

THE WOMAN WHO DID, DIDN'T, AND WOULDN'T:  
GENDER- AND GENRE-BENDING IN  
THE NEW WOMAN NOVEL

by

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## ABSTRACT

By the mid-1800s, it had become abundantly clear that there was a surplus of women in both Britain and America. Evident in the 1851 British census, this excess presented a problem: what was society to do with the overflow of women? Out of this debate evolved a literature that addressed the so-called New Woman, a questionable figure who challenged the rigid norms of Victorian conventions. Daring authors of New Woman novels explored other roles for women as alternatives to marriage and motherhood. The 1890s particularly saw a proliferation of New Woman novels, in which the standard heroine of this literary trend was educated, independent, and often practiced sexual freedom. Though New Women novels of the 1890s encompassed a variety of topics and lifestyles, contemporary H.E.M. Stutfield, an antagonist of the genre, distinguished New Women writers as belonging to one of two subgeneric groups: the purity school and the neurotic school. Stutfield applied these schools in a way that limited the possibility of both the New Woman novel and its heroine; it only takes a sampling of the New Woman genre to observe the futility of Stutfield's classification. As an intertextual triptych of responses to demographically-driven changes in late-century norms of gender, *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn't*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* provide an excellent case study in the utility and limitations of literary taxonomy by genre. By examining these novels through the lens of genre theory, I will show that New Woman authors were aware of and experimental with modes of genre in the same way they offered different approaches to gender.

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## INTRODUCTION

The last decade of the nineteenth century saw a literary trend in which a number of novels focused on a new generation of women. The heroine of these novels came to be known as the New Woman, a revolutionary character who garnered both admiration and notoriety. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the New Woman as “one who challenges or rejects the traditional roles of wife, mother, or homemaker, and advocates independence for women and equality with men.” As the definition implies, the New Woman and her novelists set about exploring different modes of life for women. Due to the abundance of New Woman novels in the 1890s, Hugh E. M. Stutfield separated the New Woman genre into two subgenres having to do with the substance of the heroine. Hysterical and unladylike heroines were members of the neurotic school, whereas heroines in the pursuit of female perfection were of the purity school. While many New Woman novels certainly fall into one or both of these two categories, Stutfield’s schools diminish the original intent behind the emerging genre. In a time of social and literary experimentation, New Woman novelists endeavored to show the world that there were multiple possibilities for women. In applying a limited view to the New Woman genre, Stutfield diminished these possibilities and reduced the agency of the New Woman novel with his use of narrow prescriptions. Together with Stutfield’s classificatory system, the New Woman novel is an invaluable tool in considering the implications and power of genre. As a relatively brief trend in literature, the New Woman novel offers a unique instance in which to measure the merits and weaknesses of genre as an interpretive strategy. As with the New Woman novel, genre has an influential impact on the work it seeks to define. From the French

word meaning ‘kind,’ genre has been used as a means of classifying literature. The application of genre to literature can be traced back to Aristotle, who is attributed with dividing texts into three main sub-genres: drama, poetry, and prose. Today, with millions of works being published every year, there now exist countless genres and sub-genres. While useful in distinguishing types of literature from others, genre and its effect on an audience has long been a subject of debate for literary scholars. Some argue that, by labeling a piece of literature as a particular genre, the text in question is limited as to what it may convey. In a way, genre is to literature as typecasting is to television or film. When an actor is cast in several similar roles, he is then associated with that particular type of character. Correspondingly, a genre presents certain recurring standards in specimens of its type. Thus, a piece of literature’s very classification can affect the perception and expectations of the reader. In this way, genre and subgenre can sometimes be detrimental to the text it aims to classify.

In “The Law of Genre,” Jacques Derrida discusses the restrictive qualities of genre, claiming, “as soon as the word ‘genre’ is sounded ... a limit is drawn” (56). Without any knowledge of a book’s specific contents, a reader is given some expectations within the book’s genre. Therefore, the reader’s understanding of the text is influenced by the set of prescriptions that accompany a genre. In addition to genre’s manipulation of the reader, Derrida finds fault with the very arbitrariness of genre. Derrida asserts that if we accept that genre exists, “a code should provide an identifiable trait” to determine if a text belongs to a particular genre (64). Since there is no such code, Derrida feels genre is insufficient. Derrida points out that literary genres can overlap, and a single text can belong to multiple genres. To attempt to categorize a text under one definitive genre is fruitless, Derrida claims, and would only serve to reduce its potential. The consequence of genre is to jeopardize the unique qualities that set a certain text

apart from others. Thus, he says, “at the very moment that a genre or a literature is broached, [...] degenerescence has begun” (66).

Derrida seems to propose a world without genres, but, he writes, this too is problematic. Without a means of classification, readers do not know what to make of a text. Derrida suggests that human beings are flummoxed by things unattached to genres or categories: “Can one identify a work of art, of whatever sort, but especially a work of discursive art, if it does not bear the mark of a genre, if it does not signal or mention it or make it remarkable in any way?” (64). Genre designation shapes the way a reader identifies and responds to a text. Without it, a text holds no meaning for the reader, putting it in danger of being overlooked. Consequently, the complete removal of genre presents its own set of problems.

Paul Ricoeur similarly discusses the attachment of meaning through genre in *Freud and Philosophy*. On the subject of maintaining one voice, Ricoeur states, “The notion of signification requires univocity of meaning: the definition of the principle of identity, in its logical and ontological sense, demands it” (23). So, a group must speak with a single voice in order to be acknowledged. Borrowing from Aristotle, Ricoeur points out that the opposite is also true: “‘Not to have one meaning is to have no meaning’ ” (23). Following this logic, a larger, united collective has a better chance of being recognized, while a single, disparate voice is less likely to be heard. Though Ricoeur admits that the signification of univocity is in some ways helpful, he ultimately sides with Derrida in claiming its deficiency. Ricoeur writes, “There is ... no universal canon for exegesis,” meaning there are no firm standards for the basis of signification (26).

Building upon these ideas, in the first chapter of *The Open Work*, Umberto Eco focuses on the potential of a text when it works beyond classification. Eco states that when one “reject[s]

the definitive, concluded message,” the “possibilities” are multiplied (3). In other words, after classification is discarded, the functionality of a subject is endless. Moreover, “an idea is ... all the more original and stimulating insofar as it ‘allows for a greater interplay and mutual convergence of concepts, life-views, and attitudes’”(8).<sup>1</sup> Eco says a work that is free of constraints and open to interpretation is more engaging than a work with “rigidly pre-established and ordained interpretive solutions” (6). Like Derrida and Ricoeur, Eco recognizes the limitations of signification and its stymieing influence.

Summatively, all three philosophers identify the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a classification system. They acknowledge that “univocity” can be beneficial to smaller, similar voices that would have otherwise gone unnoticed, but they also point out that the uniqueness of a subject can become lost. Eco and Ricoeur speak in more general terms, while Derrida applies these ideas directly to genre. Vilifying the subjectivity of genre assignment, Derrida feels the signification of genre does more harm than good. Though he doesn’t exactly condone the doing away with genre altogether, he doesn’t offer an alternative solution to genre either.

I concur with Derrida in that designating a genre is not an exact science, and I agree that one text can belong to several genres. However, in most cases, I don’t believe the aim of simply assigning a text a specific genre is devaluing. I have no qualms in labeling a text with a New Woman heroine as a New Woman novel or belonging to the New Woman genre. This label is essential in discussing the literary trend that collectively challenged existing conceptions of womanhood. This is not to say assigning a text a certain genre should convey everything there is to know about the respective text; each work has its own individual nuances that cannot possibly

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<sup>1</sup> Here Eco is quoting L. Anceschi in *Autonomia ed eteronomia dell’arte*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Florence: Vallecchi, 1959).

be accounted for within an all encompassing genre. Furthermore, any effort to measure or interpret a text purely by its genre would be wasted.

Stutfield attempted to do just that with his subgeneric schools. Stutfield felt that not only could New Woman novels be defined by one of two limited schemes, but they were a negative influence on society as well. Stutfield aired his concern with the New Woman genre in “Tommyrotics,” featured in the June 1895 issue of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. As a regular contributor to *Blackwood’s*, Stutfield condemns the apparently loose morals of the New Woman heroine and attributes her bad behavior to “a wave of unrest” within society (833). He states that, in tiring of traditional life, “humanity” has begun to seek “new forms of excitement” or entertainment (833). In associating the New Woman genre with pulp fiction, Stutfield belittles the genre as a whole. What’s more, he fervently insists that the degeneration of the modern woman is directly connected to her poor reading habits. He warns, “The popularity of debased and morbid literature, especially among women, is not an agreeable or healthy feature. [...] The enormous sale of hysterical and disgusting books is a sign of the times which ought not to be ignored” (834).

Due to this overwhelming development, Stutfield felt the need to create a classification system in order to exert some control over the explosion in production of New Woman novels. Though New Woman novels of the 1890s encompassed a variety of topics and lifestyles, Stutfield believed all New Woman novels could be sorted into one of two groups: the purity school and the neurotic school. In a later *Blackwood’s* article titled “The Psychology of Feminism, Stutfield describes heroines of the neurotic school as sexual deviants affected by mental illness, while heroines of the purity school are cast in a more favorable light. Purity school authors, like Sarah Grand of *The Heavenly Twins*, “believe in the moral and mental

perfection of the modern incarnation of the feminine spirit,” though the means of achieving this perfection was varied among New Woman novelists (107). At the other end of the spectrum, neurotic school novels, such as George Egerton’s *Keynotes*, depict “hysterical and squalid stories” of women who yield to unladylike displays of emotion and hedonism (115). By Stutfield’s description, New Woman heroines explored and, in some ways, threatened established ideas of womanhood. Many New Woman heroines were probably perceived as intimidating or confusing, and Stutfield’s schools may have been a means to control this strange and worrisome character. In this light, categorizing New Woman novels makes them less menacing to literature. By containing it as a genre, the ideology of New Woman literature is less likely to spill over into society, which was surely a fear of some Victorian readers.

Stutfield’s distinction between schools values some New Woman novels over others, but his overall tone regarding the New Woman genre and women’s literature in general is derisive. Stutfield’s use of subgenres carries a negative connotation, which may have influenced the way others read New Woman novels. As Derrida states, as soon as a genre is designated, the reader is told what to think. Given Stutfield’s disparaging remarks and the fact that he was somewhat of a literary authority, readers of *Blackwood’s* and perhaps other similar periodicals were cued to find the New Woman genre distasteful. Thus, in this particular situation, genre, or more specifically *subgenre*, is injurious to the texts identified as New Woman novels.

