



# NINETEENTH-CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

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## The New Woman's Work: Past, Present, and Future

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<1> A full generation after New Woman fiction was re-introduced to academic readers (by Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, Lloyd Fernando's "New Women" in the *Late Victorian Novel* in 1977 and Gail Cunningham's *The New Woman and The Victorian Novel* in 1978) and a decade beyond outpourings of gender-inflected essays, dissertations and books aroused as the most recent *fin de siècle* approached, the impact of this scholarship — and of the women, the writers and the texts it studies — is far from exhausted. Although undergraduates may continue to insist that Victorian women were silent, subservient and confined to their homes, the papers from the New Woman Roundtable at the 2007 British Women Writers Conference not only reflect the conference theme, "Speaking With Authority" but also focus on the importance of work. Together, our three papers illuminate the literal work in the public sphere done by middle-class women in the 1880s and 1890s; the cultural work performed by the stereotyped "New Woman" and by the backlash against her; the twentieth-century scholarship on her that reshaped the study of modernity and examined evolving questions about gender, nationality, race, class and empire. In the early twenty-first century this work again feels urgent. Its implications fuel the search for new frames of analysis and raise complex and suggestive debates about new ways that we, collectively, might think about our own work as woman scholars and about the place of humanities in an increasingly vocational and technological system of higher education.

### I. New Women's Work: Personal, Political, Public

By [Sally Mitchell](#), Temple University

<2> Eliza Lynn Linton's 1895 novel *In Haste and at Leisure* — retitled *The New Woman* for its US edition — describes an "Excelsior Club" where women discuss "the diabolical nature of husbands; the degrading institution of marriage; the shameful burden of maternity; women's claims to be a County Councillor, a voter, a lawyer, a judge, and M.P. . . . and the right of the sex in general, married or single, to live like men in every particular, if they chose to do so" (Crawford 118-19). Unsurprising details from Linton, but here is *To-Day's Woman* for 22 June of the same year on the "brilliant and successful gathering" at the annual Women Writers' Dinner. Menie Muriel Dowie (author of *Gallia*) held "a cigarette between her fingers" while speaking about "the fiction of the future." Men would be "completely unveiled by those who know them best," and novels would "represent women in relation to public life, and give the love stories of women who sit on committees" ("The Lady Journalists" 17).

<3> Searching the phrase "New Woman" in the full text London *Times* from 1885 through 1901 I had 136 hits. An ad for the "Harness Electrical Belt" on 14 December 1891 described a patient as "completely cured — she is a new woman now." The next appearance is on 16 June 1894, when a review of Sarah Grand's *Our Manifold Nature* already objects to "The prominence given to the New Woman in modern fiction."<sup>(1)</sup> Two weeks later the reviewer of *The Story of a Modern Woman* finds that the "New Woman is not so very new" and concludes that "Mrs. Dixon [sic] is a smart and clever writer who will do better when she dissociates herself from the sisterhood who are rending heaven with laments about the 'torture, the helplessness, the impotence, and the emptiness of women's lives'" (30 June 1894). The same tone of condescending regret greets *Gallia*: "no ordinary book . . . All the more disappointing . . . that Miss Dowie should have used her gifts to . . . [evolve] outrageous heroines and [drag] in the 'sex' question" (16 April 1895).

<4> In all, however, only nine reviews used the term, and several were of anonymous novels

written by men.(2) An amusing response to *The Woman Who Did* reports that “Mr. Grant Allen, who is among other things a persevering novelist, has at last achieved notoriety” (19 March 1895). And finally on 6 June 1895 — after a run of just under one year — one more anonymous book by a man is called a “belated . . . straggler from the procession of books more or less directly concerned with the New Woman.”(3)

<5> In news pages the phrase had a longer life — almost always as a disclaimer. Here, for example, is the report of an address to the students of Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville College by “Mr. Geoffrey Drage, of the Labour Commission,” a public body on which “men and women of all classes” worked together. Its success, he said, “was due to the admirable institutions which had trained those women.” After seeing the practical result of the “ladies’ colleges at Oxford and Cambridge,” Mr Drage knew “that the extraordinary creature known as the ‘new woman’ was the exception and not the rule” (“The Employment of Women”).

<6> In the thirty years leading up to what I would call the “New Woman panic” of 1894, women earned degrees from London University and outscored men in Cambridge examinations; married women gained control over all of their own property; women were elected to local government posts, appointed to policy-making Royal Commissions, and ordained in the lowest rank of Church of England clergy. An *Englishwoman’s Review* article signed by “An Old Oriental” describes the astonishing changes when he returned from thirty years of foreign service: “every hour and every day sights which would have shocked every moral sense when he was a boy. . . . [W]omen newspaper reporters [are] almost as numerous as men. Accountants and book-keepers crowd the trains morning and evening . . . . Girls of every rank think no more of riding a bicycle through the busy thoroughfares of London, than they do of going into an A.B.C. shop for a cup of tea. Go back to 1875, and try to think, if you can, what would have been said of a woman riding a bicycle down Piccadilly on a June afternoon” (151-52).

<7> The census reveals that his eyes were not misled — in 1891 the marriage rate was dropping, women’s age at marriage was rising, and the average annual fertility of wives was diminishing. Among the “Professional Class” in census categories, almost 10,000 women worked for the national government plus another 5,000 as local officials. There were 166 women law clerks; 101 doctors, 2 veterinarians, more than 50,000 sick nurses and midwives; and almost 145,000 women teachers, professors, or lecturers. Altogether more than 400,000 women were in the “professional class.” This is in addition to the explosion of women’s work as typists, telephone operators, telegraphers and commercial clerks (*British Parliamentary Papers*). In 1871, women had been one and a half per cent of commercial clerks; by 1901 they were more than 15% (Jordan 186). By 1901, women were also nearly 11% of the newly certified occupation of “dispensing chemist” (Jordan 79).

<8> Some of the political and feminist changes that made (real) New Women number in the hundreds of thousands by 1890 came about through causes and organizations that we tend to label as “conservative.” Although Ella Hepworth Dixon told W.T. Stead in 1894 that *The Story of a Modern Woman* was “a plea for a kind of moral and social trades-unionism among women” (qtd. in Dixon 194) the deliberate building of “moral and social trades-unionism” probably starts with L.M. Hubbard’s *Year-book of Woman’s Work* in 1875. As evidence of women’s public role, the twenty-fifth annual volume of this handbook, edited by Emily Janes as *The Englishwoman’s Year Book and Directory, 1901* has pages and pages of names with staff, organizations and projects: university pass lists, hospital affiliations, museum curators, women to contact for training-schools or trades-unions, secretaries of clubs and residences and athletic organizations and literally hundreds — probably thousands — of philanthropic societies. Although the word “philanthropy” is now generally applied only to people who give money, “philanthropists” in the Victorian period also included all of the women doing what we now call social work and a great many who ran organizations, managed shelters, operated nursing homes and created affordable housing for low-wage workers.

<9> *The Monthly Packet* — a magazine founded by Charlotte Yonge in 1851 as *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Younger Members of the English Church* — had a six-part series in 1898 on “Women’s Public Work” which urged readers to speak with authority in public roles. The first topic was “Poor-Law Guardians.” After 1875, women who paid local property taxes could serve on the boards that administered poor relief. By century’s end the Dickensian “Union Workhouse” had been transformed as guardians developed group homes, foster care and vocational training, built public hospitals and free clinics, established old-age homes, and created sheltered workshons for people with disabilities. In 1895 — the year the New Woman “went out

of style” — there were 883 women serving as elected poor-law guardians in England and Wales. Five years later, an additional 250 had been elected (Hollis, 486-87).

