

5-2016

The Revolutionary New Woman: Renegotiating her Social Contract through Sex

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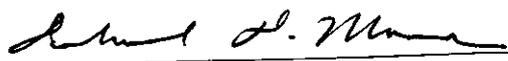
The Revolutionary New Woman: Renegotiating her Social Contract through Sex

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Department of English from
The College of William and Mary

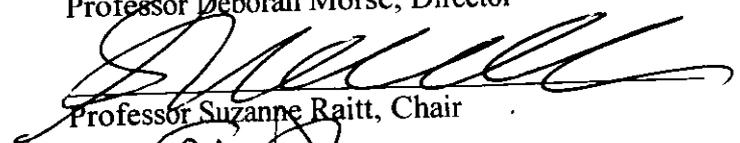
by

Nicole Walsh

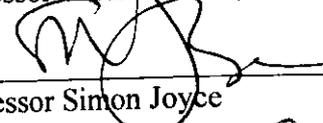
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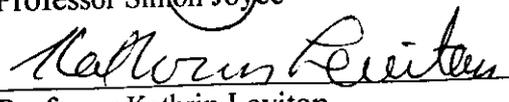
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May 4, 2016

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	Understanding the Sexual Politics of the New Woman	3
CHAPTER ONE	Abolishing the Sexual Instinct: How Rhoda Nunn Makes <i>The Odd Women</i> “New”	15
CHAPTER TWO	The Free Motherhood Ideal in <i>The Daughters of Danaus</i>	29
CHAPTER THREE	Double Trouble: Sexual Strike and Cross Dressing in <i>The Heavenly Twins</i>	47
CHAPTER FOUR	Sue Bridehead, the “bachelor girl”: Reconstructing Sexuality in <i>Jude the Obscure</i>	65
CONCLUSION	Failure or Feminism?	80
WORKS CITED		84

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the Sexual Politics of the New Woman

At the *fin de siècle*, a girl riding a bicycle would arouse mass panic about the evident deterioration of femininity and rising independence of the female sex. She was the New Woman. Stereotypes of this middle-class figure, who also worked for wages and wore mannish rational dress, materialized in *Punch* magazine's vicious caricatures of the masculine "girl graduate," "lady journalist," and "telegraph girl" (Sutherland 3-7; Marks 174-178). However, these trademark characteristics of the New Woman oversimplify her diverse and complex features through distorted cartoon images. Because this movement originates from decades of debate on the controversial Woman Question, the resulting political figure is comparatively divisive, ideologically varied, and assertive. Though the New Woman often does pursue independence through riding bikes, rejecting corsets, or holding a job, she emerges in radically different forms and champions issues about equality between the sexes, with her priorities ranging anywhere from open dialogue on sex to social purity. The New Woman movement is more than the sum of its parts; as a whole, it transcends the specific concerns of its respective constituents, broadly targeting the foundations of unjust male power.

Unsurprisingly, the New Woman incited anxiety within her patriarchal and antifeminist contemporaries. For example, Eliza Lynn Linton describes New Women as "[f]ree-traders in all that relates to sex" and deplores these activists for "preach[ing] the 'lesson of liberty' broadened into lawlessness and license" (418-419). Like many other Victorians, Linton stands in stark opposition to the principles of the New Woman: economic independence, sexual openness, and political equality. John Ruskin's domestic

ideal had, until this point, justified the subordinate female position through reaffirming separate spheres for the sexes: “We are... without excuse foolish, in speaking of the ‘superiority’ of one sex to the other, as if they could be compared in similar things” (77). However, the late nineteenth century witnesses many vocal activists who recognize the mounting pressure for social change. Though homosexual theorist Edward Carpenter considers gender in binary terms, the model of the New Woman leads him to posit that the “pinched ideal of the ‘lady’” will cease to tolerate “the unwritten law which condemns her” (62-63).

As debate on the Woman Question reflects, culture was interrogating and agitating against the traditional constraints of Victorian social norms. By the 1890s, legislative gains were gradually extending rights within marriage to women. The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 created a civil procedure and a separate court for the dissolution of marriage while the Married Women’s Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 expanded the economic rights of wives, helping this demographic to enter the workforce (Mangum 52).¹ Before this legislation dismantled the policy of “coverture,” a married woman’s “feme covert” status would rob her of any legal identity, which compromised her ability to earn income, see her children, or obtain relief from a violent husband. Despite these developments, however, laws continued to perpetuate the sexual double standard. Whereas the 1857 Divorce Act stipulates that a man can divorce his wife on the grounds of her adultery, the same standard does not hold true in the reverse; for a woman

¹ The Married Women’s Property Act of 1870 allowed women to keep any earned wages and to inherit money up to £200, yet her husband could still subsume any property that was held in her name before the marriage took place. The 1882 legislation restored legal status to wives, allowing them to buy, own, and sell property as well as enter into contracts or sue, and vice versa.

to obtain a divorce, another offense, such as bigamy, cruelty, or rape, must aggravate her husband's infidelity.

The sexual double standard also produced a pattern of culminating violence against women, rallying them to emancipate their bodies from patriarchal constraint. In 1886, Parliament abolished the Contagious Diseases Acts, which had criminalized female prostitutes and facilitated invasive medical procedures of their bodies since the 1860s. Feminists who campaigned against this policy, such as Josephine Butler, had critiqued the hypocrisy of applying sexual morality only to women. Butler used the double standard to rouse the fear of innocent middle-class women, for "if to be out of doors alone at night, or to be seen talking to men in the streets, is to be looked upon as a sign of a bad character, and to give a policeman the right to accuse a girl of prostitution, what woman will not fear to leave her house after dark, or to exchange a greeting with a friend?" (qtd. in Eberle 207). Similarly, the murders of prostitutes by Jack the Ripper between 1888 and 1891 sensationalized violence against female bodies, which propagated a narrative of sexual danger for women who transgress domestic expectations, engendered a rise in movements that explored the political economy of sex, and produced sexual media scandals like W.T. Stead's article on child prostitution, "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" (Walkowitz 122).

In conjunction with debate on the Woman Question and modest cultural progress, the arguments of New Woman authors became more accessible due to changes in the publishing industry. Throughout the nineteenth century, Mudie's Select Library possessed the market power to exclude certain novels based on their moral and commercial qualities as well as to keep the prices of "three-decker" novels inflated at a

guinea-and-a-half, which was too expensive for the average individual customer (Griest 103-106; Roberts 10). However, as novels became increasingly serialized within monthly magazines, this monopolistic body declined in power and created a context for the New Woman novel—despite its associated characteristics of “sex mania” or “erotomania”—to enter the literary marketplace (Ardis 84; Cunningham *New Woman and the Victorian Novel* 3).

In addition to their popular representation in magazines and newspapers, cultural and literary figurations of the New Woman conjure associations of intellectuality, frankness, and revolution as well as propagate agendas that challenge the political, economic, and social framework of the late nineteenth century. Yet, beyond these broad features, the archetypal New Woman does not exist. The umbrella concept encompasses wide-ranging, even conflicting, factions on what she stands for and how she behaves, especially regarding the issues of marriage and sexuality. Various New Woman authors have offered competing interpretations, permutations, and exaggerations of her qualities, yet no consensus has formed in support of a quintessential figure. Rita Kranidis grounds this discord in the very character that the New Woman represents because “this new type of heroine is more a literary and political attempt than an actualized, accomplished fact or an established type... For the feminists, then, the New Woman serves as a theoretical concept and as a dynamic social projection, and as such is continually revised and refigured” (xiv). Because cleavages within the New Woman school of thought signal charged cultural issues, tracing the representations of this figure helps to illuminate the various political strategies at the *fin de siècle*.

New Woman authors dissect, transfigure, and test female sexuality in order to map boundaries and push social constraints. These diverse factions undermine binary categories of sexuality and gender, exposing their social construction and creating instead an experimental continuum. At the extremes, authors prioritize a woman's celibacy in order to maintain her social purity or independence (Evadne Frayling from *The Heavenly Twins* and Rhoda Nunn from *The Odd Women*) or promote free unions taking place outside the bounds of marriage (Lyndall from *Story of an African Farm* and Sue Bridehead from *Jude the Obscure*). Authors also explore deviant behavior that falls between these poles, such as gender performance, adultery, and illegitimate children (Angelica Hamilton-Wells from *The Heavenly Twins* and Hadria Temperley from *Daughters of Danaus*). In all cases, these New Woman heroines deviate from social convention and sexual norms. Whereas the "scriptures of sexual difference had been part of the infrastructure of Victorian fiction," the New Woman represents "an anarchic figure who threatened to turn the world upside down and to be on top in a wild carnival of social and sexual misrule" (Showalter *Sexual Anarchy* 17, 38).

Moreover, patriarchal Victorian culture politicizes examinations of female sexuality, which illuminates the aims of New Woman thinkers. According to Michel Foucault's "repressive hypothesis," the merciless study, regulation, and privatization of sex transform this issue into a locus of power:

We are informed that if repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of

prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required. For the least glimmer of truth is conditioned by politics (5).

The political machinery governing sexuality illustrates the foundations upon which New Woman writers build their arguments. Through the “transgression of laws,” heroines attempt to negotiate a “new economy” of power, or equal freedoms with men. This rebellion specifically targets cultural norms or tacit “laws,” resonating as a critique of the social contract. Yet, although nearly every New Woman scholar mentions the unmistakable political motivations of the New Woman’s struggle for liberty and her familiarity with contemporary theorists like John Stuart Mill, the actual philosophy of contracts remains only marginally explored.² This thesis strives to fill the gap in this literature, offering a more thorough analysis of the contemporary theory, its roots in the Enlightenment, and its diverse application by New Woman authors.

Social contract theory emerges during the Age of Enlightenment predominantly from philosophers Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Though each theorist offers a unique iteration, the general concept of the social contract seeks to explain the emergence and function of civil society as well as the authority of governments. For example, Hobbes imagines a hypothetical anarchic “state of nature,” which he compares to the “condition of war” and famously describes as “nasty, brutish, and short” (76). To emerge from this violent, pre-state struggle, individuals sacrifice autonomy to a sovereign in exchange for protection. Whereas Locke similarly posits a resignation of liberty to a ruler, he perceives the formation of government to be voluntary

² Ann Heilmann comes closest to identifying the social contract and evaluating its principles when she locates first and second wave feminism as a simultaneous product and critique of Enlightenment era thought (“Mona Caird” 68).

and selective. Locke argues that a state must forfeit its authority “whenever that end is manifestly neglected or opposed,” after which power will “devolve into the hands of those that gave it, who may place it anew where they shall think best for their safety and security” (317). Consequently, a ruler’s violation of society’s “trust” justifies rebellion and the dissolution of government. That being said, dissatisfaction from marginal groups will not suffice to reform the system and will even result in sanction, as “whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body” (Rousseau 18). Though this political philosophy specifically applies to the origin of governments, the general premise of grounding authority within tacit agreements between “parties” also illuminates the behavior of and conformity within social units.

However, the social contract as initially conceived by these philosophers excludes women, causing the distinct yet related marriage contract to emerge and reinforce male power. Whereas the social contract protects individual liberties in civil society, the marriage contract belongs to the private sphere. This dynamic creates a system in which marriage must necessarily differ from other contractual relations because an ‘individual’ and a natural subordinate enter into the contract, not two ‘individuals.’ Moreover, when the state of nature is left behind, the meaning of ‘civil’ society is not independently given, but depends upon the contrast with the ‘private’ sphere, in which marriage is the central relationship (Pateman 55).

Though marriages constitute a subsidiary form of governance between dominant men and subordinate women, the respective social and marriage contracts reciprocally construct the character of society. Consequently, the structure of marriage makes manifest

patriarchal power not only in the private sphere, but also in public social groups. By degrading the status of women, theorists deny them equal access to the social contract and, thus, fundamental liberties. Locke justifies this subjugation because “generally the Laws of Mankind and customs of Nations had ordered it so: and there is... a Foundation in Nature for it” (52), but even Hobbes, who perceives no natural mastery in the state of nature, resigns that this patriarchal logic is permissible within the civil society and law that emerges from the social contract.³

Providing a crucial philosophical link for this study, John Stuart Mill interprets, translates, and applies social contract theory to the contemporary state of women’s rights in the late Victorian era. His landmark work, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), argues that the “the legal subordination of one sex to the other... ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality” (1). To support this conclusion, Mill compares marriage to a “state of bondage” (5); traces the origin of this institution to the state of nature, where in “former ages, the law of superior strength was the rule of life” (7); and makes inferences about revolution. By recognizing that the dependence of women upon men stems from a primitive state in which the strong dominate the weak, Mill engages with Enlightenment thinkers. He counters Locke’s arguments that female dependency reflects the “natural” status of women, as “what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing” (qtd. in Banks 96). Finally, Mill connects patriarchal oppression to a main tenet of social contract theory: the right to rebel. He claims that “[t]he case of women is now the only case in which to rebel against established rules is still looked upon with the same eyes as was formerly a subject’s claim to the right of rebelling against his king” (77-8).

³ Thomas Hobbes acknowledges that, in the state of nature, motherhood gives women some dominance over men. He reasons that this maternal power relegates men to a lower status, as “to the generation, God hath ordained to man a helper” (128).

This argument legitimizes feminist protest to the patriarchal logic of Victorian culture, revising the social contract to invalidate male dominion.

Not only does Mill implicitly invoke Enlightenment theorists to support women's rebellion, but also he envisions this revolution materializing through a renegotiation of the marriage contract. First, Mill observes that women's property rights, or lack thereof, in Victorian marriage reduce a wife to the "bond-servant of her husband; no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called" (30). He contrasts this analogy to slavery with other forms of contract, such as business partnerships, which treat parties as free agents. Consequently, Mill proposes to replace traditional marriage with "an equal contract, not implying the obligation of obedience" (48). Because the marriage contract defines a woman's social position, overhauling the entire institution in order to grant equal liberties would automatically revise her social contract. Mill delineates "a division of powers between [husband and wife]]; each being absolute in the executive branch of their own department, and any change of system and principle requiring the consent of both" (39). Though his argument makes reference only to marriage, the relationship between the social and marriage contracts would alter the entire system, and thus culture.