One has only to examine a sampling of New Woman literature to ascertain the multidimensionality of approaches to the marriage question. Classified as a novel of the neurotic school, Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* was published in John Lane’s *Keynote Series* in 1895. In it, Herminia Barton chooses to raise her daughter as a single, working parent and ultimately commits suicide to save her daughter from further embarrassment. Though Stutfield

labels *The Woman Who Did* as belonging to only one school, the novel contains elements of both, as do many New Woman novels. Before committing suicide, Herminia is resolute in attaining an ideal womanhood, a quality of the purity school. Contemporaries of *The Woman Who Did* similarly show traits of both schools. In a later volume of the *Keynote Series*, Victoria Crosse responded with *The Woman Who Didn't*, in which the heroine Eurydice is tempted by an affair with a young man (neurotic) but remains true to her adulterous husband (purity). That same year, another female author, Lucas Cleeve, answered Allen's novel in *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, about a young woman named Opalia who, though at first resolute in her convictions of forgoing motherhood (neurotic), yields to the joys of maternity (purity).

Observably, the lead characters of these three novels are not so easily defined, proving Stutfield's subgenres inadequate. Just as Herminia, Eurydice, and Opalia embody characteristics of both schools of heroines, so too do their respective creators show signs of engaging with interesting and subversive interpretations of genre. At the very least, there is some evidence that New Woman novelists were conscious of their own deployment of genre. Elsewhere in "Tommyrotics," Stutfield claims New Woman novels are but "treatises in disguise" (837). In the case of *The Woman Who Did*, this blatancy may have been an intentional move meant as a commentary on the futility of living one's life like a treatise. In Grant's novel, the distinction between real life and social treatise is blurred. Herminia attempts to live her life by her own code of behavior but meets an unhappy ending, as her ideas regarding marriage and motherhood are not accepted by society. In this way, Allen shows that adhering to a strict set of laws and not allowing for other possibilities is impractical. Similarly, Stutfield's schools do not take into account the various facets of womanhood presented in the New Woman genre as a whole.

Stutfield's schools are emblematic of the conventions of genre and gender of Victorian culture and, more importantly, illustrative of the limited set of possibilities for women. Just as they are in dialogue with each other, Allen, Cleeve, and Crosse are also in conversation with dominant modes of ideology in the nineteenth century; they seek to test these principles as well as those of their own making. *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn't*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* diverge from accepted forms of genre in experimenting with elements like narration and character development. In addition, the novels' authors challenge ideas of gender by offering different possibilities and choices for women. Thus, these novels are both gender- and genre-bending.

While Stutfield's *subgenres* pose a problem, establishing these types of novels as the New Woman *genre* is necessary. Though many New Woman novels can fall under any combination of genres, the distinction of the New Woman genre is helpful in identifying a literature published in the same range of years (roughly 1890-1900) that presents similar themes regarding the evolving role of women. Though I will rely on "The Law of Genre" in my thesis, I am hesitant to move towards an erasure of genre, as Derrida seems to favor. I acknowledge that genres are influential to the reader, but I also believe they are an essential tool in managing the influx of texts in modern times.

In the case of the New Woman genre, the point of contention for me is with Stutfield's schools of classifications, and I intend to trump his narrowed categorizations by illustrating the breadth of the New Woman novel and its heroine. In doing so, it will be necessary for me to provide a historical context for the beginning of the New Woman novel in the following chapter. While touching on first wave feminism, I will discuss the emergence of the 'surplus woman,' made evident by the 1851 British census, and examine her influence on the New Woman novel.

In establishing a historical context, I seek to provide a framework for the critical reception of the New Woman novel.

The next chapter will focus on critical theories in relation to genre. I will expand my readings of Derrida, Eco, and Ricoeur to establish a dialogue with genre theory. Since my thesis will deal with the particular problem of subgenre as applied to the New Woman literature, I will mainly focus on Stutfield's essays on New Woman novels and his classification system. I will relate the aforementioned genre theorists to Stutfield in order to illuminate the shortcomings of his subgeneric prescriptions. It is with Stutfield's schools where I will couch the main argument of my thesis, in essence, that Stutfield's perception of New Woman novels is restrictive, injurious to readers, and does not acknowledge the interesting ways in which New Woman authors explore both womanhood and genre.

The final chapter will detail the triptych of the New Woman novels I have chosen to hold against Stutfield's schools. In examining *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn't*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, I will show that the content of these novels far exceeds the limited themes present in the purity and neurotic schools. In demonizing the New Woman genre, Stutfield ignores the unique content of each individual novel. While Allen, Crosse, and Cleeve are in dialogue with one another, their stories all take a different turn and are worth studying in and of themselves. As a sampling of New Woman literature, they prove the versatility and complexities of novels categorized under the New Woman genre.

By arguing against Stutfield's schools, I hope to illuminate the point at which taxonomy ceases to be helpful and instead becomes detrimental to a text. As mentioned, genre can be advantageous in distinguishing similar works and themes, but it can also be used as a

manipulative tool, as in the case of Stutfield and the New Woman genre. I plan to address this and other issues in the chapters to come.

## CHAPTER 1

“The New Woman, as we read of her in recent novels, possesses not only the velvet, but the claws of the tiger. She is no longer the Angel, but the Devil in the House.”<sup>2</sup>

*Westminster Review*, 1865

In addition to distinguishing the New Woman as someone who challenges typical ideas of womanhood, the *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies the New Woman as “different from previous generations” and “chiefly with reference to the period between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.” This dating identifies the New Woman as a consequence of first wave feminism, the first recognized feminist movement, spanning the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. In *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, Sarah Gamble points to Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) as the seminal text of first wave feminism. In it, Wollstonecraft argues that women should have equal opportunities with men, particularly in education. Stemming from Wollstonecraft’s essay, an insistence for basic legal and social equality became the overarching credo for the feminist movement of the nineteenth century. First-wave feminists, largely consisting of middle class women, saw an escape from the domestic sphere, promoted a traditionally masculine education for women, and sought the rights to work, vote, divorce, and own land. Particularly in Britain and America, the effects of first wave feminism (colleges for girls, journals managed by women, better employment opportunities) advanced the cause for women’s equality.

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<sup>2</sup> “New Woman.” *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Even as “major reforms had been accomplished ... the terms ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ had only just begun to be used” (15). Gamble writes that this tentativeness in nomenclature “seems emblematic of the discontinuous, sometimes hesitant and inconsistent pattern that campaigners for women’s rights established in the period” (15). Though first wave feminists collectively endorsed the equality of women, the spectrum of motives and nuances was varied. During this period, there were many, often conflicting proposed solutions to equality, illustrating the multifacetedness of the women’s movement. While thought between individual activists was wide-ranging, “nineteenth-century feminists evolved very much as a response to the specific difficulties” experienced by women at this time (15). For example, many women were not able to rely on a husband as a means of financial support. Due to a limited amount of male providers, young women at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were compelled to explore other alternatives of existence, thus introducing a new vision for the role of women---the New Woman, a figure popularized in periodicals, cartoons, and novels.

Though there are several other contributing factors to her appearance in the late 1800s, one discovery in particular would shape the destiny of the so-called New Woman. Mid-century British census takers noted a dramatic increase in the population of single, marriageable women. The 1851 census, in particular, counted 8,186,031 males and 8,551,852 females in England with a difference of 365,821 single women.<sup>3</sup> Other sources, including Nan H. Dreher in “Redundancy and Emigration: The ‘Woman Question’ in Mid-Victorian Britain,” estimate the difference to be as much as 500,000 (3). Dreher attributes this surplus to “structural factors, including male emigration and employment abroad, higher male mortality rate, and a later male age of marriage” (3). As Dreher indicates, the rate of emigration from England escalated in the mid-1800s. Many

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<sup>3</sup> According to the 1851 census records listed on [VisionsofBritain.org.uk](http://VisionsofBritain.org.uk).

young and even married men made dangerous journeys overseas to take advantage of free land in Canada, Australia, and the United States. Furthermore, the New Zealand land wars and imperial expansion in Africa and Asia saw the deployment of tens of thousands of soldiers. In the motherland, the harsh working conditions of factories during the Industrial Revolution decreased the workingman's lifespan and augmented the male mortality rate overall.

Observably, the absence of marriageable men accounted for a very significant surplus of single young women. Though "the female surplus amounted only to 2-3% overall ... in a British population of 20 million," Dreher points out, "two-thirds of women aged 20-24 and one-third of women aged 24-36 were unmarried" (4). This alarming data aroused anxiety as surplus women threatened Victorian conventions of gender, marriage, and motherhood. The average middle-to-upper-class Victorian woman was expected to marry young, bear children, and stay at home. Without a husband as reminder of her domestic role, the surplus woman would push the social boundaries of the late nineteenth century.

J.A. Banks discusses the surplus woman in "Population Change and the Victorian City." Banks observes, "Throughout the nineteenth century there was a great growth of 'surplus' women. Already by 1841 there were 358,976 more women than men in England and Wales. By 1901 this number had increased to 1,070,015, and the sex-ratio had risen over sixty years from 1.046 to 1.068 women to each man" (288). Because of this, the number of women "who could never marry while monogamy lasted was large and grew disproportionately throughout the century" (288). With the opportunity for marriage continually decreasing, the problem that Victorian society faced "was that of finding some place for" the New Woman (288). Banks indicates that "for working-class women the factories already existed" (288), and the demographic change had little effect on women of the upper class. Though surplus women

existed in all classes of society, it was middle class women that were most associated with the New Woman as this group was afforded the luxury of exploring other options for women.

Building on Banks' observations on the surplus woman, Jeanne Clare Ridley notes, in "Demographic Change and the Roles and Status of Women," "the marriage squeeze during the nineteenth century [...] virtually necessitated some adjustments" to common modes of Victorian thinking and rearing of young women (23). Given that girls were no longer assured the prospect and security of marriage, "some provision had to be made for this growing class of single women" (23). Wealthy parents secured "the inheritance rights for their daughters," while lower classes looked to work and education for a means of provision (24). Thousands of women were obliged to move from the private to the public sphere as, "increasingly, women were educated, and labor-force participation became customary" (24). Educated, working, and independent surplus women had become the 'New Woman.'

Philippa Levine writes, in "So Few Prizes and So Many Blanks': Marriage and Feminism in later Nineteenth-Century England," that, "the growing demographic imbalance between the sexes during the course of the nineteenth century was viewed with alarm by contemporary commentators who feared that the changing ratio of men to women would increase the numbers of unmarried women" (151). Surplus women "were seen as doomed to an unhappily penniless and lonely existence [without the] material comforts of the marital state" (151). Surplus women were simultaneously pitied and made outcast by society. In contrast, the "growing women's movement ... recognized the extensive ramifications of marital status for women" as an opportunity for the advancement of woman's role in society (151). Instead of viewing this demographic change as a pitfall for women, early feminists saw the New Woman as an entry point to alternatives of femininity.

