Femininity under Construction:

Traditional Femininity and the New Woman in Victorian Fiction

By

Christina Wakeling

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Department of English, Film, and Theatre
University of Manitoba
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Abstract

The Victorian period was an incredibly volatile time for the issues of women and work. The population imbalance between men and women meant that many middle-class women would not be able to marry and instead were forced to rely on work for financial support. This paper explores the entry of middle-class women into the working world and the way in which traditional femininity became incorporated into the concept of the working woman. As the period progressed, and new types of labour became available to women, representations of the working woman changed and the image of the New Woman emerged. Fictional representations of women and work in the Victorian period reveal a tense struggle to blend traditional idealism with a newer, more modern type of femininity.

For my parents, Christa and Gordon Wakeling, who taught me that I could do anything that I set my mind to, and then never let me forget it.

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Introduction

The Victorian period offers a fascinating glimpse into the development of women's roles and the formation of the woman worker, as women began to move out of the domestic world and into the workforce and the definition of femininity began to change. A large part of the change came from the population imbalance between men and women. The large amount of men leaving for the wars or the colonies meant that not every woman would be able to marry. This inequality of the population, coupled with an increasing trend for men to marry later in life, forced many women to look to work as an option for financial security outside of marriage. However, women did not move into the workforce simply because they could not marry, as that seems to suggest that women who worked and were successful at it simply did so because they could not marry. Instead, the population imbalance in the Victorian period offered an opportunity for women to become independent.

In my thesis, I will explore the complicated relationship between the traditional Victorian definition of femininity and the emerging image of the New Woman. Martha Vicinus, in her introduction to *Suffer and Be Still,* defines the perfect Victorian lady as "a combination of total sexual innocence, conspicuous consumption, and the worship of the family hearth" (ix). The definition of an ideal Victorian lady revolves around the domestic world. She functions as a symbol of the family's wealth and she is expected to "worship" her domestic world. However, the changing social situation in the Victorian period meant that many women needed to work because marriage was no longer a certainty and the image of the woman worker began to emerge.

Throughout my thesis I will be using this term “woman worker”, to refer to the concept of a middle-class working woman that developed out of the need for women to be self-supporting. I limit the term to middle-class women because the changing social roles most directly affected that class. Arlene Young argues, in “Ladies and Professionalism: The Evolution of Work in *The Queen*” that “The gender imbalance in the population presents a more pressing problem among the ranks of girls who are not raised to work and whose families are not extensive enough to provide lifelong support for unemployed spinsters” (193). Middle-class women were not raised to work and it was not socially acceptable for them to do so, but their lack of extended financial stability outside of marriage forced them into the labour market when marriage was no longer an option. Due to the contentiousness of this issue, the middle-class woman becomes the focus of my discussion of women and work. This image of the woman worker takes on multiple characterizations throughout my thesis, beginning as the victimized seamstress and moving through several manifestations of the New Woman.

Chapter one explores how early representations of women and work focused on the image of the victimized seamstress. Victorian seamstresses were overworked and underpaid, and they frequently died young, making them a negative representation of the woman worker. Early artists focused on evoking sympathy for the plight of seamstresses, but in doing so, they victimized the woman worker. I will use Vicinus’s definition along with Lynn M. Alexander’s exploration of the seamstress in *Women, Work, and Representation*, to explore the close link between the seamstress and traditional femininity both in her characterization and in the labour she was performing. The adherence to traditional femininity, however, in the seamstress's domestic dependence and sexual innocence, is what leads to her ultimate victimization within the seamstress trope.

The predominant trope in seamstress literature represents the woman worker as a young, beautiful woman, who cannot support herself through her sewing, is seduced into moral ruin, abandoned, and left to die. Through an exploration of three portrayals of this trope: Thomas Hood's "The Song of the Shirt," Ernest Jones' "The Young Milliner," and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*, it becomes evident that this representation undervalued both the woman worker's ability to be self-sufficient and the developmental possibilities of women's work. However, Gaskell, in *Ruth,* moves past this representation by taking a seamstress farther than the familiar trope and characterizing her as both a successful mother and a successful worker, bringing traditional domestic roles into the representation of a successful working woman. Although Ruth, in traditional seamstress (as a fallen woman) fashion, dies at the end of the novel, Gaskell's representation of her as successful in both the domestic and the professional realm establishes how the woman worker, in the proper career, can be an independent and successful woman.

Chapters Two and Three focus on the emergence of the New Woman as a representation of the woman worker. The New Woman figure is linked with modernity, both in terms of new technology creating new jobs for the woman worker and in terms of new feminine roles, even outside of the workplace. In my exploration of the concept the New Woman, I will use Gail Cunningham's argument in *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* to suggest that representations of this figure work as a general rebellion against traditional definitions of femininity rather than providing a clearly defined image.

Cunningham argues, “Heroines who refused to conform to the traditional feminine role, challenged accepted ideals of marriage and maternity, chose to work for a living, or who in any way argued the feminist cause [...] were firmly identified by readers and reviewers as New Woman” (3). The multiple manifestations of the New Woman that appeared throughout the later part of the Victorian period reveal a figure still in formation. However, with the modernization and independence of the New Woman comes a newer threat to Victorian domesticity. Sally Ledger argues, “At the turn of the century, new employment opportunities were rapidly evolving. […] It was clear towards the close of the century that women were becoming competitors in the more privileged sections of the economic marketplace” (19). These newer employments provided working women with financial independence, which threatened Victorian domesticity because women who worked no longer had to marry.

Chapter two explores how George Gissing in *The Odd Women* and Amy Levy in *The Romance of the Shop* attempt to combine this modern New Woman worker with traditionally domestic narratives (that of a love interest and eventual marriage) in order to find a modern definition of femininity that incorporates the independence of the New Woman. While the failure of both authors to portray a realistic, happy marriage for the figure of the New Woman is the result of inflexibility in the traditional roles for women inside of marriage, the tension that this rigidity causes in Gissing’s exploration of two relationships (Monica Madden’s marriage and Rhoda Nunn’s potential engagement) allows for glimpses of what a successful New Woman marriage could be. Gissing’s New Woman characters ask for independence within the marriage, which neither male suitor is able to provide, and the resulting rigidity in marital roles becomes the destruction of Monica, who is unable to escape the bonds of marriage, and the destruction of Rhoda's relationship when she realizes she would be unable to submit to a husband.

Chapter Three explores more developed representations of the woman worker as a New Woman and the voluntary removal of this woman worker from the domestic narrative within two novels: Grant Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl* and Margaret Oliphant's *Kirsteen.* In both novels, the woman worker is presented as successful and independent and in both narratives she chooses not to marry. The refusal of the courtship narrative allows the femininity of the woman worker to revolve around discussions of work, rather than of sexual viability. However, the workplace is a new space for Victorian femininity and both Oliphant and Allen approach it differently. While Oliphant's woman worker, Kirsteen, voluntarily removes herself from the marriage plot because of the absence and then death of her betrothed, Allen's worker, Juliet, must remove herself from the marriage plot because she has intruded into one already in progress. In his exploration of Juliet's interference with a five-year engagement, Allen suggests that the New Woman is an uncomfortable sexual threat to traditional domesticity.

In my thesis, I do not argue that the image of the woman worker was necessarily better from one representation to the next; rather I explore developments in the field of women and work through the lens of definitions of femininity. The Victorian era is a fruitful period for study because the social atmosphere of the time did so much to change representations of femininity very quickly. It also is a time when the immediacy of print and literature began to develop and literature became a venue in which Victorians could explore social issues that weighed heavily on the public mind. Daniel Born argues that "the

Victorians and Edwardians held enormously hopeful convictions about both the epistemological validity and the transformative possibilities of art" (2). This attitude and optimism in approaching art as a means of social change encouraged many Victorian authors to challenge conventions and ideals in their representations of women and work.

Chapter One

“Worked to Death”:

Traditional Femininity and the Victimized Seamstress

Introduction

The figure of the distressed seamstress is a common trope in early Victorian representations of the woman worker. Featured in poems, paintings, fiction, and periodicals, the seamstress is the focal point of many socially conscious works which aim to generate sympathy for her plight. These representations of the seamstress focus on traditionally feminine aspects in her characterization, specifically sexual innocence and domestic dependence. With a focus on Thomas Hood’s “The Song of the Shirt,” Ernest Jones’ “The Young Milliner,” and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth*, I will argue that the adherence to traditional feminine values within the seamstress trope causes the woman worker to be victimized within the narrative because of her inability to function outside of the domestic world.

Fashionable Occupations

To be a seamstress was a very popular career for women of the Victorian period. At the time, the female population so severely exceeded that of men that a young woman could no longer depend on marriage as a means of financial support. Many middle class-women who were not financially independent were forced to turn to work as a means of survival. However, as Lynn M. Alexander notes, “in the mid-nineteenth century, only two acceptable employments were available to middle-class women: governess or seamstress” (4) and many women lacked the training to be a governess. Faced with such limited options, many women were forced to turn to needlework as a career. However, the idea of women working was troubling as Victorian society feared that work would make women less feminine and domestically dependent, interfering with the traditional construct of a family. Alexander continues, "To many, the employment of women signalled a breakdown of the traditional family structure, in which the male wage earner supported and protected his family and the woman fulfilled the role of wife and mother" (9). Victorian society feared that the financial independence available to the woman worker could destroy the traditional patriarchal family by removing the husband from the wage earner position and distracting the woman from her position as wife and mother, or leaving her independent of marriage.

However, needlework's association with traditional femininity made it more acceptable. Alexander states, "Regardless of their social class, all women in Victorian England were taught to sew. Thus, people encountering a woman sewing in literature or in art could identify with the character—either as a woman who sewed or as men whose mothers, wives, and sisters sewed" (9). Women who sewed for money were performing a task that was identical to what women in the domestic environment would do. Sewing, both as an occupation and a representation of women at work, bridged the divide between labouring women and domestic women: "The association of needlework with domesticity and the daily tasks of middle- and upper-class women made it an acceptable employment for young women who had 'fallen on harder times'" (4). Because it was linked so closely with the domestic world, needlework was considered an appropriate occupation for women. Further, it was also considered more appropriate to represent fictional women working as seamstresses rather than in less feminine occupations, such as factory work.

The movement from the domestic world to the working world was fraught with danger. Seamstresses were over-worked, underpaid, and prone to early death. As Susan P. Casteras notes, "Sewing was an integral part of the curriculum of middle-class femininity. [...] But it seems that once the woman plying her needle went outside of the home (or moved beyond the middle-class domain), she was doomed to misery and failure" (33). Sewing in the shelter of the middle-class domestic environment and sewing in a milliner's shop in London were two very different things. However, the characterization of women in each situation was almost identical. As noted in the introduction, the ideal Victorian lady according to Vicinus was "a combination of total sexual innocence, conspicuous consumption, and the worship of the family hearth" (ix). This worship of and dependence on the domestic world and complete sexual innocence were carried forward in representing the professional seamstress. However, the attributes that made an ideal domestic woman made her a helpless victim in the working world. In Thomas Hood's "The Song of the Shirt," Ernest Jones' "The Young Milliner," and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*, the adherence to traditional femininity cripples the seamstress in her position as a woman worker. However, Gaskell moves past both the traditional characterization and the familiar trope to develop a new characterization of the woman worker.

Isolation

By characterizing the seamstress as orphaned and or isolated, the artists of the period focus the sympathy of the narrative and emphasize her separation from the domestic environment. Edelstein notes, specifically in regard to paintings, that "The use of the single figure [...] simplifies the composition and the implied narrative, thus making it more direct and effective" (188). Rather than focusing on a room full of seamstresses, the authors focus on one woman. Further, the isolation trope reinforces the seamstresses removal from traditional domestic femininity. Thomas Hood, in "The Song of the Shirt," places the seamstress, quite literally, alone in a room. Although "with a voice of dolorous pitch/ She sang the song of the shirt" (Hood 7-8), there is no one in the room to hear her tragic song. The entire poem, and therefore the sympathy of the reader, is focused on one woman, shut away in a room, with nothing but a blank wall to look at and only her shadow for company (47-48). Hood has an interesting opportunity with his seamstress; by making her work within the domestic environment he creates the opportunity for a blending of the domestic world with the working world. However, work instead makes the domestic world uninhabitable. Hood's seamstress sits in "unwomanly rags" (3) with a "shattered roof" and "naked floor" (45). Even within the domestic environment, work isolates the seamstress from any comfort or security. Casteras argues:

> While affluent women sewed in the security of their cozy drawing rooms for the benefit of their families or home decoration, sempstresses had to live as solitary souls in cold attic chambers while they churned out endless garments for mass consumption. Moreover, they are shown doing so utterly alone in the city, a canonical site of vice, anonymity, danger, corruption, alienation, capitalist materialism, sickness, and disease. (33)

Outside of the shelter of the domestic environment that middle-class women were raised in, work becomes cold and impersonal. There is an interesting movement in Casteras' statement between sewing within the family, for the family, and sewing outside of the domestic world for a faceless consumer. The professional seamstress is given neither the comforts of home nor the knowledge of who she is sewing for. Jones and Gaskell continue the negative connotations of sewing outside of the home, representing the seamstress as a caged bird and work as her prison.

