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**Men Writing the (New) Woman:  
Thomas Hardy's *Jude the  
Obscure* and Grant Allen's *The  
Woman Who Did***

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*To my grandma Uccia,  
to her memory and to her endless love  
that I jealously treasure in my heart.*

*A mia nonna Uccia,  
alla sua memoria ed al suo amore infinito  
che custodisco gelosamente nel mio cuore.*



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## **Abstract**

One of the most controversial debates in late Victorian society results in the Woman Question. Having developed from the end of the 18th century, by the end of the Fin de Siècle, it resonates in English political affairs, journalism, and literature. Within this context, the social phenomenon of the New Woman emerges during the second half of the century, intending to create an individual freed from social constraints, leading her life based on personal choice. Although highly discussed in the public field, and copied by many contemporary women, the New Woman finds its largest expression in literature, where most female writers freely create heroines who decide for themselves. Being a feminine question for a female public, the New Woman fiction counts very little male authorship, which, however, distinguishes itself by producing disputed works. In 1895 Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and Grant Allen (1848-1899) publish two of the most known and water-shading novels of the genre: *Jude the Obscure* and *The Woman Who Did*. Although superficially, the two heroines of the novels, Sue and Herminia, share the preoccupations of the genre, being averse to marriage and deeply independent, they also reveal themselves as the products of a masculine viewpoint, determining a modification to be detected both in the adaptation of the New Woman theorisations and in the protagonist's epilogues. Therefore, this thesis intends to analyse the construction of the New Woman characters in Hardy's and Allen's works, focusing on the diverse strategies the two novelists use that lead to a masculine New Woman discourse and depiction.









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## Introduction

The character of the New Woman stemmed from the English *fin-de-siècle* cultural sphere as a “subject both of history and fantasy”<sup>1</sup> related to the Woman Question as an ideal to guide the improvement of women’s social and personal condition. Represented by a broad range of cultural expression, as the New Woman features in public debate, journalism, and literature, many definitions of this phenomenon can be useful to its understanding. Indeed, according to the way she is represented, she can stand closer to real-life women, as Hugh Stutfield remarks in his 1897 *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* article: “the New Woman is simply the woman of to-day striving to shake off old shackles.”<sup>2</sup> Contrarily, she can also be seen as the artificial frontrunner of women’s representation at the time. In this way, Lynn Pykett argues: “the New Woman was yet another example of the way in which, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, femininity became a spectacle.”<sup>3</sup> Additionally, she can be identified as the leader of women’s movements, being described as “a new female political identity that promised to improve and reform English society.”<sup>4</sup> However, she has also been declassified as “nothing but Foolscap and Ink.”<sup>5</sup> These few definitions prove the New Woman’s kaleidoscopic and variable nature, which, however, maintains the fixed element of the centrality of the Woman, both as the author and the subject of the New Woman works.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Heilmann and M. Beetham, “Introduction”, in A. Heilmann and M. Beetham (eds.), *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, feminism and international consumer culture, 1880-1830*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 1-14, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> H. Stutfield, “The Psychology of Feminism”, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, 1897, pp. 104-117, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> L. Pykett, *The ‘Improper Feminine’. The women’s sensation novel and the New Woman writing*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 138.

<sup>4</sup> M. E. Tusan, “Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics during the Fin-de-Siècle”, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1998, pp. 169-182, p. 169.

<sup>5</sup> “The New Woman”, *Punch, or the London Charivari*, May 26, 1894, p. 252.

Among the few men who entered the feminine New Woman's cultural sphere as serious New Woman authors, Thomas Hardy and Grant Allen are remembered as the novelists of possibly the best-known stories of the genre, all the while, however, being external to the phenomenon, as in the case of Thomas Hardy, or adopting some extremist and criticised ideas within it, as in the case of Grant Allen. In this way, I found the two authors' novels' timing and contents extremely interesting. Both Thomas Hardy and Grant Allen published *Jude the Obscure* and *The Woman Who Did* in 1895, at the New Woman's highest moment of popularity; both novels deal with a New Woman-like heroine who puts her values against society and eventually loses; finally, both novels are written by two men, a point which already challenges the cardinal assumption of the New Woman novel, which demands women's interiority as the core of the narration.

Facing Hardy's and Allen's enormously successful novels, two main questions arise. Specifically, what are the two novelists and novels' positions in relation to the New Woman literature? Moreover, to what extent does masculinity interfere with the construction of two of the most recognised New Women of the genre? Therefore, this thesis intends to analyse and compare Hardy's *Jude* and Allen's *The Woman Who Did* from the perspective of the late Victorian New Woman phenomenon, focusing on the characterisation of their heroines, Sue and Herminia, to draw the affinities and inconsistencies of the novels and their authors in regard to the serious New Woman fiction. In order to unveil Hardy's and Allen's New Women, and their final effects on the genre, this thesis unfolds into three chapters.

The first chapter revolves around the origins of the New Woman phenomenon developed during the second half of the nineteenth century. After briefly mentioning the historical framework to which the phenomenon belongs, I shall dwell on the Woman

Question, or what essentially was the ideal receptacle which allowed the New Woman to arise. Particularly, I shall tackle the topics of female education and its evolution throughout the century, the debate on marriage and women's subjection, the role of politics in facing women's demands, and finally morality, which issue enormously contributed to the creation of the New Woman. In the second section, I will concentrate on the New Woman journalistic debate, relying on some of the most important articles which contributed to it. In so doing, I will analyse journalistic pieces which promoted the New Woman, such as the 1894 critical Sarah Grand and Ouida's repartee; I will also analyse articles which condemned the phenomenon, such as Eliza Lynn Linton's best-known "The Wild Women" series. Finally, I will inspect the New Woman fiction, as the means which allowed the symbol's best realisation. This way, I will concentrate on its literary origins, protagonists, and the essential elements of the New Woman novels. Finally, I will underline the role of men within the genre, especially in correlation to non-serious commercial fiction.

As the first chapter is intended to reveal the theoretical and literary premises on the New Woman phenomenon, the second chapter deals with the first protagonist of this thesis, that is Thomas Hardy, and his masterpiece *Jude the Obscure*. In this way, I will first consider his life and works, which I stress to be pivotal in understanding the unintentional protagonist Sue Bridehead and what I argue to be her Wessex New Woman's nature. Therefore, I will analyse the character in correlation to the New Woman fiction's main elements. Particularly, I will dedicate the second part of the chapter to the characterisation of the heroine, stressing the layered masculine perspective from which the reader approaches her; and her sexuality, or presumed lack of it, as a central element both in the New Woman fiction and *Jude*. In the last section of the chapter, I will apply

Sue's sexuality to her relationship with the New Man, that is Jude. Thus, I will draw on the theory and functioning behind Sue and Jude's comradeship, and its dissimilarities against marriage, to then address its failure as the matrix of the New Woman's escalating tragedy within the novel.

The third chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to Grant Allen and his alleged New Woman novel *The Woman Who Did*, one of the top-selling of the genre. At the core of my analysis in this section lies the intention to compare Allen's novel, and its New Woman's characterisation, with Hardy's, all the while relying on my inquiry's New Woman perspective. In this way, I will dedicate the first section of the chapter to Allen's life and works, stressing his attraction to the flourishing popular fiction markets. Therefore, I will concentrate on the analysis of Herminia's New Woman nature, specifically inspecting the heroine's common elements with the serious genre, its commercial version and, most importantly, Allen's own theory on the Woman Question and in correlation to the construction of the New Woman. As with *Jude*, I shall tackle the stratified masculine perspective on the heroine, to which, in this case, Allen actively contributes with his own ideas. The last section of the chapter will be dedicated to Herminia and Alan's version of what Sue and Jude execute as comradeship, which is the Free Union. Resulting from Allen's specific Spencerian-Feminist theory, the hero and heroine's Free Union, its gender dynamics between man and woman, and its expectation of forced motherhood emerge as the core of this novel. Finally, my analysis will stress Herminia's duty to protect these ideals, to martyrdom.



# 1. The New Woman Phenomenon: From the Origins to the Literary

## Success

As Gail Cunningham states in *The New Woman and The Victorian Novel*, the New Woman is to be considered a “social phenomenon” of Victorian society.<sup>1</sup> It stemmed from the larger feminist movement of the nineteenth-century Woman Question to fully develop within late Victorian fiction. Defined as “a condensed symbol of disorder and rebellion,”<sup>2</sup> the New Woman first generated in the pages of mid-century feminist journals, and gradually gave rise to a massive social discourse, which touched upon politics, journalism, and literature. In this chapter, I shall give a comprehensive view of the New Woman phenomenon’s development under Queen Victoria’s reign, focusing on the causes of its emergence, and the analysis of the Woman Question from four different perspectives; consequently, I will analyse the New Woman journalistic debate; finally, I will concentrate on the literary branch of the phenomenon.

### 1.1. The New Woman and the Victorian Society: Origins and Developments

The figure of the New Woman was an intricately and complex avatar stemming from the preoccupations, novelties, and influences that Victorian Britain underwent during the tumultuous period of the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, as Nigel Bell notes, the New Woman’s nonconformism and revolutionism can be seen as remarkable hints of a “general restlessness of the time.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in order to fully comprehend the multiple

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<sup>1</sup> G. Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1978, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> L. Pykett, *The ‘Improper Feminine’. The women’s sensation novel and the New Woman writing*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> N. Bell, “The ‘Woman Question’, the ‘New Woman’, and Some Late Victorian Fiction”, *English Academy Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2013, pp. 79-97, p. 88.

facets of the New Woman's discourse, it is vital to get acquainted with its origins, and the context that enabled the creation of such a controversial figure.

The New Woman was intrinsically related to the Victorian Woman Question, which included all altercations in favour of the emancipation of women in the private and the public spheres, seeking justice both on a civil and political basis.<sup>4</sup> Although this movement of protest saw its flourishing within the nineteenth century, its origins are to be searched earlier in time. Among the first English figures contributing to the woman's cause, there was Margaret Cavendish,<sup>5</sup> who in a probable public hearing in the presence of a female public, declared:

[Men] possess all the ease, rest, pleasure, wealth, power, and fame; whereas women are restless with labour, easeless with pain, melancholy for want of pleasures, helpless for want of power, and die in oblivion, for want of fame. Nevertheless, men are so unconscionable and cruel against us that they endeavour to bar of all sorts of liberty, and will not suffer us freely to associate amongst our own sex; but would fain bury us, in their house or beds, as in a grave. The truth is, we live like bats or owls, labour like beasts, and die like worms.<sup>6</sup>

In the Duchess's argument, two main elements are noticeable and relevant to our inquiry. Firstly, to Cavendish, women should step outside of the male sphere of influence. Secondly, the demand for more freedom and power for the female sex represents the germ of what evolved into the Woman Question two hundred years later.

Moving on in history, a second landmark leading to the nineteenth-century Woman Question is represented by the activism of Mary Wollstonecraft,<sup>7</sup> an icon of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673) was the Duchess of Newcastle, a writer and philosopher among the first women to publish her works. Her works are various: in her life, she wrote philosophical pamphlets, such as *Philosophical Fancies* (1653), or *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666); plays, some of them published in *Plays* (1662), and other narrations, such as *The Blazing World*, a utopic short story. G. Marshall, "Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673)". Available: [https://iep.utm.edu/margaret-cavendish/#:~:text=Margaret%20Cavendish%20\(1623%E2%80%941673\),to%20social%20and%20political%20concerns](https://iep.utm.edu/margaret-cavendish/#:~:text=Margaret%20Cavendish%20(1623%E2%80%941673),to%20social%20and%20political%20concerns), Accessed 2022, December.

<sup>6</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) started her career as a teacher, to then become a publishing writer for the editor Joseph Johnson. In 1792, she wrote her best-known work, *A Vindication*, which objective was

women's rights whose thought resonated throughout the whole Victorian era.<sup>8</sup> In 1792 Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, in which the author explores the nature of the female sex, treating women as “rational creatures”<sup>9</sup> and analysing their state in society and private life. In a passage of her work, Wollstonecraft says:

What does history disclose but marks of inferiority, and how few women have emancipated themselves from the galling yoke of sovereign man? [...] men have increased that inferiority till women are almost sunk below the standard of rational creatures. Let their faculties have room to unfold, and their virtues to gain strength, and then determine where the whole sex must stand in the intellectual scale.<sup>10</sup>

With the intention of reclaiming woman's natural rights from the patriarchal society, Wollstonecraft inspects the same themes that years later would characterise the Victorian Woman Question. Specifically, these topics revolve around the inadequacy of the educational system for girls, the unbalanced relationship between woman and man, both in marriage and in society, and women's impossibility to escape their assigned coquettish and trivial roles.

Cavendish and Wollstonecraft's pivotal arguments demonstrate how women's issues started to be at the centre of social attention way earlier than the turn of the nineteenth century, slowly making “feminist sympathies” be known outside of the sole “female monopoly,” and giving them for use to the wider public debate.<sup>11</sup> The newly shaping Woman Question, then, saw four main spheres of action widening and interconnecting throughout the century. They are education, marriage, enfranchisement, and morality.

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mainly inspired by the revolutionist spirit of the French Revolution. S. Tomaselli, “Mary Wollstonecraft”, 2020. Available: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wollstonecraft/>, Accessed 2022, December.

<sup>8</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindications of the Rights of Women*, London: Penguin, (1792) 2004, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.32-34.

<sup>11</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

### 1.1.1. The Woman Question: Education

Education was one of the first concerns treated within the Woman Question. At the beginning of the century, education was guaranteed exclusively to men belonging to the higher social classes, with the consequence that poor classes and women were not protected by any legislation.<sup>12</sup> In fact, until appropriate reforms were made later in the 1800s, universal education for poorer classes was not foreseen in Victorian society, and standard and higher education were not guaranteed to women of any class. Clearly, this educational system subdued girls into a form of slavery.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, starting from the 1850s, a series of protests in favour of the regulation of female education took place. One of the first results attained in these years is the 1858 Royal Commission report which suggested the creation of a household-managed system of female education for upper-middle-class girls. The report's sight was very limited, as it comprehended only girls belonging to the upper classes and regulated female education within the frame of secondary school.<sup>14</sup> However, the report also gave rise to a series of organisations centred on girls' education, such as the Girls' Public Day School Company and the Church School Company. Furthermore, in 1864, the Endowed Schools Act granted funds for the creation of other schools for girls, regulated by the Endowed Schools Commission both in England and Wales.

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<sup>12</sup> All historical information on the development of the UK's education is taken from the following sources: D. Caglar, "The Role of Women in Education in Victorian England", *Journal of Educational and Instructional Studies in the World*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2015, pp. 55-58.

L. Picard, "Education in Victorian Britain", 14 October 2009, Available: <https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/education-in-victorian-britain>, Accessed 2022, December.

A. Richardson and C. Willis, "Introduction", A. Richardson, C. Willis (eds.), *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact. Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 1-38.

<sup>13</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> Until 1870, education for poorer classes did not have any regulation but the spontaneous creation of the "ragged schools," attended by poor children. It was with the 1870 Elementary Education Act, or Forster's Education Act, that the British government eventually regulated primary education for all children aged between 5 and 12.

Alongside the changes in primary and secondary education for middle-class girls, colleges gradually opened to women. The King's College and the Queen's College were the first two universities to welcome women students, from 1847 and 1848. Later in the 1870s, many colleges opened their doors to women, such as the Owens College in Manchester (1871), Leeds (1874), and St Andrews (1877). Simultaneously, colleges for women were created as well. In 1849, the Bedford College for Women was established, Cambridge welcomed women to Girton College (1869) and Newnham (1871), and Oxford opened Lady Margaret Hall in 1878.<sup>15</sup> Generally, women's campaigns for fair educational rights slowly got welcomed and partly satisfied during the century. However, they also underwent several criticisms from the part of conservatives who saw women's education as an aberration of nature. For example, in 1874, the psychiatrist Henry Maudsley wrote that "the male organisation is one, and the female organisation another,"<sup>16</sup> giving credit to the thought for which an equal and similar education for women and men is not naturally possible. Therefore, although many steps ahead were made for a fair education for women, this demand was also seen "as a revolt against nature."<sup>17</sup>

### **1.1.2. The Woman Question: Marriage**

The unnaturalness of the challenge to a specific lifestyle imposed by the patriarchal thought is to be seen at its fullest in the marriage debate. Particularly, the middle-class Victorian family was traditionally regulated by the separation of the spheres, reflecting the division of labour between man and woman: "the moral and reproductive

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<sup>15</sup> Despite Oxford and Cambridge offering women a higher education, they did not grant them a certified degree until 1922 and 1947 respectively.

<sup>16</sup> In Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

labour of the wife and mother within the private domestic sphere, and the competitive, economic, productive labour of the husband in the public sphere of industry, commerce and politics.”<sup>18</sup> In this way, according to the doctrine of the separate spheres, a woman’s job was to be a wife and a mother, since her life was seen through the lenses of her reproductive capacity. On the other hand, unmarried women were considered a “surplus” in society, in accordance with the 1851 Great Britain census report.<sup>19</sup> Albeit this ideology was widely accepted and adopted by men, women, feminists, and non-feminists, it encountered a neat counterargument during the century. In fact, marriage began to be perceived by some as a “form of slavery and legalised prostitution” that women were forced to join.<sup>20</sup>

The idea that marriage should be reformed started to gain consensus during the first half of the century. In this context, the socialist Robert Owen, and his disciples, the Owenites, famously agreed on the necessity of a radical change in the institution of marriage, as the traditional one could not exist in a context where sexuality and women were repressed. In this regard, as Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis remark, “all Owenites agreed that love – rational or erotic – could not flourish in a situation where women were economically dependent upon men.”<sup>21</sup> Concurrently, socialist women advocated for freer sexuality and a woman-man relationship “based on equality and mutual respect.”<sup>22</sup>

Criticism of marriage also entered medicine’s growing branch of sexology.<sup>23</sup> Within this context, one of the most influential mid-century thinkers who adopted a view

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>21</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

in opposition to the traditional ideology was George Drysdale, a mid-century physician committed to the denunciation of marriage employing medical reasons.<sup>24</sup> In his 1854 work *The Elements of Social Science or Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion*, Drysdale confronted the issue of marriage, by finding it a major factor contributing to the social and sexual subjection of women. To him, it was “the emblem...of all those harsh and unjust views, which have given to woman so much fewer privileges in love than man, and have punished so much more severely a breach of the moral code in her case.”<sup>25</sup> Hence, not only was marriage a chief instrument in the sexual degradation of women, but it also contributed to their economic passivity and dependence upon men, acting a “legalised prostitution.”<sup>26</sup>

The same terms used by George Drysdale were also used by Olive Schreiner<sup>27</sup> in her work *Woman and Labour*. Published in 1911, but developed throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, this work is composed of six chapters in which Schreiner investigates women’s role in society and history. Reflecting the economic and social condition of middle-class Victorian women, Schreiner theorised women’s “parasitism” within the forced boundaries of marriage as the symptom of women’s economic and decisional dependence on men.<sup>28</sup> In the sixth chapter, “Certain Objections,” Schreiner links middle-class wives’ parasitism with prostitution, this being:

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<sup>24</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> In Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Olive Emilie Albertina Schreiner (1855-1920) was a South African feminist writer, philosopher, and activist. As a young woman, she spent some years in London, where she published her first and most renowned novel: *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), the first New Woman novel published under the pseudonym of Ralph Lauren. She also engaged in the feminist fight for the vote, devoting especially to black women’s rights. C. L. Krueger (ed.), *Encyclopedia of British Writers: 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, New York: Facts on File, 2003, pp. 299-301.

<sup>28</sup> O. Schreiner, *Woman and Labour*, London: Virago, (1911), 1978, p. 33.

All forced sexual relationships based, not on the spontaneous affection of the woman for the man, but on the necessitous acceptance by the woman of material good in exchange for the exercise of her sexual functions.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, to Schreiner, as for many others, the social pact of marriage downgrades and ridicules women, making them subjected both sexually and economically to their husbands.

Similarly, Mona Caird<sup>30</sup> wrote several articles about women's role in marriage, later gathered in the collection *The Morality of Marriage*, published in 1897. "Marriage" was the first of these articles and appeared in 1888 in *The Westminster Review*. In her work, Caird opens the discussion with the image of a chained dog accustomed to its condition, comparing it to women chained up to the patriarchal institution of marriage. She then describes the history of the pact, finishing by giving her own version of the marriage of the future, where equality replaces exploitation. To Caird, if in the past, hunters made women theirs "by the right of conquest," in her modern times, it was marriage which created the same conditions of property of the woman "by the right of law."<sup>31</sup> In order to avoid this in the future, the author suggests working on women's economic independence, education and freedom in marriage, growing and living on the same level as men.<sup>32</sup>

The "dominant abuse of patriarchal life"<sup>33</sup> that Caird individualises in the marital institution is also analysed and criticised by John Stuart Mill,<sup>34</sup> considered "the feminists'

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>30</sup> Alice Mona Caird (1858-1932) was a New Woman novelist and an activist who especially focused on suffrage. Together with *The Daughters of Danaus*, another of his most-known works is *The Wing of Azrael* (1889), centred on the violence in marriage and following women's social rejection. Krueger, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

<sup>31</sup> M. Caird, "Marriage", *The Westminster Review*, 1888, pp. 186-201, p. 189.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 198-199.

<sup>33</sup> In Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>34</sup> Mill (1806-1873) was a liberal and utilitarian thinker and politician, and one of the most influential members of the Liberal Party. He was also a Member of the Parliament and had a seat in the House of Commons. C. Macleod, "John Stuart Mill", 2016. Available: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill/>, Accessed 2022, December.



philosophical champion.”<sup>35</sup> In 1869, Mill published *The Subjection of Woman*, in which he explored the causes that led to the woman being the first ever enslaved human in history.<sup>36</sup> The work is divided into four chapters, the first regarding women’s status in modern times, and finding women’s subjection by men in brute force. The second chapter analyses how this injustice is reflected in the institution of marriage. The third is dedicated to the lack of women in contemporary political functions, and how this affects negatively both men and women. The last one underlines the necessity to grant equal opportunities to women. In these pages, Mill highlights the social construction of women’s dependency on men as “what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing – the result of a forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others.”<sup>37</sup> Consequently, marriage, the relationship upon which women’s nature and dependence are built, has to be rethought: “the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex and the other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement.”<sup>38</sup> Throughout the course of the century, the discussion about women’s subordination in marriage, and therefore in society, also became part of major law-making.

### **1.1.3. The Woman Question: Politics**

During the nineteenth century, women’s rights in marriage greatly contributed to the political affairs of the country. Particularly, these years see the emanation of some of the major first legislative decisions somehow centred on the safeguarding of married women. In 1857, the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act was issued, with the intention

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<sup>35</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>36</sup> Caird, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>37</sup> J. S. Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, London: Longmans, Green and Co, (1869) 1924, p. 49.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

of moving the decisional power on matrimonial causes from the hands of the ecclesiastical courts to the non-religious Probate and Divorce Court. Nevertheless, as Gail Cunningham underlines, this movement does not imply that divorce was equalised: women's nature was still considered purer than men's.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, if a man could file for divorce in case of his wife's adultery, a woman had the same right only in case of "incestuous adultery, or of rape, or of sodomy or bestiality, or adultery coupled with [...] cruelty."<sup>40</sup> Successively, in 1870 and 1882 the Married Woman's Property Acts were passed, allowing women to retain their own properties after marriage and facilitating a woman's decision on divorce. Two years later, the Matrimonial Causes Act (1884) clarified that a husband unwilling to return a woman's property back to the owner had to face the accusation of desertion. Moreover, this law introduced the wife's right to allowances in the case of an eloped husband and the court's decisional right to the custody of children. Finally, the 1891 *Roe v. Jackson* case considered the wife's safety within marriage. It enacted that a wife could not be confined and imprisoned by her husband, although many exceptions were allowed. In fact, a husband could still both detain his wife suspected of adultery and push her to have sexual intercourse.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, women's equality in marriage was far from being attained in the Victorian Era. However, public discussion positively contributed to the "challenge to some of the dominant ideologies."<sup>42</sup>

Enfranchisement stood as a second major legislative issue which determined the awakening of the Woman Question. During the first half of the century, Owenites and democrats were among the first to ask for equal rights for women, including the right to

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<sup>39</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

vote. Famously in their 1825 joint appeal,<sup>43</sup> activists Anna Wheeler and William Thompson<sup>44</sup> asserted that women “are more in need of political rights than any other portion of human beings.”<sup>45</sup> Some years later, initial feminist demonstrations saw the light against the 1832 Reform Act as one of the main causes. This measure systematically excluded women from the franchise, later rejecting a further request on including them in line with the requirements of the time.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, in 1866, the House of Commons was formerly presented with a petition in favour of women’s suffrage. After this first attempt, private bills in favour of women’s suffrage were presented almost annually from 1870 onwards,<sup>47</sup> with the support of the many societies and unions that were created during the years, such as the National Society for Women’s Suffrage (1867) and the Woman’s Franchise League (1889). Thanks to this development, women’s enfranchisement became a main topic of social discussion, starting to feature in journals. For example, in 1889, the *Fortnightly Review* published two articles, one in favour of women’s suffrage, the other against it: “The Enfranchisement of Women” and “The Proposed Subjection of Men.” Along with the *Fortnightly*, other eminent political

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<sup>43</sup> *The Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political, and thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery; In Reply to a Paragraph of Mr. Mill’s Celebrated “Argument on Government”* stood as a counterargument to Mill’s argumentation on why women’s political rights are superfluous. For its strong socialist and feminist influences, this work is considered the prime account of socialist feminism. A. L. Cory, “Wheeler and Thompson’s ‘Appeal’: The Rhetorical Re-Visioning of Gender”, *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2004, pp. 106-120, p. 106.

<sup>44</sup> Anna Doyle Wheeler (1785-1848) was an Irish-born writer and feminist. In her life, she published *The Rights of Women* (1830) and *Letter from Vlasta* (1833). (D. Dooley, “Wheeler, Anna Doyle”, 2009. Available: <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.008987.v1>, Accessed 2022, December) William Thompson (1775-1833) was an Irish philosopher. He was implied in the feminist, and socialist causes, for which he entered the Cooperative movement, often labelled under Owenism. D. Dooley, “Thompson, William”, 2009, Available: <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.008528.v1>, Accessed 2022, December.

<sup>45</sup> In Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

monthlies that entered the suffrage debate were the *Nineteenth Century Review*, the *Westminster Review*, and the *National Review*.<sup>48</sup>

#### 1.1.4. The Woman Question: Morality

A last major field of interest which enormously contributed to women's protests and eventually to the creation of the New Woman is morality. The second half of the century saw an increasing attention on sexuality, which led to debates in the scientific, literary, and social areas. In fact, female sexuality, and the concept of femininity in the Victorian era were "inextricably linked" to women's roles in marriage and their political and social status.<sup>49</sup> In this way, the same mechanism that placed women under men's control in the matrimonial pact – notably, the separated spheres ideal – was also responsible for establishing women's acceptable sexual behaviour and morality. Particularly, Victorian society seemed to deny the mere concept of female sexuality,<sup>50</sup> encouraging the emergence of a double standard: women were generally seen and represented as true to their nature, and almost sexless; if this did not apply to a woman, she was then categorised as a prostitute or a fallen woman. A significant representative of this theory is William Acton, a physician who in 1857 wrote *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*. In his work, Acton often insists on women's asexuality, which should be ordinary:

The majority of women (happily for society) are not very much troubled by sexual feeling of any kind. What men are habitually, women are exceptionally. [...] As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him; and, but for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his

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<sup>48</sup> L. Brake, "Writing Women's History; 'The sex' debates of 1889", in Heilmann, Ann and Beetham, Margaret (eds.), *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, feminism and international consumer culture, 1880-1830*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 51- 73, p. 52-53.

<sup>49</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>50</sup> K. Reynolds and N. Humble, *Victorian Heroines: Representations of Femininity in Nineteenth-century Literature and Art*, New York: New York University Press, 1993, p. 11.

attentions. [...] The married woman has no wish to be treated on the footing of a mistress.<sup>51</sup>

Respectable femininity, then, demanded sexual passiveness. And every woman who did not apply to the picture risked being labelled as “non-sexual, [...] omnisequal, criminals, madwomen, or prostitutes.”<sup>52</sup>

In a few words, women’s sexuality was reduced to the capacity of their bodies to satisfy their husbands and bear children.<sup>53</sup> Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis underline the influence that evangelical ideas had on this theory, especially rooted in middle-class thought. To them, the “evangelical commitment to separate sphere ideology and the cult of domesticity” eventually brought to men’s appropriation of female sexuality and autonomy over their own bodies.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, education, being one of the main means through which women slowly gained their own social power, represented a threat to men’s legacy and was treated through the same scientific discourse which conveyed woman’s passive sexuality. For instance, in 1874, the physician Edward H. Clarke published *Sex in Education*, in which he addressed the “debilitating effects on girls of intellectual works.”<sup>55</sup> This way, the dreaded effect of the intellectual and social emancipation of women would be that of a “fall or abdication of men,” which could only have been avoided if women pursued their primary sexual role of mothers.<sup>56</sup>

The double standard seen in the treatment of female sexuality in marriage and society becomes clearer when analysed through the lenses of the “galvanic force” that

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<sup>51</sup> W. Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*, Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1867, pp. 144-145.

<sup>52</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>54</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> A. Richardson, “The Birth of National Hygiene and Efficiency: Women and Eugenics in Britain and America”, in A. Heilmann and M. Beetham (eds.), *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, feminism and international consumer culture, 1880-1830*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 240-262, p. 241.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 241-242.

made the feminist insurrections greater during the second half of the century: the Contagious Diseases Acts.<sup>57</sup> Initially intended to monitor sexually transmitted diseases within the military, they were issued in 1864, 1866, and 1869. They were later suspended in 1883 and finally repealed in 1886. Their objective was the “compulsory examination, detention and treatment of any woman suspected of being a prostitute.”<sup>58</sup> Being laws adopted to control military sexuality by effectively operating above women, the Contagious Diseases Acts truly show how society and politics believed and acted according to a “sexual double standard, legitimising male promiscuity.”<sup>59</sup> By doing so, women continued to be seen as the ones in charge of maintaining overall social decency or social shame in the sexual field, whereas men’s sexuality remained biologically recognised and excused as “brutish.”<sup>60</sup> Hence, the woman was the sole responsible for sexual choices, even as a prostitute.