Unsurprisingly, the New Woman was met with hesitancy and outrage from many Victorians. In the introduction to *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, Angeliqe Richardson and Chris Willis write, “without a husband women had no one to keep them or to enable them to reproduce legitimate children; unmarried women were thus surplus to social/reproductive requirements” (4). Single women were not productive to Victorian society, nor did they fit into the domestic setting assigned to them. Hence, the New Woman “posed a considerable if inadvertent threat to separate-sphere ideology: uncontained by spouses they risked spilling into the public sector, becoming public and visible. It was hard for a surplus woman to be an Angel of the House” (4). In other words, the presence of surplus women necessitated a shift in the perception of the roles of women. What was society to do with the overflow of women? In a time when being a wife and mother was the pinnacle of a woman’s life, what would define the New Woman?

In “Athletic Fashion, *Punch*, and the Creation of the New Woman,” Tracy J.R. Collins describes the typical New Woman:

She was young, middle-class, and single (on principle). She was financially independent or intended to be through earning her own living. She exhibited emancipated behaviors such as smoking, riding a bicycle, and taking the bus or train unescorted. She belonged to all-female clubs and societies where the talk was of ideas, and she sought freedom and equality with men. (310)

This was the face of the New Woman as imagined by writers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Parodied in some periodicals and lauded in others, the New Woman and her fascinating eccentricities made her a literary staple.

Michelle Elizabeth Tusan credits female journalists as the architects of the New Woman figure. In “Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics During the Fin-de-Siècle,” Tusan writes, “it was here in the pages of the fin-de-siècle feminist press that she was

first invented as a fictional icon to represent the political woman of the coming century ... that promised to improve and reform English society” (169). Tusan traces the root of the debate among feminists regarding the New Woman to Eliza Lynn Linton, who published an article “in *The Saturday Review* in 1868 called ‘The Girl of the Period’,” which featured a self-absorbed lush as symbolic of the independent woman (170). This negative portrayal spurred others to offer positive images of the New Woman. Linton’s New Woman was typical of early depictions of the New Woman, but, as Tusan points out, “women writers in the early 1890s ... started manufacturing their own image” of the New Woman (170).

Tusan cites an article written in 1893 from *The Woman’s Herald*, titled “The Social Standing of the New Woman,” as the first instance “that the term New Woman with the imposing capital letters first appeared in a periodical” (170). The New Woman of feminist journals was “represented in these pages as a reasonable and thoughtful woman who had only the best interests of the British state at heart. In essence, the New Woman represented feminists’ utopian vision of the model social reformer” (170). In this positive light, with her advanced notions of marriage and profession, the New Woman would usher in a new era.

In *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing in First-Wave Feminism*, Ann Heilmann echoes Tusan, claiming, “the New Woman was invented by feminist periodicals which, aiming to mobilize widespread female support for a ‘new female political identity’, encouraged woman-to-woman interchange and feminist debate” (23). Though many authors wrote under the banner of the New Woman, she was also a point of contention, as many female authors employed the New Woman for varying and often conflicting causes. Progressive female writers of the period may have been unable to come to an agreement as to the true nature of the New Woman, but it is clear that, being a product of “the deep-seated anxieties about the shifting concepts of gender and

sexuality,” the New Woman addressed a common theme: the evolving role of the Victorian woman (1). Furthermore, “the intense and prolonged critical debate she engendered shaped central aspects of British literature and culture from the late Victorian age through the Edwardian period and beyond” (1-2).

As such, the New Woman was a key figure in various forms of print by the late 1800s. In addition to enjoying the attention of both male and female journalists, the New Woman was also a popular source for cartoons. The New Woman was heavily featured in the illustrations of *Punch, or the London Charivari*, a British satirical magazine. Collins points out, “much more than the aggregate of other contemporary newspapers, magazines, books, and media, *Punch* was responsible for assembling the abiding influential pictorial representation of the body of the New Woman” (310). The cartoons of *Punch* gave a face to the New Woman. Collins quantifies, “between 1885 and 1900 there are no fewer than 200 cartoons and drawings” of the New Woman, regularly depicted in athletic clothing and activity (310). Symbolizing the blurring between gender distinctions, “the New Woman’s sporting costume ... became a magnet of contested period gender anxieties” (311).

Like her visual image, the New Woman heroine was also a locus of anxiety. Her popularity in periodicals seeped into higher forms of literature, as the New Woman became a regular fixture in late Victorian novels and short stories. New Woman novels were “a vital and popular part of the late Victorian cultural landscape – between 1883 and 1890 over a hundred novels were written about the New Woman,” Richardson and Willis reveal (1). Daring late-nineteenth century authors explored alternative roles to marriage and motherhood through New Woman literature. A “cultural icon of the *fin de siècle*,” the New Woman was a “bicycling, cigarette-smoking Amazon” who “romped through the pages of *Punch* and popular fiction”

(Richardson and Willis 12-13). The typical New Woman was well educated, financially independent, and often practiced sexual freedom, a trait disapproved of by conservative Victorians. Because of her objectionable activities, the New Woman was a source of censure, and it is to the topic of her critical reception that we now turn.

## CHAPTER 2

“In no previous age has such a torrent of crazy and offensive drivel been poured forth over Europe---drivel which is not only written, but widely read and admired, and which the new woman and her male coadjutors are trying to popularize in England.”

Hugh E. M. Stutfield, “*Tommyrotics*”

Though traces of the New Woman can be found in earlier works by the likes of Henrik Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw, George Egerton is generally acknowledged as bringing the New Woman to the foreground in regards to literature, thus making the controversial figure a household name. Heilmann asserts, though Egerton initially resisted the New Woman “label,” the feminist author “epitomize[d] the genre” with her series of short stories *Keynotes* and *Discords*, which inspired publisher John Lane “to launch his Keynote series” in 1893 (44). Illustrating the “hybridity” of the New Woman, Egerton’s works resisted social constructs of femininity while simultaneously “replicat[ing] ... patriarchal thinking about women” (45). Try as she might, Egerton and many self-proclaimed feminists like her found it difficult to fully escape from their conservative Victorian roots.

Other notable authors who invoked the figure of the New Woman as their heroine include Sarah Grand, Ella Hepworth Dixon, Mona Caird, and Ella D’Arcy, among others. Women featured in their novels and in those of others were employed in different ways according to the individual beliefs of the writer. However, it appears that most authors of novels of the New Woman affiliation sought to achieve a sort of ideal womanhood or feminine purity. And what

is almost universally true of New Woman novels is the theme or problem of marriage. Posed as a problem, marriage is addressed in a number of different ways in New Woman genres. Some heroines see marriage as an honored institution while others recognize it as an obstacle to independence.

Rather than categorize a New Woman novel according to its heroine's feelings on marriage, Stutfield devised a speculative scheme to set the novels apart from each other. But well before presenting his purity and neurotic schools to the public, Stutfield recognized the growing trend of New Woman literature. According to Matthew Taunton of the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, Hugh Edward Millington Stutfield, "a barrister, sportsman, mountaineer, and fervent Protestant," was "staunchly traditional in his social views." It is to no surprise, then, that Stutfield met the controversial themes of New Woman novels with complete aversion. Featured in the June 1895 issue of *Blackwood's*, Stutfield's article "Tommyrotics" is a scathing review of New Woman literature. Stutfield begins the article by asserting that, out of all modern maladies, society's "most dangerous and subtle foes are beyond question 'neurotics' and hysteria in their manifold forms," which he identifies as contributing to the content found in New Woman novels (833). During this time, "hysteria" would have been a loaded term. Having a specific female connotation, hysteria could have indicated irregular excitement or emotion<sup>4</sup>, a condition commonly associated with women, and/or the mysterious female malady that included all manner of symptoms and was consistently employed to discount the feelings, thoughts, or words of Victorian women. In addition, Stutfield uses a variant of the word neurosis as descriptive of the works of New Woman writers, which implies that the social problems discussed in the novels are products of an unseen psychological disorder. In doing so, Stutfield

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<sup>4</sup> "Hysteria." *Oxford English Dictionary*.

discredits the voice of New Woman authors, relegating their works to the waste of (for the most part) overly emotional women.

Stutfield blames New Woman authors for the degeneration of both women and literature, claiming the New Woman novel has “violently assailed the book” as an art form (833). What’s more, Stutfield argues, the literature that accompanies the New Woman is hardly deserving of the term: “With her head full of all the ‘ologies and ‘isms, with sex-problems and heredity, and other gleanings from the surgery and lecture-room, there is no space left for humour, and her novels are for the most part merely pamphlets, sermons, or treatises in disguise” (837). The language of this passage suggests that Stutfield associates the New Woman with her female authors, and that social issues are better left to the domain of men. In this same passage, he also reduces New Woman literature to mere propaganda. Thus, Stutfield intimates that not only are the ideas behind the novels misguided, but they are lacking in literary qualities as well.

Though Stutfield finds the literariness of the genre insufficient, he cannot deny the allure of the New Woman heroine. While blaming female readers for encouraging the phenomena with their voracious reading habits, Stutfield explains the New Woman’s appeal:

The matter rests largely in the hands of women. ... I think it cannot be denied that women are chiefly responsible for the “booming” of books that are “close to life” ... They are greater novel-readers than men ... and their curiosity is piqued by the subjects dealt with in the new fiction and drama, and not a few of them regard the authors as champions of their rights. (844)

In allowing women readers some agency, Stutfield also calls into question feminine taste and the value of novels as a literary form. Even as he accuses women and their reading habits for the popularization of New Woman literature, Stutfield imparts the responsibility for the end of the phenomenon to women as well. Almost directly after diminishing female taste in literature, Stutfield remarks, “In all matters relating to decency and good taste men gladly

acknowledge the supremacy of women, and we may surely ask them to give us a lead in discouraging books which are a degradation of English literature” (844).

Near the end of the article, Stutfield laments the state of literature at the end of the century. He compares New Woman novelists to well-respected authors of the period: “A generation that nourished its early youth on Shakespeare and Scott seems likely to solace its declining years with Ibsen and Sarah Grand, and an epidemic of suicide is to be feared as the result!” (843). In demeaning the genre, Stutfield references a common ending to New Woman novels. Finding themselves unable to bear the burden of the challenging principles of the New Woman, many heroines took their lives. This familiar pattern along with others would eventually form the basis of Stutfield’s classificatory system for New Woman novels.