By identifying how the social contract institutionalizes patriarchal power, Carole Pateman's modern variation of this theory illuminates the political motivations of the New Woman. In her work, *The Sexual Contract*, Pateman argues that original conceptions of the social contract created the basis for modern law, embedding gender-based hierarchy within sexuality, marriage, and employment. This phenomenon, which Pateman terms the "sexual contract," exposes male domination of women within various contractual relationships: "The social contract is a story of freedom; the sexual contract is

a story of subjugation” (2). For example, Pateman asserts that, in marriage, female bodies “represent the ‘nature’ that must be controlled and transcended if social order is to be created and sustained. In the state of nature, social order in the family can be maintained only if the husband is master. Unlimited feminine desire must always be contained by patriarchal right” (100). Pateman invokes concepts related to the social contract, such as the “state of nature,” to show how patriarchy emerges from anarchic conditions and inscribes women into emerging laws, such as the marriage contract. In the private sphere, male power reproduces the relationship between sovereign and citizen yet denies subordinate women the right to rebel, creating inequality that defines the New Woman’s political agenda.⁴

In light of the cultural context, sexual dialogue, and political philosophy taking place at the *fin de siècle*, this thesis argues that the heroines within New Woman novels attempt to renegotiate their status in the social contract through literal and figurative sexual transgression, which consciously violates norms and exercises their agency. Olive Schreiner’s novel, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), presents a fairly straightforward example of this phenomenon. In this work, New Woman Lyndall consistently protests Victorian women’s lack of agency and echoes the political rhetoric of John Stuart Mill, recognizing that marriage is a “legal contract” (177) that veils “the uncleanliest [sic] traffic” (156). Lyndall underscores her refusal to abide social norms through entering a free and sexual union with a mysterious man from boarding school and stipulating only one condition for the arrangement: he will let her leave when she chooses. Even after she

⁴ A related application of Pateman’s “sexual contract” can be found in Psomiades’s study of Anthony Trollope’s novel, *He Knew He was Right*. Psomiades contrasts happy, modern marriages with the misuse of power to show how liberal subjects are still entering the old marriage system (even using violence to eroticize man’s dominance), yet asserting female right of choice in their partners (47, 51-58).

becomes pregnant and falls ill, Lyndall refuses to compromise her autonomy by marrying him. Her consummation of a socially taboo relationship simultaneously signals her rejection of patriarchal constraint and emphasizes her agency. Another representative New Woman work is Sarah Grand's autobiographical fiction, *The Beth Book*. This novel follows idiosyncratic heroine Beth Caldwell from her childhood to her unhappy marriage to Dr. Daniel Maclure. Throughout, Beth subtly tests social norms and openly explores her sexuality, engaging in homosocial friendships, gender performance, and heterosexual relationships as a prepubescent while later leaving her husband in protest against his moral and sexual impurity.

However, other works complicate these dynamics and allow for a more nuanced examination of the New Woman's revolutionary sexual politics. This study bookends chapters that examine how feminist heroines function in traditional marriages with heroines who contemplate or, like Lyndall, enter free unions. On the whole, these chapters proceed by the success of each New Woman novel, defined based on the innovative, polemical tactics of heroines; however, these heroines nearly always fail, meaning that their success correlates with the magnitude of punishment that they receive from society, or the social contract. If the definition of success hinges solely on the ability of New Woman heroines to achieve their objectives, the outlook for any of these novels is abysmal. Instead, the failures reflect the aims of authors to demonstrate and undermine the inequalities of patriarchal culture. By contrasting the miserable reality that these heroines perceive with their ideal of women's rights, these so-called failures create tension with social norms.

Chapter One examines Gissing's novel, *The Odd Women* (1893), and the figure of Rhoda Nunn, who falters in her celibate mantra when Everard Barfoot proposes the idea of an un-contracted partnership yet reaffirms her independence. Following Gissing, Mona Caird's novel, *Daughters of Danaus* (1894), portrays heroine Hadria Fullerton as she resists her husband and his sister's demands for traditional wifedom. Hadria never explicitly violates sexual rules, but she symbolically does; she adopts the child of a fallen woman, leaves her marital home, and toes the line of adultery. The penultimate chapter examines Sarah Grand's novel, *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), and its two especially unorthodox heroines, Evadne Frayling and Angelica Hamilton-Wells. Like Hadria, Evadne and Angelica both marry, yet their sexual transgression is more explicitly deviant. Evadne remains celibate in order to protect her body against venereal disease, defying expectations of reproduction, while Angelica cross-dresses as a man to gain autonomy. Finally, the thesis culminates in Chapter Four's study of Sue Bridehead's agency as she navigates sexually rebellious and socially unsanctioned relationships. Whereas Rhoda Nunn reaffirms her ideology of independence by refusing Barfoot's offer of a free union, Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) heroine experiments with all forms of partnerships, moving from a sexless marriage to a free union that tragically fails.

CHAPTER ONE
Abolishing the “Sexual Instinct”: How Rhoda Nunn Makes *The Odd Women* “New”

Straddling the line between entrenched patriarchal misogynist and feminist sympathizer, George Gissing’s contradictions within and between his novels complicate his exploration of the Victorian Woman Question. However, modern critics seem to accept his novel, *The Odd Women* (1893), as marking the peak of his support for female emancipation (Grylls 162; Stubbs 151). In this work, Gissing uses the “redundant” or, as indicated by the novel’s title, “odd” woman phenomenon to reveal the socioeconomic problems perpetuated by traditional marriage. This demographic emerges because women far outnumber men in Victorian England; the surplus female population enters the economy to sustain their livelihood, yet upsets patriarchal logic in the process. Gissing’s treatment of this group shows that restricting women to the (unsustainable) career path of marriage either relegates unsuccessful bachelorettes to a life of labor and misery or, if they marry, constrains their autonomy. For example, Monica Madden, left destitute along with two sisters by the premature death of her father, desperately marries Edmund Widdowson, a chauvinist who stifles her freedom, in order to exit the work force.

Gissing uses the cultural context of “redundant” women to showcase the emergence of New Woman Rhoda Nunn, who oversees a professional training school dedicated to advancing the careers of the “odd” group. Whereas her business partner, Mary Barfoot, articulates a more moderate brand of feminism,⁵ the radical views that Rhoda advocates oppose marriage on all grounds. Rhoda poses an interesting case study to preface the novels explored later in this thesis because she grapples with the emotional

⁵ Although Gissing’s novel is set in the 1880s, John Sloan contextualizes Mary Barfoot’s aims and activities with the early phases of feminist activism and the “conservative reformism” movement, which took place in the 1860s and 1870s (120).

consequences of suppressing her sexuality, yet feels trapped by social norms and fails to act. When Rhoda contemplates joining in a free union with Everard Barfoot, she simultaneously hopes that rejecting a male suitor will bolster her feminist credibility, physically desires Barfoot, and worries that he will disgrace her. This turmoil leads her to accept the free union, then propose marriage, and finally reject any relationship altogether. Despite Rhoda's transitory reversal(s) of ideology, she ultimately reaffirms her original values by remaining single and celibate. Even though her crippling fear of social sanction restricts her ability to fulfill both her political and emotional desires, Rhoda's purposeful sexual unorthodoxy preserves her agency.

Because Gissing's confused and conflicting views on feminism are difficult to decipher, *The Odd Women* may seem like an aberration in his collection of works rather than a challenge to social norms. For example, he avidly supported education reform as a mechanism of female emancipation, yet also measured women by the Ruskinian ideal. Patricia Stubbs identifies a pattern throughout Gissing's novels in which, over time, he distances himself from the cause of emancipation and advocates a traditional view of women (144). This conservative outlook unfolds in conjunction with the deterioration of his marriages, which likely intensified his harsh opinions.⁶ For instance, some scholars associate Gissing's antipathy towards female characters in his fictions with the incompetence, poor temper, and vulgarity of his second wife, Edith (Grylls 153; Korg 189). Gissing endured two unhappy marriages before he seemingly embraced the more advanced ideas of the period and lived with Gabrielle Fleury in a free union—the same “marriage without forms” (Gissing *The Odd Women* 196) that Rhoda and Everard

⁶ When Gissing completed *The Odd Women*, he recorded in his diary: “I have written it very quickly, but the writing has been as severe a struggle as ever I knew. Not a day without wrangling and uproar down in the kitchen; not an hour when I was really at peace in mind” (Coustillas 156).

Barfoot entertain in *The Odd Women*. Whether weighing this biographical context or not, the majority of criticism on Gissing has undertaken the task of dissecting his conflicting attitudes on women, with no apparent consensus.

For instance, scholars disagree on the extent to which Gissing sympathizes with the feminist aims of Rhoda Nunn. Some critics conclude that, despite the subjectivity of Gissing's attitude on women's issues, Rhoda's character translates positively. Simon James appreciates the author's realist agenda: "Although female emancipation may seem inimical to the novelist's own libidinal needs for sexual fulfillment and domestic comfort, Gissing is nonetheless able to perceive the justice of desiring it" (122). Furthering this view, Katherine Linehan perceives that Gissing "makes the feminist heroine, even in her renunciation of marriage, a figure of greater stature and nobility than the man she rejects" (364). However, other scholars worry that Rhoda's disagreeability undermines her credibility. According to Jenni Calder, though Gissing "presents the female cause with understanding and sympathy... he cannot avoid making—and this is characteristic of him—his central character very unpleasant" (201). Moreover, Patricia Stubbs observes that Rhoda's feelings for Everard detract from her feminist ideology. Stubbs critiques, "Gissing cannot accept that a woman might actually be indifferent to the idea of marriage, and so he implants in Rhoda a secret jealousy of those women who have succeeded in attracting a lover" (152). Ultimately, the novel's contradictions within Rhoda's feminist cause are self-defeating, as "the novel's subversion of patriarchy is determined by what it seeks to subvert" (David 119).

Though situating Gissing—given his conflicting views on the female sex—within an exploration of New Woman novels may seem problematic, his work engages with and,

some would argue, supports the political theory espoused by contemporary feminists. The novelist's opinions accord with John Stuart Mill's perception of the shortcomings of male chivalry as well as the incompatibility of wifely duties with holding a job (Korg 185; Grylls 144, 159). Additionally, when Monica protests her restrictive marriage to Widdowson, she echoes the rhetoric of Mill. As her emotional affair with Bevis verges on a physical transgression, Monica considers her life thus far as "cast into bondage" (247). Monica's desire for liberty from Widdowson evokes Mill's language because he compares the status of married women to slaves (5). Moreover, Rhoda and Mary Barfoot are well versed on the Woman Question, showing Gissing's familiarity with the discourse. At the training school, the business partners cultivate an intellectual society resembling Hadria's "Preposterous Society" in Mona Caird's work, *Daughters of Danaus*, the subject of the next chapter. Rhoda and Mary not only deliver lectures on the Woman Question, but also provide relevant literary materials to their students, as a "bookcase full of works on the Woman-question and allied topics served as a circulating library; volumes were lent without charge to the members of this little society" (64). This small-scale institution seems to emulate Mudie's Select Library yet counter its notoriously conservative ideology and make novels more economically accessible. Further, it provides unmarried women with philosophical support for their autonomy where society would seek to inculcate within them a blind desire for marriage.

In addition to Gissing's philosophical influences, Rhoda's economic motivation to oversee the training school emphasizes her opposition to marriage and, by extension, patriarchal culture. When Rhoda explains the business model of the clerical school to Monica Madden, she describes unmarried women as "a great reserve. When one woman

vanishes in matrimony, the reserve offers a substitute for the world's work" (44). The term "reserve" highlights Rhoda's strategic and economic attitude by comparing women to resources that she employs in her fight to penetrate male-dominated professional fields. Though some will inevitably marry, Rhoda plans to convert unmarried women into active, contributing members of the public sphere. Rhoda continues to use this economic language when she argues with Mary and Everard Barfoot about the merits of marriage: "A girl cannot but remember that, if she marries, her calling at once changes. The old business is thrown aside—henceforth profitless!" (112). By comparing the profits of one "calling" or job to another, Rhoda disparages norms that prescribe wifedom as a career and that discourage married women from working. Rhoda's cost-benefit calculus, underscored through her use of the masculine words of economics, emphasizes her opposition to the patriarchal institution of marriage.

The novel not only displays this New Woman's economic aims, but also explores her unconventional sexuality. Initially, Gissing's narrator compares Rhoda to a man, describing that "the countenance seemed masculine, its expression somewhat aggressive,—eyes shrewdly observant and lips consciously impregnable" (25). Contemporary critics associate the New Woman with masculine and assertive traits, which the narrator perceives in Rhoda's physical appearance. For example, antifeminist Eliza Lynn Linton describes the "Wild Woman," as "no longer wom[an] in desirableness or beauty" (418). Additionally, the word "impregnable" alludes to both Rhoda's strong-willed views and her supposed physical impregnability. However, this portrayal becomes more ambiguous when the narrator perceives Rhoda's feminine sexuality as repressed. Gissing's narrator continues, "when the lips parted to show their warmth, their fullness,

when the eyelids drooped a little in meditation, one became aware of a suggestiveness... of something like an unfamiliar sexual type, remote indeed from the voluptuous, but hinting a possibility of subtle feminine forces that might be released by circumstance” (26). This description of Rhoda is overtly invasive and focused upon her body. The narrator visually probes and attempts to classify her according to traditional expectations or conditions for “feminine” women, yet, as the phrase “unfamiliar sexual type” implies, fails.

By resisting the feminine “sexual instinct” Rhoda exerts her agency to critique social norms. Rhoda defends these values in a tirade against Bella Royston, a former pupil of the training school who elects to live as a married man’s mistress. In a conversation with Mary Barfoot, Rhoda blames novels for creating the unrealistic ideal of true love that leads women to enter relationships marked by unequal power dynamics. She claims,

Not one married pair in ten thousand have felt for each other as two or three couples do in every novel. There is the sexual instinct of course, but that is quite a different thing; the novelists daren’t talk about that. The paltry creatures daren’t tell the one truth that would be profitable. The result is that women imagine themselves noble and glorious when they are most near the animals (68).

Rhoda argues that fictional love masks the primal truth about relationships between men and women, which are based on physical and sexual domination rather than emotional unity. Connecting this well-kept Victorian secret to the status of married women, Rhoda underscores that sexual hierarchy degrades women to a state “most near the animals.”

However, Rhoda protests this sexual subjugation, as she is “seriously convinced that before the female sex can be raised from its low level there will have to be a wide-spread revolt against the sexual instinct” (70). Rhoda’s celibacy defends her body against its appropriation by a man and echoes the tactics of another New Woman heroine, Sarah Grand’s Evadne Frayling, which will be explored in a later chapter.

Because Victorian culture creates competition among women to survive by marrying, social norms perpetuate a brutal status quo for the unmarried. To highlight the need for reform on this issue, Rhoda declares, “I wish girls fell down and died of hunger in the streets...I should like to see their dead bodies collected together in some open place, for the crowd to stare at... they might only congratulate each other that a few of the superfluous females had been struck off” (42). The shock-value of this statement underscores the violent underbelly of Victorian social reality, as this environment oppresses the masses that are not “fit” to succeed in the cutthroat marital system. Though her article focuses on the Madden sisters’ hopeless dreams of economic prosperity, Lana Dalley’s observation that characters “struggle for existence” (146) accords with Rhoda’s bleak outlook. Similarly, John Goode reaffirms that “what motivates feminism [in the novel] is a very oppressive social Darwinian ideology” (146). Finally, Michael Collie examines the conflation of social survival and sexual attraction, suggesting that Gissing’s realism captures why characters “remain preoccupied with the brute struggle for survival in a society indifferent to them” (154). In sum, the marriage competition creates a lose-lose situation for women: they either obtain a husband and “survive” in sexual subjugation or maintain agency at the price of misery.