The contagious Diseases Acts brought society to rethink the idea of “the passionless woman of the proper feminine [...] on behalf of a new programme of social regeneration.”<sup>61</sup> Particularly, a branch of medicine sided with the feminist cause promoting contraception whilst acknowledging the subjection perpetrated on female citizens by patriarchy. For instance, George Drysdale dedicated a part of his work, *The Elements of Social Science*, to the prevention of pregnancy. By describing various methods such as “the safe period, the sneath, the sponge [...] and withdrawal,” Drysdale gave women a chance to master their bodies in a society that tried to withhold them and contributed to making birth control “firmly attached to the feminist cause.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Reynolds and Humble, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>58</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> Richardson, “The Birth of National Hygiene and Efficiency”, *cit.*, p. 244.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>61</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>62</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

The social uproar facing Victorian sexual double standards, especially conveyed through the Contagious Diseases Acts, succeeded in making society “speak for or about woman or women.”<sup>63</sup> In this context, the New Woman grew and developed, particularly aiming at “sexual consciousness, candour, and expressiveness.”<sup>64</sup>

## **1.2. From the Woman Question to the Journalistic Debate: the Birth of the “Foolscap and Ink” New Woman**

The Victorian sexual question was a major catalyser for the rising of the New Woman phenomenon during the later decades of the nineteenth century. In fact, women began to claim the field they had been taken away from as their own, that is sex. As Gail Cunningham asserts,

it was suddenly discovered that women, who had for so long assiduously protected from reading about sex in novels and periodicals, or from hearing about it in polite conversation, had a great deal to say on the subject themselves.<sup>65</sup>

Sex and other pressing Woman Question topics were first given room in journals, which pages are at all effects the place of birth of the New Woman. Indeed, this newborn feminist symbol and the press are “inextricably bound up together,”<sup>66</sup> as not only did periodicals and journals represent the main place where women’s voice was first shared, but they also continued to stand throughout the century – and the New Woman evolution – as the main means through which the social debate was conveyed, even after the rise of the New Woman fiction.

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<sup>63</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>64</sup> L. Dowling, “The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890’s”, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1979, pp. 434-453, p. 441.

<sup>65</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, 1978, p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> A. Heilmann and M. Beetham, “Introduction”, in A. Heilmann and M. Beetham (eds.), *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, feminism and international consumer culture, 1880-1830*, London: Routledge, 2004, pp. 1-14, p. 2.

### 1.2.1. A Creature of the Press: The New Woman's Journalistic Consecration

Women's journals began to embrace the Woman Question in the 1850s. As Michelle Tusan explains, the first journals doing so were meant to be highly political and centred on what they recognised as "women's interests."<sup>67</sup> Among the others, the main journals that shifted their topics to "more practical and political"<sup>68</sup> arguments were *The English Woman's Journal*, focused on the issues among lower classes women, such as labour and prostitution; *The Lady's Cabinet*, which in 1852 announced to be making "improvements" to better support women; *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, which was firstly oriented towards feminine domestic tasks, but by the end of the 50s grew slowly influenced by political journals.<sup>69</sup> These magazines stood as the first account of the press's orientation towards women's affairs, writing in support of their struggles and vindications. Later, in the 1880s and 1890s, the Woman Question's debate expanded through ad-hoc feminist journals. The main journals of this period were *The Woman's Herald*, entirely produced by women; *Shafts*, dedicated to the working classes; *The Woman's Gazette*, which supported women's suffrage and women's social inclusion together with *The Woman's Signal*.<sup>70</sup>

In this panorama, the New Woman was created from the need to move forward to an original, modern woman, freed from social constrictions, who could stand as an inspiration and aspiration for women at the turn of the century. In 1893, *The Woman's Herald* was the first journal that made this claim a reality. In the article "Womanly Women" issued in June, it is noticed that a "truer type of woman is springing in our

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<sup>67</sup> Tusan, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>68</sup> J. A. Auerbach, "What They Read: Mid-Nineteenth Century English Women's Magazines and the Emergence of a Consumer Culture", *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 121-140, 1997, p. 122.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>70</sup> Tusan, *op. cit.*, p. 171.



midst”, with the intention of enlarging women’s social power and standing.<sup>71</sup> The article aims to describe an almost messianic woman, who is expected to “[come] forth for the world’s need.”<sup>72</sup> Not only did “Womanly Women” stand as a first interpretation of the coming New Woman, but it also paved the way for her first appearance in the press, which took place only two months later in the same periodical. On 17<sup>th</sup> June, in fact, *The Woman’s Herald* published the article “Social Standing of the New Woman”, baptising the “ink and paper” creature.<sup>73</sup>

If in 1893, journals welcomed the figure and meaning of the New Woman, 1894 represented the year in which it abandoned the feminist journal’s niche and officially entered the public debate. Defined as *annus mirabilis* by Lynn Pykett,<sup>74</sup> 1894 saw the consecration of the New Woman as it first appeared in the mainstream press: a symbol of female progression and liberation, of “disorder and rebellion.”<sup>75</sup> In 1894 *The North American Review* gave voice to the already known novelists Ouida<sup>76</sup> and Sarah Grand<sup>77</sup> with the aim of examining the new feminist figure of the time. In March, Grand published the article “The New Aspect of the Woman Question”. In her article, Grand challenges patriarchal beliefs, by addressing the incapacity of the “Bawling Brotherhood” to understand the “new woman [who] is a little above him” and who “solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere, and

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Heilmann and Beetham, *op. cit.*, p.2.

<sup>74</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p.137.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Born Maria Louise de la Ramé, Ouida (1839-1908) was a novelist particularly interested in the political facts of her time. Her most acclaimed work is *Under Two Flags* (1867), a novel based on the British in Algeria. In 1867 she also published *Idalia*, featuring a heroine within the frame of Italian independence. Krueger, *op. cit.*, pp. 265-266.

<sup>77</sup> Sarah Grand (1854-1943) dedicated her life to feminist literature, particularly the New Woman. Born Frances Elizabeth Bellenden Clarke, Grand started her feminist campaign among the protests against the Contagious Diseases Acts as a young woman. Her most notorious work is *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), in which she explores women’s sexuality, especially through the lenses of sexually transmitted diseases. Ibid., pp. 147-148.

prescribed the remedy.”<sup>78</sup> Largely centred on men and their faults committed to yet condescending women during history, Grand predicts a future in which the New Woman is “stronger and wiser” and the man, a new man, is “better.”<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, Grand claims women’s rights facing patriarchy without, however, displacing the woman from her “sacred duties of wife and mother”, where the “true womanliness” lies.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, if Grand’s creature conciliates women’s public and domestic life, her figure cannot be considered entirely human. In fact, as Talia Schaffer underlines, Grand shifted her article from the form of “reportage” to that of “myth” with the intention of creating her own symbolic New Woman, whose main social aspirations are intrinsically tied with the care for the household and therefore society.<sup>81</sup>

As a response to Sarah Grand’s “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” Ouida contributed to *The North American Review*’s forum with the article “The New Woman,” marking the first time that the term comes with capital letters.<sup>82</sup> If Grand mainly concentrates on men, their faults, and their future in connection with her messianic New Woman, Ouida places the creature within an everyday life context, in an attempt to “dispel the drama of Grand’s announcement.”<sup>83</sup> To Ouida, the New Woman is already present in literature and journals, as well as in real life, as she proceeds to describe a journal’s engraving of a real New Woman demanding the political vote.<sup>84</sup> In so doing,

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<sup>78</sup> S. Grand, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question”, *The North American Review*, 1894, pp. 270-276, p. 271.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274. This view was a common representation of the New Woman at the time. In fact, analysing the New Woman’s “utopian vision,” Michelle Tusan underlines that “her interest in politics and social justice [...] were not represented as a challenge to her dedication to the home, but rather were depicted as an extension of her domestic duties.” Tusan, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>81</sup> Schaffer, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>82</sup> L. Pykett, “What’s ‘New’ About the ‘New Woman’? Another Look at the Representation of the New Woman in Victorian Periodicals”, *Australasian Victorian Studies Journal*, vol. 6, 2000, pp. 102-112, p.104.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Ouida, “The New Woman”, *The North American Review*, 1894, pp. 610-619, p. 612.

Ouida reduces Grand's warning on women's awakening as one of the many that occurred during the second half of the century.<sup>85</sup> In addition, if Grand underlines women's roles as victims of the patriarchal system, Ouida professes the contrary, by holding them accountable for not taking care of the rights and duties they already possess,<sup>86</sup> ultimately reversing Grand's perspective and making men the "victims of women."<sup>87</sup> In Ouida's perception, then, in order to be New, the woman must not reiterate common female actions:

[...] so long as she wears dead birds as millinery and dead seals as coats; so long as she goes to races [...]; so long as she courtesies before princes and emperors who reward the winners of distance-rides [...]; so long as she invades literature without culture and art without talent; so long as she orders her court-dress in a hurry; so long as she makes no attempt to interest herself in her servants, in her animals, in the poor slave of her tradespeople [...], so long as she is utterly incapable of keeping her sons out of the shambles of modern sport, and lifting her daughters above the pestilent miasma of modern society [...] she has no possible title or capacity to demand the place or the privilege of man.<sup>88</sup>

By rejecting a demonic woman-of-the-present which reflects real-life women, Ouida expresses her own ideas on the ideal New Woman: a radical symbol – far from real-life activists - constructed "via conservative language."<sup>89</sup> It is possible to notice, then, a common pattern between Grand and Ouida, which accompanied New Woman's thinkers throughout the century: the almost systemic rejection of common, real "new" women, in favour of a fictionalised, ideal creature, easy to construct and shape according to one's own philosophy. As Talia Schaffer confirms, this trend established the debate's shift from real to fictional. It "indicates that the real war may well have been a war of words."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p.105.

<sup>86</sup> Ouida, *op. cit.*, p. 618.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 615.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 618-619.

<sup>89</sup> Schaffer, *op. cit.*, p.46.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

### 1.2.2. The Press's New Woman: Between Real and Fictional

Sarah Grand and Ouida's *North American Review* forum indicated the highest peak mainstream press movement, nourished throughout the last years of the century. In this period, the debate on emancipated women shifted from flash and bone people to imagined, accurately created individuals on paper. Telling is the moment in which the shift was completed: once society gave a name to the creature at the centre of the debate - with Grand and Ouida's 1894 articles - it eventually lost all her connections to reality and to real, emancipated women of the century. Contrarily, at the beginning of the public debate, it is the actual women who inspire the dawning fictional character:

They walked without chaperones, carried their own latchkeys, bicycled, and the more daring ones smoked cigarettes, cut their hair, or wore divided skirts and plain costume in accordance with the principles of rational dress.<sup>91</sup>

Although real emancipated women's characteristics set the common ground of later New Woman representations, "these women rarely described themselves as 'New Women.'"<sup>92</sup> In this way, as the debate evolved, it slowly enlarged the fracture between the flash-and-bone woman's emancipation and the imaginary New Woman on paper, causing both a positive and a negative impact. If on the one hand, the New Woman's notoriety helped the discussion on real women's causes, on the other hand, it dangerously shifted the attention to the theorisation of an ideal.

In the first stages, the creation of this imaginary symbol put a public of real women at the centre of the debate: writers, readers, and thinkers. Clearly, the New Woman's debate gave them the opportunity to express their own ideas within a public space, which went beyond the pages of a journal:

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 39. Women who followed the principles of rational dress wore more practical and comfortable clothes, that could not possibly respect the canons of femininity of the time.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

The periodical press provided the infrastructure for women to communicate with one another and exchange ideas in an arena where cultural values could be determined through the contested arena of the mass media.<sup>93</sup>

Hence, women could finally confront themes dear to the century's Woman Question, such as education, work, rights, and politics, all the while rivendicating their role as mothers and wives, never fully abandoned during the course of the New Woman phenomenon.<sup>94</sup> Later on, the positive debate enlarged once the historically dominated mainstream press gave space and a voice to women "in a way previously unavailable to women as readers and writers."<sup>95</sup> The utopic image of the New Woman, then, is to be considered a condensed work of many female voices who never had the chance to express their identity and hopes so freely before.

Notwithstanding the advantage that the New Woman press gave to women, its reception and manipulation largely pushed real women to the background. It was exactly in 1894, the same year of the New Woman's proclamation in the mainstream press, that some doubts began to be raised concerning the too much invading role that the woman "in fiction" took from the woman "in fact."<sup>96</sup> In 1894, Mrs M. Eastwood wrote the article "The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact", centred on the neat division and distinction between the two types of women. To Eastwood, the woman "in fact" is a "positive, tangible fact,"<sup>97</sup> whereas the woman "in fiction" represents a "lamentable creation, joyfully confined to the (diseased) imaginary realm."<sup>98</sup> Unlike her fictional counterpart, the real New Woman is the one who evolves to face the future: "far from being unfitted to the world, she is adapting herself with marvellous rapidity to its altered conditions."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Tusan, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>96</sup> M. Eastwood, "The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact", *Humanitarian*, 1894, pp. 375-379, p. 375.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>98</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>99</sup> Eastwood, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

Like M. Eastwood, many women of the time found it necessary to mark a distinction between the imaginary symbol and themselves.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, Eastwood's point of view remained "the exception rather than the rule."<sup>101</sup>

The fictional New Woman's threat to real women grew bigger over the century. The issue that derived from her advancing popularisation in mass media was that it slowly became a type standing for itself, rather than the symbolic representation of women's entrance and development within the public debate. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis describe this change as a "strategy of control" put into action by the same "status quo" that previously gave room to women's expression.<sup>102</sup> More specifically, Ann Ardis finds the origin of this change in the social naming of the New Woman and the anxiety related to it. According to her theory, once the symbol was labelled, its action field drastically narrowed down. Therefore, her "radicalism" and her representation of real-life women could be nullified.<sup>103</sup> To Ardis, the "violence of rhetoric" behind the New Woman's branding

is revealing not because it tells us much about the New Woman, not because it allows for precise distinctions between the various interest groups putting pressure on the cultural establishments, but because it reveals the anxieties fueling the establishment's need to name her.<sup>104</sup>

It follows that once the symbol was given a name, it ceased to be a reminder of something else – women's social debate. Instead, it turned into "a more strictly literary affair."<sup>105</sup>

The consequence of this transformation is proposed by the same Ardis:

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<sup>100</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>101</sup> A. L. Ardis., *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990, p. 12.

<sup>102</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>103</sup> Ardis, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

To label something literary rather than “real” is to quarantine it, in effect: to isolate it in a special corner of life, to box it off as a special kind of phenomenon, not something one encounters in society at large.<sup>106</sup>

Thus, by fictionalising the New Woman, the social debate denied her representation in everyday life, the same from which the symbolic creature sprang. This “detrimental”<sup>107</sup> marginalisation reduced the New Woman to a “media construct which did not represent the real lives and work of those people it purported to describe.”<sup>108</sup>

Added to the marginalisation of real women, the mainstream press pushed towards ridiculing the feminist symbol. In fact, by creating a “journalistic myth,” the same status quo that welcomed the New Woman “simplified and satirized [its] real concerns.”<sup>109</sup> In this way, these years see the parallel emergence of an anti-New Woman, with the aim of parodying the feminist creation through satire in mass media.<sup>110</sup> This dystopian counterimage lives throughout the New Woman’s life parable: especially in the 1870s and 1880s, “popular journals, magazines, and novels joined the outcry and lampooned politically active women as the ‘shrieking sisterhood’ labelling them ‘Wild’ or ‘Odd.’”<sup>111</sup>

### 1.2.3. A “War of Words”: Criticisms and Fears of the New Woman

Mass media’s most utilised stereotypical New Woman characterisation consisted in the woman “following non-traditional pursuits.”<sup>112</sup> In so doing, the woman was depicted smoking, bicycling, reading, or producing any type of art, and wearing “sartorial oddities,”<sup>113</sup> i.e., masculine clothes and clothes belonging to the rational dress sphere. In these terms, the most significant caricatures of the time are to be found in the weekly

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Schaffer, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>109</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>111</sup> Tusan, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>113</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

satirical magazine *Punch, or the London Charivari*. Partly responsible for creating the most popular depiction of the New Woman, this magazine never missed a chance to satirize the feminist creation, whether it was through drawings or texts. Particularly between 1885 and 1900, the weekly magazine published “no fewer than 200 cartoons and drawings that [identified] the New Woman.”<sup>114</sup> Moreover, contemporarily to the above-mentioned New Woman’s *annus mirabilis*, particularly from 18<sup>th</sup> August 1894 and 27<sup>th</sup> July 1895, only three issues did not present any reference to the New Woman.<sup>115</sup> Here are two examples of *Punch*’s satire:

There was a New Woman, as I’ve heard tell,  
And she rode a bike with a horrible bell,  
She rode a bike in a masculine way,  
And she had a spill on the Queen’s highway.<sup>116</sup>

Dress well, sweet Maid, and let who will be clever.  
Don’t study all day long  
Or else you’ll find,  
When other girls get married,  
You’ll sing a different song.<sup>117</sup>

As it can be drawn from these two texts, *Punch*’s most common target was to ridicule the New Woman’s characterisation, but also women’s more serious issues such as education and resistance to marriage. In this way, *Punch*’s caricatures show how mass media generated a countermovement to what was initially meant to be a social liberation phenomenon for women.<sup>118</sup>

Another way for mass media to express their perplexities about the slow but steady emancipation of women through the figure of the New Woman was via a serious

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<sup>114</sup> T. J. Collins, “Athletic Fashion, ‘Punch’, and the Creation of the New Woman”, *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2020, pp. 309-335, p. 310.

<sup>115</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>116</sup> “There Was a New Woman”, *Punch’s Almanack for 1897*, 1897.

<sup>117</sup> “Advice to Girl Graduates”, *Punch, or the London Charivari*, July 5 1890, p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> Tusan, *op. cit.*, p. 169.



journalistic debate, far from *Punch*'s caricatures. This way, Eliza Lynn Linton<sup>119</sup> was one of the first journalists who entered the New Woman's debate as an opposer.<sup>120</sup> In 1868, she wrote her first article regarding the ascending feminist symbol of the New Woman with the title "The Girl of the Period." With this article, Linton introduced to the mainstream press what she thought to be the new figure that feminists were beginning to describe and copy. Linton begins the article with a rapture with the past:

Time was when the stereotyped phrase "a fair young English girl," meant the ideal of womanhood; to us, at least, of home and breeding. [...] This was in the old time, and when English girls were content to be what God and nature had made them. Of late years we have changed the pattern, and have given to the world a race of women as utterly unlike the insular ideal as if we had created another nation altogether. The girl of the period, and the fair young English girl of the past, have nothing in common save ancestry and their mother-tongue.<sup>121</sup>

To Linton, the new generation of women is formed by wicked girls, whose traditional values are lost. In fact, to her, the new girl rejects the past to concentrate on modern, coquettish behaviours:

The girl of the period is a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the first articles of her personal religion; whose sole ideas of life is plenty of fun and luxury; and whose dress is the object of such thought and intellect.<sup>122</sup>

The journalist creates a materialistic image of the modern girl while detaching her from "duty," "love or happiness," "ordinary life," and "work."<sup>123</sup> Not being any more "tender, loving, retiring or domestic,"<sup>124</sup> the new type of girl is a menace to men:

Men are afraid of her; and with reason. They may amuse themselves with her for an evening, but they do not take her readily for life. Besides, after all efforts, she is only a poor copy of the real thing.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Linton (1822-1898) was Britain's first paid female journalist. Renowned for her fight against the new emancipated generation of women, she lived in contradiction with what she preached in her articles. In fact, she lived separated from her husband and was the first woman admitted to the British museum. Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>120</sup> Tusan, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>121</sup> E. Lynn Linton, "The Girl of the period", *The Saturday Review*, 1868, pp. 339-340, pp. 339-340.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

With this simple but effective article, Linton's intentions prevailed. Firstly, the journalist succeeded to present the new girl from her point of view, counterposing women's early arguments on their emancipation at their source; moreover, Linton succeeded to set the rhetoric that would accompany the New Woman's criticism throughout the century. Particularly, this rhetoric was "high-pitched, self-righteous, apocalyptic,"<sup>126</sup> and Linton strengthened it in her following works.

Particular attention is to be given to a trilogy published in the *Nineteenth Century* between 1891 and 1892 in which Linton concentrated on different aspects of what she thought the New Woman symbol to be, namely "Wild Women." Particularly, the journalist described her image of the New Woman from three different perspectives: as an insurgent, as a politician, and through the analysis of her supporters. In "The Wild Women as Politicians," Linton puts the question of women in politics – from enfranchisement to the role of politicians – on a scientific and natural level. To her, women are not naturally programmed to be in politics, as their role must be that of governing the house by being wives and mothers: "but where will be the peace of home when women, like men, plunge into the troubled sea of active political life?"<sup>127</sup> Women's sex, then, is the "core and kernel"<sup>128</sup> that defines the unfitness of women for politics which, to Linton, is "unwomanly and unnatural; self-destructive and socially hurtful."<sup>129</sup> To put politics first for Wild Women is to "have no great regard for the future or anything else but themselves."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ardis, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>127</sup> E. Lynn Linton, "The Wild Women as Politicians", *The Saturday Review*, pp. 79-88, 1891, p. 81.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

If in the first article of the trilogy Linton confutes progressive women's desire for their rights in politics, in "The Wild Women as Social Insurgents" and "The Partisans of the Wild Women" the journalist chooses a more direct accusation of the New Woman's phenomenon. In the former, reiterating Wild Women's selfishness and desire for "power over men,"<sup>131</sup> Linton describes the modern woman again, as she first does in "The Girl of the Period":

She smokes after dinner with the men; in railway carriages; in public rooms – when she is allowed. She thinks she is thereby vindicating her independence and honouring her emancipated womanhood. Heaven bless her!<sup>132</sup>

In a more accurate way, Linton introduces once again the New Woman from her point of view, stressing modern girls' rebellious behaviour, which takes them to embody an "ugly travesty" instead of "modesty and virtue."<sup>133</sup> Finally, in Linton's "The Partisans of Wild Women," the journalist focuses on the girls' two types of supporters, i.e. the ones who think to be establishing "the law of righteousness" and the ones "who see nothing but their own advantage."<sup>134</sup> In either case, their judgement is described as fundamentally wrong:

The taste of these partisans is as queer as their morality and as doubtful as their politics. If a woman does anything specially unfeminine and ugly, the hysterical press breaks forth into a hymn of praise which takes away one's breath.<sup>135</sup>

It follows that Linton's most violent accusation against Wild Women – to repudiate the traditional form of womanhood – is applied to her supporters too. According to the journalist, both the New Woman and her followers do not respect the original social, and biological role of women anymore.<sup>136</sup> This last accusation is a symptom of a greater social

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<sup>131</sup> E. Lynn Linton, "The Wild Women as Social Insurgents", *The Saturday Review*, pp. 596-605, 1891, p. 597.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 605.

<sup>134</sup> E. Lynn Linton, "The Partisans of the Wild Women", *The Saturday Review*, 1892, pp. 455-464, p. 455.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 460.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 463-464.

anxiety: As Lynn Pykett underlines, the New Woman represented a threat to nature. If her “biological destiny was questioned, the social “gender boundaries” began to weaken.<sup>137</sup> For this reason, Linton’s argument became central to other journalists’ articles siding against the New Woman.

New Woman’s opponents majorly focalised on the loss of centrality of marriage and motherhood in the New Woman’s predicaments. A major example is given by the historian Frederic Harrison’s 1891 article “The Emancipation of Women,” published in *The Fortnightly Review*. Here, although professing himself a supporter of social progress, he admits that women and men are substantially different to be able to hold the same positions in society. Interestingly, the journalist does not mention the New Woman and her supporters; instead, he talks of “revolutionists:”

And the real revolutionists aim at the total “emancipation” of women, and by this they mean law, custom, convention, and public opinion shall leave every adult woman free to do whatever any adult man is free to do. [...] Now I deliberately say that this result would be the most disastrous to human civilisation of any which could afflict it. [...] If only a small minority of women availed themselves of their “freedom”, the beauty of womanliness would be darkened in every home.<sup>138</sup>

As already seen in Linton, Harrison stresses the importance of women’s domestic sphere and a consequent catastrophic fall of society in the case of women’s gain of independence. Here it is possible to see one of the strategies put forth by the New Woman’s opponents: the depiction of women’s emancipation phenomenon through the symbolic figure “in terms of the world-turned-upside-down of revolutionary excess.”<sup>139</sup>

A final example of the debate on the New Woman figure is given by the series of articles “Dies Dominae.” Published in *The Saturday Review* between 18<sup>th</sup> May and 22<sup>nd</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>138</sup> H. Frederic, “The Emancipation of Women”, *The Fortnightly Review*, 1891, pp. 437-454, p. 450.

<sup>139</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

June 1895, the series was written by “A Woman of the Day”<sup>140</sup> with rejoinders by the conservative Lady Jeune.<sup>141</sup> The series is composed of six articles, each of which is dedicated to a particular aspect of the New Woman’s ideology: “The Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge,” “The Value of Love,” “The Practice of Marriage,” “The Maternal Instinct,” “The Sisterhood of Woman,” and “The Feminine Potential”. Throughout this debate, facing the author’s idea of women professing an emancipated love, Lady Jeune thinks: “the voyage of discovery on which the New Woman is embarking will end on the rocks of a life’s shipwreck.”<sup>142</sup> To the doubts put forth by the “woman of the day” regarding the “English married life,” the journalist underlines the lack of “feeling of constancy, affection, or gratitude” of the New Woman.<sup>143</sup> In front of society’s imposition of motherhood on women, the desire of the New Woman to be “simply-woman,”<sup>144</sup> is contrasted by Lady Jeune’s perspective: “it may be that there are women who view the question from that high point of view, but I venture to think the causes of their abstention are less ideal and more unnatural.”<sup>145</sup>

As Lady Jeune’s words prove, unnaturalness was a keyword for the depiction of the New Woman in mass media. Indeed, seen as a “manifesto of contemporary

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<sup>140</sup> The pseudonym used by the anonymous journalist is a clear reminder of the New Woman, which in 1895 was already well established in people’s minds and in the media. In declaring herself a “Woman of the Day,” the journalist gained the right to speak for the entire group of supporters, but she also nourished the New Woman’s symbol, by being her spokesperson and a developer of her philosophy.

<sup>141</sup> Susan Elizabeth Mary Jeune, Baroness St Helier (1845-1931) was an essayist, alderman to the London County Council and a philanthropist. Her main preoccupation was the fallen woman’s social situation. W. Davis, “‘Irréconciliables,’ ‘Reclaimables,’ and ‘First Falls’: Lady Mary Jeune and the Fallen Woman in ‘Tess of the d’Urberville’”, *The Hardy Review*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2008, pp. 69-82, p. 70.

<sup>142</sup> A Woman of the Day and Lady Jeune, “Dies Dominae. The Value of Love” and Rejoinder, *The Saturday Review*, 1895, pp. 687-689, p. 689.

<sup>143</sup> A Woman of the Day and Lady Jeune, “Dies Dominae. The Practice of Marriage” and Rejoinder, *The Saturday Review*, 1895, pp. 721-722, p. 722.

<sup>144</sup> A Woman of the Day and Lady Jeune, “Dies Dominae. The Maternal Instinct” and Rejoinder, *The Saturday Review*, 1895, pp. 752-754, p. 752.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 754.

anarchism,”<sup>146</sup> the New Woman’s phenomenon was at all effects labelled as one of the protagonists of the nineteenth-century “revolt against nature.”<sup>147</sup> Nevertheless, whether she was seen as an emancipated and emancipating figure, or as a degenerate, the New Woman was the example of a socially functioning and powerful being, made of ideals, words, critics, and satire. As I am going to analyse, literature had a fundamental role in the New Woman’s life, as it was in the novel that this creature reached its best mode of representation, and it was in novels that society best met her.

### 1.3. Literature’s New Women: Characteristics and Reception

If the press was responsible for making the New Woman phenomenon form and grow starting from the early 1850s, the novel was the space in which the anarchic symbol reached its widest popularity amongst society. The main reason for that is connected to the freedom of expression of New Woman’s issues that fiction offered. In fact, as Gail Cunningham states, the New Woman confronted social problems, yet her “radical stance was taken on matters of personal choice.”<sup>148</sup> Novels, then, resulted to be the best vessel to share women’s choice against “personal circumstances.”<sup>149</sup> In this way, the New Woman fiction gradually flourished during the second half of the century, and only during the last seventeen years more than a hundred New Woman novels were published.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, between the 1880s and the 1890s the literary world welcomed the New Woman novel as a genre, and the New Woman as a popular and significative literary type.

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<sup>146</sup> L. Dowling, “The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890’s”, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1979, pp. 434-453, p. 438.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 450.

<sup>148</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>150</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

### 1.3.1. A Literary Shift: the New Woman as a Literary Heroine

One journalistic episode and two literary publications were responsible for the official shift of the New Woman figure from her existence within the social and press debate to the pages of novels. Firstly, the abovementioned 1894 exchange between Sarah Grand and Ouida in *The American Review* detached the New Woman from reality to introduce her to an ideal, subjective, and literary context. Moreover, in 1893 two of “the most (infamous) fictional accounts of New Women” were published: the novel *The Heavenly Twins* by Sarah Grand, and the collection of stories *Keynotes* by George Egerton.<sup>151</sup> The subsequent – or previous, in some cases – novels of the genre belong to what is recognised as “serious”<sup>152</sup> New Woman literature. Being a free ground for writers’ expression,<sup>153</sup> this literary phenomenon does not belong to a precise school of fiction but unfolds into different personal outcomes with a pivotal element in common.