In an article titled “The Psychology of Feminism” appearing in an issue of *Blackwood’s* two years later and described by Taunton as an “example of fin-de-siècle anti-feminism at its most embittered,” Stutfield focuses on the writers and types of New Woman literature. Stutfield observes that the “lady writer has for some years past been busily occupied in baring her soul for our benefit,” busily “dissecting, ... analyzing and probing ... the innermost crannies of her nature” (105). In effect, “she is for ever examining her mental self in the looking-glass” (105). Stutfield accuses women writers of publishing every passing fancy or whim, further affirming his assertion that New Woman novels are an ephemeral art form. He identifies the driving force behind these works as a displeasure “with the order of things” (105). This is directly evidenced in the pushing of social boundaries, a recurring theme of the genre.

One prominent type of heroine in these novels is described as “consumed with a desire for new experiences, new sensations, new objects in life” (105). This heroine is selflessly devoted to the object of attaining an ideal femininity, regardless of the outcomes, as embodied by

Evadne in Sarah Grand's short story "The Heavenly Twins." Stutfield speaks at length about Evadne and other heroines like her and their desire "to penetrate to the core of truth; to dive deep down into the sacred heart of things, and to learn their true sequence and meaning" (105-106). Evadne's quest for truth exemplifies the purity school of New Woman literature, as defined by Stutfield. Purity school authors "believe in the moral and mental perfection of the modern incarnation of the feminine spirit" (107).

After describing other works belonging to the purity school, Stutfield moves to another type of discipline. To illustrate a different kind of heroine, Stutfield uses the influential piece "Keynotes," written by "Mrs George Egerton, ... the ablest of our women writers of the neurotic school" (109). Although Stutfield credits Egerton's writing abilities, he states that her "best characters are quivering bundles of nerves" and typically possess an "'eternal wildness, the untamed primitive savage temperament that lurks in the mildest, best women'" (110). Rather than attempt to achieve a perfect life like heroines of the purity school, heroines of the neurotic school are egotistical and self-serving: "Self-sacrifice is out of fashion altogether in [this] school of novelists, and self-development has taken its place" (110). In other words, heroines of the neurotic school develop and act on feelings already present. Usually afflicted with some degree of mental illness, these heroines, Stutfield claims, succumb to their darkest thoughts and desires, whether it be pre-marital sex or suicide.

As shown, Stutfield categorizes New Woman novels as belonging to one of two groups: the purity school and the neurotic school. The purity school promoted a feminine ideal by way of experience and experimentation, whereas New Woman novels of the neurotic school featured heroines suffering from depression or some other malady. From this, it is evident that Stutfield's categorization of New Woman heroines taps into preconceived notions regarding femininity.

Stutfield views women as either essentially good (pure) or bad (neurotic), believing feminine character reducible to one of two extreme poles. Similarly, Stutfield constructs a binary opposition between literature and treatise, claiming New Woman novels take after the latter. While some New Woman novelists are arguably more 'literary' than others, one cannot ignore their engagement with genre. What Stutfield fails to take into account is the self-awareness of New Woman novelists and their very experimentation with genre.

There is no gray area for Stutfield. He offers no other schools or descriptions of other varieties of New Woman novels. Instead, he purports that each New Woman work of fiction can fit into one of the two given categories. What Stutfield has created are subgenres in the overarching genre of New Woman literature. The designation of the New Woman genre is helpful in examining novels with revolutionary heroines in the specific time frame of the last decade of the Victorian era. The subgenres that Stutfield has assigned, however, are problematic.

In order to mark where genre ceases to be effective and begins to be troubling, we must further examine the works of recognized authorities on genre theory. To recap, we learned from Derrida, Ricoeur, and Eco that with genre comes limitations. Without cracking the spine, the generic classification of a novel immediately conveys specific ideas to its reader. For example, signaling a text as part of the New Woman genre cues the reader to expect a strong heroine who will in one way or another challenge social mores in the search for true womanhood. Because of these given expectations, a text is given certain boundaries of capability. That is to say, the possibilities of imagining or interpreting a text are restricted.

With the signification of genre comes a set of standards which shape the reader's comprehension of a text, manipulating the way the reader perceives it; Derrida writes, "Thus, as

soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm” (57). Just as Stutfield prescribed certain character attributes with his schools, genre assumes that all of its members are analogous in specific ways. But, since literary genres often overlap, a text’s genre cannot possibly define it. For instance, the novels examined in “The Psychology of Feminism” are not as black and white as Stutfield makes them out to be. The New Woman genre is prescriptive to some degree, but no two New Woman authors agreed on every single aspect of the movement, proving that narrow schools are as futile as they are diminishing and oppressive.

Like Derrida, Ricoeur also takes issue with the idea of an umbrella genre. In order to acquire meaning (signification), a group of subjects must speak with one voice (univocity). This assumes that all members of a group are unified and of the same mind, a concept challenged by the varied approaches to defining ideal femininity in New Woman novels. In demonstrating many different types of New Woman, writers of the genre may have done themselves a disfavor. Disparate voices are given less recognition than those that form one singular and cohesive voice. It follows that echoing a pre-established voice would be more beneficial than having a unique perspective.

In belonging to a genre, a text must forfeit its individual qualities and accept a fate of limited interpretation, the very tool that, when applied correctly, allows for the agency of a text. In the first chapter of *The Open Work*, Eco compares literary interpretation to a pianist’s performance of a group of modern works. They “are linked by a common feature: the considerable autonomy left to the individual performer in the way he chooses to play the work” (1). In contrast to classical compositions, these pieces allow the pianist a good deal of freedom as to the performance. With Bach and Verdi, he is “oblige[d] ... to reproduce the format devised

by the composer himself, whereas the new musical works referred to above reject the definitive, concluded message and multiply the formal possibilities of the distribution of their elements” (3).

In contrast to classical compositions, the performance of the modern musical pieces is open to possibility, but they still have at least one thing in common: interpretation. Though a writer creates a work with the intention of eliciting a specific response, the reader’s response to a work may vary. Furthermore, “a work of art, therefore, is a complete and *closed* form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an *open* product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on it unadulterable specificity” (4). A work is closed, in that it is a finished product and the text cannot be changed. However, the response that it elicits from the reader is open for interpretation. As Eco notes, the openness of interpretation does not negatively affect the completeness of the text. An open work is active, changing, and evolving.

In relation to genre, Derrida might argue that generic categories work towards creating a closed group of works. Attaching a genre to a text sustains the “pre-established and ordained” interpretations that seek to reduce unique voices to an all-encompassing univocity (Eco 6). In a way, genre might be applied to deviant texts to suppress revolutionary content. It follows that a text without genre is deviant and threatening. Derrida extrapolates, “One must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity” (57). This statement implies that a text without genre is tainted or incomplete, and that the application of genre is a means of controlling instances of incongruity.

With this understanding of genre, it is clear that Stutfield uses genre to manipulate the reader’s interpretation of New Woman novels. Like Derrida’s conception of genre prescriptions, Stutfield’s schools are variable. In addition, he trains readers to imagine New Woman novels in

very specific ways, in essence coaching readers to overlook the diverse models of womanhood that work beyond Stutfield's binaries. In applying his subgeneric schools, Stutfield purposefully suppresses the New Woman genre by reducing the message of possibility presented in New Woman novels.

Eco goes on to say, "In every century, the way that artistic forms are structured reflects the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality" (13). Put differently, regardless of reality, culture influences form. Society will always dictate the standards observed by its citizens. Until the emergence of the surplus woman, the possibilities for women had been relatively limited. Her appearance necessitated a dialogue regarding the evolving modes of womanhood, as indicated in the New Woman genre. In contrast to Stutfield, New Woman novelists offer meditation on both gender and genre, avoiding the binaries and stereotypes set up by Stutfield. One has only to examine a sampling of New Woman literature to discover that Stutfield's viewpoint is unfounded.

### CHAPTER 3

“But surely no woman would ever do so,” said my friend.  
“I knew a woman who did,” said I; “and this is her story.”  
*The Woman Who Did*

As alluded to, New Woman novels, though similar in theme, varied in content. Marriage, a woman’s occupation, and sexual freedom were popular topics in the New Woman genre, but the authors’ opinions or stances on these subjects differed greatly. This can be seen in *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn’t*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn’t*, which all address the subject of sex before (and after) marriage. In illustrating divergent perspectives in the New Woman genre, Allen, Cleeve, and Crosse prove Stutfield’s neurotic and purity schools to be wanting.

Penned by Grant Allan and featured in John Lane’s *Keynote Series*, *The Woman Who Did* was first published in 1895 to considerable readership. The twenty-three-chapter novel ran to nineteen editions in its first year of publication alone.<sup>5</sup> Illustrated by aesthete artist Aubrey Beardsley, a subsequent publication included a short forward from the author:

WRITTEN AT PERUGIA  
SPRING 1893  
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE  
WHOLLY AND SOLELY TO SATISFY  
MY OWN TASTE  
AND MY OWN CONSCIENCE

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<sup>5</sup> Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*.

Prior to *The Woman Who Did*, Allen, a former scientist, had published several books on topics like floriology and aesthetics to some acclaim and had even dabbled in novels. As indicated by J. S. Cotton of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Allen “had a knack for devising ingenious plots based on contemporary issues,” most notably the controversial topic of the New Woman. Cotton writes, in composing *The Woman Who Did*, “Allen honestly intended the novel as a polemic on the position of women and dedicated it to his wife, with whom he passed [his] ‘twenty happiest years.’”

Given that Allen had not published any material relating to the Victorian woman and her place in society prior to *The Woman Who Did*, his stance on the matter is rather unclear due to the many instances of inconsistency and ambiguity in the novel. Because of this, several elements of the plot and narration are in tension with each other. At times, Allen seems to promote women’s independence, but there are other moments within the narrative that belie his supposedly advanced perception of marriage and gender roles. Subscribing to Victorian conventions, the narrator associates women with passivity, and, as we will see, the character Alan believes it is his masculine duty to take care of Herminia. Allen gives the impression that, although he believes women are capable beings, men are the custodians of women as well as an avenue of the advancement of women’s situation. It is perhaps no coincidence that Allen’s advanced male character is called Alan; this creative decision lends itself to the notion of Grant Allen, the author, as champion for the cause of women. Following this idea, Allen’s concept of his own authority, albeit in the interest of women, only solidifies male dominance; whether it was his intention to do so is inscrutable. It is possible, however, that the ambiguity of the text and narrative tone were purposeful and meant to make *The Woman Who Did* less threatening to the Victorian public.