Ernest Jones' short novella "The Young Milliner," a section within *Woman's Wrongs,* is interesting because of Jones' overt participation in a political movement. A Chartist writer, Jones focused on poems, fiction, and articles that would communicate to the larger population the struggles of the working man. However, as Ella Dzelzainis notes, in 1851, Chartist politics received a challenge from Harriot Taylor in her article "The Enfranchisement of Women": "At the very beginning of Chartism's relaunch, its attitudes to women were thus being subjected to intense scrutiny" (87). Jones' work becomes an attempt to demonstrate the place of women within the larger Chartist movement. In his representation of Anna, a middle-class orphan who has fallen into financial trouble and must support herself through needlework, he is trying to appeal to a certain demographic. Dzelzainis argues, "Anna is thus emblematic of the social group to which Jones was assuming that most of his readers belonged and so was representative of the women to whom he was trying to recommend the new Chartist manifesto" (88). This is an interesting claim about a piece that works to represent the seamstress as a victimized and helpless member of society. In fact, Ian Haywood argues, "In its choice of narrative, 'The Young Milliner' is perhaps the least original tale of *Woman's Wrongs*" (xxvi). Through his seamstress narrative, Jones (as Haywood goes on to argue) appears to be throwing his own voice into the already popular pool of seamstress narratives. He does this with a progressive representation of female sexuality, and an especially gruesome punishment for his seamstress in the end.

Ernest Jones both isolates and orphans his seamstress, leaving her truly defenceless. Although she shares a lodging house with several other people, Anna is isolated by her class status from any participation in the community: “Anna sat mournfully at the window of her garret, screened from view behind her flower and her bird cage. The little canary, [...] like an imprisoned sunbeam, flitted silently to and fro as though he could understand the sorrow of his mistress” (Jones 44). Although she is pictured sitting at the window, seemingly a less isolated position than Hood’s seamstress and her blank wall, Anna is separated from the view by her flower and her bird cage, both images speaking to Anna’s class status. A canary and a plant are both interests that would have been acceptable to middle- to upper-class women in the period and not very likely to have been possessed by a woman not even earning enough to keep herself fed. But they appear in this scene to alert the reader of Anna’s position as a middle-class woman who has fallen on harder times. However, it is also these possessions that isolate Anna and seem to imprison her in her position. Anna is, “very sorrowful. [...] Friendless, an orphan thrown on the wide world, a sad and gloomy future was opening up before her” (44). Her condition as an orphan removes her from the domestic environment that a middle-class woman should call home, but her middle-class status leaves her friendless and sorrowful within the environment she has fallen into. Here, the trappings of middle-class femininity have no place in the working world. Instead they are shown to worsen Anna’s situation: work is the prison and she is a fancy bird in the wrong neighbourhood.

Even when the seamstress is presented as working in a group environment, as seen in Gaskell’s *Ruth*, she is still somehow separated from the other seamstresses. Early in the novel, when Mrs. Mason allows the seamstresses a few minutes of rest, Gaskell describes the other girls eating, their jaw motions similar to cows, holding up the gowns, or stretching out for sleep, "but Ruth Hilton sprang to the large old window, and pressed against it as a bird presses against the bars of its cage" (4). Gaskell separates Ruth from the other seamstresses both spatially and in her movements. Ruth is not content or comfortable in the environment that the other girls seem accustomed to. Instead, she presses herself against the window like a bird, an image almost identical to the one seen in Jones' piece. Gaskell is also separating her seamstress in reference to her class. Ruth is compared to a bird, graceful and typically beautiful, while the other seamstresses are compared to cows, a far less delicate animal. Once more, the traditional middle-class woman is shown to not fit in the world of work.

Both Anna and Ruth's isolated and orphaned states leave them completely defenceless when they are turned out of their lodgings. This trope of defencelessness was another aspect of the isolating characterization. As Edelstein notes, "by painting a single figure, [the artist] shows that this woman is alone and defenceless, without the protection of a husband, a family, or friends" (189). Although he is particularly referring to paintings, Edelstein's point is also true for the fiction. Both Anna and Ruth are represented as completely helpless outside of the domestic world. Jones writes, "Reader! picture the position of a young girl thus situated—orphan—helpless—friendless—and forlorn—and in London!" (49). Jones ordering is very significant here. Anna is orphaned, leaving her helpless, without the protection of the domestic realm. Futher, Jones emphasizes that she is in London, a new and threatening urban environment, a "canonical site of vice" (Casteras 33). Jones is capitalizing on Victorian society's fear of the public spaces which working women would be placed in. Jones leaves Anna with absolutely nowhere to go so that when she is evicted from her lodgings, she is forced to wander the streets in search of some sort of work and shelter. Similarly, when Mrs. Mason discovers Ruth out for a walk with Mr. Bellingham and, assuming that she is involved in an illicit relationship, expels her from the apprenticeship, Ruth is left with no one appropriate to help her. Although she is not friendless (having Old Tom to turn to), she is powerless to get to him without getting into the carriage with Mr. Bellingham. It is in the helplessness caused by their utter isolation that both Anna and Ruth are led to the next characteristic of the seamstress trope: moral ruin.

Ignorance is Bliss

Both Gaskell and Jones' characterize their seamstresses with the sexual innocence of traditional femininity, leaving them ignorant and helpless when "rescued" by their seducers. For Ruth, this moment comes when she enters the carriage with Mr. Bellingham. Although she is not intending to stay with him, she needs Bellingham to transport her to her old friends and he capitalizes on her vulnerability: "Nay, if you will go to Milham you must go in the carriage,' said [Mr. Bellingham], hurriedly. She was little accustomed to oppose the wishes of anyone – obedient and docile by nature, and unsuspicious of any harmful consequences" (Gaskell 61). Here, Ruth is described as the perfect Victorian lady. She is obliging, docile, and sexually innocent and these qualities are, ironically, what lead to her moral ruin. In this exchange, the woman worker is represented as so utterly naive and helpless, that she does not even consider the fact that getting into a carriage, unchaperoned, with a man, might be wrong. Gaskell also removes the moment of Ruth's realization from the text. After the carriage leaves, the novel then jumps to Ruth and Mr.

Bellingham vacationing in North Wales. Obviously at some point Ruth has realized Mr. Bellingham's intentions and agreed, but by removing that moment from the narrative, Gaskell retains as much sexual innocence in Ruth's character as possible.

Ernest Jones approaches Anna's moral ruin with a similar attention to her helplessness, if not ignorance. After Anna has been wandering all day in search of food and shelter, she loses her strength completely and faints away (Jones 51). It is here that Trewlaney, her agent of moral ruin, finds her and "rescues" her. Once again, moral ruin begins by stepping into a carriage (or in Anna's case being lifted, unconscious), and once again the seamstress does not have enough awareness of the situation to object. As Trewlaney carries Anna up to his room, Jones does not even give her enough consciousness to take responsibility. Anna attempts to run away, but "ere he could reach her, she had fallen senseless to the ground. […] He raised her in his arms. […] He deposited the still unconscious girl on a sofa. […] Stooping over his unconscious guest [he] moistened her lips alternately with the kisses Bacchus and of love" (54). In his repeated reference to her unconscious state, Jones emphasizes that Anna is completely defenceless in being brought to this moment. Even when she attempts to leave, she faints and is carried back. Similar to Gaskell, Jones has taken the blame entirely away from his seamstress for getting into a morally compromising situation.

In the moment when she is morally ruined, however, Jones' gives Anna what appears to be an unusual degree of agency. Although she is helpless in the moments leading up to the scene, once there, she is awakened into full consciousness: "She was restored to animation [...]. The heating draught, the nourishing viands, roused the dormant pulse of animal life, while the love in every look and tone, [...] lulled [...] the higher faculties of heart and brain" (54). This moment in Jones' text is revolutionary. By showing the moment when Anna is seduced and describing her as "restored to animation", Jones shows Anna to consciously accept the moral ruin. Ella Dzelzainis argues that "Charles does not seduce Anna, she is a willing participant in the act. [...] Jones' fictional portrayal of Anna as a sexual subject is unusual [...] in its assumption of an equality of desire between men and women" (92). Dzelzainis is correct in that the moment of Anna's moral fall is unique in its acceptance of feminine desire. Ian Haywood characterizes as "throwing down the gauntlet to Victorian sexuality" (xxxiv) and argues that "Jones does not condone her actions, but chivalrously defends her virtue relative to her accusers" (xxxiv). This defence is quite apparent in Jones's address to the reader: "World! Judge not harshly of them. She fell—let her who would have stood under the same circumstances, throw the first stone! He sinned—he *did* sin—but, by the temptation and the danger, weigh the crime" (54). There is an inequality, however, in Jones' treatment of the moment. Anna has fallen, while Trewlany has sinned (a fact that has to be repeated). The description of her participation as a fall, while an adoption of the contemporary terminology, suggests that Anna has somehow lowered herself, while Trewlaney has simply sinned, with no suggestion of any lowering. While a willing participant, the moment is far more damaging for Anna than it is for Trewlaney.

The trope of moral ruin was particularly worrisome to the Victorian public. Victorian society believed that the condition of the women in society indicated the condition of society in general. Women who were not pure were a threat. As Leila S. May notes, "To the Victorian mind, the prostitute represented the decay whose potential was the contamination of the social body" (1). The prostitute was perceived as a kind of disease to the social body, spreading contamination to anyone she came in contact with. When Anna and Ruth are left helpless and fall into moral ruin, they both proceed to live with their seducers and rely on them for financial support. Without the mantle of marriage, what they are doing, in Victorian eyes, is prostitution (although both Jones and Gaskell sweeten this situation with discussions of love). They are not married to the men who are supporting and living with them; therefore they are morally ruined and in a similar if not identical position to a prostitute. The idea that women were being morally ruined through the inability of needlework to support them would have been absolutely appalling to Victorian society. However, in the seamstress trope it is the ideal femininity within the characterization of the seamstress that leads her into this impurity. Both Ruth and Anna are so reliant on the domestic environment that, when it is taken away, they are trained to do nothing but ply their traditionally feminine trade in the prison of the working world. Further, the complete sexual innocence of idealized femininity leaves both seamstresses incapable of recognizing and avoiding the threat of moral ruin from a would-be seducer.

Death and the Sacrificial Seamstress

The final movement in the seamstress trope is the linking of the seamstress with death. Thomas Hood, in "The Song of the Shirt," represents his seamstress as sewing herself into death. She is forced to work so hard to survive that she is "sewing at once, with a double thread,/ A Shroud as well as a Shirt" (Hood 31-32). This is a brutally tragic image. She is represented as on the brink of death because of overwork and starvation, but still she cannot stop sewing. Hood's seamstress also claims, "I hardly fear [Death's] terrible shape,/ It seems so like my own" (35-36). The career of seamstressing is shown to turn a woman's body, with all of its idealized beauty, into an image of death. The seamstress's body becomes a sacrifice to her work.

Both Jones and Gaskell take their seamstress narratives to the point of death, but while Jones's ending depicts an ultimate sacrifice, Gaskell moves past this tropic ending and develops Ruth's character before her death. In a gruesome ending to "The Young Milliner," Anna's body is wheeled into a room full of eager medical students, including her ex-lover, in order to be dissected and her malady studied. Even in death, Anna is sexualized. Jones states, "It was only when the professor raised the cloth from a part of the body, that silence became at all general [...] The words 'young woman' had riveted attention—all eyes were fixed on the body" (68).The medical students' interest in her body revolves around her youth and the uncovering of her chest. Haywood characterizes this scene as a punishment of Anna (xxvi), which, considering she is being dissected on a table is hard to argue with. However, rather than punishing Anna, Jones is using the spectacle of the seamstress corpse to punish both Trewlaney and the Victorian reader by forcing them to face the results of neglecting the seamstresses. Anna's trials are imprinted onto her corpse. The examiner states, "With regard to the moral causes of this kind of maladies, the woman we are examining offers another striking case of what I have before explained to you; a great grief undermined her—a grief that even whitened part of her hair—as you see; she was only twenty years of age" (Jones 68). Anna's body has been sacrificed both to society's consumerism and Trewlaney's sexual amusement. Should the reader not have already picked up on this message, Jones leaves no question in the final words of his story: "Daughter of the People! you have worked—you have suffered—now your fate's accomplished: your body has ministered to the amusement and to the instruction of the favoured few: now [...] SLEEP! DAUGHTER OF THE PEOPLE!" (68). Anna's character has served the purpose of both entertaining and instructing the Victorian public. She has been sacrificed in every possible way within the narrative, becoming less of a character and more of a constructed symbol within the story. Jones's seamstress narrative ends in a gruesome exploration of the death of a seamstress, leaving her body naked on a table, for both her ex-lover and the reader to confront.

Just after Mr. Bellingham has abandoned Ruth, Gaskell also brings her seamstress to the brink of death, but Ruth is allowed a reprieve and given time within the narrative to develop into something more than a symbol. As Ruth is contemplating suicide, she hears Mr. Benson cry for help and it is here that she is given a new purpose in life. "Ruth, speeding on in her despair, heard the sharp utterance. […] It called her out of herself. The tender nature was in her still. […] In the old days she could never bear to hear or see bodily suffering […] She stayed her wild steps" (Gaskell 97). Mr. Benson's need for Ruth appeals to a side of her that looks to help others. Gaskell describes a tender quality in Ruth and it is this quality that saves her from her suicide; instead, she helps Mr. Benson home. Josephine Johnston argues in reference to Gaskell's writing that "The essence of her philosophy was that she saw the individual potentially. [...] She judged man from the standpoint of what he might *become*, not from the viewpoint of what he *was*" (224). Gaskell is interested in showing how the typical seamstress could be more than a helpless worker in need of rescue; she is interested in what she could become. In fact, it is when Ruth is rescuing Mr. Benson that she moves toward what will be her final career in the novel: nursing.

