tries to portray, what appears to be, a stereotypical New Woman, but by the end of the narrative our image of her has changed to that of a realistic feminist. Rhoda is a New Woman who comes close to compromising her convictions and

changing her mind, but also ends up raising a child to become a potential New Woman. This is very similar to Grant Allen's novel, when Herminia attempts to raise her daughter Dolly to become the saviour of the female sex. Although Herminia's wish is not realised, Gissing writes an open-ended story and lets the reader fill it in. Comparing Rhoda's fate to the unhappy marriage of Monica and Edmund, which is controlled and dominated by Edmund, the option of becoming a new woman comes across as more appealing. Mary Barfoot, who is a moderate feminist and also a New Woman in the novel, seems to be the most balanced character. She is able to help odd women by giving them an option to be financially independent, rather than the option of marriage. Nevertheless, she is not anti-marriage. According to her, not every woman is cut out to be single all their lives and they just need an education and a source of income to tide over a period of being a single woman. Rhoda does tick all the boxes of the New Woman when it comes to her beliefs on marriage and motherhood. Although these notions are radical at the start of the novel, throughout the novel the reader also sees Rhoda's feminine traits and her softer side. Gissing's compromise between Mary's moderate and Rhoda radical beliefs, could therefore be seen as Gissing's portrayal of the ideal New Woman.

Conclusion

Some critics regard New Woman literature as literature written solely by women who support women's cause, but others claim that any writing about the New Woman and her struggles, either in support or criticism, could be seen as belonging to the genre of New Woman literature (Schaffer 10). In order to research male authors of New Woman literature, the latter and wider definition is best suited in this thesis. In nearly all the research that has been done on New Woman literature, the focus lies on female authors or a comparison between male and female authors. Therefore, it is interesting to look into what male authors have written about the New Woman, and for this research, the works of Bernard Shaw, Grant Allen and George Gissing have been selected. The representation of New Women in Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* and George Gissing's *The Odd Women* is ambiguous and neither of these texts presents a typical, and simultaneously, successful New Woman.

After looking at these works, it can be said that the relationship between mother and child is crucial in the development of the female characters in these works. For Shaw and Allen, it could even be argued that being a New Woman and motherhood are mutually exclusive. Mrs Warren chooses her own path and becomes an owner of multiple brothels on the continent. She was more of a mother-figure to these prostitutes than she ever was for Vivie, who has been sent to schools since she was little and therefore saw her mother very rarely. When Vivie Warren expresses her disgust over Mrs Warren's current profession, she asks her mother to quit and find a more respectable position like her aunt Lizzie. However, Mrs Warren is unable to give up her work, for she likes "making money" (Shaw 172). In the end, her profession is deemed more important than her own daughter. Herminia, in Allen's *The*

Woman Who Did, is eager to raise her daughter as the first child born in free union and saviour of the female sex. Against all expectations, Dolly grows up to be a traditionalist and dreams of a conventional life. When Herminia stands in her way of happiness, she sacrifices herself. She could not live and also be an ardent supporter of woman's cause, since that would mean that Dolly would be unhappy and she would fail as a mother. Herminia cannot have it both ways, it appears. As for Gissing's novel *The Odd Women*, he proves that feminism and motherhood are not always mutually exclusive. Rhoda grows into a feminist "mother" when she shows her maternal feelings towards Monica's child.

Gissing and Shaw both show anxiety about a New Woman that is rational. At the beginning of the novel, Rhoda is characterised as a radical and clinical proto-feminist who lacks emotion. Her views on the abundance of women are shockingly radical and mathematical. She is also anti-marriage and believes that women should live like nuns, which is coincidentally also her surname. It is only when she is tempted by Everard, who is the first person to love her, that she starts to show more emotions. The coldness described by Gissing is also present in Shaw's work. Vivie Warren is the stereotypical New Woman who does not possess any warmth or emotions, except for one moment with Frank which she quickly puts an end to. Her business-like coldness towards her mother is eerie.