<10> Women’s first important public office had come from the 1870 Education Act, which required state-supported elementary schools open to all children and created local boards to run them. A London newspaper wrote in November: “There probably has never yet been an election . . . more important and interesting. . . . The candidature of women side by side with men, of Peers with artisans . . . all this is new and strange” (“The Educational Election”). On December first readers discovered that “Miss Garrett, M.D.” topped the poll for Marylebone by an astonishing plurality. With 22 candidates competing for seven seats, she had 47,858 votes; the scientist T.H. Huxley was in second place with 13,494 (“Election of Ladies” 28).

<11> By 1879, nine women were on the London School Board, holding almost 20% of the seats. (We’re now just under 17% in the US Congress.) London’s School Board was the second most important legislative body in the United Kingdom. It was responsible for creating, from scratch, a public education system for the world’s largest city, of supervising it, inspecting it, developing curriculum, commissioning books, setting the salaries and qualifications and working conditions for thousands of teachers (most of them women). In 1888 it ran schools for nearly half a million children. The average salary for woman teachers was £85 per year — significantly more than London pay for a police constable or a fire fighter (Dickens 223; *A Thousand Ways to Earn a Living* 151). A head teacher might earn £300 (Janes 85), an income that would provide a nice flat and good clothing, theaters and concerts, a trip to the Continent with friends during the summer, money to put aside for old age. (Why aren’t they in novels, I wonder? The popular “typewriter girl” was lucky to be paid £50 a year, and probably started at half that much.)

<12> By the end of the century hundreds of women had been elected as guardians, school board members, district counsellors, parish officials. All of them had campaigned, held rallies, put forth platforms and proposals. They had, in other words, spoken with authority. When we think of suffrage, however, we generally mean the parliamentary franchise — and what happened with that in the 1890s also has something to do with new-woman politics. Between 1867 and 1884 women’s suffrage was debated in Parliament almost every session, but in the twenty years after 1884, even though bills were introduced annually, they reached debate only three times (Steinbach 283).

<13> In 1897 the goal came heartbreakingly close. That year’s Parliamentary Franchise (Extension to Women) Act passed its second reading by 71 votes; it had a majority among members from every party. “We all met in the House of Commons where the excitement was great,” wrote one woman who was there. “Women laughing and kissing and crying and some M.P.s running about like school boys” (Mary Joy Haweis, qtd. in Howe 262). Bills that passed their second reading went to a committee which reported back to the Commons for final passage. On the scheduled day, the first bill taken up dealt with “persons infested by vermin.” Henry Labouchère made long speeches full of jokes; others did the same; and the session ended without a vote. Even the *Spectator* — which opposed women’s suffrage — wrote that “the spectacle of the House performing monkey tricks over the Verminous Persons’ Bill, in order to dish the women, was not an agreeable one” (“Women’s Suffrage” 158).

<14> This was a real shock to women who had seen the promised land — who had faith in the parliamentary process and saw their thirty-year struggle so close to success. The 1894 response to “new women” was, it would seem, harbinger of a politically effective backlash. In 1896 and 1897 first Oxford and then Cambridge firmly rejected proposals to grant degrees to women students. Goldwin Smith, in a letter published in the *Times* on 26 May 1896, wrote that women’s real object was “nothing less than a sexual revolution . . . deposing the head of the family, forcing women into male employments, and breaking down . . . every barrier which Nature or custom has established.”

<15> Did New Woman novelists themselves take any public role in women’s political activism? Searching biographical information for sixty-six authors — most of the women in Ann Ardis’s bibliography plus a few others — I discovered that twenty-three were pro-suffrage (they signed petitions, belonged to organizations, gave speeches). For seven more I have no evidence about suffrage, but they were publically engaged with other women’s causes. This gives me a total of thirty active feminists/suffragists among the sixty-six New Woman writers. Seven of the sixty-six opposed women’s parliamentary suffrage. The best known, of course, was Mary Ward, despite her leadership on other feminist issues. Others included George Egerton “Iota” (author of *A*

Yellow Aster) and Arabella Kenealy, a graduate of the London School of Medicine for Women who by 1920 wrote a book explaining that feminism would lead to the extinction of the female sex.(4)

<16> For the remaining twenty-nine I found no evidence of public campaigning. But though I also don't know about everyone's marital status, twenty-six out of the sixty-six remained single, and eleven — one-sixth of them — had some higher education. By the 1890s, transformations over the past thirty years enabled women to live, if they chose, in independent, public, and powerful ways — but the emotional (as well as practical) backlash was often exhausting. Even though Sarah Grand had written in 1896 that “the ‘novel with a purpose’ and the ‘sex novel’ are more powerful at the present time, especially for good, than any other social influence” (qtd. in Heilmann 1), by 12 September 1936 a *Times* obituary for Emily Morse Symonds (“George Paston”) described her as author of novels “of the revolting daughter type”: “The feminist world of which she wrote is so absolutely forgotten that it is difficult to believe it ever existed.”

<17> If the mere existence of any woman novelists between George Eliot and Virginia Woolf was a (re-)discovery by feminist literary scholars now at the point of retirement, another group of writers remains almost unknown. A passage from *Woman's Signal* in April 1895:

The English “New Woman” is a source of great interest to our French cousins. A writer in the *Temps* is somewhat enthusiastic. . . . “If you are a daily frequenter of the magnificent library of the British Museum you are brought into contact with the journalists of the fair sex, whose punctual activity and alertness it is impossible not to admire. Of the 600 admission cards which are issued, 280 are for women and . . . they are used more regularly than those of the men. Few of the women are occupied with things interesting to their sex; most prefer important studies, such as theology, political economy, or science.

“If the writer had been a little more explicit,” comments the *Woman's Signal*, “and told us what ‘the things interesting to their sex’ were, we should have been glad, now we can only gather that the things uninteresting to the sex are the ‘important studies’ of theology, political economy, or science” (“Concerning Women”).

<18> We still need to identify, recover, and consider the political and social writing by those women, examining it not only for information and opinions but also as texts: rhetoric, tactics, effects, philosophy. We might start with the authors of one or two New Woman novels who did a great deal more work in nonfiction. Jane Hume Clapperton, for example, whose writing is described in the *ODNB* as a “distinctive blend of agnosticism, socialist feminism, radical sexual morality, and eugenics.” Isabella Ford, who wrote *On the Threshold* (1895), was a founder of the Leeds Independent Labour Party, an elected member of the parish council, and author of *Industrial Women and How to Help Them*. Edith Simcox, known to us mostly because she had a crush on George Eliot, wrote for major journals on politics, literature, history and philosophy, and was elected to the London School Board in 1879 with a platform of compulsory secular elementary education for all. Florence Fenwick Miller, another London School Board member, wrote on physiology and edited *Woman's Signal*. Her daughter Irene was one of the ten “ringleaders of the mob that caused an unseemly and disgraceful scene of disorder on the assembling of Parliament”(5) on 23 October 1906 — the first group of London women sent to prison for militant suffrage action.(6)

<19> There are dozens of others — a 1986 dissertation by Carol Freeborough Martel on the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science lists more than 150 women who gave papers at the association's annual conference, for a start, and the *Wellesley Index*, the full-text searchable *Times*, the *Gerritsen Collection*, and all of the other periodicals rapidly becoming available online would make this work possible in a way that couldn't even be imagined when the three of us were writing dissertations. I would really love to hear that someone is working on Clementina Black: dozens of articles, a sharp mind, a sense of humor, and prose that speaks with authority about causes that affect all women. If the fiction *Ménie Muriel Dowie* called for, fiction that would “represent women in relation to public life and give the love stories of women who sit on committees,” did not, in fact, become the “fiction of the future,” it may have been because the “love stories” of Clementina Black and Isabella Ford and their like are still not appreciated or understood.