Working Mothers

First, Ruth becomes a successful mother. Much of her success within the domestic role of mother comes from her successful re-entry into the domestic environment. After she rescues Mr. Benson, he and his sister take her home to live with their family and she pretends to be a widow so that the community will not cast her out (Gaskell 131). Ruth's movement into motherhood serves as her first redemption. This exploration of a mother is in some manner unique in Victorian fiction. As Barbara M. Thaden notes, "good mothers are not a staple of canonized Victorian literature, even among female authors. Too often, mothers are either dead, unimportant, ineffective, or destructive" (4). However, as Thaden goes on to argue, this is not the case with Ruth. In her continued representation of a fallen woman, Gaskell has to make major movements to redeem her in the eyes of a Victorian readership and she does this through Ruth's role as mother. Directly after the birth of Ruth's son, Gaskell states, "Ruth could not sleep; if her heavy eyes closed, she opened them again with a start, for sleep seemed to be an enemy stealing from her the consciousness of being a mother. That one thought excluded all remembrance and all anticipation, in those first hours of delight" (162). Ruth's new role of motherhood and her complete devotion to it serves to edge out all remembrances and anticipation. Here we see, as Johnston argued, Gaskell's interest in what a person might *become*. Ruth's commitment to motherhood works to replace her memory of earlier transgressions. Through being a mother, she is redeemed.

Ruth's motherhood, however, also allows Gaskell to explore the dangerous political environment for mothers in the Victorian period. As Thaden notes, "throughout the nineteenth century a wife and mother in a less-than-ideal marriage could live in constant fear of losing all access to her children"(11). Mothers did not have legal custody over their own children, even in the legitimate bonds of marriage. For Ruth, this fear comes to life when Mr. Bellingham returns as Mr. Donne. As Ruth thinks of Mr. Bellingham/Donne as the father of her child, Gaskell writes, "But that very circumstance, full of such tender meaning in many cases, threw a new light into her mind. It changed her from the woman into the mother—the stern guardian of her child" (273). Ruth realizes the necessity to guard Leonard from his father, who has a legal claim to him, and she endeavours to conceal his existence. However, when that does not work and Mr. Bellingham proposes first a renewal of their earlier relations and then marriage, Ruth's determination to protect her child is absolute. Although the marriage of the mother and father would seem to be a kind of redemption from the sin of premarital sex, Gaskell is firm in placing the blame for the situation on Mr. Bellingham's shoulders, viewing him as a potentially threatening influence on the child. Ruth states:

> You shall have nothing to do with my boy, by my consent, much less by my agency. I would rather see him working on the roadside than leading such a life—being such a one as you are. [...] If there were no other reason to prevent our marriage but the fact that it would bring Leonard into contact with you, that would be enough. (303)

Gaskell reverses traditional Victorian concepts, suggesting that no father is better than the wrong kind of father for Leonard. The taint of shame from Ruth's fall has been washed clean by her repentance and devotion to her son and the risk of contamination instead comes from the father, who does not repent. Not only does motherhood offer redemption for Ruth but, through the second meeting with Mr. Bellingham, renamed Donne, offers Ruth a second chance to refuse moral ruin. This time, Ruth is a more developed woman worker; she has financial independence, a domestic environment to return to, and complete knowledge of what Mr. Bellingham is offering. Thus, Gaskell demonstrates that when a woman worker is allowed to move past the idealized definition of femininity, she is able to protect herself from dangers such as moral ruin; here Ruth is absolved of the guilt in the situation because it is clear that, had she known what Mr. Bellingham wanted and had she had the independence of another option, she would not have fallen.

Beyond being a mother, Ruth is also a woman worker. She works first as a governess in the Bradshaw household, but when the truth about her background is revealed, she is let go and turns to a career in nursing. It is in this final career of nursing that Gaskell completes Ruth's redemption and redefines the woman worker. Not only is Ruth working, but her work is both necessary and appreciated by the society around her. This becomes most apparent during the outbreak of typhus fever. Gaskell writes: "When […] the nurses belonging to the Infirmary had shrunk from being drafted into the pestilential fever-ward – when high wages had failed to tempt any to what, in their panic, they considered as certain death […] – Ruth came one day" (425). Gaskell creates an environment for Ruth where her labour is absolutely necessary. There is no one else who will nurse the patients of the fever-ward. In this manner, women's work, specifically Ruth's, is characterized as an essential and worthwhile occupation. Ruth's work is characterized as both valuable and redeeming.

Through this final career, Ruth's character is also redeemed in the eyes of society. She demonstrates, through her work, a nurturing spirit and an absolute selflessness and the courage to go where others are too afraid. In this manner, the indiscretion of her earlier fall is erased in the eyes of her immediate community:

> Then they spoke of Ruth – […]
> ‘They say she has been a great sinner, and that this is her penance,’ quoth one. […]
> ‘Such a one as her has never been a great sinner; nor does she do her work as a penance, but for the love of God.’ (429)

Ruth’s work in the community creates a place for her and generates respect for her labour. Through success and dedication to the career of nursing, she is able to erase the stain of the legacy of seamstressing from both herself and her son. Thaden argues, “By becoming a saint in the eyes of the townspeople, Ruth has allowed her son to walk erect again and given him a chance in life by providing him with a good mother to remember” (38). Gaskell has allowed Ruth to become more than a symbol of the tragic conditions for seamstresses. She uses Ruth to demonstrate the skill and respect that women can achieve as workers and as mothers.

Although Gaskell completes the seamstress trope with Ruth’s death at the end of the novel, the space in between moral ruin and death has recreated the woman worker as a valuable and important member of society. Ruth’s death becomes more than a dreary matter of course and more than a simple sacrifice to the narrative. Instead it is a tragic (if melodramatic) exploration of the consequences to which a male seducer condemns a young woman. After the outbreak of typhoid at the hospital is finished, Ruth hears of Mr. Bellingham taking ill and insists on being taken along to nurse him back to health (Gaskell 442). It is this choice that costs Ruth her life, and through it, Gaskell is able to demonstrate the cost of moral ruin to young women. Mr. Bellingham survives the fever (and the moral ruin) and continues on with his own life, but Ruth is left dead, her son motherless. However, through her drawn-out treatment of Ruth as a mother and a worker, Gaskell has ensured that the legacy she leaves her son will serve to direct him away from the path that was her own downfall. She is redeemed through her son.

Conclusion

The conventional characterization of the seamstress as an isolated young girl in danger of moral ruin and eventual death was useful in gaining sympathy for the plight of the seamstress but damaging to the concept of women working. The artists' adherence to traditional aspects of femininity represents the woman worker as a fragile figure in desperate need of being rescued. This narrative sacrifices the symbol of the seamstress, drawing attention to her conditions, but stripping her of any independence and success she may be able to achieve in her work. However, Gaskell works past this narrative and takes her woman worker through both motherhood and a new career, demonstrating the successful person that a woman worker could become.

However, Gaskell moves the representation of the woman worker past the position of a stagnant symbol. While she represents Ruth as a traditional seamstress early in the novel, she takes Ruth farther, which Jones and Hood fail to do with their seamstresses. In moving past the conventional narrative, Gaskell shows that the problem for the seamstress is not the fact that she is forced to work; it is the career in which she is trapped. Women's work can be rewarding and necessary, not just a form of starvation. It is this characterization that transitions women and work to new levels of financial independence and new areas of labour. Work becomes something for which a woman can have a particular aptitude. And it becomes an area where she can experience success and through which she can gain independence.

Chapter Two

The New Woman and the Broken Marriage: Incompatibilities between Feminist and Patriarchal Ideologies

Introduction

Gissing, through a speech of Mary Barfoot's, claims, "There must be a new type of woman, active in every sphere of life: a new worker out in the world, a new ruler of the home"(153). This modern worker and modern domestic woman is the figure of the New Woman which begins to emerge in representations of women and work later in the Victorian period. However, the New Woman is not a clearly defined figure; instead the multiple manifestations apparent in Gissing's *The Odd Women* and Amy Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* indeed reveal that it is a concept still in formation. The figure of the New Woman represents a movement against traditional femininity both within and outside of the structure of patriarchal support, creating a new kind of worker and a new domestic space. However, neither author is able to portray successfully and realistically a happy marriage for the New Woman because the rigidity of domestic roles within marriage makes it unable to support the independence of the New Woman.

The New Woman

The figure of the New Woman as a worker offers the possibility of a stronger, more independent woman than the victimized seamstress of earlier representations. While not tied to any specific occupation, the New Woman worker was typically associated with modern employments, and she was financially independent of marriage (although not always opposed to it). However, the New Woman was not a clearly defined concept. As Gail Cunningham argues, “Heroines who refused to conform to the traditional feminine role, challenged accepted ideals of marriage and maternity, chose to work for a living, or who in any way argued the feminist cause [...] were firmly identified by readers and reviewers as New Woman” (3). Because the New Woman was such a new concept, it had not yet been clearly defined. Instead, the term refers to any movement away from traditional definitions of femininity. Cunningham goes on to argue, “the New Woman represented everything that was daring and revolutionary, everything that was challenging to the norms of female behaviour” (10). The New Woman was inherently modern. She represented a new revolutionary definition of femininity and a general movement against traditional feminine roles.

With developments in the feminist movement late in the nineteenth century, the traditional definition of femininity was becoming less dominant and a new definition of femininity, one that incorporated the working woman’s independence, began to emerge. The fact that many women would not marry was becoming a more accepted fact and traditional domesticity was therefore becoming less central to the definition of femininity. Arlene Young argues, in *Culture, Class and Gender,* “For ordinary women there was now at least the possibility of choosing between dependence and independence, the possibility of rejecting conventional feminine roles and even of rejecting marriage as the only fulfilling female destiny” (128). Not only had the concept of an unmarried, self-supporting heroine come to be far more acceptable, but the woman worker also had even more options available to her in terms of a career. Yet, this new image of the woman worker was not easily created. Traditional roles, such as mother and wife, could not be completely left behind, but they could be less integral to the narrative. In portraying the New Woman, artists had to balance modernity with traditional feminine roles. In her introduction to *The Romance of a Shop*, Susan David Bernstein states, "New woman fiction of the 1880s and 1890s sketches a decidedly mixed image of exhilarating freedom and overwhelming obstacles as the turbulent condition of this social vanguard in gender transformations" (19). New Woman fiction is full of new freedoms for representations of women, but it is also rife with obstacles, one of which is the shadow of traditional femininity still hanging over any attempt at a new definition.

Within Levy's and Gissing's texts, there are multiple manifestations of the New Woman in varying combinations of modernity and traditional domesticity. In Levy's *The Romance of a Shop*, two very different versions of the New Woman are apparent in Lucy and Gertrude. Lucy's character blends traditional femininity with the skill and success of a modern worker. Levy introduces her in the text as "a young girl of about twenty years of age; fair, slight, upright as a dart, with a glance at once alert and serene" (52). This description combines attributes of traditional beauty in Lucy's youth, fairness, and serene glances with a newer energy in her upright stance and alertness. She is traditionally feminine, but with a modern energy and, as we later learn, an aptitude for photography (a very modern pursuit). Levy also emphasizes Lucy's sexual attractiveness to an unrealistic degree. Proposed to by three men, Lucy demonstrates not only sexual appeal, but also independence in her dismissal of any proposal from a man she does not wish to marry. In Lucy, Levy characterizes the New Woman as a combination of traditional beauty and sexual attractiveness with youthful energy and skill.

In contrast, Gertrude, the other New Woman figure in Levy's novel, is characterized as less attractive and almost masculine in her roles. Levy describes Gertrude as "not a beautiful woman" (51), but with "a certain air of character and distinction [which] clung to her through all her varying moods, and redeemed her from a possible charge of plainness" (51). Gertrude is excluded from the traditional feminine beauty that her sister exhibits. While she is given a kind of character that maintains a level of attractiveness, hers is not the youthful, pretty characterization of a New Woman. Instead, she is distinguished and looks "older than her twenty-three years" (52). Gertrude also plays a much different role than Lucy in the text. While Lucy is the attractive, desired young woman of the family, Gertrude is required to step into the role of the father figure. It is Gertrude who sits down at the beginning of the novel to talk finances with a family friend (53) and Gertrude who goes after Phyllis when she has eloped with a married man (169), fulfilling the role in the novel that would traditionally be filled by a father. Thus, in Gertrude, Levy defines the New Woman as a strong, masculine woman with the ability to care for her family to the point where she replaces a traditionally male role.

