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LEVINAS AND THE NEW WOMAN WRITERS: NARRATING THE ETHICS OF  
ALTERITY

by

ANITA TURLINGTON

Under the Direction of Leeanne Richardson, PhD

ABSTRACT

This study applies the ethical theories of Emmanuel Levinas to the novels and short stories of the major New Woman novelists of the fin de siècle in England. Chapter One introduces the study and its theoretical framework. Chapter Two discusses how New Woman writers confront their protagonists with ethical dilemmas framed as face-to-face encounters that can be read as the moment of ethics formation. They also gesture toward openness and indeterminacy through their use of carnivalesque characters. In Chapter Three, Levinas's concepts of the said and the saying illuminate readings of polemical passages that interrogate the function of language to oppress or empower women. Chapter Four reads dreams, visions, allegories, and proems as mythic references to a golden age past that reframe the idea of feminine altruism. Chapter Five employs Levinas's vision of the tragic artist to read New Woman *Kunstlerroman*. Chapter Six, the conclusion to the study, summarizes the underlying framework, the process that initiated the study, and considers implications for further research.

INDEX WORDS: Levinas, ethics, alterity, new, woman

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ALTERITY

by

ANITA TURLINGTON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018

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2018

LEVINAS AND THE NEW WOMAN WRITERS: NARRATING THE ETHICS OF  
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by

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December 2018

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this study to my family; my husband, John; our son, John; our daughter-in-law, Sara Beth; and grandchildren Abby and Thomas. You all inspire me every day. I want particularly to dedicate the accomplishment of this degree to my mother, Dona; she never called herself a feminist, but she surely was a strong and determined woman whose ambitions for me shaped my character. I wish she were here to celebrate with us.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In her 2001 study of ethics and narrative in late Victorian fiction, *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel, 1880 – 1914*, Jil Larson cites as the catalyst for her work a renewed willingness among scholars in the 1990s to examine the “embattled concept of ethics and literature” (2). This examination, begun a decade earlier by Wayne Booth and Martha Nussbaum, considers the way that literature can depict ethical concepts and problems and can, intentionally or not, affect the moral development of readers. Larson’s study is made possible, she notes, by the “turn to ethical criticism” in the 90s. Larson’s work interrogates the New Woman writers’ engagement with the question of female agency at the fin de siècle (3). Considering the novels of these writers in comparison with the work of Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad, Larson asserts that the New Women writers, like Hardy and Conrad, have not yet escaped mid-Victorian ideas about the ethical roles of men and women. The value of their work, Larson contends, lies in their recasting of emotion as partnering with reason in a way that is defensible for women to make better decisions and choices. In contrast to Larson, I argue that the women who comprise the major voices among the New Woman writers resist both received social conventions and aesthetic forms. Juxtaposing sharp political commentary and narrative innovations, these writers invent texts depicting a tragic present that nevertheless takes a utopian turn; by daring to explore new narrative forms, they challenge their readers to imagine new ways of living.

Foundational to this study is the Victorian hegemony’s demand for womanly altruism. Self-sacrifice, submerging any extra-domestic ambitions and choosing instead family responsibilities, was considered the only moral or ethical choice for women. In other words, the “good” woman, the Victorian “angel in the house,” was satisfied to be relegated to the domestic sphere wherein she focused her life on serving others. This feminine submission is foundational to the dominant

Victorian ethical systems, Utilitarianism and Christianity, which defined for women limited roles based on economic good or religious hegemony. However, these systems no longer functioned in a period marked by chaos and anarchy when “all the laws that governed sexual identity and behavior seemed to be breaking down” (Showalter 2). Writing during this transitional period of the fin de siècle, the writers whose work is examined here reject gender-based self-sacrifice as unethical. Instead, they seek to imagine a new ethical system for a new woman in a new century; thus, in rejecting conventional morality, they must grapple with the central emerging ethical dilemma facing both men and women: the obligation to the (perhaps unknowable) other. I argue that the texts examined in this study envision a more equitable and gender-neutral system of ethics built on mutual responsibility to the other. Their vision of a more open ethical system is illuminated by reading their texts through the theories of Emmanuel Levinas.

### **1.1 Theoretical Framework**

Donald R. Wehrs and David P. Haney, in their introduction to a collection of essays entitled *Levinas and Nineteenth Century Literature*, link nineteenth century novelists with the twentieth century theorist through their mutual contestation of the elevation of the ego and personal freedom above the ethical (29), a particularly complex problem for women, who would be accused of selfishness and radicalism for asserting autonomous privilege. According to Wehrs and Haney, “the authority of Levinas’s philosophical discourse is inseparable from the authority that literary discourse of the nineteenth century came to acquire through contesting the sufficiency of the period’s forms of placing freedom above ethics.” Instead, Levinas “discloses the rational non-violence that the best literature communicates” (29). Novelists and theorists of the period, responding to the French Revolution as a defining moment in ethical thought, recognized, as does Levinas, the dangers inherent in the autonomous ego and the need to

“ground the self in something other, more comprehensive, and more responsible than its own rational intentionality” (30).

As the New Woman novelists are indeed examining the need for both men and women to balance personal freedom and mutual obligation, Wehrs and Haney’s contentions form part of the foundation for my use of the work of Emmanuel Levinas as a theoretical framework. Defending her own use of Levinas’s work as a lens through which to examine the problematic structure of George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, Rachel Hollander argues that the novel, like other late century narratives, “constitutes an ethical response, in both content and structure, to the problem of knowing the other” (265). While Hollander mentions only canonical late-century writers in her argument, specifically Hardy, I will extend Hollander’s claim to the work of the primary New Woman writers: Olive Schreiner, Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, Ella Hepworth Dixon, George Egerton, and Mary Cholmondeley. I argue that, given their self-conscious employment of experimental narrative forms to articulate their activist stance, these novelists, even more than other late nineteenth century writers, are focused on examining the “self’s recognition of and responsibility for that which is absolutely other” (Hollander 265).

Four principles of Levinas’s work inform this study. First, in their examination of failed conventions for marriage and for relationships between men and women, the New Woman writers engage Levinas’s concept of the “face,” the pre-conscious and timeless obligation of the ethical subject for the other. The face, according to Levinas,

summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other, pure otherness, separated, in some way, from any whole, were my business...the other man’s death calls me into question,...The Other becomes my neighbor precisely

through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.” (*Levinas Reader* 82)

In particular, Sarah Grand, Mary Cholmondeley, and Olive Schreiner layer their discussion of gender bias by depicting ethically failed relationships resulting from their characters’ inability to respond authentically to this primal obligation. Their indictment of gender roles driving these failed relationships only reinforces the need to recognize mutual responsibility that is human and therefore gender neutral. Simultaneously, these novelists signal an open future for women readers, a political and social indeterminacy, through their use of carnivalesque character types who function as a challenge to hegemonical structures.

Secondly, for Levinas, the value of language as the vehicle of ethics formation lies in its immediacy and its intimacy. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas privileges language as the machinery of self-awareness and awareness of the other, the first step in the ethical progress. New Woman novelists demonstrate this connection between language and ethical formation in texts that both comment on social problems and engage their readers in the use of a new feminist language. They are therefore reconceiving language to build both a universal ethics and a new common women’s language. New Woman fiction, then, engages the power of what Levinas calls “the said”—intelligible and closed communication that is one part of the ethical relationship. On one level, they refute ideas about women that have already been codified into written language. On another, however, they use written language to invent a sense of community that stands in the space of proximity between the self and the other, which Levinas contends is necessary for an ethical relationship.

Linked with the “said,” according to Levinas, is the third principle I employ in this study—the concept of the “saying.” In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas defines the saying as the ineffable

face-to-face moment wherein ethics originates. Before the saying is concretized into language, into the said, there must first be a condition between the subject and the other that is not borne in words; this is the definition of proximity, or the responsibility to the other. Levinas acknowledges the equivocal and enigmatic nature of the saying, acknowledging too its connection to transcendence (10). In the texts examined here, the authors combine conventional linear narrative with odd interpolations: allegorical digressions, poetical prologues, dreams, and mythic visions. An ethical reading of these narrative innovations reveals how they reconceive the form of the novel while simultaneously re-framing the self-sacrifice of women in the present as fulfilling an obligation to the women of future generations.

Finally, I take the fourth principle from two essays: “Reality and Its Shadow,” and “The Poet’s Vision.” In “Reality and Its Shadow,” Levinas asserts the potential of literature to examine the “*entretemps*,” the interstices of language within which reside the potential for encountering the tragic and engaging the ethical development of the fractured self. The *entretemps* is the eternal “meanwhile” in which characters in literature exist (*Levinas Reader* 138). Existing in this suspended state, they are eternally tragic figures, always already fated to suffer. In “The Poet’s Vision,” examining the works of Maurice Blanchot, Levinas first describes the solitude of the artist, someone who exists outside of the active world in “countless worlds conceived by thought, projected by imagination, or divined by instinct” (128) that constitute the poet’s/author’s transcendent vision. He agrees with Blanchot that the artist is required to sublimate himself or herself to an art that has abandoned heroes and adventure, the old vision of “non-world” in favor of a new vision— “the being of beings,” and “the silence following the departure of the gods” (128). Writing does not lead us to truth; it leads to the “errancy of being—to being as a place of going astray, to the uninhabitable” (134). Art leads, not to truth, but to

authenticity; it shines a light that “undoes the world, leading it back to its origin, to the over and over again, the murmur, ceaseless lapping of waves, a ‘deep past, never long enough ago’” (135). The world of literature returns us to the human condition of nomadism, of exile. The New Woman *Kunstlerroman*, depicting the ethical formation of women writers, depict their protagonists as feminist artist-heroes who are exiled from others by their attempts to create authentic art and whose identities are fractured by the conflict between their personal ethics and conventional morality.

Both structurally and thematically, then, the New Woman writers investigate narrative innovations to express an ethical shift at the century’s end. As Rachel Hollander argues in her 2013 study *Narrative Hospitality in Late Victorian Fiction*, “Early and mid-nineteenth-century conceptions of morality largely assume the centrality of sympathy, or the ability to understand and care for another’s feelings” (2). Part of the shift in thinking that characterizes late-century fiction, then, considers the inadequacy of a reliance on sympathy as the basis of the ethical relationship as it emphasizes connections and commonality between the self and the other rather than an acknowledgement of human complexity and the limits of individual knowledge. While depicting late-century dilemmas for women, the New Woman writers join other novelists of the period in creating “an ethical response to social and political conditions at the turn of the century” (Hollander 264). Their novels, as Ann Ardis asserts, present authoritative explorations of women’s identity in a period of transition; during the late-century debate over the need for genuine “truth-telling” in realistic fiction, “literary texts were evaluated as...agents of cultural formation ...” (29). As social critics, the New Women writers are the literary descendants of earlier “condition of England” writers like Charles Dickens, Harriet Martineau, and Elizabeth Gaskell; their works also resemble the “slum novels” of contemporaries Arthur Morrison and

George Gissing. Their polemical spirit sets them in contrast to the Aesthetes; theirs is an activist aesthetic. Nevertheless, their novels often employ the experimental, proto-modernist structural hybridities that scholars associate with aestheticism in order to accommodate their thematic innovations. Additionally, as Linda Dowling notes, because New Woman novelists claim more sexual agency for women and write frankly about marital oppression, they were often linked in the public mind with the Decadent movement as well (435).

In writing about their present, these writers intend to redeem the past failures of the patriarchal system by presenting more nuanced alternatives. Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, Olive Schreiner, Mary Cholmondeley, and Ella Hepworth Dixon all suggest in their novels that women should aspire to more complex roles than the conventional assignments to wife- and motherhood. Acknowledging the real change occurring around them, these novelists design lives for their protagonists that acknowledge their own current dilemmas and those of other real women while attempting to make the transition to less restrictive roles. Perhaps the conventional idealized vision of womanhood was never the reality; however, the concept of the “angel in the house” certainly had a hold in the popular imagination for much of the Victorian period. By the end of the century, even though, as Ann Heilmann asserts, “even the anti-feminists had ceased to believe in her” (24), no serious alternatives to this vision of womanhood had been presented by leading novelists and writers.

In the midst of controversy over the idea of the “new woman” conducted by journalists and cartoonists, who were only too eager to lampoon the figure of the New Woman as a mannish freak, the New Woman writers attempt to clarify for readers and for themselves how this new version of womanhood, this new “self,” will emerge. When they take up their pens to write fiction, they intend for their novels to engage social issues and inspire reflection among their

readers. However, a chief difference here is that the New Woman writers foreground their activist aesthetic; narrative becomes much more overtly the vehicle for reflection and change. Each of the novels studied here includes long speeches by troubled protagonists attempting to work out their dilemmas. Evadne, for example, in Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*, indicts her aunt, mother, and other women for their complicity with a corrupt system:

You think that I should act as women have been always advised to act in such cases, that I should sacrifice myself to save that one man's soul. I take a different view of it. I see that the world is not a bit the better for centuries of self-sacrifice on the woman's part and therefore I think it is time we tried a more effectual plan. And I propose now to sacrifice the man instead of the woman. (80)

In addition, the New Woman novelists replace the earnest, intrusive Victorian narrator with equally pointed dialogues between characters, like this one from Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus*:

Hadria's eyes seemed to be looking across miles of sea to the sunny Grecian land. "If a slave breaks his chains and runs, I am always glad," she said.

"I was talking about Helen."

"So was I. If a Spartan wife throws off her bondage and defies the laws that insult her, I am still more glad."

"Oh, Hadria," remonstrated Henriette, in despair.

"I don't see that it follows that Helen did sin, however; one does not know much about her sentiments. She revolted against the tyranny that held her shut in, enslaved, body and soul, in that wonderful Greek world of hers. I am charmed to

think that she gave her countrymen so much trouble to assert her husband's right of ownership." (214-215)

These dialogues replace the authoritative, male voice of the mid-Victorian narrator with more authentic multivocal conversations among women, thus elevating the significance of women's real voices.

## 1.2 Recent Criticism

This study, grounded in the work of Jil Larson, Donald Wehrs and Richard Haney, and Rachel Hollander, will not fit within the mainstream criticism on the New Woman writers. New Woman scholarship, which began in the late 1970s, has been characterized by a few notable trends. The initial group of scholars was interested primarily in introducing this group of non-canonical and neglected writers to the attention of late Victorian critics and placing them within the cultural context of the fin de siècle. Elaine Showalter's study *A Literature of Their Own*, published in 1977, initiated interest in nineteenth century women writers who had been neglected by scholars. Among these largely forgotten writers were the New Woman writers of the fin de siècle. While Showalter dismisses this group as less artful than earlier canonical writers because they used their texts as "the vehicle for a dramatization of wronged womanhood" (16), she does concede that they influenced other women writers to continue to explore female identity (18). Gail Cunningham, in *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (1978), connects prominent New Woman writers with their more celebrated male counterparts (George Gissing, Thomas Hardy) in their resistance to traditional female stereotypes, attack on conventional marriage, and discomfort with the notion of increased freedom for women; like Showalter, however, she dismisses them as minor writers.

By 1979, the dominant trend in New Woman scholarship was initiated with the publication of Patricia Stubbs' *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel, 1880-1920*. While Stubbs too is initially dismissive of the New Woman novelists in favor of more canonical male writers, other feminist critics examined the ways that New Woman novelists reflected the contemporary debates about the Woman Question and the Suffragist movement. These examinations, led by Ann Ardis, Lyn Pykett, Sally Ledger, Rita Kranidis, Nicola Diane Thompson, and Ann Heilmann, dominated the critical landscape through 2001. Talia Schaffer, in 2001, began a trend that continues among critics today, of considering the role of the New Women writers in their connections to the Aesthetic movement.

Other critics during this period examined the New Woman writers' interest in or rejection of eugenics—Olive Schreiner and Sarah Grand both considering the development of the New Woman alongside a New Man who would be a fit mate while Mona Caird explicitly rejects the eugenic “predestination” in favor of personal freedom. We also see the beginning of a third trend—postcolonial examinations—in the work of Iveta Jusova, who examines images of imperialism in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book*.

In her 2005 article “The New Woman in the New Millennium: Recent Trends in Criticism of New Woman Fiction,” Ann Heilmann identifies three trends in New Woman criticism 2000-2005: “the quest for a new aesthetic...firmly centered on explorations of feminine alterity” (33-34); a second focus on New Woman writers' “heavy investment” in “socially divisive and oppressive ideologies like eugenics, racial hygiene and imperialism” (35); and a third focus on “the international, multi-ethnic and multi-racial dimensions of the New Woman” (36). Heilmann cites her own work (*New Woman Fiction*, 2000 and *New Woman Strategies*, 2004) as well as that of Patricia Murphy in her 2001 study *Time is of the Essence*. The second trend is led by

Angelique Richardson in *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century* (2003) and in the collection of essays she edited with Chris Willis, *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact* (2001). Heilmann also mentions the work of Iveta Jusova, whose study *The New Woman and Empire* examines the racial politics of leading New Woman writers (35) and moves other critics to begin the third trend, a move away from focus on British and American writers of the fin de siècle into a more multinational examination.

### 1.3 Chapter Summaries

Chapter One investigates the connection between the face-to-face encounter and narrative experimentation in three New Woman novels. *The Heavenly Twins*, by Sarah Grand; *The Story of an African Farm*, by Olive Schreiner; and *Red Pottage*, by Mary Cholmondeley, all confront their protagonists with apparently intransigent ethical dilemmas involving confrontations between men and women. Narratively, these encounters take place in open spaces symbolized by carnivalesque character types that anticipate not only the social transformation that these writers were promoting, but also the inadequacy of the conventional novel form to contain the transitional, open, and questioning nature of fin de siècle discussions.

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas continues his thesis from *Totality and Infinity* that our response to the other, our pre-cognitive obligation and unconditional responsibility for the other, constitutes the true ethical position. This obligation is not a choice; it simply exists. *Totality and Infinity* establishes the transcendence of “the face,” and in the course of this discussion, asserts the importance of language in the subject’s response to the other. *Otherwise than Being*, then, takes up the question of ethical subjectivity in relation to language. Here, Levinas investigates the subject’s response to the other; the subject’s being held hostage for the other and substituting for the other. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas describes the role of language in the subject’s

openness to the other, the “inexhaustible response of the self as saying” (Lingis xiii) that is expressed in a universal system of symbols that becomes the said.

Following a similar trajectory in my argument, while Chapter One discusses New Woman protagonists’ experience of the obligation to the other through their confrontation with the face, Chapter Two argues that New Woman novelists illustrate Levinas’s assertion that ethical subjectivity is the outcome of discourse. These novelists examine the power of language and its elasticity; they interrogate the function of the dominant cultural narrative, the “larger said,” as it has been used to silence women’s voices. Ultimately, they reach for a new language, sometimes objective, at other times impassioned, to disrupt and unsettle the dominant narrative. To connect with their readers, they craft a common, personal, and subversive language based on shared experiences. This focus on a new and shared language, however, is still in service to vision of the future that, though open-ended and indeterminate, suggests the possibility of a new social reality. Thus, if the larger said—the dominant discourse--describes a dystopian experience for women, the smaller said—a new feminist language-- articulates a hopeful, progressive, and utopian future.

I argue that these novelists establish this new, smaller and more personal said in three ways: first, they take their message to a new audience of middle-class woman readers in extended polemical sections in their novels. Second, they deploy debates among women characters to interrogate the role that language has played in establishing the larger said. Rejecting the typical earnest male Victorian narrator, they tell stories through women’s voices, lending authority to their individual points of view and their critique of this dominant narrative—the smaller said. And finally, these novelists depict New Woman protagonists as shaped by the books they read as children. For this investigation, I focus primarily on two texts: the “Evadne” narrative in Sarah

Grand's 1893 novel *The Heavenly Twins* and Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus*, published the following year in 1894.

Chapter Three investigates Levinas's concept of "the saying," the ethical responsibility for the other that transcends perceived conventions, as New Woman writers use dreams, visions, and allegories to establish an ethical proximity with their readers. In this shared narrative space, then, writers assert an obligation to future generations of women, which will require intentional self-sacrifice in the present. If the saying constitutes a tentative approach to the other without attempting to define or delimit the other, the New Woman writers dedicate themselves to the welfare of future generations of women. However, New Woman writers are not recruiting young suffragists; they think more speculatively and broadly, beyond current struggles toward specific ends. In mythic terms, they dedicate themselves to a principled forfeit of ease and comfort to secure an ethical future for later generations of women. This is ultimately the feminist project they describe in their writings.

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas discusses the tension between the said and the saying, which he defines in a number of ways, but which finally comes to embody the ineffable face-to-face moment wherein ethics originates. Before the saying is concretized into language, into the said, there must first be a condition between the subject and the other that is not borne in words; this is the responsibility to the other. Levinas acknowledges the equivocal and enigmatic nature of the saying, acknowledging too its connection to transcendence (10): "Being and entities weigh heavily by virtue of the saying that gives them light. *Nothing is more grave, more august, than responsibility for the other, and saying, in which there is no play, has a gravity more grave than its own being or not being*" (46, my italics). For Levinas, the two distinct but simultaneous meanings of language are the essential said and the transcendent saying. He argues that the face-

to-face ethical encounter is manifested through language, and the said and saying are then integrated in the expression of the ethical identity (Eaglestone 140). This integration of the said and the saying is critical to my re-framing of the often-criticized melding of experimental narrative with polemical sections in New Woman writing. I read their structural hybridities as reiterating the characteristics of the said and the saying. The narratives within which political and social discussions are embedded provide a frame for these writers' interrogation of language and its power, their examination of the said. The experimental and more elusive passages in their texts, then, I argue, illustrate their engagement with Levinas' concept of the saying, an ethical responsibility for the other that has priority over Victorian social and political conventions.

The texts examined in Chapter Three emphasize use visions, dreams, and allegories that open a space for the saying; they interrogate the expectation that women would willingly sacrifice their autonomy and aspirations for their parents, husbands, and children. Such passages implicitly challenge both the narratives' characters and their readers to free themselves from conventional expectations and reinterpret their own experiences through an unconventional lens. Instead, New Woman writers redirect women's self-sacrifice away from a duty to husband and children and replace the traditional responsibility with the need to secure the welfare of future generations of women. These writers depict a necessary and willing self-sacrificial stance that women in the present must embrace to envision and promote a more equitable and ethical future for later generations. While womanly self-sacrifice and its destructive effects are a prevalent theme in the New Woman canon, these novelists replace it with a feminist altruism defined in more utopian and Levinasian terms. And the genres here associated with myth, fairytales, and allegory are open-ended, challenging readers to speculate about a more open-ended future for women, what Eaglestone names "a purposeful inconclusiveness" (136).

In Chapter Four, my final chapter, I argue that the novels featuring the New Woman as writer depict their concept of the feminist artist-hero. Many New Woman writers depict protagonists who waiver unsuccessfully between the public demand that they marry and produce children and their private compulsion to produce instead aesthetic objects over which they exercise creative control. In part, their struggle is characterized by doubt surrounding the value of the work they might produce versus the cultural imperative to produce the next generation. However, this vision of the New Woman writer is often at variance with the actual experiences of the characters' authors, who were quite successful. I argue here that, in writing *Kunstlerroman*, these novelists distinguish between their own experiences and those of their protagonists, first, to address issues raised by the Aesthetes about the role and purpose of art. Their vision of the role of art, particularly literature, is to “demonstrate a utopian, emancipatory potential in revealing the fissures and hidden pathways that run through the hegemonic structures and totalizing frameworks” (McDonald 16) in which they live and write. They also intend to elevate the woman writer to a tragic figure who is living in the *entretemps*, the eternal “meanwhile” in which characters in literature exist (*Levinas Reader* 138). Their fractured identities are the result of the struggle to maintain their ethical posture, one that diverges from conventional morality. Tragedy, another term employed by Levinas to discuss aesthetics, consists in characters' fated passivity, but he also characterizes ethical protagonists undergoing a necessary fracturing of identity from a confrontation with a disruptive force (McDonald 36). In the novels examined here, tragic circumstances are multilevel: the writers in these novels are exiled from their homes, struggling both financially and for acceptance. Orphaned or rejected by their families, they strive to find their voices and to find readers. And—another circumstance aligned with tragic art—they fail. In addition, these novelists are ensnared by their contemporary debate surrounding the

Aesthetic movement. This ground has been convincingly explored by critics Lyn Pykett and Ann Ardis, who focus particularly on how Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird, Sarah Grand, Mary Cholmondeley, and Ella Hepworth Dixon document the struggles and defeats of women who attempt to negotiate their assigned roles as women with the call to write, particularly to write fiction. These texts end in defeat. In all cases, women either die or retreat to maternity, madness, or failure.

In “The Poet’s Vision,” paying tribute to Maurice Blanchot, Levinas first describes the solitude of the artist, someone who exists outside of the active world in “countless worlds conceived by thought, projected by imagination, or divined by instinct” that constitute the poet’s/author’s transcendent vision. He agrees with Blanchot that the artist is required to sublimate himself or herself to an art that has abandoned heroes and adventure, the old vision of “non-world” in favor of a new vision— “the being of beings,” and “the silence following the departure of the gods” (128). Writing does not lead us to truth; it leads to the “errancy of being—to being as a place of going astray, to the uninhabitable” (134). Art leads, not to truth, but to authenticity; it shines a light that “undoes the world, leading it back to its origin, to the over and over again, the murmur, ceaseless lapping of waves, a ‘deep past, never long enough ago’” (135). The world of literature returns to the human condition of nomadism, of exile.

The New Women writers whose work is examined here depict homeless or exiled tragic protagonists who desperately seek to create art from trauma. Like classical tragic protagonists, they are flawed, rebellious, aspiring to be more than their society wishes them to be. Like other tragic protagonists, they are punished for their desires, but they also experience transformation.