Moreover, Gissing extends the implications of Rhoda's sexual protest to a renegotiation of the social contract. In a letter to Eduard Bertz, dated just months after the publication of *The Odd Women*, the novelist radically proposes to overthrow all social norms governing female sexuality, as he is "convinced there will be no social peace until women are intellectually trained very much as men are... the only way of effecting this is to go through a period of what many people will call sexual anarchy" (171). Coupled with Rhoda's perception of a brutal status quo and desire for social reform, Gissing's allusion to "anarchy" invokes the Hobbesian social contract, which theorizes that individuals create government in order to exit an anarchic and violent "state of nature." While Hobbes's state of nature is a constructed rather than historical phenomenon, the reference to "sexual anarchy" highlights that society excludes women from public social contract protections and subjugates them through the private marriage contract. The letter's sentiment simulates an extreme negotiation in which women, who already seem to exist in a quasi-state of nature, highlight the existing, unjust social structures through their sexuality. A supporting character in Gissing's novel echoes this language. Following Rhoda's failed attempt to establish a romance with Everard, Mrs. Cosgrove counsels her on the impact of unconventional relationships: "There are women whose conduct I think personally detestable, and whom yet I can't help thanking for their assault upon social laws. We shall have to go through a stage of anarchy, you know, before reconstruction begins" (315). The allusion to anarchy, surfacing twice, is significant; Mrs. Cosgrove advocates for the same subversion that Gissing purports in his letter.

When Rhoda contemplates accepting Everard's offer of a free union, she contemplates different forms of sexual transgression. She initially plans to reassert her

celibate doctrine, distinguishing her New Woman status from that of an “odd woman.” Rhoda worries that never having received an offer of marriage damages her reputation, as “never to have known that common triumph of her sex... took away from the merit of her position as a leader and encourager of women living independently. There might be some who said, or thought, that she made a virtue of necessity” (165). Because Rhoda is aware of her status as a public figurehead of emancipation, these musings show her anxiety regarding the legitimacy of her own example. She fantasizes about rejecting Everard to strengthen her anti-marriage mantra, as entertaining and denying his proposal would reaffirm her sexlessness, agency, and authority. Conversely, Rhoda seriously considers the offer and rationalizes that a free union would also subvert social norms because “[i]f it became known that she had taken a step such as few women would have dared take, deliberately setting an example of new liberty—her position in the eyes of all who knew her remained one of proud independence” (293). Just as Rhoda exerts her sexual liberty by remaining celibate, so she exerts sexual liberty by engaging in a relationship outside the bounds of marriage. In either case, Rhoda resists a career marriage and challenges arbitrary social rules rather than subjecting her body to oppressive conventions.

However, Rhoda also grapples with the insecurities that society has inculcated within her as a woman, causing her fleetingly to desire marriage in lieu of challenging the social contract. When she reflects on her increasingly intimate relationship with Everard, Rhoda admits that “what her mind regarded with disdain, her heart was all but willing to feed upon, after its long hunger... she could not but regard [Everard] with sexual curiosity” (165). Rhoda experiences a sexual appetite resulting from her “long hunger,” or ideologically motivated abstinence. As her physical desire conflicts with her

intellectual opposition to male-dominated relationships, she wavers in her New Woman principles. Rhoda counteroffers marriage when Everard proposes a free union, subsequently lamenting that she “was not the glorious rebel he had pictured. Like any other woman, she mistrusted her love without the sanction of society” (298). The phrase “sanction of society” alludes to the punishing climate that Victorian norms cultivate for women who break social rules, as evidenced by the fallen woman narrative. Because a free union would violate the marriage contract, Rhoda’s fear of backlash motivates her to choose between, rather than act jointly on, her desire for Barfoot and social transgression.

Because Rhoda’s marriage proposal betrays her New Woman tenets, critics have prematurely questioned the feminist significance of her relationship with Everard. For example, Robert Selig perceives Gissing’s romantic plot as distracting from not only Rhoda’s principles, but also the novel’s thoughtful exploration of “odd women.” Labeling Everard as inauthentic and “exponent,” Selig questions how “these hard-working feminists would empathize in the slightest with an egoistic male who lives only for sybaritic pleasures” (75). Though Selig fairly recognizes the incompatibility of these personalities, he discounts Rhoda’s later ability to recognize Everard’s male supremacy and end her relationship with him. Following the couple’s engagement, after which “neither was content” (Gissing *The Odd Women* 297), Rhoda discovers that Widdowson has accused Monica of an extramarital affair with Everard, which results in a stalemate between Rhoda and Everard that effectively ends the betrothal. Everard refuses to provide any explanation other than an affirmation of his innocence, which outrages Rhoda and causes her to rethink the relationship. Gail Cunningham critiques the depth of this union, asserting,

free love is debased into a bargaining point. Their relationship founders on the question, but in a wholly artificial way. What one might expect, in a novel dedicated to an investigation of women and marriage, to be a central thematic concept turns out merely to be a crude plot device for impeding the path of love. Free love is chosen... but there is remarkably little examination of what it actually means (*New Woman and the Victorian Novel* 144).

Cunningham's focus on Gissing's superficial exploration of a free union overlooks Rhoda's actual intention to resist rather than succumb to the "sexual instinct." Because this heroine establishes her feminist ideology in abstinence rather than free love, Cunningham only evaluates one way in which Rhoda critiques the social climate.

Moreover, Rhoda and Everard's subsequent power struggle highlights the infeasibility of equal partnerships—whether in the form of marriage or a free union—within the context of patriarchal culture. Before Rhoda proposes to Everard, she weighs the likelihood that he will accept such an offer and concludes that "she had enough power over him for that" (282). Though Rhoda worries that Everard will lose respect for her if she desires marriage, her conscious exaction of her preferences from Everard shows that she retains her characteristic New Woman confidence. However, this assertiveness also catalyzes the relationship's dissolution. Because Everard never desires a free union, but rather to pressure Rhoda into legal marriage, her proposal robs him of the opportunity to dominate her. Susan Colón describes Everard's patriarchal attitude as "prurient curiosity as to how sexually vulnerable this indomitable New Woman is... he desires to make Rhoda... surrender her pride to his mastery and to sacrifice her vocation and career"

(454). Rhoda's short-lived desire for a utopian union to take place outside the patriarchal norms that inherently inscribe her and Everard is a fantasy. Given her need for liberty, the relationship has an expiration date from its inception. Whether Rhoda's relationship with Everard fails due to her fear of social sanction, Everard's misogyny, or their concurrent desires for domination, Gissing—contrary to Cunningham's analysis—presents a thorough argument against Rhoda's romantic success in patriarchal culture.

However, Rhoda's return to her sexless lifestyle and pursuit of her feminist goals strengthens her original challenge to social norms. Following the "sterile standoff" (David 129) between Rhoda and Everard, Virginia Madden calls on Rhoda and implores her to visit Monica, who is pregnant, ill, and estranged from Widdowson. This moment causes Rhoda to reflect on the misery of both marriage and solitude, again showing the lose-lose situation for women in Victorian society, and to realize that she "too had fallen among those poor of spirit, the flesh prevailing. But the soul in her had not, finally, succumbed... she made no vows to crush the natural instincts. But... she would still be the same proud and independent woman, responsible only to herself, fulfilling the nobler laws of her existence" (322). Rhoda learns to accept, rather than abolish, her "natural" or sexual instincts and reasserts her independence and dedication to upholding "nobler laws." This reflection suggests that Gissing "presents a more complex and harrowing picture than that of the new woman who is inherently colder to men than women... He shows a "normally" passionate woman making herself cold, with her reasons why" (Blake 95). Rhoda complicates New Woman ideology by fluctuating from sexlessness to marriage, yet her complexity seems simultaneously human and inhuman. Whereas Rhoda evades patriarchal "determinism—even if it means denying herself expression of her

sexual desire” (Ardis 111) and demonstrates “heroism in weakness” (Chase 242), she only achieves independence at the price of never acting on natural desires, or denying her humanity. Despite the paradox of his actual views on the woman question, Gissing builds on Rhoda’s weakness with Everard to create a successful, yet conservative New Woman.

Regrettably, *The Odd Women* ends on an inconclusive note, signaling the classic New Woman struggle to protest patriarchal norms without simultaneously subscribing to them. In a chapter titled “A New Beginning,” Rhoda holds the late Monica’s newborn child and murmurs, for the last line of the novel, “Poor little child!” (371). Whereas the presence of new life at the close of any novel may signal hope or new beginnings, this moment reflects the tragedy of Monica’s repressive marriage, an indirect cause of her death. Also, Rhoda’s lamentation seems to prophesize a bleak future for the baby, fated to grow up in the same cycle of repressive power dynamics. Adrian Poole perceives that the infant symbolizes failed relationships in patriarchal culture by representing “what the impossible, perfect relationship, in which perfect freedom is mystically reconciled with perfect interdependence, can never create” (193). According to Poole, the baby reproduces the same patriarchal patterns of force that characterize failed romantic relationships, such as that of Widdowson and Monica or Rhoda and Everard. Consequently, the infant only furthers the unpleasant sense of patriarchal inertia that seems to pervade Gissing’s novel.

Ultimately, whether her union with Everard Barfoot were to be successful or not, “Rhoda can only lose, win or lose” (Blake 93). Rhoda Nunn is trapped within a patriarchal society that perpetuates male domination of women through institutions and norms. However, though the hierarchical and misogynistic context of Victorian society

does circumscribe Rhoda's actions, she adjusts to maintain her autonomy. Rhoda's unconventional sexuality, such as her desire to abolish the "sexual instinct" or her brief consideration of a free union, challenges the strict social customs that influence Monica Madden to enter and regret a repressive marriage or that cause the unmarried Madden sisters to live their lives in desolation. Overall, *The Odd Women* presents a compelling, if conservative, case in support of the sexless faction of the New Woman movement. Rhoda's failure to fuse her desire for both romance and independence shows the incompatibility of her reality and fantasy. Consequently, while Rhoda's steadfast commitment to repressing the primal "sexual instinct" does not, perhaps, satisfy in the same way that true autonomy without social repercussions would, her strategy is, by her standards, successful.

CHAPTER TWO

The Free Motherhood Ideal in *The Daughters of Danaus*

Though literary history has largely glossed over the journalistic and fictional contributions of Mona Caird,⁷ she was a notorious and controversial advocate for the feminist cause in her era. When Caird published her essay, “Marriage,” in the *Westminster Review* in 1888, the conservative *Daily Telegraph* responded by opening up a debate and subsequently received 27,000 letters. The article in question later became part of a larger collection of essays, *The Morality of Marriage*. Caird explores and, according to some critics, even translates, the progressive views espoused by these essays in her novel, *The Daughters of Danaus*. This work follows heroine Hadria Fullerton as she struggles to fulfill traditional domestic expectations for womanly behavior and simultaneously pursue her musical passion, a conflict that lands her in the successive positions of unhappy daughter, wife, and mother. Despite Hadria’s failure to break from these societal expectations and embody her feminist principles, which echo the arguments of John Stuart Mill and challenge the social contract, Hadria flirts with rebellion: she adopts the orphaned child of a fallen woman, moves out of her marital household to pursue her artistic aspirations, and nearly consummates an adulterous affair. Because she initially submits to traditional marriage and ultimately returns to her husband, Hadria’s success as a New Woman is unclear; however, her sexually subversive actions demonstrate not only her conscious transgression of the social contract, but also her broader vision for the place of women in society.

⁷ See especially Lyn Pykett, Angélique Richardson, and Ann Heilmann

In *The Morality of Marriage* essays, Caird reveals her frustration with popular discourses that ground the status of women in biological or natural disabilities, arguing instead that patriarchal power is socially constructed. One example of the propaganda that Caird critiques is domestic manuals, which, “written by women... reflect the force of domestic ideology, absorbed and promulgated by representatives of the very sex it seeks to control” (Murphy 158). Caird challenges the disadvantage that traditional marriage creates and perpetuates through these domestic expectations, suggesting that society has excluded (even punished) every other development of power; and we have then insisted that the consequent overwrought instincts and adaptations of structure are, by a sort of compound interest, to go on adding to the distortions themselves, and at the same time to go on forming a more and more solid ground for preserving a restrictive system (64).

According to Caird, the institutionalized inequality between men and women both masks and preserves its artificial origin. She suggests that women have grown so accustomed to the dynamic of these hierarchical relationships that they no longer recognize the suppression, as “until the burden is lifted, few will understand how crushing was its weight. So consistent and all-pervading has been the impact on body, mind, and character, that a uniform pressure has even been mistaken by many of the sufferers for no pressure at all” (68). Caird’s rhetoric underscores this repression through comparing social subjugation to physical constraint. By contending that the social status of women is constructed rather than inherent, she also destabilizes the foundation of male power.

Additionally, Caird uses an economic and legal perspective to critique the norms that maintain women in subordination to men, associating marriage with slavery. Though

developments in marriage laws in the late Victorian era begin to address the disparity between the rights of different sexes, for Caird the underlying cultural problem still goes unaddressed. Given that women lack any ownership over their own property, inheritance, or earned income, “the present position of the married woman corresponds, in outward features, with that of a slave in the early ages” (*The Morality of Marriage* 133). The word “slave” directly invokes John Stuart Mill’s rhetoric, as he perceives marriage to be “the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house” (79). Mill also identifies that this dependency is socially constructed from “the primitive state of slavery lasting on, through successive mitigations and modifications” (5). Offering perhaps the most in-depth examination of Caird and Mill’s textual relationship, Demelza Hookway moves beyond the literary critics who simply note the similarity of their language.⁸ Hookway asserts, “[Caird] embodied [Mill’s] views on liberty of discussion in her imaginative world, so opening up possibilities for improvements in the face of social impediments or overwhelmingly adverse circumstances” (881). Hookway suggests that Caird and Mill’s open dialogue on women’s issues is the key to advancing the very progress that they envision, yet fails to identify how Caird and Mill plan to achieve their ideals.

To restore liberty to women, Caird proposes an equal contractual solution in lieu of traditional marriage. She juxtaposes the state of women subjected to the private marriage contract with the economic liberty of those operating within the public sphere, suggesting that unmarried women who perform the same domestic duties as wives would receive “a salary for far less toil, and...be a free agent into the bargain” (133). By

⁸ For additional analysis of Mill and Caird’s similar views on the socially constructed nature of society, see Richardson *Love and Eugenics* 187-188, 195.

comparing wives to domestic servants, Caird highlights the baseless economic and social discrimination that differentiates otherwise identical married and unmarried women. She also asserts that this discrimination highlights the “dislocated social condition” because “for one sex, we are working on the principle of individual freedom and the right of private contract; while... for the other sex, we are still moulding our life on the worst side of the old patriarchal idea, and denying the principle of private contract” (59). Thus, Caird hypothetically resolves patriarchal logic by empowering women with the “right of private contract,” elevating them from slave to free agent status. Whereas the original social contract theorists exclude women from the protections of the public contract in their treatises, Caird reconfigures and co-opts their logic to renegotiate the hierarchical relationship between women and men in Victorian culture.

Caird’s essays not only reveal her liberal politics,⁹ but also preface the same exploration of ideas in her fiction. In *The Daughters of Danaus*, Caird vocalizes the same premises explored in her essays: the socially constructed status of women, comparisons of marriage to slavery, and contracts. Though the aforementioned themes echo the arguments espoused by Caird’s essays, her treatment of the Woman Question in this novel is more complex. Lyn Pykett notes that Caird “does not simply translate the rhetoric of the essays into fictional form. She constructs a narrative and develops a rhetoric of feeling which dramatise and explore the dangerous combination produced by a conventionally restrictive and loveless marriage, a sensitive woman, and a particular cultural stereotype of femininity” (*The Improper Feminine* 145-146). Moreover, as New

⁹ Caird’s framework anticipates elements of 1970s and 1980s radical feminism, associating patriarchy with the historical root cause of women’s oppression, viewing sexuality as a site of conflict between masculine control and female rebellion, and using the psychology of gender to understand social conditioning, which echoes the theories of Carol Gilligan and Adrienne Rich (Heilmann, “Mona Caird” 68-69).