## Endnotes

(1) In considering the “naming” debate, it is worth recording that Sarah Grand’s “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” was in *North American Review* for March 1894 and Ouida’s “The New Woman” in May. (△)

(2) On 25 October 1894 there were two reviews, of Violet Hunt’s *The Maiden’s Progress* (“Every second novel which one takes up this year is concerned with the New Woman — whether in exaltation or derision of her”) and, in the next column, *George Mandeville’s Husband*, by the then unidentified “C.E. Raimond,” now known to be Elizabeth Robins, who had played Hedda Gabler in London in 1891. *Une Culotte, or a New Woman: An Impossible Story of Modern Oxford* (20 October 1894) was by “Tivoli,” otherwise Horace William Bleackley (1868/9-1931), who generally wrote about cricket, famous crimes and celebrated women of the demi-monde. *The Green Carnation* — a much-reprinted novel by the enormously popular Robert Smythe Hichens — was described thus: “To dress up a New Man or New Woman bogey and then ferociously knock the stuffing out of it is an amusement much in vogue with the modern novelist” (30 October 1894). Hichens (1864-1950) has more than a hundred titles listed in the Bodleian catalogue; *The Green Carnation* was most recently reprinted in 1992. A *Times* obituary on 22 June 1950 called him “in his day one of the most celebrated of popular novelists in this country. . . . For over half a century he entertained, shocked, fascinated, and only rarely bored his public.” (△)

(3) The book, *At the Gate of Samaria*, is attributed in the Bodleian’s catalogue to William John Locke (1863-1930) His obituary in the *Times* for 17 May 1930 is headed “A Master of Romantic Fiction” and asserts that “No other novelist of the day, through so long a period of steadily fruitful industry, has been so continuously acceptable.” (△)

(4) In addition to the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Gerritsen Collection*, my sources for biographical research have been the *Times*, the volumes by Crawford and Janes, “An Appeal against Female Suffrage” published in *Nineteenth Century* for June 1889 together with a full list of signatures bound as a supplement to the US edition for August 1889, and *Declaration in Favour of Women’s Suffrage*, a pamphlet printed by the National Society for Women’s Suffrage and dated 1 August 1889. (△)

(5) Untitled leader, *Times* 25 October 1906: 9. (△)

(6) Van Arsdell 223. Letters to the editor published in the *Times* on 29 and 30 October 1906 identify the women imprisoned as Anne Cobden-Sanderson, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, Edith How-Martyn, Teresa Billington, Dora Fuller Montefiore, Minnie Baldock (a member of a Board of Guardians), Sylvia and Adela Pankhurst, and Irene Miller. (△)

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## II. New Strategies for New (Academic) Women(1)

By [Teresa Mangum](#), University of Iowa

<1> Adventurer or adventuress? Explorer or exploiter? Victim or virago? Recovery work or the return of the repressed? As studies like Lee Ann Richardson's *New Woman and Colonial Adventure Fiction in Victorian Britain* and Iveta Jusová's *The New Woman and the Empire* have followed the New Woman into the places and politics of empire, the consequences of our interpretations of this icon become even more ethically as well as aesthetically insistent. These studies invite scholars to ask whether we can justify building research careers on a figure embedded in all we find most objectionable about Victorian global domination and teaching

imperialist novels like Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) and Flora Annie Steel's *On the Face of the Waters* (1896). Looking back at the usually white, middle-class New Woman figure across both the violent legacies of colonialism and the scientific and social arguments that shored up color, class, and gender inequities, can *literary critics* do anything more than simply condemn the past? To be a *bit* histrionic—a characteristic no New Woman writer worth her salt would have shied away from—the challenges of reading, teaching, contextualizing, framing, and interpreting representations of the New Woman in the actualities and imaginary of Empire thrust us into what critics even more comfortable with histrionics than myself bemoan as a crisis of the humanities.

<2> In the good company of my inspiring colleagues Sally Mitchell and Ann Ardis, I want to reflect on the ways that we might use our particular location as New Women scholars not only to shape the future of Victorian studies but also to revitalize the humanities. Ann Heilmann incisively categorizes previous New Woman studies in a 2005 *Literature Compass* overview. In particular, she suggests that in the last few years an increasingly international perspective has drawn attention to power relations driven by differences in color and ethnicity in these novels. The fine collection of essays she co-edited with Margaret Beetham, *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930*, demonstrates this trend. Ann Ardis reminds us (both in her comments at the British Women Writers Conference and in her earlier ground-breaking work) that class conflicts and differences—including those represented in neglected novels of working-class life—demand attention. Sally Mitchell's incisive examination of women's work in her essay here reinforces that claim. Forging both interdisciplinary and international intellectual connections will continue to be crucial to future New Woman scholarship. But we can do even more. If you are working on the New Woman right now, your very training pushes you to the brink of fissures in, between, and beyond the discipline of literary studies across which we need to build bridges: in historical terms, between brutalities of the past and violence in our present and in immediate, pragmatic terms, between scholars in the academy and a larger public. The on-going negotiations demanded by this field of study propel scholars toward insights, harsh truths, cautions, humility, commitment, and innovation—excellent preparation for leadership roles in reforming and advocating for the humanities more generally.

<3> If you are *teaching* New Woman literature situated in the locations and thematics of empire, the gap between your students' knowledge and the texts' details demands maps, timelines, explanations of transnational political history and imperial practices, and background material on Victorian theories of racial hierarchies and class difference. As my students and I discuss critical assessments of New Woman novels, I often find myself explaining concepts like middlebrow taste, popular fiction, topicality, or fiction with a "purpose"—categorical judgments that long kept these novels out of print and out of classrooms. Given the increasing marginalization of the humanities, even the new intellectual categories used to rescue New Woman fiction—feminist history or theory, cultural studies, and now postcolonial studies—may put this body of work at risk in the future. Moreover, when one juxtaposes "elite" texts, which often attain that status by aestheticizing, universalizing, and thus sanitizing the worlds they represent, with "bestsellers," the popular literature seldom fares well. Hatreds and fears that live side by side with kindness and generosity in any culture hit readers squarely between the eyes in popular novels. Nowhere is that more true than in Victorian representations of empire.

<4> The way we approach the New Woman, especially when she travels to locations where she is at least as much victimizer as victim, is deeply qualified by the way we define "the humanities" or whatever term we use to name what we as a discipline are. Given the pressures of the current moment—from global warming to a so-called war and lingering imperialist policies to the mundane revival of genuinely ugly macho ad campaigns (like various burger chains' "real men" advertisements), I find myself asking how I justify humanistic study of the past or of literature itself, much less of nineteenth-century New Woman novels? Add higher education's increasing demand that all disciplines answer to "economic development" or at least "public engagement" to these ethical questions, and I find myself wondering whether the New Woman is just too *old* to be made "new"?

<5> You can guess how I'll paint the answer to my own rhetorical questions in the broadest brush strokes, but the devil (and the often devilish New Woman) is in the details. The potential limitation of studying the New Woman and empire is that one *is tempted* by oppositional logic to argue either that unconventional British women and their fictional counterparts in the empire were despicable racists or that they were heroic daredevils, to treat fictional form as a prison of imperialist privilege or, perhaps more egregiously, to avoid ideologically repellant passages in order to lavish attention on the progressive aspects of intriguing texts. The great *gift* of the

humanities is that not only would such simplistic bifurcation be resisted, it would not even be seriously entertained. By training, literary scholars examine a text in all its signifying contexts and cultural implications. Our *curse* is that to others, in so doing, we appear to drown in relativistic indecision and inconclusive interpretations. We need to retain our commitment to critical analysis and respect for complexity while also clarifying the value of critical analysis to larger publics, beginning with our own college administrations and, for public universities, our state legislatures and fellow citizens. Moreover, we need to translate what we learn from reading literature into *action*—whether through our teaching or through community discussions where we use literature to focus public debates. In other words, not only can New Woman fiction, poetry, journalism, and travel literature offer scholars a riveting object of study, but many of these texts also still actively challenge readers to change the world by writing and reading *and* by taking action. What better way to ensure a future for New Woman texts than to answer that call, even knowing that like these plots and characters, we'll act unwisely and insensitively in some instances, leaving the burden upon the next generation to illuminate our mistakes and reanimate the ethical aesthetics of the best of the New Woman phenomenon?