McDonald refutes what he considers to be a superficial understanding of Levinas as rejecting art because of its immobility and sterility, its fixed form that disconnects it from immediacy and

humanity. Instead, McDonald suggests, Levinas is interested in the potential of literature to become

an ethical critique of traditional philosophy, or philosophy as modernist rationality. What enables such critique, what serves as its tragic locus, is the musicality of the artwork, and the characteristic mode of time, the *entretemps* [interstices of time] to which it is intimately related. Crucial to the notion of the musicality of the artwork is the ethical sensibility which animates it, which is contrasted with traditional morality ... (19)

McDonald goes on to discuss the concept of the tragic in its presentation of the individual's identity as "diasporic," irremediably split (21). The individual must choose between the system of morality he or she has been taught that provides the rules for living a good life and the ethical choice that occurs in the immediate present. This fracturing of the self, which puts the very identity into question, can result in the subversion of moral and political authority and "an incitement to ethical transcendence without recourse to any settled sense of self" (26). This "nomadic" self, an indeterminate state, resides in a region that is "nonconceptual ... antiepistemological ... and nonmoral," which is "trespassed, most often, in literature, by the genre of tragedy" (27). While the New Woman writers do not present classical tragic heroines in Lyndall, Mary, Hadria, or Hester, these women all experience tragic loss of identity in facing the intersection Levinas describes. These texts then illuminate not only the potential of literature to examine the formation of the ethical identity but the heroic quest of the woman artist specifically to produce work that engages the reader in the recognition of tragedy along with its attendant hope for the future.

Chapter Five, the conclusion to my study, discusses the process by which I arrived at my theoretical framework and summarizes my argument. In concert with most critical analyses of the New Woman writers, this study seeks to frame their works as texts that should be examined more seriously for scholarly study. While their works were successful and influential during the 1890s, these authors are seldom read today, and only Olive Schreiner appears occasionally in anthologies of late-Victorian literature. Reading them more closely as utopian political ethicists and skillful proto-modernists positions these writers as important transitional voices whose works should be studied as embodying significant philosophical impulses between mid-Victorian certainties and post-World War I fragmentation.

Additionally, this study presents a new feminist reading of the theories of Levinas. Levinas has been accused of sexism by Simone de Beauvoir for his treatment of women as other, and more generally by feminist critics for his use of gendered language. However, this study asserts that the theories of Levinas offer a framework for reconsidering altruism without gendering; his theories open an expansive space for reading the works of early feminists grappling with the need to consider their obligations to the other without the attendant constrictions of conventional morality.

## **2 THE NEW WOMAN WRITERS AND THE FACE OF THE OTHER**

Emmanuel Levinas's theories concerning ethical identity are generally grouped under the heading "the ethics of alterity," an ethics based on the acknowledgment that the other represents "the infinite, the transcendent (*Totality* 49). According to Levinas, our inability to categorize the other leads to a system of openness and indeterminacy, rather than a closed system that is "totalized" (50). Levinas writes that the ethical subject's encounter with the other is primordial; subjectivity is called into being by the other as the subject recognizes the call, the

summons to the other. The subject's presence before the face of the other is an epiphany that creates "an asymmetrical indebtedness" (215) on the subject's part toward the other's moral summons. This summons is based on the primacy of the other's right to exist. To be fully oneself, then, is to be for the other, who is simultaneously unknowable and cannot be made into an object of the self.

The New Woman writers, self-consciously responding to a historical moment of transition, create protagonists who grapple with the relationship between the self and the other, particularly within the parameters of the traditional marriage plot. New Woman writers question the implications of the self-sacrifice that Victorian women were expected to exercise in marriage and motherhood as they gesture toward a more equitable interchange between men and women based on an acceptance of the limits of personal freedom with a corresponding acknowledgment of the essential unknowability of the other.

Thematically, these novelists investigate an ethical shift at the century's end. As Rachel Hollander argues in her 2013 study *Narrative Hospitality in Late Victorian Fiction*, "Early and mid-nineteenth-century conceptions of morality largely assume the centrality of sympathy, or the ability to understand and care for another's feelings" (2). Part of the shift in thinking that characterizes late-century fiction, then, considers the inadequacy of a reliance on sympathy as the basis of the ethical relationship as it emphasizes connections and commonality between the self and the other rather than an acknowledgement of human complexity and the limits of individual knowledge. Concurrent with these novelists' move toward ethical openness is their experiment with aesthetic openness through their use of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque and "folk laughter," particularly through the figures of the rogue, the fool, and the clown (*Forms of Time* 158). The medieval folk carnival, which Bakhtin considers so significant

in the development of the novel, belongs at an intersection between art and life, where real life is presented through play. It is public spectacle, but inclusive--all are invited to participate.

Carnival “celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions.

Carnival was the true feast of ... becoming, change, and renewal” (*Rabelais* 10). Bakhtin calls the carnival world a “second life” and “a world inside out” characterized by folk laughter that “denies, but ... revives and renews at the same time” (*Rabelais* 11). He identifies three folkloric figures whose use as carnivalesque elements in the European novel will be significant: the rogue, the clown, and the fool (“Forms” 158). These folkloric figures exist to be read; Bakhtin calls them “life’s maskers” (“Forms” 159). They are theatrical and metaphorical figures whose otherness challenges traditional categories. They exist as objects of folk laughter, laughter that parodies convention and seeks transformation. Bakhtin describes the functions of these three figures thus:

Opposed to convention, and functioning as a force for exposing it, we have the level-headed, cheery and clever wit of the rogue (in the form of a villain, a petty townsman-apprentice, a young itinerant cleric, a tramp belonging to no class), the parodied taunts of the clown and the simple-minded incomprehension of the fool. Opposed to ponderous and gloomy deception, we have the rogue’s cheerful deceit; opposed to greedy falsehood and hypocrisy we have the fool’s unselfish simplicity and his healthy failure to understand; opposed to everything that is conventional and false, we have the clown—a synthetic form for the (parodied) exposure of others. (“Forms” 162)

This chapter argues that the New Woman novelists embed the ethical encounter, the face-to-face confrontation, within narrative innovations that anticipate an open and indeterminate future for both women and for the genre. *The Heavenly Twins*, by Sarah Grand; *The Story of an African Farm*, by Olive Schreiner; and *Red Pottage*, by Mary Cholmondeley, all confront their protagonists with apparently intransigent ethical dilemmas involving confrontations between men and women. Narratively, these encounters take place in open spaces that seem to anticipate not only the social transformation that these writers were promoting, but also the inadequacy of the conventional novel form to contain the transitional, open, and questioning nature of fin de siècle discussions. Each employs as well a figure from folklore and carnival juxtaposed with more conventional and predictable characters as a way to gesture toward both thematic and narrative transformation.

All three authors present a new way of thinking about ethical relationships between men and women that anticipate the theories of Emmanuel Levinas published in his 1961 work, *Totality and Infinity*. According to Levinas, ethics originates from the presence of “infinity” in opposition to “totality” within the human situation (80). While totality implies that the other can be assimilated into the subject’s experience of sameness, infinity suggests instead openness to the infinite potential of the other. Levinas rejects the synthesizing of phenomena in favor of a thought that is open to “the face,” the total vulnerability of the other without the masks that humans typically wear to protect themselves from revealing too much.

The novelists whose texts I examine in this chapter also grapple with the limitations of the realist novel by depicting their protagonists’ ethical crises within narrative structures characterized by uncertainty and openness. As characters seek to work out the tension between personal freedom and obligation to the other in an open space, these novelists depict encounters

that introduce cultural openness through characters who personify the carnivalesque rogue, fool, and clown, prefiguring and reflecting the kind of reversal of convention and initiation of an “upside down” world that these writers and others anticipated during the fin de siècle.

Alistair Renfrew, in his 2015 study of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories, notes that “carnival is deeply reflective of Bakhtin’s thought as a whole, developing the key ideas of embodiment and unfinalizability to an almost poetic extreme” (129). He notes that Bakhtin’s study of Rabelais, in which he originates his ideas about the carnivalesque in literature, emphasizes his concepts on “becoming, the insistence that nothing is more significant than the resistance to closure, the unfinalizability of the human subject, the question and process of ‘how a person becomes other’” (129). If, as Bakhtin asserts, carnival spirit survives the demise of actual carnival during the medieval period and makes its way instead into literature, it is an appropriate form for a transitional cultural period like the fin de siècle and a group of writers seeking to articulate change in both content and narrative structure. As Renfrew suggests:

Carnival and carnivalization are driven by the central conviction that the culture of the Middle Ages—“folk”—collective and ambivalent—has been surreptitiously transmitted (through literature) to the culture of Modernity—which Bakhtin identifies as (predominately) “official,” individualistic and rational. (131)

Bakhtin argues that, by acting out destabilization, the carnivalesque resists all that is hegemonic and reified in culture and language (*Rabelais* 34), especially the “official version” that truths and conventions are established and uniform (*Rabelais* 9). Thus, it embodies the subversive principle that nothing is finite—everything is in a constant state of change (Renfrew 134). As long as the carnival spirit is expressed, it reminds officialdom (and readers) that official culture, political authority, and social conventions are not immune to change (Renfrew 135). Because the New

Woman writers challenge hegemony and produce experimental narratives in the context of the fin de siècle cultural shift, their activist project is specifically suited to the use of carnivalesque elements.

I argue that Grand, Schreiner, and Cholmondeley link their interrogation of the face-to-face confrontation with characters who function as the rogue (Grand), the fool (Schreiner), and the clown (Cholmondeley), to introduce what Bakhtin calls “double-voiced laughter,” an ambivalent laughter that does not equate with the comic, but is identified wherever the “one-sided seriousness of any discourse is exposed to the light of another, questioning consciousness; through literary laughter, outsiderness is brought inside” (Renfrew 136-7). This use of carnival emphasizes the spirit of questioning and inquiry that is characteristic of the fin de siècle.

## **2.1 Angelica the Rogue**

According to Lauren Simek, *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), part of Sarah Grand’s New Woman Morningquest trilogy, characterizes late-Victorian examinations of ethics by contrasting two approaches for women: “one that values active self-consciousness and the public expression and debate of moral belief, and another that values a more intuitive, private and often unvoiced conception of virtue” (337-38). For Simek, as well as for New Woman critics Sally Ledger and Ann Heilmann, Angelica, in *The Heavenly Twins*, represents the actively seeking model for a New Woman whose fate in the novel is nevertheless unpromising (Ledger 116). In tracing Angelica’s growth from childhood to adulthood and marriage, the narrative depicts her as the more forceful, intelligent, and skeptical of the titular twins. However, Angelica’s story becomes what Ann Ardis describes as a “boomerang plot” (140) as the result of her actions and their consequences in the section of the novel called “The Tenor and the Boy.” In the 100-page “aside” of sorts that interrupts the overarching narrative action of *The Heavenly Twins*, Grand

depicts a rebellious young woman whose experiments with gender performance depict a questionable ethical stance that has serious repercussions for another. I argue that Angelica's masquerade as her brother, set in a "romance-time" interlude, shifts her temporarily from young woman protagonist to a dramatic performance as Bakhtin's carnivalesque rogue—a character whose mischievous behavior is intended to parody the actions of Grand's real villains in the novel—Colonel Colquhoun and Mensley Monteith. Angelica's actions, in appropriating careless male privilege in order to manipulate the hapless Tenor, reflect the sanctioned male promiscuity that destroys the lives of Evadne and Edith. Depicting Angelica in this role allows Grand to suggest that simply endowing women with masculine privilege without an accompanying ethical framework is not the answer to the dilemma of the New Woman. Her face-to-face encounter with the Tenor also introduces Levinas' ethics of alterity: Angelica causes the Tenor's death through her unwillingness to acknowledge her responsibility for the other; the Tenor engages in suicidal behavior because of his totalized and stereotypical view of Angelica as a young woman whose honor must be protected. Simultaneously, the carnivalesque nature of the Interlude introduces the roguish laughter that interrogates the cultural authority that dictates inherently false identities for men and women, forcing them into artificial and mannered interactions.

Grand places "The Tenor and the Boy" interlude in the arc of Angelica's plot to confront her protagonist with the limited options available to her as a young woman now that she has emerged from a privileged childhood. The narrative shifts from accounts of Angelica's clever pranks and outspokenness to her outrage as a young woman facing the differences between her opportunities and those offered her male twin. Angelica's nascent feminism is first articulated in a dream, which Grand employs to underscore more rigorously the direction she advocated for feminists. In fact, the dream, which appears in Book III, chapter VIII of *The Heavenly Twins*, is identical in

substance to Grand's argument in her essay "The New Aspect of the Woman Question." In both the essay and the dream sequence, Grand asserts the need for women to take over leadership and power from men to set the world to rights. In her dream, Angelica banishes clerical leaders, in particular, from her sphere, asserting that women exclusively now contain the spirit and will of God (289). Men have served as "the muscle—the hard working material of the nation" while women are "the soul and spirit, the directing intelligence" (289). Women are now assuming leadership to deal with "man the iniquitous" and "to revise moral laws" (289). Angelica's dream forecasts a time when men and women will come to marriage as equals, when "the other sphere tamed of its own accord" will come to the woman's sphere because change "comes easily...when the right time comes" (288).

Manifestly, however, Grand does not consider that the right time arrived, and she illustrates the tragic implications of abandoning gender and mimicking masculine opportunistic behavior in "The Tenor and The Boy." If women are responsible for acting as virtuous agents of change, then abandoning their gender identity in the name of personal freedom and power is not only inappropriate but destructive, as these women risk becoming equally oppressive and manipulative as the men they imitate. Thus, while Angelica's adventure as a roguish young man allows her to experience the freedoms accorded to men while engaged in a theatrical role, her identity as a young woman when unmasked will complicate the implications of her act.

Angelica's roguish behavior, though it initially seems an extension of her childhood pranks, becomes more tragic than comic. The conditions of the protracted masquerade and her exploitation of the vulnerable Tenor rob the interlude of its comic potential even as Angelica romps through the performance gleefully. In her masquerade with the Tenor, Angelica for the first time creates a male identity that is effectively her own but clothed as a male. Reimagining

herself as male does not transform Angelica in any meaningful way. Asserting the privilege accorded her male persona, Angelica wields her power only to manipulate the hapless Tenor in the same ways she has often manipulated her father and grandfather. Her roguish behavior, enmeshing the Tenor in an invented romantic triangle, making unreasonable demands, and appearing and disappearing at will, is a conscious imitation of mischievous male privilege.

Thus, in “The Tenor and the Boy,” Grand employs the disguised character of Angelica, as she has used Colonel Colquhon and Sir Moseley Mentieth earlier in the novel, to indict the unethical exercise of personal freedom. Colquhon and Mentieth are typical wealthy men who have exercised their right to live irresponsibly and who have taken advantage of the cultural sanction allowing them to victimize young women while demanding sexual purity in prospective wives. Angelica, performing her role as The Boy, subjects the Tenor to a parody of this behavior. Like Mentieth and Colquhon, Angelica keeps secret both her identity and her marital status; these secrets ultimately prove destructive to The Tenor, someone who is more vulnerable than she is. Angelica in disguise laughs at and comments on the exercise of male freedom and enjoys its privilege. However, Grand finally uses Angelica as The Boy as just another oppressive male in the novel. To assuage her boredom, she has treated the Tenor exactly like a bored young man would treat a vulnerable young woman. This layer of inversion first underscores themes presented more overtly in Evadne’s and Edith’s narratives: the dangerous outcomes for women who become the victims of men allowed to interact dishonestly and irresponsibly with women. Like a number of vulnerable young women who have been victimized by predatory men, the Tenor dies. On another level, however, Grand also implicates a system that refuses access for women to real education, echoing Mary Wollstonecraft. Angelica is ethically stunted, because,

though intellectually curious and restless, she has no real access to a challenging and rigorous education that might result in a vocation or an avocation to direct her energy.

The night world in which the Interlude is set makes possible Angelica's transgressive and subversive behavior. As Lyn Pykett notes, "For the reader the hallucinatory writing of the Interlude conjures up a dream-world where gender boundaries dissolve and reform in disconcerting ways" (159-160). In fact, Grand styles the narrative as a series of encounters set in Bakhtin's surreal romance-time chronotope ("Forms" 91) outside the main plot of the novel, which allows her to interrogate the proposition that chaos is the inevitable outcome of too much gender fluidity for women. Presenting Angelica with all of the control in the series of nocturnal meetings that frame the narrative upsets the traditional gender-based power balance. Angelica seizes both initiative and control in the guise of the Boy; she controls the narrative; she manages the times of the meetings, writes the script, and performs two roles, triangulating the Tenor's emotional connections to herself in both the guise of the Boy and the Boy's version of the real Angelica. The Tenor, though older and ostensibly playing the role of mentor, is easily manipulated into a passive and weak, more traditionally feminine, position, but acts consistently according to the dictates of chivalry and courtly love.

Most New Woman critics here focus their attention on the interlude's exploration of gender norms as a patriarchal critique or as Grand's experiment with the Decadent movement, with which the New Women writers were so often linked in the press (Dowling 12). The encounter between the Boy and the ethereal and effete Tenor has generally been read as Grand's exploration of power linked to gender norms; "a coded challenge to heterosexual gender roles" (Ledger 116). As these readers assert, Grand is interrogating the roles assigned to men and women in a seriocomic interlude that ends tragically, but I read this interlude as framed by the

ethical questions underlying the actions of the two characters. Throughout the interlude, while Grand occasionally provides moments of same-sex attraction, the gender inversion here is plainly used in the service of her overarching point: approaching the end of the century, a more open interaction between men and women is needed, one that is not predicated on the easy assumptions of convention. However, open ethical spaces and interactions that acknowledge the unknowability, the limits of knowledge, present a threat to established social structures that cannot yet be dispensed with. Thus, once the players are unmasked, the carnival spirit is once more contained; Angelica is punished for her transgression as she becomes a more submissive and acceptable wife, and the Tenor dies.

The ethical implications of the interlude resonate with Levinas's assertion of the primordial ethical encounter, the acknowledgment of the subject's responsibility for the other. In contrast with the definition of the integrated identity based on a struggle for freedom and self-assertion, Levinas describes an ethical identity that acknowledges the unknowability of the other while simultaneously responding to the obligation to respond to the other's being. As the narrative progresses, Grand establishes a relationship dominated by Angelica, in the guise of the Boy, whose capricious behavior increasingly compromises her ethical identity by victimizing a vulnerable other. The narrator says, "Sometimes he was like a wild creature...not knowing what he would do next; and ...[t]hen again he would saunter in about midnight, and sit down in a dejected attitude, looking unutterably miserable" (401). The Boy is aware of his power over the Tenor, and the narrator tells us that "no matter what he had done, by hook or by crook he always managed to bring about a reconciliation before they parted" (389). Grand here underscores the primary nature of gender identity that interests her: the degree of power and freedom granted men and women.

If Evadne's plot is a cautionary tale about the failed activist, and Edith's plot an illustration of the perils for sheltered young women, Angelica's plot in this interlude depicts the pitfalls of adopting a traditional masculine identity for women. For all of her criticisms of men, Grand was no radical, and her vision for women focused on enlightened marriages. When the Boy says presciently to the Tenor, "'I mean to be life or death to you'" (380), this assertion underscores Angelica's sense of freedom and power in the guise of the boy, the freedom and power typically granted to a young male to behave unethically. In her "play," she treats the Tenor as the subject of an experiment. Perhaps her most transgressive behavior is her determination to heighten the effects of her masquerade by triangulating the Tenor's emotional investment in promoting his romantic attachment to Angelica. Angelica's behavior here, in the guise of the Boy, demonstrates Grand's determination to illustrate the last vestiges of Angelica's womanly virtue disappearing.

Grand presents Angelica's unethical behavior as the consequence of exercising complete freedom at the expense of another; like Colquhoun and Mentieth, the result of her behavior is tragic for someone else. However, her roguish behavior is couched as a response to the limitations placed on a woman who desires and needs a vocation and is not allowed one. Under these circumstances, Angelica is not attracted to feminine altruism, which she sees as the only vocation allowed her. When the Tenor asks her why she did not interest herself in those around her and try to help them, she replies that "it is impossible for a woman to devote herself to people for whom there is nothing to be done, who don't want her devotion; and, besides, devotion wasn't my vocation" (442). Womanly self-sacrifice would not be a role that Angelica would willingly accept. However, while the reader may accept Angelica's claim that the masquerade was justified given her feelings of frustration and loneliness, Grand, in bringing the interlude to a tragic conclusion, places her on the same footing as Colquhoun and Menteith. Her drive has been

to understand what it is like to be a man and to experience the freedom granted by the masquerade. In treating the Tenor as solely a representative of his gender, she has totalized him instead of granting him the complexity of his autonomous self. He has made himself vulnerable to her, has revealed his “face” by confiding his love for Angelica and revealing the details of his past. However, the Boy/Angelica has rejected her obligation to respond ethically by acting openly and revealing her masquerade. As Teresa Mangum notes, “Grand maintains the distinctions between ‘manhood’ and ‘womanhood’ even as she argues that both concepts require revision” (45). As Ann Heilmann adds, Grand suggests that “subversive gestures may afford temporary gratification to the individual concerned but are always ultimately ineffective as a means of women’s self-liberation” (46).

However, Grand does not only interrogate Angelica’s role in the tragedy; ultimately, the Tenor’s insistence on the primacy of gender-based rituals kills him. Once Angelica has been unmasked and her true gender revealed, the Tenor is himself surprised at how quickly he reverts to tradition; although Angelica has not changed in any fundamental way, he is no longer able to view her through an objective lens. He can now only think of her in terms of respectable womanhood. This inability to accord Angelica true “otherness” kills the Tenor when he refuses to take medicine that will treat his pneumonia because it causes him to speak delusionally. Afraid that in his delusional ramblings, he might involuntarily reveal Angelica’s masquerade, he acts nobly on outdated chivalric notions in order to keep her secret. The tragedy of the interlude is ultimately that neither character—despite Angelica’s masquerade—is able to resist objectifying and totalizing the other based on gender in order to acknowledge the mystery and complexity of the other.

Grand's employment, then, of this interlude is the closest in spirit to Bakhtinian carnival of the three authors precisely because it is an interlude and therefore transitory. Adopting the mask of the rogue allows Angelica to safely thwart the conventions that so frustrate her as a young woman. Her speech after being unmasked makes clear her intent:

I have enjoyed the benefit of free intercourse with your masculine mind undiluted by your masculine prejudices and proclivities with regard to my sex. Had you known that I was a woman—even you—the pleasure of your companionship would have been spoilt for me, so unwholesomely is the imagination of a man affected by ideas of sex. The fault is in your training; you are all of you educated deliberately to think of women chiefly as the opposite sex. Your manner to me has been quite different from that of any other man I ever knew...Now, with you alone of all men, not excepting Diavolo, I almost think I have been on an equal footing; and it has been to me like the free use of his limbs to a prisoner after long confinement with chains. (457)

However, Angelica also acknowledges that she has learned to regret her actions: her “loving-consciousness was initially dormant...the love in us for our fellow creatures which makes it pain to ourselves to injure them” (452-53). Angelica's acknowledgement of her responsibility to the Tenor may appear in conflict with Bakhtin's description of the cheerful rogue, but the rogue figure is now unmasked. As Grand depicts the rogue throughout her novel, he/she becomes a figure whose thwarting of convention can sometimes come at a high cost for his victims. Angelica is not the roguish villain—that role is filled by Colquhon and Menteith. Instead, she is a subversive figure whose secret laughter suggests both resistance to authority and Grand's

ambivalence about the freedom and choices that cultural and ethical changes will offer young women.

## 2.2 Gregory Rose the Fool

Olive Schreiner's use of the cross-dressing interlude in *The Story of an African Farm* generates the fascinating Gregory Rose—sensitive, gender queer, and an example of Bakhtin's "wise fool" character, who, even as an object of scorn, makes the conventional world seem false and strange. The activist novelist, according to Bakhtin, needs the character of the fool in order to force the reader to see through the fool's eyes the vision of the world as confused by "conventions of pathos and falsity" ("Discourse" 404). The author employs the fool not only to subvert social convention, but also to advance an alternate vision that grows out of the fool's uncomprehending wisdom ("Discourse" 404). Schreiner's employment of the wise fool character coheres with her use of the "mythic mode" in the novel, incorporating allegory, folktale, and dream visions, a narrative pastiche that Gerald Monsman suggests "harmonizes comic and tragic delineations of character" (262). Like "The Tenor and the Boy," this interlude foregrounds a gender masquerade; however, in this case the carnivalesque overturning of expectations and roles pivots to an outcome that is unexpectedly tender and poignant. I argue that Schreiner's use of Gregory as the wise fool in "Gregory's Womanhood" links Levinas's contention that face-to-face ethical encounters occur on a vulnerable, unguarded, unconscious level with Schreiner's anticipation of a transitional cultural period in which Victorian gender and social conventions will no longer seem rational. Writing to Havelock Ellis, she stated, "I object to anything that divides the two sexes...human development has now reached a point at which sexual difference has become a thing of altogether minor importance. We make too much of it. We are men and women in the second place, human beings in the first" (qtd. in Cronwright-

Schreiner 51). In later writings, particularly *Woman and Labour*, she argued even more extensively for a move toward androgyny as economically beneficial. Schreiner employs this subplot to illustrate the necessary gender upheaval in the transition to a more open ethical system that privileges an acknowledgment of the limits of knowledge and the drive for sympathetic intimacy (Hollander 1).