Amongst the few similarities that could be found within the genre, the femininity of the authorship is to be considered the most essential. Indeed, as W.T. Stead wrote in 1894, New Woman novels were novels “by a woman about women from the standpoint of Woman.”<sup>154</sup> In this way, female writers could describe and analyse women’s issues from within themselves, and could detach from the masculine manner of doing literature,<sup>155</sup> searching for “new ways of writing.”<sup>156</sup> It was one of the first and most

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<sup>151</sup> Ardis, *op. cit.*, p. 12. George Egerton’s (1859-1945) real name is Mary Chavelita Dunne. Best known for her feminist literary work in the New Woman field, she was also an activist for women’s independence. Egerton lived a free sexual life, being the protagonist of several scandals and undergoing three marriages. J. March, “Egerton, George”, 2009. Available: <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.002859.v1>, Accessed 2022, December.

<sup>152</sup> C. Willis, “‘Heaven defend me from political or highly educated women!’: Packaging the New Woman for Mass Consumption”, in A. Richardson and C. Willis (eds.), *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact. Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 53-65, p. 54.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>154</sup> In Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

relevant frontrunners of the New Woman fiction, George Egerton, who gave voice to women's need to write about the "new," and therefore to write about themselves:

I realised that in literature, everything had been better done by man than woman could hope to emulate. There was only one small plot left for her to tell: the *terra incognita* of herself, as she knew herself to be, not as man liked to imagine her – in a word, to give herself away, as man had given himself in his writings.<sup>157</sup>

What Egerton and the other New Woman female writers did is, as Lynn Pykett piercingly describes, a "redefinition of realism."<sup>158</sup> As the critic explains, to write about the "new," women writers needed to dismantle and shape to their own accord a literary path created by men and which privileged only men and their stories:

Writing the New Woman involved a negotiation not only of the discourse of fiction – language, form and genre. To write the New Woman and to write woman (or women) anew was to write the, as yet, unwritten.<sup>159</sup>

Women writers' appropriation and redefinition of realism did not come only with the latest and most popular novels, but slowly developed starting from the first witnesses of the genre. In fact, although the New Woman fiction developed especially during the last decade of the century, the literary New Woman germ and consequent "revolt against accepted novelistic practice"<sup>160</sup> saw the light some few years earlier.

### 1.3.2. Who Does Recount Her? Some Protagonists of the New Woman Fiction

Despite the official literary christening of the feminist symbol occurring in the 1890s, it is to be underlined that its birth anticipated it "by a good many years."<sup>161</sup> In fact,

the first indication that a new breed of feminism was in the process of being came in 1883 with the publication, under the pseudonym of Ralph Lauren, of Olive Schreiner's novel, *The Story of an African farm*.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> In E. Showalter, (ed.), *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993.

<sup>158</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>160</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>161</sup> E. Jordan, "The Christening of the New Woman", *The Victorian Newsletter*, vol. 63, 1983, pp. 19-21, p. 19.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.



Although Schreiner does not mention the New Woman in her first novel, it is undoubted that her intention with the heroine Lyndall is of depicting one. Moreover, later in her career, not only did she continue pursuing the creation and modelling of the feminist symbol, but she also became one of the most significant spokespersons and intellectuals on the phenomenon, defined as “the Modern Woman par excellence, the founder and high priestess of the school.”<sup>163</sup> *The Story of an African Farm*, then, was a literary watershed: “whether men liked it or not, and most of them did not, women were emerging from the position of being merely an adjunct to men.”<sup>164</sup> Consequently, the New Woman fiction represented an “‘irruption of the feminine’ into fiction and the culture at large,”<sup>165</sup> and many female writers contributed to it.

After Schreiner, Sarah Grand and George Egerton were two of the most prominent writers of New Woman fiction. Author of the abovementioned article “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” Grand also published a novel which helped the New Woman fiction reach its highest peak of popularity. *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) was an “attack on the sexual double standard” which sold more than 100,000 copies in the US and more than 20,000 in Great Britain.<sup>166</sup> Its protagonists, Evadne, Edith, and Angelica, brought forth the idea that “the socially sanctioned modes of feminine behaviour were inadequate and indeed dangerous,” making the novel a transatlantic success and a model for later New Woman fiction.<sup>167</sup>

George Egerton, together with Grand, contributed to a rethinking of woman’s sexuality and biological sexual selection, making women “sufficiently race aware to make

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<sup>163</sup> W.T. Stead (1894), in Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>164</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>165</sup> Boumelha (1982, p. 79), in Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>166</sup> Richardson, “The Birth of National Hygiene and Efficiency”, *cit.*, p. 243.

<sup>167</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

responsible sexual choices.”<sup>168</sup> Particularly, Egerton’s masterpiece *Keynotes*, published the same year as *The Heavenly Twins*, offered the public a collection of short stories that “suggest the impossibility of women’s situation”<sup>169</sup> within the patriarchal system as it was constituted. Later on, *Keynotes* stood as an editorial case that gave the name to an entire series of marketed New Woman fiction. Specifically, John Lane’s series titled “Keynotes” made possible the publication of 19 collections of short stories and 14 novels among the most controversial of the genre.<sup>170</sup>

If 1893 gave voice to two of the major New Woman fiction writers, 1894 was “even more prolific.”<sup>171</sup> In the wake of Grand and Egerton’s masterpieces, the genre saw the publication of *The Daughters of Danaus*, by Mona Caird. *The Daughters of Danaus* is both a clear analysis of women’s condition within the patriarchal society and a feminist propaganda tool for revolution.<sup>172</sup> 1894 also saw the activity of another female writer who used women’s sexual awakening as the common thread of the genre. Emma Frances Brooke’s<sup>173</sup> *A Superfluous Woman* focuses on Jessamine’s story and the impossibility to be freed from social conventions in the matter of sexual choice. The protagonist is “superfluous” since she is viewed by society as “a dainty piece of flash which some great man would buy.”<sup>174</sup> As Caird and Brooke, and Egerton before them, Mérie Muriel Dowie<sup>175</sup> agreed on women’s frankness and independence within the sexual field. Muriel

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<sup>168</sup> Richardson, “The Birth of National Hygiene and Efficiency”, cit., p. 245.

<sup>169</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>170</sup> K. MacLeod, *Fictions of British Decadence. High Art, Popular Writing, and the Fin de Siècle*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 54.

<sup>171</sup> Jordan, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>172</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>173</sup> Emma Frances Brooke (1844-1926) was a New Woman novelist who supported herself by writing. Being a member of the Fabian Society, Brooke campaigned for equal education and for a ban on prostitution. Her novels mainly dealt with sexual questions and venereal diseases. R. Jukes, “Emma Frances Brooke”. Available: <https://people.elmbridgehundred.org.uk/biographies/emma-brooke/>, Accessed 2022, December.

<sup>174</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>175</sup> Muriel Dowie (1867-1945) was a British New Woman writer, who focused on women’s freedom to adventure and sexual choice. Krueger, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

Dowie's approach to the New Woman fiction was also very open to women's development of what were considered to be masculine attributes: "courage and physical toughness."<sup>176</sup> Muriel Dowie's masterpiece was *Gallia* (1895), whose heroine's autonomy echoes the author's first book, *A Girl in the Karpathians*.

Although many authors participated and contributed to the New Woman fiction, each with a strong subjectivity and style, it is possible to categorise them into two different schools, following the Victorian journalist Hugh Stutfield's guidelines. To Stutfield, there can be two literary New Woman authors, according to the subjects treated by the novelist: the "purity school," and the "neurotic school."<sup>177</sup> Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* belongs to the first group, to the point that Stutfield refers to it as the "Sarah Grandian School."<sup>178</sup> Grand and the authors belonging to this group "raise a protest in favour of purity," looking at an ideal that can be seen also in Grand's abovementioned "The New Aspect of the Woman Question." The authors in this group see purity as "the purity of truth, personal integrity and freedom."<sup>179</sup> Conversely, the more radical authors belong to the "neurotic school," especially in terms of sexual liberation. Novelists like Muriel Dowie, Caird and Brooke belong to this school, preferring the use of women's neurotic issues as a mirror of their sexual repression, without claiming to "[establish] an ideal of femininity."<sup>180</sup> With these two categories, Stutfield manages to mark a feeble but otherwise impossible division within the New Woman fiction phenomenon. Similarly, it is also possible to list several plot affinities that most of the New Woman novels share, even if, as mentioned above, they do not belong to a precise school of fiction.

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<sup>176</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>177</sup> Stutfield, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>179</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

### 1.3.3. Aspects of the Serious New Woman Novel and Beyond

Although centred on marriage, sex, and maternity,<sup>181</sup> New Woman novels present many “contradictions and complexities”<sup>182</sup> from which it may appear difficult to draw a general pattern of the literary New Woman. Indeed, the heroine is an elusive character to draw, especially given the deep subjectivity implied by every novelist to describe her. Nonetheless, it is possible to detect some topics and characterisations that are common within the New Woman fiction, particularly concerning the protagonist.<sup>183</sup> Usually, the novel’s heroine is a student, possibly from Oxbridge, and specifically from Girton. Generally, she is interested in art, especially writing. She reads many books, and most of the time she writes herself. The New Woman novel’s heroine also presents a “terrifying frankness about sex,”<sup>184</sup> leading to an open “treatment of gender relations and female sexuality.”<sup>185</sup> This way, what Elain Showalter describes as “unprecedented candour about female sexuality, marital discontent and [New Women’s] aesthetic theories and aspirations”<sup>186</sup> inevitably leads to New Woman’s novels’ final point in common: “disillusion” facing her unattainable “ideals of freedom and equality.”<sup>187</sup> This can be expressed in different ways.

The heroine’s discomfort towards her powerlessness can be conveyed through art, sex, and neurotic tendencies.<sup>188</sup> Firstly, literary New Women express their rebellion

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<sup>181</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>182</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>183</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>184</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>185</sup> Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>186</sup> Showalter, *op. cit.*, p. vii. What Gail Cunningham describes as “terrifying” and Elain Showalter as “unprecedented” marks the shift of taste that literature underwent with the New Woman fiction in terms of female sexuality. In fact, prior to the New Woman novels, Victorian novels simultaneously “[provided] heroines knowledge and experience of sexuality without compromising them and so invalidating them as role models”, furtherly insisting on the “asexuality of the middle-class wife” Humble, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>187</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

against “social pressures” by overcoming the “unwritten laws” about their representation in novels.<sup>189</sup> For instance, the figure of the “woman artist” is “repeatedly used as a way of figuring the lack of fit between women’s desire, the socially prescribed norms of the woman’s lot, and the actuality of women’s lives.”<sup>190</sup> Similarly, the heroine’s awakened sexual desire is telling of women’s aspiration to own their own sexuality against social dictates. Finally, neurosis is developed by most of the New Women in novels as a way of facing the continuous pressures against the heroines’ roles in society and their abnormal personal desires. In this way, it is especially hysteria and its unprecedented connection to female sexuality that makes the New Woman novel a potential threat to the masses.<sup>191</sup>

During the development of the New Woman literature, neurosis and its meaning of social oppression of women began to be perceived as a two-sided threat: to the traditional gendered nature, and to democracy.<sup>192</sup> In this way, the heroines’ hysterical approach, initially used by the novelists to underline the effect of a social problem on women, was then identified by the status-quo as a negative and unnatural element with the intention of undermining the novel’s message. Thus, not only the New Woman but also feminism in its entirety is looked at through the lenses of disease. In a few words, the core of the issue was shifted from society and its pressures on women to the very symbol unveiling social flaws:

By claiming that the New Woman’s discontent was the result of mental illness rather than social injustice, the threat which [the New Woman] presented could be conveniently defused and the true social causes of her discontent could be ignored.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>190</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-141.

<sup>193</sup> Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

In the same way, introspection and subjectivity, which are fundamental in New Woman fiction, were thought to be leading to a “distortion of reality,”<sup>194</sup> from which young women should be protected.<sup>195</sup> In this context, while both the serious New Woman novelists and novels were thought to be threatening society, the feminist symbol expanded beyond the serious literature, becoming, in its last stage, a stereotype especially for the New Woman commercial literature.

Ann Ardis asserts that the New Woman novels’ “uproar in the 1880s and the 1890s” was followed by “resounding silence”.<sup>196</sup> Even though this is substantially true, it is vital to remark that prior to its definitive extinction, the symbol of the New Woman detached from the cause that created it to exist purely as a stereotype. In this way, the very last phase of the feminist symbol’s life can be considered New Woman commercial literature. Conveying a milder message than George Egerton or Sarah Grand’s serious New Woman novels, this genre did not entirely abandon feminism as it still sympathised with the Woman Question, especially in terms of personal independence.<sup>197</sup> However, its highly structured plot and lack of extremism avoid generating discontent in the readers. Represented in commercialised “romances, comic novels and detective fiction,”<sup>198</sup> the heroine’s path usually starts with her studying at a college or working until a man enters her life. Moreover, the story should always end with the heroine’s marriage and her final acceptance of traditional womanhood.<sup>199</sup> Hence, the heroine’s demonstration of femininity holds a central role in the commercial New Woman novel.

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<sup>194</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>195</sup> Dowling, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

<sup>196</sup> Ardis, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>197</sup> Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

The heroine's bending to social conventions by the end of the novel and the representation of her beauty are key elements that novelists use to prove the protagonist's conventional femininity. As Chris Willis underlines, unlike the traditional New Woman, usually seen as "ugly and unmarriageable," this New Woman is "prettied-up."<sup>200</sup> She is likeable by the masses, then, not only because she is conventionally beautiful, but most importantly because, unlike her extremist fellow sister, she respects social rules. In other words, the symbol that for years stood in support of women's most advanced demands was then "depoliticized" to be channelled for mainstream use.<sup>201</sup> It is especially men novelists who took the opportunity to write about a highly popular character that "virtually guaranteed good sales" without the risk to represent the feminism behind it.<sup>202</sup> Consequently, most of the commercial New Woman novels were written by men,<sup>203</sup> such as Grant Allen with *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897) or *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899), and McDonnell Bodkin's *Dora Myrl, the Lady detective* (1900).<sup>204</sup>

Although both men and women contributed to the growth of the New Woman, especially within the journalistic debate, it was serious New Woman literature that made the phenomenon reach its highest significance, giving voice to single women's most subjective and interior expression. Thus, it is evident that most men novelists entered and took part in the New Woman literary phenomenon with a different intention than the original, serious one. However, two men novelists, notably Thomas Hardy and Grant Allen, and mainly two of their works appeared not to perfectly fit the given panorama's

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>201</sup> Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>202</sup> Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>204</sup> As for Grant Allen's fictional New Woman production, I am going to expand on it in the third chapter of this thesis. As for McDonnell Bodkin (1850-1933), he was an Irish politician and journalist, who centred his writing career, especially on detective fiction. Particularly, the *Dora Myrl* collection shows "an identikit New Woman," who if by the end of the first volume remains unmarried, later becomes a wife and mother, according to the commercial New Woman canons. Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

categories. Particularly, Thomas Hardy did not belong to the New Woman phenomenon, nor he tried to exploit its commercial appendix. However, one of his most acclaimed heroines, Sue Bridehead, stands as a popular New Woman in literature. On the other hand, Grant Allen, best known for his work within the commercialised feminist realm, authors one of the manifestos of the serious New Woman fiction, *The Woman Who Did*. Moreover, if many women novelists' works remain forgotten to this day, Hardy's and Allen's masterpieces still stand as two examples of the New Woman phenomenon. Therefore, the next two chapters aim at deepening the authors' connection with the end-of-the-century feminist phenomenon, analysing the two novels and their representation of the New Woman.



## 2. Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*: a Wessex (New Woman) Novel

The first section of this thesis has treated the wide but fundamental context in which the New Woman novel was produced. The second chapter now aims to explore *Jude the Obscure* (1895), which is the last and probably the best-known novel written by Thomas Hardy. Interestingly, even though it is possible to argue that the character of Sue Bridehead was originally intended to be “one-dimensional,”<sup>1</sup> she has fascinated readers and critics to the point that “she takes over *Jude the Obscure* from Jude.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, Hardy's powerful characterisation of Sue transforms her into a riddle that is still worth examining. Thus, this chapter intends to introduce the life and work of Thomas Hardy, to then analyse *Jude the Obscure* from the point of view of the New Woman phenomenon.

### 2.1. From Hardy's Dorchester to Jude's Wessex

The general, public impression of Thomas Hardy during the Victorian era was that of a pessimistic, scandalous author, who built his fortune thanks to non-conformist but highly profiting novels. Having had a transatlantic success over his life, Hardy's Wessex novels made the English nineteenth-century country life intertwine with the deepest human passions and fin-de-siècle technological progress. In order to fully understand his work, then, it is necessary to understand his life and the importance of Hardy's biography in his work.

#### 2.1.1. Thomas Hardy: Early Life, Work, and Ascending Popularity

Hardy's parents were Thomas Hardy (1811-1892), a builder, and Jemima Hand (1813-1904), a servant, and their marriage took place at Melbury Osmond on 22 December 1839.<sup>3</sup> Less than six months later, on 2 June 1840, Thomas Hardy was born in a cottage at Higher Bockhampton, near

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<sup>1</sup> E. Langland, “A Perspective of One's Own: Thomas Hardy and the Elusive Sue Bridehead”, *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2019, pp. 54-68, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> K. Blake, “Sue Bridehead, ‘The Woman of the Feminist Movement’”, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1978, pp. 703-726, p. 703.

<sup>3</sup> All biographical information on Thomas Hardy is taken from the following sources: D. Taylor, “Introduction”, in T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, T. Dennis (ed.), London: Penguin, (1895), 1998, pp. xvi-xxxiv. T. Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, M. Millgate (ed.), London: Macmillan, 1984. M. Millgate, *Thomas Hardy: a Biography Revisited*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. C. Watts, *Thomas Hardy; Jude the Obscure*, London: Penguin Critical Studies, 1992.

Dorchester, where the family lived for many years with Thomas's father's widowed mother and Thomas's younger siblings: Mary (1841-1915), Henry (1851-1928), and Katherine (1856-1940). Although little Thomas suffered from poor health and frequent illnesses, he manifested a certain interest in storytelling since his infancy. Thomas could read by the age of 3, a skill that was understandable given his mother's love for literature. Other elements contributing to Hardy's adult career were his grandmother and mother's country-life stories and his father's love for traditional music: "Hardy was in many respects a child of the oral tradition. He came, too, from a culture in which singing and music-making were natural forms of expression, and from a family in which music was a major preoccupation."<sup>4</sup> Like his father, Thomas played the violin and even performed at local festivities.

The first time that Thomas entered a classroom was in 1848 when the National School of his parish was established. After two years of attendance, his health was well enough to let him attend the Dorchester British School, belonging to the British and Foreign School Society. Here he studied Latin, French, mathematics, and letter writing. From 1856, he was articled to John Hicks, a Dorchester architect, thanks to whom Hardy learned architectural drawing and surveying. In the same year, he published anonymously his first piece of writing on a Dorchester paper. It was a hilarious letter written by the clock which disappeared from the town. Interestingly, by this age, it seems that Hardy had already dreamed of attending college, to then become a country parson.<sup>5</sup> In fact, during the late 1850s, he pursued self-education, adding Greek to his studies. He was also supported by figures such as the Reverend Henry Moule, eight years older than Hardy.

After six years spent at John Hicks's study, the last three of which working as his assistant, Hardy decided to move to London. Here he nourished his self-education with poetry and London's cultural influences, and he also worked for the architect Arthur Blomfield as a draughtsman. During these years, he trained for a possible place as a university student, a position that he never got. He

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<sup>4</sup> Millgate, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

also wrote his first satirical essay, “How I built Myself a House”, published in *Chamber’s Journal*. In London, he also encountered the first important woman of his life, Eliza Nicholls, whose relationship with Hardy lasted from 1863 to 1867 and may have resulted in a short engagement. It was in July 1867 that Hardy decided to abandon London and return to Dorset, due to his intellectual and physical weakness. Although he abandoned the city, he had already started to take literature seriously, to the point of making it become a fruitful occupation in less than ten years. In fact, in this same year, he wrote his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, inspired by Mrs Martin, a woman he fell in love with while living in London. The novel, written with a satirical tone, recounts the adventure of a poor architect who secretly marries a squire’s daughter. Hardy sent the work to the editor Macmillan, who praised the overall writing. Nevertheless, the novel never made publication.

Hardy’s return to Dorset was marked by two pivotal events in the author’s life: the definitive abandonment of his Cambridge dream, and the love for his 16-year-old cousin Tryphena Sparks. Although she served as a future literary reference in his cousin’s literary production, she left Dorset for a teaching career at Plymouth. On the other hand, Hardy continued his profession as an architect for his previous employer Hicks first and for Crickmay in Weymouth later. In 1870, he went to St. Juliot, in Cornwall, to work on the renovation of the Church, and there he encountered his first wife, Emma Lavinia Gifford, sister to the rector’s wife. In her recollections, she describes the meeting with these words: “Scarcely any author and his wife could have had a much more romantic meeting.”<sup>6</sup> The couple’s encounter coincides with Hardy’s increasingly serious preoccupation with his literary work, although, in the 1871 census, he still defined himself as an architect’s clerk.

In the same year, 1871, Hardy published *Desperate Remedies* in three volumes, a Victorian sensationalist melodrama that scandalised public opinion, containing, among the other unethical elements, a lesbian encounter. For these reasons, after many revisions and negotiations, Hardy’s debut novel was published anonymously by Tinsley Brothers. In 1872, Hardy published his third work, a

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<sup>6</sup> Hardy, *Life and Work*, cit., p. 71.

“short and quite rustic story” entitled *Under the Greenwood Tree: A Rural painting of the Dutch School*.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the first city novel and the second melodrama, this novel can be defined as a “splendid pastoral experiment.”<sup>8</sup> Inspired by the rural infancy of Thomas at Bockhampton, the story of Dick Dewy and Fancy Day is to be considered the first of the Wessex novels.<sup>9</sup>

The authorial voice shown in *Under the Greenwood Tree* is meant to be the basis of later Hardy’s works, including the immediately consecutive *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Hardy published the novel in 1873, after its serialisation in *Tinsleys’ Magazine*.<sup>10</sup> The story is based on Elfride, a woman contended by two suitors, who while travelling to Cornwall to demonstrate their love, do not know that the very same train carries Elfride’s coffin too. The novel’s heroine was mainly inspired by Hardy’s future wife Emma. Indeed, during the years preceding their marriage, Hardy was fondly in love with Emma: “Hardy, bookish, reticent, socially, and sexually insecure, was overwhelmed by Emma’s good looks, by her physical and nervous energy, and by the kind of fey charm – naïve yet by no means unselfconscious – later attributed to Elfride Swancourt.”<sup>11</sup>

Thomas and Emma married in September 1874 in London, during the last stages of the writing of the work that brought Hardy to finally abandon his previous work as an architect’s clerk, and fully devote himself to literature. Indeed, in his marriage register, he specified his occupation as an author. Consequently, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, previously serialised in the *Cornhill Magazine*, was published in November 1874 in two volumes. Distancing itself from the previous works connected to *The Poor Man and the Lady*,<sup>12</sup> this is the first novel in which Hardy explicitly talks about Wessex, through the filter of his infancy rural memories. It is also the very first novel that secures him further popularity in the literary realm. Once the novel was published, editors requested more work from

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> From now on, Hardy’s serialisation of his works before any publication as volumes was a standard. Especially once he became an affirmed novelist, he could earn from many sources writing one novel only: its serialisation, its publication, and its possible dramatization, both in America and Great Britain.

<sup>11</sup> Millgate, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

Hardy, and the author could finally live from his passion: “for mere popularity he cared little, as little as he did for large payments; but having now to live by the pen – or, as he would quote, ‘to keep base life afoot’ – he had to consider popularity.”<sup>13</sup>

In this way, in 1876, Hardy published *The Hand of Ethelberta*, a middle-class novel on urban life previously serialised in the *Cornhill Magazine*. Subsequently, in 1878, *The Return of the Native* was published, after its serialisation in *Belgravia*. Interestingly, this novel approaches dark themes that characterise Hardy’s late authorial voice, defined for this novel as “gloomy fatalism.”<sup>14</sup> It is also to be considered that this novel might be the pessimistic product of two great issues in Hardy’s life: his lifelong friend Horace Moule’s suicide in 1873, and the quick deterioration of his own health and of his relationship with his wife Emma, whom he never divorced, but with whom he had an overall unhappy and childless marriage. Nevertheless, he kept producing. In 1880, he published *The Trumpet Major*, serialised in *Good Words*, and in 1881, *A Laodicean* came out, serialised in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. The latter’s main body was written by Emma and dictated by a suffering Hardy, almost dying because of internal bleeding. Having overcome the illness, in 1882, *Two on a Tower* was published, previously serialised in *Atlantic Monthly*.

### **2.1.2. Later Life and Works: the Climax and End of Hardy’s Authorial Voice**

If during their first years of marriage the Hardys moved a few times between London and Dorchester, in 1885 they made a final return to the countryside. Here, they moved to Max Gate, a Victorian mansion built outside Dorchester by Hardy’s father, whose building activity became highly popular by that time. What emerges from this is Hardy’s impossibility to cut the connection between his land, Dorchester, and himself. As it is going to be seen, Hardy’s entire literary production finds its roots in his rural background and experiences, taking life in many autobiographical elements to be found in his work. Indeed, it is literature to which Hardy entirely dedicated his life once finally

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<sup>13</sup> Hardy, *Life and Work*, cit., p. 105.

<sup>14</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 14.

established at Max Gate. In this way, in 1886 Hardy published *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, a novel formerly serialised in *Graphic* and a portrait of mid-century Dorchester. This novel is also a key element in Hardy's literary development and authorial independence, as it represents "an entirely conscious choice of story, setting, and treatment, those levels of achievement at which he had more spontaneously arrived in the finest of his early works" and "the foundation" of his final novels.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in 1887, he published *The Woodlanders*, serialised in *Macmillan's Magazine*. Particularly for this novel, Hardy relied on his mother's account of her childhood at Melbury Osmond. Later, in 1888 and 1891, Hardy published two collections of short stories *Wessex Tales* and *A Group of Noble Dames*.

In 1891, Hardy's second collection of stories was completely overshadowed by another work published in the same year: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Previously serialised in *Graphic*, the novel had to be highly censored for the immoral themes that its author treated. Hence, when preparing for its volume publication, "Hardy spent a good deal of time in August and the autumn correcting *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* for its volume form, which process consisted in restoring to their places the passages and chapters of the original MS. that had been omitted from the serial publication."<sup>16</sup> Among the alterations for *Graphic*, Hardy deleted Tess's rape, her illegitimate child and Angel's carrying of the dairymaids in his arms.<sup>17</sup> These elements were the most discussed when revealed in the work's volume publication, together with the novel's subtitle: "A pure Woman." Notwithstanding all the criticism, Tess made Hardy even more popular both in the social and literary fields. As Cedric Watts underlines, in the successive forty years from its publication, the novel was translated into Italian, French, Dutch, German, Russian, and Polish, and it was reprinted around forty times in England only.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Millgate, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>16</sup> Hardy, *Life and Work*, cit., p. 250.

<sup>17</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Following *Tess*'s scandalous publication, in 1892 Hardy only published a serialised version of *The Well-Beloved* in the *Illustrated London News*. Important to Hardy's personal life, that year marked the death of his beloved father, to whom he paid daily visits during his last period of life. Also, this year marked a severe decline to estrangement in his relationship with his wife Emma. On the other hand, while the Hardys' marriage grew into a catastrophe, Thomas had the chance to meet Florence Henniker, a society woman, and a writer herself with whom in the following years Hardy had a close personal and professional relationship. As stated by both, they never exchanged a single kiss, although they once clasped their hands. In the same period, between 1892 and 1893, Hardy published another minor work, *Our Exploits at West Poley*, a long story for boys, published in the *Household*. Later in 1894, another collection of tales, *Life's Little Ironies*, saw the light. However, it was in 1895, after four years of quietness from *Tess*, that Hardy came back scandalously with the publication of *Jude the Obscure*, which treated "pre-marital sex, live-in relationships, adultery, illegitimate children and divorce."<sup>19</sup>

Equally to *Tess*'s reception, *Jude the Obscure* was both acclaimed and criticised by critics and readers from all parts of the world. Although this work will be more widely discussed later in this chapter, it is essential to note that *Jude* marks an end to Hardy's novelistic career. In fact, afterwards, in 1896, Hardy published the first collected edition of the Wessex novels, including the first edition of *Jude*. Later, in 1897, he published the volume edition of the already serialised *The Well-Beloved*. Temporally with this novel, but theoretically with *Jude*, Hardy's thirty-years novelistic career ended. He then dedicated himself to poetry, which was his first love, and which gave more freedom of speech to its author, according to Hardy. Among his most important works of the period, we can mention *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901), *A Changed Man and Other Tales* (a collection of short stories, 1913), *The Dynasts* (an epic drama in verse published from 1904 to 1914 in four parts), and *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall* (a play, 1923). The last years of his life were

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<sup>19</sup> S. R. Choudhury, "Thomas Hardy's 'Bachelor Girl' Through a Transcultural Lens", *The Hardy Society Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2015, pp. 36-42, p. 36.

constellated by death and change. In 1912, his wife Emma died. She had been estranged from 1898 but continued to live at Max Gate until her death. Two years later, Hardy married his assistant Florence Dugdale. In 1915 his sister Mary died. Notwithstanding Hardy's family tragedies, he had the chance to be socially and academically acknowledged for his lifelong work. In 1910, he was awarded the Order of Merit, after having refused a knighthood. Moreover, while he could not make it to college as a young man, he later received five honorary degrees from the Universities of Aberdeen (1905), Cambridge (1913), Oxford (1920), St Andrew's (1922), and Bristol (1925).<sup>20</sup>

On 11 January 1928, Thomas Hardy died. His heart was buried in Emma's grave in Dorchester, his ashes in Westminster Abbey. This last gesture is symptomatic of Hardy's attachment to his land and family, a key element that is central in each of his works.

