

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Alfred University

Crossing the Line: The New Woman of the Fin de Siècle

by

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Introduction

As Editor-in-Chief of the school newspaper, a double major in English and Communication Studies, and a minor in Women's and Gender Studies, I wanted to incorporate all of my interests and studies into my Alfred University Honors thesis. At first, the options felt limited since so many theses are long scientific studies with numbers, graphs, and a few unexpected discoveries. But after talking to my advisor and other professors, I realized that my thesis did not have to be anything like that and could be completely my own. This is when I decided that I would get creative and publish a book for which I would also write the introduction.

I had published a book before in the class titled "Publishing Practicum" with Dr. Allen Grove and remembered not only the time and effort I put into the book, but how much I enjoyed the entire process. I was able to practice the skills that I learned in past English classes while editing and writing the introduction, and also incorporate my knowledge of InDesign while designing the layout. Knowing I liked every piece of the project and that it combined almost all of my areas of study made me sure that I wanted to do it again for this thesis. But there was one part of my coursework missing from this assignment and that was Women's and Gender Studies.

English, Communication Studies, and my extracurricular interests were in there, but I needed to represent my minor in some way so that the thesis could not only count toward my WGST capstone project, but also so that the project was a total reflection of my time as an Alfred University student. Dr. Grove quickly solved this problem, though, when he suggested the topic of my thesis being the New Woman of the *fin de siècle*. Knowing nothing about this New Woman, I did a few searches before moving forward with the project and realized that this suggestion would be the perfect choice.

The New Woman of the *fin de siècle* was a spunky, intelligent, and independent female character who advocated for women's rights and inspired groups of women to see themselves as more than just housewives and mothers. She voiced her opinions and wanted change in the Victorian English society that was just a bit too set on its opinion of a woman's place. Finding out these details in a few early searches hooked me because I related to the wanting of change for women even today, and knew I would not grow bored writing an introduction about such an interesting female character. Also, I got the impression that the New Woman focus would make for an interesting anthology of works, so I ran with it.

The research process began as most research processes do—the googling of key words that related to the New Woman of the *fin de siècle* in an effort to create an outline for myself before diving into scholarly sources. As expected, dozens of options appeared when I hit the search button and started wading through these pages. I found the names of writers, novels, and several details surrounding the efforts of the New Woman of the end of the 19th century. With this outline created, I moved on to scholarly sources such as articles and books that I found through the library databases and interlibrary loan. In this stage of my research, though, I started to notice conflicting facts, which forced me to reassess the entire process.

Some writers of scholarly articles I planned on referencing describe the New Woman as if she were a real person. However, in my research, I found that she was a character featured throughout literature, newspapers, and even comics, so finding sources saying otherwise forced me to reexamine all of the work already put into my introduction. I went back to the very beginning and fact checked every detail and found that some of information needed to be corrected. And even though this was a tedious experience, I am actually glad that I found

conflicting facts because without finding them, I would have published incorrect information and my work would be discredited.

While in the process of completing my corrected introduction, I split my attention and began locating the texts that would make up the body of the anthology. I started small with a few searches and took down the names of authors and titles of works that consistently popped up. Sarah Grand's "A New Aspect of the Woman Question" and George Egerton's "A Cross Line" showed up in every single search while other authors and works appeared less frequently. But here is where my skills as an English major really had to come into play. I didn't want to choose works just because they appeared more than others. So, just as every English class has taught me for the last four years, I had to buckle down and work to understand what made Grand and Egerton's texts so important to the New Woman ideology and why they needed to be included in my anthology.

I learned that the piece by Sarah Grand was what actually provided a name to the New Woman character, which meant that I had to include it. Egerton's piece was different. The New Womanhood of her short story was rather quiet and unlike the character I had been reading about in my research who was not afraid to present herself as someone with an opinion. It was in recognizing the differences in Egerton's work, though, that I realized there could be more than one type of New Woman. This understanding allowed for so many more possibilities of works to include in the anthology.