Gregory Rose is at once the most conventional and the most disruptive male in the novel. We know very little about Lyndall's stranger, and Waldo remains a strangely obscure figure throughout. Gregory's arrival at the farm as the new overseer, dressed in an elaborately romantic and masculine costume "with shining spurs, an ostrich feather in his hat, and a silver-headed whip" (Schreiner 103), introduces him as a comic character, a parody of the stereotypically masculine figure. When Lyndall first sees Gregory, she tells Waldo, "There... goes a true woman—one born for the sphere that some women have to fill without being born for it" (103). The reader is invited to laugh at Gregory's fussy housekeeping, his obsession with his looks, and his girlish letters to his mother and sister. In addition, those letters make clear that he has always been ineffectual: the school masters held him back and called him "a blockhead," and his father dubbed him "a noodle and a milksop" (89). Gregory's comic value is only exaggerated and extended in his interactions with Lyndall, who unhesitatingly puts him in his place when he abandons Em and abases himself for her "[l]ike a little tin duck floating on a dish of water, that comes after a piece of bread stuck on a needle, and the more the needle pricks it the more it comes on" (124).

Even as the comic fool, Gregory Rose begins to expose the false binaries of male and female. The figure of the fool, Bakhtin notes, is an observer; he is "life's perpetual spy" (FT 161). The fool is inherently linked to metamorphosis, and one of his typical functions, as Bakhtin points

out, is in the sexual sphere “the making-public of specifically nonpublic spheres of life” (161). In addition, the fool’s inherent stupidity and incomprehension are presented in novels polemically; [incomprehension] interacts dialogically with an intelligence (a lofty pseudo intelligence) with which it polemicizes and whose mask it tears away” (“Discourse” 403). Schreiner’s use of Gregory as the uncomprehending fool places him in direct contrast to Lyndall’s pseudo intellectualism and bitter rejection of generous and ethical behavior to others.

However, Gregory Rose’s status as a comic fool shifts once he dons a woman’s clothing. When Gregory initially discovers the women’s clothing in the attic, he begins immediately to claim an alternative self. Once Lyndall has gone away with her stranger, Gregory Rose no longer has a clear identity on the farm. No longer Em’s suitor, and abandoned by Lyndall, he inhabits an uncertain space. He has even given up the lease on his cottage on the farm. Without a clear identity, he discovers the women’s clothing in the attic, clothing that had belonged to Em’s mother, and he seems immediately to respond to the opportunity to embrace the maternal identity. Examining the clothes, his eyes are “imploring” (132) as though he requests permission to embrace this new persona. Significantly, as he examines the dress, he remembers having seen a similar one worn by “a sister of mercy” (132), a role he will later adopt along with the clothing. As he tries on the hat and looks into a fragment of mirror, he notes first the incongruous combination of the woman’s hat and his beard. This moment of incongruity continues to underscore Gregory’s carnivalesque and comic role, but Schreiner does not linger on the comic possibilities here. Instead, she notes his almost instant recognition of a transformed self: “[t]he blue eyes looked out with the mild gentleness that became eyes looking out from under a kapje” (132). Already he seems to put on, with the women’s clothes, what Ann Heilmann calls the “the transfigured m/other” (139). When he leaves the attic to go downstairs, the narrator tells us, he

has “an awful and mysterious look in his eyes” (132). The term “awful” here, I assume, Schreiner intends to be interpreted in the sense that Gregory is literally in awe of the transformed self he has just witnessed.

Schreiner’s use of the wise fool character problematizes the folk tradition wherein the fool mocks the king as he is crowned the carnival king. In dressing as a woman, Gregory Rose appears to lose rank instead of gaining it, abdicating male privilege and abjecting himself. I suggest that this transitional novel includes here a transitional interpretation of the character of the fool by connecting the character of the fool with gender evolution. Gregory Rose is already a gender non-conformist. Dressing as a woman allows him to both mock the false pretense of his own and others’ masculine facades. Additionally, dressing as a woman makes Gregory Rose more like Lyndall, whose dominance makes her both the object of his devotion and his model for womanhood.

As he later cares for the dying Lyndall, Gregory willingly abjects himself, sleeping on the floor outside her door and performing all of the duties of a nurse, particularly one who is extending mercy to an indifferent subject. Throughout this interlude, he remains silent and passive, never revealing his true identity. Claire Kahane invests this incident with significantly transferring the “woman’s voice” from Lyndall to Gregory and extinguishing the “voice of protest” as Gregory represents a move away from Lyndall’s anger and activism to Gregory’s “self-abnegating subject” and “Transsexual mother” (89). However, Monsman’s reading of the episode seems truer to Schreiner’s remarks in her foreword, as he notes, “Gregory seems to move toward a total mode of being, uniting contraries to rediscover a unity in which one cannot have any single identity without possessing many other modes of being also” (262). I suggest that, as well, Gregory’s transformation and willing abnegation illustrates Schreiner’s

commitment to the principle that gender is fluid and that a universal ethics for the future will require men and women to move toward androgyny.

In Levinasian terms, Gregory is also sacrificing his own freedom and masculine privilege in service to the other, in this case, Lyndall. In an earlier conversation in the novel, they had already made this bargain:

[Lyndall says] I remember your words: You will give everything, and expect nothing. The knowledge that you are serving me is to be your reward; and you will have that. You will serve me, and greatly. The reasons I have for marrying you I need not inform you of now; you will probably discover some of them before long.

I only want to be of some use to you, he [Gregory] said. (125)

At the time of this conversation, Lyndall's intent seems to be providing herself with a husband to legalize the birth of her child, a bargain she ultimately rejects. However, Gregory, who appears to be willing to make this bargain out of his pathetic devotion to Lyndall, has indeed committed himself to sacrifice his freedom and privilege as a man in return to serve an indifferent other.

Schreiner's use of the fool here dramatizes not only gender inversion but Levinas's principle of responding to the unknowable other. Lyndall has proven herself unwilling to offer her own life for another or to limit her freedom in any way; she has acknowledged that she is too bitter about the condition of women to work toward a better future. She is "asleep, swathed, shut up in self" and will "deliver no one" until she herself has been freed (102). At this stage in her life, disillusioned by her experience as a genteel young woman, Lyndall has decided that her only duty is to herself. She rejects motherhood as an intolerable lifelong burden and only wants to be "a thing that thinks" (111). Like Angelica, Lyndall is angry because she has not been given the

opportunity to work toward something that moves her; she counsels Waldo to “live for one thing” because “anything is possible to a man who knows his end and moves straight for it, and for it alone” (114-115). Lyndall intends to be an actor, a profession she believes will allow her to “absorb and then reflect other human lives” (115). This choice seems especially ironic for Lyndall, because she has deliberately locked herself into an autonomic stance that rejects openness to the unknowability of others that would seem a necessary insight for an actor. In order to be successful, she is ready to manipulate men in order to succeed, as she argues that “[m]en and things are plastic; they part to the right and left when one comes among them moving in a straight line to one end” (115). By the time she is dying, Lyndall has had a revelation, seeing her life as that of “a poor weak soul striving after good” who “learnt, through tears and much pain, that holiness is an infinite compassion for others; that greatness is to take the common things of life and walk truly among them” and “that happiness is a great love and much serving” (154). However, this deathbed revelation feels too much like bargaining with God. Lyndall has always been a leader among the three children, and she has always struggled with adults for control. Her stated goal, even as a child, has been to run away and to gain control of her own life. Service to others has never been an important factor for her, an indication of her lack of understanding and acknowledgment of any obligation to the other.

In contrast to Lyndall, Gregory gains integrity as the transgendered figure of the fool. After first playing the fool for an indifferent princess, he now appears wise and loving. As Carolyn Burdett argues in *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism: Evolution, Gender, Empire* (2001), “[I]n place of the sacrificial woman protagonist, the character who *narratively enacts* love-as-sacrifice in *African Farm* is a man, dressed in women’s clothes” (36). Burdett also points out that, in naming her cross-dressing character after Saint Gregory, who helped create the

Nicene Creed and restore church unity, Schreiner suggests an interpretation of Gregory Rose as symbolic of reconciliation and unity (37). For Gregory, a selfless love and “absolute sensitivity to the other” transform Gregory into a fully realized human being (38).

Schreiner’s use of Gregory Rose as the fool, then, suggests two considerations. First, in aligning the comic figure of the fool with compassion and respect for the other, she underscores Levinas’s definition of the ethical confrontation between the subject and the other that calls the subject into an ethical posture that abnegates personal freedom and subjectivity. Gregory Rose becomes an ethical subject only by putting off the unethical identity that he has assumed in a conventional male role. When he neutralizes his conventional masculinity by adopting a female appearance and posture, he literally clothes himself as the other, putting on the traditionally subordinate role as he abdicates privilege in much the same way that the fool is crowned king during carnival; he now originates the “double-voiced laughter” that subverts traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity. Joyce Avrech Berkman, in *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner: Beyond South African Colonialism* (1989) describes what she interprets from Schreiner’s writings to be her “tripartite transformative process: the overcoming of female self-hatred and dependency, ...the reformulation of individual identity freed from the socially constructed bifurcation of feminine and masculine personality; the resolution of sex antagonism through the comradeship of ‘new men’ and ‘new women’” (126). Ultimately, Schreiner suggests that the age of transition that she and the readers are inhabiting is one that will require men and women to recognize Bakhtin’s “second life,” an openness to the medieval sense of festival that acknowledges deeper human truths and spiritual knowledge through their openness to change and questioning of hegemonic institutions, and a “world inside out” (*Rabelais* 11).

If Grand interrogates the inherent unethical and unhealthy nature of false gender binaries through her use of the rogue, Schreiner extends the argument a step further in advocating for a move toward androgyny. Lyndall's bitterness leads, not to the laughter of the rogue, but to self-destruction. Lyndall distances herself from others, insisting on a subjectivity that is enclosed and autonomous. Neither has her intelligence led her to a meaningful kind of resistance--her anger has merely paralyzed her. In contrast, Schreiner depicts Gregory Rose as a mythic figure with roots in folklore, one whose consciousness links him with an understanding of the fundamental obligation to the other. In Gregory Rose, in fact, we see the intersection of Levinasian ethics and Bakhtinian folkloric laughter.

### 2.3 **Dick the Clown**

As Carolyn de la L. Oulton and other critics have noted, Mary Cholmondeley appears to employ none of the experimentation that characterizes the work of Schreiner and Grand in her novel *Red Pottage* (1899). Much of her style mimics George Eliot's, whose work she greatly admired (Oulton, de la L. 205). Her chapters are headed by didactic epigraphs, mostly in the form of proverbs or literary quotations from her contemporaries, particularly Emerson, Eliot, and Kipling. Cholmondeley's narrator is the familiar Victorian moralizing and intrusive character; and the "Postscript" to *Red Pottage* is a cozy aside to the reader wherein the narrator reveals the as yet unwritten pages in the "Book of Life" that he sees for Rachel Ward, Dick Vernon, and Hester Gresley (283). I argue, however, that Cholmondeley's innovative use of the hysteria trope for both men and women as an illustration of ethical renovation merits attention. The breakdowns that she details for her three protagonists illustrate the need for the literal breakdown and destruction of current mores in order for real transition and change to occur. As SueAnn Schatz comments, the novel is illustrative of the author's "practical idealism" (28) and a

feminism “grounded in reality and practicality” (26). Structurally, Cholmondeley’s three narrative threads confront each of the three protagonists with an ethical challenge; however, the two dominant narratives, centered on Hugh Scarlett and Rachel Ward, specifically investigate the Levinasian challenge based on the willingness of the individual to resign the desire to dominate and master others, instead responding to the calling of “the face,” the complete vulnerability of the other. According to Levinas, in “Ethics as First Philosophy,” our dominant self, with our unjustifiable exercise of complete freedom, is confronted by a sense of obligation to and responsibility for the other. We respond to the stripped-down vulnerability of the other with vigilance and an obligation to justify our own right to exist. Acknowledging this obligation, we forfeit the desire to exercise complete freedom (Hand 82-83). As an unwilling participant in Lord Newhaven’s duel/death pact, Hugh Scarlett must literally kill himself or try to justify his right to exist to redeem an obligation to Newhaven. He is nominally free to make either choice. And later in the novel, Rachel Ward is exhorted by the Bishop, the authoritative representative of Christian dogma, to take responsibility for Hugh’s life or death as a result of her acceptance or rejection of his love. Through these ethical challenges, Cholmondeley depicts her two main protagonists disintegrating into physical and psychological chaos, their identities fragmented, when faced with their own ethical failures. Through the Rachel narrative, she also indicates the need to move toward a more universal ethics beyond limited gender definitions.

Additionally, like Grand and Schreiner, Cholmondeley employs folkloric laughter within her novel of ordeals through the use of the third of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque figures, the clown, embodied in the character of Dick Vernon. Vernon, whose birth places him within the ranks of the wealthy middle class, nevertheless functions as an outsider whose years of living in Australia, lack of aristocratic polish, and working class opinions make him uncomfortable in

high society. Dick's friendships allow him entrance to society, but his blunt and honest observations serve not only to make him a foil for the melodramatic behavior of both Lord Newhaven and Hugh Scarlett, but to serve as the commentator on the absurdities of society's conventions. Dick's outsider status makes him an appropriate representative of the "world inside out," and Cholmondeley uses Dick as the spokesman for change and for the transition to a social system that promotes ethical behavior by rejecting conventional positions based on class and gender.

In the plot centered on Hugh Scarlett, Cholmondeley uses the mechanism of a death pact initiated by Lord Newhaven in order to problematize several ethical underpinnings of late Victorian society. When Lord Newhaven forces Hugh into the bargain as a way of exacting compensation for his loss of honor in losing his wife's love to Hugh, he does so on the basis of an archaic system wherein his wife is treated as his exclusive property, a system that has just been reformed through a series of laws under the various Married Woman Property Acts of 1870 and 1894. These laws changed the conceptions of women's relationships with material property and thus cast doubt on their position as material property themselves. Thus, the conventions demanding that a man defend his honor or that of his wife seem outdated. In addition, Lord Newhaven himself calls into question the validity of the mechanism when he notes ironically that he found this idea in a magazine serial. Lord Newhaven's manner, even as he demands that Hugh participate in the death pact in order to avert scandal, is described by the narrator as "languid" (12), and he refers to "the somewhat hackneyed circumstances" in which he and Hugh find themselves (13). Thus, Cholmondeley uses the death pact and Hugh's eventual breakdown and death as a symbolic end to an archaic marital system.

It is from Hugh Scarlett's plot that the novel's title emerges; Hugh believes that he has sold his birthright—his position as an honorable man with an unsullied reputation to offer a virtuous woman in marriage—for an adulterous affair with a silly and trivial woman. This affair has now landed him in a duel for his life. He is forced then to fight in a defense of the honor he has forfeited already. The life or death situation in which he finds himself forces him to defend his right to exist at the expense of Lord Newhaven's life. Thus, his plot becomes a sustained study on the right of a man to exist dishonorably at the expense of another's life. I suggest that Cholmondeley employs this plot for two purposes. First, she interrogates the remnants of a tradition that positions women as possessions of their husbands and symbols of their honor so that a wife's appropriation by another man is an affront to the husband. Second, in depicting Hugh's breakdown and death, she symbolizes the necessary disintegration of an obsolete system that requires strong women to marry and prop up weak, dissolute men. His refusal to accept the responsibility for his own moral failings and his dependency on a good woman to save him are destructive and outworn patterns of behavior at the turn of the twentieth century. Cholmondeley dramatizes, through Hugh's novel-length breakdown, her vision of an open future for men and women, one based on Levinas' description of mutual vulnerability and refusal to objectify the other.

The reader observes Hugh's systematic rejection of responsibility. First, he feels trapped and resentfully bound by his tacit acceptance of the pact (15). He blames Lady Newhaven, the silly and vain woman with whom he has conducted an affair. After falling in love with Rachel, he seeks justification for rejecting his responsibility. Eventually, he feels caught in an ethical labyrinth, with no possible escape: "There was no help for him. There was no way out. He was in a trap. He must die, and soon, by his own hand. Incredible, preposterous fate!" (74). When he

nearly dies from drowning, he has resigned himself to dying, but his attachment to Rachel convinces him that Newhaven has behaved unethically in requiring his death, and he begins to convince himself that he is not obligated to sacrifice his own life at the demand of the other. Two points are salient here: on one level, Cholmondeley interrogates a ritual that has certainly become ridiculous by the end of the century; on another level, however, the reader understands that Hugh's arguments for his own right to live are nevertheless fundamentally dishonorable because he is unwilling to confront his challenger or tell the complete truth to Rachel.

However, Hugh's psychological breakdown creates openness in the narrative, the potential for transformation. His suicide after Rachel angrily rejects him seems like the only possible end for a man whose ethics are based on fear. Unable to acknowledge his failure as an ethical subject to both Lord Newhaven and Rachel, Hugh spirals into a trance state and then further into delusions and madness. Hugh's breakdown takes the form of identity fragmentation. He sees a shadow beside him that embodies the "old Hugh," the unethical man. In his delusional state, Hugh believes he must kill the unethical, dishonest and unworthy man in order to be with Rachel. He sets out to kill himself in order to find Rachel and be with her. Using Christian symbolism, Cholmondeley depicts Hugh as driven to the lake in a determination to immerse himself in a kind of baptism. He will, he thinks, kill the "old self" in the lake so that Rachel will see the new self he has become, and she will return to him:

She would never have forsaken him. But she had mistaken this evil creeping shadow for him, and he had not been able to explain. But she would understand presently. He would make it all very clear and plain, and she would love him again, when he had got rid of this other Hugh. He would take him down and

drown him in Beaumere. It was the only way to get rid of him. And he, the real Hugh, would get safely through. (273)

While Hugh's breakdown and death symbolize the necessary disintegration of an obsolete system, his final recognition of an unethical self that must be destroyed does suggest the possibility of transformation.

Both Rachel's and Hugh's responses to the death pact, in fact, deepen the satirical plot mechanism into a sustained meditation on the obligation of the self to the other in the ethical relationship. For Rachel as an ethical subject, the pact clearly is repugnant. As she has experienced poverty and observed economic injustice, Rachel has acknowledged the obligation of one to the other as well as the demand that she relinquish the freedom that money has provided her to help others. In addition, while she likes Lord Newhaven and resists Lady Newhaven's foolish and dangerous self-absorption, she nevertheless responds to Lady Newhaven's need of her; Rachel sees through Lady Newhaven's illusions and her insincerity but is drawn to her because Lady Newhaven reveals her "face" when she shows Rachel the genuine terror she feels on behalf of Hugh. The sincerely vulnerable face that Lady Newhaven presents to Rachel is enough to call out Rachel's response. Because she knows of the affair between Hugh and Lady Newhaven, Rachel struggles to love a man who has behaved dishonorably and wants to help him make a fresh start (107).

Cholmondeley, in the Rachel plot, undermines and disrupts conventional ideas of the need for womanly self-sacrifice by dramatizing the difference between genuine philanthropy and the idealized but shallow demands on women to marry flawed and dishonest men. Cholmondeley presents in Rachel a portrait of the New Woman who defies the bold, mannish portrait so popular in the media of the time. While she possesses wealth and independence, she has also been poor,

and her recognition of socioeconomic injustice and the way she is forced into competition with others who are also poor and struggling to survive shapes her ethics. Although she receives a fortune left to her by the man who cheated her father and is able to return to society, she finds herself regretting the loss of a life that is stripped down to its essentials. As she later tells Hugh after her return to society, she has difficulty transitioning back to the polite artifice of society and playing effectively the appropriate “games” required by social occasions (27).

In Rachel’s relationship with Hugh, Cholmondeley employs the familiar motif of the traditional “good woman” who sets out to recuperate a profligate man, exactly the marriage tradition that Sarah Grand and other women involved in the Social Purity Movement sought to prevent. However, early in her friendship with Hugh, before knowing anything about him, she responds to a sense of responsibility for him: “A long look passed between them. Hugh’s tortured soul, full of passionate entreaty, leaped to his eyes. Hers, sad and steadfast, met the appeal in his, and recognized it as a claim” (28). Rachel’s sense of the call of the other here will be repeated later in her interactions with Lady Newhaven. Her interactions with both men and women in the novel replicate almost exactly the Levinasian sense of the claim of the other: “the being that expresses itself imposes itself, but does so precisely by appealing to me with its destitution and nudity—its hunger—without my being able to be deaf to that appeal...the face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation...” (“Ethics and the Face” 191, 202). Hugh, desperate to find a savior from his own moral degeneracy, sees her as a Madonna figure: “...in faces, calm and pure as Rachel’s, on which the sun and rain have never beaten, there is an expression betokening strong resistance from within of the brunt of a whirlwind from without” (11). Her status in representing the Ruskinian ideal of purity is confirmed early in the

novel when Hugh desperately determines to fasten on to her strength and purity so that her “pure, strong soul” can redeem him from “the ugly by-paths of these last years” (11).

While even Rachel recognizes that Dick is a better man than Hugh, Rachel’s missionary-style fervor causes her to prefer Hugh to Dick because Hugh needs her more. Cholmondeley here depicts the way that even privileged women are made to feel responsible for saving weaker men through appeals to their altruistic instincts—society’s familiar demand for womanly self-sacrifice. Ultimately, the Bishop uses this sense of responsibility to indict Rachel for her failure to forgive and therefore to save Hugh. The Bishop has, up to this point in the novel, seemed to represent an enlightened and sensible authoritative voice. He respects and attempts to protect Hester for her talent; he recognizes Dick as a good and honest man; and he sees through James Gresley’s foolish inadequacies as a brother and a clergyman. However, his speech to Rachel reveals his adherence to the conventional view of women as responsible for providing a sanctuary for men, particularly weak men. While he grants Hugh’s inadequacies as a man, one who is “shallow and hard, . . . without moral backbone, the kind of man who never faces a difficulty, who always flinches when it comes to the point, the stuff out of which liars and cowards are made” (268), he nevertheless blames Rachel for not fulfilling her responsibility to Hugh.

For the reader, Rachel’s instinctive repudiation of a man who has lied to her and caused the death of another through his cowardice seems just. However, Hugh’s breakdown strips his identity to utter vulnerability. Beyond the Bishop’s exhortations, it is Hugh’s defenselessness and the fact that he is stripped of all conventions that summon Rachel to more ethical behavior. As Levinas describes this calling in “Ethics as First Philosophy,” Rachel’s own existence is justified when she is able to lay down her ego and acknowledge her responsibility to the other (Hand 83)

by responding to Hugh's need. While Hugh's demand of her to sacrifice herself in the name of convention was not ethical because it was based on his totalization of her as a pure woman obliged to save him, his breakdown reveals his "face." Cholmondeley makes an important distinction here: an ethical relationship between men and women does not negate the need for self-sacrifice or obligation to the other. However, both men and women respond to the other as ethical subjects only when they reject comfortable and familiar assumptions.

When Cholmondeley introduces Dick as the novel's humorous commentator, she redeems the text from simply functioning as a dark depiction of late-Victorian society. As Bakhtin asserts, parodic writing that includes folk laughter is "far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humour denies, but it revives and renews at the same time" (*Rabelais* 11). Dick's presence in the novel, therefore, as the clown, who often upends characters' pretensions, makes possible at the end of the novel a sense of possibility and transformation. As Renfrew notes, Bakhtin's notion of folk laughter is communal; the satirical novelist fails when her mockery of her subjects is shallow and one-dimensional. Instead, laughter can be a corrective only when "the one-sided seriousness of any discourse is exposed to the light of another, questioning consciousness" (136). Dick's presence in the novel, then, introduces "discourse shaped by laughter" (137), which maintains the novel's sense of liberating both the characters from their narrow-minded society and the novel from its defined limits. Like the fool, the clown exists to interrogate false stereotypes and to expose artificial convention.

Like the typical figure of the clown, Dick is presented as an outsider. He does not belong to the society world that he will uncomfortably inhabit out of friendship with Lord Newhaven and in pursuit of Rachel. He is described as an awkward but goodhearted figure in Chapter One, described as "strongly built, ill-dressed...with his keen, brown, deeply scarred face and crooked

mouth” (9). Although he is an old friend of Lord Newhaven’s, he has just returned from Australia, and his presence at the party is revealed to be through a four-year-old invitation that he has mistakenly used. His dress clothes don’t fit him; Lord Newhaven has already observed that his pants are too short and his waistcoat is out of date. Dick’s lack of polish is immediately revealed when he asks Newhaven to “trot out a few heiresses” (10). He is consistently presented as a foil to Hugh Scarlett: when Hugh first notices Rachel, he determines to marry her so that she can save him from his profligate way of life (11). After also deciding to pursue Rachel, Dick, in contrast, has a hard time remembering her name (42). As Hester’s cousin, Dick figures in her memories as the son of a prosperous squire whose childhood behavior was so mischievous and disruptive that his family sent him to Australia to make his way. Now that he has returned, Dick continues to disrupt expected outcomes. He clarifies his attitude toward others’ expectations of him when he removes a padlocked gate from its hinges, and Rachel asks him if he always does what he wants to do. “It saves trouble,” is his answer (87). In addition, the figure of the clown is often used in novels to resist and reveal false religion. Cholmondeley’s use of Dick to laugh at Mr. Gresley’s lack of common sense and hypocrisy offer some of the funniest scenes in the novel, particularly in the temperance meeting, when he overrules James’ call for complete abstinence from liquor with a more sensible exhortation to “look out for an honest publican...who will buy only the best liquor from the best sources...and [r]emember some men have heads and some haven’t” (98). He and James, the hypocritical villain of Hester’s plot, have always been at odds because of James’ dishonesty and pretentiousness. Dick ends the novel as the only suitor worthy of Rachel’s love, and the narrator looks ahead to note that he seems “to see Rachel with children around her, and Dick not far off” (283). Through his presence, Dick lightens the melodrama of the ordeals that Rachel and Hester face, but he also represents the

alternative to Hugh for Rachel. As an outsider who is not tethered to convention, he represents the “New Man” to her emerging New Woman. He is the least materially eligible of Rachel’s admirers, but he is also the most adventurous and open to transformation. Cholmondeley’s choice of Dick as the eventual partner for Rachel reaffirms her rejection of the traditional marriage plot as well as her commitment to a vision of uncertainty for the future. Her selection of the figure in the novel who has functioned as the clown scaffolds this novel’s acknowledgment of carnival’s reminder that the present and the future are in a constant state of becoming.