Like Gissing, who imagines a womanly New Woman through Mary and Rhoda, Allen also attempts to envisage a New Woman who is both radical and traditional. Herminia is anti-marriage, but, contrary to other New Woman, thinks motherhood is woman's natural duty in life, thereby bearing similarities to Rhoda who also embraces motherhood at the end of Gissing's narrative. Herminia tries to raise Dolly to the best of her capabilities and as far as her feminist beliefs would let her. She even performs the ultimate motherly sacrifice by committing suicide, so Dolly can live her conventional life. Thus, Grant Allen presents a very

ambiguous New Woman who takes her own life, suggesting that Herminia turns out to be the martyr of her own beliefs.

Mrs Warren, Herminia and Rhoda all see their daughters, or in Rhoda's case, her students, as a project and opportunity to pass down their ideals. This is also the case for Mrs Warren, who has given her daughter the ultimate New Woman upbringing, a proper education that she herself never had. Even though she wants Vivie to end up in conventional marriage, she contributed to the fact that Vivie is financially independent. Herminia's goals for Dolly are very clear. She wants to shape her in the embodiment of the New Woman. As for Rhoda and Mary, who even run a school for women to train them for office work, they want their students to have the opportunity to provide for themselves. Rhoda also wants to pass on her anti-marriage beliefs, and sees these students as the group of women who can join her in her beliefs for women's emancipation. Monica's baby girl is also seen as a New Woman in the making. These 'projects' are significant parallels between the three literary works, while in all three cases the outcome remains ambiguous, or unresolved. In addition to the interesting mother-child relationships of the female characters, Dolly and Vivie's rejection of their mothers can be traced back to their education. Dolly is raised by her mother in the spirit of feminist beliefs, but still thinks the Victorian conventions to be correct because she adopted these traditional beliefs and ideas from her fellow students. Her education is what led her away from Herminia's feminist ideals. It seems that Allen sees traditional education, which is Dolly has enjoyed, as the main instigator of her conventional assumptions. Similarly, Vivie turns against her mother because of what she was taught at school. She only knew life from books and did not know what real hardship was, like Mrs Warren experienced when she was younger. Mrs Warren acknowledges this and regrets the fact that Vivie received proper education. The notion that the educated daughters of these New Woman are alienated from their mothers because of their education, is very controversial as normally, education was

seen as something positive. The difference between Dolly and Vivie, is that Dolly received traditional education at a middle-class school and Vivie a form of advanced education at the University of Cambridge. Both authors are seemingly critical of these forms of education, as they are represented as sources of friction and alienation.

Shaw, Allen and Gissing present the reader with different images of New Women and their fate. Although Shaw's portrayal is very controversial due to fact that the main character was a prostitute, it also shows the determination of Mrs Warren that causes her to lose her daughter. Shaw's version of the New Woman's fate is ambivalent because both women end up estranged due to the fact that they choose work over family. However, Mrs Warren's choice of profession is not in lines with the beliefs of New Women, since she exploits women instead of saving them. Allen's portrayal of Herminia was ambivalent because she thinks that motherhood is natural for women and marriage an act of slavery. Next to that, Allen's depiction of the New Woman dying a tragic death, tells the reader that a happy ending seems impossible for New Women. And lastly, Gissing's representation of the New Woman is the most positive of all three. Rhoda may start out as the stereotypical New Woman, but she grows into an ideal image by gaining more feminine traits, while still keeping her determination to advocate woman's cause. According to Gissing, a New Woman is best off in a marriage for love instead of for financial necessity, or she had better become financially independent through training. For future research, it would be interesting to see if the same themes occur in new woman fiction written by female authors.

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1:

Maurier, George. *The New Woman*. 1895. *Punch Photoshelter*. Web. 9 May 2016.



THE NEW WOMAN.

"YOU'RE NOT LEAVING US, JACK! TEA WILL BE HERE DIRECTLY!"

"OH, I'M GOING FOR A CUP OF TEA IN THE SERVANTS' HALL. I CAN'T GET ON WITHOUT FEMALE SOCIETY, YOU KNOW!"

Figure 2:

The New Woman—Wash Day. 1897. Library of Congress. Web. 9 May 2016.



The New Woman,— Wash Day.
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