1 *'a sort of Bogey whom no-one has ever seen'? The nature of the search*

In the 1890s there was a positive media feeding frenzy in Britain and in North America both defending and attacking the 'New Woman'. Some commentators have dated the beginning of this very precisely, from March 1894, when the British novelist Sarah Grand first used the label in an article in the *North American Review*.[1] Grand hailed the New Woman as one who has at last 'solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy'.[2] Other commentators have seen the term growing out of and crystallising a steadily swelling debate over several decades about the position of women of the middle classes, their scope for independence, the implications of the access to secondary and higher education which they were beginning to secure, and the legal, financial, social and psychological constraints imposed upon them by marriage.[3]

The latter is a more fruitful reading, allowing as it does a consideration of a wider literature over a longer period, not only fiction and drama but also political and social writing on the subject contemporaries came to know as the 'Woman Question' and which attracted a range of campaigning organisations. Although the structure of the English state and political system favoured single-issue campaigns, those involved were often associated, even though their primary targets differed, and they were collectively known to contemporaries as 'the women's movement'. The terms 'feminism' and 'feminist' were only just arriving in the language. Casting the net widely in these ways brings benefits. Periodical

[1] 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *North American Review* 158 (March 1894), pp. 270–6, reprinted in Carolyn Christensen Nelson, ed., *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles and Drama of the 1890s* (Peterborough, Ontario 2001), pp. 141–6. For Sarah Grand, see also below, pp. 2, 75.
[2] *Ibid*. p. 142.
[3] Cf. Nelson's 'Introduction', pp. ix–x; Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford 1992), pp. 252–4 and her *English Feminism 1780–1980* (Oxford 1997), pp. 134–43.

writing was and is mostly ephemeral. Although over a hundred New Woman novels were published in the course of the decade and immediately either side of it,[4] few are now read for their intrinsic merit, even if we acknowledge the force of John Sutherland's comment that 'interest in the type enriches female characterisation in mainstream fiction of the late Victorian period'.[5] Widening the range and time-frame allows us not only to add writing which has acquired an enduring reputation and resonance but also to develop a much more complex explanatory framework for the debate itself and the challenge it represented to the ideology of domesticity, so powerful in the earlier half of the century.[6] This ideology celebrated the woman as moral authority, arbiter in the home and family standing apart from, uncontaminated by, the often sordid dealings of the public sphere, quintessentially the male sphere. The actualities of lives seldom quite matched the rhetoric or the theory; but the ideological challenge to domesticity gathered force only in the second half of the century. While the New Woman debate represents a literary peak in this challenge, it is also a curtain-raiser to the very real and practical challenge represented by the campaign for women's suffrage, gaining numbers, momentum and traction from 1900.

The style and character of writing on New Women, both for and against, may be sampled in Sarah Grand's articles and in her novels such as *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897); in Mona Caird's *The Wings of Azrael* (1889) and *A Romance of the Moors* (1891) and her articles subsequently collected in *The Morality of Marriage and other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Women* (1897); in Grant Allen's articles 'Plain Words on the Woman Question' (1889) and 'The Girl of the Future' (1890) and his novel, *The Woman Who Did*, in 1895; in Sydney Grundy's play *The New Woman* (1894) and A. W. Pinero's play *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith* (1895).[7] Extending the range allows us to add to these Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African*

[4] Ann Ardis, *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (London 1990).

[5] In John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (2nd edition London 2009), p. 466.

[6] For the formation of the domestic ideology, its power and the historiographical debates which have surrounded this, begin with Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (2nd edition London 2002).

[7] Included in *The New Woman and Other Emancipated Woman Plays*, ed. with an Introduction by Jean Chotia (Oxford 1998).

Farm (1883), George Gissing's novel *The Odd Women* (1893), and Mrs Humphry Ward's later novels, *The Testing of Diana Mallory* (1908) and *Delia Blanchflower* (1915); and to consider the context in which D. H. Lawrence began to write. It enables us to add plays such as George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1894), Harley Granville Barker's *The Madras House* (1910) and the first English translations and performances of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1889), *Hedda Gabler* and *Ghosts* (both 1891). It allows a consideration of the impact of Edward Carpenter's *Love's Coming of Age* (1896), the first volume of Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897) and the first English-language accounts of and then translations of Freud's work, from 1893 onwards.[8]

Plainly there is a great deal of noise and activity here. Its ubiquity is demonstrated in some surprising ways; in 1897 Tom Ball, later to become a regular music hall performer – and to father the British prime minister Sir John Major – won a prize for his participation in a Midlands swimming gala, dressed as 'a new woman in bloomers'.[9] More sedately, the noise and activity have sustained a thriving academic industry.[10] This study is less an addition to that industry, rather an attempt to explore the relationships between the noise and changes on the ground, changes in the ways middle-class women actually lived their lives.