<6> New Women novels entangled with empire offer one powerful example of the ways we might fashion what I'll call scholarship of engagement. I turn to a writer that I am currently wrestling with myself, Flora Annie Steel (1847-1929).<sup>(2)</sup> More precisely, I'm preparing a Broadview edition of her 1896 novel *On the Face of the Waters*. Even choosing how to describe Steel's subject matter—what she, like most British Victorians, called the Indian (or Sepoy) Mutiny of 1857 and what today is variously called the Sepoy Rebellion or the Indian Uprising or the First Indian War of Independence—a scholar is caught in a global web of postcolonial politics.<sup>(3)</sup> I apologize in advance for all the excellent studies I will be unable to mention. I mention only a few specific titles, and those few were chosen to suggest paths a New Woman literary scholar might overlook. The rest of my comments are organized in response to questions I find myself repeatedly asking in teaching and researching Steel's career and her novel, written in the moment of New Woman fiction though situated at a critical juncture for British imperialist ambitions decades earlier. How might literary scholars use New Woman fiction to deepen our knowledge of transnational relations under empire by continuing to study the part literature played in maintaining and critiquing those relations? How can we differentiate for ourselves and our students between the arrogance and violence we need to confront in these novels and the uses we make of what that literary history can teach us—in all its complexity? And, finally, what can we learn from the rhetoric and form and hence the reading practices and contextualizing research these novels require of readers that will help us to explain why the subject matter and interpretive methods of the humanities remain absolutely crucial to the creation of a just society?

### **The New Woman and Interdisciplinarity**

<7> Scholars of New Woman fiction, especially of texts grappling with empire, have benefited from the increasing opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration. Priya Joshi takes a cue from sociology in her book *In Another Country* (2002), a study of the ways Indians read nineteenth-century British novels. By tracking library and publishers' records, and other material traces left by Indian readers, Joshi offers quantifiable evidence of Indian tastes in British fiction. Her work reverses the usual global flow of analysis and upends our sense of New Woman readership. Joshi's study offers, for instance, a fascinating contrast with Flora Annie Steel's autobiographical accounts of Indian students' literacy when she served as the first Inspectress of Schools for much of northern India, an experience Rebecca Sutliff discusses in her intriguing look at Steel's government reports on schools.

<8> Cultural geographers offer another crucial resource for contextualizing both our understanding of empire and of New Woman texts like Steel's. Postcolonial theory has profoundly reframed Victorian studies and set us on a course toward more nuanced understandings of the ways spaces structured relations within empire, from the pink cloaking of global maps to back entrances for "native" servants. This work reminds us that these novels are rooted in historical, ideological, and imagined geographies. Cultural geographers like Richard White increasingly turn to Henri Lefebvre's account of constructed space to argue that modernizing technologies such as railways and telegraphs drastically refigured not only land but the space/time relationships that shape our experience of geography. These same technologies enabled empire, of course, and it can be no accident that the New Woman is both urban and transnational, caught up in increasingly global technologies, from bicycles and typewriters to steam ships and stethoscopes.<sup>(4)</sup>

<9> Other forms of spatial study such as Rosemary George's *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* or Sara Mills' *Gender and Colonial Space* have resituated New Woman novels in relation to domestic architecture,. Given that Steel collaborated with Vivian Gardiner in writing *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook: Giving the Duties of Mistress and Servants, the General Management of the House, and Practical Recipes for Cooking in All Its Branches* (1888), one of the most widely read domestic manuals for British women setting up house in India, attention to the material culture of domestic space is

particularly relevant. This scholarly fascination with spaces, locations, and cultural tensions suggests we might profitably shift emphasis from the character of the New Woman to the structuring effects of contact, as suggested by Susan Zlotnick's delicious "Curry and Cookbooks" essay about the transportation of colonial foodways back to Britain. Interpreting the fictional spaces of a novel like *On the Face of the Waters* through geographical and architectural accounts of spatial relations is enormously instructive. The novel transgresses boundaries between colonizers and colonized when English characters must pass as Indians. The results are imperial hybrid spaces of contact but not of equality, of transformation without political change. In her autobiography and in the preface to the novel, Steel asserts that her goal was to write a novel that would heal the continuing breach between English and Indian audiences by offering an unbiased view of the motives, actions, brutality, and heroism on both sides:

The reader may rest assured that every incident bearing in the remotest degree on the Indian Mutiny, or on the part which real men took in it, is scrupulously exact, even to the date, the hour, the scene, the very weather. Nor have I allowed the actual actors in the great tragedy to say a word regarding it which is not to be found in the accounts of eye-witnesses, or in their own writings (Preface, v).

If present-day readers overlook the novel's attention to contact zones and their transformative effects due to our impatience with Steel's overt imperialism, we miss glimpses into an historical mirror. Those glimpses reveal the particular ways even a writer deeply sympathetic to her subjects—in this case Indians, whom Steel otherwise carefully and knowledgeably differentiates into Pathans and Gurkhas, Hindus and Muslims—can still fall into rhetorical reassertions of arguments for empire.

<10> This attention to differences among non-westerners, among other qualities of Steel's novel, also calls attention to the interdisciplinary promise of anthropology, with all its political problems (as so thoroughly interrogated in Jim Buzard's *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels*), for New Woman studies. Steel herself set out to be an anthropologist, collecting folklore in *Tales of the Punjab* (1894) and infusing her fiction with anthropological and cultural details with obsessive exactitude (if also with British disdain). As Buzard's work suggests in reference to a different set of novels, the lure of ethnography helps to explain the love and loathing of otherness that makes New Woman writers so attentive to detail in colonial contexts. Similarly, studies inflected by the anthropological emphasis on purity and pollution, such as the essays in William Cohen and Ryan Johnson's *Filth: Dirt, Disgust and Modern Life* sweep the dirt in New Woman novels back out from under colonial carpets, a necessary first step being taken in studies like those by Iveta Jusová and Lee Ann Richardson.

### **Structured Reversals**

<11> What does it mean to teach "British literature" much less the "British" New Woman novel in the twenty-first century? As Joshi's work suggests, both New Woman studies and the humanities increasingly demand a radical "transnationalizing" of our archives, our history, our theory, and our practice as teachers. Historian Antoinette Burton's work on Indian travelers, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (as well as her reflections on archives), reminds us that London was at least a temporary home to many Indians and Indian travelers in the 1890s. As many postcolonial historians, literary critics, and theorists' arguments suggest, all nineteenth-century literature is empire literature.

<12> Whatever our color, we as scholars threaten to reproduce what Burton calls the "white women's special burden"—their imperialist condescension to the colonized women they hoped to serve—if we fail to make serious efforts to learn what is being written by scholars outside the west when we write about the New Woman's travels. I am continually surprised that I have to rely on international on-line bookstores to learn about work published by South Asian scholars, even in English, even by a major globalized corporation such as Oxford India. We need access to

(in my present case) scholarship being written and published in India, such as Indrani Sen's *Woman and Empire*, which includes an important chapter on Steel, or Harish Trivedi's *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India*. Fortunately, Meenakshi Mukerjee's crucial studies of nineteenth-century literature written in English by Indians have been published in the U.S. as well as in India. Our very curriculum of "English" literature is challenged by Mukerjee's accounts of writers like Bengali poet, novelist, and lawyer Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (or Chatterjee), whose novel *Rajmohan's Wife* was serialized in the Indian English-language magazine, *Indian Field*, in 1864. The Merchant and Ivory film *Shakespeare-Wallah* (1965), in which a theatre troupe adapts Shakespeare for Indian audiences, suggests there may also be a great number of fascinating Indianizations of British novels yet to be discovered (one of the topics Priya Joshi pursues).<sup>(5)</sup> We can also take advantage of films made in India by Indian directors, such as Ashutosh Gowariker's Academy Award nominated *Lagaan (The Tax)*, (2001). Set in rural India as a somewhat fanciful representation of 1893, the film depicts insensitive, brutal British officers who bet the heavily taxed villagers they cannot beat the British at cricket, a game the villagers have never played. If the villagers win, the British will give them several tax-free years. A sort of New Woman figure, the sister to the head British officer, secretly teaches the villagers the game. The film reverses the perspective of so-called "Raj films," all too familiar to British and American audiences. North American (non-Indian) students are confronted by a sense of how it feels to be "othered," deepening their experience of transnational reading in all its complexities. The film also offers wonderful examples of the semiotics of gender, class, cross-cultural relations, sartorial detail, and architecture that have come to represent "empire" in contemporary popular culture, a productive juxtaposition with nineteenth-century discourse.