The dichotomy between a young, beautiful New Woman and an older, more masculine characterization is also apparent in George Gissing's *The Odd Women*; however, Gissing is less clear in his divisions. Monica Madden, the youngest of the Madden sisters, begins the novel as an employee in a drapery shop. Although her job is tiring, she maintains her traditional beauty: "Monica's face was of a recognized type of prettiness; a pure oval; from the smooth forehead to the dimpled little chin all its lines were graceful" (Gissing 54). Monica is recognizably beautiful in the traditional sense of the word. Again, this characterization of the New Woman also emphasizes sexual availability. Within a few pages of Monica's introduction as an adult character, she has already received a proposal of marriage. As with Lucy, Monica demonstrates New Woman qualities in her management of her potential suitors. Monica is critical of Mr. Bullivant and refuses him because she does not feel he is financially suitable. However, this exchange also complicates Monica's characterization as a New Woman figure. She does not reject her suitor on the basis of a lack of attraction (although that is also present), but because he would never be able to support her financially. She asks Mr. Bullivant, "How would it be possible for you to support a wife? [...] What reasonable hope have you?" (55). Although her ability to refuse an offer of marriage with cool logic fits with the characterization of a New Woman, Monica's reasoning does not. She appears to desire to return to the system of patriarchal support from which the death of her father removed her and her rejection of Mr. Bullivant is based on his inability to provide that.

Monica's characterization as a New Woman is seen in the potential Gissing places within her. Wendy Lesser argues that Monica "is not feminist by principle, but in practice she rebels against the restrictions of the feminine fate" (212). Monica is not overtly feminist, but her actions are feminist in nature. She is able to navigate the city independently, she is able to refuse or accept her own marriage proposals, and, later in the novel, she fights for independence within the traditional roles of marriage. However, she is not a New Woman. Arlene Young argues, "Monica has nothing of the New Woman about her. She is, instead, the ideal of passive femininity. [...] Accordingly, she is unfit for any kind of gainful employment or for the demands of an independent life" (149). Monica has no wish to be independent of patriarchal support and no desire to enter into the modern employments so integral to characterizations of the New Woman worker. However, in both Rhoda and Monica, Gissing suggests the potential for something more than the initial characterization. I argue that Gissing is moving toward a blending of aspects of traditional femininity with characteristics of the New Woman. Monica's unconscious feminism, as noted by Lesser, suggests potential New Woman values within Monica's traditional femininity which begin to develop more clearly in her later marriage to Widdowson.

Rhoda Nunn, similar to Gertrude, is a far more masculine and less traditionally feminine character, but she, also, has the potential for something more than her initial characterization. In a chapter entitled "An Independent Woman," Gissing describes Rhoda as having "a clear, though pale skin, a vigorous frame, a brisk movement—all the signs of fairly good health" (48). Rhoda is strong and healthy with a masculine countenance. She is not traditionally beautiful, but she is described as having the energy that is seen in other descriptions of New Women. There is the suggestion of a new kind of femininity in this modern energy. However, Gissing complicates this description by stating, "when the lips parted to show their warmth, [...] one became aware of a suggestiveness [...] hinting a possibility of subtle feminine forces that might be released by circumstance" (48). Here, again, Gissing hints at the possibility for something more than his initial description. In his masculine, strong New Woman, Gissing suggests that, should a love interest appear, a softer femininity might emerge within her. While Monica presents New Woman potential, Gissing gives Rhoda a femininity-in-waiting. Gissing resists extremes in the characters of his women. He seems to call for a blending of New Woman and traditionally feminine qualities.

Just as Cunningham's definition of the New Woman is broad and flexible, we see Levy and Gissing's representations of the figure similarly differing. Yet there is at least one characteristic that unifies the representations. Both Gissing and Levy demonstrate an attention to modernity in the employments of their New Woman. By focusing on typewriting and photography, both authors are offering a modern field of employment for their New Woman figures. This allows woman's work to move away from the images of slavery and slow starvation and into a more promising realm. Gertrude states in *The Romance of a Shop,* "Think of all the dull little ways by which women, ladies, are generally reduced to earning their living! But a business—that is so different. It is progressive; a creature capable of growth; the very qualities in which women's work is dreadfully lacking" (Levy 55). Here, through one of her New Women, Levy moves from "dull" traditional labour into a new kind of employment. Women's work is now something that can provide the woman worker with a sense of accomplishment; it is compared to a living organism that can grow. Young argues that "Work gives [the Lorimer sisters] a special kind of freedom, the freedom to create their own destinies, their own stories; it gives them access to a self-determined life, not just a conventional existence" (139). For the Lorimer sisters, work provides the freedom to shape their own lives. Much of this new freedom comes from the Lorimer sisters' ownership of the photography studio. Elizabeth Evans argues, "Levy's novel is unusual in that the characters are shop proprietors, not paid assistants. Rather than commodities on display, modeling clothes for the purchasing public, Levy's 'women in business' are the producers of spectacles, not the subject of them" (26). Levy makes a very modern move in representing her woman workers as business owners. Their professional life not only offers them independence from the traditionally feminine careers, but also offers them total control of their careers.

In *The Odd Women*, Gissing directly links Rhoda Nunn's success as a woman worker to her training in modern technology. Rhoda began her career as a teacher, but had only gone into it "like most girls, as a dreary matter of course" (Gissing 50) and had later escaped it by receiving training in shorthand, bookkeeping, and commercial correspondence. She took positions as a cashier and then a shorthand writer, but eventually was being edged out of her field by those who could use a typewriter. She tells Virginia, "I went to learn type-writing, and the lady who taught me asked me in the end to stay with her as an assistant. [...] She makes it her object to train young girls for work in offices. Some pay for their lessons, and some get them for nothing" (50). In Rhoda's career as a women worker she has lived the movement that Gertrude alluded to in her speech. Beginning as a haphazard teacher, or in one of the "dull little ways by which women [...] are reduced to earning their living," Rhoda moved up into more modern employment as an assistant or clerk. However, even there she was losing her ability to find prosperous employment without training in modern technology. By learning to type-write, she has progressed into successful, prosperous labour and now teaches other women the same technology working as an assistant to the charitable Mary Barfoot. Young argues, "To teach women the skills of office work is to teach them the skills of independence; it furthers the cause of woman's emancipation and undermines sexually biased social and economic structures" (153). Not only has Rhoda progressed through the different careers open to women to reach the highest level of modernity possible, but she now helps to run an organization that takes other women through the movement. Once again, the New Woman's ability to be a successful worker is linked to her knowledge of modern technology.

The school that Rhoda helps run is an interesting example of the link between the success of the New Woman and modern technology; Miss Barfoot is providing less fortunate, educated women with charity, but it is in the form of training, rather than financial aid. Rhoda and Miss Barfoot are attempting to change the field of women's work on a broad scale; they are attempting to train women to be New Women. In a speech to her students, Miss Barfoot first links this new woman worker to more modern types of technology: "What course of training will wake women up [...]? It must be something new, something free from the reproach of womanliness. I don't care whether we crowd out the men or not. I don't care *what* results, if only women are made strong and self-reliant and nobly independent" (Gissing 153). Miss Barfoot's mission is to find a type of work for women, through modern training, that will allow them to be strong and independent. She, like Rhoda and Gertrude, is moving away from earlier options for woman's work and towards something new, something better. In this speech Gissing also directly comments on the blending he hinted at in his descriptions of Rhoda and Monica. Miss Barfoot argues, "There must be a new type of woman, active in every sphere of life: a new worker out in the world, a new ruler of the home. [...] Let a woman be gentle, but at the same time let her be strong; let her be pure of heart, but none the less wise and instructed" (153). Gissing, through Miss Barfoot, suggests that the old must be blended with the new. Women can maintain their traditional attributes such as gentleness and purity of heart, but they need to add to this strength and wisdom. Rather than an either/ or (old or new) situation, Gissing suggests the successful New Woman can be a blending of both.

Out With the Old

Both Gissing and Levy's novels begin with the death of the Father symbolizing the death of patriarchy, but to very different ends. In Gissing's *The Odd Women*, the Madden sisters are so dependent on the patriarchal system through the support of their father that, when he dies, they are destitute. Deirdre David describes Dr. Madden as "a well-meaning advocate of the Victorian belief in male direction and protection of women, but in material terms [...] an embarrassingly ineffective father" (121). Dr. Madden believes in the patriarchal system, arguing that the "home must be guarded against sordid cares to the last possible moment" (Gissing 32), but he fails to provide adequately for his daughters in the eventuality of his death. Gissing uses Dr. Madden as an embodiment of a system that can no longer be depended upon. The two older daughters, Alice and Virginia, are crippled by their fathers' failure to plan for the eventuality of his death and his refusal to educate them to provide for themselves. David argues, "Exiled from the old patriarchal order by virtue of their father's failure to provide for them after his death, and unable to embrace a new feminist order by virtue of their timidity and years of indoctrination in male, middle-class conservatism, they are eccentric to both patriarchal and feminist ideological circles" (123). Alice and Virginia are dependent on the more traditional definition of femininity in which women are supported first by their fathers and then by their husbands, but this system can no longer support them. However, they do not have the training or the mental capacity to find themselves a more successful occupation than the dreariness of traditional female labour. Although they actually have a capital of eight hundred pounds upon their fathers' death, the women do not know what to do with it, other than invest it and live off of the income. Thus, the death of their father sentences the six daughters to years of drudgery in the "dull little ways" (Levy 55) women with their lack of training could try to earn a living.

Monica Madden offers a different story in her youth and potential. Only five when her father dies, Monica has not been raised within this system of domestic dependence. That said, Monica offers an interesting complexity. While she is young, capable, and demonstrates an independence in her movements around the city, she has not fully escaped the patriarchal system that crippled her sisters. In his brief description of the ten years following Dr. Madden's death, which saw three of the sisters die, Gissing describes Monica as having "no aptitude for anything but being a pretty, cheerful, engaging girl, much dependent on the love and gentleness of those about her" (41). While Monica appears to have potential in the fact that Rhoda and Mary Barfoot accept her for training, she does not have a marketable skill. In fact, the career of draper's apprentice was chosen for her because "there was every likelihood that, at such a place as Weston, with her sister [Isabel] for occasional chaperon, she would ere long find herself relieved of the necessity of working for a livelihood" (41). She was apprenticed to a draper because her sisters hoped it would put her into the path of a gentleman to marry. However, Gissing undermines this naive hope with Isabel's decline into mental illness, acceptance into a charitable institution, and eventual suicide. Gissing alludes to the potential for Monica, through marriage, to return to the dependence on patriarchy, but undermines this hope by a stark reminder of what the initial domestic dependence has left in its wake. In *The Odd Women*, the death of the father as a symbol of the death of patriarchy is not a liberating circumstance; instead, it is a tragic exploration of what domestic dependence can mean for women who are left alone.

Levy's treatment of a father's death is much more hopeful in that it allows the Lorimer sisters the opportunity to pursue a career in something they were already trained to do. In a situation that very much resembles that of the Maddens, the Lorimer sisters are left with a capital of only five hundred pounds when their father dies. However, two of the Lorimer sisters, Lucy and Gertrude, exhibit much more aptitude to be self-sufficient than Alice and Virginia do. Recognizing that they are all able to take photographs, they decide to invest their capital in setting up a shop and supporting themselves. This easy conversion from daughters into women of business is, admittedly, quite romanticized, which is an aspect of Levy's text that cannot be ignored (the title says it all). Bernstein argues, "On the cusp of literary modernism, Levy's writing reflects a shifting consciousness, a mode of representation hovering between romance and realism, between idealized versions of remodelled lives for women and men, and the mundane hazards of such social change" (11) While addressing realistic concerns, Levy solves many of the novel's problems in a romanticized way that glosses over the difficult realities of the situation. Where Gissing addresses the realistic results of six daughters being left without financial support, Levy uses the death of a father to free the four Lorimer sisters to pursue a modern career, which they just happen to be trained to do.

That said, what is important in Levy's opening is the inattention she gives to any patriarchal order. The novel begins shortly after the death of Mr. Lorimer, so the Lorimer sisters are not shown to be dependent on the patriarchal system out of anything other than habit and convenience. Instead, Mr. Lorimer's death provides an absence of patriarchy, rather than a tragic loss. The Lorimer sisters are perfectly capable of supporting themselves and, furthermore, are capable of recognizing which career would be most beneficial. They recognize that they could "find places as governesses; but [...] should be at a great disadvantage without certificates or training of any sort" (Levy 54). They are also able to keep the family together, suggesting that the family unit as a concept is not dependent upon a patriarchal head. Even when they do turn to an outside male for help with their business venture, it is "Not for his advice, [...] but to arrange any transaction" (55) and for training for Lucy. The Lorimer sisters are only superficially reliant on men; they show themselves to be perfectly capable of supporting themselves when necessary.