Carolyn Christensen Nelson has suggested that the New Woman 'was educated at Girton College, Cambridge, rode a bicycle, insisted on rational dress, and smoked in public . . . she rejected the traditional role for women and demanded emancipation'.[11] Such images proved a gift to *Punch*; and the New Woman and bicycles, often linked, were

[8] Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work*, vol. II, *Years of Maturity 1901–1919* (London 1974 edition), pp. 30–2 *et seq*. The political and sexual journalism and debates are treated at length in Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London 2008) but the briefer account in Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffery Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London 1977) remains helpful. See also Laura Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women's Emancipation in England 1830–1914* (Manchester 2012), esp. ch. 6. For the anti-suffrage women writers, see Julia Bush, *Women against the Vote: Female Anti-Suffragism in Britain* (Oxford 2007), ch. 4.

[9] John Major, *My Old Man: A Personal History of Music Hall* (London 2012), p. 297. I am indebted to Chris Stray for this reference.

[10] See for example the programme and paper abstracts for 'Women Writers of the fin-de-siècle' International Conference, Institute of English Studies, University of London, June 2010.

[11] 'Introduction' to *New Woman Reader*, p. ix.

1 Cartoon from *Punch*, drawn by George Du Maurier, 15 June 1895

staples through the second half of the 1890s, as the examples from 1895 and 1896 above and on page 5 show. From the caricatures we can extract two lines for more prosaic further enquiry: we should be looking for women who challenged the conventions of lady-like behaviour and we should begin this search by looking at women graduates, especially those attempting to gain a foothold in Oxbridge.

The 'girl graduate' was a familiar figure in the popular fiction of the period generally. As Chris Willis remarks, 'A Girton education became the stock attribute of the intellectual New Woman of popular fiction.' Herminia Barton, 'the woman who did' in Grant Allen's novel of that name, has just left Girton, as has Bernadine Holme, the heroine of Beatrice Harraden's *Ships that Pass in the Night* (1893). Grant Allen used the character again in *The Typewriter Girl* (1897) and for his woman detective, Lois Cayley; while McDonnell Bodkin's girl detective Dora Myrl was (implausibly) 'a Cambridge Wrangler and a Doctor of Medicine'. Before taking up detection she had also been 'a telephone girl, a telegraph girl' and a 'lady journalist'.[12] These are but a sample of the

[12] Chris Willis, '"Heaven defend me from political or highly educated women!": Packaging the New Woman for Mass Consumption', in Angelique Richardson

2 Cartoon from *Punch*, drawn by George Du Maurier, 13 June 1896

caricatures, both verbal and visual, and there were many more. Albert Morrow's striking poster for Sydney Grundy's 1894 play *The New Woman*, used for the jacket and reproduced on p. 6, is perhaps the epitome. The subject was not this time a Girton girl but the New Woman novelist, George Egerton. We should note the pince-nez, the plain dress, the mass of books and papers and the cigarette, marked to suggest that the inexpert smoker had tried both ends before succeeding.[13]

Analysts of New Woman writing and writers, both for and against, generally agree that these images in pictures and in words were caricatures. Talia Schaffer sums up the prevailing view when she writes, 'By

and Chris Willis, eds., *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms* (London 2001), pp. 53–65, at pp. 55–60, direct quotations from pp. 55 and 59. See also e.g. Annie Edwardes, *A Blue-Stocking* (1877), *A Girton Girl* (1886); Emma Frances Brooke, *Transition* (1896); L. T. Meade, *A Sweet Girl Graduate* (1891); Emily Cox, *Courtship and Chemicals* (1898); Alice Stronach, *A Newnham Friendship* (1901); 'Alan St Aubyn' (Frances Bridges), *The Harp of Life* (1908); Mrs George de Horne Vaizey, *A College Girl* (n.d. probably Edwardian).

[13] For further discussion of this see below, Chapter 4, pp. 74–6.

