INDOCTRINATED SPHERES: INTERGENERATIONAL EDUCATION AND GENDER CONSTRUCTS IN GITHA SOWERBY’S RUTHERFORD AND SON

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by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Through an odd mixture of fate, luck, and fortuitous connections, I came to find Githa Sowerby. When I set out to write an undergraduate thesis, I was still trying to find myself between the two worlds of Theatre and English. I set out to just write a paper and instead found myself on an incredible two-year journey to “find Githa” and, somehow, I ended up finding myself as well.

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I. Finding Githa
Among the many forgotten Edwardian plays is Githa Sowerby’s *Rutherford and Son* (1912). That it has largely been forgotten is partly because it was the only play by Sowerby that was successfully produced in her lifetime and, without frequent subsequent productions of plays by Sowerby, both play and author faded into obscurity. *Rutherford and Son* also has been largely forgotten because it is difficult to categorize within Edwardian drama. The play, considered by many Edwardian critics to be one of the grimmest realistic dramas on the English stage, explores the problems and subsequent tragic outcome of a Victorian family running a capitalist industry. Sowerby confronts many ills of Edwardian society within its pages, but gives special attention to gender-based power struggles. Therefore, this play and its female author are rightly often associated with the feminist theatre of the Edwardian era.

Only by identifying the underlying causes and overall form of this rebellion by women against an unbalanced social system in the play is it then possible to understand the gender themes Sowerby intended for the play as a whole. Using sphere ideology, I argue that *Rutherford and Son* is emblematic of late-Edwardian social drama in that it reveals the problems with a society educated solely based on the morals of capitalist patriarchy and the inability of women who are trapped within the private sphere of the system to become fully emancipated from it.

In order to prove this, I first establish a definition of sphere ideology as it applies to politics and gender through public/private spheres and male/female spheres, using Jürgen Habermas’ definition of political public and private spheres as a referential model.
Habermas’ sphere ideology questions the creation of a democratic “public” sphere consisting of individuals that represent society as a whole because that public sphere was exclusive to only the bourgeois reading public and did not represent lower-class or female members of society. The existence of exclusive political spheres in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century bourgeois England can therefore be linked to the existence of private and public gender spheres.

Using this ideology of unequal spheres, I argue that the existence of these spheres in *Rutherford and Son* is the root cause of the biased education of those within them. The basis of this hypothesis is the notion that educating the people within the capitalist patriarchy to adopt that system’s moralities and ethics ensures the continued existence of the desired power structure. In other words, if those who are not in power (in this case, women and the lower class) are taught to adhere to a certain standard of behavior and not question the existing hierarchy, then the capitalist patriarchy will have no competition and will continue to flourish.

If such an educational structure is evident in the play, then next I need to prove whether or not it is detrimentally restrictive to those who have been educated by it. To do so, I analyze the symbolism of female entrapment within the play’s physical setting and the extent to which Mary and Janet are able to overcome their gender restrictions by being New Women characters, using the definition of New Women as understood by Gary Farnell.

In order for *Rutherford and Son* to be emblematic of late-Edwardian social drama I must prove that it is similar in theme and construction to other already-established
works in the genre. In order to justify calling it a social drama, I make a comparison between it and Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*. Written and produced only a year apart, both confront similar issues with the education of women within sphere ideology. By proving that thematic and structural similarities exist between *Rutherford and Son* and such a well-known social drama as *Pygmalion* I can, by extension, prove that Sowerby expressed many of the same themes and employed a similar style as her male playwriting counterparts.

The press gave Sowerby high praise, at times comparing her to Arthur Wing Pinero (“Wins Success”) and at others claiming that she had “taken her place in the front rank of [London’s] dramatists” (“A Woman Dramatist”). Other papers praised her perceived suffrage agenda:

> No play has ever been written that in the truest, strongest sense was so really a “Suffrage” play, although the word is never uttered and the thought never enters the minds of the people portrayed. As the hard, servile, weak, or worthless men are one after another weighed and found wanting, and as the threads are picked up and held firmly by one gentle woman, goaded into cruel strength by love of her little son and contempt for her wretched husband, we get glimpses of the hell this world has held for women—a hell created by the arrogance of men. (“Rutherford and Son: A Great Suffrage Play”)

While this review accurately expresses the play’s central conflict—the figurative entrapment of women within a male-dominant sphere—it is inaccurate in calling
*Rutherford and Son* a suffrage play. However, any drama written by a woman in the politically charged Edwardian era is difficult to disassociate from the suffrage cause. Modern critic Sheila Stowell does not identify Sowerby as a suffrage playwright, but does assert that Sowerby is a feminist playwright “of the suffrage era” alongside overtly suffrage writers such as Cicely Hamilton and Elizabeth Robins. Sowerby herself did not participate directly in the suffrage movement or drama, yet scholars continue to thematically connect her work to the movement.

This comparison between Sowerby and suffrage playwrights is problematic because it erroneously places the work within the small niche of “suffrage” plays. *Rutherford and Son* belongs within the larger category of early twentieth century “feminist” social dramas because it confronts inequalities in a gender-based power structure but does not make any explicit references to the suffrage movement or the cause of female enfranchisement. Moving beyond the pervasive, and limiting, assumption that an Edwardian female feminist playwright must be making a point about suffrage, I argue that a more universal denunciation of gender inequalities than just the female fight for the vote can be found within the work.