Woman Hadria maneuvers within marriage, she seems to experiment with the social contract framework that Caird implicitly outlines in her essays. In sum, Caird converts her own political philosophy into Hadria's moral code, which exposes contemporary obstacles to overcoming patriarchal norms.

Though Hadria protests gender-based inequalities, patriarchal culture dictates that, because she is a woman, she falls subject to the lack of autonomy that she challenges. Patricia Murphy examines how domestic duties enforce social conditioning for women, arguing that a woman's "time was never truly her own but instead directed by cultural expectations. The ideological implications of this monopolization of women's time are staggering, for temporal control became a vehicle for social control in reinforcing the separate spheres" (156). Murphy identifies time as one of the many mechanisms by which patriarchal society regulates the behavior of women. Whereas Lisa Surrige also examines the theme of time within this novel, she argues that Caird's aesthetic treatment of it underscores the socially constructed nature of social status by highlighting the "liberatory possibilities of historical change." Caird's allusions to mythology and witchcraft, or the "novel's disruptions of narrative time... suggest the historical mutability of social structures even as the text's realist discourse reveals their immediate force (Surrige 132-133). While Murphy and Surrige employ different perspectives to analyze the significance of time, both emphasize the domination of patriarchal power in Caird's contemporary moment. In their respective works, Mill and Caird also denigrate this socially constructed phenomenon (Mill 73; Caird, *The Morality of Marriage* 64).

Likewise, from the outset, Hadria asserts that society, rather than nature, disadvantages women. In the opening scene of the novel, Hadria lectures to the

“Preposterous Society,” a group of her siblings that meets covertly to discuss the Woman Question.¹⁰ Hadria responds to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s argument that social conditions can always be overcome, questioning, “is not circumstance, to a large extent, created by these destroyers...? Has not the strongest soul to count with these, who weave the web of adverse conditions, whose dead weight has to be carried, whose work of destruction has to be incessantly repaired... Surely circumstance consists largely in the inertia, the impenetrability of the destroyers” (10). For Hadria, the “destroyers” symbolize those who create social rules and subjugate others in order to maintain the status quo: in other words, men. Through this challenge to Emerson’s argument, she suggests that, though exceptional individuals can overcome circumstances, inequalities will more often prevail. Shortly after this lecture, Hadria similarly observes that girls “are stuffed with certain stereotyped sentiments from their infancy, and when that painful process is completed, intelligent philosophers come and smile upon the victims, and point to them as proofs of the intentions of Nature regarding our sex, admirable examples of the unvarying instincts of the feminine creature” (23). Echoing Caird's essays, Hadria contends that social conditioning disguises artificially constructed female behavior as a natural, “unvarying” phenomenon; like Caird herself, Hadria identifies and rejects this social oppression.

However, society enforces hierarchical relationships not only through social constructs, but also through women policing each other, which shows that patriarchal culture really has indoctrinated repression within the female sex. Ann Heilmann describes this dynamic as a vicious cycle, asserting that women “unconsciously seek revenge by

¹⁰ This freethinking society seems reminiscent of Karl Pearson’s Men and Women’s Club, which discussed similar issues from a eugenic standpoint. Though the club acknowledged the Victorian regulation of sexuality and championed a new ideal for the middle class heterosexual relationship, it still marked certain sexualities as dangerous and propagated an unbalanced discourse of power between men and women (Walkowitz 136-139, Showalter *Sexual Anarchy* 47-57).

exacting self-sacrifice from the next generation of women, who in turn would instill this principle in their own female children, thus perpetuating the cycle of internalised oppression handed down from mother to daughter” (“Mona Caird” 71). In Hadria’s case, her mother and sister-in-law, Henriette Temperley, simulate the role of patriarchal authority. Henriette, the arbiter of Hadria’s marriage from its inception, especially enforces social norms by reminding Hadria after she moves to Paris that “[e]very woman who marries enters, by that fact, into a contract” (344). Desperate to effect conventionally feminine behavior from Hadria, Henriette resorts to using the economic leverage of the heroine’s marital status to convince her to reunite with Hubert Temperley, her husband. Also, Professor Fortescue, Hadria’s feminist mentor, observes that women vengefully oppress each other: “It is a law that we cannot evade; if we are injured, we pay back the injury, whether we will or not, upon our neighbors” (450). Even the word “law” underscores the extent to which unwritten customs have solidified into inexorable rules.

Whereas Caird proposes an egalitarian contractual solution to resolve the patriarchal problems that she explores in her essays, her realist novel presents the contemporary state of contracts as a cruel necessity, a manipulative tactic, and a farce. Women lack the status of free agent in negotiating their private marriage contracts, as there is “uncommonly little that a girl can do (or rather that people will let her do) unless she marries, and that is why she so often does marry as a mere matter of business” (Caird *Daughters of Danaus* 28). The language in this remark from Hadria underscores that marriage functions like an economic transaction. Hadria implicitly recognizes that society’s marriage norms create a double bind for women; they are powerless if they do marry, yet powerless if they do not marry. Society pressures women not only

economically, but also emotionally. When Henriette Temperley, who pressures Hadria to marry in the first place, implores Hadria to return to her husband, Hadria likens her marriage contract to “simply a cunning contrivance for making a woman and her possible children the legal property of a man, and for enlisting her own honour and conscience to safeguard the disgraceful transaction” (345). Hadria critiques the exploitative contract for masking an economic “transaction” with emotional appeals to women’s “honour and conscience,” which tricks women into submitting to the ownership of men. Caird furthers this view on marriage through Hadria’s relief when she leaves her husband to study music. Upon arriving in Paris, Hadria realizes the “price people consented to pay for the privilege of human ties! What hard bargains were driven in the kingdom of the affections!” (305). Her sardonic use of the words “privilege” and “bargains” mocks the sincerity of marital relationships if they come at such a high “price.”

Moreover, Hadria extends the economic problems with the marriage contract to identify its sexual subjugation of women. By constantly critiquing her “position of a slave” (343) and the marital experience of “woman’s bondage” (341), Hadria implicitly cites Mill’s comparison of marriage to slavery; however, she extends the analogy to also reject the sexual transaction that marriage inscribes:

By bartering your womanhood, by using these powers of body, in return for food and shelter and social favour, or for the sake of so-called ‘duty’... How then do you differ from the slave woman who produces a progeny of young slaves, to be disposed of as shall seem good to her perhaps indulgent master? I see no essential difference (343).

Hadria reveals how the marriage contract facilitates the purchase of a woman's body and reinforces male power. She strips away the multiple justifications for this institution, such as economic benefits and social duty, in order to unmask the "barter" or trade that takes place in exchange for female reproductive capabilities. By framing the marriage contract in terms of sexual "producing," Hadria politicizes her resistance to the conventional duties of motherhood.

Consequently, Caird's resistance to the private marriage contract informs her resistance to the broader social contract. Extending beyond the politics of most New Woman authors, Caird perceives a constructed relationship between the status quo and a hypothetical, anarchic state, from which the former arises. Angelique Richardson clarifies Caird and Mill's perspectives on these abstract concepts: "While Caird and Mill were aware that the State was a necessary and *desirable* departure from the state of Nature... they fought against the right of the state to interfere in the life of an individual unless they impinged on another's freedom" (192). In other words, these political thinkers reserve the right of rebellion if society fails to protect all individuals equally. Additionally, Abigail Mann maintains that the evolutionary premise of the "state of nature" helps Caird access the "authority to ask Darwinian questions in order to offer up alternate readings of old debates about control over the female body" (43). Conceiving of society as developed from a more primitive state not only implies the constructed nature of patriarchy, but also allows women to undermine its hypothetical origin. Though Richardson and Mann evaluate questions of anti-eugenic feminism and social Darwinism, respectively, social contract theory better clarifies Caird's political aims.

By equating constructed social inequalities with uncivilized norms, Caird uses the “state of nature” to justify her protest. In his treatise, *The Subjection of Women*, Mill attempts to dismantle the “peremptory exclusion” (101) that represses women on the basis of their sex. Mill traces this phenomenon over time, showing that anarchic dynamics continue to reproduce these inequalities. He asserts, “[t]he morality of the first ages rested on the obligation to submit to power; that of the ages next following on the right of the weak to the forbearance and protection of the strong... the time is now come for the morality of justice” (43). Similarly, Caird suggests that the state has regressed in its treatment of women, as “women originally became the property of man by right of capture; now the wife is his by right of law” (*Morality of Marriage* 72). For Caird, laws that institutionalize and legitimize inequality are not only unacceptable, but also no more civilized than a less governed, more anarchic state. Just as Mill theorizes that women must rebel to attain equality (77-78), Caird champions that “all attacks on liberty ought to be resisted” (*Morality of Marriage* 169). Hadria follows this logic to realize her autonomy, defying marriage norms in order to “discuss the question of the sovereignty of the will... to try that theory and see what comes of it” (*Daughters of Danaus* 284).

Moreover, by comparing patriarchal culture to the Hobbesian state of nature, Caird implicitly invalidates the social contract. In *The Daughters of Danaus*, Caird’s persistent use of the word “brutal” in conjunction with her liberal political views seems to evoke Thomas Hobbes’ description of the state of nature as “nasty, brutish and short” (76). For example, Hadria’s father insists that the world is “ruled by mere *brute* force, and would be so ruled to the end of time” (98; emphasis added). Through Mr. Fullerton’s masculine assertions of power, Caird hints that society’s treatment of women is primitive.

Further, in a conversation with her female friend and literary idol, Valeria du Prel, Hadria echoes Hobbesian language and remarks that “women secretly hate, and shrink from this *brutal* domestic idea that fashions their fate... the bars are, half of them, of human construction” (68; emphasis added). Because society constrains women to an ideal that appears no less oppressive than their treatment in a “brutish” state of nature, Caird implies the need for social reform. Hadria reiterates this idea following her marriage to Hubert, attributing the repressed status of women to “mere *brutal* necessity that held [women] all in thrall—the inexorable logic of conditions” (169; emphasis added). These “inexorable... conditions,” or social norms, replicate patterns of female subjugation, such as marriage. Thus, Hadria perceives society to be infringing upon her liberty, which invalidates the social contract.

This theoretical frame illuminates the political motivation of Hadria’s sexual politics as she challenges social convention. Her rebellion takes various forms, such as her apathy towards her biological children, her adoption of an illegitimate child, and her dangerous flirtation with Professor Theobald. Through resisting prescribed motherhood duties, Hadria separates her physical reproduction from its social complement, thereby maintaining control over her sexuality. Although Hadria gives birth to two sons by her husband, their presence in the novel is virtually nonexistent.¹¹ While critiquing that Hadria doesn’t seem to care who looks after her children, Lady Engleton jests that the heroine will “depopulate this village” (185). Lady Engleton intends this comment to be humorous, yet the word “depopulate” reveals society’s biological anxiety concerning

¹¹ Sparse biographical evidence of Caird’s life also suggests that she was a neglectful mother to her son, Alister Caird (Rosenberg 488-489).

mothers who fail to conform to traditional standards.¹² Thus, Hadria's family hopes that motherhood will tame her social views because "children have been the unfailing means of bringing women into line with tradition. Who could stand against them? They had been able to force the most rebellious to their knees. An appeal to the maternal instinct had quenched the hardiest spirit of revolt. No wonder the instinct had been so trumpeted and exalted!" (187). Despite the desperate hopes of Henriette and Hadria's mother, bearing children only intensifies Hadria's political views. She recognizes and rejects how society uses children and maternal duties to "quench" unconventionality, or "the hardiest spirit of revolt."

Not only does Hadria resist the traditional motherhood ideal, but also she substitutes it with a revolutionary alternative that undermines male-dominated structures. Examining the novel's mythological references, Ann Heilmann asserts that Caird disrupts classic myths through the binary of mother and child, which "replaces the wrath of the gods with the forces of environment, heredity, and temperament" (*New Woman Strategies* 215). For example, Heilmann parallels Caird's reference to the myth of Medea, known for both her artistic ambition and her infanticide, with Hadria's abandonment of her children to pursue music. When Henriette visits her in Paris, Hadria defends her decision to reinvent motherhood "apart from the enormous pressure of law and opinion that has, always, formed part of its inevitable conditions. The illegal mother is hounded by her fellows in one direction; the legal mother is urged and incited in another: free motherhood is unknown amongst us" (342). Hadria's desire to discover a version of motherhood free from patriarchal norms, or "the enormous pressure of law and opinion,"

¹² The poor training and lack of regulation of midwives lead to a high infant mortality rate (154 deaths per thousand) even at the end of Queen Victoria's reign, and infants entrusted to wet nurses rather than their biological mothers were at an even higher relative risk (J.H. Miller 27; McBride 47).

extends Caird's utopian ideal of women as free agents from romantic to maternal relationships and transcends stereotypes of fallen women and conventional mothers.

Whereas Abigail Mann reads Hadria's attempts to redefine her maternal relationships as forcing new conversations yet failing (44), Hadria seems to achieve this objective in part through Martha Jervis, the illegitimate child of fallen woman Ellen Jervis.

More radical than her neglect of her biological children, Hadria's adoption of Martha Jervis signals her social and sexual protest to patriarchal norms. When she takes Martha under her wing, Hadria responds to the social backlash: "Whatever the wrongs of Ellen Jervis, at least there were no laws written, and unwritten, which demanded of her as a duty that she should become the mother of this child. In that respect she escapes the ignominy reserved for the married mother who produces children that are not even hers" (188). Hadria illicitly articulates that bearing an illegitimate child out of wedlock is liberating rather than ruining. By questioning the marriage laws that deny women rights over her children, Hadria challenges social norms; by defending a deceased fallen woman, Hadria radically challenges sexual norms. Hadria's adoption of Martha, who inherits the symbol of her biological mother's sexual transgression, undermines the male-dominated system of procreative control and removes Hadria from a cycle that literally reproduces patriarchal authority (SurrIDGE 135; Heilmann *New Woman Strategies* 232). In a male dominated social system, motherhood and sexual regulation are bound up in each other, yet Hadria disregards both.

Furthermore, Martha symbolically inverts the patriarchal logic underpinning gender norms, showing how Hadria accesses her autonomy. Despite her unhappiness in marriage, Hadria enters a so-called "Renaissance" in caring for the child, whom she

adopts “without the pressure of any social law or sentiment, and in these circumstances of freedom, its helplessness appealed to her protective instincts. She felt the relationship to be a true one, in contradistinction to the more usual form of protectorate of woman to child” (240). Because her maternal “protective instincts” for Martha are voluntary, Hadria overcomes the restrictive social norms that obligate a mother to nurture her biological children and realizes an ideal of free motherhood. Hadria contrasts her “true” relationship with Martha with the “protectorate,” or state of control, that patriarchal logic imposes upon conventional mothers, which implies that Martha liberates her from this repression. When Martha restrains Professor Theobald with his watch chain, she further enacts Hadria's sexual protest. As Martha figuratively holds Professor Theobald captive, he and Hadria converse:

“You now stand for an excellent type of woman, Professor: strong, but chained.”