Both Gissing and Levy's novels share a conspicuous absence in the lack of a mother. In both novels, the mothers have died long before the events of the stories begin. The dead mother is very much a trope in Victorian fiction. In a culture that idealized the role of women inside the home, not a lot of attention was paid to the mother in literature. In *The Maternal Voice in Victorian Fiction*, Barbara Z. Thaden states, "The adventures of the orphan thrown upon the world can often provide more colorful plot twists than can the adventures of the drawing room, and the parentless hero or heroine is a literary convention older than the novel itself" (4). The straightforward reasoning behind the death of both parents as a trope in fiction is that it allows the author to expose his or her hero or heroine to more exciting adventures than may be acceptable should a parent still survive. It was more acceptable for a woman to go out and work because she absolutely had to than for her to have a desire to work, while still able to be dependent on her parents. However, this explanation still does not account for the very different treatments of the parents' deaths. In Gissing and Levy's novels, the death of the father initiates the novel's events, while the death of the mother is inconsequential. Thaden goes on to argue that "the literary phenomenon of the dead mother in Victorian novels reveals that for most novelists, even for some mother/authors, the mother's influence was nil; alive or dead, remembered or forgotten, mothers had no impact on the future successes or failures of their offspring" (17). This is a very bleak viewpoint, but it holds merit in the discussion of the two novels. Neither novel gives significant attention to the mother; in fact, Levy mentions Fanny's mother only in connection to the income that is left to her, and fails to mention the other daughters' mother.

I would, however, argue that there is another dimension to the refusal to acknowledge the mother and that is a movement away from the traditional domestic values that are inherently tied to the figure. When Gissing does mention the Madden's mother it is with an air of dismissal: "Mrs. Madden, having given birth to six daughters, had fulfilled her function in the wonderful world; for two years she had been resting in the old churchyard that looks upon the Severn Sea. [...] A sweet, calm, unpretending woman; admirable in the domesticities" (31). Mrs. Madden perfectly fits the definition of traditional femininity. She is a dutiful and fertile wife (as is her function in the world) and she is successful in domestic endeavours. However, she is also dead, there being no function for her outside of bearing children. By removing this figure of archetypal femininity from the novel, Gissing allows femininity to move away from this definition; however he also allows traditional femininity to be idealized. Alice and her father sigh with fondness over the memory of their sweet, refined, domestic mother and wife. Considering Dr. Madden is dead within the next few pages, one wonders how this image of traditional femininity would have held up against the absence of patriarchal support. By never exploring the self-sufficiency of Mrs. Madden (except through the legacy of her daughters), Gissing allows the image of traditional femininity to maintain its serene beauty, but firmly places it in the past. However, Mrs. Madden has left at least one mark on the world in the figure of Monica: "In speech and bearing Monica greatly resembled her mother; that is to say she had a native elegance" (41). In speech and bearing, Monica has a native elegance that recalls the previous generation. Although her mother and that traditional femininity are in the past, Monica's mother has passed down an element of herself to her daughter.

Rhoda Nunn's legacy from her parents is much different; and it becomes integral in the formation of her character as a New Woman. Rhoda's mother is an invalid and her father is non-existent. In this way, Rhoda is removed from the patriarchal system early in life. The ineffectual parent in this case is a mother, who is unable to pass on traditional domesticity because she is ill and the forgotten parent is the father. Because of this, Rhoda has a very different upbringing; she is raised to function as worker rather than a dependent. In the passage in which she is first introduced, as a fifteen-year-old girl, Gissing states, "With a frankness peculiar to her, indicative of pride, Miss Nunn let it be known that she would have to earn her living, probably as a school-teacher; study for examinations occupied most of her days" (33). Rhoda plans to be a woman worker from an early age and Gissing suggests she is even proud to be so. In fact, one of her only male influences, Mr. Smithson, feeds her radical feminist arguments, rather than traditional patriarchal values. Rhoda is educated to be a New Woman; at a young age she is taught to rely on herself for financial support and to question traditional social values that confine women to certain roles. Thus, Rhoda's status as a New Woman begins to form early in the novel.

Domestic Spaces, Public Places

The removal of the patriarchal and maternal representations of traditional domesticity does not exclude the domestic environment from the New Woman novels. This is an important distinction from earlier representations of women and work. While the New Woman narratives frequently do involve the death of both parents, this is not necessarily a removal from the shelter of the domestic world. Instead, the New Woman narrative explores a new definition of domesticity. This new domestic environment is most clearly seen in *The Romance of a Shop*, where the sisters, upon the death of their father, resist familial efforts to farm them out to separate homes and instead go into business so that they will be able to stay together. While the Lorimer sisters' entry into the field of labour and the necessity for them to support themselves is progressive, the women fight to maintain a more traditional level of domesticity. When discussing the business venture, Gertrude states, "Why not turn to account the only thing we can do, and start as professional photographers? We should all keep together" (Levy 54). This statement blends the modern concept of new labour with the ability to maintain the domestic unit. However, it is a new domestic unit, one that mixes work with domesticity. The four sisters do not *all* know how to take photographs; Lucy and Gertrude are shown working as photographers while Fanny keeps the house and Phyllis helps out in either the house or the studio. The four sisters work as a community, running the business and the home as a team.

This blending of domesticity and labour is most clearly demonstrated in the photography shop itself. The sisters rent one floor of a building for their photography studio/shop and then two more floors above, separated by a dressmaker, for their living area. Elizabeth F. Evan's argues that "This balance between domesticity and professionalism is represented by the spatial composition of their shop and lodgings on Baker Street and by the sister's manipulation of that space" (32). On top of physically having the Lorimer sisters inhabit a building that houses both their professional world and their domestic world, Levy goes into great detail about how they decorate their living quarters and their shop. This manipulation of the space brings a kind of domestic spirit into every aspect of their living arrangement. "Then followed a period of absorbing and unremitting toil. All through the sweet June month the girls laboured at setting things in order in the new home" (Levy 77). Levy's ambiguous use of the word "home" in this sentence reveals the way domestic energies are expanded in the novel between the house and the shop. The professional and domestic worlds are combined to create a new domestic unit that exists in both realms.

This concept of a new domestic realm is not immediately apparent in *The Odd Women*. Rather than recovering from the death of their father and creating a new domestic unit, the Madden sisters are separated and largely killed off. However, what the novel does offer is an example of female community within work in Miss Barfoot's training school. Miss Barfoot, wealthy through the death of a sister and an uncle, has made it her work to "draw from the overstocked profession of teaching as many capable young women as she could lay hands on, and to fit them for certain of the pursuits nowadays thrown open to their sex" (Gissing 79). Miss Barfoot offers a school exclusively for women in order to train them for careers that will take them away from the over-populated fields of traditional labour, such as teaching. She does not do this for money, but rather as a philanthropic mission. In this way, the school becomes an example of women taking care of women in an inherently feminine environment.

This concept of feminine community is demonstrated in the office space that the training school inhabits. As Rhoda and Mary Barfoot walk through the rooms, the business is demonstrated as both run and owned by women:

> They ascended to the second story, where two rooms had been furnished like comfortable offices; two smaller on the floor above served for dressing rooms. In one of the offices, type-writing and occasionally other kinds of work that demanded intelligence were carried on by three or four young women regularly employed. […] In the second room, Miss Barfoot instructed her pupils, never more than three being with her at a time. (79)

Gissing describes both the space and the inhabitants as exclusively female. The inclusion of dressing rooms on the floor above suggests a kind of domesticity and the employment of three or four young girls, most likely those who have received training from the school, suggests a feminine community that takes care of itself. Cunningham argues, "Miss Barfoot's training school stands firm at the centre of the novel as a beacon of enlightenment and resource, beckoning the poor and misguided and generously dispensing the warmth of its idealism, but never revealing its inner mechanisms" (134). Miss Barfoot's school exists in the novel as an example of what the working world could be for women. However, Cunningham has romanticized it in this description. While offering a glimpse of what New Woman training could be, Miss Barfoot and Rhoda are very shrewd in this endeavour. They are not beckoning all the "poor and misguided"; instead they are very clearly helping a specific kind of woman: middle-class and educated. Gissing's realism is harsh and he is clear in his distinction of whom, exactly, this school is helping. For the students who do attend, the school offers a blend of domestic and commercial space, suggesting the opportunity for a new domestic world. This blending is also seen in the frequent representation of Rhoda and Miss Barfoot, two business partners, within their domestic setting. Sally Ledger argues, "Whilst they train single young clerks as typists to enable them to remain economically independent and to avoid the necessity of conventional domesticity, they themselves are continually shown in cosy domestic settings. Heterosexual domesticity is replaced by a domesticity based on same-sex friendship" (168). Through Miss Barfoot and Rhoda's living arrangements, Gissing provides a blending of professional space with domestic space. Although friends, Rhoda and Mary are also business partners and many discussions of politics and business take place in these "cosy domestic settings."Gissing demonstrates that a woman worker does not need either to submit to patriarchal dependence or to sacrifice domestic comforts; he instead offers a third option.

An Impossible Choice

For both Levy and Gissing's working woman, marriage necessitates a separation from the New Woman movement. However, in making this argument, I have to begin with an exception. The most promising marriage in the two novels is that between Lucy and Frank Jermyn. Although threatened by the potential death of the groom, Lucy and Frank are reunited and happily married by the end of the novel. After marriage, Lucy continues to work and seemingly continues to be successful. The narrator describes her as a skilled mother of two, but clarifies that "the photography, however, has not been crowded out by domestic duties; and no infant with pretensions to fashion omits to present itself before Mrs. Jermyn's lens" (Levy 193). Levy demonstrates the blending of work and domestic duties in what appears to be a very happy marriage. Here, Levy has successfully represented a married New Woman, but this union is accomplished within a heavily romanticized narrative and is not the focus of the novel's ending.

Also, the marriage of two sisters and death of one leaves Gertrude, the unwed New Woman, without the female community which has supported her throughout the novel and Levy is unable or unwilling to leave her single. Gertrude has exhibited many New Woman attributes throughout the novel in her skill, independence, and ability to take care of those around her, but in the end, Levy takes away any happiness in this self-reliance. As Gertrude sits in the empty apartment at the end of the novel, Levy states:

> She who held unhappiness ignoble and cynicism a poor thing, had lost for the moment all joy of living and all belief. The little erection of philosophy, of hope, of self-reliance, which she had been at such pains to build, seemed to be crumbling about her

> ears; all the struggles and sacrifices of life looked vain things.
> (190)

At the end of the novel, in preparing Gertrude for marriage, Levy undermines everything she has worked to build in the image of the New Woman. Gertrude's independence and philosophies lose their joy and the New Woman is left sitting on the only chair in an empty room. When her love interest, Lord Watergate returns, their reunion carries alarming imagery of a parent with a child: "He had taken her into his arms, without explanation or apology, holding her to his breast as one holds a tired child. [...] And she, looking up into his face [...], felt all that was mean and petty and bitter in life fade away into nothingness; while all that was good and great and beautiful gathered new meaning and became the sole realities" (192). Levy describes Gertrude's relationship with Lord Watergate as though Gertrude were a tired child, returning to a sheltering home. As she looks into his eyes, her life as an independent woman not only seems to fade away, but also is described as "all that was mean and petty and bitter in life." Although seeming to demonstrate the possibility for a happy New Woman marriage in Lucy, in Gertrude, who remains the focus of the novel's ending, Levy creates a dichotomy between feminist philosophy and marriage.

There is a chance that Levy is not being completely serious in this ending. Evans argues that those who dismiss the novel's ending as too tidy fail "to recognize Levy's playful use of a familiar narrative" (38) and continues on to argue, "the novel's closure, particularly in Gertrude's marriage to a lord, contains ironic reference to the mythology surrounding the shopgirl and the fantasy of an elevating marriage" (38). However, in taking part in this traditional trope (in jest or not), Levy has had to strip her modern worker of the modern trappings the New Woman narrative provides. The New Woman becomes a child who has run away and now must return to the sheltering parent's arms. Marriage in Levy's treatment of Gertrude becomes a choice between the feminist movement and traditional femininity supported by patriarchy.

Gissing, especially, creates an either/or situation for his New Woman characters, forcing them to choose between the freedom of the New Woman movement and the financial support of patriarchy. Monica views her marriage to Widdowson as a rescue from a life of labour. However, she soon misses the freedom that her New Woman status afforded her. Ledger offers an interesting reason for the trope of early marriage in New Woman novels, suggesting "its insertion into the early parts of a novel allow for a dissection, rather than a celebration, of one of Western culture's major institutions" (26). This is certainly true of Gissing's portrayal of Monica and Widdowson. The destruction of their marriage is drawn out on the page, allowing the reader to see how the rigid marriage roles for the wife imprison the New Woman to a destructive degree. Widdowson, with his belief in traditional feminine and masculine roles, feels Monica's entire world should be the domestic environment. He tells her "a woman ought never to be so happy as when she is looking after her home" (Gissing 178). Widdowson believes that a wife should be solely devoted to both her husband and her home. Deidre David argues that "Widdowson's obsessive adherence to the Victorian dogma of female frailty […] not only destroys his marriage, but it also makes him a tragic victim" (123). Widdowson's inability to separate himself from traditional domestic roles destroys his marriage. Monica, however, argues for a more modern kind of marriage: "I wish to do my duty […] but I don't think it's right to make dull work for oneself, when one might be living" (Gissing 178). Monica agrees that it is a wife's responsibility to take care of her home, or domestic environment, but she feels there should be more to marriage. She is arguing for a role beyond the traditional wife, a kind of combination of New Woman with her modern interests and freedoms and traditional wife, with her devotion to the home environment. Monica is attempting to blend the feminist and patriarchal ideologies that David has identified within the novel; however, she is not allowed to do so by her husband and this inability to blend becomes the downfall of their marriage. David states, "Monica therefore is the victim of male ideology twice over—once as theorized by her father and once as practiced by her husband" (124). Monica is a New Woman trapped in a traditional marriage. Here Gissing characterizes marriage as a separation from the feminism of the New Woman movement and suggests that women must choose one or the other.