After a month, I finally had all of the works that would be included in my anthology collected and ready for editing. I chose four essays, the first by Sarah Grand, the second by Ouida, and the last two by Mona Caird, to provide the reader with an idea of how progressive women and the New Woman character were being regarded during the end of the 19th century.

While both Grand and Caird reinforce the positives of female reformists, Ouida writes only of the negatives and her work lacks any kind of support for the New Woman character.

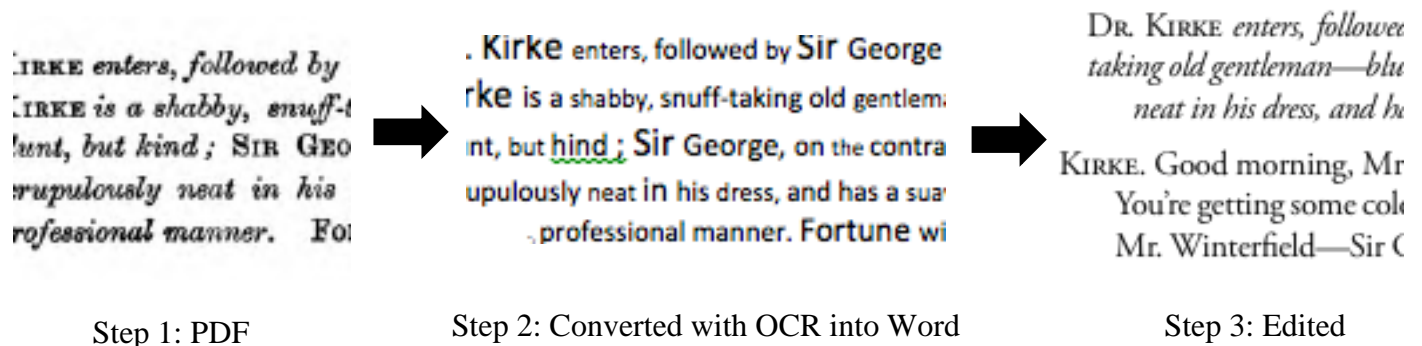
Next, I chose two plays, both of which are written by men and portray the New Woman character kindly. Unlike other male writers of the time who cartoonised and reduced the character to an overly-sexual being or miniature brute, Sydney Grundy and Arthur W. Pinero write true New Woman characters who maintain their femininity while still advocating for what they want. Neither of their characters are cast in negative lights and both stay true to the progressive ideology.

Finally, I decided on five short stories and an excerpt from a novel. The short stories are by Sarah Grand, and George Egerton, and the excerpt is from a novel by Ella Hepworth Dixon. Each of these pieces includes a different type of New Woman character with some being quieter and others being more sexually free. I felt that it was important to have this variety of characters because it was what was true of the time and reinforces the idea that there was no single mold for the New Woman.

If I could have included one more section inside of this anthology, it would have been a section on New Woman poetry. In trying to gather all of my materials, I had difficulties finding more than a few poems that represented the New Woman character. Three poems by Amy Levy were great examples that I wanted to include, but I did not want a section represented by only a few pages and one author. If I had more time, though, I am sure that I would have been able to find more poetry to fill this section.

One of the biggest challenges with this anthology after locating all of the pieces was the optical character recognition process, which takes an incredible amount of time, focus, and patience. Optical character recognition is a process that involves taking the words from a PDF

and converting them through software that interprets the images of the letters. These character images may be flawed, though, which leads to incorrect text characters being created. When the conversion process is complete, editable text characters are available and may be saved onto a Word document. This is a complicated process to explain; below are pictures of the three steps involved in the process.



The first step in this process is the easiest: identify the text that will be converted and open it in Adobe Acrobat. Next, highlight the text within the PDF just as you would highlight in a Word document. When all of the text is highlighted, right click and copy the material. To begin step two, open a blank Word document and right click to paste. When paste is clicked, the OCR begins as the material is converted into an editable format that is compatible with Word. The outcome of this conversion process is seen in the picture associated with step two. Character styles, punctuation marks, and even whole words are lost or misinterpreted. The errors in the text lead into step three of the process.