### **2.1.3. *Jude The Obscure***

On 28 April 1888, Thomas Hardy noted in his journal the idea of a short story about a young man who cannot make it to college. It took Hardy seven years from that original idea to create what we now know as *Jude the Obscure*. Initially serialised between December 1894 and December 1895 in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in America, and *Harper's Monthly Magazine* in Great Britain, the volume edition was first published in December 1895. Even in this case, Hardy had to undergo several changes in order to make the story appropriate for a "family magazine"<sup>21</sup>, as *Harper's* was. Particularly, he drastically reduced sexuality, especially if shown outside of marriage. Once published as a volume, the story was repristinated according to Hardy's original intention (subsequently, the novel was later majorly altered in the 1903 and 1912 editions). *Jude the Obscure* was an immediate selling success, as from its first publication to 1929, the novel sold around 130,000 copies in Britain only. However, it sparked controversy too.

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<sup>20</sup> M. Ray, "Hardy's First Honorary Degree", *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1995, pp. 33-42, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 53.



Not surprisingly, the novel received a harsher reception than *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, being called “Jude the Obscene” by *The Pall Mall Gazette*, and appearing in Margaret Oliphant’s Anti-Marriage League. Particularly, the journalist’s 1895 article published in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* accuses Hardy of downfall after the herculean and noble success in depicting the two-times fallen Tess as a pure woman.<sup>22</sup> In opposition to *Tess*, instead, *Jude* is characterised by “grossness, indecency, and horror.”<sup>23</sup> Principally accused of desecrating the institution of marriage, Hardy explains in a letter to his friend Edmund Gosse that his one and only intention is to represent “[firstly] the labours of a poor student to get a University Degree, & secondly [...] the tragic issues of two bad marriages, owing in the main to a doom or curse of hereditary temperament peculiar to the family of the parties” to then underline that “[his] own views are not expressed therein.”<sup>24</sup> Not only Hardy’s ideals, but also his personal life are declared not to have inspired the work. This is how Hardy’s second wife is “instructed” to answer to questions related to the topic: “to your enquiry if *Jude the Obscure* is autobiographical, I have to answer that there is not a scrap of personal detail in it, having the least to do with his own life of all his books.”<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, although Hardy strenuously declared that the story of his “poor puppet”<sup>26</sup> does not concern nor is it inspired by his life, it can be thought that this novel is possibly the most autobiographical in Hardy’s production.<sup>27</sup>

Hardy’s Wessex is “partly real, partly dream-country,”<sup>28</sup> meaning that Hardy’s inspirations for his fictional places are taken from what he lived throughout his life, that is the Dorchester countryside. Particularly, many of the cities populating Wessex do not retain any fictional element but their own name. Famously in *Jude*, Hardy’s Christminster is Oxford, Shaston is Shaftesbury, Alfredston is Wantage, and so on. Interestingly, Marygreen, Jude and Aunt Drusilla’s village, is

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<sup>22</sup> M. Oliphant, “The Anti-Marriage League”, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 1896, pp. 135-149, p.138.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> T. Hardy, *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy. Volume Two: 1893-1901*, R. Purdy Little and M. Millgate (eds.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, cit., p. 93.

<sup>27</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> Millgate, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

inspired by Fawley, the village where Hardy's grandmother lived, which also stands as the name of Jude's family. Furthermore, unlike other novels, Hardy's autobiographical elements go beyond minor narrative details but represent the main trait of the protagonists and the novel's themes. For instance, Sue's character is possibly inspired by Tryphena Sparks, the teacher cousin to Hardy with whom he fell in love as a young man, and for whom he received the same warnings as Jude on the matter of marrying a cousin.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, analysing Sue's full name, Susanna Florence Mary Bridehead, it is possible to notice two references: the first to Florence Henniker,<sup>30</sup> and the second to Mary Hardy, his sister. Finally, Sue's intellectual regression throughout the novel could be associated with Emma Hardy's path from agnostic to highly religious.<sup>31</sup>

The protagonist Jude, and his desecrating coming-of-age path, are highly reminiscent of Hardy himself. Hardy and Jude are two men from the countryside, Hardy belonging to a builders' family and working on the renovation of Gothic churches during his years as an architect's clerk; Jude choosing to be a stonemason and being the one who psychically renovates ancient churches. Both pursue self-study, in order to be admitted one day to their dream colleges: Oxford, and its fictional rendition, Christminster. Both, however, go through rejection and soon abandon their aspirations to be graduates and successively curates. Moreover, if Jude lives two bad marriages, Hardy lives the majority of his life in an unhappy marriage with his first wife Emma. Given all the personal influences that can be discovered in *Jude*, it is indeed possible to state that

the ideological tensions and conflicts which energize the novel derive so evidently from Hardy's personal experience of class conflict and injustice, of religious aspiration and disillusionment, of the moral hypocrisies and double standards in late Victorian England, and of "a deadly war between flesh and spirit."<sup>32</sup>

Hardy's ideals and experiences, which clearly reside in his work, make it a novel that takes "moral and political courage"<sup>33</sup> to write, and at the same time enters the realm of pessimism.

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<sup>29</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> "As Hardy once acknowledged in a conversation with Edmund Clodd, Mrs Henniker was his most immediate 'model' for Sue Bridehead, especially in her elusive and teasing phases." Millgate, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

<sup>31</sup> Millgate, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

<sup>32</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

*Jude*'s protagonists live a life of what could be defined as a disgrace. Depicted as two "unconventional lives,"<sup>34</sup> Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead want to reach an ideal that is nowhere to be approachable for them, and in their experiences, they cross paths with one another and other characters' misfortunes too. The end does not leave any trace of hope as there is none for humanity. In this way, *Jude*, together with *Tess*, is the first example of what Enrica Villari calls the "modern tragedy," where limited human will and modern external forces act conjointly on a person and sanction their end.<sup>35</sup> Seeing Hardy's artistic intentions from this perspective, it could be argued that he was a pessimist. Nonetheless, as Cedric Watts underlines, "he simply served the truth, he claimed; and if the truth he recorded seemed frequently to be tragic, it did not follow that he was unaware of a 'contrasting side of things.'"<sup>36</sup> In fact, Hardy had no intention of making up more misfortune than it was to be found in real life. Contrarily, he wanted to show how Jude and Sue's "tragedy"<sup>37</sup> could reflect that of real people in his own time: "the tragedy is really addressed to those into whose souls the iron of adversity has deeply entered at some time of their lives, & can hardly be congenial to self-indulgent persons of ease & affluence."<sup>38</sup>

*Jude*, then, is "a novel which 'makes for' humanity,"<sup>39</sup> and which contains a bestiary of restless humans torn between an inhibiting past and future aspirations. In this frame, Hardy places and analyses the daughter of modernity, Sue, a New Woman, by relocating her from the New Woman's "theoretical debate" to the tragic reality of modern life.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, cit., p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> "Tragico moderno", my translation. E. Villari, "La fatale ostilità tra carne e spirito. Paganesimo, cristianesimo e tragico moderno in 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' e 'Jude the Obscure'", in P. Tortonese (ed.), *Il Paganesimo nella letteratura dell'Ottocento*, 2009, pp. 205-228, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, cit., p. 91.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> W. A. Davis, Jr., "Reading Failure in(to) 'Jude the Obscure': Hardy's Sue Bridehead and Lady Jeune's 'New Woman' Essays, 1885-1900", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1998, pp. 53-70, p. 66.

## 2.2. “This Sue Story”:<sup>41</sup> the New Woman Perspective in *Jude the Obscure*

On 15 January 1894, in a letter to Florence Henniker, Hardy writes: “I am creeping on a little with the long story, & am beginning to get interested in my heroine as she takes shape & reality.”<sup>42</sup> Clearly, Hardy was fascinated by Sue since the beginning of his work on *Jude*, to the point that, more than one year later, while working on the novel’s volume publication, Hardy wrote once again to his confidant Henniker: “curiously enough I am more interested in this Sue story than in any I have written.”<sup>43</sup> In fact, although the story was conceived to have one main protagonist, Jude, who was divided between two women and two very different types of marriage, one of these women emerged from Hardy’s original plan while writing the work to become a “cohesive character”, proving to be narratively equal to Jude.<sup>44</sup> In the next section, I shall address the question of whether Sue is a literary New Woman or not, her representation in the novel, and to what extent this character is a Wessex creation rather than a New Woman product.

### 2.2.1. Sue, the Wessex’s New Woman

A major common thread in Hardy’s Wessex novels is certainly the depiction of the heroines of the stories. Represented as strong and independent women, the very elements that remove them from the canonical Victorian feminine,<sup>45</sup> they are all involved in “issues of femininity, love, sex, and marriage.”<sup>46</sup> For instance, Bathsheba, Hardy’s “first non-conformist heroine” from *Far From the Madding Crowd* demands to decide on her matrimonial life;<sup>47</sup> Grace, from *The Woodlanders*, and Tess embody the critique of “society’s debilitating version of womanhood,”<sup>48</sup> Eustacia, from *The Return of the Native*, exploits and explores her sexual freedom.<sup>49</sup> Sue Bridehead equally belongs to

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<sup>41</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, cit., p. 84.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> A. Chattopadhyay, “Woman in Victorian Society as Depicted in Thomas Hardy’s Novels”, *International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2011, pp. 23-28, p. 27.

<sup>46</sup> S. N. Saleh, P. Abbasi, “The Ideological Questions of Marriage in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*”, *Kata*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2015, pp. 49-57, p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> P. Stubbs, *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920*, Bristol: Methuen, 1979, p. 80.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

this group of unconventional women, giving the last and possibly the best-known example of the feminine struggle against marriage and its patriarchal consequences on women. Hence, one of the ways to treat the character of Sue is specifically that of the New Woman.

Surely, Hardy was not a New Woman novelist. Nevertheless, he was highly sympathetic to women and their causes,<sup>50</sup> as it is possible to understand from his earlier works and his preoccupations with women's sexual freedom and marriage. Most importantly, he was in contact with authors or read works from the New Woman fiction, possibly being influenced to some degree. In this way, he read *The Heavenly Twins* and later met its author, Sarah Grand;<sup>51</sup> in a letter to Henniker, he makes clear that he knows "Miss Dowie (Mrs Norman) author of 'Gallia' the 'Girl in the Carpathians' &c;"<sup>52</sup> and a copy of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* was part of his library at Max Gate, with his autograph on the title.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, once *Jude* came out as a volume, Hardy sustained correspondence with Chavelita Clairmonte, namely George Egerton in the New Woman fiction: Hardy read *Keynotes*, and Egerton read the newly published *Jude*. The New Woman author described Hardy's heroine with these words:

Sue is a marvellous true psychological study of a temperament less rare than the ordinary male observer supposes. I am not sure that she is not the most intuitively drawn of all your wonderful women. I love her, because she lives – and I say again, thank you, for her.<sup>54</sup>

Such detailed analysis of Hardy's heroine is a key element in the positioning of Sue within the New woman realm, as it is especially Egerton who stresses the importance that New Woman fiction must put in its heroines' psyches. Similarly, revealing is also Hardy's reply to Egerton, describing his heroine as "a type of woman, comparatively common & getting commoner,"<sup>55</sup> possibly hinting at the woman Egerton was an expert in, namely the New Woman, who in those years reached her highest peak of popularity becoming, indeed, common. It is to be concluded, then, that Hardy was surely

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<sup>50</sup> Nigel, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>51</sup> Davis, "Reading Failure", *cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, *cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>53</sup> S. Dutta, "Sue's 'Obscure' Sisters", *The Thomas Hardy's Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1996, pp. 60-71, p. 64.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>55</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, *cit.*, p. 102.

influenced by the New Woman fiction of his time, and that Sue's inspiration comes from a certain literary type, that is, the feminist symbolic woman of the period.<sup>56</sup>

However, inspiration is not enough, and Hardy's plan for *Jude* was not that of remaining within the boundaries of the typical New Woman novel. In this way, if a categorisation of the entire novel as a New Woman fiction product is not correct, an association with it is more than plausible.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Sue's starting point in the novel is as a "surely motivated" New Woman.<sup>58</sup> However, her psychological development and the greater frame that Hardy builds around her projects the character into a wider world, making her a narrative instrument in the hand of Hardy's "iconoclastic voice."<sup>59</sup> "This Sue's story," then, must not be intended, once again, as a New Woman story, but as a Wessex one, comprehending a New Woman, sister to the Hardy heroines who precede her.

The first revealing element that brings the reader to see Sue not as a singled out main character, but as a part of something greater is by seeing her through Hardy's set of opposites. As Hardy explains in a letter to Edmund Gosse, "the book is all contrasts [...], e.g. Sue & her heathen gods set against Jude's reading of the Greek Testt; Christminster academical, Chr in the slums; Jude the saint, Jude the sinner; Sue the Pagan, Sue the saint; marriage, no marriage; &c. &c."<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, in this letter, Hardy highlights Sue's contrasts, as well as Jude's, implicitly putting them in the position of main characters of the novel. Nevertheless, the duality and therefore the complexity of Sue's character comes after the original intention that Hardy had with her, which was to make her Jude's feminine counterpart in the novel, while Arabella represented the other opposite half. "Contrasted yet complementary,"<sup>61</sup> Arabella and Sue complete Jude's double nature: "the fleshy and the spiritual."<sup>62</sup> Particularly, Arabella is described as a "complete and substantial female human – no more, no less,"<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 704.

<sup>57</sup> H. Shin, "The New Woman's Predicament in The Story of an African Farm and Jude the Obscure", *Feminist Studies in English Literature*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2012, pp. 91-115, p. 92.

<sup>58</sup> Davis, "Reading Failure", *cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>59</sup> R. Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, p. xv.

<sup>60</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, *cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>61</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, *cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>62</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>63</sup> T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, T. Dennis (ed.), London: Penguin, (1895), 1998, p. 39.

whose main role in the narration is to awaken Jude's "animal passion."<sup>64</sup> Her lowness is hinted at by Hardy the very first time she meets Jude – by throwing the slaughtered pig's genitalia at him<sup>65</sup>– and their first outing, where her laugh is described as "the low and triumphant laugh of a careless woman who sees she is winning her game."<sup>66</sup> Telling is also an element of artificiality proper of her: throughout the novel, she practices her fake dimples<sup>67</sup> to result more attractive to men; moreover, she uses fake hair, always described hanging from the looking glass.<sup>68</sup> Thus, if on the one hand, Arabella stands as the careless woman, who exploits men and tends towards artificiality, on the other we are presented with Sue, whose main preoccupations are intellectual.

Sue's first description in the novel comes through a photograph that Aunt Drusilla gives to Jude before heading to Christminster. Once in the city, Jude first sees her at the Anglican bookshop where she works. Unlike with Arabella, the narrator does not focus on her body, or sexual potential, but only on her prettiness.<sup>69</sup> In fact, Sue's sexual traits are hidden for the majority of the first encounters, letting her intellect emerge, instead. In this way, Sue's first impression is a clear and stereotypical example of a New Woman.<sup>70</sup> Coming from the countryside but socially grown in the city, she is "an urban miss"<sup>71</sup> among the few middle-class female individuals showing "wit and independence."<sup>72</sup> Additionally, she lives alone and earns her own living working in a bookshop. Furthermore, she is "naturally intelligent and interested in ideas."<sup>73</sup> After she leaves school, she studies with an undergraduate she lives with for almost two years; afterwards, at Christminster, she teaches at Phillotson's school, and later she enters the Training College at Melchester to pursue her

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-40, 60.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 58, 269.

<sup>69</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., pp. 78, 88.

<sup>70</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>71</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 139.

<sup>72</sup> Z. Linde, "Intended by nature to Be Left Intact": an Asexual Reading of Jude the Obscure", *The Thomas Hardy Journal*, vol. 27, 2012, pp. 81-88, p. 81.

<sup>73</sup> C. Watts, "Hardy's Sue Bridehead and the 'New Woman'", *Critical Survey*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1993, pp. 152-156, p. 154.

career as a teacher. Oftentimes, she is depicted having intellectual debates with Jude, and in one conversation with him, she describes her studies:

I don't know Latin and Greek, though I know the grammars of those tongues. But I know most of the Greek and Latin classics through translations, and other books too. I read Lemprière, Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Lucian, Beaumont and Fletcher, Boccaccio, Scarron, De Brantôme, Sterne, De Foe, Smollett, Fielding, Shakespeare, the Bible, and other such.<sup>74</sup>

Additionally, in a scene with his friend Gillingham, the schoolmaster Phillotson laments: "I can't answer her arguments – she has read ten times as much as I. Her intellect sparks like diamonds, while mine smoulders like brown paper."<sup>75</sup>

Sue's intelligence also serves to channel the other main characteristic of the New Woman type, namely, the revolt against conventions. Described as a "nonconforming spirit,"<sup>76</sup> and "the sceptical voice of the present age,"<sup>77</sup> Sue rejects all sorts of social constrictions that Victorian society reserved for women. Particularly, Sue opposes to any sort of social dictation derived from religion, whose core in the novel is to be found at Christminster. Her "simmering revolt against traditions"<sup>78</sup> is well explained in a passage in which she divides the intellectual Christminster from the religious one:

I have no respect for Christminster whatsoever, except, in a qualified degree, on its intellectual side. [...] And intellect at Christminster is new wine in old bottles. The mediævalism of Christminster must go, be sloughed off, or Christminster itself will have to go.<sup>79</sup>

In this way, Sue's revolt covers every aspect of human life which in some ways is influenced by religion, it being knowledge, as it has been seen, or, more widely, marriage.

As it is going to be further analysed, Sue's idea of the relationship between men and women does not involve the social constriction of marriage, regulated by the Church. In fact, throughout the novel, Sue repetitively opposes the "sordid conditions of a business contract"<sup>80</sup> as, in her opinion, no

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<sup>74</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 147.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>76</sup> Shin, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>77</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>78</sup> E. L. Knauer, "Unconscious Sue? Selfishness and Manipulation in 'Jude the Obscure'", *The Hardy Review*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2009, pp. 41-51, pp. 44-45.

<sup>79</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 150.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 286.



contract should dictate whom to love and for how much time. In this way, while in a romantic relationship with Jude, Sue says: “I think I should be afraid of you, Jude, the moment you had contracted to cherish me under a Government stamp, and I was licensed to be loved on the premises by you – Ugh, how horrible and sordid!”<sup>81</sup> It is freedom, then, that Sue seeks in her life, and neither being a wife nor a mother could help her reach her objective.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, this is the reason why Sue wants to escape the matrimonial trap she finds herself in with Richard Phillotson. If, to him, Sue is “committing a sin in not liking [him],”<sup>83</sup> Sue, follows her own moral dictates, campaigning against the matrimonial duties in a “rigorous, radical, militant” way.<sup>84</sup> Logically, Phillotson embodies the conventions Sue rejects, as once back at Christminster with Jude and their children, Sue sees Phillotson and says: “I felt a curious dread of him; an awe, or terror, of conventions I don’t believe in.”<sup>85</sup>

Particularly, Sue’s rejection of traditions is not political and does not involve the social panorama whatsoever.<sup>86</sup> Contrarily, Sue works on controlling her personal choice, her “As I choose”<sup>87</sup> and, as Gail Cunningham stresses, the fictional New Woman acts in her life in the same way, by operating on personal choices and avoiding political matters.<sup>88</sup> As a result, by denying social conventions, Sue willingly decides to live as an outcasted. In a conversation with Jude, it is the same Sue who does not include herself in society:

- You called me a creature of civilization, or something, didn’t you? [...] It was very odd you should have done that.
- Why?
- Well, because it is provokingly wrong. I am a sort of negation of it.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>82</sup> W. Deresiewicz, “Thomas Hardy and the History of Friendship Between the Sexes”, *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 38, no. 1/2, 2007, pp. 56-63, p. 60.

<sup>83</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 223.

<sup>84</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 329.

<sup>86</sup> Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 704.

<sup>87</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 223.

<sup>88</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 147.

Not surprisingly, the New Woman's exclusion from civilization is a central theme in the New Woman fiction, as seen in the first chapter of this thesis. However, it is interesting how it is the same Sue who willingly excludes herself from society, almost reflecting the ideas promoted by the New Woman's critic Lady Jeune, a close friend of Hardy's, and a probable source of inspiration for him.<sup>90</sup>

It is to be concluded that although Sue's first impression contains some New Woman stereotypical elements, her characterisation goes beyond this general view made in this section. As Kathleen Blake maintains, "Sue Bridehead is a free woman but a repressive personality, sophisticated but infantile, passionate but sexless, independent but needing men, unconventional but conventional, a feminist but a flirt."<sup>91</sup> In other words, throughout the whole novel, Sue shows a duality which is representative of both Hardy's original idea of the story and Sue's own inconsistency as a character. Therefore, in the next section, I analyse the reasons for Sue's inconsistency and the effects on the character.

### **2.2.2. An "Opaque"<sup>92</sup> Sue through the Masculine Perspective**

In her article "The Anti-Marriage League", Margaret Oliphant sees Sue's transgression as "more indecent" than Arabella's behaviour,<sup>93</sup> referring to Sue's trespassing of Hardy's contemporary standards of decency. Indeed, if Hardy's intention of describing Arabella's type of common woman is fulfilled, the author's work on Sue presents some weaker spots in correlation with her character's duality and the reasons behind it. In this way, if at the beginning of the novel the reader is presented with a convinced New Woman heroine, an outsider, a fighter for her independence, at the end of the novel she subverts her beliefs to live an "unexpected invocation of convention."<sup>94</sup> In between this major change, which, as I shall argue, equally involves Jude, the representation of Sue's psyche and

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<sup>90</sup> Davis, "Irréconciliables" cit., p. 71. In his article "Reading Failure in(to) Jude the Obscure" William Davis analyses the relationship between Sue's actions in the novel and Lady Jeune's New Woman. Interestingly, both Lady Jeune and Hardy depict a New Woman whose personal decisions lose over nature, as in the case of Sue's pregnancies. Davis, "Reading Failure", cit., p. 58.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 706.

<sup>92</sup> P. Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form*, Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982, p. 147.

<sup>93</sup> Oliphant, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>94</sup> Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 720.

motivation for her behaviour is too weak to support what Jude calls Sue's "colossal inconsistency."<sup>95</sup> In other words, the reader does not have access to Sue's mind.

The most significant episode in which the reader gets to know Sue from a closer perspective is during her walk through the countryside of Christminster, where she purchases the statuettes of Venus and Apollo.<sup>96</sup> Besides being a telling episode of her pagan, Hellenic attitude, as opposed to Jude's medievalism,<sup>97</sup> this scene involves an exceptionally alone Sue. Thus, once she buys the figures, the narrator comments: "she began to be concerned as to what she would do with them. They seemed so very large now that they were in her possession, and so very naked. Being of a nervous temperament she trembled at her enterprise."<sup>98</sup> Reading this scene, it is possible to draw two considerations. Firstly, this episode is pivotal in the frame of Sue's initial presentation to the reader, especially given that it does not involve Jude's perspective, unlike her previous appearances.<sup>99</sup> Secondly, although the narrator is omniscient,<sup>100</sup> it is not possible to read Sue's mind anyway. In fact, the narrator lets us know that Sue is of a trembling temperament, however, he does not present us with any inner thought that could demonstrate this. It is to be noticed, then, that Sue's mind is somehow filtered and partially accessible. A possible reason for this is Hardy's original intention with Sue, as she was meant to be a second character,<sup>101</sup> as opposed to Arabella. A second possible reason, which, in my view, does not exclude the former, is that the narrator withholds a relatively masculine perspective, primarily led by Jude's conscience.<sup>102</sup>

Sue, then, is never fully revealed to the reader, as "she is constantly distanced from the novel's centre of consciousness by the careful manipulation of points of view."<sup>103</sup> In this way, the main gaze

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<sup>95</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 175.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>97</sup> Shin, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>98</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 94.

<sup>99</sup> The scenes deal with Sue as depicted: in a photograph, in the shop, and at church. Hardy, *Jude*, cit., pp. 78, 88, 91

<sup>100</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>103</sup> Boumelha, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

from which we see Sue is that of Jude, who relegates her to “a fiction of his own making.”<sup>104</sup> In fact, from the first time, Jude sees Sue in a photograph, and then in person, he idealises her and her actions to the point that the flesh and bones character vanishes from the reader’s perspective. Particularly, throughout the novel, Sue is in Jude’s eyes, an “ideal character,”<sup>105</sup> whose image prevents Jude from seeing the bodily creature that is the real Sue. Therefore, following Jude’s religiosity, Sue is represented as “a kindly star, an elevating power,”<sup>106</sup> “a divinity,”<sup>107</sup> “a seraph of heaven,”<sup>108</sup> and “a guardian angel.”<sup>109</sup> Given Jude’s religious attitude in describing Sue, not only do we see Sue as “what [he] thinks she is,”<sup>110</sup> but we also see her stripped of her main bodily feature, which is sexuality.<sup>111</sup> Hence, after having spent a night with his former wife Arabella and seeing Sue as “so ethereal a creature,” Jude “felt heartily ashamed of his earthliness in spending the hours he had spent in Arabella’s company.”<sup>112</sup> Later in the novel, once they live together, Jude explains to Sue: “But you, Sue, are such a phantasmal, bodiless creature, one who – if you’ll allow me to say it – has so little animal passion in you.”<sup>113</sup> In a few words, to Jude, and therefore to the reader, Sue is “the most ethereal, least sensual woman [he] ever knew.”<sup>114</sup>

Following Jude’s prominent perspective on Sue, the reader depends on his interpretation of her which, as it has been seen, is biased. Consequently, “Sue’s consciousness is opaque, filtered as it is through the interpretations of Jude, with all attendant incomprehensions and distortions.”<sup>115</sup> This way, if Jude does not understand the flash-and-bones Sue, then she is described as a “riddle,”<sup>116</sup> and “a lovely conundrum.”<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, if Sue does not satisfy Jude’s “assumptions about her nature

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<sup>104</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>110</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>111</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>112</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>115</sup> Boumelha, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.

<sup>116</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, pp. 135, 229.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

and her beliefs,”<sup>118</sup> she is then depicted as a perverse enemy.<sup>119</sup> In this way, the narrator describes a “perverseness that [is] part of her;”<sup>120</sup> she is also described as “cruelly sweet” to Jude;<sup>121</sup> she is accused of being “incapable of real love.”<sup>122</sup> Then, not only is the real Sue hidden from the reader’s understanding but she is also made “the instrument of Jude’s tragedy, rather than the subject of her own.”<sup>123</sup> By doing so, the narrator shifts the attention from Sue’s individuality to her female nature, generalising Sue’s decisions and behaviour through the lenses of sex.<sup>124</sup> This generalisation of Sue’s guilt is exploited also from Phillotson’s point of view: “what precise shade of satisfaction was to be gathered from *a* woman’s gratitude that *the* man who loved her had not been often to see her?”<sup>125</sup> As Elizabeth Langland points out, in Phillotson’s reasoning, Sue is generalised into the category “woman,” implying that Sue’s behaviour and perverseness are common to women; whereas Phillotson remains himself as he is “the man.”<sup>126</sup> It can be derived that starting from the biased perspective of the omniscient narrator, given by the obtrusive filter of Jude’s idealisation, *Jude* shows “a series of expectations” that male characters have on women.<sup>127</sup>

This section has dealt with the problem of Sue’s interiority not being totally accessible to the reader. Indeed, Jude’s perspective is highly responsible for this narrative choice, as, originally, Sue was meant to be only a secondary character dependent upon Jude’s story. However, if Sue’s character exceptionally evolves throughout the story, her representation remains shadowed by Jude’s perspective, this being the product of the collision between Jude’s carnal love for Sue, and his simultaneous idealisation and elevation of the heroine. As a result, the reader is not able to meet the real Sue, whose construction is further distorted by the pressure applied to female nature, intended to

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<sup>118</sup> J. R. Doheny, “The Characteristics of Jude and Sue: the Myth and the Reality”, in Mallett, Phillip (ed.), *Thomas Hardy: Texts and Contexts*, New York: Palgrave, 2002, pp. 110-132, p. 112.

<sup>119</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>120</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>123</sup> Boumelha, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>124</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>125</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 161. My emphasis.

<sup>126</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>127</sup> Davis, “Reading Failure”, *cit.*, p. 58.

be the cause of Sue's inconsistency.<sup>128</sup> Consequently, Sue shows the impossibility of "liberating herself from male expectations without repressing her sexuality."<sup>129</sup> This is going to be inspected in the following section.

### 2.2.3. Sue's Sexuality: Frigidity or Freedom?

As it has been seen, the construction of the character of Sue is the result of a layered masculine perspective: the one of Jude, and the one of the omniscient narrator. It can be argued that this biased representation of the woman in the novel takes away what the female protagonist strives to do during the story, that is living by following her own conscience and choice, or, in other words, being a New Woman. Thus, using Penny Boumelha's words to define Hardy's choice with Sue's representation, "Sue Bridehead [is] an illustration of Hardy's pessimism about women's attempts to defy the inexorable, 'natural' limitations of their sex."<sup>130</sup> This "anxiety about female sexuality"<sup>131</sup> in Hardy's writing has been detected by many critics in the course of time, and it has led them to categorise Sue's sexual behaviour mainly as frigidity.

As many critics notice, Sue's inconsistency is related to her frigidity. Elizabeth Langland talks about the many psychological interpretations of the character as "masochistic, narcissistic, frigid, or hysterical;"<sup>132</sup> Rosemary Morgan sees Sue as the least sexual heroine in Hardy's novels as an intention of the author to share a serious feminist message, and to appoint Sue as its spokesperson.<sup>133</sup> Kathleen Blake sees "the feminism by which Sue frees her brilliant individuality" as the cause of her frigidity.<sup>134</sup> More drastically, Zane Linde defines Sue's behaviour as a symptom of asexuality, underlining that Sue's "reaction to sex is innate and not the result of a rebellion against the existing system."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Shin, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

<sup>129</sup> T.R. Wright, *Hardy and the Erotic*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1989, p. 120.