This either/or situation is created by the rigidity of traditional feminine roles within marriage. Widdowson, as an embodiment of these traditional ideals, is unable to change his views on marriage in order to accommodate his more modern wife. Gissing does not vilify him for this. As David argues, "Widdowson's misery is so fully realized by Gissing that it is impossible to slide him neatly into the slot of male villain in a feminist novel" (124). The domestic expectations of the Victorian period are as much a prison for Widdowson as they are for Monica. The reader is forced to watch the destruction of a traditional marriage while being given glimpses in Monica's dialogue of what the New Woman marriage could and should be: a combination of traditional roles with modern freedom.

In Rhoda and Everard Barfoot's potential relationship, the combination of patriarchy and feminism is possible, but never achieved. Rhoda has trouble trusting Everard outside of a traditional marriage, but recognizes that anything other than a free union would undermine her political views. In contrast, Everard wants Rhoda to prove her love for him by agreeing to a free union, but intends to pretend to be married with anyone who does not know them, in order to avoid the uncomfortable social implications of free union. Gail Cunningham argues that Everard's and Rhoda's relationship "quickly degenerates into a crude power struggle" (142) and that "the whole idea of free love is debased into a bargaining point. Their relationship founders on the question, but in a wholly artificial way" (142). Cunningham is right to describe the situation as a power struggle and it is at the question of free union that the relationship ultimately disintegrates; however, this exchange is more nuanced than an artificial discord. Instead, Gissing is exploring the complications of the rigid marital roles imposed upon the New Woman figure and the inability of these roles to support New Woman independence.

Rhoda has built her political career on the concept of independence for women; to marry and become a dependent would destroy the work that she has done. In contemplating marriage, Rhoda thinks, "What was her life to be? At first they would travel together, but before long it might be necessary to have a settled home, and what then would be her social position, her duties and pleasures? Housekeeping, mere domesticities, could never occupy her for more than the smallest possible part of each day" (Gissing 274). This is very reminiscent of Monica's views on marriage. Gissing is arguing that the New Woman as a wife needs interests within the marriage that extend farther than the domestic world. For this to happen, the wife needs to be allowed a level of freedom within the marriage. Rhoda acknowledges that intellectual activities and the prospect of being a leader in some movement will always be an interest for her, but is unsure of her ability to continue this, once married: "Practical activity in some intellectual undertaking [...] would claim her again. But how if Everard resisted such tendencies? [...] No longer an example of perfect female independence [...], she might illustrate women's claim to equality in marriage.—If her experience proved no obstacle" (274). Rhoda fears Everard's ability to interfere with her personal freedoms will take away her ability to perform her public duties, but a free union, while fitting with her political message, would exclude her from the society of many of her friends. Gissing is highlighting the inequality within the structure of marriage. Should Everard choose to, he has the power to stop Rhoda, a financially independent and professionally successful woman, from pursuing her career. This is where Rhoda and Everard's relationship breaks down. In a free union, Rhoda and Everard could no longer be part of society, but in a traditional marriage, Rhoda would lose her freedom. Even if Everard *allows* her to pursue her political career, he will always hold the power to take that away.

Although Rhoda and Everard's relationship disintegrates among the pressures of public image, personal freedoms, and pride, Gissing has offered a glimpse of what a successful marriage for the New Woman would be. In contemplating her future as Everard's wife, Rhoda sees the potential for a blending between her duties as a wife to the domestic environment and her professional aspirations. If Everard would allow her the freedom, she could achieve both. This is similar to the marriage which Monica has argued for with Widdowson. In looking at the failure of the two relationships in the novel, Cunningham argues that, "beneath the two detailed investigations of the couples' problems, we have a continual chorus of anti-marriage lament" (137). Cunningham has identified an attitude against marriage that is definitely evident in Gissing's novel. However, I would modify this claim to an argument against a particular kind of marriage. Gissing, in both

Rhoda's and Monica's desire for a marriage in which they can have more than just the traditional feminine duties is offering a glimpse of what the successful New Woman marriage would look like. Neither couple in the novel is able to achieve this combination of tradition with modernity, but Gissing is careful not to attribute the blame for this failure to any particular character. Both Rhoda and Everard are too prideful and they share the blame for their relationship's failure, and, while Widdowson is overly controlling, Monica married the wrong man for the wrong reasons.

Although his portrayal of marriage is unpromising, Gissing provides hope at the end of the novel through the birth of Monica's daughter. Monica has died and Rhoda has remained unmarried, but Monica's daughter is left to be raised outside of the patriarchal order, suggesting potential for the development of anew, stronger New Woman. At the end of the novel, Virginia is a recovered alcoholic; she and Alice, who are left to raise Monica's daughter, are finally discussing opening their own school; and Rhoda's business with Miss Barfoot is expanding and successful. The novel closes with Rhoda holding the child, after Alice promises to "make a brave woman of her" (Gissing 332). Gissing's description of the moment combines promises for the future with remembrances of the past:

> [Rhoda] gazed intently at those diminutive features, which were quite placid and relaxing in soft drowsiness. The dark, bright eye was Monica's. And as the baby sank into sleep, Rhoda's vision grew dim; a sigh made her lips quiver, and once more she murmured, 'Poor little child!' (332)

Monica's child becomes a hope for the next generation. Raised outside of patriarchy, she has the chance to become the successful New Woman that neither Rhoda nor Monica could be. However, in her birth she also carries the death of her mother. Rhoda's "Poor little child" is ambiguous, seemingly referring to both the journey ahead of the baby, and the difficult journey Monica has completed. Wendy Lesser argues that the child "is not just the orphan, or not just Monica embodied in her daughter, but also the child Rhoda might have had [...] – as well as Rhoda's own child-self, that naively tough woman who finally disappears only when Rhoda herself begins to understand the power of passion" (214). Monica's child embodies the hope for the next generation, but she also carries the weight of the previous generation, which has suffered for the freedoms she will enjoy. In this last image of the New Woman, Gissing introduces the imagery of a generational type of development, suggesting that the suffering experienced by Monica and Rhoda's generation brings the promise of freedom for the next.

Conclusion

Gissing and Levy's novels offer a blending of traditional domestic femininity with aspects of the modern New Woman, most recognizably in terms of public and private spaces. However, neither author is able to carry this blending of traditional with modern into a successful New Woman marriage without large amounts of romanticizing. This failure is the result of rigidity within the marriage that refuses to allow for progression in women's roles.

However, Gissing offers hope by suggesting that the New Woman is a generational concept. He represents the previous generation of women as traditional wives, women whose roles did not surpass that of bearing children; while the current generation fights a battle to blend feminist principles and the patriarchal ideology, with neither side happy with the results; and, finally, Gissing promises hope for a blending of patriarchy and feminism in the next generation in the child waiting to be raised as a “brave woman” outside of an early dependence on the patriarchal system.

Chapter Three

Bachelor Girls:

The Removal of the Marriage Plot from New Woman Novels

Introduction

While the potential marriage plot is never fully abandoned, some later representations of the New Woman focus the femininity of their working woman around her career, rather than a traditionally domestic marriage plot. Both Grant Allen in *The Type-Writer Girl* and Margaret Oliphant in *Kirsteen* present romanticized versions of women and work. Through these representations, the authors attempt to "sell" the image of the woman worker as an independent, empowered woman, who is voluntarily removed from marriage and independent of the domestic environment. However, while Oliphant's removal of Kirsteen from the marriage plot allows Kirsteen to be a focused and successful woman worker, in Allen's novel, Juliet's interaction with the marriage plot suggests an uncomfortable threat to traditional domesticity posed by the woman worker.

Domestic Bonds

While Allen, in *The Type-Writer Girl,* includes the death of the father as the initial motivating force for Juliet's movement into the workforce, he leaves behind the trope of a patriarchal death as the only motivator. The novel begins with the sentence, "I was twenty-two and without employment" (Allen 23). This opening is both ambiguous about the financial position and the gender of the narrator. While a first person narration of a novel entitled *The Type-Writer Girl* seems to imply femininity, Allen is not specific as to who is twenty-two and without employment at the beginning of the novel. Instead, in this first line he implies that every twenty-two year old of either gender is in need of employment. Rather than work becoming the unfortunate result of a parent's death, work is treated as an inevitable aspect of a young person's life.

When Allen does mention the father's death he, through Juliet, is unwilling to narrate the episode in any detail. Juliet states, "Four months earlier I had suffered a great loss. [...] It is far from my desire to make capital out of my inmost heart. I cannot spin phrases about my dead father. [...] I had my livelihood to earn. [...] The need for bread served to edge out my grief" (27). Allan portrays Juliet as unwilling to include the death of her father in her story because she does not wish to use her personal emotion for profit. However, what this also does is remove the death of the father from being a central point to the beginning of the narrative. Although it leads to Juliet's need to provide for herself, the focus becomes work, rather than the loss of her domestic support, and Juliet is shown to be perfectly capable of supporting herself.

In *Kirsteen*, Oliphant takes the traditional trope of a woman worker's separation from domesticity and makes this separation a voluntary removal, rather than the stereotypical death of the father. In the beginning of the novel, Kirsteen is surrounded by a large family with both a mother and a father, however ineffectual they may be. This is not a pleasant domestic environment; Kirsteen's father is domineering and violent and her mother takes shelter in invalidism. Kirsteen, her mother, and her sisters are given nothing except the daily mending and their own company, the contribution to the household not even being valued: "the girls at Drumcarro were left without any care at all. They were unlucky accidents, tares among the wheat, handmaids who might be useful about the house, but who had no future, no capabilities of advancing the family, creatures altogether of no account" (Oliphant 32). Within the domestic realm that has traditionally been the expected focus of femininity, Kirsteen and her sisters are considered inconsequential. They do not advance the family name in anyway and, although useful "about the house," they are not useful enough to be valued.

This usefulness is mostly seen in the constant sewing and mending that the women do. In almost every scene where they are gathered, the women of the novel are working on some kind of sewing project; sewing is linked with their feminine identity. In the first few pages of the novel, Kirsteen sits to embroider her brother's handkerchiefs that he will take with him to India, but she doesn't have any thread:

> Kirsteen raised her head and pulled out a long thread of red hair. 'I'm going to do it in this colour,' she said, with a slight blush and smile. […]
>
> 'My colour of hair,' [her mother] said, smoothing with a little complaisance her scanty dark locks under cap, 'was more fit than yours, Kirsteen, but Robbie will like to have it all the same.' (7)

Although Oliphant acknowledges that the practice of sewing with a thread of hair, an aspect of the body very much tied to femininity, is not unusual in the time of the novel, this scene establishes the link between the identity of the women in the household and the task of sewing. In a novel where so much sewing occurs, it is unrealistic that they would be out of thread, but the opportunity allows Oliphant very literally to demonstrate the link between femininity and sewing in the novel. However, Kirsteen is represented as ill-suited for this task, her hair being the wrong colour. Her mother, who is firmly lodged in the domestic world, is represented as having the right colour of hair, thereby being better suited for the domestic world and its work, while Kirsteen, as we soon see, is better suited for something more.

Kirsteen resists the imprisonment within the domestic scene that she experiences and rebels against her role as an unappreciated seamstress. After Robbie, following a long line of his brothers, leaves for India, Kirsteen wishes she could leave as well: "'I cannot settle to work,' said Kirsteen, 'and I will not. I'm not just a machine for darning stockings. I wish I was Robbie going out into the world.'" (24). Kirsteen is arguing for an existence outside of the bonds her traditional feminine world imposes upon her. She wants to do and be more than the daily mending. However, the problem for Kirsteen is not the sewing; instead, it is the lack of freedom and appreciation that the domestic environment entails. When Kirsteen leaves home and goes to work, it is as a seamstress. Sewing is not the negative aspect of her life; the bonds imposed by her domestic environment are. Arlene Young argues in "Worker's Compensation: (Needle) Work and Ideals of Femininity in Margaret Oliphant's *Kirsteen*" that "There is indeed pathos in Kirsteen's story, but this pathos is relieved by, rather than created by, Kirsteen's involvement with needlework" (42). Kirsteen rebels against the sewing within the home, but by maintaining this aspect of her life when she crosses over to the working world, Oliphant makes it clear that it is not the sewing that is the issue. Instead, sewing in a professional world allows her to escape the thankless environment of the home.

With her patriarchal domestic environment still intact, Kirsteen's motivations for entering the workforce revolve around her moral integrity. Secretly engaged to a neighbour since his departure to India, Kirsteen refuses to marry Glendochart, the significantly older lord whom her father has selected for her. However, Kirsteen's refusal of Glendochart is more than an unwillingness to break her secret betrothal. Glendochart is not a suitable match for Kirsteen's youth and vitality and she recognizes this to the point where she finds it humorous: "To marry Glendochart: Glendochart—there burst through Kirsteen's distressful thoughts a sudden picture of the old gentleman descending the side of the linn guided by her hand, the safe places selected for him. [...] And there burst from her in the midst of her troubles an irrepressible laugh" (Oliphant 84). Young argues, "Although in representing Kirsteen's distress over her dilemma Oliphant does not openly address sexuality, the troubling implications of Kirsteen's situation seethe just beneath the surface of the text. Glendochart's age and Kirsteen's youth and vibrancy are constant themes that underscore the unsuitability of the match" (45). Although Oliphant does not openly identify the objections to the union as sexual in nature, the unsuitability of the match is emphasized through a focus on physical differences. In her imagining of Glendochart, Kirsteen recognizes and focuses on his age, finding his inability to descend a difficult slope without her help humorous. The motivating forces around Kirsteen's desire to leave the domestic environment and earn her own way in the world centre on an insistence on controlling her own body. She refuses to exist as "just a machine for darning stockings" and she also refuses to sacrifice her body in order to advance the family name. She demands and retains the right to marry whomever and whenever she would wish to.