All three authors examine the coming transition, with more or less confidence in positive transformation, and all clearly examine the ravages of a system in which one partner is allowed to exercise freedom at the expense of compassion, and the other partner is expected to sacrifice her freedom and her identity to maintain the status quo. However, none of these writers favors a corresponding lack of responsibility and obligation for women. The themes in these novels clearly suggest that the authors do not advocate a radical rejection of motherhood or marriage; instead, they gesture toward openness and transformation in these institutions. As Levinas suggests, the traditions surrounding marriage and motherhood emerge from political and religious systems that are modes of synthesis, that are thus mythic, thematizations of origins and ends. While Grand gestures toward the need for a new ethical framework by interrogating destructive gendered behaviors, both Cholmondeley and Schreiner suggest more positive alternatives through a vision of transformation and change based on movement from gender binaries toward androgyny. In the coming transitional period they are anticipating, clearly, a system of ethics that requires mutual obligation to the other as well as a recognition of the other’s autonomy. Simultaneously, however, these novelists seek a corresponding formal transformation indicated by their use of carnivalesque elements. Unsatisfied with the foreclosure

of the marriage plot or the form of the conventional novel, they introduce characters whose presence is rooted in folklore but look forward with carnival logic to change and renewal.

### 3 THE NEW WOMAN WRITERS AND THE SAID

As discussed in Chapter One, New Woman novelists in wrote toward ethical openness and indeterminacy by embed carnivalesque characters in their novels. The next two chapters examine how these writers engage with Emmanuel Levinas's concepts of the "saying" and the "said," described in his 1974 study of the role of language in ethical development *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Describing our precognitive recognition and call to responsibility for the other, Levinas identifies the saying as "the proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach, the one for the other, the very signifyingness of signification" (5). However, this phenomenon cannot be made manifest without a correlative linguistic system, the said, which, while it limits the saying and "betrays" it into definition, is a necessary step (5).

*Otherwise than Being* continues the argument from *Totality and Infinity* that our response to the other, our pre-cognitive obligation and unconditional responsibility for the other, is the ethical position. This obligation is not a choice; it simply exists. *Totality and Infinity* establishes the transcendence of "the face," and in the course of this discussion, asserts the importance of language in the subject's response to the other. *Otherwise than Being*, then, takes up the question of ethical subjectivity in relation to language. Levinas describes the role of language in the subject's openness to the other, the "inexhaustible response of the self as saying" (Lingis xiii) that is expressed in a universal system of symbols that becomes the said. Following a similar trajectory in my argument, while Chapter 1 discusses New Woman protagonists' experience of the obligation to the other through their confrontation with the face, this chapter argues that New

Woman novelists illustrate Levinas's assertion that ethical subjectivity is the outcome of discourse.

These novelists examine the power of language and its elasticity; they interrogate the function of the dominant cultural narrative, the "larger said," as it has been used to silence women's voices. Ultimately, they reach for a new language, sometimes analytical and restrained, at other times angry and passionate, to disrupt and unsettle the dominant narrative. To connect with their readers, they craft a common, personal, and subversive language based on shared experiences. Ultimately, this focus on a new and shared language, however, still serves a vision of the future that, though open-ended and indeterminate, suggests the possibility of a new social reality. Thus, if the larger said describes a dystopian experience for women, the smaller said articulates a hopeful, progressive, and utopian future.

The novelists examined here establish this new, smaller and more personal said in three ways: first, they employ extended polemical sections in their novels to take their message to a new audience of middle-class woman readers by literally going on record with their side of public controversies. Second, they deploy conversations and debates among women characters to interrogate the role of language in establishing the larger said. Rejecting the typical earnest male Victorian narrator, these texts tell stories through women's voices, lending authority to their individual points of view and their critique of the dominant narrative—the smaller said. And finally, these novelists depict New Woman protagonists as ethically influenced by the power of language in the books they read as children. This investigation focuses primarily on two texts: the "Evadne" narrative in Sarah Grand's 1893 novel *The Heavenly Twins* and Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus*, published the following year in 1894.

### 3.1 Articulating a New Said

When they shifted their arguments from essays to novels, the New Woman writers did not abandon polemical language. As they engaged with commentators and critics who continued to promulgate conventional ideas about women's opportunities, these novelists confronted a body of work that existed in print and which both defined and limited ways of thinking about ethical womanhood—the overarching narrative that I am naming the larger said. Because the debate was being conducted around them in essays and *Punch* cartoons, the New Woman novelists wrote in part to express and defend their point of view. They documented a side of the debate overwhelmed by primarily male voices in journals and newspapers—the authentic, average woman's voice. In their drive to record their argument, they employ the function of the said that Levinas sees as advantageous but also dangerous: the said concretizes ideas and reifies them by permanently locking an expression or a moment. However, for the New Woman writers, that is exactly the function of language they are exploiting—they can begin, by telling stories in women's voices, to create a body of work in print that offers an alternative language and vision, both a corrective vision of the present and a progressive vision for the future.

Levinas notes that any book is “pure said” (171); it illustrates the commitment into language of the saying, the “interruption” of the saying as it is frozen into time on the page. However, he also explains that every book becomes part of a conversation characterized by moments of disruption and intervention. In publishing their novels, the New Woman writers inject themselves, their protagonists, and their utopian vision into the conversation.

Indeed, as Talia Schaffer discusses in her 2001 essay “‘Nothing But Foolscap and Ink:’ Inventing the New Woman,” the real turning point in the New Woman debate occurred when the conversation shifted from discussing real women to discussing characters in novels (40). In

Sarah Grand's essay "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," Grand unwittingly coins the term that would gain momentum from Ouida's response in an essay entitled "The New Woman." Thus, as Schaffer notes, Grand is already moving the figure she is describing into the realm of fiction by idealizing and mythologizing her (42). As Schaffer discusses and Ann Heilmann argues more extensively in *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (2000), the term "New Woman" itself was unstable from its first use because of the many ideological stakeholders employing the term to capture an abstract cultural conception (2). Rita Kranidis, in *Subversive Discourse: The Cultural Production of Late Victorian Feminist Novels* (1995), argues that the New Woman in reality "has not yet materialized socially;" once moved into novels, however, as a character, she "serves as a theoretical concept and a dynamic social projection" used by novelists to critique the social order (xiv).

Protagonists in New Woman novels are depicted as heroines who decline traditional roles, resist accepted conventions of marriage and motherhood, aspire to or do work for a living, and argue feminist ideals (3). Gail Cunningham interprets the emerging picture of the New Woman as culturally defined by her advocates in journalistic discourse: she is middle-class, principled, idealistic, intelligent, and individualistic (11). These were attributes attached to the figure who appears in public discussions. However, the New Woman protagonists who appear in the heyday of New Woman novels, the 1880s and 1890s, possess attributes that make them more difficult to sum up: they often embody the lived experiences of their creators, but they are also clearly conceived as part of the social and political project of the New Woman authors, to function as persuasive models for real young women.

However, moving from the straightforward argument of an essay to more layered and complex narratives, these novelists also engage with the aspect of the said that illustrates the

ways in which language moves the encounter between individuals from an intangible connection into one defined by a common language. The said, fixing and designating the meaning of an encounter, comprises a necessary step in the ethical relationship because it becomes, over time, the vehicle for identity and relationship: “a being, designated by a substantive, is distended, in the time of lived experience, into life, into essence, into a verb, but across the opening that the diastasis of identity works, across time...such is consciousness” (Levinas 36). In other words, these novelists shifted their concerns into narrative fiction, specifically in the form of the feminist bildungsroman, to establish closer relationships with their intended middle-class readers. As Kate Flint discusses in *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (1995), in her chapter on New Woman writers, these writers’ employment of the bildungsroman “encourages sympathetic identification on the reader’s part” as the “reader’s growth in knowledge is made to parallel that of the protagonist” (296). Indeed, the New Woman writers perceived the relationship between their novels and a “society of readers” who would be invited to adopt language and concepts reflecting what they had read (Flint 315). Thus, readers become vicarious participants in debates conducted in a new, feminist language that they are encouraged to internalize. This particular type of novel, then, invites an intimate relationship between writer and reader, which imitates the proximity that Levinas asserts is necessary for ethical relationships.

Choosing the novel form as the vehicle for a transformative link with readers makes sense for these writers on two levels. First, as Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, the novel in the late nineteenth century was still a young genre, one without strict generic definition. The form was and is still developing, so it lends itself to a movement of women writers so enmeshed in their own time. As noted in Chapter 1, these novels are often permeated with the folkloric laughter that subverts hegemonies and closed systems. The form of the novel is flexible and characterized by “an

indeterminacy, a certain semantic open-endedness, *a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the open-ended present)*” (italics mine) (Bakhtin 323). The novel reflects reality as it develops and shifts because the form itself is so capable of shifting; it reflects “the tendencies of a new world still in the making” (324). For a group of writers intent on dramatizing the current reality for women, the openness and flexibility of the novel as a form permits them to include many voices and forms—interludes, fantasies, allegories, “proems,” folktales, dreams, etc. If, then, as I argue, these writers are exploring through their protagonists an open-ended ethical system, one that foregrounds alterity and indeterminacy, the form here matches its content. As Bakhtin notes, the novel is “younger than writing and the book; it alone is organically receptive to new forms of mute reception, that is, to reading” (321). Thus, the New Woman writers employ the novel to engage in a conversation with their readers, while also modeling a polyphonic community of women, one whose voices are permitted to speak provocatively or subversively without the author intervening between character and reader. Essentially, then, they are taking advantage both of the permanent nature of language to fix their ideas within a genre that is flexible and adaptable to contemporary needs. Within the novel form, these authors model the proximity between subjects necessary for ethical transformation with and for their readers by depicting characters in conversation and debate with one another, within communities of women.

### **3.2 Dialogues with Readers through Character Monologues**

Within the novels, passionate debates or monologues illustrate Levinas’s assertion that philosophical writing, or communication, must grapple with the limitations of language in its tendency to foreclose the openness, the uncertainty, the disruption of the same that is the saying. Thus, while these passages remain questioning, open, tentative sallies—often mournful, or bitter,

or enraged--they are not prescriptive. They stop short of defining or describing a desirable outcome, except in the most general terms. Some characters perform this function by speaking directly to readers through extended monologues that effectively function as dialogues with readers.

Perhaps the best known of these passages is included in Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, published in 1883, a decade before the peak of the New Woman debates. Lyndall, the proto-feminist protagonist of the novel, bitterly evokes Mary Wollstonecraft in an extended monologue with a silent Waldo, arguing about "the position of women" (178), which she says is her passion. The monologue is long, angry, and resentful, and much of it interrogates the way the world *speaks to* women, as this excerpt demonstrates:

"It is not what is done to us, but what is made of us," she said at last, "that wrongs us. No man can be really injured but by what modifies himself. We all enter the world little plastic beings, with so much natural force, perhaps, but for the rest—blank; and the world tells us what we are to be, and shapes us by the ends it sets before us. To you it says—"Work;" and to us it says—"Seem!" To you it says—As you approximate to man's highest ideal of God, as your arm is strong and your knowledge great, and the power to labour is with you, so you shall gain all that human heart desires. To us it says—Strength shall not help you, nor knowledge, nor labour. You shall gain what men gain, but by other means. And so the world makes men and women." (179)

Lyndall's argument here is an indictment of the reified ideas that shape the development of women—the inflexible and overarching mandates communicated to them from the earliest years of their lives. Throughout this extended monologue, Lyndall uses the phrases "it says" and "they

say,” over and over. Lyndall’s anger and frustration are directed at an imaginary “they” who control the messages and the naming used to keep women in their place. For Lyndall, the patriarchal admonitions are masterminded by an amorphous power structure that uses the power of language to exclude women:

“They say women have one great and noble work left them, and they do it ill. That is true; they do it execrably. It is the work that demands the broadest culture, and they have not even the narrowest. The lawyer may see no deeper than his law-books, and the chemist see no further than the windows of his laboratory, and they may do their work well. But the woman who does woman’s work needs a many-sided, multiform culture; the heights and depths of human life must not be beyond the reach of her vision; she must have knowledge of men and things in many states, a wide catholicity of sympathy, the strength that springs from knowledge, and the magnanimity which springs from strength. We bear the world, and we make it.” (180).

For Lyndall, even the role that women are biologically determined to appropriate is one for which they criticized, but she considers, like Mary Wollstonecraft before her, that women are set up to fail even in this role. Schreiner, in the earliest of the New Woman novels, employs Lyndall’s monologues as implicit dialogues with her readers, articulating an angry and extended indictment of the culture and its larger said. She models here a sense of urgency and restlessness that was beginning to gather energy in activist movements even in the mid-1980s. Later in the same monologue, however, Lyndall offers her vision of a more hopeful future:

“A great soul draws and is drawn with a more fierce intensity than any small one. By every inch we grow in intellectual height our love strikes down its roots deeper,

and spreads out its arms wider. It is for love's sake yet more than for any other that we look for that new time...Then when that time comes...when love is no more bought or sold, when it is not a means of making bread, when each woman's life is filled with earnest, independent labour, then love will come to her, a strange, sudden sweetness breaking in upon her earnest work; not sought for, but found. Then, but not now—" (102)

Another extended monologue is employed by Sarah Grand at the end of the Interlude, "The Tenor and the Boy," in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*. The Boy, now unmasked as Angelica, explains her reasoning for masquerading as a boy and hiding her true identity from the Tenor:

"I wanted to *do* as well as to *be*, and I knew I wanted to do, but when the time came for me to begin, my friends armed themselves with the whole social system as it obtains in our state of life, and came out to oppose me. They used to lecture me and give me good advice, as if they were able to judge, and it made me rage." (438)

Angelica's anger toward the well-meaning women who have abetted the cultural imprisonment of other women will resonate with young women readers. Angelica is especially interested in the way men speak to each other, which is distinctly different from the way they speak to women:

"I wanted to hear how men talk to each other...I have enjoyed the benefit of free intercourse with your masculine mind undiluted by your masculine prejudices with regard to my sex...I almost think I have been on an equal footing; and it has been to me like the free use of his limbs to a prisoner after long confinement with chains." (443-444)

Grand here singles out the power of male language. Angelica understands how language has been used to trivialize women; her attempts at independence have been stunted. She believes that if only she can somehow gain access to the ways that men speak to each other, this secret language will unlock knowledge that she can use to gain more personal freedom and power.

Both Schreiner and Grand, in these monologues, employ the angry, bitter female voice to articulate their consciousness of the dominant culture's language and their need to interrupt its narrative and challenge its power. Both Lyndall and Angelica voice readers' inchoate ideas awakening to their own need to subvert expectations attached to the identity already established for them by their culture; these protagonists' words, now in print, fixed and permanent, literally put words in their readers' mouths. Thus, through these monologue/dialogues with readers, New Woman writers employ novelistic language to encrypt a new, feminist said for a new generation of readers.

### **3.3 Modeling Conversation among Characters to Give Women a New Language**

To move a step further, however, Sarah Grand and Mona Caird depart from the use of the angry monologue to a more nuanced approach-- a series of conversations between characters, which traces their characters' evolving awareness of the invisible guiding hand of the larger culture, particularly as this guidance is deployed in declarations about women and their identity. As Robert Eaglestone comments about Levinas in his analysis of *Otherwise Than Being*, Grand and Caird's texts are "both discursive and performative" (139); that is, according to Eaglestone, Levinas uses two techniques to question or subvert traditional ideas about philosophy in *Otherwise than Being*. First, he changes terms and definitions frequently, illustrating the slippery nature of language and its constant "interruption of itself" (139). Second, he frequently employs questions rather than statements because questions convey openness and indeterminacy; they

open a dialogue with the reader (139). Grand and Caird use similar techniques. Their protagonists' conversations with other women often feel repetitive, as if they are seeking definition and not finding it. Additionally, they raise many questions about the limits of language in their need to understand their own ideas. Thus, like Levinas, Grand and Caird demonstrate the limits of language even as they also foreground the use of a new feminist and personal language to disrupt the larger said. Their protagonists are speaking their way into their new ideas, discovering not only the ways that language has betrayed them, but also discovering the power of language to reframe an open-ended, utopian vision for women.

Two novels that trace these conversations between women are Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* and Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus*. In *Evadne*, Sarah Grand's protagonist, readers are presented with a young woman who is just beginning to articulate feminist convictions, and whose ethical development emerges through dialogues with her mother, an aunt, and ultimately, supportive feminist mentors. The *Evadne* plot is one of three in the novel that Grand uses to "emphasize the necessity for women to learn to critique their culture if they want to resist or transform it" (Kranidis 90).

Caird, on the other hand, documents a different experience—the young woman with firm convictions about the need for change whose statements and the language in which she frames her ideas are challenged and discouraged by her sister, a reluctant mentor, and finally, by the conventional middle-class women who surround her. In this case, Caird illustrates the use of language as a kind of weapon—questioning, passionate, often unregulated and unfiltered speech that is employed as the protagonist's only access to power.

In both novels, because these novelists are modeling interactions for their readers, they begin with the power of maternal language and its implications. Maternal language is represented by

both Grand and Caird as a complicit force that continues to enclose young women within conventional and often destructive boundaries by linking rebellion against convention with public shame and disgrace. In *The Heavenly Twins*, for example, after weeks of increasingly acrimonious exchanges in letters, Evadne, confronted by a tearful mother, is told that she is “selfish and unnatural,” and her actions will make it impossible for her sisters to marry (107). Her mother attributes Evadne’s obstinacy to her “over-education” and the reading that Evadne has managed to do in spite of her parents (107). When her arguments do not persuade Evadne to return, Mrs. Frayling employs emotional blackmail, declaring that Evadne’s intransigence is destroying her health. This argument, of course, succeeds, and Evadne agrees to an unhappy compromise. Language has failed Evadne and her parents; Evadne has carefully articulated her position in her letters, and her parents have rejected her position, insisting instead on obedience based on the proper role of a daughter. The gulf between them seems unbridgeable because the force of logic cannot overcome the power of maternal self-sacrifice.

Similarly, as Ann Heilmann argues, the most prominent theme in *The Daughters of Danaus* is Caird’s “critique of motherhood as an oppressive patriarchal institution” (158). Hadria articulates her reasons for abandoning a fraudulent marriage to her sister-in-law; however, she too sacrifices her autonomy and returns home at the news that her father has lost his income and her mother is dangerously ill. Like Evadne, all of Hadria’s logical arguments fail to overcome the force of parental need. Though neither of her parents confronts her directly, their role at this point in the novel represents the force of convention and the expectations directed at young women. If Hadria does not return home to care for her mother, she will be even further ostracized. No matter how talented she may be, the force of her musical ambitions simply cannot withstand the

demands of the community that she sacrifice her dreams to do her duty. Nursing her mother, Hadria has a prophetic vision:

She realized now, with agonising vividness, the sadness of her mother's life, the long stagnation, the slow decay of disused faculties, and the ache that accompanies all processes of decay, physical or moral...the appeal of womanhood itself:—the grey sad story of a woman's life, bare and dumb and pathetic in its irony and pain: the injury from without, and then the self-injury...the unconscious thirst for the sacrifice of others, the hungry claims of a nature unfulfilled, the groping instinct to bring the balance of renunciation to the level, and indemnify oneself for the loss suffered and the spirit offered up. (263)

For their readers, both Grand and Caird write prophetically here; these passages warn readers about the force of tradition and the larger said. The dominant discourse is powerful. However, as subsequent passages in these novels will illustrate, there is also power in language that emerges among and between women—the conversations are personal and the language is idiosyncratic, but its very newness and difference is its appeal to readers.

As both novels progress, Grand and Caird depict each protagonist next in relationship with a woman who serves as mentor of sorts and with whom her conversations provide opportunities to articulate her own growing convictions about the way to understand womanhood. These conversations foreground the characters' search for their own language through which to articulate a position on marriage and motherhood. Evadne finds a sympathetic listener in her aunt, Mrs. Orton Beg. Less conventional than her sister, Evadne's mother, Mrs. Orton Beg is physically similar to Evadne, but living in a cathedral town has deeply affected her character. She is described by the narrator as a woman whose "spiritual nature predominated," who

inspired others to “desire to go forth and do great deeds of love” (72-73). More significantly for Evadne, she is a more flexible thinker than her sister, and she privileges moral behavior above conventional appearances. Thus, when Evadne makes her case for not living with her husband, Mrs. Orton Beg’s initial response is involuntarily conventional and she is horrified. However, she later comes to acknowledge the moral force of Evadne’s arguments: Grand shows her responding to Evadne’s argument and admitting its justification, when she thinks “reason and right were on Evadne’s side” (81). Simultaneously, her aunt knows the opposition Evadne will face as well: “she felt in her heart the full force of the custom and prejudice that would be against her, and shrank appalled by the thought of what the cruel struggle to come must be if Evadne persisted in her determination” (81). Grand here uses Mrs. Orton Beg as the model of a woman whose natural inclination is to behave as expected, but who is won over by the force of a valid argument, even to admitting the duplicity that good women practice by choosing not to know the truth:

“If I ever let myself dwell on the horrible depravity that goes on unchecked, the depravity which you say we women license by ignoring it when we should face and unmask it, I should go out of my mind. I do know—we all know; how can we live and not know? But we don’t think about it—we can’t—we daren’t...” (82)

Grand articulates the differences between Mrs. Orton Beg and Evadne in a telling passage about the power of words and their implications:

“There is one word more I would say, although I do not wish to influence you,”

Mrs. Orton Beg began hesitantly.

“You mean *submit*” Evadne answered, and shook her head. “No, that word is of no use to me. Mine is *rebel*. It seems to me that those who dare to rebel in every

age are they who make life possible for those whom temperament compels to submit. 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)

Mrs. Orton Beg’s conversation with Dr. Galbraith also embeds Evadne’s dilemma within the larger context of the struggle for women’s rights when she describes Evadne as the new version of Faust’s Marguerite—one who, like other young women, would sacrifice romance for the pleasures of learning and knowledge, who rejects a momentary passion in favor of a “sense of proportion” and looking forward to

the gradual growth of knowledge through all the ages, the clouds of ignorance and superstition slowly parting, breaking up, and rolling away, to let the light of science shine—science being truth, and there is all art, and all natural beauty from the” beginning—everything that lasts and *is* life (98).

This step in Evadne’s education demonstrates a critical function of language that Levinas discusses: the ethical subject becomes aware of the power of the said and “all the possibilities of vocabulary” (37). For the first time, Evadne demonstrates her understanding of the power of language and its function in establishing order. She has set terms for the future; however, as I will discuss later, up to this point, her ideas about ethical behavior have been private, shaped by her readings in biology and social theory. She has now taken an important step in beginning to articulate her convictions publicly and acting on them.

Similarly, Caird depicts Hadria, trying to reconcile her own ambitions with the demands of motherhood and domesticity, working out the conflict first with a sympathetic mentor. Unlike Evadne, however, whose language reveals the scientific and philosophical texts that have shaped

her thinking, Hadria expresses herself passionately, using vivid language that often verges on the poetic:

“Renunciation is always preached to girls, you know...preached to them when as yet they have nothing more than a rattle and a rag-doll to renounce. And later, when they set about the business of their life, and resign their liberty, their talents, their health, their opportunity, their beauty...then people gradually fall away from the despoiled and obedient being...”(45)

And later:

“I have seen this sort of traditional existence and nothing else, all my life, and I have been brought up to it, with the rest—prepared and decked out like some animal for the market—all in the most refined and graceful manner possible; but how can one help seeing through the disguise; how can one be blind to the real nature of the transaction, and to the fate that awaits one...” (50)

This is visceral language that is unregulated and unleashed, but also revealing in its lyricism of Hadria’s talent as a composer of music. Ironically, Hadria’s mentor Valeria Du Prel, a successful novelist, often chastens Hadria about this extravagant use of language. What appeals to Hadria about Valeria Du Prel is that she is an independent, unmarried woman who supports herself as a novelist. Hadria idealizes Du Prel and envies what she views as the artistic life that will be unavailable to her, hemmed in by family duties and expectations. Du Prel functions partly as a surrogate mother whom Hadria can use as a sounding board for ideas she is unable to share with her own mother, a woman who refuses to entertain the possibility of the nontraditional woman. However, Du Prel also seems to be a character whom Caird employs to illustrate a fissure between fiction and real life. The female protagonists in Du Prel’s novels may be bold and

rebellious, but she is not. While she writes narratives about women who transgress convention, Du Prel idealizes marriage and womanly self-sacrifice. Not a New Woman, Du Prel is instead an example of “The Independent Woman,” a type defined by Martha Vicinus and discussed by Ann Ardis as a woman who participates in the public sphere but maintains her class position and her standing as a “lady” because she continues to endorse traditional gender and class conventions (Ardis 16). In a novel that investigates the implications of self-sacrifice, Du Prel functions as an object lesson for both Hadria and readers—if Caird is indicting marriage as a hollow contract for women, she is also carefully distinguishing between women who seek real change and those satisfied and well-served by the status quo. Du Prel values her independence and solitude, but she is not ready to shun convention. When Hadria confides to Du Prel that she feels suffocated by the demands that she cater to her parents and find a suitable husband, Du Prel only acknowledges some reservations about the “tyrannical tradition” that allows “no latitude for variety of type;” she even cites the hopelessness of “beating one’s wings against the bars” (49). For Du Prel, Hadria is an impractical and intemperate young woman whose ideas will, she is certain, change as she grows older, falls in love, and marries.