As the heroine (or anti-heroine) of the novel, Herminia Barton is first presented to the reader as a “tall, dark” girl with “black hair,” dressed in a “curious Oriental-looking navy-blue robe” decorated with “arabesques in gold thread” and a belt of “Moorish jewel-work” (9). From this first impression, Herminia is quickly identified as being abnormal, foreign and other. Her clothing and coloring set her apart from other young women in attendance at Mrs. Dewsbury’s garden party, where she meets the “very free and advanced” Alan Merrick, an up-and-coming barrister (10). Mrs. Dewsbury points out, “But then he’s also very well-connected and wealthy. That’s something, especially when one’s an oddity” (20). Mrs. Dewsbury’s clarification suggests that, perhaps for the security of their own class position, “very well-connected and wealthy” people are not usually “very free and advanced,” but, arguably, it is Alan’s very station in society that enables him to exist as “an oddity” at all (20).

Being the daughter of the Dean of Dunwich, Herminia comes from a respectable background as well. During their conversation, Herminia reveals to Alan that she attended Girton College at Cambridge but did not take a degree, as she felt her growth and education there were limited. Herminia and Alan quickly find themselves to be of the same mind concerning the emancipation of women. The pair makes plans to meet again before the end of a swift and tidy first chapter.

The omniscient narrator introduces the main characters in the first couple of pages and quickly develops the tone of the novel. The first chapter is heavy in dialogue, which functions as a platform to establish the forward-thinking convictions of Herminia Barton and assumedly those of the novel’s author. As Alan and Herminia become acquainted in the following chapters, Herminia makes known her stance on marriage; she believes it to be a “vile slavery” for women (41) and merely “an assertion of man’s supremacy” (43). She refuses to “sell” herself “for a

mess of pottage, a name and a home, or even for thirty pieces of silver,” an obvious reference to Judas, casting herself as Jesus Christ (41). Herminia concedes that, as an unmarried woman, her path will be a difficult one and accepts her fate as a “victim” and “martyr” for the cause of women (41). In the face of an uncertain future, she is resolute: “Unless one woman begins, there will be no beginning” (41).

Though Alan is aware of Herminia’s convictions and agrees on many points, he still has every intention of marrying her. Despite his own advanced ideas, Alan cannot ignore his masculine desire to make Herminia his in the conventional sense. In the third chapter, the narrator pontificates on the truths of human nature and asserts that men of Alan’s social status are “born married” (29). It is only natural that he wish to “find a companion, a woman to his heart, a help that is meet for him” (29). However, rather than choosing a woman to “make life run smooth for him,” Alan would have his wife improve his “moral character” and be a “compliment” to his being (32). This, the narrator claims, distinguishes “pure love” from “pure selfishness” (29). So, though he is compliant with the way of men and society, Alan’s intentions are honorable.

In contrast to previous chapters, the third chapter contains little dialogue and serves as a means for the first of many long-winded diatribes from the narrator. The narrator discusses at length the history of men and marriage, alluding to the fact that men, too, are burdened with the duty and expectations of matrimony. It is this sense of duty that spurs Alan to offer his proposal to Herminia, who declines and instead suggests they coexist in a union without the legality of marriage. Alan begs her to reconsider, to entertain the idea of a “mere ceremony” if only to legitimize the birth of their future children, but Herminia will not yield (42).

Herminia believes that, as a child purposely conceived in a free union, their offspring would be a gift, a birth to renew the world. As she is throughout the novel, here Herminia is represented as both a Madonna and Christ-like figure: “She sat amid the halo of her own perfect purity. To Alan, she seemed like one of those early Italian Madonnas” (98). Her mere existence is alluded to as an “*Anathema maranatha* among her sister women,” that is, a sacrifice to God (51). She uses sacrificial language when referencing herself as a martyr for the emancipation of women. Furthermore, she is often pictured in white dresses and described as being “lily-like” (57). Given that the lily is typically associated with the Easter feast, the celebration of Christ’s resurrection, Herminia is illustrated as the rebirth of women, an original New Woman. Like Christ, Herminia foresees her unfortunate fate and yet still maintains her convictions and continues to follow her “thorny path” (47).

Convinced he must protect Herminia in whatever way is possible, Alan eventually succumbs to Herminia’s proposition, but he has some difficulty thinking beyond the “old model of marriage” (69). As she had “debated these problems at full in her own mind for years,” Herminia seems to have all the details of their understanding worked out (69). Herminia still wants to keep her independence in employment and home and sees no reason why her relationship with Alan should “differ at all in respect of time and place” (69). Alan fears a rude awakening is in store for Herminia, who is determined to preserve her old patterns of life. Alan’s suspicions ring true when neighbors in Bower Lane begin to gossip of Herminia’s frequent late-night caller. When she becomes pregnant, Herminia eventually acquiesces to her partner’s advice and quits her job teaching at a girl’s school.

Like several others, this particular chapter is light in the way of dialogue or action and acts as another instance of digressive prose. The narrator again concerns himself with the

functioning of society and alleges that, as expected of her, Herminia “yields to masculine judgment” and that “it must always be” so (81). Men are and have been in command because they are the only sex capable of performing the “hard work of the world” (74). It follows that men are “active” and “aggressive,” while women, as a rule, are “sedentary, passive, receptive” (82). Try as she might, Herminia cannot escape this universal truth, says the narrator.

For Herminia’s confinement, the expectant parents travel to Italy, where they can assume the identity of a married couple. After visiting Florence, the two make the long trek to the desert-like Perugia, evoking the journey of Mary and Joseph before Christ’s birth: “And this dreary desert was indeed the place where her baby must be born, the baby predestined to regenerate humanity” (110). In addition to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, other biblical lenses, particularly those of prominent females, are easily applied to the character of Herminia. Herminia can be viewed as Mary Magdalene, the only disciple who persevered in the face of public condemnation and stood by the cross at Christ’s crucifixion. Just as Mary Magdalene’s sins were cleansed by Jesus Christ, so too is Herminia’s faux pas justified by the birth of her daughter, a child whom Herminia believes will emancipate the world.

In another way, Herminia is similar to Eve, in that she is relentless in the pursuit of enlightenment, and, like Eve, Herminia will be the first to produce a child of the new world. However, Allen’s decision to cast Herminia as an Eve-like figure isn’t entirely positive. As Mary Poovey notes in *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, “as late as the 1740s woman was consistently represented as the site of willful sexuality and bodily appetite: whether figured as that *part* of man responsible for the Fall, ... or represented as man’s foil, ... women were associated with flesh, desire, and unsocialized, hence susceptible [to] impulses and passions” (9-10). Poovey writes that this ideology spilled over into

the nineteenth century. In this light, Allen's professed feminism is overshadowed by his less obvious assimilation to Victorian ideas of gender.

Though some of Herminia's associations with women of the Bible could be interpreted as negative, Allen's use of biblical allusions is to his advantage. Whether or not they agreed with the ideology of *The Woman Who Did*, Victorian readers would have found a biblical reading of Herminia as sympathetic, familiar, and comforting. Victorian readers may have been apprehensive regarding the advanced nature of *The Woman Who Did*, but its biblical undertones work to soothe any ruffled feathers. In evoking stories from the Bible, a literary work beset with conservative gender conventions, Allen helps his own case and that of Herminia by reinforcing women's dependence and inferiority to men.

Herminia comes face-to-face with her sex's plight when, once in Perugia, Alan becomes gravely ill. An Italian doctor confirms that he has contracted typhoid fever, a result of drinking water in Florence. Herminia contacts Alan's father, Dr. Merrick, who urges Alan to marry Herminia on his deathbed. When Dr. Merrick finally arrives, he learns that his son has died a bachelor and thus Alan's father has no reason to continue his acquaintance with Herminia. After offering her fifty pounds, Dr. Merrick leaves Herminia alone. This scene brings to mind the temptation of Christ in the Judean Desert, further solidifying the association with Herminia as a redeeming figure.

Having nothing to keep her in Perugia any longer, the pregnant Herminia returns to England and finds work as a hack journalist. During what little leisure time she has, Herminia writes a "pet novel" (141). Of the novel, the narrator writes, "It was seriously meant, of course, but still it was a novel" (140). This interesting pronouncement intimates that the novel as a literary form is trivial or in some way unfavorable. He proclaims that the novel "is every

woman's native idea of literature," suggesting that women cannot fathom other aspects of literature (140). A woman is fitted with a "keener interest in social life" and "a deeper insight into the passing play of emotions," which "enable her to paint well the complex interrelations of every-day existence," the fodder of novels (140-141). Because women's limited experience only extends to the happenings of "every-day existence," the narrator argues women are the perfect candidates for writers of novels (141). The narrator clearly associates women with novels and men with higher forms of literature:

If a man tells you he wants to write a book, nine times out of ten he means a treatise or argument... Even the men who take in the end to writing novels have generally begun with other aims and aspirations, and have only fallen back on the art of fiction in the last resort as a means of livelihood. But when a woman tells you she wants to write a book, nine times out of ten she means she wants to write a novel. For that task nature has most often endowed her richly. (140)

In addition to designating novels as a lower art form, the tone of this passage seems to imply that women are perhaps incapable of achieving any higher literary forms, which are the domain of men. Moreover, men only deign to write novels as a "last resort" or with "other aims" in mind (140). Since Grant Allen had fulfilled his duty to masculine nonfiction before the publication of *The Woman Who Did*, this statement must qualify him as the latter.

Allen's attempts to insert bits and pieces of a treatise on the emancipation of women are unmistakable. *The Woman Who Did* makes clear the fact that Allen was a proponent of the women's movement. That being said, it is curious that Allen would have his heroine compromise her beliefs. Herminia quits her job, moves to Italy, and assumes the identity of a married woman against her will. Herminia foreshadows a difficult life for herself early on in the novel and admits there will be no happy ending: "We have each to choose between acquiescence in the wrong, with a life of ease, and struggle for the right, crowned at last by inevitable failure. To succeed is to fail, and failure is the only success worth aiming at" (44-45). There is indeed no

happy ending for Herminia in *The Woman Who Did*, as her daughter Dolores grows up to be ashamed of her illegitimacy and of her mother's part in it. As a last gesture for Dolores's sake, Herminia drinks a phial of poison to rid her daughter of her embarrassment, and the novel ends abruptly.

The artistic decision to have Herminia die at the end of *The Woman Who Did* could point to one of several factors. Assuming Allen's principles correlate with the narrator's, his stance on free love is sometimes ambiguous. Allen includes numerous comparisons between marriage and slavery in the novel, but he also acknowledges the troublesome social stigma of illegitimate children. Perhaps Allen didn't feel the world was capable of producing a successful free love union, or maybe he anticipated that a happy ending would result in further condemnation of his novel.