After the optical recognition process is complete and the text fully converted, the final step is editing each line of each essay, play, and short story. I spent hours on each piece, especially the plays which were harder to line edit because of having to check the spellings of words outside of the English language and to make sure that accents were connected to the

correct letters. It took three months of line editing before each piece was complete and ready to be uploaded to InDesign.

To some, uploading the Word file into InDesign is the most stressful part of the publishing process. But to me, it is both the easiest and most enjoyable because I get to be creative and use my layout and design skills. After placing the text into InDesign, I began working through the book page by page to correct footnotes, section headings, character styles, and the spacing between words. Then, I got creative and designed the opening pages of both plays and the title pages of the essays and short stories. Finally, I added my introduction, a timeline that I created, a table of contents page, and a suggested reading page to complete the inside of the book.

The final parts that I had to complete before sending the book to print was naming the anthology and designing the front and back covers. I titled my anthology *Crossing the Line: The New Woman of the Fin de Siècle* to describe in the fewest words possible what it was that the New Woman character was doing, which was crossing the made-up line that separated the domestic sphere from the public sphere. Lastly, with help from my father, who illustrated the front image, I depicted a sense of the stories inside of the book with a cover image of a woman looking out as if ready for a new start. Also, I purposefully pictured only a silhouette with zero recognizable characteristics in an effort to portray the fact that the New Woman character did not have one identifying feature and could be any woman.

In completing this thesis, I feel a sense of pride because of the effort that I put into republishing this great collection of works. Many of the stories included within this anthology are unknown to contemporary readers, so to be able to group them together into one book is

exciting. It is worth mentioning, though, that throughout this process I did not only learn about the New Woman of the *fin de siècle*, but also about her presence today in America.

Currently, women are rising up and speaking their truths just as women who were influenced by the New Woman character did in Victorian England. With efforts such as the Times Up movement and the worldwide Women's March taking place in 2018, it is clear that the fight for women's rights is still just as real as it was over a century ago. Despite being separated by borders and oceans, women around the world share similar struggles and unite over these issues. Just like in the time of the New Woman, women still are not sexually free, they are still not heard, and, most importantly, so many women are still not believed. But in speaking up and standing by one another as so many women are today, I recognize that the New Woman lives on in each of us as women are still fighting to have their voices heard and respected.

CROSSING THE LINE

THE NEW WOMAN OF THE FIN DE SIÈCLE

After centuries of debate over the place of women, the New Woman would shake up the status quo when she appeared in English society during the *fin de siècle*. Her efforts as an advocate for women's rights inspired the growing groups of women who declared themselves more than just housewives and mothers, and added fuel to the fight for women's suffrage and educational reform. Brought to life in essays, plays, novels, and short stories by notable writers such as Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, and George Egerton, the New Woman's independence and sexual agency challenged the stereotypical Victorian female. With an agenda for change, she encouraged women to follow her call to action to make themselves heard in the male-dominated society that was 19th-century England.

Within this anthology are works that represent the New Woman character of the *fin de siècle*. Her spunky attitude, independent spirit, and desire for change live on over a century later throughout the essays, plays, and fiction bound together in this book.

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Cover Image by Leon Scott Gee



CROSSING THE LINE: THE NEW WOMAN OF THE FIN DE SIÈCLE



CROSSING THE LINE

THE NEW WOMAN OF THE FIN DE SIÈCLE



Edited by Logan E. Gee

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEW WOMAN ESSAYS

A NEW ASPECT ON THE WOMAN QUESTION – Sarah Grand	1
THE WOMAN QUESTION – Ouida	7
MARRIAGE – Mona Caird	15
A DEFENSE OF THE WILD WOMAN – Mona Caird	46

NEW WOMAN PLAYS

THE NEW WOMAN – Sydney Grundy	71
THE NOTORIOUS MRS. EBBSMITH – Arthur W. Pinero	137