<13> We can also rely on other forms of visual culture studies to educate ourselves into re-seeing Victorian representations of colonial others. Christopher Pinney's *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* offers dazzling illustrations of such cultural translation. Pinny, an anthropologist, argues that photographic portraits were first used by the British to measure and categorize Indian "types." Indian photographers turned the tables by ornamenting their black and white portraits with color and jewels that reconstituted this western representational technology as Indian art. Situating the New Woman novel in relation to nineteenth-century Indian culture as well as "Anglo-Indian" culture might teach us to read very differently indeed.

### Languages

<14> Flora Annie Steel also raises another important issue for scholars serious about following the New Woman into the imperial past. One of Steel's first objectives when she arrived in India was to learn Indian languages. Reading her self-aggrandizing autobiography provides insight into her convoluted views of language. Discussing the failure of what would then have been called Anglo-Indians either to rule Indians or to appreciate them, she writes:

I attribute this largely to the fact that the English regiments, their officers, their wives, their families, scarcely know the language at all. So they submit to things to which they should not submit, and fail to get what they have every right to expect. Thus they seldom learn to like their servants. (*The Garden of Fidelity*, 133)

Her novels are peppered with Urdu phrases; she apparently translated many of the folk tales she collected herself, and she claimed to study Indian documents written in Indian languages in preparation for the writing of her novel about the 1857 rebellion. I am indicting myself along with most American academics when I say that to be the best scholars of colonial literatures and histories we can be, we need to place language study front and center in our undergraduate and graduate programs, and we must do all that we can to support our colleagues who teach in language departments, especially those who teach non-European languages. In the very moment that we in the humanities are recognizing our need for Arabic or Bengali—to study English literature generally as well as New Woman novels—those programs are vanishing. The increasingly insistent voices in the field of translation studies offer one promising development. As Susan Buck-Morss argues in *Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*, "If we understand the task of translation as a political project, then the treatment of political languages as *mutually* open to transformation challenges the unequal arrangements of global power" (7). We can, at least, teach comparatively (until we're able to read Hindi or Bengali). The translated 1890s short stories of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, for example, offer a revelatory juxtaposition with Steel's (and Rudyard Kipling's) short stories set in India.

### Conclusion—public engagement

<15> The great value of studying texts from earlier historical moments, what Cary Nelson recently called the “resolute alienation effect” of the past, forces responsible readers to situate popular, topical literature in its own historical, social, political, geographical contexts simply to comprehend what they are reading.(6) As teachers and scholars, confronting the New Women in relation to empire demands that we work unflaggingly to understand how a literature that actively advocated for social progress on the gender front in Britain could simultaneously collude with racism, flaunt white privilege, and dehumanize people marked inferior by class, color, religion, or region that inhered in imperialism. As we learn from the work of other disciplines, craft approaches that are transnational and comparative, and connect with international scholars and scholarship—I want to believe that we will also find ourselves refashioning “the humanities” into a crucial means not only of understanding our world but of changing it for the better.

<16> In conclusion, editing and writing about Steel’s *On the Face of the Waters* has led me on intriguing travels myself as a scholar. As Ann Ardis compellingly demonstrates using the example of Katharine St. John Conway’s 1896 novel *Aimée Furniss*, *Scholar*, recovery and revisionary work helps expose the inadequacies of the usual methods of humanities scholarly process and classroom pedagogy. When it was clear that I needed to study the political history of British India in order to render Steel’s texts intelligible, I turned to my colleague in imperial history, Jeff Cox, for help.(7) As a result, we have twice convinced our different departments to buck the economic constraints on co-teaching courses. Though I have not yet studied Hindi or Bengali, I have used research funds to support two of my English Department’s graduate students from India. This exchange provided international students with funding and rewarded me with their expertise in languages.

<17> I have also begun challenging myself to convince larger communities of the value of literature and literary history. This fall, I’ll be teaching a course on Victorian women in fiction, which will feature several New Woman texts. My class will collaborate with students and faculty from Theatre Arts to produce a public staged reading of Elizabeth Robins’ play *Votes for Women!* (1907). (We’re hoping to recruit our Dean and our Vice President for Research for two key roles.) One group of students will serve as dramaturges: they will approach their research on the play, its literary strategies, its allusions, the struggle for suffrage, and the struggles among women of different classes knowing they will ultimately share their discoveries in the form of program notes. Another group will collect visual images of fictional New Women and of suffragists and suffragettes and prepare a slide show to run before and after the performance. They will help to prepare program notes on the power of the press and visual culture in shaping responses to the New Woman on the page, on the stage, and in the streets. In other words, students will approach their research and writing about a New Woman play with a clear vision of an audience and an objective—convincing their own peers and fellow citizens that what women imagined, wrote, and did 100 years ago still affects us today.(8)

<18> The event will be a collaboration with the League of Women Voters and our community Women’s Resource and Action Center. We hope League members will follow up with a public forum about local candidates. We are inviting women of both political parties to take bit parts in the play. In another coordinated event, the University of Iowa Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Interdisciplinary Colloquium (a group of faculty and graduate students)(9) will sponsor a panel of scholars who will discuss the struggles for full suffrage in different countries during the last few centuries. On the eve of the Iowa Caucus for the next presidential election, what better way to remind members of both town and gown communities how hard won the right to vote was than to immerse them in the language, image, characters, and conflicts of the transnational New Woman?

<19> In seeking images of suffragettes for this upcoming class, I stumbled upon a photo in the Museum of London collection that captures a contingent of Indian women. Dressed in saris, they are marching in the Women’s Coronation Procession in London on June 17, 1911. One woman holds a banner stitched with words. Those visible read “Crown Colonies and Protectorates.” Half-hidden behind a banner in the center of the photo that holds the single word INDIA stands a rather starched, slightly smiling middle- or upper-class white woman in an elegant suit and a massive hat, who may be Mrs. Fisher Unwin, an organizer of this contingent. She does not appear to be leading, chastising, defending, or speaking for her companions. In that moment, at least, she is simply there—with them. Clearly there are more stories that need telling about the New Woman and empire.



Many thanks to Researcher Nikki Braunton and the Picture Library of the Museum of London for sharing this image, which the Library records describe as “Indian suffragettes on the Women’s Coronation Procession, London, 17th June 1911. Mrs. Fisher Unwin, who had links with India, was in charge of this contingent, which was part of the Empire Pageant.”