In *Du Prel*, Caird employs a woman who makes her living through narrative to call attention to Hadria’s radical ideas through the style of her language; Du Prel often accuses Hadria of using exaggerated language: “Ah! Hadria, you exaggerate, you distort; you forget so many things—the sentiments, the affections, the thousand details that hallow that crude foundation which you see only bare and unsoftened” (51). Hadria constantly expresses her growing conviction that she has been raised as a sacrifice to the demands of a self-perpetuating system. She uses a variety of images that are strong and vivid to illustrate for readers both her anger and frustration and the

understanding that language, while it can be used powerfully, is ultimately inadequate to accomplish the radical change that will free her.

Both Grand and Caird go on to develop themes about the efficacy of language either to free women or further constrict them through a series of conversations between men and women that make up much of the action of each novel. In the characters of Mrs. Malcomson and the American clergyman, Mr. Price, who appear in the “Malta” section of *The Heavenly Twins*, Grand provides Evadne with her first real advocates, who will offer Evadne the opportunity to articulate her emerging feminist ideas. When Evadne first encounters Mrs. Malcolmsen, she is engaged in berating a handsome but conventional clergyman, Mr. St. John, on the platitudes about women she so often hears from the pulpit. He has defended the “old exquisite ideal of womanhood” and her “beautiful submission to the hardships of her lot” when Mrs. Malcolmsen retorts that the “poetry of the pulpit” has “pleased our senses” and “flattered us into inaction by it, and used it as a means to stimulate our vanity and indolence by extolling a helpless condition under the pompous title of ‘beautiful patient submission:’

“You have administered soothing sedatives of ‘spiritual consolation’ as you call it, under the baleful influence of which we have existed with all our highest faculties dulled and drugged. You have curtailed our grand power to resist evil by narrowing us down into what you call the ‘women’s sphere,’ wherein you insist that we shall be unconditional slaves of man, doing always and only such things as shall suit his pleasure and convenience.” (176-177)

Another advocate who appears less often is Mrs. Sillenger, who interjects:

“I wonder men like yourself, Mr. St. John...continue so prejudiced on this subject. How you could help on the moral progress of the world, if only you

would forget the sweet soporific ‘poetry of the pulpit’...and learn to think of us women, not as angels or beasts of burden—the two extremes between which you wander—but as human beings...” (178)

Throughout the “Malta section” of the novel, Mrs. Malcolmson continues to debate Mr. St. John and more conventional women in the military community. Outspoken but reasonable, she uses the authority of her husband’s position to raise questions about the ways in which false analogies and characterizations of women have been used to constrict them. Mrs. Malcolmson normalizes feminism; Grand depicts her as a middle-class woman whose husband makes no attempt to curtail her outspokenness and who is respected in the small community of English people in Malta. Her arguments are presented as logical and good-natured throughout. In counterpoint to Mrs. Frayling and Mrs. Orton Beg, Grand positions Mrs. Malcolmson as an illustration of a mature and reasonable feminist who is able to articulate her ideas within a very traditional (military, in this case) culture and cause the other reasonable members of the community to reconsider their own positions.

Grand employs Mr. Price, the radical American, to make the case for the evolution of women in the most direct terms. Defending Evadne’s emerging outspokenness, he tells Mr. St. John that women may once have “meekly acquiesced” and even believed what men told them, that they were “illogical, unreasoning, and incapable of thought” but now women have arrived at more logical conclusions; he believes that “unrest and rebellion against the old abuses” will be a great improvement, an “onward impulse” that men should not resist (217). As Mr. Price is an American and an older man, he is both progressive and authoritative.

The “Malta” section of the novel foregrounds language in distinct contrast to earlier sections. Because Evadne is now in conversation with older and disinterested men and women, the

language here is divested of familial obligation. Mrs. Malcolmson and Mr. Price are outsiders, and their language is generally confident and matter-of-fact. This section of the novel is short, but it reflects two possibilities for Evadne and the novel's readers: in the small world of the military post in Malta, well-educated and thoughtful people both assume and speak logically of the coming transition for women. These men and women are authoritative, and so their progressive ideas seem to be replacing the older and more destructive conventions. Second, the small community in Malta is a model for readers in its openness to debate. Grand uses this episode to illustrate how language allows the ethical subject to literally speak her way into ethical subjectivity.

By contrast, if Grand employs conversations between Evadne and her friends in Malta to depict Evadne's moral growth through self-expression, Caird writes many angry diatribes for Hadria that function performatively as multiple efforts to open exchanges, to interrupt more conventional ideas. As Levinas employs multiple definitions for the saying and the said to open and interrogate the nature of philosophical language (Eaglestone 139), Caird is similarly employing forceful and emphatic statements to interrupt, over and over, stagnant notions about womanhood. Throughout the novel, Caird uses Hadria to speak eloquently against conventional ideas; through Hadria, she is forcefully negating destructive ideas and replacing them with the language of powerful and righteous anger at the prospect of serving as one of "society's scapegoats" (Ardis 18). These dramatic passages ring eloquently for the reader as Caird has composed them to reflect the pain of an artist who is painfully constricted by duty. As Ann Heilmann comments, Caird "exposed the patriarchal roots of all authoritative discourses, urging on her readers the recognition of the dangers inherent in imbuing the old mythologies of male-governed society with the new female-directed demands of the age" (158).

Caird depicts Hadria's ongoing conversations with the most influential women in her life, her sister-in-law, Henriette, and her neighbor, Lady Engleton. Henriette is particularly influential in Hadria's life as she has played matchmaker in promoting the marriage between her brother Hubert and Hadria. As Henriette mendaciously convinced Hubert to pretend to accede to a less conventional marriage that would theoretically cede more independence to Hadria than was usual, Hadria considers Henriette to have conspired in a fraud, and she considers her an enemy. Henriette consistently presents the conventional view of marriage and feminine self-sacrifice. She feels no remorse for her part in tricking Hadria into marriage with her brother, and Hadria directs her angriest and most radical speeches to Henriette, as in this exchange:

“It would take too long to go into this subject,” said Henriette. “I can only repeat that I fail to understand your extraordinary views of the holiest of human instincts.”

“*That* catch-word! And you use it rashly, Henriette, for do you not know that the deepest of all degradation comes of misusing that which is most holy?”

“A woman who does her duty is not to be accused of misusing anything,” cried Miss Temperley hotly.

“Is there then no sin, no misuse of power in sending into the world swarms of fortuitous, poverty-stricken human souls, as those souls must be who are born in bondage, with the blended instincts of the slave and the master for a proud inheritance? It sounds awful I know, but truth is apt to sound awful. Motherhood, as our wisdom has appointed it, among civilized people, represents a prostitution of the reproductive powers, which precisely corresponds to that other abuse, which seems to most of us so infinitely more shocking.” (249-250)

This conversation is one of many in the novel wherein Hadria passionately attacks convention, and Henriette defends the need for womanly submission. Hadria's assertion that motherhood has been forced on unwilling women like her is enraged; the sheer force of her language leaps from the page, conveying the righteous anger Caird is communicating to her readers as their right.

Hadria's other sparring partner, Lady Engleton, is described as a woman unwilling to entertain uncertainty or openness. Like Valeria Du Prel, she is another example of the "independent woman" who only dabbles in new ideas. The narrator describes her someone who "enjoyed playing with unorthodox speculations, but...objected to have her customary feelings interfered with...She liked to leave a question delicately balanced, enjoying all the fun of 'advanced' thought without endangering her favorite sentiments" (187). Caird effectively presents Lady Engleton as the figure Hadria could have been. Her husband Hubert, in fact, sees Lady Engleton as the woman he thought he was marrying in Hadria: she is an artist, and therefore has "originality and brilliance," (127) but never trespasses the bounds of conventionality. He thinks of Lady Engleton that she "always knew when to stop; she had the genius of moderation. She stood to Hadria as a correct rendering of a cherished idea stands to a faulty one" (127). Lady Engleton, who is thoughtful and intelligent enough to debate with Hadria, nevertheless is unwilling to consider the potential for change in a society that satisfies her in its current form. For Caird, the Henriettes and Lady Engletons of the world represent the contemporary forces that are marshalled most effectively against emerging feminists; thus, Hadria's anger and eloquence are deployed in contrast to their statements throughout the novel. The force of her language, used to name and designate, illustrates the power of the said to create a teleological narrative of oppression and pain (Levinas 36).

### **3.4 Critiquing the Larger Said through Scenes of Reading**

The final consideration that Grand investigates about the power of language is in the potential for shaping young women's convictions through their reading, part of the late-century debate on women's rights. As Ann Heilmann suggests, the popular *Punch* cartoon "Donna Quixote" captures much of the force of the controversy. The illustration depicts the New Woman character dressed as a traditional "bluestocking" with her feet on a pile of books, and surrounded by symbols suggesting her militant feminist ideas. She is reading/has read Ibsen, Tolstoy, Sarah Grand, Iota, and Mona Caird—these books have left her with, as the caption declares "A world of disorderly notions, *picked out of books*, crowded into his (her) imagination" (3). The books at her feet, from the perspective of the *Punch* cartoonist, represent the subversive influences on the young bluestocking produced by literary rabble rousers—authors who are notably either women or foreigners. Unwittingly, the cartoonist depicts exactly what New Woman writers hope for: their novels and those of like-minded writers will effectively model the beginnings of a new "larger said" that is both contrarian and feminist. As Heilmann notes, not only does the cartoon depict the significant role of reading and writing for the New Woman, but it captures the intersection of "literary (self-) representation, . . . popular culture, and first-wave feminism" (4). Notably, the cartoon illustrates the unease in the late nineteenth century with women reading novels; the general suspicion of the effect on women of reading novels at this point mirrored the earlier targeting of sensation novels, but "the issue of women's reading in the 1890s becomes most active around the question of access to knowledge" (301).

Although Caird does not address this issue, in *The Heavenly Twins*, Evadne Frayling's bid for more agency in determining her future is linked by Grand to the books she has read and their power in shaping Evadne's convictions about her worth and identity. As Flint points out, "Evadne's reading is her source of knowledge about herself and her world. When her concerns

and her reading shift from personal reading to social/political works, she “realizes her own limitations” (25). Grand links Evadne’s identity so closely to her reading because in order for the New Woman to survive, she “must learn first and foremost to be a critic of her culture. Her failure or success depends upon how well she learns to read—men’s books, men’s reasoning, men’s means of control, and the masculine privilege that organizes the marriage plot” (Mangum 90).

The first chapter of the novel begins “At nineteen Evadne looked out of narrow eyes at an untried world inquiringly. She wanted to know” (5). The narrator goes on to describe Evadne as a child who “demand[ed] instruction as a right” Her relationship with her father, who underestimates her intelligence, focuses Evadne’s energies on acquiring facts and accurate information, for this is the advice her father gives Evadne’s brothers. Seeking facts leads her first to study mathematics, and later, to read opportunistically. When a book or novel is left out by her father or a visitor, Evadne takes the opportunity for unsanctioned reading, documenting her impressions in a commonplace book (16). Reading in this way, Evadne is exposed to the ideas of John Stuart Mill on “The Subjection of Women,” Lewes “Life of Goethe,” and Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield*. She later finds a box of science books in the attic and studies anatomy and physiology. Acquiring this type of knowledge is taboo for a young woman of her class, but the narrator points out that Evadne reads both fiction and nonfiction “with the utmost deliberation and with intellect clear and senses unaffected by anything” (24). While she goes on to study “pathology...prophylactics and therapeutics,” she is nevertheless “quite unharmed because she made no personal application of her knowledge as the coarser masculine mind of the ordinary medical student is apt to do” (24). Her reading and writing produces in Evadne a logical, disinterested worldview. As the narrator describes her character, on the brink of womanhood,

when she is made to become more self-conscious, Evadne's chief interest is the acquisition of knowledge; she is not primarily interested in literature, as "mind as creator appealed to her less than mind as recorder, reasoner, and ruler; and for one gem or poetry or other beauty of purely literary value which she quotes, there are fifty records of principles of action" (25).

Given Evadne's dedication to facts and knowledge, and her understanding of anatomy, it is inevitable that she will resist living with a husband who has been unmasked as profligate. Her bid for release from marriage to a husband she no longer trusts is, however, foiled by her mother's tearful plea that she has embarrassed her family by adopting such an unorthodox stand against marriage. To all of Evadne's concerns about Major Colquhon, Mrs. Frayling simply responds that Evadne must read her Bible, say her prayers, and do the right thing (106). Mrs. Frayling blames Evadne's obstinacy on her reading:

"Once you over-educate a girl, you can do nothing with her, she gives herself such airs; and you have managed to over-educate yourself somehow, although how remains a mystery. But one thing I am determined upon. Your poor sisters shall never have a book I don't know off by heart myself. I shall lock them all up.  
(107)

Reading, as Adam Seth Lowenstein notes, is "an emancipatory force" in a young woman's life (436). However, later, Evadne's undoing and collapse into hysteria is also directly linked to her reading, or her lack thereof. Having promised Colonel Colquhon that she will not act on her newly formulated feminist convictions, she stops reading any challenging or rigorous texts that might motivate her to take action. Instead, she declines into a bitter, frustrated woman who will no longer engage with substantive ideas about women. Her comments in the last section of the novel reflect how her willingness to read only trivial and "safe" women's novels both reflects

and shapes her decline into depression. After expressing a distaste for discussions of politics or business, she declares the uselessness of women attempting to play a role in public life:

“I hear women say that they are obliged to interfere just now in all that concerns themselves because men have cheated and imposed upon them to a quite unbearable extent. But they will do no good by it. Their position is perfectly hopeless, and the mere trade of governing is a coarse pursuit, and therefore most objectionable for us” (533).

When asked about her reading, Evadne admits that she had sought knowledge as a young woman, but now avoids books that are “true to life.” Instead, she prefers safe books, those that will “take me out of this world and make me feel something,” books that have “the effect of rest upon my mind;” she likes best “to know nothing and believe in ghosts” (534). Later in Dr. Galbraith’s narrative, he makes clear that he understands how Evadne’s promise to Colonel Colquhoun that she will not act on her beliefs has caused her to decline into bitterness and depression over the years.

The relationship between Evadne’s ideas, her reading, and her ability to act on the knowledge that she has acquired, reflects Levinas’s description of the way that the said confers identity on human beings: the said, in its fixing of meaning, creates narratives over time—it “imprisons the living in a state of consciousness” (38) and makes subjective identity possible. Evadne’s worldview, her ethical positions, had been formed through her reading and later, through conversations in Malta. Her inability to act on these positions, to contribute to the larger conversation, has left her stunted and rigid, indifferent to the possibilities around her. “At the crux of the general epistemological concerns of the novel lies this conflict between action and passive surrender to a predetermined life-script (Flint 440).

### 3.5 Conclusion

Clearly, addressing the need for social change was not a new tactic for Victorian novelists: in writing novels of social criticism in an effort to affect their readers' opinions, New Woman novelists followed the most influential novelists of the mid-Victorian period, including Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and Elizabeth Gaskell. However, the New Woman writers specifically target middle class women readers with their middlebrow novels in order to change readers' behaviors and enlist them in an activist community<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, in writing serious, polemical fiction, in fact, they reclaim the moral high ground: instead of corrupting the minds of young women readers, as sensation and gothic novels were widely considered to do, the New Women novelists intend to employ fiction in a serious effort to dramatize the lived experience of middle class women coping with a society in transition and to connect women with each other. As Ann Ardis argues in the last chapter of *New Women, New Novels*, these authors deserve recognition for their determined use of polemical content: "They flaunt their anger. They proclaim their heresies in loud voices. They document the efforts made to silence them. And they produce an aesthetic of political engagement that is quite different from the (ostensibly) apolitical formalism of high modernism" (170).

The New Woman novelists represented a transitional moment at the end of the century that is equidistant from the certainties of mid-Victorian novelists and the confident innovations of the Modernists. As Elaine Showalter discusses in *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, what she calls "textual anarchy" began with George Eliot's death in 1880 (59). Some, like Olive Schreiner, openly rejected Eliot's moralistic tone (Showalter 64) and defended a more personal aesthetic. Eliot was widely considered to have written from a man's point of view, while the New Woman writers were writing to women readers and with the intent of making

political and social statements that reflected a kind of gender solidarity (64). Ella Hepworth Dixon articulated the act of writing as promoting “a kind of moral and social trades-unionism among women” (qtd. in Showalter 64). Thus, the generic innovations that these writers introduced were intended to reflect a myriad of women’s experiences that could not be confined to the traditional form of the three-decker mid-Victorian novel.

According to Gail Cunningham, “The important point is that for this brief period at least the emancipation of women and the emancipation of the English novel advanced together” (3). As Cunningham notes, because New Women were rebelling within a personal context, the novel was a more appropriate way of portraying them as the novel could “investigate in detail the clash between radical principles and the actualities of contemporary life” (17) through “a fictional heroine who took a fresh look at these” and who would provide a model for with whom middle class women readers could safely identify (17).

Both Caird and Grand end their novels with broken, exhausted protagonists whose failure to act on their principles has defeated their early promise as radical reformers. Through her misguided promise to Colquhoun, Evadne dooms herself to a lifetime of suppressing her intellectual interests and stifling her activist impulses. Hadria surrenders to her mother’s needs and continues the destructive cycle of feminine self-sacrifice that Caird presents. However, even a dystopian ending cannot fully mute the voices of the women in these novels for their readers. As Anna Maria Jones argues in her 2007 article “A Track to the Water’s Edge”: Learning to Suffer in Sarah Grand’s ‘The Heavenly Twins,’” the radical potential of these novels lies less in the imagined success of their protagonists and more in what she defines as a kind of performative self-sacrifice that readers must undergo. Activist readers of these novels are called on to suffer by intellectually holding both social critique and “utopian idealism” simultaneously (222). As

readers come to understand within their own cultural context, their own time is not likely to see the fruition of their desire for change; that will occur in a utopian future, a future secured at least in part through the writing of the present. As they internalize a new, feminist, utopian said, these readers become part of a community newly engaged in critiquing the larger said whose power has defined them. These novels are not intended, like the “safe” novels that Evadne reads, to transport readers to a hopeful but solely imaginative fantasy world. Imaginative fantasy is perhaps beguiling, but it does not provoke its readers to action, and that is the end to which the New Woman writers are leading.

The nature of the book and of the said, as Levinas concludes, is that books are constituted of “pure said,” the presentation of the saying and its context. But books constantly interrupt one another’s discourse; they call for other books, and the dialogue continues, already in need of further interruption as the book is printed, already “interpreted in a saying distinct from the said” (171); just as Caird and Grand shape a new said to influence the larger discourse, they anticipate the next wave of women writers who will become a part of the ongoing conversation.

### 3.2 Endnote

<sup>1</sup>Teresa Mangum, in *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant* (1998), argues that Sarah Grand, as a New Woman novelist, was part of a turn of the century movement in women’s fiction to engage middle class women readers in an “intermediate” level of fiction. Mangum quotes Jane Tompkins’ study of nineteenth century American fiction, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790 -1860* (1985), on the role of middlebrow novels. Tompkins notes: “I see them as doing a certain kind of cultural work within a specific historical situation and value them for that reason. I see their plots and characters as providing society with a means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which the authors and their

readers shared, dramatizing its conflicts, and recommending solutions” (qtd. in Mangum 20).

Mangum argues that New Woman novels demonstrate the emergence of a category of fiction that critics would be “routinely calling ‘middlebrow’ only a few years later (19). As Mangum goes on to note, New Woman novelists, along with other novelists who fall into the middlebrow

#### 4 THE NEW WOMAN WRITERS AND THE SAYING

*Otherwise than Being*, Levinas’s study of the limits of philosophy, discusses the tension between the said, which he defines as language, and the saying, which he defines in a number of ways, but which finally comes to embody the ineffable face-to-face moment wherein ethics originates. Before the saying is concretized into language, into the said, there must first be a condition between the subject and the other that is not borne in words; this is the definition of proximity, or the responsibility to the other. Levinas acknowledges the equivocal and enigmatic nature of the saying, acknowledging too its connection to transcendence (10): “Being and entities weigh heavily by virtue of the saying that gives them light. *Nothing is more grave, more august, than responsibility for the other, and saying, in which there is no play, has a gravity more grave than its own being or not being*” (46). (my italics). Clearly, states Levinas, in the process that leads saying to said, justice and self-reflection become possible (46).

The texts I examine in this chapter interrogate perhaps the most powerful weapon arrayed against Victorian women—the expectation that they would willingly sacrifice their autonomy and aspirations for their parents, husbands, and children—through visions, dreams and allegorical passages that allow their readers the freedom to experience meanings that are less fixed, but that carry that “gravity more grave” to which Levinas refers. Instead, New Woman

writers redirect women's self-sacrifice away from a duty to husband and children and replace the traditional responsibility with the need to secure the welfare of future generations of women.

These writers depict a necessary and willing self-sacrificial stance that women in the present must embrace in order to envision and promote a more equitable and ethical future for later generations. While womanly self-sacrifice and its destructive effects are a prevalent theme in the New Woman canon, these novelists re-conceive the notion in more utopian and Levinasian terms. For Levinas, mutual self-sacrifice is a primordial and ethical stance; in the texts I examine here, mythical or allegorical framing suggests the unconscious, precognitive nature of the drive.

Levinas describes language as an amphibology, a term that the OED defines as "a sentence which may be construed in two distinct senses." For Levinas, the two distinct but simultaneous meanings of language are the essential said and the transcendent saying. He argues that the face-to-face ethical encounter is manifested through language, and the said and saying are then integrated in the expression of the ethical identity (Eaglestone 140). This integration of the said and the saying is critical to my re-framing of the often-criticized melding of experimental narrative with polemical sections in New Woman writing. I read their structural hybridities as reiterating the characteristics of the said and the saying. The narratives within which political and social discussions are embedded provide a frame for these writers' interrogation of language and its power, their examination of the said. The experimental and more elusive passages in their texts, then, I argue, illustrate their engagement with Levinas' concept of the saying. For example, Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* presents angry monologues by Lyndall, her proto-feminist protagonist, which angrily indict the controlling and confining narrative about women and their power. Clearly, Schreiner employs Lyndall's comments to encourage readers to consider the power of language as it has been arrayed against them. However, the text also drifts

into allegorical passages that appeal to the reader's inarticulate and unconscious recognition of the other.

In the texts I examine, elusive, symbolic and transcendent moments presented as visions, dreams and allegories engage with experiences that cannot be expressed through transactional language. These powerful scenes interject the weight of mythology and folklore into texts, along with their appeal to the Jungian unconscious. Thus, while asserting common cause with their readers and bending the dominant discourse—the said—to their own ends, New Woman writers simultaneously establish what Eagleton describes as a “purposeful inconclusiveness” (136).

In this chapter, then, I argue that the New Woman writers engage with Levinas's concept of the saying through their use of dreams, visions, and allegories to envision an ethical proximity with their readers, asserting an obligation and a responsibility to future generations of women, which will require intentional self-sacrifice in the present. If the saying constitutes a tentative approach to the other without attempting to define or delimit the other, a kind of passivity, we see the New Woman writers dedicating themselves to the welfare of future generations of women. This approach makes clear why, even in their polemical passages, these novels never behave as recruitment tools for some specific call to action. New Woman writers are not recruiting young suffragists; they think more speculatively and broadly, beyond current struggles toward specific ends. They intend to redeem the past oppressive self-abnegation, which was one-sided and forced them into confining roles; they now, in mythic terms, dedicate themselves to a principled and deliberate forfeit of ease, comfort, and acceptance in order to secure an ethical future for later generations of women. This is ultimately the feminist project they describe in their writings.

I begin my argument by noting intersections between three critical discourses: New Woman studies, Bakhtinian chronotopes, and folklore studies. Adam Seth Lowenstein, in his study “‘Not a Novel, Nor Even a Well-Ordered Story’: Formal Experimentation and Psychological Innovation in Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*,” argues that the New Woman writers critique cultural norms through allegorical forms that rely on “outdated or anachronistic temporalities, often situated in a pre-modern, pre-civilized Golden Age, in order to speak about futurity and reform” (Lowenstein 434). Bruce Clarke, discussing allegory as a means of engaging technological advances, describes the function of allegory as a means of social critique: “Allegorical temporality is discontinuous time. In allegory some temporal dissonance, some historical clash of past and present, present and future, generates a layered text often intended to neutralize or harmonize that dissonance, to recuperate an obsolescence” (60). This use of an ancient setting as a way of envisioning future reform is similar to Bakhtin’s discussion of “historical inversion,” or Golden Age thinking, wherein the writer locates ideals of “purpose, ideal, justice, perfection, the harmonious condition of man and society” in a heroic or Edenic past (147). The Golden Age, in Bakhtinian terms, is not a specific historic period, but instead refers to an imagined period celebrated as a mythic time in which humans achieved legendary status. The New Woman writers often either set their dreams and visions in an idealized folkloric past, or they use forms like fairytales and allegories that recall an idealized past. In doing so, they appeal to readers on an unconscious level, accessing the collective memories of the values taught by these tales. To access a mythic past, to assert the primacy of an idealized good, makes possible a vision of a mythic future for women.