“Oh thank you! (Infant, I implore!)”

“The baby ably impersonates Society with all its sentiments and laws, written and unwritten.”

“Ah!—and my impounded property?”

“Woman’s life and freedom” (243).

Literary critics fixate on this scene, arguing, for example, that Hadria takes on masculine power through feminizing Professor Theobald (Murphy 167-168) or that her voluntary motherhood removes her from the norms that enforce women’s subjection (SurrIDGE 135); however, their analysis of gender roles is marginal. Not only does Hadria invert gender norms, but also, through Martha, she dismantles the social contract. Martha, the

product of sexual transgression, acts as the patriarchal authority, or “impersonates Society,” by constraining Professor Theobald with his watch. She implodes patriarchal hierarchy to usurp power from Professor Theobald, which emphasizes not that she feminizes him, but rather that she redeploys the social contract to highlight its flawed terms.

In her most severe act of rebellion, Hadria entertains illicit sexual desire, which violates social customs that order women to be chaste. Ann Heilmann connects Hadria’s libido with her foiled attempts to pursue music, for which she compensates by “exult[ing] instead in the ‘evil’ spell of feminine sensuality and invest[ing] herself with the deadly quality of the *femme fatale*” (*New Woman Strategies* 222). Suggesting that Hadria’s sexuality channels her pent up artistic passion downplays the heroine’s deliberate social protest. Rather, this heroine consciously exerts her sexual power, the “one solitary weapon that *can’t* be taken from a woman” (Caird *Daughters of Danaus* 390). As Hadria travels to Paris, literally and figuratively distancing herself from her marriage, she connects her sexuality to her agency and senses that “the desire had been growing in [her] to test her powers of attraction to the utmost, so as to discover exactly their range and caliber. She felt rather as a boy might feel who had come upon a cask of gunpowder, and longed to set a match to it, just to see exactly how high it would blow off the roof” (332). Hadria’s rhetoric captures the volatility of her pent up physical desire. Comparing herself to a boy testing explosives, she wants to experiment with the raw power of her sexuality to “blow off the roof,” or metaphorically explode norms that underpin the social contract. Furthermore, Hadria connects her sexual appetite to the “thirst for masculine homage and

for power over men” (333). Like Martha’s symbolic restraint of Professor Theobald, Hadria desires to reverse patriarchal norms and, thus, invert the social contract.

Although Hadria disregards the legal expectations of her marriage contract, her quasi-sexual subversion ultimately reaffirms male power. When Henriette accuses Hadria of loving her intellectual mentor, Professor Fortescue, Hadria responds to the broader concept of adultery rather than refuting the false claim: You think that I should regard myself as so completely the property of a man whom I do not love, and who actively dislikes me, as to hold my very feelings in trust for him... I claim rights over myself, and will hold myself in pawn for no man” (351). Whereas the possibility of adultery, whether the marriage is loving or loveless, horrifies Henriette, the “mere legal claim meant nothing to [Hadria]” (332). The word “pawn” indicates her refusal to abide by the rules, or contractual terms, of a social game. According to Gail Cunningham, though “Caird makes it clear that Hadria would have taken a lover...she is more concerned to show how any individual bids for emancipation must finally be frustrated by the power of social convention” (“New Woman Fiction” 183). Indeed, Hadria’s illicit flirtation with Professor Theobald backfires and underscores her subjugation. After Professor Theobald reveals to Hadria that he is Martha’s biological father and she rejects him for ruining Ellen Jervis, he steals the child and mocks that “the law has infinite respect for a father’s holiest feelings” (439). Professor Theobald’s misogynistic intentions highlight the triumph of unjust patriarchal power. Despite Hadria’s attempts to invert social norms, her flirtation nearly entraps her in a hierarchal affair. Further, Professor Theobald repairs Hadria’s damage to the social contract by reclaiming Martha, showing that patriarchal culture rejects free motherhood.

While Hadria's failed attempt to resist the social contract results in her depression, she also hopes for future success. Broken by Professor Theobald, Hadria submits to the social behavior that her family desires and, as she "sank in faith and hope, she rose in the opinion of her neighbours. She was never nearer to universal unbelief than now" (463). Hadria's depression, evidenced by her surrender to patriarchal rules and "unbelief," reveals her fear that the next girl who "dares to scorn the role of adventuress that society allots to her will have the harder fate" (471). Though Hadria's attitude seems despondent, she dreams of "a vast abyss, black and silent, which had to be filled up to the top with the bodies of women, hurled down to the depths of the pit of darkness, in order that the survivors might, at last, walk over in safety" (451). Hadria darkly envisions the violent toll that patriarchal power takes on female bodies, yet optimistically pictures "survivors" crossing over the chasm, symbolically bridging the disparity between the sexes. In other words, Hadria anticipates that future women will benefit from the work of failed heroines who come before them.

Ultimately, literary critics disagree on the extent of Hadria's feminist success, or lack thereof. Casey Cothran, examining Hadria's physical and emotional suffering as a New Woman, posits that by "making her own painful confinement within the domestic sphere into a sad spectacle, Hadria encourages others to re-envision the roles of all women in late Victorian culture" (64). Conversely, Lyn Pykett pessimistically asserts that Hadria "emphasize[s] women's complicity in their own subjection, and the part they play in enforcing and policing the self-sacrificial subjection of other women" ("The Cause of Women" 136). In addition to these diverse perspectives, the social contract offers a systematic criterion to evaluate Hadria's relative success. Although Hadria fails to realize

her individual aims, this theory predicts that society punishes those who unsuccessfully defect. Thus, the sanction that Hadria receives from patriarchal authority unsurprisingly conforms her behavior, yet a more holistic review of Hadria's success would consider her commitment to her values preceding the inevitable failure. In *The Daughters of Danaus*, Caird creates a New Woman heroine who consciously exerts her sexuality to renegotiate an unjust contract, and whose ultimate failure underscores the very inequality that she protests from the outset. Additionally, Hadria's dissatisfaction at the end of the novel suggests that she exists in a more positive and autonomous state than Sue Bridehead, a heroine to be discussed in a later chapter. Hadria and Sue both surrender to their spouses following events that punish their unconventionality; however, whereas Sue's ideal of liberty is utterly destroyed, Hadria maintains her untraditional views and what seems like her hope for future equality.

CHAPTER THREE
Double Trouble: Sexual Strike and Cross Dressing in *The Heavenly Twins*

Credited with coining the term “New Woman,”¹³ author, feminist, and political activist Sarah Grand embraces the contemporary debates of the late nineteenth century and offers a complex interpretation of marriage and female sexuality, which has been described as falling within the related movements of female eugenics and social purity. While the eugenicist perspective emphasizes qualities of biological determinism and civic motherhood within Grand’s writing, social purists root Grand’s beliefs in support of traditional morality (Richardson *Love and Eugenics* 101-108; Heilmann *New Woman Fiction* 79, 82). Though Grand borrows her perspective on women’s issues from these schools of thought, she expands their political tenets by exploring female sexual desire and bending gender roles (Ledger 113; Lloyd 181). Grand mainly echoes Josephine Butler, known for campaigning against the Contagious Diseases Acts, whose brand of social purity aims to correct the hypocrisy of gender-specific moral codes (Eberle 221-229; Hall 43-44). Even within the fictional works of Grand, who christens the New Woman, the archetypal example of this figure remains ideologically elusive. Because her heroines diverge in their subversive pursuits and meet with diverse levels of success, the term “New Woman” remains “a site of ideological struggle” (Doughty 186). For example, in Grand’s novel, *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), two female protagonists challenge similar social norms in radically distinct ways; however, both exert their sexual agency to achieve political ends. By withholding sex from her husband and cross-dressing, respectively, Evadne Frayling and Angelica Hamilton-Wells violate tacit social laws in order to challenge patriarchal norms.

¹³ See Grand, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question,” 271.

In contrast with Evadne and Angelica, Grand's autobiographical heroine from *The Beth Book* (1897) arguably receives the most successful ending. Beth Caldwell rejects the vivisectionist practices of her husband and leaves her oppressive marital home to publish a bestselling novel. Whereas Evadne likewise protests the disrepute of her husband, she still consents to live with him, represses her beliefs at his request, and subsequently falls ill from hysteria. Angelica similarly flouts social rules only to revert to convention, repenting her transgression and becoming a dutiful wife. Despite Beth's comparative materialistic and ideological triumph, Evadne and Angelica present the more polemical case studies within Grand's works. Both heroines more openly employ their sexuality to protest the socially constructed sexual double standard. Evadne represses her physical desire for her husband, Major George Colquhoun, and resists sex in order to safeguard her health against his suspected venereal disease. Asserting rights over her body destabilizes the traditional expectations that a woman becomes the property of her husband and, as a duty, bears his children. Similarly, Angelica deviates from sexual norms through cross-dressing and illicitly visiting an unmarried man. Because these heroines use their sexuality to transgress and attempt to reform social rules, their radical behavior undermines the social contract.

Though Grand's moderate strategy, or what John Kucich terms "middlingness" (197), gains her popular support and veils her subversive critiques of patriarchy, it inscribes her heroines within hierarchical logic. Ann Heilmann argues that Grand mimics social convention to placate conservative readers while simultaneously undermining the same norms through radical subplots: "[*The Heavenly Twins*] ventriloquizes authoritative voices with the aim of undercutting the patriarchal claim to objectivity with the feminist

concept of relativity, arguing the centrality of gender in determining point of view and shaping truth perceptions” (*New Woman Strategies* 45). Coupling incompatible patriarchal and feminist discourses allows Grand to appeal to both traditional views that value social morality and advanced views that criticize gender roles (Doughty 187-188). This strategy effectively garners her novels commercial success; *The Heavenly Twins* was Grand’s most successful work and an unexpected bestseller when it was published, reprinting six times in the first year alone. However, because Grand implicitly reinforces patriarchal norms, she undercuts Evadne and Angelica’s subversive behavior.

From the outset, Evadne’s rational self-government prefaces her concerted protest against the corrupt patriarchal system. During her childhood, Evadne forms her principles by systematically reviewing debates on the Woman Question, after which “all the arguments upon which [Evadne] formed her opinions were found in the enemy’s works alone. She had drawn her own conclusions; but after having done so, as it happened, she had the satisfaction of finding confirmation strong in John Stuart Mill” (14). Because Mill’s writings, the “enemy” of her father’s patriarchal perspective, systematically undermine the foundations of traditional marriage, as discussed in previous chapters, this reference signals Grand’s awareness of the institution’s patriarchal characteristics.¹⁴ However, Evadne eagerly enters the institution of marriage after falling in love with Major Colquhoun, which diverges from heroines such as Rhoda Nunn in *The Odd Women* and Hadria Fullerton in *The Daughters of Danaus*, who unfailingly oppose the institution’s hierarchical structure. Though Evadne elects to marry, and Mill notes that

¹⁴ Tapanat Khunpaktee invokes the principles of John Stuart Mill to examine Evadne’s individualism, which conflicts with traditional social norms for women and suggests that marriage is oppressive and counters her desire for liberation (138-143). However, this argument does not connect the agency of New Woman heroines like Evadne with their actual motivations.

women often voluntarily do (13), her rationality underscores that doing so will not compromise her values. As Evadne, “more an intellectual than a human being” (20), contemplates her impending nuptials to Major Colquhoun, she reaffirms that “she was quite prepared to decide with her mind. She never took her heart into consideration, or the possibility of being overcome by a feeling which is stronger than reason” (52).

Evadne’s resistance to passion shows that she maintains her independent thinking despite entering an institution that possesses the potential to undermine her values. Consequently, after discovering Major Colquhoun’s disreputable past, Evadne flees.

Evadne’s subsequent resistance to Major Colquhoun reveals not only her moral objections to impurity, but also her challenge to the sexual politics of the late Victorian era. Claiming that she will “decline to live with him” (78), Evadne initially resists her parents’ entreaties to return to her husband and defies social convention for married couples. This stance mirrors that of another of Grand’s New Woman heroines; in *The Beth Book*, Beth Caldwell declares, “If I ever have a bad husband, I shall *not* stay with him, for I can’t see what good comes of it” (224). Evadne realizes that her husband’s sexual past transcends her individual circumstances and determines to set an example for women on the whole to “stop the imposition, approved of by custom, connived at by parents, made possible by the state of ignorance in which we are carefully kept—the imposition upon a girl’s innocence and inexperience of a disreputable man for a husband” (78). By framing her protest to her own marriage in relation to a broader problem, Evadne attacks the social norms that condone the sexual double standard. She specifically opposes the concerted efforts of parents to maintain the “state of ignorance” that

disadvantages women by making them dependent upon immoral men, rendering her protest, while born of moral conflict, one that targets patriarchal authority.

Moreover, Evadne's refusal to live with Major Colquhoun, a traditional feature of marriage, also challenges the economic qualities of the institution. Major Colquhoun's language underscores the gains that he hopes to transact through this arrangement, as he "had married Evadne in order to win the credit of having secured an exceptionally young and attractive wife, and now all he thought was 'what fellows would say' if they knew of the slight she had put upon him" (86). The terms "credit" and "secured" convey that marriage disguises a man's purchase of a woman, which will reap him social benefits that are more valuable than the marriage itself. When Evadne refuses to honor this unequal agreement, her father punishes the rebellion by cutting Evadne off from her mother. Evadne responds by asserting her liberty, as women "are not the property of our husbands; they do not buy us. We are perfectly free agents to write to whomsoever we please" (116). Evadne repudiates the perception that her marriage to Major Colquhoun indebts her to him as his "property," proving to her father that her autonomy cannot be purchased or constrained by patriarchal authority. She exercises her right as a "free agent" to write to her mother, using contractual language to stake a claim to that liberty.

Just as Evadne resists the social dictates of marriage, so she resists the sexual imperative to consummate her marriage. Evadne returns to her husband, but worries that his sexual history has exposed him to venereal disease; accordingly, she agrees "to keep up appearances; but only that" (109) and remains celibate. She also politicizes this decision. When her aunt, Mrs. Orton Beg, suggests that Evadne fulfill her wifely duties, Evadne vehemently refuses to "*submit*... that word is of no use to me. Mine is *rebel*... It

is the rebels who extend the boundary of right little by little, narrowing the confines of wrong, and crowding it out of existence” (95; emphasis in original). Evadne frames her self-preservation efforts in political terms by stating her desire to “rebel,” intending her actions to redefine the relationship between women and men or enlarge the spectrum of women’s rights. Because this protest aims to revise the status quo, Evadne opposes the unwritten laws that structure contemporary culture, or the “general conditions of human society” (Mill 39). Teresa Mangum describes Evadne’s refusal to consummate her marriage in contractual terms, as “Evadne’s sense of duty forces her to remain married to the Colonel even though she believes his previous sexual experience should *invalidate* the marriage *contract*” (101; emphasis added). Given Evadne’s political rhetoric, extending Mangum’s logic from Evadne’s individual marriage contract to her broader social protest does not require a great leap. Evadne’s critiques of marriage condemn the patriarchal logic that perpetuates the sexual double standard, suggesting that the tacit agreement maintaining customs and norms, or the social contract, endorses oppressive laws and should be invalidated.