#### Endnotes

(1) I am very grateful to the conference organizers, Stacey Floyd, Hannah Freeman, Katherine Osborne, Melissa Purdue, Christopher Reese, and their faculty advisor, Ellen Rosenman, for inviting me to be part of a panel, especially a panel that includes two scholars and friends whom I admire greatly. Thanks also to the Obermann Center for Advanced Studies at the University of

Iowa for the time and space to prepare this talk and to Corey Creekmur for his editorial suggestions.(^)

(2)For a quick, helpful introduction to Steel and her work, see biographical entries by Julie English Early and Rebecca Sutliff.(^)

(3)The complexities of twenty-first century accounts of the events are suggested by advertisements for “Mutiny Tours”: <http://www.parveenpaul.com/mutiny-india-tour-package.html>.(^)

(4)Kathryn (Kate) Henderson is currently writing a dissertation that develops just this point through comparison of transnational short stories by New Women writers entitled “Making Room: British Women Writers, Social Change, and the Short Story, 1850-1940.”(^)

(5)The book *Parsi Thiyetar*, written by Somnath Gupt in Hindi and published in 1981 in India, offers a fascinating example both of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hybridization of a genre, theatre, and of a twentieth-century translation and critical exchange success story. The book was translated into English by Kathryn Hansen and published by Seagull Books in Delhi in 2005 as *The Parsi Theatre: Its Origins and Development*.(^)

(6)Nelson used this term in a paper he delivered at the University of Iowa, “When Context Was All: The Specificity of Popular Poetry,” April 5, 2007.(^)

(7)Jeff Cox has written two important books on British missionary movements in India.(^)

(8)I also encourage readers interested in engaged scholarship and teaching to explore several exciting projects designed to enhance graduate education. The Obermann Center for Advanced Studies is piloting a week-long Graduate Institute on Engagement and the Academy. Fifteen students attended the first Institute in 2007. The program is described online at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~obermann/gradinstitute/index.html>. Iowa’s program was inspired by the Institute for the Public Humanities for Doctoral Students hosted by the Simpson Center for the Humanities at the University of Washington [http://depts.washington.edu/uwch/research\\_graduate\\_Connecting.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/uwch/research_graduate_Connecting.htm). The University of Texas at Austin Humanities Institute, like the Simpson Center, offers fascinating models that the “public humanities” might take: <http://www.humanitiesinstitute.utexas.edu/programs/>. Finally, as Ann Ardis notes in her talk, the organization and conference, *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, offer inspiration to us all. Their current website address is <http://www.ia.umich.edu/>, but the organization will soon be moving to Syracuse University in New York.(^)

(9)For details about this organization, I welcome you to visit our website at <http://intl-programs.uiowa.edu/academic/encsg/index.shtml>.(^)

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### **III. Landscape for a New Woman; or, Recovering Katharine St. John Conway, "Michael Field," and "the author of *Borgia*"**

By Ann Ardis, University of Delaware

<1> I intend for my title to convey a tribute to both Carolyn Steedman and Mary Poovey—a tribute, specifically, to Steedman’s brilliant memoir/critique of working-class historiography, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, and to Poovey’s 1999 keynote address to this conference, "Recovering Ellen Pickering," which was published alongside responses by Margaret Homans and Jill Campbell in *The Yale Journal of Criticism* in 2000. I have been haunted by these texts in preparing for this roundtable on current scholarship about the New Woman, which has been an occasion for reflecting on how research on the New Woman and on the Victorian *fin de siècle* more generally has changed since I published *New Women, New Novels* in 1990 as well as for thinking ahead, thinking about important new initiatives in the field.

<2> When Rutgers published *New Women, New Novels* seventeen years ago, the scholarship on New Woman fiction could quite literally be held in one hand. Moreover, almost all of the primary works and the voluminous *fin de siècle* periodical press writings about New Women were out of print, available exclusively in research libraries and archives, especially once Virago Press curtailed its "Modern Classics" series of reprints in women’s literature. The situation is quite different today, of course. A mature body of scholarship exists, and new editions of primary texts and periodical press writings are sustaining further work in this field and supporting its

integration into university classroom teaching. I would even venture to suggest that the Victorian *fin de siècle* has emerged as one of the most exciting arenas of study within Victorian studies, and that scholarship on the New Woman has played no inconsiderable role in a re-valuation of late-nineteenth-century debates about gender, race, national identity, and the "progress" of modernity that has transformed the way we think about and teach the entire Victorian period, not just the *fin de siècle*.

<3> Yet the cautionary wisdom of both Steedman and Poovey still resonates: Steedman because her historical research on "lives for which the central interpretative devices of the culture don't work" (5) should make us ask, I will argue today, whether issues of class and historiography have yet been adequately addressed in New Woman scholarship; and Poovey because her refusal, in 1999, to endorse the kind of feminist recovery work that she herself pioneered, the concerns that she raised about the theoretical incoherence of English studies as a discipline, and the consequences of this incoherence in terms of our collective inability to mount an adequate defense of liberal arts training in the face of flagging enrollments and funding pressures, are sobering reminders of the need for "finding answers together" (468) about the nature and value of an education in the humanities rather than focusing all of our attention on local interpretative disagreements. So I have two goals for this talk. I want first to bring to your attention several current projects that speak to the issues raised by Steedman’s work and that I see as particularly promising new initiatives in scholarship on the New Woman. And I want to frame a commitment to the ongoing enterprise of feminist historical recovery work in terms that speak to the macro-level issues about the state of humanities research and teaching in higher education that Poovey thrust so uncomfortably, yet importantly, under all of our noses in her keynote address to this conference eight years ago.

<4> Let me begin, then, by invoking an early passage from Steedman's book, which introduces the set of challenges she faced in writing about working-class childhood—her own in the 1950s, her mother's in the 1920s—and the interpretative paradigms of psychoanalysis and working-class historiography that fail to make sense of these life stories. I apologize for the length of this passage, but it is crucial to the argument that follows. "To begin to construct history," Steedman writes,

the writer has to do two things, make two movements through time. First of all, we need to search backwards from the vantage point of the present in order to appraise things in the past and attribute meaning to them. When events and entities have been given their meaning in this way, then we can trace forward what we have already traced backwards, and make a history. When a history is finally written, events are explained by putting them in causal order and establishing causal connections between them. But what follows in this book does not make a history (even though a great deal of historical material is presented). For a start, I simply do not know enough about many of the incidents described to explain the connections between them. I am unable to perform an act of historical explanation in this way.

This tension between the stories told to me as a child, the diffuse and timeless structure of the case-study with which they are presented, and the compulsions of historical explanation, is no mere rhetorical device. There is a real problem, a real tension here that I cannot resolve (my inability to resolve it is part of the story). All the stories that follow, told as this book tells them, aren't stories in their own right: they exist in tension with other more central ones. In the same way, the processes of working-class autobiography, of people's history and of the working-class novel cannot show a proper and valid culture existing in its own right, underneath the official forms, waiting for revelation. Accounts of working-class life are told by tension and ambiguity, out on the borderlands. The story—my mother's story, a hundred thousand others—cannot be absorbed into the central one: it is both its disruption and its essential counterpoint: this is a drama of *class*. (21-22, emphasis in original)

<5> In a 2005 essay for Blackwell's *Literature Compass* on "The New Woman in the New Millennium," Ann Heilmann defines three trends in recent criticism of New Woman fiction: 1) an interest in "the quest for a new aesthetic...firmly centered on explorations of feminine alterity" that has much in common "with late twentieth-century conceptualizations of *écriture féminine*" (33-34); 2) a focus on New Woman writers' "heavy investment" in "socially divisive and oppressive ideologies like eugenics, racial hygiene and imperialism" (35); and 3) a focus on "the international, multi-ethnic and multi-racial dimensions of the New Woman" (36). As both an editor and a scholar, Heilmann has been a hugely influential champion of *fin-de-siècle* studies. Her monumental five-volume edition of reprints, *The Late-Victorian Marriage Question: A Collection of Key New Woman Texts*, has made a vast and disparate array of turn-of-the-century periodical literature about the New Woman easily accessible to current and future generations of readers and scholars. The four-volume edition of Sarah Grand's writings that she co-edited with Stephanie Forward, *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, is equally ambitious, and equally valuable in increasing the accessibility of these materials to contemporary readers. Moreover, both of her single-author studies of New Woman writers as well as the collection of essays, *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930*, that she and Margaret Beetham recently published, are substantial contributions to the field. It is Heilmann's absolute confidence that late nineteenth century writings about the New Woman "anticipate" or "prefigure" ("New Millennium" 13) late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century feminist concerns that I find myself questioning, however, as I juxtapose her arguments with Steedman's far more cautious phrasings about the inability to turn her stories of her childhood into history and her refusal to perform acts of historical interpretation that erase rather than foregrounds the tensions and ambiguities and disruptions of lives lived "on the borderlands" in "the drama of *class*."