This concept of employing a mythic vision is examined by Sasha L. Biro, in her article “Levinas’s Reception of the Mythic” Biro argues that, although Levinas initially rejects the

mythic as a state of being before reflection and thought and thus, before the ethical, he uses mythic language and examples to develop his assertions. Like Eagleton, Biro reads Levinas's language as performative and constantly interrupting itself. She reads Levinas, incorporating mythic examples throughout his writing, as open to an alternative reading: "the myth shines through, speaking not of a pagan nothingness shorn from the ethical but, instead, of the power (primacy) of the imagination, which is in itself ethical" (427). The New Woman writers incorporate mythic language and references to access the diachronic nature of the saying—the obligation to the other is both infinite and ambiguous.

Anticipating magical realism, these texts illustrate how daily, normative events could at any moment "unfold into a mythological scene or tableau" (Bakhtin 104); thus, historical time and mythological time are interwoven and indistinguishable. Here, I return to Mikhail Bakhtin in his discussion of the chronotope. As he traces the development of the novel from ancient Greek romances to the works of Rabelais, Bakhtin identifies a number of major and minor chronotopes, beginning with the "adventure-time" of ancient Greek romances. In his discussion of the adventure-time chronotope, Bakhtin notes that at the core of all chronotopes in ancient literature is "folk-mythological time;" the literature of the ancient Greeks is characterized by their sense that reality was shot through with traces of mythological time. This aspect of the Greek epic and drama characterizes scenes and tableaux in New Woman texts that position dreams and visions as momentary intrusions into everyday life, suggesting an intersection between reality and myth that speaks to Biro's interpretation of Levinas's discussion of the ethical identity.

The texts I examine here fall into two categories: visions that evoke the form of fairytales or folktales, and narratives that employ prophetic allegory. George Egerton, in the dream sequence from her short story "A Cross Line" in *Keynotes* (1893); Ella Hepworth Dixon, in *Mary Erle's*

mirror vision from *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894); Emma Frances Brooke, in Jessamine's dream from *A Superfluous Woman* (1894); and Olive Schreiner, in Lyndall's mirror visions from *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) explore shared and powerfully emotional experiences through dreams and visions that carry mythic weight. These writers invite readers to participate in transformative scenes that evoke the familiar forms of childhood—fairytales or folktales—but set within newly adult contexts. Sarah Grand, in her “Proem” section of *The Heavenly Twins*, and Olive Schreiner, in both *The Story of an African Farm* and “Three Dreams in the Desert,” employ prophetic allegory to say the unsayable through an ancient form, accessing Golden Age archetypes to reach their readers on an unconscious level. Schreiner and Grand employ these allegories to envision an open-ended but hopeful future. Like biblical prophets, the rich language they use is suggestive but not definitive. Thus, building on Biro's argument, I read all of the texts I examine here as employing strange, obscure, or allusive language to capture shared experiences that are deeply personal or boldly prophetic. In their very obscurity, the visions, dreams and prophecies discussed here resist closure; they begin a dialogue with readers and invite questions and other narratives.

Less directly, these claims are also undergirded by Rachel Hollander's argument in her essay “*Daniel Deronda* and the Ethics of Alterity”, wherein she suggests that the more open and less traditional ending for Gwendolen Harleth, as opposed to the rather conventional ending for the novel's titular protagonist, preserves the “originary ethical moment of uncertainty” (283); this openness at the end of the novel suggests the shortcomings of the linear, conventional realist novel to examine an ethics based on openness to the other (284). As I have suggested in previous chapters, the innovations introduced by New Woman writers are intended to address these shortcomings. However, as Ann Ardis points out, while the work of these novelists displayed

some of the same characteristics of accredited proto-modernists, their radical feminism sidelined the texts (170). Their structural innovations have been considered tentative, transitional, pre-modernist forays into radical experimentation. Here I assert instead the intentionality of narrative experimentation to invent a narrative structure appropriate to the feminist project; as Bakhtin notes, the novel is the most open and appropriate form for those writers engaged in critiquing their culture because of its availability to reinvention.

#### **4.1 Dreams, Visions, and Trances**

The language of prophetic or numinous vision certainly satisfies Levinas's description of the saying as "grave" and authoritative. For late-Victorian readers, biblical passages from both the Old and New Testament would be familiar; in addition, reasonably educated readers would be aware of literary references to tales from classical Greek mythology. The use of visions in New Woman fiction then offers an opportunity to lend a mythic weight to a woman's experience. The experiences are nearly always prophetic; thus, they function, like visions and dreams in epic poems, to be interpreted. Penelope's dream about her suitors as geese slaughtered by an eagle in the *Odyssey*, for example, is sent to her by Athena to comfort and strengthen her as she staves off the aggressive suitors. This dream, though cast in symbols, is more straightforward than many, as the eagle is revealed as Odysseus. Less straightforward is Hecuba's dream, when pregnant with Paris, that she will give birth to a burning torch. Along with biblical prophetic dreams that are interpreted by such figures as Elisha and Joseph, these dreams are cast in symbolic terms that require readers to understand their significance on a nonliteral level. Three examples of similar dreams or visions are employed by George Egerton, Emma Frances Brooke, and Ella Hepworth Dixon.

One of the most familiar visions in the New Woman canon appears in the short story “A Cross Line,” the first in the collection *Keynotes* (1893) by George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne). As the un-named protagonist is lying in the sun, she imagines that she sees in the clouds “[o]ld time galleons ...with their wealth of snowy sail spread, riding breast to breast up a wide blue fjord after victory” (8). Longing to escape domestic drudgery, she imagines Cleopatra and Antony, and sees herself “in Arabia on the back of a swift steed” (8), embarking on an intensely erotic imaginative adventure:

Flashing eyes set in dark faces surround her; ...her thoughts shape themselves into a wild song, a song to her steed of flowing mane and satin skin...a song to the untamed spirit that dwells within her. Then she fancies she is on the stage of an ancient theatre out in the open air, with hundreds of faces upturned towards her. She is gauze-clad in a cobweb garment of wondrous tissue. Her arms are clasped by jeweled snakes, and one with quivering diamond fangs coils round her hips...She bounds forward and dances, bends her lissome waist, and curves her slender arms, and gives to the soul of each man what he craves...(8)

This vision is an unabashedly erotic fantasy of controlling and enthralling a gathering of men subservient to her sexuality. However, even more important than its exploration and celebration of a woman’s desire and ambition is the setting for the fantasy. In a Golden Age past, to be sure, women certainly were not granted more agency then than during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but logic is not the point here. The daily, normative event could at any moment “unfold into a mythological scene or tableau” (104); thus, historical time and mythological time are interwoven and indistinguishable. The moment that the protagonist’s daydream becomes more vivid depicts the intrusion of mythological time into historical time. The effect is much like the later use of

magical realism—blurring the line between prosaic reality and mythological fantasy imbues the vision with narrative gravity. We cross over into adventure-time, wherein time and space are suspended and alien. The subsequent vision acquires the strangeness and mystery of the saying both because it will prove to have implications for the protagonist's understanding of her obligations to other women, and also because its power derives from symbolic associations and suggestions.

The ancient setting for the fantasy employs the power of myth. As Ann Ardis notes, it is significant that the protagonist's fantasy takes place in an ancient culture wherein "she would be able to take pleasure in both her erotic fantasy and her fantasy of success as an artist in a public forum" (100). The protagonist "moves from culture into nature—and exposes the latter as culture's vision of what lies below or behind itself in a primitive or archaic cultural formation" (100). The mythic past connects the protagonist to Cleopatra, a powerful figure both for her status as a ruler and as an alluring woman. For her readers, the symbol of a powerful woman monarch who also leveraged her sexuality as part of her power would provide a compelling fantasy. However, even more significant is the protagonist's view of her imaginary self "on the stage of an ancient theatre out in the open air, with hundreds of faces upturned towards her." Greek tragedies and comedies were didactic; they engaged their audiences in debates about moments of ethical crisis, and the arc of justice they trace reflects the arc of social justice that developed in Greek culture. The relationship between playwright and audience is thus analogous to the relationship between Egerton and her readers. Egerton employs this image deliberately to comment on her intention to use narrative as a means of engaging her readers in a conversation about their own understanding of the transitional time in which they were living and the ethics of the future.

Because George Egerton depicts women's sexuality and maternity as part of their nature, she is sometimes dismissed by feminist critics as a biological essentialist. However, Sally Ledger reads in her short stories "an unresolved tension between an essentialist, biologically driven maternal impulse associated with femininity, and a less tangible 'excess' of desire that has, in the stories, nothing to do with reproductive sexuality" (xix). Desire in the fantasy is certainly erotic, but the protagonist is expressing her own desire as well for the agency to express herself publically. The eroticism of the fantasy is inescapable, but sexual desire, for Egerton, is a metaphor for ambition and influence.

Lisa Hager argues that Egerton intends even more in her depiction later in the story of the relationship between the protagonist and her maid; their cross-class intimacy suggests a view of women's sexuality that depicts a "community of women" who connect with one another mutually instead of hierarchically (1). Hager's reading of the text is supported by the protagonist's own interpretation of her dream as she reflects later on the ways women are connected in a kind of unacknowledged "sisterhood." The immediate aftermath of her intensely passionate vision is the protagonist's meditation on her conviction that men have created an image of women that limits their perception of the true and more complex nature of women. Men are blind to a restlessness in women and a desire for change and excitement, what she considers the fundamental "primeval trait" that is found in women (9). She envisions women as participating in an unwritten code to keep "the workings of our hearts...closed to them, that we are cunning enough or great enough to seem to be what they would have us, rather than be what we are" (9). Few men, she claims, have the insight to understand the contradictory nature of women. Women, however, she thinks, are united in an unspoken understanding of this link between them: "Women talk to me—why, I can't say—but always they come, strip their hearts

and souls naked, and let me see the hidden folds of their natures. The greatest tragedies I have ever read are child's play to those I have seen acted in the inner life of outwardly commonplace women. A woman must beware of speaking the truth to a man; he loves her the less for it. It is the elusive spirit in her that he divines but cannot seize that fascinates and keeps him" (11). The protagonist's meditation establishes her as an ethical actor; she asserts her responsibility to other women and the bonds of responsibility that link women with one another. Additionally, the vision binds women in, significantly, an unspoken code—one that is unsayable, and in fact, does not need expression.

This meditation is the very definition of Levinas's concept of proximity. Women, according to Egerton, do not even need to voice the links between them and their obligation to one another. This understanding simply is inherent in their condition. Indeed, for the protagonist, or for Egerton, all women share this universal fantasy of empowerment reaching back into a mythic past; it is a shared understanding of their identity and accesses as well a sense of continuity and connection with pre-Christian, matriarchal societies. However, this shared understanding also has important implications for the present and the future in its clear depiction of the intention to acquire power in a public and influential setting.

Like Egerton, Emma Frances Brooke employs a compelling vision for her protagonist that interrogates a woman's obligation to ethical maternity. Through a powerful but horrifying vision in *A Superfluous Woman*, Brooke's protagonist conjures a vision of a biblical hell wherein she suspends herself, determined to prevent the birth of a deformed child. Dissatisfaction with her superficial life led the young Jessamine to run away to the Highlands to work on a farm, but this solution was not satisfactory. Suffering from restlessness and a desire to thwart the conventions, the character can neither accept the place dictated by her class, nor break from the expectations

she has been raised to meet. In the last section of the novel, having perversely succumbed to the demands of her society status and married the syphilitic Lord Heriot, she has borne him two deformed children. Finally, she wills herself into a trancelike state in order to prevent the birth of a third monstrous child.

In her trance, Jessamine sees herself poised on the edge of an abyss from which she has been pulled: “a place of torture in the centre of a whirl of fire and noise. There were shapes and cries, regiments of creatures, waves of fire, and wide shouting mouths with fangs that darted and fastened on her heart.” She imagines the child she is carrying as “a shadow” that is “small, still, insignificant, but containing within itself monstrous possibilities” (210). As the “Review of Reviews” pointed out, the novel has much the same theme that Grand develops in the “Edith” narrative in *The Heavenly Twins*. However, while Grand depicts Edith’s children as sickly and Edith eventually consumed by madness and rage, Brooke instead creates a protagonist who imagines the effects of syphilis through a vision of hell that could be pulled straight from the pages of *The Book of Revelation* or Dante’s *Inferno*. The effect is certainly a more gothic imagining of the theme, but the prophetic weight of the language accomplishes something different from Grand’s more straightforward depiction; in Brooke’s depiction, the pregnant woman is no longer a victim. She is asserting power over the symbolic importance of her body as a reproductive mechanism. Like all women, her significance to her husband and to her culture lies in the maintenance of her virginity so that she can, after marriage, bear the next generation of property owners. In choosing not to have a child, she does not reject this role so much as she employs it to deny both her husband and the surrounding culture its expectation. She asserts the power of women to control their bodies.

Like Egerton, Brooke accesses here the collective power of women's memories and their connections with a continuous narrative about transgressive women. She recalls the orthodox view of suffering in childbirth as punishment meted out to Eve for her disobedience. Jessamine's decision to manipulate the process for her own intentions elevates her to the stature of biblical characters who rebel against the demands of a patriarchal society. She thus becomes a threat to a culture that accepts the propagation of an increasingly degenerate upper class. Her decision has tragic consequences for herself and her child, but she also effectively ends the monstrous line of her husband's family, and she decides for herself, rejecting any effective treatment. The gothic vision of hellish maternity effectively functions as both a cautionary tale for readers and a mythic vision of a woman's power and agency rather than as a victim of a profligate husband. Brooke here makes a bold gesture to reach out to readers and engage them, not only in the debate surrounding The Contagious Diseases Act, but also implying the necessity for women to consider their own reproductive rights. These suggestions, though, are couched in terms that, like Egerton's vision, carry the weight of religious ritual and thus elevate the woman's role to heroic and powerful. Jessamine becomes a figure carrying out the necessary self-sacrifice of a generation of women in order to bring about a more open and optimistic future. As Anna Maria Jones argues in "A Track to the Water's Edge: Learning to Suffer in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*," Brooke's depiction of Jessamine's suffering traces a motif in New Woman texts—readers must suffer for the benefit of future generations (218). The readers to whom the New Woman writers direct their texts will be transformed into new women whose political struggles will benefit those who come after them. Egerton and Brooke, through their readers, expand the call to the other and the ethical obligation to the other outward to successive generations.

Two final scenes link the power of the prophetic vision with fairytale tropes that integrate childhood memories and folkloric time. According to Bruno Bettelheim, fairytales resonate with readers' first memories of learning to distinguish between good and evil, suffering and punishment. Young girls read or listen to fairytales as a way of exploring their identities (383). They operate in that primordial and unconscious space that Levinas describes. Images of fairytale princesses and evil queens, wicked stepmothers and oppressed stepdaughters shape young women's understanding of their identity. One of the most familiar and powerful images from fairytales is the image of the wicked queen in *Snow White* looking into the mirror to confirm that she is still "the fairest of them all." The image of a woman seeking reassurance of her power from a mirror is both a commentary on the commodification of women's beauty and the need to confront one's reflection in order to understand one's identity. The scene also suggests that the Queen is confronting another self—a reflected and threatening other. Similarly, the mirror scenes in both Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* and Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* anticipate Sir James Frazer's analysis of reflections in *The Golden Bough*. In Chapter 18.3, "The Soul as a Shadow and Reflection," Frazer documents widespread beliefs that link reflections with "the shadow-soul" and death. Frazer notes that this belief explains the Victorian tradition of covering mirrors after a death, as "[i]t is feared that the soul, projected out of the person in the shape of his reflection in the mirror, may be carried off by the ghost of the departed." Both Dixon and Schreiner employ mirror scenes that involve a protagonist confronting an alternate self—a shadow-soul—in the mirror as she faces an ethical crisis. In each case, the protagonist reiterates her acceptance of present suffering that will be redeemed in a more optimistic future.

Ella Hepworth Dixon constructs a dramatic and poetic confrontation in a mirror between her protagonist, Mary Erle, and the two halves of Mary's self: the self she has become through dutiful and exhausting work, and the self who is still yearning for a passionate and fulfilling connection with a man. In this vision, Dixon describes the dilemma shared by many of her readers struggling with the tug of war they experience between making the honorable choice and making the easy choice. Offered the opportunity to run away with her former fiancé, who abandoned her to marry a wealthy woman, she is momentarily tempted. She sees this moment as perhaps her last chance to experience a man's love. After years of struggle, she is bitter about "the impotence, the helplessness of woman's lot... She was the plaything, the sport of destiny, and destiny always won the game" (254). However, at this point in the novel, Mary has seen two women die painful deaths because they have surrendered to passion and have trusted a man.

The fair and just self whom Mary has embraced is, of course, the source of her response, which she frames as a statement of unity with other women: "I can't, I won't, deliberately injure another woman. Think how she would suffer! Oh, the torture of women's lives—the helplessness, the impotence, the emptiness!" (255). Dixon then confronts Mary with the consequences of her decision through a mirror vision in Chapter XXII, "The Woman in the Glass." Walking through the city in an effort to avoid another confrontation with Hemmings, Mary is continually reminded of his wife and children as she notices "endless rows of houses, trim, smug dwellings, every one of which represented the Family—that special product of civilisation for which she, as an individual, was to be sacrificed...." (259). After returning to her rooms, unable to sleep, Mary looks into the mirror; she has a sense of being haunted by another self, as she thinks that she has struggled with "a strange sense of dual individuality" (262). In the

mirror she sees “a woman...with reproachful, haunting eyes” who appears “curiously young” (263):

The cheeks were delicately thin, but the lips were those of a girl of eighteen; in the fluffy, fair head the few grey hairs were lost among the pale gold. There was the line of her throat, her beautiful white shoulders, the delicate modeling of her satiny arms. (263)

In the vision, this woman first appears to be the version of Mary whom she is trying to suppress, the Mary who longs to give in to Vincent. The vision in the mirror, like Gypsy’s vision in “A Cross Line,” asserts a woman’s power to attract a man. Mary has resisted this self, has not acknowledged her physical and sexual powers. But the woman in the mirror confronts her not only with her potential, but also with the negligible consequences of the unethical behavior Mary is debating:

‘You may torture me, starve me, but you cannot make me unlovable. He loves me!’ smiled the woman. ‘Why, he would ruin himself to-morrow for me. I have only to say one word, and his life is mine...We are alive now. We love each other. Give him to me! Only a few short years am I here,’ pleaded the haunting eyes: ‘I, and such as I, tearing our little hands in the search for gold, shaking them at the heavens with impotent vengeance...Why, people in the next generation will shrug their shoulders and say, “After all, they were only human.” And I,’ pleaded the woman in the glass, ‘I shall have lived.’ (264)

Mary, an idealistic woman who has watched other women suffer after agreeing to offers like Vincent’s, has long rejected this aspect of her identity. However, as she grows older and lonelier,

she is painfully aware of her lost opportunities. However, the vision in the mirror now shifts dramatically:

When she raised her head again, the eyes were no longer triumphant, they were reproachful. ‘Who am I? Why am I here?’ they asked: ‘To live is to suffer; why do you let me live? Must I go on looking back at you until my eyes are faded, my lashes are grey, until I have run through the gamut of mental and physical pain? I am a living, suffering entity,’ said the woman in the glass, ‘in a world of artificial laws; of laws made for man's convenience and pleasure, not for mine. Have I one thing for which I have longed? Have I a human love, have I the hope of immortality, have I even tasted the intoxication of achievement? Human life is but a moment in the æons of time, and yet one little human lifetime contains an eternity of suffering. Why, since you take joy from me, why do you let me live?’(263 – 65)

This *Snow White* confrontation reflects a set of urgent questions for Dixon’s readers. What is the place of women? If they reject the domestic life, what will be the alternative? How do they respond to the adversarial nature of their relationships with each other that has been imposed on them? Dixon, employing the mirror as a vehicle for a woman to confront the sides of her nature, embodies this dialectic literally as two women struggling with each other within every woman. Dixon never resolves the dilemma satisfactorily: Mary makes the ethical decision and refuses to undermine or destroy another woman’s marriage. But she does so at the cost of any happiness for herself, condemning herself to a lonely and painful life. This section of the novel is truly the heart of Dixon’s argument and is the only truly polemical section in *The Story of a Modern*

Woman. Clearly, Dixon foregrounds her insistence on the responsibility that women have for one another as a necessary commitment that will take them into a more fulfilling future.

Conversely, in *The Story of an African Farm*, Olive Schreiner depicts Lyndall as a unified and integrated self *only* when she confronts herself in the mirror. As she prepares to leave the farm with the stranger, she comforts her shadow-self:

‘We are all alone, you and I,’ she whispered; ‘no one helps us, no one understands us; but we will help ourselves.’ The eyes looked back at her. There was a world of assurance in their still depths. So they had looked at her ever since she could remember, when it was but a small child’s face above a blue pinafore. ‘We shall never be quite alone, you and I,’ she said; ‘we shall always be together, as we were when we were little.’

The beautiful eyes looked into the depths of her soul.

‘We are not afraid; we will help ourselves!’ she said. She stretched out her hand and pressed it over them on the glass. ‘Dear eyes! We will never be quite alone till they part us—till then!’ (131)

For Lyndall, the vision of the self she sees in the mirror is a kind of Wordsworthian vision of a child’s eyes. The eyes she sees, the face she sees, reminds her of the elusive period in her life before the struggle of adulthood. Schreiner employs a similar scene at Lyndall’s dying moment, wherein she literally watches her soul depart into the mirror:

Then the white face on the pillow looked at the white face in the glass. They had looked at each other often so before. It had been a child’s face once, looking out above its blue pinafore; it had been a woman’s face, with a dim

shadow in the eyes, and a something which had said, 'We are not afraid, you and I; we are together; we will fight, you and I.' (156)

As Lyndall dies, the narrator describes a "wonderful, yearning light in the eyes still" while "the soul, clear and unclouded, looked forth" (156). Dixon, writing a decade after Schreiner, depicts the fractured self that tradition has imposed on women. For Schreiner, the earliest of New Woman novelists, the woman in the mirror signifies the assertion that each woman will struggle in the present; however, she will also draw strength from her own recognition that there is a struggle to be fought. Lyndall's death is a defeat in the present, but her image in the mirror encourages her to see the future optimistically. The other Lyndall in the mirror is not only Lyndall's self, she is also other women. Thus, in Lyndall's assertion of unity and completion with her other self, she asserts her connection to and need for other women.

These images of the woman confronting herself in the mirror are powerful motifs from the unconscious, and I suggest that Dixon and Schreiner are reaching their readers here on a transcendent level, communicating an ethical struggle that is fundamental to women's identity. The image of a woman confronting herself is one they implant in their readers' minds; their feminist project rests, after all, in the willingness of women readers to confront themselves and their assumptions, and, finally, to acknowledge their need for one another and ethical responsibility for each other.

#### **4.2 Proems and Allegories**

The other set of texts to examine here use allegorical language, setting radical ideas within a familiar and centuries-old form. Allegory is also familiar to readers in the form of Christian teachings in Jesus' parables and classics like *Everyman* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Allegory, by nature, is a Golden Age form that generalizes about virtuous principles and

qualities. To write allegory is to write philosophy. In an 1888 letter to Havelock Ellis, Olive Schreiner writes that poetry and allegory are the forms she uses to convey her most layered and complex ideas. Her writing, she says, “is all poetry from the first to the last...There are allegories in it; I’ve tried to keep them out, but I can’t. I’ve come to the conclusion that only poetry is truth” (Schreiner and Rive 142). According to Gerald Monsman, “for Schreiner and her contemporaries, allegorical thinking supplied the connections, the correspondences between real and dream life, allowing the artist (and the reader) to understand his or her private aspirations in universal and historical terms” (55). Indeed, Schreiner relies on allegory to evoke emotional depth from more abstract ideas; allegorical writing for Schreiner proceeded, she believed, from a more unconscious and instinctive mode of working (Burdett 78). For Schreiner, then, allegory as a mode of writing proceeds directly from the source of the saying, wherein she connects with her readers through an indirect approach to language.

Among Schreiner’s many allegorical writings, of particular note here are two: “The Hunter,” which appeared in the section from *The Story of an African Farm* entitled “Waldo’s Stranger,” and the “Three Dreams in a Desert” selection from *Dreams*. Both allegories deal with the theme of renunciation in the search for truth. While “The Hunter” tells the story of the seeker of truth whose lifelong struggle to find truth requires the renunciation of worldly distractions, it is “Three Dreams in a Desert” that directly connects this theme to women. “Three Dreams” directly articulates Schreiner’s belief that women of her generation were preparing the way for future generations by writing toward the future.

“The Hunter” is reminiscent of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* sans the Christian focus. Waldo has refused money for his carving, preferring to offer his art to the stranger. Understanding this demonstration of Waldo’s integrity as an artist and seeker of truth, the

stranger tells Waldo the story of the man who seeks fulfillment by rejecting a typical life in order to seek truth. Like “Everyman,” this allegory is set in an ancient time wherein the Hunter of Truth is directed by Wisdom and Knowledge in his quest to find the beautiful silver bird of Truth. Dedicating his life to building a stairway to the mountains wherein the bird resides, the Hunter gradually sacrifices everything—Excess, Sensuality, Human Nature-- to his single-minded quest. Along the way, he acquires the virtues that accrue in his noble quest. Ultimately, like Mary Erle, the Hunter commits himself to noble Denial and heroic self-sacrifice in the cause of illumination for those who will come after him:

Where I lie down worn out other men will stand, young and fresh. By the steps that I have cut they will climb; by the stairs that I have built they will mount. They will never know the name of the man who made them...But they will mount, and on my work; they will climb, and by my stair! They will find her, and through me! And no man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself. (85)

Gerald Monsman suggests that Schreiner employs allegory as a means to present an “alternative configuration for the patriarchal and colonial suppression of the ‘thousand meanings’ of women's or natives' lives by an overwhelming cultural and technological power” (55). Through allegorical language, she presents a vision that unifies her readers around the “moment in which the self transcends its loneliness and identifies the Other as no longer foreign but as that in which its dreams are reflected” (56). Indeed, Schreiner appears to embrace the openness of allegory, its multivocal nature, as a means to drawing her readers closer. By focusing on women figures in her allegories, she elevates women's voices to the significance traditionally reserved only for

men. Writing about women in a complex and layered form that is directed to women readers, Schreiner imaginatively presents a more ethical future for her readers' descendants.