There are other ways in which Allen comes across as ambiguous. When it comes to authorship, Allen's narrator associates women with novels and men with treatises, yet Allen himself has written a novel. Like Stutfield, the narrator feels women are more readily adapted with the skills and experience to pen a novel, pointing out that a man might only use the platform of the novel if he had ulterior motives. In writing *The Woman Who Did*, Allen subverts the gender stereotype attached to novels while also making no attempt to deny an objective behind his prose.

*The Woman Who Did* may very well have appeared to Stutfield as a thinly veiled treatise; however this is partly what makes Allen's novel so interesting to examine. The narrator's diatribes contribute to the feel of propaganda, but there are various levels at which experimentation with this genre is at work. In addition to *The Woman Who Did* reading as a treatise, the novel's heroine Herminia essentially lives her life as if it were a treatise, adhering to

her own strict principles at the expense of her reputation. Her demise demonstrates the inefficacy of her endeavor to apply an unforgiving set of rules to her own life. In the same way, Stutfield's schools are inapplicable to the many models of womanhood presented in New Woman novels. In particular, Herminia fulfills characteristics of both the purity and the neurotic school. She is unmarried and sexually active, pinning her as a hedonist and therefore a heroine of the neurotic school. She commits suicide, a typical occurrence with neurotic heroines, and yet while she lived she struggled to attain her own idea of feminine purity. In this way, Herminia challenges Stutfield's view of New Woman heroines in portraying the unconventional choices of a single mother.

The explosion of New Woman novels in the 1890s is directly linked to dissatisfaction with the limited opportunities for women, as New Woman novelists proposed new alternatives to traditional modes of behavior. Even among New Woman novelists, there was much debate over the means of achieving an ideal femininity. For example, Lucas Cleeve was unhappy with the solution (or lack thereof) offered by Allen. Following the publication of *The Woman Who Did*, Cleeve promptly responded with *The Woman Who Wouldn't* within the same year. According to an entry in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Lucas Cleeve was the pseudonym for Adeline Kingscote, well-born lady and wife to a Lieutenant-Colonel in the British army. By 1895, Kingscote had already written two books during her time spent in India with her husband: *Tales of the Sun or Folklore of Southern India* (1890) and *The English Baby in India and How to Rear It* (1893).

In the preface of the first edition of *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, Cleeve defends Allen's novelistic intentions and asserts that he "does not advocate the absence of marriage; he, on the contrary, illustrates the miseries that ensue from any divergence from the orthodox path mapped

out by God and man” (v). Though Cleeve and Allen both write about women who have resisted traditional social behavior, Cleeve appeals to the average Victorian reader by establishing herself as a woman of principle and a non-deviant. She laments the laxness of morals in modern women and writes that marriage has been reduced to “merely a profession” to them (v). What’s more, “the revolt of women is beginning to ruin men’s lives” (v). With *The Woman Who Wouldn’t*, Cleeve wishes to revitalize the institution of marriage and give women “some good reason” to marry (v).

In contrast to the English garden party in the first scene of *The Woman Who Did*, Cleeve’s novel opens with a striking image of waves crashing upon a beach, where Opalia Woodgate and Alan D’Arcy first meet. Their passionate conversations are neither the product of “worldly consideration” nor of “parental coercion” (3). In other words, Opalia and Alan do not let others, particularly their parents, influence their beliefs. Yet, “sometimes their dissections were original, but sometimes they were borrowed dissections which they had read and used as if their own, really forgetting that they were other people’s, because they suited them so well” (3). This loaded passage seems to suggest that, though they are quick to reject the principles of their parents, young people have no qualms in adopting the advanced and controversial ideas of new thinkers.

Opalia, who has apparently fallen victim to these new ideas, is described as “the heroine of every novel put together,” essentially a representation of every woman (5). However, her appearance is by no means ordinary. She has the features “of a goddess” (5) and is compared to Psyche, “the beauty that Eros loved” (6). Furthermore, the heroine’s namesake is a reference to the festival of Ops, a fertility goddess of the Sabine tribe. These pagan associations identify Opalia as non-Christian and thus set the tone for reader expectations of her character. Like

Herminia in *The Woman Who Did*, Cleeve's heroine is also a Girton girl and has some advanced ideas of her own that will prove difficult to enforce. Echoing Herminia's self-sacrifice, Opalia proclaims, "There is no salvation without crucifixion. We all shrink from open martyrdom, and our silent private ones do no good to women as a body. I am ready to sacrifice myself, if sacrifice it is" (8).

Through a series of narrative interjections (often placed in parentheses), the reader learns Opalia's opinion of marriage: "What was the good of educating a girl to purity and modesty, if in one night that education was negated?" (11). Furthermore, Opalia states, "the church cannot make holy what would otherwise be unholy" (20). Opalia believes that consummating one's marriage is hypocritical and demeaning. To her, marriage "means the woman giving up everything in the world, and the man swearing he is her slave when he is about to become her master" (11-12). Opalia reveals this view to Alan, who teasingly disagrees: "It is the one moment when a woman rules man's destiny and can do with him as she likes" (14). Here, Alan implies that, although it is the only hold a woman has over a man, woman's sexuality is powerful.

Despite his best efforts, Alan is unable to persuade Opalia, who is determined to stay virtuous and chaste even in marriage. She observes, "Everywhere I have seen people that failed because they had no principles, no scheme of life laid down. They were all theories and no practice---life being a living contradiction to their words and writings" (17). Opalia defames others who have come before her and failed to implement their own theories. Without naming the title of the novel, Opalia uses specific language that points to Herminia in *The Woman Who Did*:

["I read a book once," she went on, "in which the heroine would not go through the form of marriage in church for fear she should lose her liberty, yet every

action of her life showed that her liberty had gone, whether she defied the conventional laws of society or not. Her life was an utter failure... because it was defiance, not sacrifice. She was simply following her impulses and indulging in them.” (17-18)

Opalia claims Herminia did not truly sacrifice anything because she indulged in her own sexual impulses. Opalia distinguishes herself from Herminia, in that she will resist her desires and live a life of principle.

When Opalia agrees to marry Alan albeit as a sort of sister, he is naturally disappointed, in both Opalia and in himself for his reaction: “Now that she had offered love which he had pretended was all he coveted, it was no good to him” (20). He feels the instinctual need to possess her completely and cannot conceive of an unconsummated marriage. The two go their separate ways, and Opalia realizes that such a marriage is impossible, because “if Alan failed, all men would fail” (22). Opalia puts the idea of marriage out of her head and engrosses herself in religion, which is “her form of sensuality” (33). She finds work at a parish taking care of its more unfortunate congregants. Opalia preoccupies herself with the “woes of the poor... Mrs. Jones’s eleventh baby, and the impossibility of paying the rent... She touched each wound with a healing hand... wrangl[ed] over the price of tea and shrimps for their dear sakes” (41-42). The tone of this passage sets Opalia up as a Christ-like figure, further emphasizing the theme of sacrifice.

In addition to caring for the poor, Opalia keeps a book of thoughts in her spare time. In her book, Opalia enumerates the many tenets of her beliefs. Similar to the anti-heroine of Allen’s *The Woman Who Did*, Cleeve’s Opalia pursues rigid guidelines in exploring the path of feminine perfection. When she has a particularly difficult time of putting her theories into practice, Opalia consults “her little book” for encouragement (62). Opalia’s self-authored laws function almost as a conduct book. A typical conduct book would have addressed social

behavior specific to class and history and usually highlighted all the positive qualities of a model citizen in society. Cleeve may have mirrored this popular style in an effort to illustrate a book of *misconduct*. Cleeve acknowledges the eventual triumph of the social order but only after detailing Opalia's muddled path to motherhood. Rather than an archetype to live up to, Opalia is an example of what not to do.

Meanwhile, Alan has become a successful painter and entered into a flirtation with Millie Morris, a married lady of some importance. Instead of showing his painting of Lady Morris, Alan hangs one of Opalia instead at Burlington House, where he runs into his former flame. Their relationship is again reignited, and Alan determines he cannot live without Opalia and relents to her notion of marriage. During their engagement, Opalia jokes, "We can spend all our money on ourselves, for there will be no children to save for" (123). Alan reflects that children are more important to a man, who must continue a family's legacy. In contrast, "a woman's idea of offspring is like that of a little girl longing for a new doll" (124). He says angrily to Opalia, "Have you pictured a childless old age? ...The solace of motherhood will be denied you! Have you weighed all this? ...I may die... and you will have no companion" (126). As Opalia considers this somber thought, the reader is given the first glimpse at a fracture in Opalia's firm resolve.

Opalia and Alan marry quickly and honeymoon in Italy, where they sleep in separate bedrooms. It is there that Alan reveals his hope that Opalia will someday change her mind; he gives her a pearl necklace that she is only to take off when she is ready to consummate their marriage. The newlyweds return home from Italy to resume their respective work. As the flush of the honeymoon subsides, Alan gradually comes to resent Opalia for continuing to abstain

from consummation, and so he turns again to Lady Morris. After witnessing an inappropriate exchange between the pair, Opalia finds sanctuary with Lady Neath, a fellow parishioner.

Lady Neath shows Opalia that she has been misguided: “The real sacrifice of women is giving themselves up to men, having children, etc... You are escaping all the expiations, all the real sacrifices of womanhood” (215). Lady Neath uses a retelling of the story of Adam and Eve to illustrate her point. Lady Neath reckons that it was Satan who taught Eve “the relations of the sexes” (216). As punishment, Eve “was told that what she had done for Satan she must henceforth do for her husband” (216): “That was the curse, the compulsory imposition of what she had given freely to Satan. Next comes the expiation, the suffering of childbirth. Then out of pity comes the beautiful compensation, a child... which is the nearest akin to the glory of creating, which assuages all pain, all sorrow, all sacrifice” (217). The cleansing birth of the child erases all transgressions and redeems the mother. Lady Neath describes the true sacrifice of women in a way that convinces Opalia she must return to Alan immediately and unfasten her pearl necklace.

Lady Neath’s view of motherhood clearly conjures Jesus Christ’s reparation for the sins of mankind. Christ’s crucifixion is likened to the labors of childbirth and his rebirth to the redeeming nature of the child’s existence. As shown, this is not the only moment in which Opalia is depicted as Christ-like, godly, or holy. Like its predecessor, *The Woman Who Wouldn’t* is brimming with Christian allusions. For example, there are several instances in which Opalia doubles as the Virgin Mary. While in Italy, Alan calls her the “Madonna without the Infant Jesus” (153) and describes his love for Opalia as a “Madonna-like love” (55). To Alan, “living with his wife was like a perpetual worship in church before a beautiful shrine with an immaculate Madonna” (152-153).