<sup>130</sup> Boumelha, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>131</sup> Stubbs, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>132</sup> Langland, *op. cit.* p. 58.

<sup>133</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>134</sup> Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 704.

<sup>135</sup> Linde, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

From a New Woman's point of view, the channel of sexuality was widely exploited by the New Woman authors to share the discontent of a gender constantly pressured by society. In this way, sexual abstinence, as well as sexual freedom were an expression of the New Woman's discontent: "some emancipated women (like Mona Caird and Olive Schreiner) advocated free sexual union, while others (like Kathlyn Oliver and Christabel Pankhurst) advocated rigorous sexual abstinence."<sup>136</sup> Therefore, it could be derived that Sue perfectly fits the New Woman sexual category. Nevertheless, in this regard, Hardy does not give Sue's sexuality a precise direction to follow, let alone a reason for her discontinuous behaviour. Instead, Sue lives a constant struggle between frigidity, determined by her feminism and the "peril of the 'femaleness that breaks her.'"<sup>137</sup> Thus, on the one hand, Sue's "flesh [quivers] under the touch of [Phillotson's] lips,"<sup>138</sup> "a wild look of aversion [passes] over her face"<sup>139</sup> once the schoolmaster kisses her, and "depression [seats] upon her features" the morning after she yields to Jude.<sup>140</sup> On the other hand, at Father Time's question on why she has so many children she replies "I can't help it,"<sup>141</sup> suggesting an active and willing sexuality;<sup>142</sup> and during the last encounter with Jude, she succumbs to him by asking him to kiss.<sup>143</sup> Seeing Sue's ambivalent sexual behaviour, the question of whether she is frigid or not, whether she is able to love or not remains open.

Keeping in mind the masculine outlook in Sue's depiction in the novel, it is necessary to see Sue's behaviour from another perspective rather than the masculine one. Hence, Arabella's significant point of view can make the reader see Sue in a different light from that of a cold, frigid, and perverse idol. Particularly, Arabella's perspective is used by the narrator to follow Sue and Jude's movements at the Great Wessex Agricultural Show. At this time of the story, the couple does not

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<sup>136</sup> Watts, "Hardy's Sue Bridehead", cit., p. 155.

<sup>137</sup> Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 704.

<sup>138</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 363.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 334.

<sup>142</sup> Deresiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>143</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 389.

have children of its own, apart from Father Time, and lives a supposedly happy period on which Hardy does not dwell any further.<sup>144</sup> Arabella's analysis of the couple focuses on Sue's emotions through her actions. At first, the witness shows some prejudice towards Sue:

She's not a particular warm-hearted creature to my thinking, though she cares for him pretty middling much – as much as she's able to; and he could make her heart ache a bit if he liked to try – which he is too simple to do.<sup>145</sup>

Here, Arabella recognises both Sue's resistance to love determined by her nature (“as much as she's able to”), and at the same time a mutual sentiment between the two, which is later underlined by the narrator: “scrutinizing them narrowly from the rear she noticed that Jude's hand sought Sue's as they stood, the two standing close together so as to conceal, as they supposed, this tacit expression of their mutual responsiveness.”<sup>146</sup> Towards the end of the scene, Arabella's sight concentrates on Sue's features, as the ultimate proof of the woman's ability to love:

In the meantime the more exceptional couple and the boy still lingered in the pavilion of flowers [...] Sue's usually pale cheeks reflecting the pink of the tinted rose at which she gazed; for the gay sights, the air, the music and the excitement of a day's outing with Jude, had quickened her blood and made her eyes sparkle with vivacity.<sup>147</sup>

Sue's blushed cheeks and sparkling eyes are signs of an excitement that is determined, among the other things, by Jude. To further stress Sue's responsiveness to her lover, the narrator's last glimpse at the two from Arabella's eyes is: “Then she looked up at him, and she smiled in a way that told so much to Arabella.”<sup>148</sup> Arabella's precious contribution to the depiction of Sue helps the reader see the character in a different way than the opaque and biased perspective from Jude. In fact, “Arabella registers a whole complexity of feelings in Sue that catches not only at her contradictoriness but at the dormant passions underlying her contradictory signals.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>Sue describes the moment as a return to “Greek Joyousness”, far from the “Christminster luminaries”, hinting at the couple's marriage-less period against the Christian social code that they renounce. Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 297.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 292-293.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

<sup>149</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 105.



Arabella's point of view helps the reader see Sue as a flesh-and-bones woman, which is rarely shown because of the idealising method put in place by Jude. Arabella's valuable proof is also supported by a statement of the author on Sue's sexuality in a letter to Edmund Gosse:

There is nothing perverted or depraved in Sue's nature. The abnormalism consists in disproportion: not in inversion, her sexual instinct being healthy as far as it goes but unusually weak & fastidious. One point illustrating this I cd not dwell upon: that, though she has children, her intimacies with Jude have never been more than occasional, even while they were living together, [...] and one of the reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she fears it wd be breaking faith with Jude to withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it.<sup>150</sup>

This extract concentrates on two main aspects relevant to our discourse. Firstly, Sue's contested sexual behaviour does not entirely fit the definition of frigidity. In fact, "Sue is able to love and she does," and during her happy period with Jude, described in the episode of the Great Wessex Agricultural Show, she "is not ashamed of her passion."<sup>151</sup> Secondly, this parenthesis of the relationship between Jude and Sue in the story seems to be an exception to Sue's "weak and fastidious" sexual behaviour, for which she attempts to keep her sexuality under control.

Given the "excessive sexuality" Hardy puts in his women,<sup>152</sup> Sue's spirituality against Arabella's fleshy counterpart<sup>153</sup> is not to be considered an exception to the rule. As it has been seen, Sue does not lack sexuality. Nevertheless, she needs to control it in order not to be mastered by her feminine instinct which, however, pushes to emerge throughout the novel. As William Davis underlines, "Sue represses for a time what can never be suppressed for ever, the irrationality and weakness of the female."<sup>154</sup> Therefore, the only way to emancipate from sexuality for Sue is to repress it and be free as she was during her infancy. As she says: "I crave to get back to the life of my infancy and its freedom."<sup>155</sup> As I shall inspect, Sue's spiritual sexuality influences her relationships with men as it is the only way in which this New Woman finds a balance with the other sex.

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<sup>150</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, cit., p. 99.

<sup>151</sup> Blake, *op. cit.*, p.723.

<sup>152</sup> Boumelha, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>154</sup> Davis, "Reading Failure", cit., p. 68.

<sup>155</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 139.

### **2.3. Sue's Ideal Love: a New Woman's Comradeship**

Until now, I have concentrated on Sue's ambiguous figure and her New Woman traits, specifically her sexuality. In fact, not only is sex a pivotal element in the New Woman fiction panorama, but it is also an accentuated trait of Hardy's heroines. Particularly in this case, Sue distinguishes herself for her renowned lack of sexuality which should not be considered frigidity. Contrarily, it is a calculated means for Sue to contrast what for Hardy is a natural force which contributes to her tragedy, namely gender. In this way, I shall dedicate the next section to Sue's mastering of her sexuality in her relationships. Particularly, I will tackle Sue's idea of comradeship, Sue and Jude's failed comradeship, and finally, I will analyse the implications of Sue's choice comparing them to the New Woman fiction.

#### **2.3.1. Sue's Ideal Comradeship**

The repression of Sue's sexuality brings the heroine to be described through "her strange ways and curious unconsciousness of gender."<sup>156</sup> In a way, the description of Sue's annihilation of gender boundaries seems to be innate in her, as it already emerges during Sue's infancy, when she appears unconscious of their rules whatsoever. In fact, Aunt Drusilla says of her: "she was not exactly a tomboy, you know; but she could do things that only boys do."<sup>157</sup> Since her infancy, then, Sue goes beyond her gender to embrace the masculine one. This behaviour is retained by the heroine as an adult. In a conversation with Jude, she explains:

I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have mixed with them – one or two of them particularly – almost as one of their own sex. I mean I have not felt about them as most women are taught to feel – to be on their guards against attacks on their virtue.<sup>158</sup>

Then, Sue's suppression of her gender is purposefully thought of with the intention of having a better relationship with the opposite sex. Her dialogue with men is not based on conventional sexual

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

instincts, but it goes beyond them. In a few words, Sue's dream is "to be equal with men, to be their comrades and to share in their intellectual labours."<sup>159</sup>

Sue's desire for comradeship with the other sex is not new in the New Woman literature, as "for the New Woman, relationships with men [...] had to involve mental companionship, freedom of choice, equality, and mutual respect."<sup>160</sup> Indeed, comradeship is one of the first accounts made within the genre. The first New Woman heroine, Lyndall in Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* expresses the same preoccupations as Sue, longing for "sexual equality."<sup>161</sup> Later in her life, Schreiner theorised this vision in her essay *Woman and Labour*, confirming that "the New Woman's conception of love between the sexes is one more largely psychic and intellectual than crudely and purely physical."<sup>162</sup> Sue's ideal relationship perfectly fits this definition. The heroine seeks a union with the other sex as "an emotional but not sexual relationship,"<sup>163</sup> also hinting at the impossibility to have an equal sexual relationship without letting the woman succumb to "the socially and accepted norms and traditional feminine roles."<sup>164</sup>

In Sue's view, both the male and female comrades escape social "gins and springes"<sup>165</sup> to retain their own individuality and contemporarily grow together mentally and emotionally.<sup>166</sup> Interestingly, it is Phillotson who gives the reader a precise definition of what is comradeship for Sue in one of the rare episodes in which the heroine is recounted clearly, far from Jude's opaque vision. Talking about Sue's decision of leaving the marriage with Phillotson, the schoolmaster describes Sue and Jude's relationship:

To the best of my understanding it is not an ignoble, merely animal, feeling between the two. [...] I found in their manner that an extraordinary affinity, or sympathy, entered into their attachment, which somehow took away all flavour grossness. Their supreme desire is to be together – to share each other's emotions, and fancies, and dreams.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>160</sup> Deresiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>161</sup> Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>162</sup> Schreiner, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

<sup>163</sup> Linde, *op. cit.*, p. 82

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>165</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>166</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>167</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 231.

Thus, for Sue, sexuality is not included in her ideal relationship with the other sex, as she is the first one who suppresses it in order to be equal to the other: “She removes the sexual barrier by as much as possible removing the sexual element from the relationship. This she does by repressing the sexual invitation in herself.”<sup>168</sup> She applies these principles twice in *Jude*.

Hardy shows two comradeships in Sue’s life, the first recounted retrospectively, with the undergraduate, and the second with Jude, which however does not cover the entirety of their relationship, as I shall analyse later in the chapter. On both occasions, Sue overcomes her gender to meet the opposite sex. She says of the undergraduate: “we used to go about together – on walking tours, reading tours, and things of that sort – like two men almost.”<sup>169</sup> As for Jude, she goes beyond by crossing “the heterosexual configuration of her relationship with Jude”<sup>170</sup> by dressing as a man in his Sunday suit.<sup>171</sup> Similarly, on both occasions Sue is challenged by men’s fleshy desires. Although, as we shall see, Sue succumbs to Jude’s sexual propositions, she lives her comradeship with the undergraduate remaining true to her principles. She says to Jude:

He asked me to live with him, and I agreed by letter. But when I joined him in London I found he meant a different thing from what I meant. He wanted to be my lover, in fact, but I wasn’t in love with him.<sup>172</sup>

It is possible to notice that, contrarily to the Christminster student, Sue does not conceive a relationship between opposite sexes to be forcedly sexual.<sup>173</sup> Instead, she seeks what Jane Thomas identifies as sublimation through the renunciation of sex.<sup>174</sup> In fact, the love she feels for the undergraduate is not that of a “lover”, as she underlines to Jude. Nevertheless, in the fifteen months the two live together, they share their time, emotions, and knowledge according to Sue’s conception of comrades’ love. In this way, it is pivotal to notice that Sue keeps a photograph of the undergraduate

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<sup>168</sup> Blake, *op. cit.*, pp. 710-711.

<sup>169</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>170</sup> J. Thomas, “Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure and ‘Comradely Love’”, *Literature & History*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2007, pp. 1-15, p. 5.

<sup>171</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>173</sup> Linde, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>174</sup> Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

in her room at the Melchester Training School,<sup>175</sup> and it is likely that she kisses that precise photograph by the window during her marriage days at Shaston.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, Sue and the undergraduate's comradeship represents Sue's "non-sexual" "ideal relationship" in the novel.<sup>177</sup> Nevertheless, in *Jude*, Sue's suppression of her own sex and the consequent sublimation of a man's love imply his fall.

Describing her relationship with the undergraduate to Jude, Sue talks about his sufferance while living as comrades: "he said I was breaking his heart by holding out against him so long at such close quarters; he could never have believed of a woman. I might play the game once too often, he said."<sup>178</sup> Sue's playing the game is to be noticed also in her relationship with Jude, as she is accused of coquetry through her double behaviour towards men.<sup>179</sup> Thus, facing Jude's accusation of being a flirt, she replies: "some women's love of being loved is insatiable; and so, often, is their love of loving."<sup>180</sup> In this way, there is a pattern to be noticed between Sue's relationships with the undergraduate and with Jude. In both cases, Sue represses her sexuality, and therefore her ability to love outside the boundaries of sublimation. However, as Kathleen Blake underlines, she finds "safe channels" to express her sexuality without failing her own principles.<sup>181</sup> In this way, she expresses through minor sexual behaviours, such as "jealousy, disgust, and epicurean emotions, thereby evading the worst of the 'inexorable laws of nature' for women."<sup>182</sup> If Sue wins over the laws of nature through her comradely love, she wins over the men of her life in a similar way: "the more she allows her sexual nature to survive in self-protective permutations, the more vulnerable she makes her lover."<sup>183</sup> In this way, she contributes to the undergraduate's death; she is the cause of Phillotson's loss of his

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<sup>175</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 141.

<sup>176</sup> Doheny, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>179</sup> Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 718.

<sup>180</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 204.

<sup>181</sup> Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 722.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 717.

school and income;<sup>184</sup> and, as we shall see, Sue's relationship with Jude will contribute to the protagonist's death.

Sue's ideal comradeship with the man she loves is a typical trait of New Woman literature, as well as a significant attitude of the heroine who wants to emancipate from women's subduction to men in marriage and to their nature. Thus, comradeship allows equality between the sexes all the while maintaining an emotive and intellectual relationship with the other sex. Nevertheless, if on the one hand Sue is an innovative New Woman, who can immolate her fleshy instincts for spiritual benefits, on the other hand the men she encounters demand exactly what she keeps suppressing, showing how advanced of a New Woman she is, but also how she cannot "[liberate] herself from men's expectations."<sup>185</sup> Sue's major weakness in her ideal picture of comradeship is her coquetry, namely her residual sexuality. In the next section I shall show how this last piece of human vice is what sinks her ideal comradeship with Jude, and what greatly contributes to their tragedy.

### **2.3.2. New Woman and New Man between Comradeship and Marriage**

In this section, I shall focus on Sue's relationship with Jude which cannot be fully considered a comradeship but, as I will argue, enters the realm of marriage, and leads to the protagonists' miseries. Indeed, marriage in *Jude* is treated from a highly critical and opposing perspective, being the only theme on which the narrator and Sue's conflicting visions concur. Showing "a total of six marriages and two obscenities to the count of two couples,"<sup>186</sup> Hardy is very clear on the negative effects of a legal pact between man and woman. In a letter to Edward Clodd, the author states: "The story of Jude, however, makes only an objective use of marriage & its superstitions as one, & only one, of the antagonistic forces in the tragedy."<sup>187</sup> Similarly, in a letter to George Douglas, he defines

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<sup>184</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 317. Although Sue does not perceive her relationship with the schoolmaster as a comradeship, since she is by no means willingly in love with him, I believe that she behaves in the same coquettish way as with the undergraduate and Jude, liking him "as a friend", without fully realising that her actions imply their marriage. (Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 212) Moreover, Phillotson's agreement on Sue's comradeship with Jude is clearly a cause of the schoolmaster's misery: "No man had ever suffered more inconvenience from his own charity, Christian or heathen, than Phillotson had done in letting Sue go." Ibid., p. 357.

<sup>185</sup> Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>186</sup> Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>187</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, cit., p. 92.

the “marriage question” as the “vehicle of the tragedy.”<sup>188</sup> In this way, the Fawleys’ tradition of marriage tragedies<sup>189</sup> intersects with the absurdity of an everlasting pact of love between two persons ratified by an official document.<sup>190</sup>

Hardy’s vision of marriage in these words is greatly demonstrated with the first two marriages of the novel: Jude with Arabella, and Sue with Phillotson. In the first case, Hardy uses Arabella’s sexuality and shrewdness to show the folly of marriage. Firstly, Jude is almost forced to marry, as Arabella fakes a pregnancy,<sup>191</sup> later hinting at women’s common usage of this lie with the intention of securing a husband.<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, their marriage is clearly described as a foolish act:

The two swore that at every other time of their lives they would assuredly believe, feel, and desire precisely as they had believed, felt, and desired during the few proceeding weeks. What was as remarkable as the undertaking itself was the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore.<sup>193</sup>

Defined as “a permanent contract on a temporary feeling,”<sup>194</sup> the union between Sue and Phillotson serves the narrator to underline the role of the woman in the pact, who loses her freedom of choice, identity and sexuality starting from the ceremony. Thus, in a letter to Jude, Sue asks him to escort her to the altar, commenting: “according to the ceremony as there printed, my bridegroom chooses me of his own will and pleasure; but I don’t choose him. Somebody *gives* me to him, like a she-ass or she-goat, or any other domestic animal.”<sup>195</sup>

Although critical of the ceremony, Sue marries Phillotson anyway, to later discover quite naively the implied sexual subjugation of the woman within marriage: “what tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally! – the

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>189</sup> The narrator underlines Jude and Sue’s unfitness to marriage on many occasions. During Jude’s infancy, Aunt Drusilla reminds him that “’tisn’t for the Fawleys to take step any more” (Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 13) or “the Fawleys were not made for wedlock: it never seemed to sit well upon us.” (Ibid., p. 70) Furthermore, in two episodes the Fawleys are called “unlucky” in marriage (Ibid., pp. 168, 282), and on one occasion Sue defines the family as “unhappy” wives and husbands. Ibid., p. 209

<sup>190</sup> Stubbs, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>191</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 57.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

dreadful contract to feel in a particular way, in a matter whose essence is voluntariness!”<sup>196</sup> As a response to Sue’s attitude, Phillotson’s principles in marriage represent the well-rooted social thought on morality, for which Sue’s emotional and sexual unresponsiveness becomes a sin under the law. He accuses her of “committing a sin in not liking [him],” and reminds her: “You vowed to love me.”<sup>197</sup> In this way, Kathleen Morgan comments:

Phillotson, even so, feels it incumbent upon himself to exercise his conjugal rights. He assumes this to be an extension of his day-to-day functions and he assumes that Sue’s sexual submission to him is a moral obligation. In resisting him, she is not in his eyes simply unresponsive, coldhearted, selfish or unsympathetic, but morally at fault.<sup>198</sup>

Eventually Phillotson changes his mind and lets Sue go, commenting “I wouldn’t be cruel to her in the name of the law. She is, as I understand, gone to join her lover. What they are going to do I cannot say. Whatever it may be she has *my full consent* to.”<sup>199</sup> Phillotson’s latter sentence underlines how strong is the husband’s decisional power over Sue. This condition is what Sue seeks to escape in her comradeship with Jude.

Sue and Jude’s comradeship is foreseen by the narrator since their first encounter. In fact, not only is Jude extremely attracted to his cousin, but the two are also described as highly similar to each other. In this way, Penny Boumelha states that their cousinship serves the plot to convey this likeness, as well as many episodes in the story. These episodes are expressed “either by careful counterpointing of the plot (Jude, in his distress, spending the night at Sue’s lodging, balanced by Sue, in hers, spending the night in Jude’s room) or by means of images such as that of Sue’s appearance in Jude’s clothes as a kind of double.”<sup>200</sup> Moreover, it is the same Phillotson who in the novel notices “the extraordinary sympathy, or, similarity, between the pair,” adding that “he is her cousin, which perhaps accounts for some of it.”<sup>201</sup> Indeed, the two share a similar sensibility towards the world. On the one

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., pp. 222-223.

<sup>198</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>199</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 235. My emphasis.

<sup>200</sup> Boumelha, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

<sup>201</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 229.



hand, Sue is a product of “modern conditions”<sup>202</sup> and “the ethereal, fine-nerved, sensitive girl, quite unfitted by temperament and instinct to fulfil the conditions of the matrimonial relationship with Phillotson, possibly with any man;”<sup>203</sup> on the other hand, Jude, whose sensibility is conveyed mainly through his compassion for animals, as when he lets some rooks eat the harvest, at his own expenses; when he refuses to cruelly slaughter a pig; or when he ceases a trapped rabbit’s sufferance.<sup>204</sup> In this way, a pivotal sentence that summarises Jude’s stance is: “I am not a man who wants to save himself at the expense of the weaker among us!”<sup>205</sup>

Jude and Sue’s being equally “horribly sensitive”<sup>206</sup> leads to two considerations. Firstly, they are constructed by Hardy to be comrades, as they define themselves multiple times in the novel.<sup>207</sup> Secondly, as this thesis’s perspective on Sue is that of the New Woman, Jude may well be seen as her similar, corresponding New Man, whose faith is to build an equal relationship with the New Woman, and whose virility, according to Olive Schreiner, is reciprocated by a moral effeminacy.<sup>208</sup> Positioned as the woman and the man of the future in the New Woman perspective, these figures translate in the Wessex world as a man and a woman who “are a little beforehand,”<sup>209</sup> and whose aspirations “[take] two or three generations.”<sup>210</sup> Particularly, if Sue’s independence and visions on marriage and sexual equality openly challenge the patriarchal present in which she lives, Jude’s growth develops throughout the novel. As a child, his sensibility is already associated with his New Man trait: “this weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that he was the coming sort of man.”<sup>211</sup> Moreover, the day following his first marriage with Arabella, he starts doubting marriage: “there seemed to him, vaguely and dimly, something wrong in a social ritual which made necessary a

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<sup>202</sup> T. Hardy, “‘Postscript’ to 1912 Wessex Edition”, in T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, T. Dennis (ed.), London: Penguin, (1895), 1998, pp. 466-468, p. 468.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 64, 214.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 382.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 338, 166.

<sup>208</sup> Schreiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-257.

<sup>209</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 287.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.* “Coming” is to be found in the manuscript and in the serialised version of the novel. D. Taylor, “Notes”, in Hardy, Thomas, *Jude the Obscure*, T. Dennis (ed.), Dennis, London: Penguin, (1895), 1998, pp. 409-465, p. 413

cancelling of well-formed schemes involving years of thought and labour.”<sup>212</sup> Finally, it is Sue who conducts him towards comradeship, making him reject marriage and his previous religious and traditional visions.<sup>213</sup> The tragedy of this “perfect union”<sup>214</sup> is added by Hardy through sex.

As Patricia Stubbs underlines, “sexual entanglements” in *Jude* represent “the seeds” of failure for the protagonists.<sup>215</sup> Particularly, sexuality is what ruins the otherwise perfect comradeship between Sue and Jude. As seen above, Sue’s mastering of her sexuality is not reciprocated by men’s control of their own. Thus, both the undergraduate and Jude push Sue to have sexual intercourses with them. If in the case of the Christminster student, Sue holds her control throughout the fifteen months they live together, in the case of Jude, she constantly needs to set a certain distance from the cousin. In this way, the imagery of windows is associated with Sue for both her need to escape social conventions – by jumping through them escaping marital sex and the Melchester Training School’s conventionality<sup>216</sup> – and especially to be able to communicate with Jude without the implication of sexuality.<sup>217</sup> Both occasions “resolve into Sue’s favorite disposition of the sexes, making spiritual love with a window in between.”<sup>218</sup> However, Jude’s attitude towards Sue is “unmistakably of a sexual kind” since their first encounter.<sup>219</sup> Therefore, this issue becomes relevant once Sue and Jude start to share quarters.

As Sue and Jude live as comrades a “tension between [Jude’s] non-marital sex and [Sue’s] non-sexual love,”<sup>220</sup> grows between them. In this way, Jude’s already existing sexual attraction never gains a response until when Sue’s residual sexuality is stimulated through jealousy, that is when Arabella visits Jude to inform him of the existence of Father Time. The same Sue later admits it:

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<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>213</sup> This is one aspect that Jude touches upon after Sue’s final conversion. Here Jude confirms Sue’s pivotal role in his evolution of ideas “on so many things.” Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 351.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>215</sup> Stubbs, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>216</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., pp. 143, 226.

<sup>217</sup> Deresiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 61. The two talk through a window about their relationship on two specific occasions: at Shaston, when Jude visits her, and at Marygreen on the occasion of Aunt Drusilla’s death. Hardy, *Jude*, cit., pp. 204, 214.

<sup>218</sup> Blake, *op. cit.*, p. 717.

<sup>219</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 97.

<sup>220</sup> Boumelha, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

“mine was not the reciprocal wish till envy stimulated me to oust Arabella.”<sup>221</sup> In so doing, Sue’s residual sexuality channelled through jealousy combines with Jude’s attempts at convincing Sue to marry him and therefore at having a sexual relationship with him. Sue’s only chance to keep him close is to agree to his request: “very well then – if I must I must. Since you will have it so, I agree! I will be. Only I didn’t mean to! [...] I ought to have known that you would conquer in the long run, living like this!”<sup>222</sup> Then, Sue’s coquetry, as I defined it earlier in this thesis, makes her surrender to Jude’s carnal love. In this way, the morning after, the narrator underlines the woman’s defeat – “depression sat upon her features” and a “sadness showing in her smile” – and Jude’s gaiety.<sup>223</sup> Sue’s and Jude’s moods are telling of a greater movement that this episode starts. In fact, although afterwards the couple never marries, their symbolic marriage happens the moment Sue yields to Jude, as underlined by her comment “the little bird is caught at last!”<sup>224</sup> As William Deresiewicz effectively summarises, “sex meant pregnancy, and pregnancy meant marriage – or, as Jude and Sue discover, disgrace.”<sup>225</sup>

To conclude, although theoretically forming a perfect comradeship between New Woman and New Man, Hardy’s hero and heroine remain trapped in a world in which the tension between sexual relationships and marriage defines the novel’s core of tragedy.<sup>226</sup> The resulting impossibility to perform Sue’s ideal comradeship is given by humans’ innate sexuality, under any form. This is later discovered by Jude who, having understood his faults, admits: “Perhaps I spoilt one of the highest and purest loves that ever existed between man and woman!”<sup>227</sup> The consequences of Sue and Jude’s failed comradeship shall be inspected in the following section.

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<sup>221</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 352.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 267, 268.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268. The imagery of the caged bird is not new in the depiction of Sue. In fact, Hardy calls her “bird” other times in the novel (Hardy, *Jude*, cit., pp. 211, 292, 335). Interestingly, Shanta Dutta highlights the similarities of Hardy’s imagery with the New Woman fiction: “One image common to Schreiner, Egerton and Hardy is that of the captive/caged bird which represents woman's sense of entrapment within the narrow rôle assigned to her by patriarchal society.” Dutta, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>225</sup> Deresiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 60

<sup>226</sup> Boumelha, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>227</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 354.

### 2.3.3. Sue's Tragedy: the New Woman's Defeat Against Nature

The previous section has shed attention on Sue and Jude's conceptual comradeship, which fails during the pivotal scene of Sue's yielding to Jude. Analysing the dramatic force and importance of this scene, Zane Linde describes this event as the point of no return of the novel – the common one being the death of the couple's children.<sup>228</sup> From a New Woman interpretation of *Jude*, I find this theorisation to be the most appropriate, as Sue's sexual subjection to Jude is the real catalyst of the couple's following tragedies. Indeed, after a brief period of happiness described in the Great Wessex Agricultural Show, the aftermath of Sue's sexual defeat necessarily leads to tragedy.

Unlike Jude's tragedy, which involves financial struggle, Sue's tragedy presents the double layer of "class conflict," and of "conflict of genders."<sup>229</sup> In this way, if Jude's decline consumes throughout the story from his impossibility to enter university, to his poverty and bad health, Sue's decline starts with the sexual decision to renounce to her principles in the name of "charity"<sup>230</sup> towards Jude. In fact, not only does her decision mark the fall of the New Woman in the story, but it also defines Hardy's "anxiety about female sexuality"<sup>231</sup> revolving around Sue. This is explained by the heroine herself after her conversion to tradition. To her, "[Jude's] wickedness was only the natural man's desire to possess the woman," whereas women are forcedly supposed to control their own sexuality.<sup>232</sup> The remaining time Sue spends in a relationship with Jude is an unofficial marriage, in which the two live together and reproduce, deviating from Sue's initial ideals. In this way, Hyewon Shin describes the heroine during her descent as "completely defeated by sexuality and consumed by maternity."<sup>233</sup> Pivotal are the episodes in which she is forced to be called "Mrs Fawley,"<sup>234</sup> leading to the heroine's "depersonalisation"<sup>235</sup> or the one in which she sells gingerbread to feed her family.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Linde, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>229</sup> Langland, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>230</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 352.

<sup>231</sup> Stubbs, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>232</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 352.

<sup>233</sup> Shin, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>234</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 298.

<sup>235</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>236</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 319.