Perhaps Schreiner's most famous allegorical sketch, however, is "Three Dreams in a Desert," which became an almost sacred text for imprisoned suffragettes, some of whom could quote it verbatim (Heilmann 125) because of its powerful articulation of their role in preparing the way for generations of women to come. The piece depicts allegorically the position of women in the past, present, and an idealized future. In the first dream, the past, Woman lies unmoving in the sand, covered by the sand of centuries; she is burdened by the "hard-baked clay of Ancient Customs;" she was forced by Man into subjection during the Age-of-dominion-of-muscular-force and imprisoned by Inevitable Necessity. As the narrator watches, the age changes to the age-of-nervous-force and cuts the band of Inevitable Necessity. As the woman begins to move, she is inextricably bound to man, who cannot move until she does. She begins painfully and slowly to move, and by the end of the dream, she has almost risen.

In the second dream, the woman is now able to move; on the banks of a river that runs between the desert and the Land of Freedom, she encounters Reason in the shape of an old man. He tells her that the only avenue to Freedom is "down the banks of Labour, through the water of Suffering." Removing the "shoes of dependence" and the "mantle of ancient received opinions," she can wear only the garment of Truth into the water. Before she attempts to cross, Reason also tells her that she must relinquish man, who here appears as a mewling and dependent infant. According to Reason, man must earn his own freedom; she will be burdened by him and will lose her footing by trying to nurture man. The last scene in this dream is the one most treasured by suffragettes and coined a cherished phrase. Reason tells woman that she will probably not

cross the river into Freedom, but she will join others in creating “a track to the water’s edge” that others will follow:

Lead on! make a track to the water’s edge! Where you stand now, the ground will be beaten flat by ten thousand times ten thousand feet.” And he said, “Have you seen the locusts how they cross a stream? First one comes down to the water-edge, and it is swept away, and then another comes and then another, and then another, and at last with their bodies piled up a bridge is built and the rest pass over.”

She said, “And, of those that come first, some are swept away, and are heard of no more; their bodies do not even build the bridge?”

“And are swept away, and are heard of no more—and what of that?” he said.

“And what of that—” she said.

“They make a track to the water’s edge.”

“They make a track to the water’s edge—.” And she said, “Over that bridge which shall be built with our bodies, who will pass?”

He said, “The entire human race.”

And the woman grasped her staff.

And I saw her turn down that dark path to the river.

The third and shortest dream simply envisions a “heaven on earth” wherein “brave men” and “brave women” walk unafraid and hand in hand. However, it is the second dream that is obviously the most compelling vision for Schreiner’s readers. Their footsteps will provide the

track wherein others will follow, but the price they will pay is an acceptance of apparent failure in the present.

Again, the link in both allegories is clearly to an ethical choice in the present that will nurture a more optimistic future. As Patricia Murphy argues, allegory, in its interpretive openness, imparts a sense of timelessness, of infinity that constitutes what she names as “female temporality” (207). The similarity in allegorical writing to biblical style encourages “a transgressive form of reading—a feminine form of reading, if juxtaposed against the appropriate response to the ultimate patriarchal narrative, the Bible” (208). Thus, Schreiner here is rewriting the patriarchal story and opening up narrative and interpretive possibilities (209). Infusing her allegories with optimism and idealism, Schreiner employs what Joyce Avrech Berkman calls “boundary transcendence,” permeability “between the actual and the ideal” bridging “mythic and spiritual perceptions with material existence” and “pointing to ways to heal divisions of race, class, and gender” (213-214). And, even more compelling for her readers, she uses Christ imagery that allows her readers to frame their struggle for equality in terms of spiritual redemption (Heilmann 125). This re-framing of a political movement in transcendent terms, Heilmann suggests, “tapped into the feminist unconscious of the times” (126).

As Schreiner harnesses the power of allegory to access the primordial force of the saying, Sarah Grand employs a similar form in the “Proem” that is a prelude to *The Heavenly Twins*. Set in Morningquest, a cathedral town, the complicated and sometimes unwieldy novel begins with a meditation on the influence of the Cathedral chimes on the townspeople. The church bells, which chime Mendelsohn’s “He watching over Israel slumbers not nor sleeps, “on one level appears to represent the power and influence of God and the Cathedral. Michelle Mouton also reads this meditation as Grand’s examination of a feminist aesthetic and readers’ expectations (77). I

suggest another reading: the Cathedral bells keep the time of an ancient and powerful institution that controls the lives of the townspeople. The bells are inescapable; they chime at regular intervals and can be heard throughout and beyond the city. The narrator suggests that the chime has literally become inextricably linked with the bodies of the townspeople, “one of their first sensations...like a blood relation, a part of themselves,...with them wherever they went, ready to respond at any moment, like sensitive chords vibrating to a touch” (vii). The largest part of the meditation is dedicated to an examination of the townspeople’s response to the bells. The most disconnected and unappreciative listeners simply complain about the noise; others are reminded to think about the nature of God and to reinvent God in the image that most closely reflects their own priorities (viii). These listeners interpret God as an exaggeratedly masculine and distant father, a more human and Jovian character to whom they pray and whom they attempt to propitiate through church attendance, or a complex and baffling deity formed in a much more recognizable and human image: “a God of peace who patronized war; a gentle lamb who looked on at carnage complacently; a just God who condemned the innocent to suffer; an omnipotent God who was powerless to make his law supreme...” (ix). This version of God, the narrator notes, changes constantly, depending on fickle human concerns and trends. Humanity, clearly, has interpreted the meaning and need for existing institutions to suit themselves and shifting opinions. Reading the meditation as Grand’s commentary on the omnipresence of patriarchy makes sense of the last part of the meditation. Near the end of the Proem, Grand literally “rings a change” that forecasts the theme of her novel: change is coming. The narrator of the Proem emphatically declares that

even in Morningquest a new voice of extraordinary sweetness had already been heard, not *his*, the voice of man; but *theirs*, the collective voice of

humanity, which declared that ‘He, watching,’ was the all-pervading good, the great moral law, the spirit of pure love, Elohim, mistranslated in the book of Genesis as ‘He’ only, but signifying the union to which all nature testifies, the male and female principles which together created the universe, the infinite father and mother, without whom, in perfect accord and exact equality, the best government of nations has always been crippled and abortive. (xi)

As Ann Heilmann notes, the Proem’s long meditation on religion, philosophy, hegemony, or aesthetics, depending on how one reads the allegory, ends with a vision straight from Madame Blavatsky’s theosophical principles: “the Universal Divine Principle of double-gendered sexlessness as the origin of all cosmic development” (94). Grand’s vision of a prosperous future is one characterized by both spiritual and practical androgyny. This drastic change, of course, will not happen in the present; it is Grand’s vision for a better future for women. As the narratives of her three protagonists in *The Heavenly Twins* demonstrate, this theme is underscored by their suffering in the present. The Proem ends with the narrator asserting that while change is certainly coming, the townspeople are generally oblivious because the time has not yet come.

Naomi Lloyd, in “The Universal Divine Principle, the Spiritual Androgyne, and the New Age in Sarah Grand’s *the Heavenly Twins*” (2009), reads the Proem as heavily influenced by Grand’s interest in theosophy. In Grand’s declaration of a new view of the deity as androgynous, she elevates those who understand the necessity for a “dual-sexed divine” (79) to the highest level of understanding in the city. Those who have undergone this spiritual awakening Morningquest understand “Elohim’ to be ‘mistranslated in the

book of Genesis as 'He'; they believe the term to signify instead 'the union to which all nature testifies, the male and female principles which together created the universe'" (Lloyd 80).

Adam Seth Lowenstein illuminates, however, Grand's recourse to allegory, noting that the Proem's mix of "mythical" and "prosaic" language results in "a kind of allegorical time" (434). Indeed, the folktale language and appeal to a mythical past results in "some temporal dissonance, some historical clash of past and present, present and future" that "generates a layered text often intended to neutralize or harmonize that dissonance, to recuperate an obsolescence" (Clarke, qtd. in Lowenstein 434). Like Schreiner, Grand here accesses the qualities of allegory that underscore its mythic implications, and also like Schreiner, she casts her (no pun intended) grand vision of the future for women in grave and mythic tones. The Proem is interrogative—it raises the kinds of questions that Levinas discusses in his definition of the saying. In its interpretive openness, it also offers cautious optimism for a more ethical future. This emphasis on a new conception of ethics for women will become the driving theme of her novel. As Lauren Simek ends her essay "Feminist 'Cant' and Narrative Selflessness in Sarah Grand's New Woman Trilogy," "Exploring the possibilities offered by novelistic narrative's ambiguous sense of self and audience, Grand encourages women to cultivate a similar perspective, to develop the ability for unself-conscious selflessness, as well as the ability for active interpretation of that selflessness in themselves and others" (364).

To write about women's mythic and biblical past, re-centering the biblical experience on woman as Christ figure, is to reassert patriarchy as sacred—not in terms of reproduction—but in terms of power and centrality. Schreiner positions women in the present as messianic figures in their willingness to sacrifice present happiness and safety for future generations. This type of

self-sacrifice redeems the oppressive past of abnegation. To access the unconscious drives expressed most compellingly in symbols, folk motifs, and prophetic dreams is to enter into the realm of the saying. Uniting the saying and the said in their writing, New Woman writers envision the possibility of a just and ethical future for women through their commitment to one another in the present. These writers cross boundaries in their texts to re-frame their present difficulties in mythic tones; to imagine and to prophesy an indeterminate but transcendent future.

## 5 NEW WOMAN AESTHETICS AND ETHICS

As Chapters Two and Three discuss, New Woman writers intentionally reach out to a community of women readers to build a shared vision of a future for women. Their suggestions about this future are not prescriptive; instead, Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mary Cholmondeley and others enhance the baseline arguments of Victorian feminist activists by imbuing their protagonists, first, with a shared language; and second, with transcendent dreams and experiences gesturing toward a feminist utopian vision of the future. Critics of the period generally assumed that New Woman novels were at least semi-autobiographical, and they particularly leveled this charge at those novels written as *Kunstlerroman*—Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage*, Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman*, and, especially, Grand's *The Beth Book*—and those like Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* that feature a failed woman artist-figure. However, these novels' depictions of their artist-protagonists do not limn the career trajectory of their authors. Olive Schreiner, Sarah Grand, Mary Cholmondeley, and Ella Hepworth Dixon enjoyed considerable success, both financial and social. While their novels did not enter the literary canon, their work was nonetheless widely read and debated during the fin de siècle. Why, then, do their novels depict writing and publishing, particularly writing and publishing serious

works of fiction, as such a struggle for their protagonists? Are they suggesting a significant value in failure as a means of moving forward for women?

The last question to consider in this study, then, is this: How do these writers depict a generation of women authors and philosophers who will move women forward? Drawing again on the work of Emmanuel Levinas, I argue here that, in writing *Kunstlerroman*, these novelists distinguish between their own experiences and those of their protagonists, to depict the figure of the feminist artist-hero. The figure of the feminist artist-hero, an outsider working in exile, embodies the present struggle of the New Woman to enter the larger conversation of literature and art; however, precisely because she is the figure who will continue to document this struggle, she will be called to lead the next generation of women. In doing this, New Woman writers are building on the legacy of Elizabeth Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, and depicting women whose desire to create art becomes a hero's quest, mirroring the journey of traditional epic heroes. Reading the texts examined here through a series of characteristics or stages that are suggested by Levinas's reading of Maurice Blanchot illuminates their authors' depiction of their protagonists as heroic figures whose quest is artistic. These artist-heroes are characterized as tragic figures whose quest to create authentic art condemns them to exile, isolation, and fractured identities.

In "The Poet's Vision," an analysis of the aesthetic of Maurice Blanchot, Levinas describes artists as tragic but heroic exiles whose transcendent vision carries mythic implications. According to Levinas, writing like Blanchot's does not lead us only to truth or a vision of reality; it leads to the "errancy of being—to being as a place of going astray, to the uninhabitable" (134). Great art leads to authenticity; it shines a light that "undoes the world, leading it back to its origin, to the over and over again, the murmur, ceaseless lapping of waves, a 'deep past, never

long enough ago” (135). This distinction between truth and authenticity is a touchstone for the New Woman artist-hero figures. In his early study of ethics and aesthetics, “Reality and Its Shadow,” Levinas asserts that the work of art exists outside of time, in what he calls the “hither side of time” or time’s “interstices” (131). Art must be more than simply a reflection of reality that leads to knowledge if it is to have any value. Thus, in this early study, Levinas reads artists as intentional myth-makers, deliberately obscure and enigmatic in their attempt to reach for something more than the real, something other and beyond language (142). Later, then, in his study of Blanchot, he expands on this distinction between the real and the transcendent, using the terms “truth” and “authenticity.” Truth is limited to depictions of the known world, the “sovereignty of self,” and the limits of history (130). In contrast, authentic literature, according to Levinas, goes beyond the real to the unthinkable, and to what he calls the “errancy” of being. The mission of the writer is to continue to engage with what is unknown, insecure, evading our grasp. We are called both backwards and forwards; authentic literature reminds us where we have been by connecting with a mythic past. It reminds us, especially, of our failures. But it also calls us forth into the nomadic existence of change and openness. This is the role of the protagonists discussed here. They reflect their creators’ understanding that for all of their current success, the future of women writers will be freighted with the responsibility to articulate a vision of the future as marked by change, possibility, and transformation. As Levinas notes, the artist-hero accepts the role of the “Eternal Wanderer ... along the border of non-truth, a realm extending farther than the true” (136).

While the suffragist movement engaged in political advocacy on behalf of women, the New Woman novelists depicted feminist heroes as writers whose tragic lives would yield authentic writing. These novels, then, affirm the importance of written language (Levinas’s the Said) in

shaping the future for women, especially as the language that records women's voices and narratives. That the feminist heroic figure is a writer is also significant because it reinforces the belief that literature, or more broadly, art, must not separate itself from its social and political context; that, instead, its power lies in its engagement with the lives of readers. Their vision of the role of art, particularly literature, is to "demonstrate a utopian, emancipatory potential in revealing the fissures and hidden pathways that run through the hegemonic structures and totalizing frameworks" (McDonald 16) in which they live and write.

The feminist artist-hero undergoes, in the course of her journey, a series of trials and challenges, but she finally experiences a fracturing of her identity that results from the confrontation between her ethics and the larger conventional morality (McDonald 36). This fracture transforms her into the type of hero she will become. Additionally, these novels underscore the notion that the New Women writers, their readers, and their protagonists, all inhabit what Levinas describes as the *entretemps*, the "meanwhile" inhabited by characters who exist only in the world of a novel. New Woman writers and their readers inhabit their own *entretemps*, the transitional time and space between the *fin de siècle* and an indeterminate future for women.

### **5.1 The Solitary Hero**

In "The Poet's Vision," Levinas first describes the solitude of the artist, someone who exists outside of the active world in "countless worlds conceived by thought, projected by imagination, or divined by instinct" that constitute the poet's/author's transcendent vision. He agrees with Blanchot that the artist is required to sublimate himself or herself to an art that has abandoned heroes and adventure, the old vision of "non-world" in favor of a new vision—"the being of beings," and "the silence following the departure of the gods" (128). The characters depicted in

the four novels examined here are all orphans: Lyndall is one of three English children being raised on a farm in South Africa by a careless and disinterested guardian. Mary Erle's unstructured childhood is the result of her mother's death as a result of giving birth to Mary's brother. The subsequent death of her father when she is a young adult forces Mary then to become the guardian of her orphaned brother. Beth's father dies when she is a young child, and she is left to the less than tender mercies of an abusive mother. Hester Gresley's parents died early in her childhood, and she is subsequently raised by an aunt.

Depictions of orphaned protagonists are certainly typical of Victorian literature; Laura Peters, in her study *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture, and Empire* (2000), reads the orphan figure as subverting the Victorian idealization of the domestic sphere. The orphan embodies difference, a character whose existence disturbs prevailing notions of rootedness and security (27). The female orphan is a particularly subversive character whose vulnerability can be read in terms of sexual availability and threat (19). Thus, here, the orphaned status of the protagonists signals two things to the reader: first, these young women have always been on a different path from their more conventional counterparts. Their orphaned or abandoned status marks them as figures who are already other; second, as orphans, these characters underscore the threat of sexual promiscuity that New Women were generally considered to pose.

In addition to depicting their protagonists as orphans, these authors go on to characterize their protagonists as solitary or exceptional—they are distinguished from others by their atypical pursuits or behavior. Their solitary pursuits or exceptionality mark them as prospective artists; as Levinas asserts, the artist is an outsider, someone who chooses difference even as a child.

Schreiner depicts Lyndall, for example, as the leader of the three children on the farm; she is skeptical of adult motives and confident in her ability to get what she wants. When she tells Em

that she plans to leave the farm and attend school in spite of their guardian's wishes, she argues that "... nothing helps in this world ... but to be very wise, and to know everything – to be clever" (11). She wants to be rich when she grows up, but she also craves knowledge: "there will be nothing that I do not know" (11). Lyndall patterns herself after Napoleon Bonaparte. She admires him precisely for his rise from common beginnings to become "master of the world" (12). Her assessment of Napoleon's trajectory describes her own plan: "When he said a thing to himself, he never forgot it. He waited and waited and waited until it came at last" (12). Schreiner depicts Lyndall consistently as self-possessed and determined to make her own plans, a nascent leader despite her gender. Lyndall is an exceptional child, precocious, realistic, and persistent in demanding autonomy. Her departure from the farm to go to school is the result of her strong will; she has literally bullied her guardian into paying for her education.

Likewise, Dixon's narrator in Chapter Two of *The Story of a Modern Woman*, "A Child," emphasizes Mary Erle's difference by locating her firmly in the *entretemps* of the fin de siècle:

Born too late for the simple days of the fifties, when all it behoved a young girl to do was to mind her account-book, read her Tennyson, show a proper enthusiasm for fancy-work stitches, and finally, with many blushes, accept the hand of the first young man who desired to pay taxes and to fulfil the duties of a loyal British subject ... Mary was yet too soon for the time when parents begin to take their responsibilities seriously, and when the girl is sometimes as carefully prepared, as thoroughly equipped, as her brother for the fight of life. (14)

Left alone by her parents, Mary becomes a "strange, indolent child" (17) whose intellectual curiosity drives her to explore the outdoors rather than behave like a conventional little girl.

The school-age Mary, whose mother has died, is subject to benevolent neglect by her father and subsequently becomes bookish: “She had only to pick out her volume. It was a revelation in the possibilities of life” (21). The narrator notes that Mary led “an odd life” (25) much influenced by reading Rousseau; in early adolescence, serious and intense, Mary endured “[s]trange, anxious days, passed in the twilight of ignorance ...” (25) Though she will later become a companion for her father, Mary is effectively self-raised after her mother dies. Dixon’s emphasis on Mary’s strangeness and the experimental nature of her childhood is insistent; the reader understands her as a solitary thinker who, left on her own, has chosen her own influences. Her ethical choices later in the novel will return her to this period in her life.

While Cholmondeley only sketches a description of Hester Gresley’s childhood, she foretells the intensity of the adult Hester’s commitment to her writing in the power and dominance of her imagination in childhood. Though her friend Rachel comes from the wealthier family, Hester is the leader who “told Rachel ... what the London sparrows said to each other in the gutters, and how they considered the gravel path in the square was a deep river suitable to bathe in” (31). Hester concocts stories about princes rescuing princesses until she becomes bored, and then makes up stories about the trees leaving town each evening to visit their friends (31). When Hester enters society as a young woman, her aunt sees that she is “becoming a personage” about whom people wonder. She is expected to become someone singular (32).

The most extended account of the childhood of the exceptional artist figure is provided by Sarah Grand in *The Beth Book* (1897). Grand’s subtitle, *Being a Study from the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure, a Woman of Genius*, makes her intentions clear. Almost from birth, Beth Caldwell embodies difference and exceptionality. Discussing her infancy, the novel’s discursive narrator describes Beth as “a child of light” in nearly messianic terms, one who would be shaped

by “that light which illuminates the spirit” (34). While Beth has unusual facility with language and intense emotional responses to music and nature, she is a thinker whose “memory helped itself by the involuntary association of incongruous ideas” (41). She has visions; she is a rebellious child who spends “much of her time in school ... in solitary confinement for breaches of the peace” (40). Early on, the narrator notes Beth’s certainty that she is called to something more that she cannot quite grasp, “something which eluded her—something from which she drifted further away as she grew older—some sort of vision which opened up fresh tracts to her” (52). Ultimately, the narrator comments that Beth is a visionary; when reliant on guiding visions, her character is integrated and strong. Her intellect, on the other hand, misleads her; she will, the narrator notes, spend her life vacillating between the two, making impulsive and unpredictable choices (52). However, the overriding characteristic that Beth possesses, like Hester, is her imaginative life, which compels her to make up poems and stories. As she grows older, she disappears from home and her abusive mother to wander alone, mentally composing stories and poems. Like Lyndall and Mary Erle, Beth has always shown signs of exceptional intelligence and independence. As a young girl, she endured beatings from her mother because of her precocity. Grand describes her protagonist as a child visionary who is singled out by others in the community as oddly compelling. As she tells her friend Sammy, “... things come into my mind, but I don’t think them, and I can’t say them. They don’t come in words. It’s more like seeing them, you know, but you don’t see them with your eyes, but with something inside yourself” (200). From her earliest years, she invents poems and stories that “just come to her” and that others often reject as her work. Writing is natural for her; as she tells her Aunt Victoria in an offhand manner, she plans to write books that at least “won’t be worse than anything in the

Bible” (213). As an adolescent, she learns to discriminate between good and bad writing; “by the effect of bad books upon her ... she learned the value of good ones” (215).

The authors of these novels position their protagonists, then, as thinkers, nascent leaders or artists with rich inner lives. Already as children they have been shaped by tragedy in the loss of one or both parents. All of these characters childhoods that reinforce their difference or their solitude to a moment when they are called out of their ordinary world. For most, the move into the world is a next step that will call them to the quest to write.

## **5.2 The Call to a Quest**

For Levinas, the artist’s experience is characterized not only by solitude or exceptionality, but by exile. The nomadic existence of the artist sets her outside comfort and convention and casts her into the condition that will produce insight. Levinas describes this condition in “The Poet’s Vision” through the metaphor of light and darkness. The illumination that is the consequence of exile is delayed. The call to being—in this case, the call to write—is answered from an understanding of the “ebb and flow of Nothingness and Being” (128). To undergo homelessness and exile is to be subjected to suffering and self-examination that will be fruitful later. Levinas employs an elegant mythic reference for this period in the artist’s development when he declares that the “owl of Minerva does not spread its wings until dusk” (128).

The New Women writers whose work is examined here depict homeless or exiled tragic protagonists who desperately seek to create art from trauma. In some cases, these characters are jolted out of the ordinary world by financial crisis. Mary Erle, for example, must find a way to support herself and her brother after her father’s death. Hester Gresley is shaken into action by her friend Rachel’s abrupt descent into poverty after her parents’ deaths. Later, she is exiled from her once-comfortable life with her aunt in the city to dependent status in the stultifyingly

conventional home of her clergyman brother. These women both suffer a loss of status and a separation from their friends.

In contrast, both Lyndall and Beth choose to leave comfortable homes to assert their independence and to claim their autonomy. Lyndall has spoken throughout her childhood of her desire for more education and her certainty that acquiring an education will be the first step to the life she desires, the life of an artist. Beth leaves a home that has never truly been comfortable to seek freedom and autonomy through marriage to a man she wrongly believes will support her in her desire to educate herself.

For these hero-artists, this move into the unknown is also analogous to Campbell's first stage of the mythical hero's journey, which "signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (53). In each case, the artist-hero crosses a threshold into a different life, and through that new life, she identifies her quest to become an artist. That quest then impels her actions and characterizes her adult life. Dramatic, even theatrical accounts of their suffering form their stories, not descriptions of their art or their philosophies. Intensely alone in their drive to write, they exile themselves from others. Like classical tragic protagonists, they are flawed, rebellious, aspiring to be more than their society wishes them to be. Like other tragic protagonists, they are punished for their desires, but they also experience transformation.

### **5.3 Obstacles, Trials and Tests**

Levinas characterizes the role of the artist as struggling for that transcendent experience that will impel her vision. If literature is separate from the real world, its genesis must lie in an experience that is both "a fundamental experience, and an experience of the origin" (130). Thus, the protagonists here experience a series of misfortunes that shape their poetic vision. In the

typical hero story, the tests and trials he undergoes test his resolve, strength, and fitness for the role of champion. For the feminist artist-hero, the misfortunes she undergoes and the obstacles she faces all stem from her identity as a young woman. Artist-heroes face a lack of educational preparation, support for their work; their work is rejected or destroyed. While the obstacles they encounter initially stymie these protagonists, they will finally experience a transformative ethical encounter that will transform them and ready them to produce works that reach beyond the realistic novel to work that will engage readers beyond simple truths to an open-ended and just vision.