Kirsteen's movement into the role of the woman worker requires a complete separation from her domestic environment. Oliphant describes this as a movement into darkness: "The sensation of being the one creature moving and conscious in that world of darkness [had so occupied her mind] that she had scarcely realized the severance she was making, the tearing asunder of her life. Even Marg'ret [The Drumcarros' servant and Kirsteen's close friend] [...] had faded from Kirsteen's mind when she took her first step into the dark" (Oliphant 106). The movement away from the domestic environment and toward work is portrayed as a step into darkness, so terrifying that the separation from traditional domesticity is barely even felt. Oliphant writes as though she means to scare a reader away from the path that Kirsteen has chosen. However, Kirsteen's arrival at Miss Jean's milliner shop directly contrasts this image: "the door was suddenly thrown open, and Kirsteen found herself in front of a flaring candle which dazzled her eyes" (145). Although her separation from the domestic world is fraught with darkness, Kirsteen's entry into the working world is associated with a blinding light. Oliphant presents Kirsteen's arrival as a saving moment for her, as she falls at the feet of her potential employer. Although requiring a removal from traditional domesticity, the working world holds promise.

Romanticized Employments

The representation of seamstressing in *Kirsteen* and typewriting in *The Type-Writer Girl* are both heavily romanticized, working to sell feminine labour as a positive concept. In Allen's novel, this can be seen in Juliet's exaggerated financial independence. With only six shillings and eleven pence (Allen 28) in her possession at the beginning of the novel, and without collecting her first job's wages, Juliet manages to let an apartment, travel to and join an anarchist colony, return to London, dress herself well enough to display her genteel status shortly after taking a new job, and follow her potential lover to Venice at a moment's notice, all on a type-writer's salary. While financial concerns are a constant undercurrent in the text, it is not the real, tragic financial concerns, as with Gissing's Madden sisters, desperately dividing their meagre earnings to provide for a diet of rice. Instead, Juliet's financial concerns become an almost comedic factor in the novel. While she occasionally has to borrow money or stretch herself a little thin, there always appears to be something that can instantly earn her more money, such as a sudden ability to write and publish a story. Her approach to money focuses on enjoyment and humour: "Altogether, I was forced to confess to myself with shame that I returned to London after this escapade not only a wiser, but a poorer woman. [...] Yet, after all, I had had my amusement and bought my experience" (60). Juliet's focus is on the experience and fun she has had, rather than a tragic concern over where her next meal will come from.

Juliet's position as a type-writer is represented as financially freeing, and full of new and interesting adventures. However, this was not the case with type-writing as an actual career. Type-writers, especially female type-writers, were usually not even paid enough to live on their own. Christopher Keep, in his article "The Cultural Work of the Type-Writer Girl" notes, "Most typists, however, neither lived alone nor could afford to indulge in sartorial extravagance" (410). Citing B. L. Hutchins 1906 survey, Keep further notes that the entry level for a typist was ten shillings a week and argues that "Such wages absolutely prohibited anything like an 'independent' lifestyle: an unfurnished 'bachelor' apartment in London let for more than most typists earned in a week and they had not only to feed and board themselves from their wages, but to dress to a standard appropriate for a 'genteel' office" (411). Allen is presenting a romanticized version of the type-writer as the wages that the average type-writer earned would not even allow Juliet to rent her apartment, let alone to fund her other adventures. She appears to be a perfect New Woman in her financial independence, ability to move about the world with absolute freedom, and knowledge of and success with the modern technology of the type-writer.

Oliphant's representation of seamstressing is also much romanticized in her development of an idyllic workshop and quick promotion. Oliphant's seamstress narrative is devoid of the half-starved workers and negligent employers that are represented in the earlier works. Instead the shop is presented as a perfect example of harmonious feminine community:

> If the young women in the workroom had sometimes to work for part of the night it was only what at that time everybody was supposed to do in their own affairs or in their masters', when business was very urgent [...]. The head of the house sat up too, there were little indulgences accorded, and when the vigil was not too much prolonged there was a certain excitement about it which was not unpleasing to the work-women in the monotony of their calling. (Oliphant 208)

Oliphant takes the long hours traditionally associated with a kind of cruelty to employees in the work of seamstresses and associates it instead with a sense of communal excitement. Young argues "the give and take of the relations between Miss Jean and her employees creates an atmosphere of cooperation and mutuality. These are not the alienated workers of an oppressive industrial age" (47). Miss Jean's workshop is a space of feminine community rather than slow starvation. The fact that Miss Jean sits up with her girls when they are required to work late does not, by itself, dispel the echoes of overwork that traditionally accompany the seamstress narrative. In the opening to *Ruth*, the girls are working late into a similar night and Mrs. Mason is, similar to Miss Jean, sitting up and working with them. However, the seamstresses presented in that image are down-trodden, starving, and sickly, and the entire scene is painted with pathos (Gaskell 4). In contrast, Oliphant describes the workshop in *Kirsteen* with an air of communal excitement and shared success. She goes on to describe Miss Jean reading to the girls as they work and the tea being served at midnight as "the fine-flavoured tea which Miss Jean herself affected" and "dainty cakes and cates" (Oliphant 210). The seamstress workshop in *Kirsteen* is not the traditional sight of sympathy-inspiring misery; instead it is a supportive and occasionally exciting place of communal work and communal success.

Also, Kirsteen is not the traditional seamstress heroine. Rather than the half-starved woman, sewing the whole day long and never being skilled enough or paid well enough to support herself, Kirsteen is presented as skilled, healthy, and quick to become a business partner. Oliphant states:

> It may not be thought a very high quality in a heroine, but Kirsteen soon developed a true genius for her craft. She had never forgotten Miss Macnab's [the seamstress who visit's Kirsteen's family early in the novel] little lecture upon the accuracy of outline necessary for the proper composition of a gown [...]. She followed up this [...] by many studies and compositions in which her lively mind found a great deal of pleasure. (155)

Oliphant's seamstress is skilled and excited to study her craft. Seamstressing becomes less of a monotony forced onto the woman worker by a cruel twist of fate, and more a chosen and enjoyable profession, capable of offering financial success. However, this differentiation revolves around the concept of Kirsteen as a different kind of worker. Oliphant suggests that the reader may consider her skill and success as "not a very high quality in a heroine," but what kind of heroine? Kirsteen's self-sufficiency makes her a poor candidate for the traditional seamstress narrative or marriage plot, but positions her in keeping with newer representations of women and work. Oliphant has taken a New

Woman with her skilled and professional approach to work and implanted her into the traditional narrative of a seamstress. Ann Heilmann argues, "The text thus interweaves elements of Gothic romance (as tyrannical father, a heroine who runs away rather than be married by force to a man she does not love) with the feminist theme of female self-determination and professional independence" (228). Oliphant blends the traditional elements of both Gothic novels and the traditional seamstress narrative with a New Woman narrative about independence through feminine labour. Kirsteen is a new kind of worker: studied, skilled, and very successful.

By setting her novel seventy years in the past, Oliphant allows her narrative to work as a reclaiming of the image of the woman worker. As I explored in my first chapter, early representations of seamstresses used the image to evoke sympathy in a reader for the plight of the woman worker. Although this was a valid social concern, this movement on the part of the artists sacrificed the image of the woman worker, tying it to negative associations such as moral ruin, starvation, and over-work. In *Kirsteen*, Oliphant goes back to the traditional seamstress narrative, but demonstrates how a skilled worker can find independence, success, and happiness within this traditionally demoralizing field. Heilmann characterizes Oliphant's choice of the seamstress shop as erroneous, arguing "In combination with the earlier setting of the text, Oliphant's choice of a milliner's shop is unfortunate, evoking, as it does, the image of the dreaded sweated trades" (231) and further, "Oliphant may have wanted to make a point about how to manage a business otherwise notorious for its exploitation, but her refusal to deal with the issue seriously [indicates] she was not concerned with women as a collectivity [...] She was concerned with [...] how individual women responded to the pressures in their lives" (232). Heilmann sees

Oliphant's choice as unfortunate and her refusal to deal seriously with the workshop as an indication of Oliphant's uninterest in women as a collective. Yet, by distancing her narrative by seventy years, Oliphant allows herself room for a certain amount of romanticizing. Whether or not the plight of the seamstress was still an ongoing issue in 1890, when *Kirsteen* was published, Oliphant has deliberately distanced herself from the topic. The focus of the novel is, instead, to explore the image of the New Woman within the traditional seamstress narrative. This insertion of modernity into tradition allows Oliphant to reclaim and re-define this narrative. It also allows her to compare and contrast the modern worker with the traditional figure. Kirsteen's independence and strength within the traditional narrative highlights developments in the image of the modern woman worker.

A key example of this modernity within the traditional trope occurs when the would-be seducer, Lord John, finds Kirsteen in the milliner shop. After Kirsteen attempts to dismiss Lord John's advances, he retaliates by reminding her of her place, and reminding the reader of the traditional narrative of moral ruin associated with the seamstresses: "'You can't dismiss me again in that grand style,' he said. 'Loch Long is one thing and a milliner's in London quite another. Do you think I will believe that you have come here for nothing but to fit gowns on women not half so pretty as yourself?'"(Oliphant 158). Lord John, is referring to an earlier meeting between himself and Kirsteen in a far less structured setting, where she has been able to claim a class level that requires him to behave with respect toward her. However, in this meeting she has fallen in class level and also entered into the perils of the traditional seamstress narrative: the wealthy young man is in a position to seduce the young woman into moral ruin. Also, Oliphant has layered yet another piece of information into this conversation. Knowing who Kirsteen is and where she comes from, Lord John accuses her of not ending up in the milliner shop for "nothing but to fit gowns on women." The narrative implies that Lord John believes Kirsteen is in some way ruined. A young woman of genteel class, leaving (or being banished from) home and taking up a position in a much lower class implies either the death of her patriarchal support, which Lord John knows has not happened, or moral ruin of some sort. However, Kirsteen is neither of these characters; instead she is a New Woman in a traditional narrative and can take care of herself:

> [Kirsteen] was deeply indignant at this attempt to take advantage of what he thought her weakness; but she knew that she was not weak, which is a consciousness that gives courage. Had she been one of the other girls in the workroom to be flattered or frightened or compromised, no doubt she would have done some imprudence, implored his silence, or committed herself in some other way. But Kirsteen was out of the range of such dangers. (158)

Kirsteen is indignant at Lord John's assumption of her weakness and fully recognizes her own power both in regards to him and as regards her own body. This element of control is a theme in *Kirsteen*. Her departure from the domestic environment is not a result of fate, it is a choice she makes in order to control whom she marries; her decision to enter the career of seamstressing is, again, a choice; and now she is able to choose to refuse Lord John's advances. Kirsteen recognizes the fact that the other girls, the traditional seamstresses, would not be able to stand up to John. But Kirsteen is different; the New Woman within the traditional narrative is an autonomous force, able to withstand the conventional plot devices.

Juliet is also represented as different from the average worker. She comes from a higher class, retaining many of her lady-like attributes, but is also uncommonly autonomous in her movements around and between countries. Further, Allen is careful to represent her as, without describing her as, educated. Juliet refuses to tell the reader whether or not she is Girton educated, but her repeated references to classical fiction seems to communicate this for her. It is her education that allows her to procure the job working for "Romeo." Allen states: "He [...] began dictating rapidly. The passage, chosen of set purpose, was full of Greek names and rather recondite words of technical import. I saw he had selected it as a test of knowledge as well as of speed. I was glad I had been at—But that would be confessing" (Allen 77). In order to qualify for this post, Juliet must demonstrate both a skill at type-writing and a relatively high level of education. Allen suggests the successful New Woman is educated and intelligent.

Allen's representation of the New Woman works to sell an image of the woman worker. This independent, spirited, and attractive young woman is an interesting example of the commercial ideal. Although Juliet laments that her choice of occupation is "an accomplishment as diffused as the piano" (28) in London, she seems to have no trouble finding work or board. Both jobs she applies for, she receives, suggesting that it is not quite as hard to find work as she has claimed. However, this carefree portrayal of the type-writer works to sell the career to Victorian readers. Christopher Keep explores how the cultural representations of the type-writer work to make her an acceptable representation of the woman worker. He argues, "Popular representations of the Type-Writer Girl provided such an image: they served to mediate between the multiple and often contradictory demands of the marketplace and received notions of what it meant to be a 'proper' woman, providing a legible figure in which such contradictions could be provisionally contained" (Keep 404). The type-writer girl provided a figure in which the perpetual complications between the New Woman and traditional femininity could, once again be worked through. However, there is a new dimension to this issue in these works; the romanticizing of labour within narratives such as Allen's works to sell the image of the New Woman as a modern worker. Rather than the complex explorations of the figure which I explored in my second chapter, here there is a movement to define and portray this image positively. Keep continues, "the Type-Writer Girl was the acceptable face of the 'New Woman': she represented the desire for a career and independence in such a way as not to endanger those traditional feminine sensibilities [...]. The Type-Writer Girl, then, was not a specific person, [...] but a carefully conceived product" (228). The image of the New Woman within the context of type-writing was a deliberate attempt to portray the woman worker positively to the Victorian public. The type-writer was young, skilled, but also marriageable.