As Patricia Stubbs points out, “all her proud independence has gone, her vitality drained by her new circumstances so that we can hardly recognize in her the ‘bright intellect’ of her ‘bachelor’ days.”<sup>237</sup>

The most sombre consequence of Sue and Jude’s tragedy is the death of their children. Positioned in a telling narrative point, this event happens once Sue’s initial character completely deteriorates. She is depicted as surrounded by children, the fruits of her failure; she is unwanted by a society who, by morality, rejects her family; the relationship with her supposed comrade does not involve a shared intellect and epicurean love, but revolves around the two’s “unstable compromise.”<sup>238</sup> In this way, Sue’s fragile state eventually shutters once human’s misery and poverty are added to the equation by Father Time’s gesture. Sue individualises the cause of the tragedy in what she initially firmly believes in, that is her experimental comradeship with Jude: “perhaps the world is not illuminated enough for such experiments as ours! Who were we, to think we could act as pioneers!”<sup>239</sup> With this sentence, Sue regrets the revolutionising spirit that characterised herself and the New Woman image during Hardy’s times. In this way, it could be argued that Hardy’s narrative choice on Sue’s dramatic epilogue stands as a stance towards his New Woman.

Interestingly, Hardy’s decision to let Sue’s dream relationship sink is reminiscent of an image brought forth by Hardy’s anti-New Woman friend Lady Jeune.<sup>240</sup> In one of her famous rejoinders, Lady Jeune foresees the New Woman’s future ending with her “life’s shipwreck.”<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, in her article “Women of To-day,” the journalist describes the coming “new generations” as naturally weak and unfit for society, as a result of their mothers’ “mode of life.”<sup>242</sup> These thoughts are to be detected firstly in Phillotson’s friend Gillingham’s words, who describes Phillotson’s agreeing to Sue’s comradeship as a “general domestic disintegration.”<sup>243</sup> Moreover, Jude and Sue are aware that

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<sup>237</sup> Stubbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>238</sup> Doheny, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>239</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 352.

<sup>240</sup> Davis, “Reading Failure”, *cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>241</sup> A Woman of the Day, Lady Jeune, “Dies Dominae. The Value of Love” and Rejoinder, *The Saturday Review*, 1895, pp. 687-689, p. 689.

<sup>242</sup> Davis, “Reading Failure”, *cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>243</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 231.

their offspring “will act and feel worse than we.”<sup>244</sup> Finally, as William Davis underlines, both in Hardy’s and Lady Jeune’s vision, it is children who pay for the New Woman’s actions: “Sue’s belief that the deaths of her children represent a punishment for her lifestyle is merely Lady Jeune’s thesis carried to its logical extreme.”<sup>245</sup> This belief of Sue’s brings the two protagonists to the last tragic consequence following their comradeship’s failure: a return to tradition after the two pioneers’ defeat. In fact, as the novel concludes, they “are all once again trapped by the ‘daily continuous tragedy’ promoted by conservative marital ideology,”<sup>246</sup> namely the pact that they have avoided throughout the entirety of their comradeship. Both decisions imply death.

Considering Sue’s sexual yielding to Jude a New Woman’s sacrifice, in the moment when “the result of her physical and emotional sacrifice proves to be futile,”<sup>247</sup> that is, when Sue and Jude’s children die, Sue experiences a sudden change of view and an apparent rejection of her principles. In a conversation with Jude, she condemns their comradeship:

And yet little more than a year ago I called myself happy! We went about loving each other too much – indulging ourselves to utter selfishness with each other! We said – do you remember? – that we would make a virtue of joy. I said it was Nature’s intention, Nature’s law and *raison d’être* that we should be joyful in what instincts she afforded us – instincts which civilization had taken upon itself to thwart. What dreadful things I said!<sup>248</sup>

In so doing, the Christian beliefs in which she initially did not recognise herself, seem to be her only way to cope with the trauma of her life’s failure. Here, we can clearly see Hardy’s psychological justification for Sue’s actions. To follow some principles that she has always seen as retrograde, patriarchal, and coercive for women, is to inflict an emotional and physical punishment: “in Sue’s case, sexual masochism can grow up in a woman who cannot break free emotionally from an ideology which her mind tells her is damaging.”<sup>249</sup> Therefore, Sue subjects her body to a man for the second time in her life. If with Jude, she does it in order to be able to live with her comrade, this time she

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>245</sup> Davis, “Reading Failure”, cit., p. 63.

<sup>246</sup> K. Faber Oestreich, “Sue’s Desires: Sexuality and reform fashion in Jude the Obscure”, *Victorians Institute Journal*, vol. 41, 2013, pp. 128-154, p. 144.

<sup>247</sup> Linde, op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>248</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., pp. 338-339.

<sup>249</sup> Stubbs, op. cit., p. 64.

does it to willingly “mortify the flesh”<sup>250</sup> by sleeping with Phillotson and entering “a suicide of sorts, a symbolic death.”<sup>251</sup> In this way, in Hardy’s imaginary, if Sue is doomed to live in a perennial, self-imposed death, Jude similarly forces himself to return to Arabella, to live a painful but morally accepted marriage,<sup>252</sup> and finally to commit suicide by leaving his umbrella behind while visiting Sue.<sup>253</sup>

The New Woman and the New Man die as both diverge from the rules. In fact, although Sue exclaims “It is my duty. I will drink my cup to the dregs,”<sup>254</sup> she reveals her real feelings by passionately kissing Jude<sup>255</sup> and giving herself to Phillotson with “aversion” on her face and clenching her teeth.<sup>256</sup> Similarly, although Jude marries Arabella, he clearly states to Sue “you are mine,”<sup>257</sup> going against marriage’s dictates. By doing this, Hardy makes sure to underline that, although nature has ceased their comradeship, they still do not act “by the letter.”<sup>258</sup> From Hardy’s Darwinian perspective, then, the New Woman and the New Man are unfit for the hostile society they live in, and are “doomed to die, physically or emotionally.”<sup>259</sup> Hardy himself does not believe in his protagonists’ “perfect union,” “two-in-oneness.”<sup>260</sup> “I don’t see any possible scheme for the union of the sexes that wd be satisfactory.”<sup>261</sup> Contrarily, the ones who survive are those who live according to social respectability and rules, namely Phillotson and Arabella: Phillotson “succumbs to patriarchal dictates”<sup>262</sup> and marries again a clearly traumatised Sue only to have his job and respectability back;

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<sup>250</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 344.

<sup>251</sup> A. Bhatt, “The New Woman and Her Doomed Fate in Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* and Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*”, *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2018, pp. 195-200, p. 197.

<sup>252</sup> Telling of Hardy’s critical intention is the landlord’s thought on the couple: “[he] had doubted if they were married at all, especially as he had seen Arabella kiss Jude. [...] he was about to give them notice to quit till by chance overhearing her one night haranguing Jude in rattling terms, and ultimately flying a shoe at his head [...] and concluding that they must be respectable.” Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 385.

<sup>253</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 387.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> Bhatt, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>260</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 338.

<sup>261</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, cit., p. 122.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*

Arabella, who sports indifference and lacks empathy,<sup>263</sup> represents the only “survivor,”<sup>264</sup> who does not challenge nature, unlike the revolutionary New Woman and New Man, but consistently goes along with its rules and social constructs. It is Arabella’s thought on Sue which closes the novel: “She’s never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she’s as he is now!”<sup>265</sup> Once again, Arabella gives the reader a clear and truthful perspective on Sue, representing nature’s winner who witnesses the New Woman’s defeat.

Analysing Sue Bridehead and her interaction with *Jude*’s context, it can be derived that an appropriate definition for the character is that of a Wessex’s New Woman. In fact, although Hardy was clearly influenced by some New Woman authors and characteristic in the creation of his protagonist, he created Sue’s character also following his personal view on women and including Sue into the large group of Wessex’s independent and strong female characters. In this way, if on the one hand, Sue’s main New Woman traits are visibly developed, on the other hand, they contribute to a larger evolution of the character in the novel, that is the development of her own tragedy. Consequently, Sue’s (New Woman) modern sensibility, her decisions, and her ideals clash with Wessex’s “forces and laws,”<sup>266</sup> produced by nature, society, and familiar history. The result of Sue’s experiment revolves around Sue and Jude’s intertwining, in which flesh and spirit, past and future, innovation and superstition confront, reconfirming what Jude once states: “The woman mostly gets the worst of it in the long run!”<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Villari, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>264</sup> Watts, *Thomas Hardy*, cit., p. 83.

<sup>265</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 408.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.



### **3. *The Woman Who Did*, or Grant Allen’s Conservative New Woman**

On 16<sup>th</sup> February 1895, Thomas Hardy sent a letter to Grant Allen, informing him of the reception of Allen’s *The Woman Who Did*, a New Woman novel that Hardy read “from cover to cover.”<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, if Allen published his work at the beginning of the year, in the same period Hardy’s *Jude* was being published on *Harper’s*, and its author was working on the publication of the volume edition, issued at the end of the same year. Moreover, both novels gravitate in their own ways around two unconventional women, Herminia and Sue, whose lives and ideas share so much that Hardy comments to Allen: “my poor heroine learns only by experience what yours knows by instinct.”<sup>2</sup> This similarity has been equally underlined by Margaret Oliphant, who, in her article “The Anti-Marriage League” criticises the two newly-published novels by addressing their authors’ immorality: “we have little doubt that Mr Hardy, and Mr Grant Allen [...] and the other members of the band, believe that they have got the true.”<sup>3</sup> Following these similarities, I shall devote this chapter to the analysis of Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* and the feminist ideals behind it. Particularly, I will first introduce Allen’s life and works and then concentrate on the author’s New Woman fiction; therefore, I will tackle the novel’s New Woman topics, majorly focusing on Herminia’s depiction as a New Woman, her (Allen’s) extreme conservatism, and similarities with Sue in *Jude the Obscure*, which stands as both a parallel and opposed example of the same-period male-authored New Woman fiction.

#### **3.1. Grant Allen’s Life and Works**

Although Grant Allen’s popularity is tightly attached to his novel *The Woman Who Did*,<sup>4</sup> the author’s entire career and production reflect his vast field of interests, which spaced from sciences to

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<sup>1</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, cit., p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Oliphant, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> P. Morton, “Grant Allen: A Biographical Essay”, in W. Greenslade and T. Rodgers (eds.), *Grant Allen: Literature and Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005, pp. 23-43, p. 24.

social studies, politics, and Woman's Rights. Particularly, Peter Morton reflects on each category Allen has deepened in his life. Citing Frederic Harrison's words, Allen wrote about:

“biology, physics, botany, mineralogy, metaphysics, history, paleontology, archaeology, theology, philosophy, sociology, ethics, art, criticism”. [...] Harrison could have added to his list: biography (Allen wrote three), classical studies, folklore, topography, geology, entomology, interior decorating and travel.<sup>5</sup>

In this way, throughout his career, Allen wrote “over thirty fiction and nonfiction books, dozens of short stories, several volumes of poetry, and hundreds of articles.”<sup>6</sup> It must be derived that, although this thesis concentrates on only one work of his, it is essential to investigate Allen's life and works, and their correlation to his bestseller *The Woman Who Did*.

### 3.1.1. From a Canadian Infancy to London's Scientific Journalism

Charles Grant Blairfindie Allen was born on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1848 in Alwington, Canada.<sup>7</sup> He was the third of seven children and the youngest of two sons. His father was Joseph Anticell Allen (1814-1900), an Irishman and Anglican priest, who moved to Canada between 1840 and 1842. His mother was Charlotte Catherine Ann Grant (1817-1894) and was the daughter and heir of the fifth baron of Longueuil. Allen was proud of his “mingled ancestry,”<sup>8</sup> as his family's roots were French-Canadian, Irish, and Scottish (his family also descended from Scottish Jacobite). Allen spent his infancy and teenage years between Alwington and Wolfe Island, partly owned by his family. As a child, he showed a deep interest in languages and writing, skills that were supervised by Allen's father who was the two sons' tutor during Allen's infancy. Also, thanks to him, by the age of ten, Grant

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> L. Wilhelm, “Sex in Utopia: The Evolutionary Hedonism of Grant Allen and Oscar Wilde”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 46, 2018, pp. 403-424, p. 405.

<sup>7</sup> All biographical information on Grant Allen is taken from the following sources:

E. Clodd, *Grant Allen. A Memoir*, London: Grant Richards, 1900.

P. Morton, “Grant Allen: A Biographical Essay”, in W. Greenslade and T. Rodgers (eds.), *Grant Allen: Literature and Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005, pp. 23-43.

P. Morton, “*The Busiest Man in England*”. *Grant Allen and the Writing Trade, 1875-1900*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

W. Greenslade and T. Rodgers, “Resituating Grant Allen: Writing, Radicalism and Modernity”, in W. Greenslade and T. Rodgers (eds.), *Grant Allen: Literature and Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005, pp. 1-22.

S. Wintle, “Introduction”, in G. Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, Oxford and New York: OUP, (1895), 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Morton, *A Biographical Essay*, cit., p. 24.

knew four languages, Greek included. Allen's instruction intensified once the family started a grand tour, firstly moving to New Haven, Connecticut, to let Grant and his elder brother be tutored by a Yale professor. From this first journey, Allen went back to Alwington only three times in his life. The following year, in 1862, the Grants moved to the English Colony of Dieppe, in France. Here he studied for another year at the Collège Impérial and practised his French to become bilingual. Therefore, he moved to King Edward's School in Birmingham, which was his last step before being granted a Senior Classical Postmastership at Merton College, Oxford, in 1867.

Being "a renegade and an outsider" his whole life,<sup>9</sup> in college he was perceived "as a clever student with a reputation for 'advanced' political opinions."<sup>10</sup> His first published works go back to these years, as he took part in the *Oxford University Magazine and Review*, where he wrote "poems and a humorous tale mocking American pretensions" between 1869 and 1870.<sup>11</sup> During this period, he unexpectedly married Caroline Anne Bootheway, three years older than him, a possible prostitute who was affected by tuberculosis. Edward Clodd argues that Allen's choice "brought out his noblest qualities, crippled his energies, and made life a terrible struggle."<sup>12</sup> Allen took care of his wife until her death in 1871, the same year he graduated and started working first as a private tutor and then as a teacher at a Reading Grammar School in Oxford. Here, he met and married his second and long-lasting wife, Ellen Jerrard. In 1873, the two moved to Jamaica, where he was offered the post of "Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy" in a Government College. In this way, he lived for three years in Spanish Town, where "he developed a fanatical hatred of all forms of human exploitation."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Morton, *The Busiest Man*, cit., p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Morton, *A Biographical Essay*, cit., p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Morton, *The Busiest Man*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Clodd, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Wintle, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

In Jamaica, Allen also had the time to deepen his studies of the evolutionary theories of Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin<sup>14</sup> and apply them to “coloursense” and “botany.”<sup>15</sup>

Once back in England, in 1876, Allen started writing as a freelancer. The first work that he published was *Physiological Aesthetics* (1877), an “intensely Spencerian”<sup>16</sup> work in which Allen connects our aesthetic taste to sexual selection in animals, and human personal beauty. Similarly, some years later, in 1880, Allen published in *Mind* an article related to this first work, namely “Aesthetic Evolution in Men,” in which the author reiterates the importance of Darwin’s sexual selection for the enquiry on men’s “love for beauty.”<sup>17</sup> Following the public interest in his first work, Allen was invited to write two pieces for the *Cornhill Magazine*, the first with the title “Carving a Cocoa-nut,” for which he first gained money from literature. He then started writing for *London* and the *Daily News* and, at the same time, worked on the book *The Colour-sense: Its Origins and Development* (1879), which was acknowledged by, among others, Spencer, Darwin, and Wallace.<sup>18</sup> This scientific success in Allen’s life, driven by Darwin’s profound influence on the author,<sup>19</sup> coincided with a lung illness, which forced him to spend a year at Hyères, in France.

In 1880, Allen came back to England, where he started writing for the *St. James’s Gazette*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Knowledge*, and the *Fortnightly Review*. In 1881, he moved from “that squalid village” that was London,<sup>20</sup> to Dorking, in Surrey, a peaceful village with a direct railway to the city. Here, he continued working in his house called “The Nook.” The product of this intense period is the collection of articles titled *Colin Clout’s Calendar* (1882), for which Allen “picked out

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<sup>14</sup> As I will analyse in detail in the last section of this chapter, Allen’s New Woman is highly influenced by evolutionism, particularly by Spencer’s innovative theory of the time. In fact, if Darwin paved the way with “empirical observation,” Spencer went beyond by studying “the progressive evolution of human beings and social organizations.” B. Cameron, “Grant Allen’s The Woman Who Did: Spencerian Individualism and Teaching New Women to Be Mothers”, *ELT*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2008, pp. 281-301, p. 282.

<sup>15</sup> Clodd, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Morton, *A Biographical Essay*, cit., p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> A. Grant, “Aesthetic Evolution in Men”, *Mind, a Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy*, 1880, pp. 445- 464, p. 447.

<sup>18</sup> Clodd, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> Greenslade and Rodgers, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Clodd, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

those pieces which best assert the truths of Darwinism.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, 1881 saw the publication of *The Evolutionist at Large* and *Vignettes from Nature*, two of Allen’s “semipopular collections.”<sup>22</sup> During the decade, Allen continued to cultivate his passion for sciences through journalism, being a fine example of “the stratum of those freelance authors who practised the more elevated levels of journalism for a living.”<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in these years he embraced fiction “with some little reluctance” but also knowing its monetary worthiness.<sup>24</sup> In this way, in 1884 Allen had enough short stories to publish his first collection titled *Strange Stories*, followed by his first novel, *Philistia*. These two publications and their profits represented a turning point for Allen, as “at least one long novel and many stories, appeared almost every year thereafter.”<sup>25</sup>

### 3.1.2. Grant Allen’s Final Years: Fictional Works and Literary Legacy

While “*being thought a scientist was still important to him,*”<sup>26</sup> Allen intended to pursue novel writing as an easy and more fruitful means of subsistence. In this way, he learned how to satisfy the requests of the market, writing “romances, science fiction, colonial fiction and crime and detective fiction,”<sup>27</sup> while still producing non-fiction. Indeed, he was fundamental in the establishment of popular science fiction, with short stories such as “Pausodyne” and “The Child of the Phalanstery,” both published in the collection *Strange Stories* in 1884. He wrote five more collections of short stories, some of which were previously published in *Belgravia*, *Longman’s*, the *English Illustrated Magazine*, *Black and White*, and the *Graphic*. With time, Allen acquired a taste for ghost stories and the supernatural. Particularly, he exploited bizarre events to then conclude with their rational solution, being true to his scientific nature.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, Allen produced many stories studying the human mind’s deviation, shifting from religious fundamentalists to criminals. In this way, *The Devil’s Die*

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<sup>21</sup> Morton, *A Biographical Essay*, cit., p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> Morton, *The Busiest Man*, cit., p. 96.

<sup>23</sup> Morton, *A Biographical Essay*, cit., p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Clodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>25</sup> Morton, *A Biographical Essay*, cit., p. 32.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Greenslade and Rodgers, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Morton, *The Busiest Man*, cit., p. 113.

(1888) represents the finest example of this production, being a novel centred on a “brilliant, charming, but sadistic researcher.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1886, Allen kept nourishing his scientific taste, by publishing *Common Sense Science*, a scientific essay collection. He also published *For Mamie’s Sake: A Tale of Love and Dynamite*, described by Allen himself as a “wicked novel,”<sup>30</sup> which recounts the immoral love stories of the blonde Mamie Llewellyn. However, as the 90s approached, Allen was more interested in the production of short stories, especially those published in papers which brought him much income. Indeed, as Peter Morton explains, Allen’s short fiction’s popularity was due to its unpretentiousness, and the “acceptable moral behind it.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, in these years, Allen collaborated with the American *Pocket Magazine*, *Forum*, and *Cosmopolitan*. However, it is *Strand* with which the author sealed one of his most profitable relationships. First published in 1891, the *Strand* hosted one of Allen’s stories in its first issue. Thereafter, Allen “was rarely out of its pages in the later 1890s.”<sup>32</sup> Particularly, in those pages, Allen nourished his collections of detective fiction regarding his protagonists Colonel Clay, Miss Cayley, and Hilda Wade.

1891 also saw the success of one of Allen’s best thrillers, *What’s Bred in the Bone*. Submitted to the magazine *Tit-Bits* for a competition, it “won the prize, sold enormously, was translated into Danish and Icelandic, and was filmed in 1916.”<sup>33</sup> Dealing with murders and diamond hunting in Africa, this work puts Allen “at the very top of his populist form.”<sup>34</sup> However, Allen continued writing enormously, as it was in the 1890s that he “approached the peak of his productivity.”<sup>35</sup> In this way, along with many popular short stories, in 1893, he started publishing a series of 52 articles in the *Westminster Gazette*, initially thought to deal with “popular Science and other matter,” but soon

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>31</sup> Morton, *The Busiest Man*, cit., p. 113.

<sup>32</sup> Morton, *A Biographical Essay*, cit., p. 37.

<sup>33</sup> Morton, *The Busiest Man*, cit., p. 119.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>35</sup> Morton, *A Biographical Essay*, cit., p. 36.

discovered to be very political and polemical.<sup>36</sup> It is the same Allen that in a letter to his friend Edward Clodd recognises his controversial tone: “I like my articles from the ‘Westminster Gazette’ [...] but I don’t know how long the Editor will permit me to speak my mind out with such comparative freedom.”<sup>37</sup> Indeed Allen’s highest moment of popularity is also marked by some radical positions taken by the author on different public matters.

As William Greenslade and Terence Rodgers underline, “Allen was far more active in radical campaigns than could have been reasonably expected from a hard-working, freelance writer without a private income.”<sup>38</sup> In fact, the author was openly socialist, being the Vice-President of the Land Nationalism Society, and a member of the Fabian Society, the Legitimation League, and the Free Press Defence Committee. Moreover, he criticised the monarchy and its colonialism, the House of Lords, and militarism.<sup>39</sup> Especially in the 90s, he was highly involved with Woman’s Rights associations and ideas. In the meanwhile, he could afford a comfortable life thanks to his popular fiction: “each year he wintered abroad, and he regularly travelled further afield too: North America, Algiers, Egypt.”<sup>40</sup> Additionally, in 1893, Allen moved from his mansion in Dorking to Hindhead, in Surrey, where he built a house on the hilltop, the Croft. It was exactly in his new house that Allen wrote one of his most controversial novels, labelled as hill-top, purposely reminiscent of the geographical position of the Croft, and hinting at Allen’s high ideals.

Allen’s two hill-top novels were both published in 1895. The first was *The Woman Who Did*, and the second was *The British Barbarian: A Hill Top Novel*. Although I shall plently discuss the former further in this chapter, it is to be noticed that both these novels reflect Allen’s later stances on “sexual marital and parental roles which strangely blend the orthodox and the wildly radical.”<sup>41</sup> *The British Barbarians* was published in the aftermath of Allen’s success for *The Woman Who Did*.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Clodd, *op. cit.*, p. 148. Allen “vanished” from the Gazette in 1895. The reason is unclear. Morton, *A Biographical Essay*, cit., p. 37

<sup>38</sup> Greenslade and Rodgers, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Morton, *A Biographical Essay*, cit., pp. 36-37.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

Described as “a politicoeconomic fable with ethnographical trimmings,”<sup>42</sup> it deals with a New Woman and her search for liberty outside of marriage within Allen’s “broad insight into his idea of a modern future.”<sup>43</sup> The novel’s “messianic sermonising”<sup>44</sup> did not gain much popularity, to the point that afterwards the author sank into partial obscurity. Thus, in his last years, he abandoned the hill-top genre but did not stop writing. Between 1897 and 1899, *Strand* published his final series of articles dealing with natural history: “Glimpses of Nature” and “In Nature’s Workshop.” Moreover, Allen wrote six more novels. Four of them were: *A Splendid Sin* (1896), a social comedy with a physiologist as the protagonist; *Tom, Unlimited* (1897), and *The Incidental Bishop* (1897), two juvenile fictions; and *Linnet* (1898), a historical romance. If the latter are products of Allen’s ability to space around genres, the last two are the final examples of Allen’s interest in the New Woman literature. Thus, *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897) recounts the adventures of Juliet, a Girton-educated secretary, whereas *Rosalba: The Story of Her Development* (1899), a story set in Italy, recounts the journey of the protagonist in the discovery of her own past. Both these two novels were published under the pseudonym of Olive Pratt Rayner, reminiscent of Olive Schreiner, sealing their connection with Allen’s two New Woman products *The Woman Who Did* and *The British Barbarians*. However, unlike the latter, the two novels belong to the genre of commercial New Woman fiction, treating the subject of emancipated women in a lighter and less controversial tone.

Grant Allen died on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1899, following a liver complaint. He requested a non-religious funeral, with a memorial held by Frederic Harrison. This choice reflected his scientific ideals, as well as his most debated radical stances, which he had cultivated throughout his private life and career. It is in *The Woman Who Did* that these two sides of Allen come together, to create a highly marketable, orthodox, and Spencerian New Woman novel.

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<sup>42</sup> Morton, *The Busiest Man*, cit., p. 109.

<sup>43</sup> Greenslade and Rodgers, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.



### 3.1.3. The Making of *The Woman Who Did*

Grant Allen wrote the manuscript of *The Woman Who Did* in the spring of 1893, during his stay in Perugia. Then, in February 1895, it was published by John Lane in the Keynotes series. As Peter Morton underlines, the choice of the publisher was pivotal to Allen as “it was known that he [Lane] never published ‘entertainers.’ And that was exactly the spin that Allen, author of numerous entertainers, needed to have put on his reputation at this point in his career.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Allen had always admitted how his choice of writing popular novels was purely driven by the economic benefits that derived from that. As he stated in an interview, “my line is to write what I think the public wish to buy, and not what I wish to say, or what I really think and feel”<sup>46</sup> adding that sensationalism “pay a little better.”<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, *The Woman Who Did* seems to embody the popular literary product Allen was used to selling, as the novel features Herminia, a New Woman, whose phenomenon reached its highest pick of popularity in the 1890s. Moreover, the protagonist’s life and the way it is recounted adopts an openly sensationalist “evangelical rhetoric.”<sup>48</sup>

Contrarily to what could be deduced, Allen’s intention with *The Woman Who Did* was, in his own words, personal and principled: “this was the book he had always wanted to write – it came from the heart of his personal convictions, and he had no eye to the main chance, or to final considerations.”<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the principles that are to be found in the novel were dear to Allen, as the author reiterated them at other times in his career. Particularly, in 1890, he became a member of the Central National Society of Women’s Suffrage.<sup>50</sup> He especially contributed to the Woman Question’s debate mainly with two articles and one essay: “Plain Words on the Woman Question” (1889), “The Girl of the Future” (1890), and “Falling in Love” (1889). Their main preoccupation, which stands as

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<sup>45</sup> Morton, *The Busiest Man*, cit., p. 147.

<sup>46</sup> R. Blythwayt, *Interviews*, London: Smith’s Printing and Publishing Agency, 1893, p. 72.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>48</sup> V. Warne, C. Colligan, “The Man Who Wrote a New Woman Novel: Grant Allen’s ‘The Woman Who Did’ and the Gendering of New Woman Authorship”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2005, pp. 21-46, p. 27.

<sup>49</sup> Wintle, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> As it shall be argued later in this section, Allen’s interest in women’s rights, including this decision, was seen as “opportunistic.” Greenslade and Rodgers, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

the pillar of *The Woman Who Did*, is the emancipation of women from a Spencerian perspective. In “Falling in Love” Allen defends Darwinian sexual selection in marriage. To him, “love at first sight”<sup>51</sup> is “a marvellous instinct” which safeguards the human “balance intact.”<sup>52</sup> The freedom that Allen underlined in his idea of sexual selection was applied by the author to women too, resulting in a thesis in favour of women’s emancipation. Particularly, in “Plain Words on the Woman Question,” published in *The Fortnightly Review*, Allen combines his feminist thoughts with his scientific beliefs. In this article, Allen underlines to have “the greatest sympathy with the modern woman’s demand for emancipation” and to be “an enthusiast of the Woman Question.”<sup>53</sup> However, he also states that Women’s Rights female activists “are pursuing a chimaera, and neglecting to perceive the true aim of their sex,”<sup>54</sup> namely, being mothers and wives by nature. In this way, Allen centres his article on female education, and its emancipating role for women, only in the case it leads them to acknowledge their purpose for civilisation: “emancipate woman [...] but leave her woman still.”<sup>55</sup>

In the latter article, Allen ideally puts himself among the “sensible men” that “will co-operate” with women for their emancipation, and among the “few exceptional men, here and there in the world, who wish to see [women] fully and wholly enfranchised.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, a year later he acts as the main spokesperson for the group. In his article “The Girl of the Future,” published in *The Universal Review*, he identifies as the “prophet” of the truth behind the Woman Question and its issues.<sup>57</sup> In the article, he reiterates his theory of education, stressing the need for women to be educated on their bodies’ capacity. Additionally, he expands the sexual selection theory, introducing the “Free Union” of man and woman outside marriage as “an actuality.”<sup>58</sup> These ideas converge into a novel three years later,

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<sup>51</sup> G. Allen, “Falling in Love”, *Falling in Love and Other Essays*, London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1889, pp. 1-17, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> G. Allen, “Plain Words on The Woman Question”, *The Fortnightly Review*, 1889, pp. 448-458, p. 450.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 452.

<sup>57</sup> G. Allen, “The Girl of the Future”, *The Universal Review*, 1890, pp. 49-64, p. 64.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

in 1893, when Allen wrote *The Woman Who Did* “wholly and solely to satisfy my own taste and my own conscience.”<sup>59</sup>

Although Allen stressed his novel’s noble intentions, the author’s interest in its economic potential is unquestionable. In fact, before its publication, both Allen and the editor Lane launched an aggressive marketing campaign, to which the author actively contributed by sending a copy of the manuscript to W.T. Stead, an influential literary critic who proclaimed the novel “Book of the Month” in the *Review of Reviews*.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, Allen invited his friends to help him avoid failure. In a desperate letter to Edward Clodd, he writes: “if it fails to boom, I go under for ever. I hope, therefore, you will talk about it to your friends, no matter how unacquiescently. It is a serious crisis for me, and only a boom will ever pull me through.”<sup>61</sup> Allen’s marketing strategy worked. Immediately after its publication, the novel sold 25,000 copies in Britain and 10,000 in America. It was then translated into Yiddish, German, French and Swedish.<sup>62</sup>

Indeed, *The Woman Who Did* and its content gained so much popularity that it “became the archetypal anti-marriage novel,”<sup>63</sup> all the while receiving criticism for both its rhetoric and message. Particularly, the novel’s captivating title was targeted by *Punch* and converted into “The Woman Who Wouldn’t Do,” a satirical piece published in the *New Woman* dedicated “She-Note” Series of the magazine.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, many feminists contested Allen’s strong idea of women’s biological duty to be mothers and wives. Particularly, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, head of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, wrote a review of Allen’s novel in *The Contemporary Review*. What Fawcett mainly criticised Allen for is his lack of real interest in the woman’s cause: “he purports to write in the interests of women, but there will be few women who do not see that his little book belongs very much more to the unregenerate man than to women at all.”<sup>65</sup> Fawcett also underlines

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<sup>59</sup> G. Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, Oxford and New York: OUP, (1895), 1995.