Dixon consistently depicts Mary Erle, for example, as someone with potential who is struggling to find a foothold despite her lack of preparation for “the fight of life” (14). Dixon depicts Mary’s encounter with the realities of publishing in Chapter X, “In Grub Street.” Like her paintings, Mary’s first attempts at writing are rejected. Although she simply tries to reproduce the kind of popular story she has read, formulaic and predictable, her editor finds these efforts barely acceptable. Both magazine editors Mary approaches accept her work only because of her father’s name and her social connections. Mary’s attempt to write an authentic text is brutally rejected by the Editor of *Illustrations*, who has requested that she try her hand at a novel. She tells Perry the editor has rejected her novel because the subject was “too sad—too painful” and would be rejected by British readers (149). She has instead been instructed to produce a novel that would conform to the popular and successful formula of “a ball in the first volume; a picnic and a parting in the second; and an elopement, which must, of course, be prevented at the last moment by the opportune death (in a hospital) of the wife, or the husband...in the last” (149). Her editor attempts to explain it to her: The British public does not want to read novels that are “too much like life;” instead, Mary should strive for a tone that is “breezy” (183). Mary,

exhausted by her efforts, does not feel like she can accomplish the required breeziness. Instead, she “can't help seeing things as they are, and the truth is so supremely attractive” (183). The editor also notes her need to include more love scenes, which the public likes and which “illustrate so well” (183). Finally, she needs to ensure a happy ending. No one wants to read the morbid novels of Russian and French writers; the British reading public wants to read “pretty stories” with “a wedding at the end” (183). While clearly this episode contains Dixon’s scornful assessment of the reading habits of the British reading public and the state of popular women’s fiction, it also depicts Mary’s struggle to engage with her emerging vision that her work can have a power of its own. She is accepted as a Grub Street hack but rejected when she attempts to lift her work to the level of serious social critique. Mary struggles to publish work with an authentic voice, but authentic work is necessarily strange and obscure; the editor, a powerful man who controls the commercial apparatus, sensibly rejects her odd and melancholy work in favor of making money.

Schreiner depicts Lyndall as an aspirational figure, striving for power and agency. In her conversations with Waldo after returning to the farm, Lyndall describes her efforts to write plays and argues that the education offered her as a young woman was an inadequate preparation for anything but wifehood. Having seized the opportunity to go to school, Lyndall is frustrated and disappointed by the trivial subjects taught to young women. She tells Waldo “... of all cursed places under the sun ... a girls’ boarding-school is the worst. They are called finishing schools, and ... [t]hey finish everything but imbecility and weakness, and that they cultivate” (96). Lyndall powerfully articulates the defeats she has suffered and the tragic waste of her potential. As she recounts to Waldo, she effectively educated herself and tried to write: “I bought books and newspapers, and at night I sat up. I read and epitomized what I read; and I found time to

write some plays and find out how hard it is to make your thoughts look anything but imbecile fools when you paint them with ink and paper” (96). Through Lyndall, Schreiner indicts the substandard education available to ambitious young women. Lyndall, the aspiring writer and actor, has been defeated by her own lack of preparation and knowledge. If Mary Erle is defeated by entrenched patriarchal structures, Lyndall is discouraged by a sense of her own inadequacy. Schreiner depicts Lyndall as a kind of wasted capital; the obstacles she faces are too much for one young woman to overcome. Throughout Lyndall’s development as a child and now as a young woman, Schreiner has positioned her as a strong and confident voice, someone with an authentic vision. Lyndall continues to try to articulate her vision; she is driven by a vision she cannot give form. Her tragedy is that she does not have the tools to articulate that vision.

Cholmondeley presents Hester Gresley with a series of tests and challenges that confirm her role as a woman of genius. Hester’s novel, *An Idyll in East London*, both establishes her brilliance and causes controversy because of its subject matter. Because most people do not understand that she has based the experiences described in the novel on those of her friend Rachel, Hester is thought by many to have invented the details in the novel, a critique of the lives that the poor are forced to live. As the narrator points out, the novel was met with “astonished indignation and admiration, and her acquaintances—not her friends—were still wondering how she came to know so much of a life of which they decided she could know nothing” (38). Hester’s early success hints that she already has access to her own voice and a complex interior life.

Hester’s exile to her brother’s house presents her with a number of obstacles to completing her second novel. In a conventional household, she is expected to take care of children and entertain visitors instead of spending hours in her room writing. When friends enquire about her

progress on the new book, Hester replies that she manages a few hours per day, but “of course—it is very natural—they think that rather self-important and silly. I am thought very silly here, Rachel” (78). Driven to write, she destroys her health by rising early in the morning to work on her second novel. Describing Hester’s vision and her solitary struggle, Cholmondeley positions her as the idealist, the writer or artist who is isolated by her own need to communicate her vision, her transcendent experience, to readers. Homeless, exiled from those who care for her, isolated, she struggles to tell an authentic story. The obstacles she faces as a dependent woman are significant, but Hester’s genius sustains her:

“I cannot reach up to it. I cannot get near it,” she said. “When I try to write it is like drawing an angel with spread wings with a bit of charcoal...I make everything commonplace and vulgar by putting it into words. I go alone into the woods and sit for hours quite still with the trees...And I come home, Rachel, and I try, sometimes I try for half the night, to find words to translate it into. But there are no words, or if there are I cannot find them ... “(80-81).

This passage is perhaps the most direct articulation of the writer’s engagement with her authentic vision. Hester’s work is beyond her ability to put into words; she is compelled to try and to sublimate her needs and herself to the struggle to which she feels called. Intense and passionate about her need to write, Hester’s eyes show “an infinite patience ... that patience of enthusiasm which will cast away its very soul and all its best years for the sake of an ideal” (53).

Cholmondeley underscores Hester’s character as the inspired writer who, driven by her need to create, will deny herself any comfort or ease and overcome any challenge or obstacle.

Similarly, Grand depicts Beth as a writer who has understood her calling since childhood. She has left home and an abusive mother to find what she hopes will be the peace and stability she

needs to become a writer. A marriage that quickly becomes unhappy motivates her to study and write. While Grand never clarifies just what Beth is writing, she determines that she will continue to read and to eventually make a career of writing: “She meant to write and write and write until she acquired power of expression. About what she should have to express she never troubled herself. It was the need to express what was in her that had set her to work” (387-88). Beth, like Rachel, is depicted as a visionary hero who is compelled to communicate experiences that are elusive. She has left home to marry a man she barely knows because she craves freedom and opportunity to study and write. However, in the course of her marriage, she has discovered that her husband does not approve of her aspirations and wants her to be a more conventional wife. He is coarse and unrefined, and Beth finds his lovemaking monotonous. In addition, the lack of privacy in her marriage offends her (Grand 363). She finds herself losing her vitality, as she no longer takes the solitary walks that have sustained her and inspired her writing (372). The final trial for Beth that encourages her to leave her husband is her discovery that he is having an affair, although beyond being affronted, she does not particularly care that he is betraying her (424). Later trials will provide the impetus for her to leave home. Again, like Cholmondeley, Grand positions her character as one compelled to express herself and determined to overcome any trials and tests to achieve her goal.

The trials that these characters undergo, proceeding from gender limitations, defeat Mary and Lyndall. Neither character will initially achieve her goal to write authentic works. Hester and Beth, on the other hand, are emboldened by their suffering and confirmed in their quests to write important and authentic books. As Levinas argues, the artist closely tracks the tragic hero figure of ancient works. Whether they triumph over their challenges or not, they and their art will be transformed by their ordeals.

This aspect of the New Woman *Kunstlerroman*, the obstacles and challenges faced by artist protagonists, has been explored in depth by critics. Depictions of the feminist artist figure, especially their suffering and trials, serve as coded messages to aspiring woman readers about their own standing in an inhospitable culture. These critical readings of this stage of the journey of the artist-hero interrogate the writer's intention to comment on the relationship between the heroic feminist artist and the power of the larger context for her work. Analyses of the role of these protagonists underscore Levinas's contention that authentic work both transcends and interrogates the cultural context that produces it.

Ann Ardis, for example, in her 1990 study *New Women, New Novels* places her discussion of New Woman *Kunstlerroman* in the chapter entitled "Retreats." She describes "the 'boomerang' plotting of novels that punish New Women for their political and artistic ambitions and the representation of honorable retreat in self-reflexive novels about the antagonism New Women encounter as they pursue their utopian visions" (165). Additionally, in the section Chapter 5 "Crossing the Line," subtitled "Reconceiving Maternity," Ardis discusses the ways in which Victorian women redefine maternity more broadly to provide an acceptable basis for their reformist efforts and their movement into the marketplace. She extends this discussion to examples of New Woman novels wherein protagonists articulate their creative production in maternal terms. Ardis notes that mid-Victorian women writers like Elizabeth Gaskell cast their writing as an extension of their domestic activity and therefore not a violation of the woman's private sphere of influence. Late-century New Woman writers move a step further away from traditional visions of maternity in reimagining it in "nonbiological terms" (127). The most prominent example from the discussion is Hester Gresley in Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage*, who articulates her grief at the loss of her book in terms of motherhood, as if her book were her

child. As Ardis argues, Cholmondeley is doing something quite different here from the mid-Victorian depiction of writing as acceptable and womanly; she instead conflates artistic production with biological reproduction, taking place in the same sphere (Ardis 129).

Lyn Pykett, in her 1999 essay, “Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Representations of the Female Artist in the New Woman Fiction of the 1890s,” argues that this fiction is one example of the “self-reflexivity” of New Woman fiction, which “foregrounds the conditions of its own production” (136). Pykett convincingly argues that the figure of the New Woman artist or writer is used by these authors to explore four issues: the feminist artist as invader of masculine space, as a symbol of conflicted female interiority, as an investigator of the nature and function of art, and as an opportunity to discuss the role of politics or activism and art. However, by the end of her essay, she suggests that novelists imply a need for deeper Freudian analysis into the exploration of female desire, “oceanic longings for self-transcendence as well as the desire for self-expression; the desire to speak up and speak out; the desire for a form of creativity other than the biological one of maternity” (148).

Rita Kranidis also explores the feminist artist figure in *Subversive Discourse: The Cultural Production of Late Victorian Feminist Novels* (1995) as indicative of writers rejecting conventional, patriarchal definitions of art and style, particularly the pronouncements of the Aesthetes. Authors challenge aesthetic ideology by demonstrating the obstacles to women’s literary and artistic production, how they are shut out from the privileged world of art and the artist. However, Kranidis too notes the indeterminacy that characterizes the narratives:

The feminists’ struggle for social and literary self-determination produced texts that open themselves to socially and historically based readings, precisely because of their inculcated, apparent awareness of late Victorian ‘culture’s discursive agency.’ Feminists both used and

manipulated cultural and literary conventions to create texts that are, paradoxically, both open-ended and self-referential. (105)

#### **5.4 Fragmentation and Transformation**

In the novels studied here, the artist-heroes must make choices that force them to assert their own personal ethics in conflict with conventional definitions of morality. This moment both fractures and transforms their identities, as Levinas asserts: “Crucial to the notion of the musicality of the artwork is the ethical sensibility which animates it, which is contrasted with traditional morality ...” (19). McDonald goes on to discuss the concept of the tragic in its presentation of the individual’s identity as “diasporic,” irremediably split (21). The individual must choose between the system of morality he or she has been taught that provides the rules for living a good life and the ethical choice that occurs in the immediate present. This fracturing of the self, which puts the very identity into question, can result in the subversion of moral and political authority and “an incitement to ethical transcendence without recourse to any settled sense of self” (26). This “nomadic” self, an indeterminate state, resides in a region that is “nonconceptual...antiepistemological...and nonmoral,” which is “trespassed, most often, in literature, by the genre of tragedy” (27). This fracture of the self, I suggest, moves the artist-hero permanently outside the comfort of the domestic sphere. Her decision to assert her own morality over the accepted code of morality places her firmly in the role of exile and affirms her authentic role as a writer whose fractured identity frees her from writing simple truths and prepares her to reach for art that engages with a world of her own imagining.

While the New Woman writers do not present classical tragic heroines in Lyndall, Mary, Beth, or Hester, these women all experience tragic loss of identity in facing the intersection Levinas describes. These texts then illuminate not only the potential of literature to examine the

formation of the ethical identity but the struggle of the woman artist specifically to produce work that engages the reader in the recognition of tragedy along with its attendant hope for an as-yet undetermined future.

Schreiner depicts Lyndall as transformed through failed maternity into a saintly figure who comes to understanding only as she lays dying. Believing that she is unprepared to accept the role of artist or writer, Lyndall surrenders to her lover, but she is unwilling to marry and accept the consequences of being a wife and mother. Schreiner locates the fragmentation of Lyndall's identity in the trauma of this confrontation between the culture's expectations and Lyndall's determined resistance. In the aftermath of her decision, as Lyndall is dying, she still does not deviate from her determined belief in the power of the will and knowledge: "It is thinking and thinking of things that makes them real ... when you draw your mind together, and resolve that a thing shall not be, it gives way before you; it is not" (154). However, near to death, Lyndall atones for a life spent in isolation; she has allowed no one to touch her emotionally except her dead child, and now she sees herself as "a poor, weak soul striving after good ... in the end it learnt, through tears and much pain, that holiness is an infinite compassion for others; that greatness is to take the common things of life and walk truly among them; that ... happiness is a great love and much serving" (154). Schreiner ultimately depicts Lyndall as a failed artist who was never able to articulate an elusive vision but has been transformed into a saint through tragedy.

Mary Erle faces her own ethical crisis when she chooses to obey her dead friend Alison's exhortation: "Promise me that you will never, never do anything to hurt another woman ... I don't suppose for an instant you ever would. But here come times in our lives when we can do a great deal of good, or an incalculable amount of harm. If women only used their power in the

right way! If we were only united we could lead the world. But we're not—we're not ...” (213). When Mary replies “... but we shall be by and by. All we modern women are going to help each other, not to hinder. And there's a great deal to do—” (214), Cholmondeley prepares the reader for the later scene in which Mary refuses to run away with Vincent. Cholmondeley frames the debate, the fracturing moment for Mary, as her confrontation with the conventional belief that romantic love trumps any ethical misgivings Mary may have. However, Cholmondeley reverses this more predictable view when Mary, instead, asserts the primacy of her connection with another woman:

“I can't, I won't, deliberately injure another woman. Think how she would suffer! Oh, the torture of women's lives—the helplessness, the impotence, the emptiness! ... All we modern women mean to help each other now. We have a bad enough time as it is, ... surely we needn't make it any worse by our own deliberate acts!” (255).

For Hester, the confrontation is even more dramatic. Hester's intense connection to her work reflects Levinas' argument about the fragmentation of the self that the ethical artist encounters when her personal ethics come into conflict with an unethical moral code (McDonald 17). Confronted with her brother's unethical act in destroying her manuscript, Hester instinctively pushes the knowledge away, inadvertently hurting a young child. The trauma of the loss of her novel pushes Hester into a breakdown wherein she conflates the loss of her novel with her own actions in hurting Regie. She is sure she has committed the murder of a child in the same way he has murdered her “child.” Her vision has been that transcendent vision of which Levinas speaks—she has sublimated herself in service to an art she feels compelled to create, and its loss empties her. As she explains to the Bishop, “I was impelled to do it by what you perhaps will call

a blind instinct, what I, poor simpleton and dupe, believed at the time to be nothing less than the will of God” (335). Hester’s ethical vision has come into conflict with facile and dishonest morality with its destructive power. Her vision has been pure and compelling, but her brother represents the damage that dishonest religious and patriarchal hegemonies have done to women of genius. Her great work irremediably lost, Hester too now exists in the *entretemps*, suspended in grief.

Grand depicts Beth, like both Mary and Hester, as the artist whose ethical decision causes her to reject the role of the artist. Grand’s rejection of the writing life, a solitary and suffering one for Beth, should be read as a rejection of writing as a vocation for the woman of genius that will make a difference in the lives of others. She has positioned Beth as a writer whose work has the potential to be great; Beth is the writer for whom women have been waiting, but it is clear that they are not yet ready for her. Like Mary Erle, Lyndall, and Hester Gresley, Beth represents the figure of the woman writer who feels compelled to write authentically but has not yet found her readers.

Ultimately, Grand has Beth articulate a philosophy of literature that mirrors Levinas’ description of art as reflecting authenticity. Rejecting art for art’s sake, she contends that “what we want from the written word that reaches us all is help and advice, comfort and encouragement” (476). However, later, after leaving her husband and exiling herself from her friends, she rejects “her pretty talent for writing, her love of turning phrases, her play on the music of words” (540) in favor of a calling to speak. She has come to believe that while she chose writing as a vocation because of egotism and ambition, oratory has chosen her, and she has no choice but to follow her own clear power. The novel ends, too, with her recognition of the man who fulfills the vision she had seen of the ideal man to whom she would devote herself.

## 5.5 Resolution

For Levinas, the artist-hero ends her quest as a new woman. She has been tested and has failed, overcome by her own lack of preparation, the power of conventional bias, or her own lack of conviction. She has struggled with a choice that threatens her own sense of personal ethics. Making the more difficult choice, she has triumphed ethically. Ultimately, the quest is the point. The artist-hero is not triumphant—she is authentic. She is transformed by the breaking down and reconstruction of a new identity. She represents the ethical struggle of the artist-hero who will lead others into a mythical, emancipatory future by writing a new world that moves her readers beyond observable truth and knowledge into imagination. In Levinasian terms, these protagonists represent a transitional generation of writers who exist in an *entretemps* that does not yet offer them a voice. In an especially prescient example, Schreiner employs a speech by Lyndall to affirm the power of authentic art to imbue the modern reader with a sense of continuity with the past as well as a connection to a utopian future:

When my own life feels small, and I am oppressed with it, I like to crush together, and see it in a picture, in an instant, a multitude of disconnected unlike phases of human life—a medieval monk with his string of beads pacing the quiet orchard, and looking up from the grass at his feet to the heavy fruit-trees; little Malay boys playing naked on a shining sea-beach; a Hindoo philosopher alone under his Banyan tree thinking, thinking, thinking so that in the thought of God he may lose himself; a troop of Bacchanalians dressed in white, with crowns of vine-leaves, dancing along the Roman streets; a martyr on the night of his death, looking through a narrow window and feeling that he already has the wings that shall bear him up ... a Kaffer witch doctor seeking for herbs by moonlight while from the

huts on the hillside come the sounds of dogs barking, and the voices of women and children...I like to see it all; I feel it run through me ... (114).

This remarkable speech affirms the artist's ability to transcend boundaries of time and space to understand the implications of the connections between her own solitude and the other lives she can imagine. The artist conjures images from the interstices, the "gaps in time" that are unrepresentable in language (McDonald 18). Finally, the passage also affirms Levinas' contention in *Poetry and Resurrection*, underscored in the novels examined here, that writers tell stories that carry traces of previous stories as a trace of "an immemorial or unrepresentable past, of a radical alterity and transcendence" (McDonald 33).

## 6 CONCLUSION: INTERSECTIONS AND EXTENSIONS

This study comprises the convergence of a group of late nineteenth century women novelists, a twentieth century philosopher, and a twenty-first century perspective. I became interested in the New Woman novels initially because they were so strange and unpredictable; they seemed not to conform to any predictable conventions. These novelists clearly were self-consciously responding to the fin de siècle conversation about women's rights contextualized in debates about "wild women," bicycling, chaperones, women's suffrage, sensible clothing, venereal disease, and marriage reform. They seemed to be presenting their side of the overall debate in the polemical speeches and conversations they invented for their protagonists. They also embedded the narratives about their protagonists in novels that were daringly innovative and sometimes frankly just strange in their interpolations of allegory, myth, folktale, visions, and dreams. The novels were both scandalous and popular during the fin de siècle, often running through several printings. While the novels were, as Teresa Mangum notes,

generally considered “middlebrow” even before the term was invented, such a luminary as Mark Twain was a fan of Sarah Grand’s work. The New Woman novelists succeeded in recruiting many of their readers to the suffragist cause as well. After considerable success, however, they seemed just to disappear, never becoming part of the accepted canon. Only after they were “rediscovered” in the late 1970s by Gail Cunningham, Elaine Showalter, and most helpfully, Ann Ardis, in their assessments of Victorian women writers did they become the subject of scholarly study. After reading critical analyses by a range of critics including Ann Ardis, Ann Heilman, Talia Schaffer, Sally Ledger, Lyn Pykett, and Teresa Mangum, I noted the consensus that the New Woman writers had written problematical novels that engaged with the condition of late-Victorian women but also appeared to be responding to the state of the novel post-George Eliot.

I sought a theoretical structure that might integrate the common characteristics of the novels—generally realist narrative, polemical sections, and experimental interpolations-- and account for them holistically. When I encountered Rachel Hollander’s essay “Daniel Deronda and the Ethics of Alterity,” which appeared in a volume edited by Donald R. Wehrs and David P. Haney entitled *Levinas and Nineteenth Century Literature: Ethics and Otherness from Romanticism through Realism* (2009), her reading of the novel through the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas successfully resolved the problem of the two distinct plot threads. She reads the two disparate plot threads as Eliot’s effort to engage with the transitional nature of the late-Victorian period that rejects sympathy in favor of openness and indeterminacy and the more open-ended plot and ending for Gwendolen Harleth as responding to the problem of the alterity or unknowability of the other. Hollander’s assertion that the fin de siècle period was characterized by the work of writers attempting to respond to this need seemed promising. Wehrs

and Haney's introduction to their collection posited that reading Victorian novels through Levinas illuminates the way those novels grapple with the limits of personal freedom.

Because I had read the section of Levinas's study *Totality and Infinity* entitled "Ethics and the Face," I began there. Because Levinas grounds ethics in relationships, in real, embodied life and experience, I saw a parallel between his description of the vulnerability of the face-to-face interaction and the relationships that the New Woman novelists describe. They move from writing essays to writing novels and short stories because fiction provides the framework for telling stories about the New Woman, who replaces the Angel in the House, in terms of lived experience. As they envision a more open system of ethics, they imagine that system in terms of relationship.

Most importantly, however, the face-to-face relationship for Levinas is based on the self's call to responsibility for the other, the obligation for the other. For the readers of New Woman fiction, feminine altruism, always within the domestic sphere, is the fundamental demand of Victorian culture for women to be considered ethical. How can they invent a new ethics that allows them to move forward into a new century in a more equitable system? Here, Levinas offers a new way of thinking about altruism that will be shared and equitable.

Levinas discusses the ethics of alterity in terms of openness and indeterminacy; I saw in the novelists' generic explorations their efforts to link theme and structure. Bakhtin's discussion of folk laughter and the carnivalesque, which provides another avenue for subverting the hegemonic demands placed on women, illuminated some of the most striking innovations in the New Woman tradition. Their use of the rogue, the fool, and the clown as subversive and comic characters also denote openness and change.

I encountered Levinas's ideas about the said and the saying in Robert Eaglestone's 1997 study *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas*, which reads the theorist's discussion of ethics and discourse in *Otherwise than Being*. In Levinas's definition of these two concepts about discourse, the face calls the subject into discourse and thus makes possible reasoned dialogue in the cause of justice. In my reading, the pairing of polemics and narrative innovations—dreams, visions, allegories, and poetical proems--in New Woman novels is illuminated and integrated when considered through the lens of Levinas's concepts of the said and the saying. This reading resolves the inclusion of two such apparently disparate characteristics. The effect of language that concretizes and fixes ideas is the power of language that the New Women interrogate in their novels. They are not only indicting the power of the controlling narrative but resisting its power by creating, in dialogue with their readers, a feminist language of their own.

They engage with the transcendent power of the saying, the moment of connection and calling in the face-to-face encounter, a moment that is unsayable, but locating the power of connection between women and a vision for an expansive future in mythic visions, allegories, and dreams. Like the saying, these passages in the novels interrogate a future that is possible by appropriating the power of the mythic past.

Finally, to bring these ideas full circle, I employ Levinas's theories about the *entretemps* from *Reality and its Shadow* and the description of the tragic writer/artist from "The Poet's Vision" in the last chapter. The New Woman writers do not depict themselves in their novels about women writers. Instead, they depict tragic, exiled, visionary women who are called to write. These figures carry the burden of articulating a more open future, documenting in writing the next step for women. None of the *kunstlerroman* examined here ends happily; true to Levinas's description, the artist-heroes depicted in these novels are tragic figures exiled from conventional

relationships and domestic settings. They are aspirational figures looking toward a more hopeful future but attempting to reconcile themselves and their desires to a still-oppressive present.

This study suggests some continued examinations, particularly, first, to anticipate objections from feminist critics. The criticism levelled at Levinas by Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray is for his sexist language, his relegation of women to secondary status, and his apparent masculine bias in his exploration of the erotic. I suggest here, however, that the theorist's overarching theory of ethics formation and the limits of personal freedom should and can resonate for women. While Levinas's ideas were born out of the devastation of the Holocaust and the continual cycle of anti-semitism, women continue to struggle with the consequences of centuries of struggle and oppression. The fundamental concepts of the face-to-face encounter, I argue, are gender-neutral. Levinas's theories offer women access to indeterminacy and openness, the non-definition needed for a more global and non-gendered system of ethics.

The application of theories of ethics formation and the implications of Levinas's theories might also be examined in contrast with Victorian novelists' interrogation of sympathy. Early feminist novels, particularly works by Charlotte and Emily Bronte, offer potential texts to be examined in light of the ethics of alterity. Certainly, early feminist artist figures, particularly the protagonists of Browning's "Aurora Leigh" or Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, offer context for my study of later feminist artist figures.

Additionally, more work is called for in examining productive intersections in the work of Levinas and Bakhtin. Both consider the manner in which written language and narrative structure offer new ways of critiquing the dominant narrative. Additionally, both consider figures that exist in the margins and serve to illuminate the culture they critique through the flexible form of the novel.

In writing about the consequences of written language and concretizing the transcendent, Levinas asserts that every book is already in conversation with other texts, those already written and those that have not yet been written. I hope this study begins a conversation with other studies yet to be written.

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