Bachelor Girls

While both Oliphant and Allen portray young, marriageable woman workers who fall in love with and wish to marry men, both protagonists are removed from the marriage plot. In *Kirsteen,* this removal is accomplished early on in the narrative. Kirsteen and Ronald Drummond become engaged the day before he goes off to India and Kirsteen promises him that she will wait until he returns. However, this betrothal requires only a passive involvement from Kirsteen. Oliphant notes, "In those days there was no thought of the constant communications we have now, no weekly mails, no rapid course overland, no telegraph for an emergency. When a young man went away he went for good—away; every trace of him obliterated as if he had not been" (18). With Ronald, Oliphant has given Kirsteen the trappings of a traditional marriage plot, without any need for her to perform traditionally feminine duties. Her betrothed goes far away, and her betrothal is a secret. At first this situation can be read as troublesome in the way it promises to affect Kirsteen's life: "When she gave that promise she meant waiting for interminable years [...]He would be as if he were dead to her for years and years. Silence would fall between them like the grave. And yet all the time she would be waiting for him and he would be coming for her" (19). This proposed situation puts Kirsteen in a very passive position. Ronald leaves to travel across the world, while she patiently waits in her father's domestic environment for the time to come when she will move into her husband's domestic environment. However, Oliphant uses this betrothal as an excuse to motivate Kirsteen out of the traditional domestic role and into the modern position of a woman worker; this movement becomes acceptable within the confines of traditional femininity because Kirsteen is refusing to marry in order to preserve her moral integrity

Ronald's death becomes both the close and the beginning of a narrative for Kirsteen, but the courtship plot does not control the larger narrative of the story. Instead, through the closure of his death, her life as a worker is both renewed and redefined:

> And thus life was over for Kirsteen; and life began. No longer a preparatory chapter, a thing to be given up when the happy moment came, but the only life that was to be vouchsafed to her in this earth. [...] Her career was determined, with many objects and many affections, but of that first enchantment no more. She took up her work with fresh vigour. (227)

Kirsteen's interaction with the traditional domestic narrative is over; however, her own narrative is not. Work becomes Kirsteen's permanent employment, but not in a negative way. In Oliphant's portrayal of Ronald's death we have a version of the traditional patriarchal death in that it forces Kirsteen to rely solely on work. However, it is different because Kirsteen has already been working; instead, this death simply redefines Kirsteen's position as a woman worker, making her career a life-long pursuit, rather than a way to preserve her moral integrity until her future husband returns. Ann Heilmann, in exploring Oliphant's complicated interaction with the New Woman movement, argues that she never moved away from a traditional understanding of a woman's role in marriage, and therefore, for Kirsteen to maintain her successful working woman status, she must remain single: "Although her unmarried state is not a deliberate choice, but the result of tragic circumstances, Oliphant implies that it is only as a single woman that Kirsteen has been able to achieve what she wants from life" (229). Ronald's death, while tragic, was also liberating for Kirsteen and her status as a woman worker as it freed her from the expectations of traditional femininity.

Juliet's interaction with the traditional marriage plot is far less conventional and complicates Allen's New Woman narrative. Juliet falls for her employer and her job as a type-writer is represented as giving her a remarkably unconventional amount of freedom within her own courtship plot:

> Poverty emancipates. It often occurred to me how different things would have been had my dear father lived and had I remained a young lady. In that case, I could have seen Romeo at intervals only, under the shelter of a chaperone; as it was, no one hinted at the faintest impropriety in the fact that the type-writer girl was left alone with him half the day. (Allen 86)

Juliet is allowed to interact with her potential lover in a very intimate setting without anyone's suspicion being aroused. Her position as a New Woman gives her more freedom within the courtship plot, allowing her to be much more proactive than a traditional lady. It also allows her to connect with her possible suitor on other levels. After learning of his authoring a book of poetry, Juliet writes, "My knowledge of this book drew me nearer to Romeo. Having once accepted the fact that I knew of his work, he consulted me time and time again as to type and paper—sometimes also as to the choice of an epithet or a point of cadence when two equally balanced alternatives divided his presence"(98). Juliet's working relationship with Romeo has led to her ability to recognize his handwriting, which led to her knowledge of his book of poetry, and now allows them to converse on a level that is usually not available to a courting couple. This is because they are not a courting couple; they exist in the undefined territory of a heterosexual work relationship. With the entry of women into the workforce, new rules of relationships had to be determined. Allen's representation of this heterosexual space becomes troubling as the courtship plot draws to a close.

Allen, through Juliet, initially argues that a new kind of woman is required within the courtship plot. This New Woman becomes far more aggressive in her pursuit of a love interest. After Romeo has left for Venice, Juliet decides to follow him. In defence of this action, she claims:

> In the world in which we live men are no longer ardent. We scarce affect to conceal the fact that they grow shy of marriage. As a necessary consequence, women have changed too; the woman of this age often knows she loves [...] and must use those weapons which the world allows her. (112)

Juliet is calling for a new kind of woman within the new relationships between men and women. She claims women must be more active in seeking a man's affection. Women, in this description, become the seducers and men take the traditionally feminine role of the seduced. By voicing these opinions through his protagonist, Allen would seem to suggest that he shares this opinion. However, once Juliet is reunited with the alleged Romeo in Venice, she learns that he is already engaged and has been for five years and her role dramatically shifts.

Allen's characterization of the women worker in the conclusion of this courtship plot suggests that she is a dark threat within the work place. The woman worker's vibrancy and overt sexuality become a threat to the traditionally feminine woman. It is when Juliet hears herself described by Meta, Romeo's traditionally feminine fiancé, that realizes she cannot be with Romeo:

> [Meta] went on with her story. She loved him more and more. Her heart was bound up with him. After so long a time, too! If he had told her three years ago—But five years—you could never make five years seem nothing. […]
>
> 'A hateful woman—a type-writer girl at his office! Could you ever believe a person like *that* would come between us? […] The dreadful creature she has bewitched him! He loves *her* best now. And yet, you would think the years must count; the years must count!' (127-128)

In the other side of the story, Juliet becomes a cruel and spiteful woman who has bewitched away the potential husband of a traditionally feminine woman. In this scenario, Allen demonstrates how modernity inevitably must clash with tradition. However, he also suggests that modernity must bow to tradition. In Meta's repetition of the phrase "the years must count," Allen draws attention to a kind of prior claim. This is not a comfortable moment of Allen's text, nor is it a fair one. Romeo, for example, is never questioned as to why he did not feel the need to alert the woman he was unofficially courting to the fact that he was already betrothed. Allen attributes the blame to the dark, magnetic-eyed office worker, who tries to seduce away another woman's potential husband. And, although Juliet sets everything right at the end of the novel, borrowing the money from Meta so that she can leave Romeo, the ending is uncomfortably ambiguous: "If this book succeeds I mean to repay Michaela. Meanwhile, in any case, I am saving up daily every farthing to repay her. For I am still a type-writer girl—at another office" (139). Juliet, with her magnetic sexuality, could be any type-writer in any office. The threat of the office seduction is left open by Allen at the end of the novel.

It is in the characterization of Juliet's sexuality that I argue Allen fails to positively represent the woman worker. Although she bows to the prior claim on her potential fiancé, Juliet is not represented as an inherently moral woman, even within the New Woman narrative. Instead, Allen suggests Juliet is a threat to traditional marriage. And, as an ambiguous type-writer, she becomes a threat that could be lurking in any office, anywhere. Allen's New Woman is not bound by the conventions of traditional morality; instead, she holds the power to obstruct or allow marriage and the reader is left with the uncomfortable feeling that she may not always choose to yield to a prior claim. This focus on the type-writer as a sexual object, however, does speak to a new definition of femininity. Allen and Oliphant are able to define the femininity of their woman workers within the workplace, without the need for a marriage plot. This is why both marriage plots are able to both develop and disappear with relative ease. They are no longer the focus of the narrative; instead the focus and the femininity revolve around the image of the woman worker and her success in her chosen career.

Conclusion

The fiction of the Victorian period offers a unique view of the development and manipulation of women's roles, both old and new. The changing social situation of the time afforded women new freedoms in what they wished to do; marriage was no longer the only option for young, middle-class women and they began to move into the workforce. However, with the entry of women into the working world, new jobs and new roles had to be created. The traditional women, with her sexual innocence and domestic dependence, did not have the strength or self-sufficiency to survive in the working world. Also, the limited work options available to a woman with no training other than a traditional upbringing forced women into the dangerous conditions of seamstressing.

As the period progressed and new technology developed, new options in women's labour, such as type-writing and photography, also began to develop. These options required training and offered women the financial independence to lead successful, single lives. As women's roles and lives changed, the attitudes toward and definition of femininity had to change with them. Fiction offered Victorians an area where femininity and work could be explored and discussed. Ledger, in looking at New Woman fiction, states "To a certain extent the New Woman is only available to us textually, since the New Woman was largely a discursive event" (3). In classifying the New Woman as a discursive event, Ledger draws attention to the use of fiction as a method of exploration. Print media offered the Victorians a medium of ongoing discussion. Through newspapers, novels, poems, and all forms of print, society could explore and discuss new manifestations of femininity. This method of conversation offered a medium through which authors could work toward social change.

The varying representations of the woman worker throughout the period are indicative not only of the changing conditions of women's work throughout the period, but these different representations also reflect changing attitudes and concerns in regards to women and work. Early in the period, with Hood, Jones, and Gaskell's work, the fictional representation of the woman worker reflects how uncomfortable Victorian society was with the concept of the middle-class woman outside of the domestic environment. These attempts at representing the woman worker largely fail because of an inability to represent a middle-class woman without the idealized qualities of sexual innocence and domestic dependence. Later, as the New Woman begins to emerge, a new approach to defining femininity also emerges as both the artists and the larger public deal with newfound independence among the female population. It becomes apparent that there is a preoccupation with how the New Woman will fit into the traditional roles of wife and mother, and the rigidity of these roles complicates fictional attempts to blend the two. Finally, in Oliphant and Allen's literature the attitudes toward work move toward a separation from the traditional domesticity and an interest in representing the woman worker as happy outside of these traditional roles.

Allen and Oliphant accomplish this in different ways, but their approaches are unified by a level of romanticism. Allen's novel focuses on selling the typewriter as a carefree worker, without a realistic exploration of the wages or living conditions of typewriters. The woman worker becomes an adventurous, liberated woman, who can chase a man around Europe. But she also becomes a threat. Allen suggests that while some Victorian women are pursuing the traditional domestic roles, there are others, lurking in the working world, waiting to seduce away husbands and fiancés. Allen's text gestures toward a discomfort in the minds of the Victorian public with women and men co-existing in the relatively unregulated working world. In contrast, Oliphant's separation of Kirsteen from the domestic narrative and focus on Kirsteen as a woman worker works to reclaim a previously victimized image. In *Kirsteen*, Oliphant reaches back to the seamstress trope, but rewrites it, removing the male influence and focusing on work as a liberating force. Ann Heilmann is right in that Oliphant's focus on the seamstressing trade evokes the earlier representations of the sweated trade (231), but in fact, this is a deliberate choice on Oliphant's part. This evocation and then romanticizing reclaim the seamstress as a woman worker and portray her with the modern developments in the attitude towards women and work. Years later, the seamstress can be portrayed as a successful, independent worker, rather than the victimized young woman of earlier representations.

The issues that are most predominantly discussed in the fiction of the Victorian period are issues that have carried forward and are still struggled with today. Women's roles as wives and mothers and how they blend with or inhibit a woman's ability to work are still issues in today's society. The Victorians offer us an interesting vantage point from which to explore early changes in attitudes towards these roles, an exploration which becomes informative for today's scholars both with regard to the differences and similarities between Victorian and modern concerns. Oliphant's retelling of the past in *Kirsteen* is perhaps most illuminating because of the space between what has been and what could be. And, similarly, through an examination of how women originally moved into the workforce and how attitudes towards woman and work changed, we potentially can learn the most about what may still need to change from the space between then and now.

I have not wished to argue that one manifestation of the woman worker is better than another; the progression between each manifestation does not necessarily track an improvement. Instead, the fictional forum allows Victorian artists a space in which they can experiment, manipulating the image of the woman worker to combine traditional values and modern characteristics. Through this fictional exploration, Victorians could explore the image of the woman worker and the implications of women's entrance into the working world. As I noted in my introduction, Daniel Born argues, "the Victorians and Edwardians held enormously hopeful convictions about both the epistemological validity and the transformative possibilities of art" (2). Art offered a chance for social change: through an exploration of and adjustment to social attitudes of the time, artists could draw attention to problematic expectations of women. And, through a glance backward at these early explorations, scholars can see more clearly the problematic expectations of women today.

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