3 Albert Morrow's poster for Sydney Grundy's play, *The New Woman*, 1894

1895 "New Woman" had become a wildly skewed reductive media construct which did not represent the real lives and work of those people it purported to describe.'[14] There is likewise general agreement that many women active in the loosely associated campaigns of the

[14] Talia Schaffer, '"Nothing but Foolscap and Ink": Inventing the New Woman', in Richardson and Willis eds., *New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, pp. 39–52, at

women's movement of the late nineteenth century disliked the caricature intensely, as intended to undermine and belittle their work, a view the suffrage campaigner Millicent Garrett Fawcett expressed forcefully when she reviewed Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*.[15]

Yet this image was a most successful literary ploy for at least a decade and recognition of the extent to which it was a construct has not prevented some of those analysts of New Woman writing from making large, if rather general, claims about the relationship of the construct to lived lives. It is an assumption which underpins Deborah Epstein Nord's discussion in *Walking the Victorian Streets*, although she locates New Women in the 1880s.[16] Editing a selection of New Woman plays in 1998, Jean Chotia remarks that 'women, albeit mightily slowly, were progressing towards emancipation … Women who had access to education … were increasingly entering the professions, notably teaching and medicine.'[17] Matthew Beaumont asserts that 'the new female mobility ushered in by expanding educational and occupational opportunities … afforded a feeling of confidence' but offers no evidence to support this.[18] Teresa Mangum, in her study of Sarah Grand, claims that after Married Women's Property legislation guaranteed women possession of their earned income, they 'more confidently moved into the workforce as teachers, nurses, midwives, clerks, writers and journalists'.[19] That particular claim, as we shall see, was wide of the mark. It does however have the merit of focusing attention on money. As Olive Schreiner, 'The Modern Woman par excellence, founder and high priestess of the school', wrote to Edward Carpenter in October 1894, commenting on an article of his on marriage, 'You don't perhaps

p. 49; cf. Teresa Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor, MI 1998), p. 28.

[15] Mangum, *Sarah Grand*, pp. 28–9; cf. Richardson and Willis, 'Introduction' to *New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, pp. 1–38, at pp. 25 and 28; Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge 2007), p. 16.

[16] Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca, NY 1995), Part III, 'New Women' esp. pp. 215–16. I am indebted to Clare Pettitt for referring me to this study.

[17] Chotia, ed. *New Woman and Other Emancipated Woman Plays*, Introduction, pp. ix–x.

[18] Matthew Beaumont, 'The New Woman in Nowhere: Feminism and Utopianism at the Fin-de-Siècle', in Richardson and Willis, eds., *New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, pp. 212–23, at p. 213.

[19] Mangum, *Sarah Grand*, p. 52.

dwell QUITE enough on the monetary independence of women as the first condition necessary to the putting of things on the right footing.'[20] To do new things, challenge established patterns of behaviour, women of the middle classes needed economic independence. If you controlled adequate resources, you had choice; you could, if you wished, challenge prevailing social conventions, especially those around marriage and sexual relationships. Without economic resources you were dependent, on either family or husband or both, and constrained by their expectations.

A crucial first step towards clarifying the relationship between the New Woman caricature, the larger attendant literature on the Woman Question and actual social change is thus to discover whether in this period new ways of acquiring independence were emerging; and whether there were new opportunities to earn a living without sacrificing social status. If there were, how many women made use of these? Only when we have some answers or part-answers to such basic enquiries are we then free to move on to look for choice about lifestyles and consider the exercise of choice and the factors influencing it more generally.

This study is therefore an attempt to re-situate the New Woman caricature and the broader debate of which it was a part, by examining the opportunities for earning money, achieving independence, available to middle-class women in Britain in the last third of the long nineteenth century, from about 1870 to the outbreak of the First World War. This is likely to prove less straightforward than it might sound, as one case-study will illustrate. The first years of Ada Radford's adult life suggested that she might become a New Woman. Born in 1859, she was sent to secondary school and then went up to Newnham College, Cambridge to read Mathematics between 1881 and 1883. After a short spell teaching in a girls' high school, she settled on her own in London, contributing occasionally to literary periodicals like the *Westminster Gazette* and the *Yellow Book*, and moving in distinctly radical circles.[21] Her brother, Ernest Radford, and his poet wife Dollie, were firm friends of Eleanor Marx and devoted supporters of William Morris's Socialist League.

[20] Carolyn Burdett, 'Capturing the Ideal: Olive Schreiner's *From Man to Man*', in Richardson and Willis, eds., *New Woman in Fiction and in Fact*, pp. 167–82, at p. 180, n.12, Schreiner's emphasis; the description of Schreiner is W. T. Stead's in 1894, quoted *ibid*. p. 167.

[21] One of her *Yellow Book* stories has been reprinted in Nelson, ed., *New Woman Reader*, pp. 91–100.