<sup>60</sup> Morton, *The Busiest Man*, cit., p. 149.

<sup>61</sup> Clodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>62</sup> Morton, *The Busiest Man*, cit., p. 149.

<sup>63</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> “The Woman Who Wouldn’t Do”, *Punch, or the London Charivari*, March 30 1895, p. 153.

<sup>65</sup> M. Garrett Fawcett, “The Woman Who Did”, *The Contemporary Review*, 1895, pp. 625-631, p. 631.

Allen's opportunism in the Woman Question: "it is satisfactory to remember that Mr. Grant Allen has never given any help by tongue or pen to any practical effort to improve the legal or social status of women."<sup>66</sup>

Despite criticisms, Allen's *The Woman Who Did* was a success, which he tried to replicate with his second hill-top novel, *The British Barbarians*. After this, he ceased to publish serious novels committed to the Woman Rights cause, if not the two abovementioned commercial novels *The Type-Writer Girl* and *Rosalba*. Nevertheless, to this day, *The Woman Who Did* remains the most-known New Woman novel, as well as the most controversial.

### **3.2. Herminia Barton: Grant Allen's Controversial New Woman**

Despite Hardy's and Allen's *Jude the Obscure* and *The Woman Who Did* being published in the same year and dealing with the topic of marriage and independent women, their authors' intentions towards the New Woman phenomenon greatly differed. In fact, Hardy's main objective was that of recounting his New Woman in the Wessex world, while avoiding any parallelism to his life or beliefs. In this regard, in a letter to his friend Edmund Gosse, Hardy defines "curious" any definition of the novel as a "manifesto on 'the marriage question,'" adding that no personal ideals were explicated in the novel.<sup>67</sup> Contrarily, as mentioned above, Allen actively participated in the debate, sharing personal ideals, too. Allen kept this same attitude during the writing process and the publication of *The Woman Who Did*. It is sufficient to underline that the novel was published within the Keynotes collection, that is John Lane's New Woman series, and that Allen's ideas on the New Woman are reflected in Herminia's actions and arguments throughout the novel. Indeed, as I hope to demonstrate, *The Woman Who Did* fully belongs to the New Woman fiction.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>67</sup> Hardy, *Collected Letters*, cit., p. 93.

### 3.2.1. Introducing Herminia: the Structure of *The Woman Who Did*

In his manifesto-like introduction to *The British Barbarians*, Allen retrospectively recognises *The Woman Who Did* as the first of the two hill-top novels published in 1895, which the author defines as “every one of my stories which I write of my own accord, simply and solely for the sake of embodying and enforcing my own opinions.”<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Allen refers to his ideas on purity, and the role of women in society and in the family, framed within the feminist debate. In this way, *The Woman Who Did* treats Allen’s idea of purity combining the New Woman fictional style with Allen’s views and narrative tone. The result is a “brilliantly simple” plot, in line with the New Woman novels,<sup>69</sup> in which the seriousness of the purpose and an easy read are combined. Particularly, Allen was highly experienced in writing readable and light stories as his fiction was meant to be popular and best-selling. As William Greenslade and Terence Rodgers describe it, Allen’s writing involved “one-dimensional characters” whose actions were depicted in “highly readable page-turners whose plots frequently turned on stock devices of Victorian fiction.”<sup>70</sup> As for *The Woman Who Did*, Allen exploits this same principle, by attaining to the simple New Woman plot, focused on two symmetrically opposed women and their relationships: Herminia and Alan, and Dolores and Walter.<sup>71</sup> Their story develops in a few more than one hundred pages.

Herminia Barton is the wealthy daughter of the Dean of Dunwich, who ostracises her for her radical thoughts and behaviours. While on one of her “unaccompanied holydays,”<sup>72</sup> in the English countryside, Herminia is introduced to Alan Merrick, a wealthy London attorney. In a few pages, the two confess their mutual love and, having turned down any hypothesis on marriage, pursue Herminia’s vocation on the Free Union. The two live in this style until Herminia’s pregnancy, which pushes them to retire to the Italian town of Perugia to make Herminia deliver their baby far from the

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<sup>68</sup> G. Allen, “Introduction”, *The British Barbarians*, London: John Lane, 1895, pp. vii-xxiii, p. xi.

<sup>69</sup> Wintle, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>70</sup> Greenslade and Rodgers, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> S. Ernst, “The Woman Who Did and ‘The Girl Who Didn’t’: The Romance of Sexual Selection in Grant Allen and Mémie Muriel Dowie”, in W. Greenslade and T. Rodgers (eds.), *Grant Allen: Literature and Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005, pp. 81-94, p. 86.

<sup>72</sup> Wintle, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

judging English society. Unfortunately, Dolores's birth follows Alan's sudden death, after which his father, Dr Merrick, repudiates Herminia and her daughter, since the couple did not agree to marry. Dolly grows up with his mother in a London suburb, surrounded by radical thinkers close to Herminia, who, in the meantime works as a journalist and writes a New Woman novel. Herminia's life changes once Dolores shows her traditional values, not in line with her mother's wishes for her future. Once Walter, a young squire, proposes to Dolly, Herminia is forced to tell her the truth about Alan and their scandalous Free Union. The novel ends by Dolores seeking shelter at Dr Merrick's and Herminia taking her life to let Dolly marry.

It is to be noticed that Allen decides to depict few but significant characters, each one with their own function. Herminia is the protagonist, a New Woman and, as I shall investigate, Allen's mouthpiece; Alan is Herminia's companion, a New Man, and an instrument to the heroine's mission; Dolly, Walter, and their union represent the past, contrasting with Herminia's innovative ideas. By creating such a simple context and characters, the novel centres entirely on the message that Allen wants to convey, rather than the story itself. In fact, as Gail Cunningham underlines, despite the novel's simplicity, even mediocrity, it had great success as "it was the message, not the medium, which counted."<sup>73</sup> Particularly, the core of Allen's message is to be found in Herminia's characterisation and actions.

### **3.2.2. Grant Allen's Stereotypical New Woman**

Since the beginning of the story, Herminia's depiction exploits elements common to the New Woman character. In this way, in her first appearance, the reader is immediately made aware of Herminia's education, her style, and her social position. Particularly, she studied at Girton,<sup>74</sup> the Cambridge college majorly associated with the New Woman. Moreover, her dress, "a curious oriental-looking navy-blue robe of some soft woollen stuff"<sup>75</sup> is purposely reminiscent of the New

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<sup>73</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>74</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Woman-associated rational dress fashion as her “whole costume, though quite simple in style [...] was charming in its novelty, charming too in the way it permitted the utmost liberty and variety of movement to the lithe limbs of its wearer.”<sup>76</sup> Additionally, she is introduced as “the Dean of Dunwich’s daughter,”<sup>77</sup> hinting at her middle-class origins and wealth. Finally, she works as a teacher at a school in London.

Interestingly, both Herminia and Sue’s depictions respect the classic characterisation of the New Woman, as an independent, overall wealthy, and educated woman. However, the specific particulars of Herminia’s dress and education at Girton College are highly reminiscent of a commercial depiction of the New Woman, rather than a serious one. Indeed, as we have seen in the first chapter of this thesis, the commercial New Woman fiction, and its caricatural production, in *Punch*, for example, often included the representational elements of Girton and of masculine clothes, belonging to the rational dress sphere.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, unlike Hardy’s representation of Sue, which seldom touches upon Sue’s appearance, Allen insists on two other major aspects of the commercial New Woman fiction, i.e. youth and beauty,<sup>79</sup> which in the case of Herminia reflect her freedom and independence. Thus, Herminia’s young age and “unusual beauty”<sup>80</sup> coexist with her independent air: “that face was above all things the face of a free woman.”<sup>81</sup> This results in Herminia being “beautiful, still with the first flush of health and strength and womanhood in a free and vigorous English girl’s body.”<sup>82</sup> This stereotypical representation of the New Woman serves to easily identify and categorise the main character, preparing the reader for Allen’s feminist theorisations that will be shared throughout the novel.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>78</sup> Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

Richardson and Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>79</sup> Willis, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>80</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, *cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

A great part of *The Woman Who Did* is dedicated to Herminia's ideas on women's independence, marriage, and motherhood.<sup>83</sup> In this sense, Sue's character shares the same preoccupation but in a different way.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, if Herminia expresses her ideas first and then applies them in the story, Sue acts first, rather than explaining her morals to the reader. In a few words, what for Herminia is dialogic, for Sue is experiential. For example, both women seem to share a refusal of marriage, however its application is different. On the one hand, Sue goes through a marriage with Phillotson before fully comprehending the social pact's mechanism and its downsides for women. On the other hand, Herminia refuses marriage by principle, depicting brides as "blind girls who go unknowing to the altar, as sheep go to the shambles,"<sup>85</sup> being already conscious that the social pact strips women of their rights.<sup>86</sup> In fact, as she clearly states, to be a married woman "would be treason to my sex. Not my life, not my future, not my individuality, not my freedom."<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, in this regard, Sue seems less political than Herminia. In fact, both women follow and apply their own principles exclusively within their life's sphere of action, this being a New Woman's characteristic.<sup>88</sup> However, if Sue's ideals are rendered in the novel as instincts, rather than being explained to the reader, Herminia tends to educate the readers, explicitly introducing them to her ideals.

*The Woman Who Did* contains alternative pivotal moments in which Herminia shares her views on women's rights, and generally, on how an emancipated woman should behave. Besides the topic of marriage, another relevant stance that Herminia takes regards women's education. Equally

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<sup>83</sup> Unlike with *Jude*, the narrator of *The Woman Who Did* does not concentrate on the characterisation and the hero's ideas regarding these theories, but simply agrees with the heroine. This is possible as, being a New Woman novel, the spokesperson should be the woman. Nevertheless, the narrator wants the reader to identify Alan as a New Man, by making him comply with Herminia's thoughts and, most importantly, by stressing on their similarity. In this way, in the first lines of the novel, the social-conforming Mrs Dewsbury highlights to Alan: "she is one of your own kind, as dreadful as you are; very free and advanced; a perfect firebrand. In fact, my dear child, I don't know which of you makes my hair stand the most." Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., pp. 26-27.

<sup>84</sup> It is convenient to look once again at Hardy's comment on the difference between the two heroines: "my poor heroine learns only by experience what yours knows by instinct." Hardy, *Collected Letters*, cit., p. 69.

<sup>85</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 41.

<sup>86</sup> Stubbs, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>87</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 43.

<sup>88</sup> Once again, Herminia is explicit about this aspect of the New Woman too. She remarks: "it's the question of the social and moral emancipation that interests me far more than the mere political one – woman's rights as they call it. [...] the vote is a matter that troubles me little in itself; what I want is to see women made fit to use it." Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 28.



to marriage, accessibility to female education was a core issue of the Woman Question during the nineteenth century, and, for this reason, it is implicitly treated in *Jude* too, as Sue is granted access to study. Nevertheless, Herminia shares a particularly narrow point of view on the issue, claiming that men's higher education does not necessarily free women from their subjection.<sup>89</sup> Talking about her experience at Girton, Herminia underlines that its education "made only a pretence at freedom,"<sup>90</sup> later explaining:

They're trying hard enough to develop us intellectually; but morally and socially they want to mew us up just as close as ever. And they won't succeed. The zenana must go. Sooner or later, I'm sure, if you begin by educating women, you must end by emancipating them.<sup>91</sup>

Interestingly, Herminia's stance on female education coincides with Allen's ideas shared in his previously mentioned articles "Plain Words on the Woman Question" and "The Girl of the Future," in which the author shares his concerns towards women's masculine education,<sup>92</sup> confirming its impossibility to emancipate them.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, as I shall inspect later in this chapter, Herminia shares Allen's views on another crucial aspect of the New Woman, namely motherhood. Hence, although *The Woman Who Did* is indeed a New Woman novel, Herminia's character and actions seem to belong more to Allen's imposition of masculinity on the feminine topic<sup>94</sup> rather than fully conforming to the New Woman novel. This perspective given to the character by the author himself is reinforced in the novel by the narrator and New Man.

### 3.2.3. A New Woman's Masculine Perspective

In *The Woman Who Did*, Allen adopts a masculine perspective on several layers of the narrations, particularly involving his own writing, the ideals behind the novel, and its actants. Firstly, as analysed above, Allen's stances within the Woman's Rights movement were quite radical, to the point of being harshly criticised by the author's contemporary feminists and later by critics. In this

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<sup>89</sup> J. Fuller, "'Ordinary Teacher-Woman': The Complicated Figure of the Mother / Teacher in Late Victorian Fiction", *Victorian: A Journal of Culture and Literature: The Ohio State University Press*, vol. 135, 2019, pp. 59-69, p. 66.

<sup>90</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 27.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>92</sup> Allen, "Plain Words", cit., p. 453.

<sup>93</sup> Allen, "The Girl of the Future", cit., p. 57.

<sup>94</sup> Warne and Colligan, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

way, what Allen defined as woman-directed advanced ideas have been labelled by critics a consequence of his conflicting feminism. For instance, Vanessa Warne and Colette Colligan talk about “inconsistencies in [Allen’s] feminism that have perplexed and infuriated readers of all type;”<sup>95</sup> Sarah Wintle underlines his being “offensively dismissive of contemporary feminists;”<sup>96</sup> and Patricia Stubbs goes further by claiming that “Grant Allen was no feminist.”<sup>97</sup> Although Allen had very personal ideas on the Woman Question, he created his own version of the feminist claims of the time. As a result, he entered the market of women’s books, defined by the same Allen as feminine,<sup>98</sup> all the while preventing any feminine association at the same time.<sup>99</sup> This strategy finds its best application in *The Woman Who Did*.

Writing *The Woman Who Did*, Allen continues to recount a feminine story while distancing from it and proving his masculinity on any given occasion. In this way, Allen’s first attempt at doing so is the dedication of the novel to his wife: “To my dear wife, to whom I have dedicated my twenty happiest years I dedicate also this brief memorial of a less fortunate love.”<sup>100</sup> By dedicating his work to his wife, Allen subtly states his gender and proves his virility. Additionally, he also goes against the novel’s theories and the claim that they belong to his “conscience.”<sup>101</sup> Indeed, “in a novel that advocates free union and castigates marriage, the author’s dedication to his wife is out of place. His book may endorse advanced ideas, but he distances himself from them by reminding his readers of his own conservative lifestyle.”<sup>102</sup> Similarly, in his article “Plain Words on the Woman Question,” Allen equally feels the need to underline his masculinity while supporting the Woman’s Rights movement with his own theories.<sup>103</sup> Thus, Allen introduces the readers to a supposed advanced man

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<sup>95</sup> Warne and Colligan, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>96</sup> Wintle, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>97</sup> Stubbs, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>98</sup> Warne and Colligan, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>100</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, *cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>101</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, *cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>102</sup> Warne and Colligan, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>103</sup> Specifically, Allen hints at the virility of the cause’s men supporters. For instance, he argues: “we men are (rightly) very jealous of our virility. [...] for virility is the keynote to all that is best and most forcible in the masculine character.” Allen, “Plain Words”, *cit.*, p. 452.

and woman without, however, showing total support for the cause, this being “undercut by a sense of threatened masculinity.”<sup>104</sup> In the novel, Allen maintains this same objective, asserting a certain masculinity to the narrator and therefore to himself.

Throughout the novel, Allen exploits precise means to preserve the narrator’s masculinity. To begin with, the male narrator’s voice is to be identified in the preface to the novel: “‘but surely no woman would ever dare to do so,’ said my friend. ‘I knew a woman who did,’ said I; ‘and this is her story.’”<sup>105</sup> This conversation, possibly between “two men at the club titillating themselves with lewd thoughts,”<sup>106</sup> has the function to mark a preliminary distance between the femininity of the novel and its subject, a woman, from the narratorial voice and, therefore, its author. Then, throughout the novel, Allen distances himself from the feminine genre of the work by adding frequent essay-like passages. In so doing, he “brings his book back into the proscribed sphere of male literary activity by making it more like a treatise than a novel.”<sup>107</sup> Moreover, Allen’s narrator switches from the third to the first person, adding personal comments too. For instance, the narrator says: “Herminia Barton’s features, I think, were even more striking in their way in later life.”<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, in another passage, the narrator states his ideas clearly by beginning his sentence with: “indeed, it adds to my mind [...]”<sup>109</sup> In so doing, this “uneasy movement in narrative voice from third-person omniscient to first person [...] disrupts the direct engagement between narrator and character, allowing room for authorial distance and even opposition.”<sup>110</sup> Allen’s imposition of masculinity on the novel continues through the character of Alan.

Another way of proving Allen’s masculinity and detachment from the novel’s overall femininity is the identification of the narrator with the hero.<sup>111</sup> Firstly, this is achieved through the similarity

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<sup>104</sup> Warne and Colligan, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>108</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, *cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>110</sup> Warne and Colligan, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

between the name Allen and Alan. Moreover, in one specific passage, the narrator includes both within the male sphere: “nature makes us virile,” and “we must shield the weaker vessel.”<sup>112</sup> Later on, recounting Herminia’s story, Allen’s masculinity keeps being legitimised by Alan’s point of view. As the novel begins, the masculine character predominates over the heroine. In fact, Alan Merrick is the one who is first shown by the narrator, to then be introduced to Herminia. Thus, Herminia’s first glance is given to the readers through Alan’s perspective: “he raised his hat. As he did so, he looked down at Herminia Barton’s face with a sudden start of surprise. Why, this was a girl of most unusual beauty!”<sup>113</sup> In so doing, “the novel thrusts the reader into Alan’s position, as his gaze moves across Herminia’s body.”<sup>114</sup> Similarly, a few pages later, the narrator comments on Herminia through Alan’s eyes: “She seemed even prettier than last night, in her simple white morning dress.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, not only Herminia’s appearance is regulated by the masculine perspective, but the narrator also shares Alan’s thoughts on her: “this girl so interested him. She was the girl he had imagined, the girl he had dreamt of, the girl he had thought possible, but never yet met with.”<sup>116</sup> The assertion of Alan’s perspective over Herminia drastically reduces the New Woman’s impact on readers. As I shall analyse, Allen adopts this strategy not only to convey a masculine narrator and author but also to frame the supposed transgressive character of a New Woman within traditional femininity.

### **3.3. Convention Behind Progress: Herminia’s Free Union and Ultimate Tragedy**

So far, I have focused my analysis on Allen’s incongruencies regarding the assertion of strong masculinity within *The Woman Who Did* as a New Woman novel. On the same line, this section of the chapter will be dedicated to how the New Woman of the novel, Herminia, is affected by Allen’s strategic imposition of masculinity. Particularly, I shall focus on Herminia and Alan’s courtship and

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<sup>112</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 48.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>114</sup> Cameron, “Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did*”, cit., p. 292.

<sup>115</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 33.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

free union: the particularities of the relationship, and their connection with Allen and Herminia's ideals on motherhood.

### 3.3.1. Creating the Free Union: The New Woman and New Man's Deceptive Courtship

Unlike with *Jude*, in *The Woman Who Did* the New Woman and New Man's first encounter represents the novel's first scene. Apart from reflecting a less structured plot than the one created by Thomas Hardy, this element underlines the importance that Allen puts on the couple's significance in the story and in the ideas that they share. In this way, the literary strategy that Allen employs to recount Alan and Herminia's first encounter and subsequent courtship determine the two characters' position for the rest of the novel. Most importantly, it hints at Herminia's real stance as a New Woman and the fact that "beneath all this talk of independence and freedom lurks an almost entirely traditional ideal of femininity,"<sup>117</sup> as opposed to Alan's traditional masculinity. Particularly, this scene is reminiscent and utilises elements from the romance narrative.<sup>118</sup> As Janice Radway states, the romance narrative requires the hero to be an active element in traditional courtship, being the one who "provokes a response" from the woman and holds a "spectacular masculinity."<sup>119</sup> Whereas the heroine should be "an extraordinary example of full-blooming womanhood,"<sup>120</sup> with developed sexuality and rebelliousness which, however, are prevented to be threatening to the man by her "true femininity [which] is never left in doubt".<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, during the courtship, the traditional heroine holds the "power to re-create" the man, who in turn abandons his sexual promiscuity in exchange for the heroine's love.<sup>122</sup>

In the courtship between Alan and Herminia, it is possible to detect the elements that Radway lists in her work. Firstly, Alan embodies the hero's requirement to be the first in the couple choosing

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<sup>117</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>118</sup> Cameron, "Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*", *cit.*, p. 292.

<sup>119</sup> J. A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991, pp. 126, 128.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128, 130.

to courtship. In fact, the reader is made aware that, once Alan sees Herminia, he gets interested in her.<sup>123</sup> Thus, the narrator's focus on his reaction helps establish the subsequent courtship as the man's decision. Moreover, Alan Merrick is introduced to the readers as a virile and sexually promiscuous man.<sup>124</sup> He loses his promiscuity once together with Herminia, who tasks herself to change and elevate him: "Herminia Barton was to preserve him. It was her task in life, though she knew it not, to save Alan Merrick's soul. And nobly she saved it."<sup>125</sup> As for Herminia, she is depicted as the "image of romantic womanhood."<sup>126</sup> Particularly, the narrator inspects the three elements that a traditional heroine must embody: beauty, rebelliousness, and sexuality. As mentioned above, Herminia's beauty is stressed since her first encounter with Alan, and throughout the course of the novel too.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, her rebelliousness is exemplified in the feminist theories that she shares with Alan during their courtship. In this way, she discusses women's education, freedom and independence from men,<sup>128</sup> and her aversion to marriage.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, she is frank about her feelings and interest in Alan: "For Herminia was frank; she liked the young man, and [...] she knew no reason why she would avoid or pretend to avoid his company."<sup>130</sup> Similarly, she clearly states her feelings to Alan: "I like you very much [...]. Why should I shrink from admitting it?"<sup>131</sup> However, as Janine Radway detects in the romantic heroine's behaviour, Herminia's sexual openness is counteracted by rather a traditional femininity.

During Herminia and Alan's courtship, and throughout their relationship, Herminia's "feminine sexuality,"<sup>132</sup> which also indicates her nature of New Woman, is counterbalanced by

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<sup>123</sup> This affirmation refers to the previously analysed scene in which Alan first meets Herminia and the narrator concentrates on his thoughts rather than the heroine's. Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 26.

<sup>124</sup> His virility is addressed both by the narrator and by him. (Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., pp. 48, 55) His sexual promiscuousness, to Allen's eyes, lies in his choice of not having dedicated to love once mature enough: he is "not quite like those best of men, who are, so to speak, born married." Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>126</sup> A. Cotes, "Gissing, Grant Allen and 'Free Union'", *The Gissing Newsletter*, vol. 19, no. 4, 1983, pp. 1-18, p. 9.

<sup>127</sup> During a later encounter with her father, Herminia is described as still beautiful; afterwards, the narrator underlines her "chastened beauty;" Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., pp. 100, 107.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>132</sup> Cotes, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

romantic-like traditional feminine behaviour. Thus, if Alan expresses his sentiments to her, the narrator underlines Herminia's canonical response: "Herminia's heart gave a delicious bound. She was a woman, and therefore she was glad he would speak so. She was a woman, and therefore she shrank from acknowledging it."<sup>133</sup> In another passage, she blushes, as a romantic heroine should do: "Alan looked at her hand. Her face was crimson by this with maidenly shame."<sup>134</sup> Later in the story, the narrator points at her "unerring womanly instincts" and "unerring feminine tact."<sup>135</sup> As a result, Herminia submits to Alan's masculinity, while Alan asserts his protection of the couple. In this way, Allen's application of a traditional romance pattern to this New Woman novel leads to some contradictions.

Although Alan and Herminia are substantially and by plot a New Man and a New Woman, their courtship is recounted in a way in which their characters also respond to a traditional gender pattern. Firstly, Herminia's femininity and modesty struggle against her nature as New Woman. On the one hand, once they reveal their feelings for one another, Herminia relies on Alan as a traditional woman and man are expected to do, that is, by giving Alan power over her. In fact, she "laid her head with perfect trust upon the man's broad shoulder,"<sup>136</sup> and she "took his kiss with sweet submission, and made no faint pretence of fighting against it."<sup>137</sup> On the other hand, Herminia willingly gives herself to Alan, who "expects more resistance,"<sup>138</sup> turning her "self-surrender"<sup>139</sup> into a hint of her freedom at the sexual selection as a New Woman. Similarly, Allen represents Herminia's purity to stress her social fall, but also to make her a virginal romantic woman. In this way, Allen refers to Herminia's purity several times during the course of the story. For instance, Alan notices "how pure, how pellucid, how noble the woman was;"<sup>140</sup> her actions are guided by "purity and nobility;"<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 39.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* p. 54.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* p. 108.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>138</sup> Ernst, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>139</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 41.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

finally, both during her first night with Alan and during her suicide, she wears a white dress.<sup>142</sup> Hence, on the one hand, Herminia's purity refers to the romantic narrative's trope - and common contemporary usage - for which the woman must be represented as virginal, contrasted to the hero's experience.<sup>143</sup> On the other hand, Allen's strategy is reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, in an attempt to contrast Herminia's independent tendencies to the "conservative and hypocritical society."<sup>144</sup>

Herminia and Alan's behaviour and role during their courtship reflect an ongoing discrepancy in Allen's theorisation regarding the New Woman's attitude towards the Free Union. As I shall analyse in the following section, Herminia theoretically rules the couple's Free Union, being "the stronger partner"<sup>145</sup> and an ideal reference to Alan. However, their Free Union also shows Herminia's failure at being a completely independent woman within a comradeship-like relationship that aims at the two sexes' equality.

### **3.3.2. "Love and Duty Against Convention:"<sup>146</sup> Allen's Spencerian Comradeship**

A major common New Woman element between *Jude* and *The Woman Who Did* is their "significant - and overt - challenge to the notion that marriage should be the goal of a woman's life."<sup>147</sup> Indeed, both novels stand as a strong critique of the social compact, which, however, tends to lead to two different outputs. In his work, Thomas Hardy represents marriage as one of the "forces and laws"<sup>148</sup> that rule over society and that the rebellious Sue eventually cannot escape, both socially and in spirit. Contrarily, *The Woman Who Did* offers an alternative to marriage, in an educational attempt to change those same social forces and laws that stand against Herminia. This section aims

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., pp. 61, 140.

<sup>143</sup> Radway, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>144</sup> Cameron, "Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*", *cit.*, p. 293.

<sup>145</sup> Cotes, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>146</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, *cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>147</sup> Reynolds and Humble, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>148</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, *cit.*, p. 207.



to inspect Herminia's ideals on marriage, the realisation of the Free Union with Alan, and its final objective.

Throughout the novel, Herminia stands many times against marriage, as "an institution granting man sole monopoly of female bodies."<sup>149</sup> In this way, in her opinion, marriage is only the "blinding effect of custom"<sup>150</sup> adopted by "a blind and superstitious majority."<sup>151</sup> To the New Woman, real civilisation commences once the "monopoly of the human heart"<sup>152</sup> ends: "We must cease to be Calibans. We must begin to be human."<sup>153</sup> Similarly, Sue conveys these ideas throughout *Jude*. In fact, Thomas Hardy's heroine looks at marriage as a forced love between two people, regulated by a superstitious social institution. However, if Sue personally distances herself from it, Herminia explains the theory behind her political position. Hence, throughout the novel, the New Woman addresses marriage arguing: "I know what marriage is – from what vile slavery it has sprung; on what unseen horrors for my sister women it is reared and buttressed; by what unholy sacrifices it is sustained and made possible."<sup>154</sup> Later in the novel, she becomes Allen's spokesperson in including marriage within the social slavery sphere.

The seventeenth chapter of *The Woman Who Did* is possibly the most dialectal of the novel. Here, the narrator inspects Herminia's ideas on marriage, and as I will analyse later, on the Free Union, offering the reader a treatise on Allen's New Woman ideas. In this way, Herminia lists the social compact among society's "lowest vices."<sup>155</sup> To the New Woman, patriotism is the first to encounter, which, far from being a "virtue," embodies "collective selfishness."<sup>156</sup> Later on, Herminia places the "instinct of property," which annihilates any form of brotherhood with one's "fellow-

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<sup>149</sup> Cameron, "Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*", cit., p. 293.