Additionally, the subject of venereal disease in *The Heavenly Twins* locates Grand’s work within the debate on women’s bodily rights, underscoring that Evadne’s unconventional marriage renegotiates wider social inequalities. During the 1860s, Parliament passed the Contagious Diseases Acts, which subjected prostitutes to compulsory medical exams and, if found to be infected with venereal disease, imprisoned them within lock hospitals. Evadne’s sexual resistance to her potentially infected husband contests and reverses the patriarchal logic of this legislation, reclaiming female bodily rights. Because these acts treat infected women as vessels of contagion, Grand’s

presentation of a syphilitic male body inverts the logic of the medical and political establishment (Ledger 115; Heilmann *New Woman Fiction* 86). This broad social issue suggests that Evadne's subversive celibacy targets the social system rather than solely her marriage. The same issues emerge even more explicitly in *The Beth Book*, as Beth marries vivisectionist Dr. Daniel Maclure, who runs a lock hospital fueling "the whole horrible apparatus for the special degradation of women" (Grand *The Beth Book* 415). Roxanne Eberle, through comparing Grand's writing to that of contemporary activist Josephine Butler, argues that *The Beth Book* uses the Contagious Diseases Acts to associate marriage with legalized prostitution (228-229). Eberle's logic shows that male domination of female bodies easily extends from the criminal to the domestic sphere, contributing to the construction of the unjust contracts that Evadne protests.

Accordingly, venereal disease fuels Grand's criticism of a pervasive cultural problem and bolsters her argument to revise the social contract. For example, Evadne's counterpart in the novel, Edith Beale, faces the same social dilemmas as Evadne but makes the opposite decisions. When she ignores Evadne's warnings about her infected husband, Edith consummates her marriage and develops venereal disease, which underscores the danger of the sexual double standard. After wedding Sir Mosley Menteith, Edith realizes that "her senses... were now being rendered morbidly active by disease. The shadow of an awful form of insanity already darkened her days" (280). Though Edith originally rebuffs Evadne's warning about her impure husband, she later echoes the heroine's political language. Debilitated by syphilis, Edith cautions, "the same thing may happen...and *will* happen so long as we refuse to know and resist" (304; emphasis in original). This rhetoric similarly spreads to nascent New Woman Angelica

Hamilton-Wells, who condemns that “[t]here is no law... either to protect us or avenge us. That is because men made the law for themselves, and that is why women are fighting for the right to make laws too” (307). Edith and Angelica implicitly recognize that the social contract excludes women and constructs a culture that facilitates male domination, which requires women to “resist” or “fight” for recognition and protection. Additionally, Evadne believes that custom must be reformed because “the system... is at fault, the laxity which permits anyone, however unfit, to enter upon the most sacred of all human relations... such marriages as we see contracted every day are simply a degradation of all the higher attributes which distinguish men from beasts” (340). Not only does Evadne’s language again highlight the contractual qualities of marriage, but also she indicates that the institution is a product of a flawed “system” or social contract.

Although Evadne fails to realize her political aims when she promises to keep her ideology private, her subsequent hysteria still reaffirms her previous attacks on patriarchal culture. Evadne suppresses her feminist views at her husband’s request, yet the mental restriction “cramped her into a narrow groove wherein to struggle would only have been to injure herself ineffectually... she found herself reduced to an existence of objectless contemplation” (349). This “objectless” status relegates Evadne to the role of a traditional wife, who, by marrying, has already accomplished the end goal of her career. Because this “cramped” lifestyle suffocates Evadne’s political aims, it breeds mental stress, for had “she not found an outlet for her superfluous vitality as a girl in the cultivation of her mind, she must have become morbid and hysterical, as is the case with both sexes when they remain in the unnatural state of celibacy with mental energy unapplied” (350). Grand preempts arguments that Evadne’s hysteria stems from her

frustrated sexual desire by highlighting a caveat in Evadne's "mental energy unapplied." Though Evadne technically joins "the shadow land of the failed rebel" (Heilmann "Narrating the Hysteric" 123), her repression highlights the social problems that she critiques. By conforming an entire sex to the sole track of marriage, patriarchal society constructs a double bind in which women either have sex and subject their bodies to physical disease or resist sex and succumb to the stress that catalyzes mental disease.

Furthermore, the novel underscores Evadne's oppression through a destabilizing shift to the first-person narrative of Dr. George Galbraith, who reinforces patriarchal logic by invasively diagnosing Evadne's hysteria. As the CD Acts evidence, the medical establishment in the late nineteenth century exercises male power by regulating female sexuality; Grand's fictions especially call attention to the disturbing practices of male doctors by transforming medical men from authority figures into villains, thus rejecting their institutionalized power (Heilmann *New Woman Strategies* 27). For example, Dr. Galbraith's medical gaze dissects Evadne by comparing her physicality to that of Angelica, who he perceives to be a "splendid specimen of hardy, healthy, vigorous, young womanhood. Evadne looked sickly beside her, and drooping, like a pale and fragile flower in want of water" (602). Just as Dr. Galbraith's scientific language reinforces his medical status, so his sexual language reinforces his patriarchal status. Comparing her to a thirsty flower, Galbraith reveals his desire to enter Evadne's mind and metaphorically hydrate her, which emanates the "phallic symbolism" that scholars observe in his overall attitude (Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies* 70). However, while the destabilizing shift in narrative point of view results in Dr. Galbraith's patriarchal perspective, it also undermines his logic. Granting Dr. Galbraith narrator status allows

Grand to “wrest cultural authority for both her fiction and her politics” (Mangum 117) as the formal choice “reverses the power dynamics, especially in the case of female readers, by encouraging them to study *his* ‘case’ while he is engaged on examining Evadne’s” (Heilmann “Narrating the Hysteric” 130).

Despite Dr. Galbraith’s narration silencing Evadne, she continues to subvert his authority through sexually autonomous behavior. Dr. Galbraith attains true patriarchal status by marrying Evadne after Colonel Colquhoun’s death and conceiving a child with her; though Evadne’s pregnancy indicates that she submits to a sexual relationship with the doctor, she resists the norms governing marriage. Evadne attempts suicide in order to abort the birth of her child, justifying her actions to a stricken Dr. Galbraith: “You would not see that it is prophetic, as I do—in case of our death—nothing to save my daughter from Edith’s fate—better both die at once” (665). Evadne’s manic rationale shows her willingness to transgress social, sexual, and moral laws to protest the subjugation of innocent women to tainted men, a common phenomenon due to the sexual double standard. Although Evadne’s suicidal notions seem hysterical rather than political, they show the resilience of her feminist ideology. After she gives birth, she remarks to Dr. Galbraith,

“I would not do the same thing now, but it is only because...I no longer perceive the utility of self-sacrifice.”

“But do you not perceive the sin of suicide?”...

“Christ committed suicide to all intents and purposes by deliberately putting himself into the hands of his executioners; but his motive makes

them responsible for the crime; and my motive would place society in a similar position” (671; emphasis in original).

Evadne’s docility and submission at the end of the novel only thinly veils her desire to hold society accountable for its hypocrisy. Rather than repenting her sin, she analogizes the crucifixion of Christ to her suicide attempt, politicizing the nature of her self-sacrifice and directly challenging society’s corruption. This image is especially charged because Evadne gives birth to a boy, meaning that, were her abortion successful, she would deny Dr. Galbraith his heir, hijacking his ability to perpetuate the cycle of patriarchal power. Thus, despite Evadne’s failure to fully embody her New Woman principles, the novel closes her chapter on an uncertain, violent note that questions social norms.

Unique to Grand’s novel is the presence of a second New Woman heroine, Angelica Hamilton-Wells, whose sexual transgression of the social contract bends gender norms to show their social construction. She and her brother, Diavolo, challenge binary assumptions about gender through what seems like innocent antics as children, but becomes dangerous rule breaking upon reaching adolescence.¹⁵ In their youth, Angelica and Diavolo physically vie for the family inheritance because “Diavolo’s a boy, so he gets the property because of the entail, and we neither of us think it fair, so we fight for it, and whoever wins is to have it” (28). Despite gains in property rights for married women in the late nineteenth century, men still predominantly inherit family estates. Although Angelica and Diavolo’s contest seems absurd and juvenile, it actually questions which system is truly fair. The twins continue to violate social norms by exchanging clothes at Evadne’s wedding. While their mother exclaims, “It is unnatural!” (61), their pre-sexual

¹⁵ The mythological symbolism of the “heavenly twins” as the Gemini twins under the Zodiac shows how Grand frames the emergence of the New Woman and the New Man. They denote the evolution of humanity and, as they reach immortality, they leave behind mortal restrictions on sex and gender (Lloyd 185).

child status mitigates any real threat of androgyny. Their mother's fears stem from Darwinian discourse, which uses biological reasoning to suggest that "the New Woman's agenda seeking widespread changes... that would accord women equal cultural status was both anti-evolutionary and *unnatural*" (Murphy 111; emphasis added). Thus, the twins subtly undermine the biological basis for discrimination among the sexes.

As society imposes gendered rules upon Angelica, she contests and inverts traditional customs. The Hamilton-Wells hire a tutor for Diavolo in order to separate the twins and conform Angelica's femininity, for she "had no coquettish or womanly ways, insisted on wearing her dresses up to her knees, expressed the strongest objection to being grown-up and considered a young lady, and had never been known to look at herself in the glass" (243). Yet Angelica resists these socially constructed feminine aesthetics and jockeys to maintain her autonomy. In the process, she upsets sexual hierarchy by embracing the marriage contract, a classic patriarchal arrangement, yet reversing its power structure. For example, Angelica proposes to Mr. Kilroy, demanding, "marry me, *and let me do as I like*" (321; emphasis in original). By doing the actual contracting, Angelica not only exercises the latitude of action that she desires, but also interrupts the exercise of male power. Although "[m]arriage is the quintessential act for women, requiring that they 'do' nothing more than consent" (Simek 340), Angelica converts this institution into an expression of female agency, even choosing Mr. Kilroy because she anticipates that he will allow her more freedom, which resembles Lyndall's reasoning when she temporarily agrees to marry Gregory Rose in Olive Schreiner's novel, *The Story of an African Farm*.

While married to Mr. Kilroy, Angelica exercises this liberty by cross-dressing as her brother and visiting the “tenor” on her nighttime excursions, which inverts gender norms and thereby violates social rules.¹⁶ Because the virginal tenor believes that Angelica is truly an effeminate boy, the sexual undertones of the visits imply the tenor’s homoerotic feelings for “Diavolo.” Unconscious eroticism emerges most explicitly when “the boy” plays the violin for the tenor, which “steeped the tenor’s whole being in bliss... under the spell of the boy’s playing, he could not have resisted it” (403). In addition to these sensory, sexualized descriptions of the boy’s music, the tenor fixates upon the boy’s “delicate, dainty... white fingers” (402). Furthermore, the tenor signals his unconscious anxiety by actively reaffirming the platonic nature of his relationship with the boy. He seeks reassurance in “the calm human fellowship, the brotherly love undisturbed by a single violent emotion, which is the perfection of social intercourse to me... I’ll have no sex in my paradise” (423). However, the articulation of these sentiments suggests that the tenor is in fact experiencing strong sexual feelings. As a result, this relationship, “redolent of carnal attraction” (Bogiatzis 49) and “creating a shadow world of artificial sexual being” (Kucich 198), is problematic for both the tenor’s obedience of heteronormative custom as well as Angelica’s reputation as a married woman. Her inversion of gender creates a sexually charged scenario, putting them both at social risk.

Additionally, the tenor channels his homoerotic feelings for “Diavolo” through his idealization of Angelica, which reinforces her subversion of patriarchal culture. In her book, *Between Men*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick theorizes that male homosocial bonds within romantic triangles, whether sexual or nonsexual, represent a “form of the traffic in

¹⁶ Despite its explosion of gender norms, book IV of *The Heavenly Twins*, titled “The Tenor and the Boy,” was so popular that Grand published it as a standalone novella in 1899.

women: it is the use of women as changeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing bonds with men” (26). Coupled with his subliminal attraction to “the boy,” the tenor fulfills these qualifications by romanticizing Angelica. When “Diavolo” criticizes Angelica, the tenor defends his inaccurate, yet mythologized image of her “pale proud purity of her face, with the unvarying calm of her demeanor... His dear lady. His delicate-minded girl” (401). Though trafficking erotic male friendships through women metaphorically exploits and represses the female body, Angelica inverts this dynamic. The tenor unknowingly expresses his conventional perception of Angelica to the woman herself, which places her in the dominant position to regulate this traffic. Angelica’s visits to the tenor also challenge patriarchal power by remapping sexuality, as the erotic triangle functions as “a sensitive register precisely for delineating relationships of power and meaning, and for making graphically intelligible the play of desire and identification by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment” (Sedgwick 27). By simultaneously violating social rules, manipulating the tenor, and bending sexuality, Angelica implicitly restructures and renegotiates society’s marginalization of her power—and, indeed, all female power.

Moreover, Angelica explodes the gender binary when she reveals her true identity to the tenor, which destabilizes social norms underpinning patriarchal hierarchy.¹⁷ Upon realizing that “Diavolo” is Angelica, the tenor desperately tries to justify his friendship with “the boy,” rationalizing that it “was only a change of idea really, the boy was a girl, that was all; but what a difference it made” (446). When the tenor refuses to accept

¹⁷ A comparative cultural example of this phenomenon is the cross-dressing of “Fanny” and “Stella,” or Ernest Boulton and Frederick William Park. In this case, men masqueraded as women, showing gender performance in the alternative direction to Angelica, and also convinced witnesses that they were female. Fanny and Stella were arrested in 1870 and their trial was turned into a spectacle, though the prosecution was unable to prove any homosexual offenses or that cross-dressing was a violation of law.

Angelica's social experiment and reinforces gendered stereotypes, she challenges that he "cannot bear to see [her] decently dressed as a boy, but... would think nothing of it if [he] saw [her] half undressed for a ball" (454). Given that she attracts the tenor while masquerading as a boy, Angelica's experiments destabilize not only his conception of sex and gender, but also society's conception of sex and gender. Through the twins' gender inversion, Teresa Mangum argues that Angelica "illustrate[s] the power of individuals to unsettle the dichotomous logic that reproduced sexual difference as gender roles, a structuring process that, as the twins' insights make clear, benefits men" (126). Several critics offer similar variations of this argument as they attempt to decipher this charged scene as well as similar events in Grand's other novels, such as Beth's transient cross-dressing and masculine features in *The Beth Book* (Heilmann *New Woman Fiction* 119; Fessler 39-40; Lloyd 189; Bogiatzis 49). Though scholars reach a relative level of consensus regarding the significance of Angelica's masculine performance, pushing these analyses further reveals the political implications of Angelica's cross-dressing, which allows her to contest and subvert the social contract.