Ada did not share all Ernest and Dollie's political enthusiasms but stayed close and regularly contributed to their insecure finances.[22] A user of the British Museum Reading Room, like many young women writers and political activists of the period,[23] Ada was acquainted with Richard Garnett, the Superintendent of the Reading Room, and his family. Her Cambridge contemporary and lifelong friend, Constance Black, married Garnett's son Edward in the autumn of 1889; and like Garnett's daughter Olive, Ada supported the group of Russian political exiles and revolutionaries, led by Stepniak and Volkhovsky, who worked on the periodical *Free Russia*.[24]

Yet following her marriage in 1898, at the age of 39, to the Fabian political scientist Graham Wallas, the trajectory of Ada's life appeared to shift. Gradually she reduced her involvement with the Russians. She did not cease to write but her next publication in 1906 was a book of children's stories, *The Land of Play*. During the First World War she put a considerable amount of time and effort into translating and disseminating some of the work of the French philosopher Émile Chartier, writing as 'Alain'. There was a long interval before her last two books, *Before the Bluestockings*, a study of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century learned ladies, and *Daguerrotypes*, a family memoir, both published in 1929. She chose to put most of her energy into supporting her husband in his career and public activities and into caring for their one child, May, who was born in 1899. Ada did voluntary work with the London Schools for Mothers[25] and from 1919 to 1934 served on the Council of Bedford College. Altogether she appears to have settled into a more traditional pattern of family life; and the ways in which she

[22] Newnham College Archives (NCA), Wallas Papers *passim*, but see esp. 2/7/9 John Radford to Ada Wallas 3 January 1899. For Dollie's poetry, see Ruth Livesey, *Socialism, Sex and the Culture of Aestheticism in Britain 1880–1914* (Oxford 2007), ch. 5.

[23] See Amy Levy, 'Readers at the British Museum', *Atalanta: Every Girl's Magazine* (April 1889), pp. 449–54. Reprinted as Appendix B to Levy's *The Romance of a Shop*, ed. Susan David Bernstein (Toronto 2006); Susan David Bernstein, *Roomscape: Women Writers in the British Museum from George Eliot to Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh 2013). I am indebted to Clare Pettitt for this latter reference.

[24] NCA Wallas Papers, *passim*; *Tea and Anarchy! The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett 1890–93*, ed. Barry C. Johnson (Birmingham 1989), pp. 108–22, and *Olive & Stepniak: The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett 1893–5*, ed. Barry C. Johnson (Birmingham 1993).

[25] See Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood* (London 1980), pp. 96–7.

sustained the small family's position within the larger Radford and Wallas networks through an extensive and lively correspondence and frequent visits have established pedigrees not only through the nineteenth century but stretching back into the eighteenth century.[26]

Yet there is no indication in Ada's surviving papers that she saw her marriage as representing any kind of disjunction in her life; rather, it contributed to an evolution, a response to circumstances, but also a set of fresh choices. Graham remained immensely supportive of her activities, especially her writing, always encouraging her to do more, as did friends like Logan Pearsall Smith; and Logan and Ada exchanged drafts for critical comment. The correspondence and those volumes of her diaries which survive reveal ample evidence of shared intellectual life and friendships, perhaps the strongest and certainly the most enduring with the French historian Élie Halévy and his wife Florence, whose relationship in many ways resembled the relationship between Graham and Ada.[27]

This one example of the experience of being a New – or Newish – Woman helps us to begin to question how much the realities of life for middle-class women actually changed in the course of the whole century, let alone the last third. Ada's acquaintance Olive Garnett, whose diaries are an exceptional source for the social *mores* and activities of advanced liberal intellectual and artistic circles, recorded a discussion in October 1892 at the home of her brother Edward and sister-in-law Constance about the invitation issued in 1814 by Shelley and his new love, Mary Godwin, to Harriet, his wife, to share a home. The Garnetts' friend, the exiled Russian revolutionary and journalist

[26] See e.g. Christopher Tolley, *Domestic Biography: The Legacy of Evangelicalism in Four Nineteenth-Century Families* (Oxford 1997); Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge 2001); R. J. Morris, *Men, Women and Property in England 1780–1870* (Cambridge 2005).

[27] For Graham, see Martin J. Wiener, *Between Two Worlds: The Political Thought of Graham Wallas* (Oxford 1971) and Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge 1978). The personal papers of the Wallases are held in the Archives of Newnham College Cambridge. Ada's papers form series 2 in this collection; Graham's form series 1. As these show, they wrote to each other almost daily when apart. Ada's First World War diaries, 2/1/3 to 2/1/6 also survive. For exchanges with Logan Pearsall Smith, see e.g. 2/7/11, Logan Pearsall Smith to Ada Wallas 8 August 1908; 2/7/13, Logan Pearsall Smith to Ada Wallas 11 March, 28 March, 11 April and 15 August 1915. The folders 2/5/1 to 2/5/12 contain letters from Florence Halévy 1913–34.