<6> In Steedman's work the past is *unheimlich*; it doesn't prefigure or anticipate the present in any obvious sense. Rather, stepping into that landscape involves trying to make sense of events and entities that don't seem to cohere or follow a familiar (or familial) logic of causality: specifically, her mother's desire, in 1950, for a New Look coat; her mother's political conservatism in spite of her traditional Labour background; and her advice to her daughter to "Never have children...; they ruin your life" (85). This is a past contemporary feminist scholars cannot simply embrace by suggesting that it mirrors or anticipates our own concerns. Instead,

this past is unsettling in its otherness, impossible to assimilate via dominant interpretative paradigms. Moreover, it is a landscape hatch-marked as deeply by roads not taken (i.e., the Labour radicalism that Steedman's mother rejects) as by ideas and ideologies ratified by subsequent events. I would like to suggest that there is a connection to be made between Steedman's wonderfully thought-provoking memoir/meditation on historiography and the challenges that Diana Maltz is facing currently in trying to get Katharine St. John Conway's 1896 novel, *Aimée Furniss, Scholar*, back in print, back within contemporary readers' horizon of interests. I also see a connection between Steedman's work and the challenges being faced in what might be termed the second generation of scholarship on "Michael Field," as epitomized by the volume *Michael Field and Their World*, co-edited by Margaret Stetz and Cheryl Wilson, that Rivendale Press has just released. I will pursue each of these in turn in what follows.

\* \* \* \* \*

<7> Better known to history by her married name, Katharine Bruce Glasier, and remembered for her activism on behalf of the British labor movement rather than as a novelist or short story writer, Katharine St. John Conway published *Aimée Furniss, Scholar* in 1896. Her eponymous heroine is a middle-class schoolteacher who awakens to the need for radical, class-based social change when she witnesses a drunken itinerant carpenter's violence toward his pregnant wife on the street outside her rented rooms. After a working-class girl in her own community is jilted by her gentleman lover, Aimée "marries" Annie Deardon in a sequence of scenes that invokes north-of-England regional folk traditions of courtship, high church marriage rituals, and a Biblical allusion to David's love for King Saul. Aimée then gives up her teaching post and moves to a working-class seaside community with this young girl, making her commitment to the welfare of Annie and her illegitimate child both a stepping stone toward and a condition of her heterosexual partnership with a socialist comrade, Edgar Howardson, at the novel's conclusion.

<8> As Maltz notes, even though recent scholarship in Victorian studies "has sought to highlight the overlooked complex relationships between class and gender in reform-minded late-Victorian and Edwardian fiction," "contemporary reprints of such novels are nearly non-existent" (3). Turn-of-the-century British socialist fiction written by men and "recounted from working men's perspectives" was re-issued in the 1980s and '90s by publishers such as Paladin and Methuen, while the Feminist Press and Virago re-issued novels "that charted middle-class women's aspirations toward university entrance, voluntary, and autonomy in the public sphere" (3). Yet a comment Gustav Klaus made in 1987 still rings fairly true today: "Feminist criticism (and publishing) has yet to rediscover its socialist mothers of the novel...the current vogue for reprints has bypassed the works of Clementina Black, Emma Brooke, Ethel Carnie, Gertrude Dix, Margaret Harkness, Constance Howell and others" (Klaus, as quoted by Maltz, 3-4).

<9> I have made this point elsewhere but it bears repeating here: Americans do not have, or deploy comfortably, a language of class ("Political Attentiveness" 15). So perhaps it should come as no surprise that the field of scholarship on the New Woman has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years not primarily by tackling the imbrications of class and gender issues laid out in Steedman's work, which Maltz is grappling with in developing her critical edition of *Aimée Furniss, Scholar*, but instead by addressing the "racial and ethnic taxonomies, social Darwinism, and imperialist ambitions" (Patterson 26) that "coexisted with the emancipatory theories of some New Women" (Richardson 6). By no means do I want to undermine the importance of the latter trend(s) in recent research, which has been underscored so eloquently in this roundtable by Teresa Mangum. I do, however, want to suggest that work on issues related to class, socialist activism, and the very complex interrelationships of Anglo-Catholicism, aestheticism, and ethical socialist theology that a novel like *Aimée Furniss* requires us to address might well be flagging behind research on issues of race, ethnicity, and imperialism for all the wrong reasons: reasons having to do with the *unheimlich*-ness of a past that does not fit contemporary interpretive paradigms. Though it certainly seems appropriate to employ a contemporary language of lesbianism to describe the emotional and physical intensity of Aimée's relationship with Annie, calling *Aimée Furniss* a lesbian novel does not do justice either to the heterosexual marriage plot that frames St. John Conway's text or to the mixed gender, cross-class collective assembled at its conclusion, which includes Aimée, Annie Deardon, Annie's illegitimate child, Aimée's socialist lover, the carpenter who beat his pregnant wife in the novel's opening scene, and the working-class orphans that Aimée's lover has taken into his care. Likewise, calling this a New Woman novel does not quite do justice to Conway's emphasis on her protagonist's renunciation of middle-class individualism, or to the religious and ethical dimensions of the socialist collectivism this novel is trying to imagine. Nor does it capture Conway's sense of confidence in the inevitability of a

trying to imagine how does it capture Conway's sense of coherence in the aftermath of a revolution in class relations, or the rethinking of same-sex as well as hetero-sexual gender relations that she links inextricably to this kind of seismic shift in class relations.

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<10> Similarly complex historiographic and methodological challenges are being faced, I would suggest, by the scholars whose work is featured in *Michael Field and Their World*. Heilmann identifies three trends in recent scholarship on the New Woman in her essay for *Literature Compass*. A fourth major trend is center stage in *Michael Field and Their World*: namely, a shift to consideration of the material conditions under which New Woman writing was published, which also entails increased attention to poetry, drama, and non-fiction prose written by and/or about New Woman rather than a continued focus on fiction (or the novel even more exclusively).

From my perspective, one of the most exciting aspects of the scholarship in this volume is the care that is taken in acknowledging not only the gaps in the historical record that make recovery of this writer/these life partners so difficult but also the myriad of ways in which Katherine Bradley (1846-1914) and Edith Cooper (1862-1913)'s lives and literary careers cannot be made sense of via "the central interpretative devices" of our culture (to borrow Steedman's phrasing yet again): defy modern readers' efforts to "perform...act[s] of historical explanation" that would paper over the rich and complex ambiguities in these women's life stories (5, 21).