In addition to Christian imagery, Cleeve includes in her descriptions of Opalia obvious references to pagan religions. This might seem potentially problematic, but these pagan allusions inform the necessity of Christian overtones. In the novel, pagan references serve the function of recognizing Opalia as not without sin and in need of salvation (by way of motherhood). In other words, the salvific birth of a child would be lost on Opalia if there weren't something wrong with her. In this way, Cleeve's use of pagan imagery is essential to Opalia's character.

As an imperfect being, Opalia is on the quest for perfection and believes she will accomplish this by following the rules laid out in her self-authored conduct book. Not unlike Herminia, Opalia later finds her principles to be unreasonable, as further proof that employing black and white boundaries, whether to literature or to women, is impossible. Moreover, one could argue that Opalia functions as both a heroine of the neurotic school and heroine of the purity school, in that she seeks a perfect way of life (purity) and yet is self-serving (neurotic) in her disregard for motherhood. On top of the intermingling of schools, a dialogue between genres is also evident. Taking a cue from Allen, Cleeve incorporates the more feminine cousin of the treatise with the deployment of the conduct book. Though she sets herself apart from Allen in her introduction, Cleeve is equally aware of genre and, in a similar fashion, uses a recognized genre to expound upon the debate of womanhood.

As the last in our triptych, *The Woman Didn't* rounds out my illustration of the varied nuances contained within the New Woman genre. Riding the coattails of Allen's success, an author writing under the name of Victoria Crosse produced *The Woman Who Didn't* in the same year. Victoria Crosse was the penname of Annie Sophie Cory, Anglo-Indian novelist and sister of the poet Adela Florence. In January of 1895, Cory's first publication under the pseudonym of

Victoria Crosse appeared in John Lane's *Yellow Book* as an extract from a later novel titled *Six Chapters from a Man's Life*. During the following August, Cory published *The Woman Who Didn't* as Crosse in Lane's Keynotes series. According to Charlotte Mitchell of the *Oxford Dictionary of Biography*, "many critics have been misled, as no doubt were some contemporaries, into believing that the book was written as a riposte to Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* ... In fact, it is very different, ... and the title seems to have been a bit of clever marketing." While Mitchell is astute in recognizing the disparity between the two novels, there are several similar themes at play.

Unlike the omnipotent narration of *The Woman Who Did* and *The Woman Who Wouldn't*, *The Woman Who Didn't* is narrated by Evelyn, a British officer in the Indian army and one of two main characters. The novel begins in Egypt as Evelyn catches sight of a "cultivated" woman while boarding a ship to London (1). The two meet again a day or so after embarking on their journey. While conversing with his new, "self-reliant" (10) female friend, Evelyn is taken aback to find that she has been traveling by herself and bunking on the left side of the ship, which is designated for men. As if social rules are not applicable offshore or beyond England, the woman tells him, "Oh they don't divide us very distinctly on these French boats" (8). She divulges that her name is Eurydice Williamson and allows Evelyn to walk her back to her cabin, where he tries to steal a kiss from her. Eurydice responds by pushing him away and slamming the door in his face. Evelyn later relates the occurrence to his traveling companion Dickinson and attributes the faux pas to his six-year stint in India: "A hard-worked Indian officer, going home on his first leave, is apt to be afflicted with a buoyancy of spirits" (18-19).

After a brief period of tension, Eurydice agrees to hear out Evelyn's apology. Evelyn playfully reminds Eurydice that forgiveness is "the divinest prerogative of the human being," to

which Eurydice replies (22), “On the contrary... to respect itself” (23), further solidifying her status as a lady. Eurydice relents to Evelyn’s charms and the pair continues to enjoy each other’s company. As Eurydice becomes more comfortable around Evelyn, their conversations become more frank. When Eurydice tells Evelyn that she has been suffering from seasickness on their voyage, Evelyn is glad to hear she is imperfect:

‘I think those people that are above the ordinary weaknesses of human nature are hateful:---people with seraphic constitutions [that] never look seedy. It’s annoying to ordinary mortals... I think pain and suffering on a beautiful face accentuate its beauty, and it gives opportunity to sooth and console. I think a perfectly independent person is always irritating and unattractive.’ (26-27).

This passage serves a few different functions. First, Evelyn flatters Eurydice by suggesting that, until this point, he had thought her flawless. He also seems to find strength and independence unbecoming in a woman. Moreover, he acknowledges the imperfectness of human beings, perhaps speaking to New Woman novelists of the purity school and the goal to achieve feminine perfection.

As Evelyn professes the natural fallibility of human beings, he is quick to identify faults in others. One night on the boat, he comes upon a gathering of passengers including Eurydice and his friend Dickinson. Among them is a girl playing a banjo who has “disdained to dress for dinner,” wears “a man’s red tie,” and sits “cross-legged with the cigar in her mouth, reminding one of the American girl, slang, modern fastness, and other disagreeable things” (33). Like the New Woman, the girl has disregarded several social taboos and threatens gender constructs. In contrast, Eurydice sits gracefully, the “whiteness” of her skin “hardly defined ... from the whiteness of her dress” (33). Here, and in several other instances, Eurydice is pictured in white, symbolizing purity. It is clear that Evelyn distinguishes Eurydice as having all the qualities of a true lady.

In the same scene, the group coerces Eurydice to play a song for them on the girl's guitar. Eurydice lends her haunting voice to the tune of Schubert's *Adieu*, foreshadowing future events: "Farewell, thou waitest for me, / Soon, soon I shall depart. ... Farewell until the dawning of the Eternal Day. ... The day that shall re-unite me / For ever unto thee" (38-40). Overcome with emotion and admiration after Eurydice's song, Evelyn confesses to Dickinson, "Do you know, I always thought it impossible I should marry" (43). Previous to meeting Eurydice, Evelyn had never been able to imagine being "boxed up ... in perpetuity" with someone (43). He makes clear his opinion on marriage, saying, "I can imagine her carrying a man away into any folly--- even marriage" (45). Though purportedly averse to the idea of marriage, Evelyn has traditional standards of his bride-to-be: "Surely when one marries one does not want a repetition of the women one may have known before marriage?" (46). In addition to desiring a chaste bride, Evelyn thinks of his partner as the "missing portion of [his] own broken and incomplete being" (47) with the power to "restore wholeness and entirety" (48). Evelyn considers marriage the unity of two half-beings, incomplete without the other.

After deciding on Eurydice as his mate, Evelyn pursues and fixates on her. He narrates, "Our opinions, theories, arguments were everything. We were like parents losing themselves in the identity of their children... She was clever... Her influence on my moral being was as great" (52). To Evelyn, Eurydice is his redeemer; having perhaps neglected his moral duties, Evelyn is inspired by Eurydice's good example. On the seventh day of their acquaintance, Evelyn is convinced he's in love and vows to devote himself to her with the "noblest love one human being can feel for another ... that has its roots in reverence" and "with the ardour of ... worship" (53). Given that seven is an especially biblical number and Evelyn describes his devotion to

Evelyn like the worship of a deity, the language of this passage elevates Eurydice to a Messianic pedestal.

Determined to have this redeeming influence forever in his life, Evelyn makes up his mind to marry Eurydice but before he can propose, Eurydice reveals she is already married. At this shocking revelation, Evelyn's feelings for Eurydice begin to change: "Married! this woman. ... The gentleness, the reverence ... that I had sedulously encouraged and cultivated for her sake [were] annihilated and obliterated" (63). While Evelyn is disgusted with himself for pursuing a married woman, he nevertheless acknowledges that his passionate feelings for her still exist and thus he relents to hear Eurydice's explanation. She elucidates that she lost her wedding band on the second day of the trip. Moreover, her marriage to an adulterous husband has not been a happy one: "My marriage is not such a pleasant thing that I am always thinking and talking of it" (67). Evelyn is flummoxed, suggesting she could have her pick of suitors, to which Eurydice says, "Hardly a girl in a thousand marries the man she would choose." (68). She explains that at twenty-three, after turning down a number of other men and giving up hope of finding true love, she accepted the proposal of the one that "pleased [her] best" (68). She espouses the desperation of her situation and laments women's dependence on men: "Don't you see ... what a woman's position is? You men only care for youth and beauty! ... Character, intellect, virtue, they are practically nothing to you. You teach a woman that ... she must marry in her twenties or face all the rest of her life alone" (68-69).

Eurydice's sad plight brings to mind the fate of her namesake. The goddess Eurydice of Grecian mythology was the happy wife of Orpheus until, one day, she was struck dead by a venomous snake. Though Orpheus makes an attempt to retrieve his lover from the Underworld, she is destined to remain in hell. Similarly, the Eurydice of *The Woman Who Wouldn't* is

trapped in an unpleasant situation with no foreseeable means of escape. In this doubly pagan and Christian metaphor, the role of the snake, as suggestive of Genesis, is interchangeable. Eurydice is (initially) tempted by both the promise of companionship in marriage *and* the enticing lure of a passionate romance with Evelyn. Either way, Eurydice's fulfillment is dependent on a man. When asked why she does not take her future into her own hands and divorce her husband out of "self-respect," Eurydice asserts that "marriage is the holiest of all sacraments and divorce is a sacrilege" (71). Like Ophelia and Herminia, Eurydice, having the "material of which martyrs are made" (83), intends to set an example for other women and stay "true to [her] principle" (73). Recognizing the futility of pursuing Eurydice any further, Evelyn respects her beliefs and the two part on sad terms when the boat docks in London.

Several months later, Evelyn and Eurydice reunite by chance on a train platform in Dover. Eurydice remains steadfast in her decision to stay married, though she allows Evelyn to visit her while her husband is away on business. Despite temptations, Eurydice resolves to "stand [her] ground, whatever the cost" (124). Evelyn is derisive of Eurydice's code of behavior, claiming there is "no use in clinging to [her] theories and ideas" in this transitory life (127) and that her life of "martyrdom" is pointless (129). When Eurydice's husband returns home, Evelyn says his goodbye, and the novel ends rather abruptly.

Though *The Woman Who Didn't* doesn't directly address *The Woman Who Did* in the way that Cleeve's novel does, Crosse speaks to many of the same themes. More importantly, *The Woman Who Didn't* forces a Stutfieldian to consider the role of the male character in the designation of either school. In one way, Eurydice is a heroine of the purity school, as she honors her marriage and remains obedient to her husband, although he has been unfaithful. Alternatively, as a married woman, Eurydice is engaging in improper behavior by indulging

Evelyn's crush. However, this aspersion does not take into account the misdeeds of the husband. In this particular situation, judging Eurydice on her behavior alone isn't enough, as some background information is required to understand her actions.