NEW WOMAN FICTION

EUGENIA – Sarah Grand	215
THE YELLOW LEAF – Sarah Grand	243
THE STORY OF A MODERN WOMAN – Ella Hepworth Dixon	295
A CROSS LINE – George Egerton	320
VIRGIN SOIL – George Egerton	334
AT THE HEART OF THE APPLE – George Egerton	343

INTRODUCTION

IN 19TH-CENTURY England, being a woman could be less than enjoyable. She had growing opportunities, such as the possibility of an education and more legal protections, but she was still a second-class citizen whose place was in the home. Societal norms dictated that her duties were tending to her children, to whom she had limited legal claim, serving her husband, and having no opinion on politics or any other matter outside of her domestic sphere. But true change arrived in the *fin de siècle* when a new type of woman made her first appearance in England's novels and periodicals.

The *fin de siècle*, a time of social and moral movements at the end of the 19th century in England, gave birth to women who challenged Victorian stereotypes. With her representation in novels such as *Story of an African Farm* (1883) by Olive Schreiner and *The Odd Women* (1893) by George Gissing, she was a character who was relatively unheard of in earlier Victorian fiction. She did not yet have a single name, but she had a clear message for English readers: the traditional roles of women needed to change.

While her presence was hard to miss in late Victorian fiction, these progressive women also made their way into periodicals throughout the country. In 1894, she was finally given her name, the New Woman, by Sarah Grand, a writer of New Woman novels such as *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897). In her article, "A New Aspect of the Woman Question" that appeared in *The North American Review* in March of 1894, Grand stated, "... but the new woman is a little above [man]...and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere." Grand was challenged by writers such as Maria Louise Ramé, who wrote under the pseudonym Ouida. Ramé believed that this New Woman was pompous and unrealistic in her aspirations to change the world. Following these negative comments, the mainstream media began morphing the New Woman into a manly caricature with delusional opinions and unfeminine desires. But the New Woman character and her reformist attitudes were met with open arms by women-run publications that featured her throughout their pages.

With the New Woman's presence in novels and other media, her influence easily made its way into Victorian society as women, specifically those in the middle class, adopted her ways and slowly found their voice in the public sphere by advocating for women's suffrage and, in some cases, temperance. She and her radical views lingered in English society until the very beginning of the twentieth century when she disappeared from newspapers and popular literature, but her agenda remained. In 1918 some women got the vote, and the changes the New Woman put in motion are still with us today.

CONTEXT FOR THE NEW WOMAN

EVEN BEFORE MARY Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, the question of where women belonged had been on the minds of both men and women. But the book inspired progressive women in the early and mid-1800s such as Harriet Martineau and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon who adopted and expanded upon Wollstonecraft's work by advocating for women's educational and employment opportunities. Causes such as these held through to the time of the New Woman and were incorporated into the shaping of her character.

Soon, rights to property and suffrage also weaved their way into early reformist platforms, and women were now starting larger campaigns for their rights. With these demands, change did come. The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 allowed women to obtain a divorce if she could prove her husband's adultery, cruelty, desertion, or bigamy. Under this act, a man also had the right to divorce, but he only had to prove his wife's infidelity. Added later to the act was a clause stating that a woman could protect her own property and finances from her husband if she proved desertion.

With the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1864, English laws once again disempowered women. In an effort to stop the spread of venereal disease and protect the health of military men, the act allowed police officers to arrest suspected prostitutes in military towns. If a magistrate determined a woman was a prostitute, she was forced to undergo a medical examination. If she tested positive for venereal disease, she had to stay in a hospital for at least three months or risk imprisonment. Amendments to the act in 1866 and 1869 extended its range into other areas of England and increased the time of forced hospitalization for infected women.

Opposition arose when an effort against this act was launched by Josephine Butler, one of many figureheads in the growing women's movement. Butler argued that women who were accused of prostitution were not being treated fairly. She referenced previous documents, such as the Magna Carta which allowed for a fair trial before persecution, in an effort to support her arguments. In Parliament, liberal politicians William Fowler and James Stansfield also opposed the acts. Specifically, Stansfield believed the acts legalized prostitution.