<11> More specifically, what interests me most about this new work on Michael Field is that the complexities of Bradley and Cooper's literary careers are pushing contemporary scholars to employ more flexible and inclusive conceptualizations of both the author-function and of collaborative writing and personal identification strategies than literary studies typically accommodates. As Katharine Pionke notes in her essay, "Michael Field: Gender Knot," "Michael Field' was a personal name not simply a pseudonym" for Bradley and Cooper; the name was an "intrinsic part of who they were," not just a means of avoiding critical (mis)interpretation as a "woman writer" (24). As María DeGuzmán argues in her essay/photomontage, "Attributing the Substance of Collaboration as Michael Field," this name also evokes a place: "a space of activity" (72) and a sacralization of creative collaboration that reviewers in the Victorian *fin de siècle* failed to appreciate, committed as they were to a bourgeois ideology of artistic genius/individuality that was leveraging greater explanatory power than ever in a literary marketplace saturated increasingly by modern commodity culture and advertising techniques. Yet Michael Field wasn't the *only* name under which these writers published: Bradley published her first book of poetry in 1875 as "Arran Leigh" (Pionke 23); Bradley and Cooper published *Bellerophon* in 1881 as Arran and Isla Leigh (Pionke 23). Moreover, as Holly Laird argues in her essay, "Michael Field as 'the author of *Borgia*,'" our understanding of their double authorship needs to incorporate appreciation not only of their use (jointly *and* singly) of multiple pseudonyms but also of their equally careful deployment of anonymity: when Michael Field encountered increasing difficulties in the literary marketplace in the 1890s, Bradley and Cooper became, from about 1905 to 1911, "active agents of a new form" of co-authorship, reemerging briefly "as unnamed, literally anonymous authors and then as the anonymous 'author of *Borgia*,' (with 'Field' hovering in the background, presented as willing sponsor of the works of their anonymous acquaintance, 'the author of *Borgia*'))" (31-32).

<12> If Michael Field's life and literary career call into question the values of bourgeois individualism that undergird contemporary disciplinary practices related to authorship that we tend to take for granted, they also require contemporary scholars to think more critically about *other* interpretive paradigms that can domesticate the past, erase its otherness. Richard Dellamora's essay on Field's Sapphism and Frederick Roden's on the challenges of writing a lesbian catholicism are particularly noteworthy contributions to Stetz and Wilson's collection in this regard. Positioning Field's *Long Ago* (1889) within a tradition of Victorian Sapphism, Dellamora very carefully avoids "reducing sexual dissidence to [modern] categories of sexual identity" as he reads Field's phantasmagoric pastoral landscapes of desire (127). With equal care, Roden explores the "sophisticated theology that requires neither a male priest nor a male-focused Deity" in Field's journals and poetry (156), working through the mind/body, self/other "dichotomies and dualisms" of a patriarchal Church that Bradley and Cooper address "through an unorthodox pattern of poesis" (161).

<13> Mary Poovey surprised her audience at this conference in 1999 by *not* arguing on behalf of Ellen Pickering's recovery. By contrast, I hope to see *Aimée Furniss, Scholar* back in print, available for use in the classroom and as a stimulant both to further scholarship on Conway and to

discussions of issues of class and historiography in turn-of-the-twentieth-century studies. As for Michael Field, “Field has [already] arrived; Field is canonical” (Roden 155), thanks to Broadview Press’s beautiful *Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory* (1999). Nonetheless, the challenges I hear in both Steedman’s and Poovey’s work about the foundational claims of both history and literary studies as academic disciplines cannot be ignored, and I want to close today by posing a challenge to my own audience in the form of the following questions. First, are we willing to pursue historical recovery work in tandem with a critical self-consciousness about disciplinary history and a commitment to working, collectively, on defining “the nature and value” (Poovey 468) of the humanities training we offer to today’s students? And second, is it possible to pursue our shared research and teaching interests in British women writers with a deliberately dual focus: sustaining at one and the same time a micro-level pursuit of historical recovery work while also attending to macro-level issues pertaining to the state and status of humanities teaching and research in higher education in the contemporary moment?

<14> A point that Poovey made in response to Margaret Homans’ and Jill Campbell’s responses to her keynote address still holds true today: “Universities across the U.S. [continue to] report that enrollments in all liberal arts subjects have declined relative to enrollments in professional subjects[;...] among the 25 courses undergraduates most frequently complete, only four are liberal arts subjects (and English composition is the only one a literary critic is even remotely qualified to teach” (468). As Poovey went on to note, “resolving the theoretical incoherence of our disciplinary work” won’t necessarily reverse this trend, but “it is part of a project we need to pursue collectively” (468). Such a project “would take the self-reflexivity for which literary criticism has become known beyond interpretive disagreements. It would focus on developing a shared rationale for literary work (and for the liberal arts in general) that explains what we do and why it matters” (468).

<15> We need, in 2007, to be engaging each other in discussion of these kinds of macro-level issues. We need to be training the next generation of (feminist) scholars and teachers for all three aspects of the intellectual work that lies ahead of them in an academic career: teaching, research, and public advocacy on behalf of the humanities.

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*Coda, May 2007*

<16> Sally’s final point about the need for further work on New Women’s non-fiction prose writings frames in historical terms an underlying point of connection between the issues Teresa and I raised about the need to revitalize the humanities through more publicly engaged scholarship and the interest that all three of us share in women’s history and literature. If the “love stories of women who sit on committees” are still hard to imagine (Mitchell), perhaps that’s because the privileging of “literary” writing in English departments is still so complexly bound up with what Evan Watkins terms the “work practices” of this discipline. These practices glamorize research while under-valuing teaching—a point made eloquently by a young African

American adjunct faculty member during the question and answer session for our roundtable when she noted how the research/teaching split is built upon the backs of teachers like herself who do not have the benefit of health care or job security, yet are staffing a higher percentage of the humanities courses being offered at colleges and universities across the country even as student enrollments in the liberal arts decline relative to enrollments in professional subjects. But these work practices also erase from view the *other* kinds of writing that faculty members do: e.g., letters of recommendation, memos, meeting minutes, peer review and task force reports, funding requests, copy for web pages, wikis, listserves, etc. Some of this writing is signed, some is written collaboratively, some is ghost-written for public presentation or publication under someone else’s signature. As in the case of Teresa’s new course, some of it even reaches audiences most faculty don’t regularly think of engaging. All of it is “work”; all of it has a part to play in the love stories of women (and men) who sit on committees—yet it’s never what you talk about when someone asks you, “what are you working on?”

<17> I do not deny any of the enormous privileges enjoyed by those of us who are employed/tenured at research institutions. Nonetheless, I would suggest that the “engaged research” Teresa will be undertaking with her undergraduates this fall is a wonderfully creative example of the kind of public advocacy on behalf of the humanities we need to be training the next generation of university teachers to undertake. As Ellen Rosenman noted during the question and answer session, teaching can itself be considered a form of public advocacy for the

humanities, and as such it is something that all of us engage in. True enough—but the need to stage conversations *across* the barriers that ordinarily separate students and faculty alike from “townies” and/or university administrators is all the more pressing in the current funding environment for higher education.

<18> At my own institution, “best practices” in this regard are modeled in our Art Conservation graduate program, which offers monthly public clinics at which faculty and students share their knowledge about the care of works of art of all materials with members of the general public (<<http://www.artcons.udel.edu/news/public>>). Additionally, every August, the students finishing its three-year Master’s of Science Program present their final internship projects to an audience of their fellow students, faculty, university administrators, museum staff and faculty from institutions up and down the East coast, local conservators in private practice, and alumni of the program. Trained from day one in this program to share their technical expertise with the general public as well as with other specialists in their sub-fields within Art Conservation; encouraged, specifically, to “foster a lifelong habit of regarding their academic work as something that has *public value*, extending far beyond the walls of academe,” these students are stunningly effective in their advocacy for the preservation of our cultural heritage.

<19> I’d like to see more faculty in the humanities imagining the public value of academic work in this manner, designing training opportunities in public outreach for the next generation of college teachers—and participating in projects like Imagining America’s review of promotion and tenure policies nationally, so as to ensure that public scholarship is recognized appropriately in faculty evaluation processes. We need to demonstrate, in forums still more public than our classrooms, the nature and value of an education in the humanities.

<20> So I’m keeping my fingers crossed that Teresa will succeed in recruiting her Dean and Vice President for Research to play roles in *Votes for Women!* this fall. And my hope is that these administrators attend the public forum about local candidates that’s going to follow the staging of the play. Elizabeth Robins would cheer to see Democratic and Republican League of Voter activists and political candidates mixing with students, faculty, and administrators in such a forum.

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