Because Angelica embarks upon her nightly excursions to deliberately undermine social laws, she politicizes her sexual agency. To contextualize her deviant behavior, Angelica explains to the tenor that cross-dressing frees her from society's constraints:

There was no latitude allowed for my individuality. I was a girl, and therefore I was not supposed to have any bent, I found a big groove ready waiting for me when I grew up, and in that I was expected to live whether it suited me or not. It did not suit me. It was deep and narrow, and gave me no room to move... my friends armed themselves with the whole social

system as it obtains in our state of life, and came out to oppose me... they would insist upon domesticating me (450).

Angelica's language, employing the terms "bent," "groove," and "narrow," mirrors the narrator's description of Evadne's "cramped" existence when Colonel Colquhoun prevents her from embodying her New Woman principles. Whereas Evadne allows social laws to restrict her autonomy, Angelica escapes these restrictions, opposing the "whole social system" and the "state of life" that they create. Even the term "domesticate" connotes Angelica's attack on society's repression of women, given that feminists in this era link the issues of animal mistreatment and female subjugation. Furthermore, Angelica believes that "if [she] broke down conventional obstacles—broke the hampering laws of society, [she] should have a chance" (450). By targeting social laws with which she disagrees, the heroine deliberately politicizes her subversive actions. Until discovered, Angelica's agency "came naturally; and the freedom from restraint... was delicious" (453). Angelica exposes the unjust "hampering laws of society," or the flawed terms of the social contract, when she gains more freedom as "Diavolo."

However, just as Evadne becomes inscribed by marital convention at the end of Grand's novel, so Angelica reverts to traditional behavior in her union with Mr. Kilroy. Angelica repents her social experiments to her husband, whom she nicknames "Daddy," echoing yet rescinding her earlier, assertive marriage proposal to him: "O Daddy! Why have you let me do as I like?" (547). Although some critics perceive Angelica's actions to be political, as she does exercise some power by composing Mr. Kilroy's speeches, this explanation seems contrived due to her infantile behavior. Audrey Fessler asserts that through "earning approval of social arbiters like Mr. Kilroy and Dr. Galbraith for her

performance of “wifehood,” Angelica surreptitiously and strategically dons her husband's voice in order to agitate for broad political and social reforms in the service of all women” (51). More believably, Angelica poses another example of a New Woman who, in attempting to resist the social contract, bears its punishment in her conformity. Even Mr. Kilroy’s name underscores this outcome, sounding phonetically like “kill joy” and echoing of the murder of her independent soul. Likewise, the ultimate success of Beth, who takes a public stance on her feminist views and enjoys materialistic and emotional validation, remains unclear. Grand anchors her within a budding romance, which “grafts a romance ending upon a quest plot, and the fruit thereof is at least bitter” (Doughty 190).

Ultimately, *The Heavenly Twins* traces the efforts of two New Woman heroines who, while possessing diverse motivations and exerting their sexual agency differently, both contest the unfair social laws that disadvantage women. Unwilling to risk her health, Evadne refuses to consummate her marriage with Major Colquhoun. She later attempts suicide to abort her unborn child, symbolically rejecting her second union with Dr. Galbraith. Conversely, Angelica masquerades as her brother and initiates a socially dangerous, sexually charged friendship with an unmarried man. Whereas Evadne protests disreputable men, holding them accountable for the sexual double standard, Angelica reveals the constructed nature of the gender binary. Both heroines exert their sexuality to target the social laws constraining women to a state of dependency upon men. However, these New Women succumb to the very social norms that they initially protest through their inscription within marriages to conventional men. Through she exposes a diverse range of social laws to be unjust, Grand nullifies her own political protest by subscribing to patriarchal logic from the outset, which dooms Evadne and Angelica’s rebellion.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sue Bridehead, the “bachelor girl”: Reconstructing Sexuality in *Jude the Obscure*

“Either Mr. Hardy’s powers have undergone a sad deterioration... or he has determined to try the patience of his public and to see whether they will accept in lieu of a novel a treatise on sexual pathology” (857), writes Robert Tyrell in a scathing review of Thomas Hardy’s novel, *Jude the Obscure*. Tyrell furthers his criticism by arguing for a superior work of New Woman fiction, Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* (1895), “inasmuch as it deals far more sincerely with free love as a practical institution” (858). Notwithstanding the irony that Allen writes an antifeminist work coded as a New Woman text,¹⁸ Tyrell’s backlash illuminates the intolerant cultural context during which Hardy explores the subversive ideas about sex and marriage that permeate *Jude the Obscure*. This work follows Jude Fawley and Sue Bridehead as they endeavor to maintain a utopian partnership whilst navigating a patriarchal society. Hardy uses Sue, a New Woman heroine, to levy a critique against social, cultural, and economic inequalities that patriarchal logic propagates in order to control women (Schoenfield 183).

This thesis culminates with a discussion of Sue Bridehead because her experimental and somewhat unstable sexuality constitutes the most polemic and complex example of social protest among New Woman heroines. Simultaneously sexed and sexless, Sue transgresses contemporary norms by entering unconventional partnerships. She oscillates from intellectual cohabitation to asexual marriage to extramarital comradeship and back again, exercising her agency through flouting the rules of sexuality. Like other New Women heroines, such as Hadria Temperley in *The Daughters*

¹⁸ The controversial novella was not popular with feminists, who protested that Allen was attacking the wrong institutions (Showalter *Sexual Anarchy* 52). For a more thorough explanation, see especially Flint 295 and Reynolds and Humble 41.

of *Danaus* and Evadne Frayling in *The Heavenly Twins*, Sue cites John Stuart Mill to signal her challenge to both the unwritten social contract and the marriage contract. However, Sue's subversive desire to live platonically with her husband or, alternatively, have sex with a free union partner, violates social custom, especially when she inevitably conceives children outside of legal marriage. Eventually, Victorian society punishes Sue and Jude by imposing insurmountable socioeconomic repercussions that trigger the tragic deaths of her children, inducing Sue to submit to traditional marriage. Though Sue ultimately fails to realize her ideal of liberty, her unconventional sexuality transgresses a broad spectrum of norms in a conscious attempt to renegotiate the social contract.

That being said, scholars perceive conflicting representations of female characters in Hardy's fictions. For example, Judith Mitchell notes that feminist readers struggle to either accept or reject Hardy's polarizing contradictions within his works, citing that he endows his female heroines with less power and control as well as excludes them from a relationship with his narrators (172-173). Similarly, Kristen Brady recognizes that the unstable rhetoric surrounding female sexuality in the late Victorian era characterizes the "association of conflict and contradiction" in Hardy's texts, which "like women and dislike them...they are the source for female readers of frustration and fascination" ("Matters of Gender" 104). Brady also connects this tension to *Jude the Obscure*, resigning that "Thomas Hardy's most powerful attack on Victorian social conventions is also his most emphatic endorsement of the biological determinism in nineteenth-century gender ideology" ("Textual Hysteria" 99). Like in the texts previously discussed, however, this inconsistency in rhetoric seems to indicate that Hardy is a product of a

civilization in transition on women's issues. Consequently, he imbues patriarchal logic within his works even as he seeks to subvert it.

By critiquing the social construct of marriage, Hardy disparages the patriarchal logic embedded within Victorian society. In the postscript of *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy confronts how marriage functions in patriarchal culture. Citing this institution as “the tragic machinery of the tale,” he asserts that “the civil law should be only the enunciation of the law of nature” (41). Hardy implies that society artificially constructs civil or marital laws that lead to Jude and Sue's tragedy, which correlates public norms with the structure of private institutions. Furthermore, he defines “high tragedy” as a treatment that “show[s] Nature's unconsciousness not of essential laws, but of those laws framed merely as social expedients by humanity, without a basis in the heart of things” (qtd. in King 101). Again, Hardy associates Sue and Jude's misfortune with arbitrary norms, or laws that lack any basis other than social convenience. Hardy dryly continues, “the famous contract—sacrament I mean—is doing fairly well still, and people marry and give in to what may or may not be true marriage as lightheartedly as ever” (42). By degrading the religious component of marriage to an afterthought, Hardy challenges the façade of piety that cloaks its patriarchal logic. The term “contract” underscores that the institution has lost its ideological foundation and become a social transaction, which, as this thesis has previously discussed, masks the purchase of a female body. Consequently, Hardy indicts not only marriage laws, but also Victorian culture: “Like the New Woman writers, Hardy shows himself to be in favour of freer divorce, but by no means confident that a fairly minor adjustment of the law would sweep away all the problems of sex and marriage in the modern world” (Cunningham *New Woman and the Victorian Novel* 94).

Echoing Hardy's arguments against the marriage contract, Sue Bridehead, his "imaginative spokesperson for an impossible but life-supporting ideal of freedom" (B. Hardy 81), also critiques arbitrary social constructs. After Sue begrudgingly marries Richard Phillotson, she vents to Jude her frustration that "the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns" (238). The term "moulds" conveys that Victorian culture forces Sue into a standardized yet unbefitting "shape" or role, which she compares to abstract constellations in order to highlight their arbitrary, constructed characteristics. The impetus of this statement stems from Sue's reluctance to wed Phillotson, yet she follows through with the nuptials due to social pressure after she spends a night with Jude. This moment exemplifies how patriarchal culture bends Sue to its norms and compels her to violate her own values. Sue faces a similar ideological crisis following the deaths of her children, perceiving that "there is something wrong somewhere in our social formulas" (356). The term "formulas" again suggests that society treats every individual uniformly, forcing conformity despite a lack of fit.

From the outset, Sue opposes these rigid social roles, subverting traditional gender and sexuality norms. Before Jude engages in an unconventional union with Sue, Aunt Drusilla describes Sue in her childhood as someone who "could do things that only boys do, as a rule" (147). Sue defines her code of behavior in opposition to the social rules prescribed for girls, showing her initial protest to social constructs that dictate feminine behavior. This rebelliousness prefaces Sue's later exertion of sexual agency in an attempt to subvert patriarchal norms. However, James Kincaid perceives Sue's childhood sexuality not as a tool of resistance, but rather a patriarchal mechanism to

control her body. Aunt Drusilla's physical interaction with Sue as a child, whom she "smacked... for her impertinence" (T. Hardy 146), underscores the voyeuristic attitudes of Victorian readers because "[c]ausing others to blush, [Sue] must be made to blush herself, forming the connection between spanking and the enticing erotics of modesty Victorian sexologists posited" (Kincaid 134). Although Kincaid turns the tables on Sue's sexual agency, asserting that her "act of defiance, her self-assertion, in fact, freezes her" (139) as a sexual object, his analysis highlights that New Woman heroines are ultimately inscribed by patriarchal culture, which in some ways nullifies their protest.

As she endeavors to locate her ideal of liberty, Sue continues to undermine patriarchal logic by living platonically with a man. On her cohabitation with a male undergraduate at Christminster, Sue comments, "[m]y life has been entirely shaped by what people call a peculiarity in me. I have no fear of men, as such, nor of their books. I have mixed with them—one or two of them particularly—almost as one of their own sex" (181). Whereas Sue's "mixing" with men tentatively bridges the divide between genders, her self-description as "one of their own sex" implodes rigid gender roles. Sue's sexless relationship with the undergraduate not only violates Victorian social custom, but also upsets norms of male domination. When the undergraduate invites Sue to live with him, she "found he meant a different thing from what [she] meant" (181). Sue's asexuality refuses to reassure male superiority because, by denying her own sexuality, Sue removes her body from masculine control and threatens patriarchal power (Brady "Textual Hysteria" 95). Sue relates the story of this comradeship to Jude while wearing Jude's clothing, which emphasizes the sexual nature of her social transgression. The garments transform Sue's female body into a masculine figure "masquerading as [Jude] on

Sunday” (178), causing the landlady to mistake Sue for a “young gentleman” (179). Sue is androgynous at best, but mannish at worst, which suggests that women can be comparable to men in not only appearance, but also power. Like Angelica’s cross-dressing in *The Heavenly Twins*, Sue’s transgression subverts patriarchal logic.

Moreover, Sue extends her resistance to sex to her marriage with Phillotson, which further flouts social laws for female behavior because reproduction is a core wifely duty. After she weds Phillotson, Sue affirms to Jude that Phillotson “gives [her] perfect liberty” (223). While the term “liberty” may apply generally to the freedom that Sue’s husband allows her, it also suggests that he does not pressure her into any undesired activity, such as sex. Underscoring this interpretation, Sue implies in a conversation with Jude that marriage has stifled her ability to love. Though Sue alludes to “impulses” and “aberrant passions” that code her desire, she concludes that “[s]ome women’s love of being loved is insatiable... they can’t give it continuously to the chamber-officer appointed by the bishop’s license to receive it” (237). Sue rejects the social pressure to channel her desire through the “chamber-officer appointed... to receive it,” emphasizing the artificial and contractual basis of marriage. A few months later, Sue laments, “What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes...the dreadful contract to feel in a particular way” (245). By making reference to marriage as a “contract,” Sue condemns the nature of transaction that characterizes this relationship and the sense of obligation it imposes to be sexually “responsive.”

Additionally, Sue engages with the rhetoric of political theorists to resist the private marriage contract and renegotiate the public social contract. When Sue requests that Phillotson allow her to live separately from him, and with Jude, she invokes the

arguments of John Stuart Mill to justify her position. She quotes, “She, or he, ‘who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation.’ J.S. Mill’s words, those are” (256). Again, Sue rejects society’s arbitrary constructs and rules, such as the institution of marriage, which rob her of the agency to determine her own “plan of life” and constrain her to “ape-like...imitation.” Although Sue cites the aforementioned passage from *On Liberty* (1859), *The Subjection of Women* also reflects her situation. Making reference to the latter text, Rosemarie Morgan locates Mill’s comparison of marriage to slavery in Sue’s ideology, arguing that “Sue makes an exhaustive (and exhausting) bid to emancipate herself from dependency, from the man-made laws circumscribing her bondage” (120). Mill’s analogy between slavery and marriage emphasizes not only the crippling dependency of women upon men that the marriage cultivates, but also its exploitative contractual features. However, Sue’s attempt to renegotiate these terms extends beyond the legal principles of marriage and to the cultural root of patriarchy; she exercises her sexual agency not to defy her husband, but rather to protest society’s unjust norms on the whole.

Consequently, Sue challenges the social contract by living separately from her husband and platonically with another man, which subverts sexual norms. When Sue desires separation from Phillotson, she intends to share a household with Jude. Sue clarifies her intentions in a conversation with Phillotson:

“And do you mean, by living away from me, living by yourself?”

“Well, if you insisted, yes. But I meant living with Jude.”

“As his wife?”

“As I choose” (255).

Employing a word that demonstrates her autonomy, Sue “chooses” to reject arbitrary social conventions in order to forge an intellectual communion with Jude. However, given that her cohabitation with the undergraduate fails due to his sexual desire, Sue’s ideal seems to overestimate Jude’s willingness to engage in a platonic structure. When Sue rendezvous with Jude after Phillotson releases her from her marital obligations, she requests to sleep in separate hotel rooms, much to Jude’s chagrin. Sue recognizes the conflict between her physical desires and social custom, envisioning a utopian “proper state of society,” in which “the father of a woman’s child will be as much a private matter of hers as the cut of her under-linen, on whom nobody will have any right to conjecture” (272). Sue wants the privacy to explore her own relationships instead of following the customary motions of society, such as marriage. However, because Sue characterizes her ideal unions based on the paternity of children, a byproduct of sexual intercourse, her new partnership seems less platonic than she initially states. Sue undermines patriarchal norms by choosing to remain celibate and removing her body from male sexual domination, yet seems to repress her human desires.