While the composition of the last response novel leaves a little to be desired, there is no denying the crossover of themes and similar content. On the surface, all three heroines are given names with origins in antiquity, suggesting pagan undertones. This association further solidifies the idea that the female characters need saving, particularly from their own beliefs. In some ways, the power of salvation and moral virtue lies in the male character of the novel; it is the hero's obligation to enlighten the heroine of her skewed outlook on marriage and/or motherhood. For example, both Alan Merrick and Alan D'Arcy win over their respective spouses to observe socially moral conventions. On the other hand, the heroine acts as the redeemer in some cases. Christian imagery is prolific in the novels and all three heroines are described as savior-like figures. Often depicted in white, these heroines see themselves as martyrs for their kind, examples for other women to follow. Additionally, though he may not always agree, the hero cannot help but be inspired by the heroine's dedication to her strict principles, however misguided.

Though *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn't*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* obviously have overlapping themes, they serve to illustrate the diverse and wide-ranging opinion on marriage and motherhood in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a sampling of the New Woman genre, the novels include heroines with distinct principles who meet very different ends. While the selected novels are admittedly not the stuff of genius, their characters and messages are too complex to be defined by the limited terms of Stutfield's subgenres of purity and neurotic schools. As shown in the description of the articles "Tommyrotics" and "The Psychology of

Feminism,” Stutfield makes many assumptions about the New Woman genre. First, in “Tommyrotics,” he associates the New Woman with being loose and “debased,” interested only with revolt (834). This may be in some way applicable to the character of Herminia, with her disdain for marriage, but it is certainly not true for all New Woman heroines, as evidenced by Opalia and Eurydice. If *The Woman Who Didn’t* and *The Woman Who Wouldn’t* are any example, it seems as though New Woman authors were very much absorbed in the concept of moral virtue, contrary to Stutfield’s prescription.

Another unfounded assumption Stutfield gives is that New Woman novels are merely pulp fiction and lack literary qualities. Although the two novels in response to *The Woman Who Did* were written in a relatively short period, the three novels as a whole address important social issues. Rather than merely providing entertainment, they challenge the notions of gender and genre and are quite revolutionary in content. And while Stutfield accuses New Woman novels as being books disguised as treatises, each of these three novels cannot be reduced to a “sermon” or “pamphlet” (837). *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn’t*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn’t* incorporate plot, character development, and imaginative content, qualities essential to the designation of literature. In addition, Allen, Crosse, and Cleeve are aware of existing genre forms and are critically and innovatively engaged with concepts of genre. Allen’s story mimics a treatise while illustrating the inability to live one’s life like a manifesto, while Crosse’s novel is a reimagining of a classical myth. In this way, the novels are in dialogue with both themselves and with genre.

Perhaps most importantly, Stutfield’s theory that all New Woman novels can fit into one of two categories, as presented in “The Psychology of Feminism,” is tenuous. The terms of Stutfield’s subgenres are vague and insufficient as this triptych of New Woman novels plainly

fulfills the requirements of both schools. While Herminia gives in to sexual desires outside of marriage, she is in no way represented by Allen as self-serving. Quite the contrary, Herminia, like Opalia and Eurydice, sees herself as a martyr for women. Neither does she suffer from madness or show signs of wildness, having been educated at Girton College and raised by a priest. Not only does Stutfield fail in seeing the loopholes behind his own identification of *The Woman Who Did* as a novel of the neurotic school, but the requisites of his subgenres are also unsatisfactory and allow little room for diversity. The purity school, for example, is vaguely defined by the character's goal of ideal femininity. This distinction can be applied to almost every New Woman novel, and certainly to the three novels discussed here. Stutfield's prescription is unmindful of the varied avenues through which a New Woman heroine might achieve her own sense of purity. While casting judgment, Stutfield's subgenres stymie the possibility of expression through literature and are incapable of allowing for alternate and imaginative realities, so that it is no wonder he considered New Woman novels unliterary. It would be difficult indeed to subscribe to Stutfield's schools and still be complex, literary, and revolutionary in the way the novels of the New Woman genre continue to be.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Stutfield's conception of genre is directly influenced by conventional ideologies of gender. By limiting the capabilities of the New Woman genre, Stutfield sought to assuage the anxiety associated with the surplus woman. In *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century*, Lyn Pykett writes, as one of "the most dramatic examples of the crisis of gender definition," the New Woman "challenged traditional gender boundaries" and "was a creature of contradictions": "She reproduced and was produced by a complex network of social tendencies and anxieties. The New Woman was represented, by turns, as either a cause or a symptom of cultural disintegration and social decline, or as the cure for current social ills. ... In short, she was ... 'a curious inversion of sex'" (16-17).<sup>6</sup>

As an anastrophe to gender and genre, the New Woman elicited fear in some and inspired hope in others. While Stutfield saw the New Woman as a blight on society, New Woman heroines imagined themselves as saviors of the world. New Woman authors used their heroines to explore new possibilities for both women and self-expression, "developing a new range of fictional forms and techniques for the purpose" (Pykett 56). Some New Woman novelists "developed visionary, allegorical, or utopian forms as a way of representing the present and envisioning a better future for women" (56). Others "experimented with new fictional forms," distancing "themselves from the traditional plots of the three-volume novel in an effort to find an appropriate form for exploring and articulating the inner lives of women" (56). Indicative of the varying opinions from author to author, New Woman novels reflected the different approaches to

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<sup>6</sup> A reference to Eliza Lynn Linton in "Wild Women as Politicians" (1891).

achieving an ideal femininity under the collective goal of shedding old forms to forge new identities.

Pykett goes on to describe the significant ways in which New Woman novelists strayed from conventional genres. She points out, in the place of a “unified character,” “we find a problematization and unfixing of identity” (57). In contrast to static, unchangeable protagonists, New Woman heroines are fluid and unstable. While Eurydice proves, for the most part, unwavering in her loyalty to her husband, Herminia and Opalia’s ideas of femininity are evolving. In both cases, the heroine explores identity through growth, experience, and change. Furthermore, in shirking conventional roles, their identities are ‘unfixed,’ in that they do not adhere to the standards of Victorian womanhood.

In addition to the rethinking of “womanliness,” New Woman writers upset conventional storylines (57). Pykett notes, “Marriage, the destination of the plot of the mainstream Victorian novel, and the resolution of all its (and supposedly the heroine’s) problems, became” the chief “source of the heroine’s” troubles in the New Woman novel (57). For example, Herminia commits suicide as an amends for refusing to marry her father’s daughter, Opalia is distanced from her husband because she will not consummate her marriage, and Eurydice is trapped in a loveless marriage with an adulterous husband. From this sampling alone, we can see that the subject of marriage was a locus of concern as well as the driving force among many New Woman novels.

Lastly, Pykett observes, the New Woman genre also defied “conventions of narration” (57). In New Woman novels, “the moral and social guidance of the omniscient narrator” is replaced with a “decentered narrative ... in which a multiplicity of voices and views on current issues are juxtaposed” (57). (This would perhaps account for Allen’s ambiguity and give some

meaning to the seemingly divergent opinions in *The Woman Who Did*.) While a “multiplicity of voice” might seem counterintuitive to the success of the New Woman genre, this multivocality is essential in illustrating the many voices of the New Woman and the multiple modes of womanhood.

This multivocality was stifled by Stutfield’s attempts to provide a solution to the influx of New Woman novels of the 1890s. Having acquired a distaste for early feminist themes before presenting his concept of the purity and neurotic schools in *Blackwood’s*, Stutfield was predisposed to dismiss the New Woman genre as a whole, which accounts for his aggressive tone in “Tommyrotics” and “The Psychology of Feminism.” Conceivably drawing from his own thoughts regarding women, Stutfield imagined New Woman heroines as collectively imperfect but with either good or bad intentions. Stutfield’s schools are indicative of the limited possibilities for Victorian women and serve as a vain attempt to control the New Woman as a growing threat to conventional ways of life.

After measuring them against *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn’t*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn’t*, Stutfield’s views on genre have proven to be self-serving. We have seen that New Woman heroines are not so easily categorized and that the neurotic and purity schools are too constrained to function properly. Furthermore, Stutfield fails to recognize the engagement and subversion of genre in New Woman novels. While labeling New Woman texts as a genre operates as a practical function, Stutfield’s schools serve a more sinister purpose. In limiting the ability of New Woman novels to exist outside of the perimeters of established thought, Stutfield had some control in the way in which New Woman literature was perceived. Stutfield trained his readers to see New Woman novels in a limited way, preventing other means of interpretation. The impact of these important texts was lessened due to Stutfield’s influence.

In this way, Stutfield employed the neurotic and purity schools as a technique to reject New Woman novels, which may have been detrimental to their sustainability.

At the time of *The Woman Who Did*'s publication, Allen was praised by many for tackling such a touchy subject. At the back of Allen's novel *The British Barbarians*, an advertisement for the eighteenth edition of *The Woman Who Did* recounts numerous favorable reviews: "Perhaps our children's children will some day be canonizing Mr. Grant Allen for [*The Woman Who Did*]. [...] Label it as one will, it remains a clever, stimulating book" (*Sketch*); "Mr. Grant Allen has undoubtedly produced an epoch-making book, and one which will be a living voice" (*Humanitarian*); "However widely we may differ from Mr. Allen's views on many important questions, we are bound to recognise his sincerity, and to respect him accordingly" (*Speaker*) (210-211). Interestingly, one reviewer speaks of Allen's novel in terms of "voice," recalling the discussion of univocity in Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy*. *The Woman Who Did* and its subsequent responses perhaps benefited from being identified as part of the New Woman genre, but Stutfield's subgeneric distinction arguably affected the novel's longevity in the canon. Stutfield's schools illustrate the fact that, in order to be effective, genre must be used sparingly and with thoughtfulness.

Uneasy with the principles of the New Woman genre, Stutfield and many of his contemporaries wished to maintain Victorian society. Nineteenth century culture was not ready for the contentious ideas of free love and independence New Woman authors concerned themselves with, and the conclusions of *The Woman Who Did*, *The Woman Who Didn't*, and *The Woman Who Wouldn't* suggest their own writers were aware of this fact as well. Neither Herminia's nor Eurydice's story is a happy one, and Opalia is persuaded to act against her forward-thinking beliefs.

While two out of three of the examined heroines do not succeed in life, together these three novels are successful in putting pressure on conceptions of genre and gender. As influenced by the tenets of first wave feminism, Allen, Crosse, and Cleeve offer a variety of different outcomes and solutions to the question of marriage. The range of responses present within the New Woman genre as a whole is indicative of the unlimited capabilities of woman. In conclusion, the power of the New Woman novel lies in its resistance of classification and the desire of its authors to explore and create new possibilities for women at the *fin de siècle*.

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