<sup>150</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p.58.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

citizens.”<sup>157</sup> Thereafter, Herminia lists slavery, described as the “vilest of them all.”<sup>158</sup> Finally, if the latter takes the name of the “monopoly of human life,” its more immoral version is recognised as “the monopoly of human heart.”<sup>159</sup> In this way, Herminia finds its origins in “the primitive habit of felling a woman with a blow, stunning her by repeated strokes of the club or spear, and dragging her off by the hair of her head as a slave to her captor’s hut or rock-shelter.”<sup>160</sup> As to Herminia’s present day, she showcases an updated version of this slavery. In fact, to her, contemporary women “enslave the Man in return” pursuing “equality in an equal slavery.”<sup>161</sup> Thus, to Herminia (and Allen), marriage is no longer bearable within a civilised society: “now it is not adultery, but marriage, which is morally indefensible.”<sup>162</sup>

Herminia’s moral solution to marriage’s slavery is the Free Union. Although for Allen, this was only an “intellectual theory” that he did not apply to his life,<sup>163</sup> it becomes “fundamental to [Herminia’s] theoretical position” within the novel.<sup>164</sup> The Free Union is based on the Spencerian idea for which animal sexual selection evolves in society as “an intimate bond founded on mutual affection not on legal constraints.”<sup>165</sup> Herminia makes this theory her own by presenting it as a solution to the primitivism of marriage. The heroine theorises on both Man and Woman’s perspectives. As for men, she argues:

No man, indeed, is truly civilized till he can say in all sincerity to every woman of all the women he loves, to all the women who love him. “Give me what you can of your love and yourself; but never strive for my sake to deny any love, to strangle any impulse that pants for breath within you. Give me what you can, while you can, without grudging.”<sup>166</sup>

Likewise, women should address their lovers in these terms: “give me what you can of your love and of yourself; but don’t think I am so vile and so selfish and so poor as to desire to monopolize you.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>162</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>163</sup> Cotes, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>165</sup> Cameron, “Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did*”, *cit.*, p. 283.

<sup>166</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, *cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

Herminia and Alan put into practice the Free Union once Alan consents to renounce marriage in favour of the more civilised “irregular compact.”<sup>168</sup>

At the base of Alan and Herminia’s Free Union, as for Jude and Sue, lies a similarity between two individuals of different sex. As Herminia notices, this is “the magic link of sex that severs and unites us [which] makes all the difference.” In this way, the New Woman and New Man refer to each other not as husband and wife, but as “very dear, dear friends, with the only kind of friendship that nature makes possible between men and women.”<sup>169</sup> Moreover, the comradeship’s common ground between Jude and Sue holds on the two individuals’ uniqueness, sympathy towards each other, and wish to elevate the other to be a better human being. Likewise, Herminia says to Alan: “lift me! – raise me! exalt me! Take me on the sole terms on which I can give myself up to you.”<sup>170</sup> Although the two work together to reach this objective, it is the New Woman to be the one who guides the union. Indeed, as Sue is Jude’s idol in leading him through the comradeship’s love and the New Woman’s way of living, Herminia does the same for Alan:

Gradually she was raising him to her own level. [...] Herminia was weaning Alan by degrees from the world; she was teaching him to see that moral purity and moral earnestness are more worth after all than to dwell with purple hangings in all the tents of iniquity.<sup>171</sup>

The mutual advancement within the New Woman and New Man’s relationship that Herminia promotes in the novel eventually turns into a substantial difference with Thomas Hardy’s comradeship and the average feminist thought. In fact, although Allen professes a certain degree of equity and even moral supremacy of the New Woman over the man, Herminia and Alan’s practice of the Free Union does not reflect their biological impartiality. As Patricia Stubbs underlines, Herminia “thinks about relationships and sexual morality in much the same way as any orthodox heroine.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>172</sup> Stubbs, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

In the recounting of Alan and Herminia's Free Union, if on the one hand, Allen promotes "the rejection of marriage, and the legal, sexual and economic bounds it attached to women," on the other hand, he suffocates this argument by applying "gender distinctions" to the relationship between the New Woman and New Man.<sup>173</sup> Indeed, explaining to Alan how the Free Union will work, Herminia claims what could be seen as a drastic measure to prevent any damage to both individuals' independence. In this way, they consent to live apart, as "the notion of necessarily keeping house together [...] belonged entirely to the regime of the man-made patriarchy;"<sup>174</sup> she decides to live as modestly as she is used to, continuing her work as a teacher;<sup>175</sup> she refuses any money from him as "she would be self-supporting still."<sup>176</sup> If in principle, this decision reflects Herminia's extremist views on women's autonomy, her judgement dramatically changes once the two conceive a child, and Alan decides to escape to Italy. On this occasion, Herminia explains:

It must be always so. The man must needs retain for many years to come the personal hegemony he has usurped over the woman; and the woman who once accepts him as lover or husband must give way in the end, even in matters of principle, to his virile self-assertion. She would be less a woman, and he less a man, were any other result possible. Deep down in the very roots of the idea of sex we come on that prime antithesis – the male, active and regressive; the female, sedentary, passive, and receptive.<sup>177</sup>

With these words, Allen confirms what during Alan and Herminia's courtship is hidden under the romantic circumstances, that is, the author's belief in a paradoxical Free Union which at the same time aims at freeing women from men's historical abuse and preserves "women's instinctive passivity"<sup>178</sup> towards "masculine common sense."<sup>179</sup> As a result, Allen limits the New Woman's freedom to choosing the man to whom she will be naturally subjected. As the narrator reasons, "she was woman enough to like being led. Only, it must be the right man who led her."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Reynolds and Humble, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>174</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, *cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>178</sup> Warne and Colligan, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>180</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, *cit.*, p. 51.

If in *The Woman Who Did*, the New Woman and the New Man retain the traditional sexual differences and power roles of traditional marriage, in *Jude the Obscure*, Sue and Jude's comradeship builds on gender equality between the two individuals. In this way, if Sue denies traditional femininity, aiming at a sexual similarity with the man she loves, Herminia fulfils Allen's words in "Plain Words on the Woman Question:" "make your men virile: make your women womanly."<sup>181</sup> Likewise, if Sue and Jude's comradeship aims at reaching an intellectual connection with each other, Herminia and Alan's Free Union denies the woman's "intellectual activity,"<sup>182</sup> making the man a mentor to the woman. Indeed, the couple's shared intellectual burden only regards the New Woman's theoretical sphere, as it is the only argument Herminia has a saying on throughout the novel, particularly, during their courtship. Contrarily, when portraying Herminia outside her constrained intellectual superiority, Allen depicts her as almost primitive: "nature, she understood; was art yet a closed book to her? If so, she would be sorry."<sup>183</sup> In this way, art becomes "a new subject in which Alan could be her teacher from the very beginning, as most men are teachers to the women who depend upon them."<sup>184</sup> Once again, Allen confirms the superiority of the man over the New Woman dictated by a biological distinction. It is no surprise, then, that Herminia's abovementioned connection with nature, as opposed to Alan's intellect, reflects women's supposed ancestral duty in society, namely motherhood.

### 3.3.3. "*E pur si muoverà*"<sup>185</sup>: Herminia's Motherhood and Voluntary Martyrdom

As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, Sue's final objective within the comradeship with the New Man is to attain a higher union with Jude. In this sense, motherhood stands as an obstacle to the New Woman, as it moves her relationship into the realm of traditional marriage and

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<sup>181</sup> Allen, "Plain Words", cit., p. 456.

<sup>182</sup> Cameron, "Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*", cit., p. 282.

<sup>183</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 74.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>185</sup> Allen, "The Girl of the Future", cit., p. 64. "And yet it will move" (my translation). Possibly a homage to Galileo's "and yet it moves," Grant Allen utilises this slightly modified rendition in his article "The Girl of the Future" to underline that his theory on the New Woman will be given justice in due time in the future. Similarly, *The Woman Who Did's* narrator describes Herminia's martyrdom in the same sense. This will be analysed in this section of the chapter.

subsequent sexual submission of the woman to the man. In this way, *Jude* questions childbearing as a New Woman's final desire for her fulfilment,<sup>186</sup> eventually contributing to the heroine's tragic descent. Contrarily, *The Woman Who Did* advocates for a "new variation of the New Woman" in which the heroine "understands and accepts her maternal destiny."<sup>187</sup> In this way, it is necessary to position Herminia's motherhood within Allen's paradoxical feminism. As analysed above, if on the one hand, Allen's heroine promotes women's emancipation against patriarchal marriage, on the other hand, she endorses Alan's power over her, accepting women and men's conventional roles. Thus, Allen's idea of motherhood conforms to this rule, by portraying the heroine's visceral refusal to marriage's sexual submission but accepting and promoting the other side of the coin, that is childbearing's sexual enslavement,<sup>188</sup> considered "essential to the liberation of women."<sup>189</sup> I shall dedicate this section to this particular aspect of Herminia's characterisation as New Woman, by analysing its theoretical background, realisation within the story, and resultant connection with Herminia's Martyrdom.

As with all the New Woman theories that are to be found in *The Woman Who Did*, motherhood belongs to Allen's own theorisations on the topic. Specifically, Herminia's motherhood represents the core of their *mise en abyme* in the novel, as women's reproduction equally represents society's gear within Allen's ideals. Indeed, Allen's New Woman theory was highly influenced by evolution, represented by the author "as a unifying and organising philosophy with Spencer as the grand master and Darwin as a biological evolutionist."<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, Allen's evolutionary theory goes beyond, as he connects Spencer's social evolutionism with the added women's key role as child-bearers.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, to Allen, women must acknowledge that their role in sexual selection and reproduction

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<sup>186</sup> Stubbs, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>187</sup> Cameron, "Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*", *cit.*, p. 294.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 289-290.

<sup>189</sup> Fuller, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>190</sup> H. Atchinson, "Grant Allen, Spencer and Darwin", in William Greenslade and Terence Rodgers (eds.), *Grant Allen: Literature and Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005, pp. 55-64, p. 56.

<sup>191</sup> Cameron, "Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*", *cit.*, p. 283.

“ultimately serves the larger social body.”<sup>192</sup> Allen’s first explanation of this theory is to be found in his controversial articles prior to *The Woman Who Did*. Here, he already promotes women’s essential social task as mothers for the sake of humanity’s survival: “the vast majority of the women must become wives and mothers, and must bear at least four children apiece.”<sup>193</sup> In this way, modern female education must tend towards introducing them to this role,<sup>194</sup> and society will eventually “recognise maternity as the central function of the mass of women.”<sup>195</sup> In this way, in *The Woman Who Did*, Allen promotes the New Woman as an emancipated individual who willingly embraces her maternal destiny within society.

Following his journalistic claims, Allen creates the literary figure of Herminia promoting both the New Woman’s liberation from patriarchy and the forced maternity he requires from women. The result is a progressive woman who conceives maternity as a free act, leading towards the creation of a new society.<sup>196</sup> Once again, she abides by nature as she already does in her subjection to the New Man. Herminia explains: “every good woman is by nature a mother, and finds best in maternity her social and moral salvation. She shall be saved in child-bearing. [...] She knew that to be a mother is the best privilege of her sex.”<sup>197</sup> Thus, for Herminia not only a woman’s womb is the key instrument for society to grow, but also, she is allowed by nature to be independent only after childbearing.<sup>198</sup> In this way, by “accepting the orbit for which nature designed her,” Herminia finds her full realisation as citizen and woman only with maternity: “every woman should naturally wish to live her whole life, to fulfil her whole functions; and that she could do only by becoming a mother.”<sup>199</sup> Contrarily, celibacy, which is disadvantageous for both men and women,<sup>200</sup> represents a wicked obstacle to the

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<sup>192</sup> B. Cameron, “Sister of the Type: the Feminist Collective in Grant Allen’s ‘The Type-Writer Girl’”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2012, pp. 229-244, p. 234.

<sup>193</sup> Allen, “Plain Words”, cit., p. 449.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 456.

Allen, “The Girl of the Future”, cit., p. 57.

<sup>195</sup> Allen, “Plain Words”, cit., p. 458.

<sup>196</sup> Cameron, “Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did*”, cit., pp. 281-282.

<sup>197</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 94.

<sup>198</sup> Cameron, “Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did*”, cit., p. 283.

<sup>199</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 59.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

female fulfilment: sprung from supposed “man-made institutions,” celibacy is defined by Herminia as “a sort of anti-natural religion for women.”<sup>201</sup> In this way, criticising the Sue-like types of New Women, for whom motherhood stands as a tragedy rather than a natural objective in society, Allen proceeds his depiction of the rightful New Woman’s maternity by elevating Herminia’s figure and task as a mother.

Within Alan and Herminia’s Free Union, maternity finds a place from the beginning. Indeed, Herminia gives for granted that the two will conceive a child, as she talks about it while explaining their coming life as comrades: “she should give her children, should any come, the unique and glorious birth-right of being the only human beings ever born into this world as the deliberate result of a free union, contracted on philosophical and ethical principles.”<sup>202</sup> Looking at Herminia’s maternity, the reader witnesses what Angelique Richardson calls the “biologization of the love-plot,”<sup>203</sup> in which love – or what Allen recognises as sexual selection – eventually contributes to the survival of the human species. In this way, not only does the New Woman and New Man’s baby represent the success of the free love’s experimentation, as it shows the Free Union’s equality by being “half his” and “half hers;”<sup>204</sup> but it also symbolises the first example of Allen’s ideal woman, who willingly gives her body for the sake of humanity.

In order to convey the importance of Herminia’s duty, Allen utilises religious imagery around the New Woman’s maternity. In fact, the child is subtly depicted as a Jesus-like figure who is destined to “regenerate humanity”<sup>205</sup> and who carries the salvation of women’s half of humankind.<sup>206</sup> Consequently, Herminia acquires the image of Jesus’s mother as the creator and carrier of the world’s saviour. While pregnant, she is described in this way: “She sat, a lonely soul, enthroned amid the halo of her own perfect purity. To Alan she seemed like one of those early Italian Madonnas, lost in a

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>203</sup> A. Richardson, “Allopathic Pills? Health, Fitness and New Woman Fictions”, *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1999, pp. 1-21, p. 3.

<sup>204</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., pp. 78, 89.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., pp. 80, 89, 92.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., pp. 83, 94, 101, 103.



glory of light that surrounds and half hides them.”<sup>207</sup> Similarly, while raising Dolly alone, she is described as Mater Dolorosa.<sup>208</sup> By addressing Herminia’s Mary-like role in the novel, Allen exalts her as what Patricia Murphy calls a “eugenic Madonna,”<sup>209</sup> who elevates Allen’s New Woman’s duty to procreate with a culturally recognised archetype of the mother figure, that is Mary. This results in the legitimisation of Herminia’s decision of giving birth outside of marriage, far from being defined as a woman’s fall. Indeed, it is Herminia herself who states: “other women have fallen, as men choose to put it in their odious dialect: no other has voluntarily risen as I propose to do.”<sup>210</sup> Hence, Herminia carefully plans her enfranchised motherhood, and with that, her martyrdom.

The narrator foresees Herminia’s tragedy since the beginning of the story, as in the first novel’s lines he talks about her future “willing martyrdom for humanity’s sake.”<sup>211</sup> Later on, the readers are often reminded of Herminia’s sacrifice, as she “constantly and tediously reiterates her firm resolution to be a martyr to the cause.”<sup>212</sup> In this way, the heroine mentions it as a “self-imposed sacrifice”<sup>213</sup> that “she was willing to make for humanity.”<sup>214</sup> She is aware of her “final martyrdom,”<sup>215</sup> as she wants herself to be the first woman to pave the way: “Unless one woman begins, there will be no beginning.”<sup>216</sup> As for the cause of Herminia’s sacrifice, Alison Cotes proposes that Herminia is a martyr for “the female sexual revolution,”<sup>217</sup> which clarifies one passage in which the narrator explains: “she was making [Alan] understand and sympathize with the motives” of her martyrdom.<sup>218</sup> Nevertheless, I suggest these motives be acknowledged as Allen’s version of women’s rights’ liberation, given his highly biased feminist view brought into the novel. Thus, Herminia’s sacrifice

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-74.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>209</sup> P. Murphy, “An Unstable Conception: Grant Allen’s Eugenic Madonna”, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, vol. 25, 2011, pp. 121-139, p. 121.

<sup>210</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 46.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>212</sup> Cotes, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>213</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 65.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>217</sup> Cotes, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>218</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 63.

reflects her freedom in the sexual selection of a partner, entering the Free Union as an independent woman, and fulfilling her natural duty by being pregnant. Despite Herminia's achievement of this state, her martyrdom presents major failures carried on by the heroine herself.

As Sue Bridehead, Herminia is aware of her status as a social outsider and a victim of a bigoted society. Nevertheless, if Sue overtly experiences social rejection throughout her story - for example with the sequences in which her family is not allowed to various accommodations around Wessex – Herminia rarely shows any open confrontation, dealing with her battle in her own private sphere, rather than openly in society. In this way, once her pregnancy becomes evident, she “[gives] way” and abandons the school she works in;<sup>219</sup> she adopts the name of Mrs Alan Merrick<sup>220</sup> in Italy and Mrs Barton once back in London with her daughter;<sup>221</sup> finally, she never tells Dolly, whose birth should be the core of her just martyrdom, the truth about her story.<sup>222</sup> Thus, Herminia interacts with nothing like a theoretical counterpart to her martyrdom: “there is no real intellectual debate, no realistic doubt in her own mind, no dramatic tension about her decision.”<sup>223</sup> Furthermore, although the narrator claims that the heroine's martyrdom is somehow victorious, as I shall see, the heroine openly renounces her objective once the New Man dies, shifting this pressure to Dolly who, however, is kept from the truth: “Alan's death had made her task impossible; but if Dolly could fill her place for the sake of humanity, she would not regret it.”<sup>224</sup> This proves that, to Allen, the New Woman's freedom is indeed tied to the man, as she cannot perform her duty without him. Although Herminia clearly states to have failed the task she is passing to Dolly,<sup>225</sup> the narrator keeps referring to her as a moral pioneer. In this sense, I argue that with Alan's death, the whole meaning of Herminia's martyrdom changes: if it is centred first on Herminia's free union and her production of free citizens outside of marriage, it now aims at making Dolly do that.

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., pp. 93, 95.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>223</sup> Cotes, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>224</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 101.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

Dolly's character represents Herminia's definitive failure, which condemns the heroine to death. Hinted at several times during the narration of her growth, Dolly's nature is far from being similar to that of her mother, as she is attracted to and conforms to the same norms that Herminia repudiates. Already as a child, she manifests an interest in the figures of Alan and Herminia's wealthy fathers, once she accidentally sees them.<sup>226</sup> Later on, Dolly shows no attraction to her mother's cause: "Dolly found her mother's friends were apt to bore her: she preferred the society of the landlady's daughters."<sup>227</sup> In this way, Herminia soon realises that "the child of so many hopes, of so many aspirations, the child predestined to regenerate humanity, was thinking for herself – in a retrograde direction."<sup>228</sup> As the narrator underlines, her having "what the world calls common sense"<sup>229</sup> is a product of what Brooke Cameron identifies as "social influence or sympathy"<sup>230</sup> as Dolly is influenced or sympathises with her peers at school, drifting away from her mother's "unpractical Utopianism."<sup>231</sup> The decisive stroke is given by her courtship with a squire's son, Walter Brydges. In this case, Dolly behaves as a veritable "ideal romantic heroine,"<sup>232</sup> marking a neat difference with her parents' relationship. In this sense, she shows hesitation, modesty, shyness and, above all, she is not direct as her mother was with Alan: to Walter's "Do you *love* me, Dolly?" she replies, "I think I *might*, in time,"<sup>233</sup> respecting the social code. Dolly's discovery of Herminia's real condition forces the daughter to choose society over her mother.

If in *Jude*, Father Time embodies the new generation's refusal to his parents' advanced ideas, similarly, Dolly denies her "morally ahead"<sup>234</sup> mother and her "noblest heritage living woman ever yet gave the child of her bosom."<sup>235</sup> In this way, by refusing Herminia's legacy, Dolly equally

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<sup>226</sup> Once, she sees the Dean of Dunwich when he comes preaching in London; later on, she is given a coin by an old man in the streets whom Herminia recognises as Alan's father. Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., pp. 101, 103.

<sup>227</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 108.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>230</sup> Cameron, "Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*", cit., p. 297.

<sup>231</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 117.

<sup>232</sup> Ernst, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>233</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 126.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

challenges her mother's moral purity to validate her conventional own: "You are not fit to receive a pure girl's kisses."<sup>236</sup> Facing this, Herminia decides to immolate herself for the sake of her child's happiness, representing once again the figure of a saintly mother during the climax of her martyrdom. Therefore, she wears a dress "as pure as her own soul," places on her bosom "two innocent white roses," and takes her own life "like some saint of the middle ages."<sup>237</sup> The end of Herminia's "stainless soul"<sup>238</sup> underlines two central Allen's concepts. Firstly, Herminia's death is designed to stress the heroine's noble sacrifice rather than a punishment for her actions,<sup>239</sup> whereas Sue's epilogue is described as the natural progression of the forces and laws over a transgressive woman. Secondly, Allen's narrator aims to enhance the reader's sympathy towards an unjustly ostracised woman, condemned for her honourable ideas,<sup>240</sup> whereas if the reader finds any sympathy for Sue, it is for the character rather than her morality. Hence, *The Woman Who Did* ultimately serves the same scope Allen had for his article "The Girl of the Future:"<sup>241</sup> the prediction of the "church of the future" sprung from "martyrs" of whom Herminia is the first.<sup>242</sup>

Herminia's death reflects what *The Woman Who Did* was originally conceived for, which is letting Allen write a catching and possibly sellable novel based on his personal ideas in a profitable and conceptually fertile market such as that of the New Woman. Indeed, to this day, the novel is the most recognisable among the New Woman literary works. However, Allen's application of the New Woman tropes to his heroine's story betrays the author's deepest intention to share his personal idea on the Woman Question driven by "[his] own conscience."<sup>243</sup> In this way, Allen's primary objective with the novel is to introduce and educate the readers to his New Woman's "new cultural norms:"

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Cameron, "Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*", cit., p. 295.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>241</sup> Here, Allen prophesies: "But killing the prophet is not quite the same thing, after all, as disproving his prophecy. The Holy Office might have burned Galileo, but the world would have gone on moving through all time for all that." Allen, "The Girl of the Future", cit., p. 64

<sup>242</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 140.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

“Allen turns to the educational novel in order to cultivate conditions and new forms of sympathetic identification conducive to the proliferation of the maternal individual.”<sup>244</sup> Thus, Allen’s New Woman results to be only a successful means to convey his ideal Spencerian woman, proving that the New Woman is indeed “not the subject of Allen’s work, but rather its instrument.”<sup>245</sup> Hence, as the narrator underlines during Herminia’s last moments, “she was always a woman,”<sup>246</sup> but not completely a New Woman.

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<sup>244</sup> Cameron, “Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did*”, cit., p. 297.

<sup>245</sup> Warne and Colligan, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>246</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 140.



## Conclusion

The New Woman phenomenon and especially its literary rendition have been fundamental within the feminist historical framework in creating an advanced and unfettered symbol that could inspire women and make society aware of their demands. In this thesis, I have specifically focused on the male-authored New Woman fiction, analysing two of the best-known and controversial novels of the genre, *Jude the Obscure* and *The Woman Who Did*. Written by two outsiders of the phenomenon, but published during its highest peak of popularity, these two novels recount in their own ways the lives of two New Women, exploiting different approaches, but the same masculine outlook.

In my analysis, I have investigated the similarities and incongruencies between the novels and the New Woman fiction, additionally comparing Hardy's and Allen's attitudes on the feminist phenomenon and their heroines. Adopting this line of research, I have first explored the New Woman phenomenon's historical and theoretical grounds, considering the journalistic debate and the literary field. Therefore, I have analysed Thomas Hardy's work, placing Sue within his Wessex world and the New Woman framework. Finally, I have centred my inquiry on Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*, considering Allen's writing career, his Spencerian activism, specially dedicated to women and their biological role, and the modality in which he constructed a New Woman novel in his own personal way. Hence, the work of analysis on the two novels and their authors' attitudes towards the New Woman phenomenon has allowed me to draw some conclusions on these two male-authored New Woman masterpieces.

A first conclusion is that both novels present affinities with the New Woman literary phenomenon. Particularly, both Sue and Herminia are characterised in a way that is reminiscent if not equal to any standard New Woman. Both are independent, educated, and somewhat economically at ease. Both challenge in their own way the gendered social norms, being represented ahead of their

contemporaneity.<sup>1</sup> In fact, if Sue aspires to live equally with men, adopting an almost androgynous behaviour, Herminia openly faces women's issues within marriage and education. In this way, on the one hand, Sue defines marriage as "a tragedy artificially manufactured for people,"<sup>2</sup> and Herminia names it a form of "slavery."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the two heroines similarly promote a relationship with their chosen New Men outside of the socially accepted institution, which in *Jude* is recognised to be a comradeship between man and woman, whereas in *The Woman Who Did* it is identified as Free Union, already theorised by Grant Allen in his 1890 article "The Girl of the Future."<sup>4</sup> Finally, both heroines challenge society and are ultimately defeated, as intended by the New Woman fiction standards. In fact, as Gail Cunningham underlines, "mental breakdown, madness and suicide are apparently the common penalties the New Woman must pay for her attempts at emancipation."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Sue and Herminia undergo this same scenario, on their own terms. As for Sue, she is vanquished by those orthodox ideals she repudiates but by which "she is still emotionally bound."<sup>6</sup> This culminates in a spiritual death, in which she suppresses her real self to subdue and be faithful to "the letter."<sup>7</sup> As for Herminia, she turns her suffering and eventual suicide into the first-ever martyrdom in the name of her (Allen's) ideals.

A second conclusion which applies to both *Jude the Obscure* and *The Woman Who Did* is the authors' employment of their time's evolutionary discourse, creating a unique link between their characterisations of the New Woman and the influences from their contemporaneity. Particularly, the application of evolutionary theories in the New Woman fiction is not new, as New Woman writers already exploited them to reverse their fundamental negative vision of women's natural development.<sup>8</sup> However, in Hardy's and Allen's cases, evolutionism is applied to Sue and Herminia

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<sup>1</sup> If Sue and Jude define themselves "a little beforehand," (Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 287) Herminia is described as "ahead of her contemporaries." Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 215.

<sup>3</sup> Allen, *The Woman Who Did*, cit., p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Here, Allen states: "the Free Union is an actuality." Allen, "The Girl of the Future", cit., p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Stubbs, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> Hardy, *Jude*, cit., p. 388.

<sup>8</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 155.



to reach two different outcomes. In *Jude*, Darwinism is employed to show the impossibility of the New Woman and the New Man to survive in the Wessex society, putting their deaths against Arabella's example of that "animalistic instinct" that allows her to be the "sole survivor in the world ruled by Darwinian principles."<sup>9</sup> Contrarily, Allen exploits his Spencerian beliefs to build a positivist scenario in which Herminia educates the reader on how to become a "self-regulating and independent individual."<sup>10</sup>

If Sue's and Herminia's characterisations show their fundamental nature to be that of New Women, the two novels present some discordant traits with the genre, specifically on perspective. In fact, if the New Woman fiction aims to highlight the heroine's inner self,<sup>11</sup> *Jude* and *The Woman Who Did* avoid this viewpoint in two different manners. In Hardy's work, the narrator intentionally recounts most of the novel from the point of view of its eponymous protagonist, Jude. This leads to the readers missing what is the essence of a New Woman novel, which is Sue's own insight into her reasonings, motives, and feelings. Contrarily, in Allen's novel the protagonist is surely Herminia. However, although the author focuses primarily on her story, he constantly distances himself from the overall femininity of the character and the novel. This leads to a broken narrative, where the perspective is intended to be feminine, but where the author struggles to supersede it via the narrator and the New Man's assertion of masculinity. In this way, the two novels prove the existence of a certain sexual uneasiness within male-authored New Woman novels.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, in *Jude*, it develops into Sue's a-sexualisation; whereas in *The Woman Who Did*, it is represented by Allen's attempt at recounting a sexually aware woman who, however, eventually succumbs to a willing dependence on the New Man and a physical sexual subjection to motherhood.

Finally, I centre this last consideration on what I think the nature of these two novels is. In fact, despite clearly both belonging to the New Woman sphere, throughout this thesis I have shown

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<sup>9</sup> Shin, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

<sup>10</sup> Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

<sup>11</sup> Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Reynolds and Humble, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

major elements that are worth considering when the two works are associated with the literary phenomenon. As for Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, even though the novel is one of the finest examples of the author's Wessex novels, it is essential to remark that he undoubtedly intended not to write New Woman fiction. Rather, Hardy did feature a New Woman in the novel, Sue Bridehead, whose inspirational character made the author elevate her to be a main character in the storyline. In this way, Hardy exploits the popular New Woman features creating a "conscious dialogue with both feminist and anti-feminist fiction of its time"<sup>13</sup> in the attempt to build a contemporary feminine figure in line with the aspirations and characterisation of the protagonist Jude. Therefore, in Hardy's world, Sue is a Wessex tragic heroine before being a New Woman. If Hardy exploits the New Woman's characterisation in his novel, Allen tends to utilise the best-selling literary genre, instead, probably conscious of the possibility to reach the highest possible number of the public. Hence, *The Woman Who Did* is a simple and direct novel, exclusively centred on the evolution of its protagonist, but lacking almost any effort on the part of the author to provide the readers with a sight of the protagonist's interiority. In this way, the narrator's focus is not on the New Woman *per se*, and her interaction with the narrative space, as with *Jude*, but rather on her embodiment of Allen's theories, and their "overt political purpose"<sup>14</sup> to educate the public on the future of women and eventually humanity.

In her work *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*, Gail Cunningham underlines the New Woman phenomenon's tendency not to label the literary heroines as New Women, even though they promoted the feminist symbol's ideals.<sup>15</sup> In this way, Sue Bridehead and Herminia Barton seem to conform to this affirmation, as they have represented the Victorian symbol to this day but were not classified as one by their authors. In this sense, *Jude the Obscure* and *The Woman Who Did* show how blurred could the lines be within the phenomenon, representing the work of two men, with two

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<sup>13</sup> Boumelha, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>14</sup> Reynolds and Humble, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

different intentions, and two different styles, being influenced by such a popular figure and eventually turning it into a men's product. By making the New Woman theirs, Thomas Hardy and Grant Allen challenged and deconstructed the cardinal principle<sup>16</sup> of the feminist symbol, writing their own masculine versions of what they perceived as the Woman of their time. In other words, before being two unprecedented New Women, Sue and Herminia are women written by men.

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<sup>16</sup> Specifically, I hint at the New Woman novel's intention to be a product written, read, and having the perspective of a woman. Pykett, *op. cit.*, p. 5.



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