Though Sue’s inconsistent behavior meets with criticism from scholars, her sexual exploration actually evidences her careful navigation of patriarchal norms. Labeling Sue and Jude’s ruthless wife, Arabella Donn, as “destructive collaborators,” Marjorie Garson argues, “Sue voices the conclusions of contemporary (male) criticism so as to undermine Jude’s convictions intellectually, while her maddening (‘female’) inconsistency undoes him emotionally” (164). Similarly, Joanna Devereux asserts that Sue manipulates Jude with her sexuality, comparing Sue’s resistance to sex to Arabella’s

exploitative promiscuity (123).¹⁹ These critics suggest that Sue ruins Jude by co-opting his intellectual and sexual power, yet in doing so they hold her accountable for Jude's inflexible perceptions of gender. Sue's unconventional behavior incites anxiety within Hardy's male narrator, as she "challenged the standard biological definitions and, in doing so, jeopardized the cultural construction not only of femininity but also of masculinity" (Brady, "Textual Hysteria" 95). Moreover, Sue's variability results from her attempts to simultaneously appease and circumvent patriarchal constraints that are incompatible with her ideals because she is "[c]onditioned to behavioural patterns associated with enforced dependency, and motivated to compete, under a system of rewards and punishments, for attention and approval from those in authority over her" (Morgan 116). Therefore, what some critics perceive to be Sue's manipulation or hypocrisy is actually her attempt to survive in patriarchal culture.

When Sue and Jude's intellectual partnership evolves into a physical one, Sue seems to betray her initial values and submits to patriarchal pressure. Sue initially resists sex with Jude, causing him to criticize her credibility: "since your marrying Phillotson because of a stupid scandal... under the affectation of independent views you are as enslaved to the social code as any woman" (274). Though Sue does wed Phillotson to avoid social disgrace, she abstains from consummating the marriage. Jude not only misinterprets Sue's sexual agency, but also attempts to inscribe her within social norms and undermine her value of liberty. He attains success in this venture when Arabella's reappearance catalyzes his and Sue's sexual relationship. Jude implies that he might leave

¹⁹ Though Arabella also exerts sexual agency, her ideology towards society excludes her from the status of a New Woman. Rather than taking issue with the status of women, Arabella succeeds by taking advantage of the status quo and manipulating men. For this reason, Patricia Ingham refers to her as a pragmatist and a survivor (178-179); See also Garson 158-161 for a comparison between Sue and Arabella's destructive treatment of Jude.

Sue for Arabella, as Arabella is his wife “rather more than [Sue]” (295), which pressures Sue to subscribe to patriarchal logic in order to maintain her free union. Ensuring Jude that he is her “dear protector” and she is “not a cold-natured sexless being” (297), Sue consummates a sexual relationship with him. Despite Sue’s responsiveness to Jude throughout the novel, this radical ideological shift is difficult to resolve. Sue releases her repressed desire for Jude and flouts the social norms that she seems to disparage when she envisions her “proper state of society,” yet only accesses this rebellion through male-dominated pressure and latent fear of abandonment and disgrace. Though many critics of *Jude the Obscure* view this type of ideological oscillation as evidencing the heroine’s inconsistency or internalization of patriarchal logic, as previously discussed, Sue continues to resist conformity through her rejection of marriage.

By refusing to legally wed Jude, Sue positions her sexual relationship in deliberate opposition to the patriarchal qualities of the marriage contract. After Phillotson divorces Sue on the false grounds that she committed adultery, Jude proposes the idea of marriage. However, Sue abhors the thought of Jude purchasing her, protesting that “the moment you had contracted to cherish me under a Government stamp... I [would be] licensed to be loved on the premises by you” (289-290). By comparing herself to a piece of property, Sue echoes the same rhetoric that precedes her wedding to Phillotson, in which she compares herself to a “domestic animal” (203) being gifted to a man. In both instances, Sue makes reference to her objectification by marriage laws; however, Sue’s economic language also reveals her political protest. Legal phrases like “on the premises” or “Government stamp” imply that marriage laws will confer ownership or rights over her body to Jude while the terms “contracted” and “licensed” highlight the business

transaction that marriage disguises. Though Sue and Jude nearly wed on three occasions, even pretending at one point to have secretly married to gain social acceptance, Sue consistently opposes the “sordid conditions of a business contract” (316). Her perception of marriage as an economic trade informs her resistance to patriarchal norms and politicizes her sexual transgression, as she simulates a marital relationship without sacrificing her body to the legal control of a man.

Because Sue violates the marriage contract, the social uproar incited by her union with Jude foreshadows the sanction of a sovereign authority, or society. When Phillotson releases Sue from her marital obligations and suggests that she can rear children alone, his confidant, Mr. Gillingham exclaims, “The family would no longer be the social unit... By the Lord Harry... Matriarchy!” (264). Gillingham’s shock demonstrates his engrained association of the paternal figure with the authority of this “social unit.” This bias in turn illustrates the insecurity of patriarchal power in Victorian culture, as the “old certainties of gender needed constant shoring up to prevent social disintegration of the kind that was widely feared” (Ingham 162). Undoubtedly, this society would consider Sue’s androgyny coupled with her divorce on false grounds and intellectual, platonic union to be deviant, thus inciting Gillingham’s anxiety. Furthermore Sue and Jude’s “attempt to remodel the patriarchal family” contests its Oedipal structure, which “reflects and determines a string of wider social inequalities, certainly those between men and women, but also those fostered by the sovereign mechanisms of the modern state” (Neilson 76). Because private social units and public institutions mutually construct the character of society, patriarchal culture depends upon maintaining inequalities between men and women; thus, threatening the marriage contract automatically threatens the social contract and, by

extension, male power. As Mona Caird notes, “To dismantle the current concept of marriage is to dismantle the social fabric” (qtd. in Ingham 176).

Consequently, Sue’s free union with Jude unravels as she gives birth to children, causing her defiance of social and sexual customs to meet with social punishment and tragic failure. Shortly after Sue and Jude consummate a physical relationship, Arabella briefly witnesses the couple and Father Time in a state of bliss. As Sue and Jude explore an agricultural exhibition, they display “[t]hat complete mutual understanding, in which every glance and movement was as effectual as speech for conveying intelligence between them... almost the two parts of a single whole” (322). Though the free union seems successful on its surface, the scene forebodes social anxiety and backlash. The phrase “two parts of a single whole” makes reference to either the couple’s complementarity or similarity; because the latter suggests that Sue’s traits mirror Jude’s masculinity, “[t]he unmanly male and the New Woman are clearly not two halves of a single whole... The breaking down of complementarity leaves both in a territory without maps. In particular there is no agreed mapping of the role of sexuality in a relationship based on friendship” (Ingham 173). Because Sue and Jude’s relationship defies norms, society lacks the convention to categorize, or “map,” their partnership, and thus rejects it. Consequently Sue’s unmarried mother status disqualifies her from finding shelter and causes her to make insensitive comments about childbirth and to reveal another pregnancy to Father Time. Coupled with the harsh economic conditions, this information leads the child to murder Sue’s two other children and commit suicide; his note chillingly explains that they “are too menny” (365). Sue’s lamentation that her “perfect union... two-in-oneness—is now stained with blood” (367) darkly echoes Arabella’s perception

that Sue and Jude comprise “two parts of a single whole,” which underscores the failure of their harmonious partnership.

Additionally, Father Time’s violence channels society’s backlash into a contractual penalty that punishes Sue for violating social norms. Because Father Time is Arabella’s biological child, his role in this sanction symbolizes not only society’s rejection of Sue’s free union, but also the triumph of Jude’s legal marriage and rightful wife.²⁰ Furthermore, this event motivates Sue to remarry Phillotson, showing her voluntary surrender to the patriarchal norms that she initially seeks to undermine. Despite her previous resistance to this contract, Sue perceives that not only society, but also God has punished her, causing her to mourn that she “must conform!” (371). Whereas Sue’s remarriage to Phillotson does not entirely mark the subjection of her agency, as she initially maintains a “nominal marriage only” (417), her later submission to sex within marriage “as a punishment to her poor self” (427) certainly does. Sue submits to contractual obligations in more ways than one, not only marrying Phillotson, but also swearing upon the New Testament never to see Jude again, which entangles her in yet another binding agreement that restricts her agency and satisfies patriarchal hierarchy.

Though some critics interpret Sue’s tragedy as befitting her inconsistency, Hardy’s ending critiques the status quo. Elisabeth Bronfen examines how the exchange of female bodies intersects with tragedy in Hardy’s works; though she only marginally applies this treatment to *Jude the Obscure*, her analysis is valuable. Bronfen maintains, “The feminine tissue is treated like a page onto which lovers, society’s laws, or the

²⁰ Showalter posits that Father Time represents the syphilitic child of Jude and Arabella, who represents the “conflicts, lies, and hypocrisies of the sexual system,” which relates to Grand’s critiques of venereal disease in *The Heavenly Twins* (“Syphilis, Sexuality and the Fiction of the Fin de Siècle” 108; Mangum 98).

repressed past write themselves” (68). “Society’s laws,” or the implicit social contract, punish Sue for transgressing norms by forcing her conformity and reassuming control over her body through marriage, which inscribes her within the very patriarchal subjugation that she initially protests. Because Sue’s grief leads her to physically subject her body to Phillotson, her tragedy reflects the phenomenon that Bronfen observes, as well as social punishment. Furthermore, Hardy’s realist portrayal of Victorian society supports reading *Jude the Obscure* as a social critique because the “political and social and religious formations provoked by the personal and societal pressures on Hardy develop within the range of the relationship between Jude and Sue, which in turn interrogates standards Hardy implies dominate society” (Kramer 171). Consequently, the failure of Sue’s New Woman ideal of liberty does not reflect upon her efforts as a New Woman, but rather on the patriarchal underpinnings of Victorian society.

Despite struggling throughout the course of the novel to find relief from a patriarchal culture, Sue’s tragedy in *Jude the Obscure* causes her to surrender to the very norms that she initially seeks to resist. However, given Hardy’s own statements about marriage laws and artificial constructs motivating the “tragic machinery” of the plot, Sue’s failure seems to be a critique of the flawed institutions that structure a power imbalance between women and men. A characteristic New Woman, Sue champions this cause. By resisting legal marriage, she challenges the qualities of transaction embedded within this private contract and resists male domination. Moreover, to effect her subversion of these norms, and, by extension, the social contract, Sue exerts her sexual agency and experiments with various unconventional relationships: she is sexless and sexualized, married and divorced, as well as independent and dependent. Transitioning

from a sexless marriage with Phillotson to a free union with Jude, Sue manages to merge stark divisions within the New Woman school of thought, unifying these arguments around her resistance to gender-based inequality.

CONCLUSION

Failure or Feminism?

There are no winners amidst the heroines of New Woman novels. As the tactics of these revolutionaries become more innovative and polemical, so their literary fates grow bleaker, progressing from resigned independence to unhappy marriage to utter tragedy. To put it simply, “the strong-minded heroine declares her independence from the angelic ideal and takes her place as a representative, but also a sorely disappointed, human figure” (Helsing et. al. 109). Because these heroines protest, undermine, and rebel against a male-dominated culture in which they are fundamentally inscribed, they are doomed to be checked by patriarchal logic from the outset. However, within these so-called failures lies the ability of New Woman novels to wrestle with and unsettle the confinements of traditional Victorian society. The New Woman’s tragedy not only transforms her into a sympathetic figure for readers, but also juxtaposes the incompatible reality and ideal of women’s rights. Although she suffers the social punishment for her radical and sexually deviant behavior, she also illuminates institutionalized social injustices and lays the groundwork for future change.

Though these women fail to successfully subvert their unjust social structures, using contract theory still clarifies their principled conflict with social convention. One aspect of the social contract, on any level of analysis, predicts that transgressing rules will, if not inciting a revolution, elicit a sanction from the sovereign, or society. Consequently, the failures of these heroines, which result from either social punishment or their fear of its imminence, manifest in their conformity. For instance, Sue Bridehead reacts to the deaths of her children by marrying Phillotson and living with him as a conventional wife, showing that the “ultimate horror has come—her giving herself like

this to what she loathes, in her enslavement to forms!” (428). That such a regular or unremarkable existence for this era imparts failure and distress within these heroines highlights the injustice of patriarchal norms rather than the inability of women to overcome them. Thus, the unsatisfying endings for female protagonists are just as politically significant as their subversive tactics. Even Rhoda Nunn, who, compared to other heroines that this thesis studies, seems to be in the most powerful position at the end of the novel, has to sacrifice her emotional and physical desires in order to maintain her independence. At the same time, heroines who do not make that same sacrifice of humanity become vulnerable to the possibility of hysteria, social disgrace, and death. The trade off is inherently unfair.

There is always room for further study of these complex heroines. Though the vast majority of existing criticism points to the political motivations of New Woman authors as one of the core features of the movement, this thesis is the first to connect the influence of John Stuart Mill to the substantive social contract theory underpinning these heroines’ social protest. Further research can expand the scope of the works explored to include transatlantic or American authors, such as Edith Wharton, Henry James, Kate Chopin, or Charlotte Perkins Gilman; antifeminist fiction from Eliza Lynn Linton, Margaret Oliphant, or even Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* (1895); and non-novel contributions like George Edgerton’s collection of short stories, *Keynotes* (1893), or Sydney Grundy’s play, *The New Woman* (1894). A more thorough survey of works will be able to examine if similar themes play out on a broader scale and analyze more specific research questions. For example, this thesis examines the permutations of the social contract by New Woman authors who refuse to be inscribed by its original

patriarchal tenets; however, some works hold the potential to be understood using more specific iterations of from specific theorists, such as Gissing and Caird's quasi-Hobbesian approach. Another valuable direction in which to take this research would be to further analyze these works by the heroines' specific types of sexual subversion. For example, no scholarship directly compares the asexual to the hypersexual New Woman or the married to the unmarried New Woman, yet interrogating and contrasting different forms of transgression or social circumstances may yield further insights into her social rebellion.

Ultimately, the production of New Woman novels markedly decreases by the end of the decade and gives rise to resurgence in idealism and romanticism (J.E. Miller 36; Showalter *Sexual Anarchy* 171). However, the decline of New Woman novels does not necessarily indicate a lack of success, as "what looks like sexual anarchy in the context of *fin-de-siècle* anxieties may be the embryonic stirrings of a new order" (Showalter *Sexual Anarchy* 18). Though failing in the short term, New Woman authors anticipate a cultural trend towards sexual equality. These dynamics, occurring over a century ago, are still relevant today as minority groups continue to be excluded from equal access to civil liberties and women still fight for rights over their own bodies. While isolated gains have been made in the last century, the underlying patriarchal culture that the New Woman challenges still exists, institutionalized within modern law. For example, culture has, to a certain extent, progressed from debates over the acceptability of free unions, yet the sexual double standard lurks in more subtle forms. Consequently, New Woman novels serve as critical yet currently undervalued texts to understand the early roots of feminism, to evaluate the possible origins or root causes of the period's unequal social context, and to appreciate the diversity of forms of cultural transgression.

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