I argue that *Rutherford and Son* is a vehicle for these more universal gender themes to be revealed through Sowerby’s socialist ideology. Although themes of suffrage and socialism are not mutually exclusive, since both are based on ideals of political equality, a distinction can be made between the two in the case of *Rutherford and Son*. Suffrage theatre is intended to bring to light social inequalities that can be resolved specifically by means of women’s enfranchisement, while social drama confronts
inequalities on the basis of gender and class with the intent of inciting change from within the underlying power structures, both politically and socially. Sowerby was a known Fabian socialist and thus a member of a group intent on gradually bringing about this social change. Unlike suffrage groups, which were often militant in their tactics, Fabian socialists strove for social equality without the use of revolutionary action. Although the Fabian society as a whole was reluctant to take a stance on the issue of women’s rights, there were women’s rights activists and supporters of both genders among its earliest members. As Stowell notes, Sowerby’s socialist political ideology is evident in *Rutherford and Son*;

> Within the space of its three acts and in a work some critics praised as equal to Pinero . . . Sowerby manages to address many of the major issues troubling Edwardians. Waste, inheritance, capitalist enterprise, the status of women, cross-class alliance and marriage all come under Sowerby’s purview as she exposes with unremitting grimness the agony of life in John Rutherford’s house. (131)

In light of these obvious socialist concerns, it is essential, when considering the work in terms of its sociological context, to use a political approach in conjunction with the already established feminist approach. By doing so, it may be possible to elevate Sowerby’s writing beyond association with suffrage theatre to the level of main stage entertainment on equal footing with her male contemporaries.

No disparagement is intended by claiming that *Rutherford and Son* is elevated “beyond” suffrage theatre. Indeed, suffrage theatre played an incredibly important role as
political propaganda in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Even Bernard Shaw waded into the suffrage theatre mix with *Press Cuttings* (1909), placing himself alongside the competent female playwrights who had already made a name for themselves by writing suffrage propagandist plays. Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John’s *How the Vote Was Won* (1909) and Elizabeth Robins’ *Votes for Women!* (1907) are both among the most well-known examples of suffrage theatre. However, overtly suffrage plays were almost never able to move beyond the drawing room or private meeting hall and onto a main stage. In order for a play written by a woman to gain the amount of popularity needed to last for a long run in the West End, the word “suffrage” had to be eliminated from its central themes. Such is the case in *Rutherford and Son*, which ran for 136 performances at three different London theatres during the second half of the 1911—1912 season before being transferred to New York for the beginning of the 1912—1913 season. The play’s success is a result of its complexity. It is neither just a feminist play nor just a domestic drama, but instead it exists in the gray space between the two by having elements of both.

*Rutherford and Son*, at its most simplistic narrative level, is the story of an upper-middle class Victorian family from the North of England and the problems they face as a result of the glassmaking business they own. The simplicity begins to fade, however, when the veneer of domesticity is pulled aside to reveal the underlying problems, particularly for women, within the system of capitalist patriarchy.

Set in the Victorian era but written in the Edwardian, and therefore with all the benefit of hindsight, Sowerby applies contemporary socialist values of the late-
Edwardian age to remembrances of her own childhood. She was raised in a capitalist-oriented industrial family much like the Rutherfords, and her personal biography heavily influences the subject matter of the play. The play is set on the banks of the river Tyne near the city of Newcastle, a scene taken directly from Sowerby’s memories of her childhood home in Gateshead, where the family business, Sowerby’s Ellison Glassworks, Ltd., was located.

Fig. 1. Gateshead Map (1858)

*Rutherford and Son* tells the story of how the Rutherford family is torn apart by the capitalist environment its own patriarchy has created. Rutherford Sr. is the established master of the household, who followed in his own father’s footsteps to become head of the Rutherford Glassworks (commonly referred to as the Works) and takes great pride in his accomplishments as patriarch of the family and the business. Rutherford and his spinster sister, Ann, like any good Victorians instilled with the values of his age, expect
the children of the family to subscribe to the roles their father has given them, demand they uphold the family name with honor and with pride, and, most importantly, envisage that Rutherford’s oldest son will succeed him in taking over the family business. All goes awry when Rutherford’s idealized world begins to crumble around him. Rutherford sees his youngest son, Richard (Dick), as a disappointment because he is a vicar who chose a life in the church over the family business. The daughter, Janet, silently rebels with sulky looks and careless behavior in response to her role of the domestic female serving in her dead mother’s place. Even worse, she defies her father through a secret affair with Martin, Rutherford’s most trusted employee at the Works who is of a lower socio-economic class than the Rutherford family. Rutherford’s eldest son, John, upon whom Rutherford had rested all of his hope for the future of the Works, is the biggest disappointment of all. He abandons the Works, moves to London, and marries a girl of a lower class in an attempt to build a new life. John’s dream of a life away from the Works falls apart when he and his wife, Mary, have a child they cannot financially support and are forced to move back into the Rutherford household. In the three months between when they move back into the household and the start of the play, John, with the help of Martin, has secretly been working on an invention, a cheaper method of producing clear glass, which he hopes to use to gain his financial freedom by selling it to his father. Rutherford, enraged at the idea of buying something from his own son to support the family business, manipulates Martin into giving him the invention behind John’s back. By the end of the play, Rutherford bullies Dick into leaving and taking a job elsewhere, forces Janet to leave the Rutherford house and never return, fires Martin, and abuses John
to the point where he leaves for Canada to start a new life and callously abandons his wife and child. In the end, Mary is the only character who is able to stand up to Rutherford. She knows his greatest weakness as a patriarch is the lack of an heir to take over the Works, and she makes a deal with him: if he will support her and her son for ten years, she will give her son to him to be trained as the next head of the family business. The play ends with the cry of the baby, whose fate has just been decided for him.

Although this drama has become virtually forgotten in the century since its first production, Sowerby’s consummate control of naturalistic style and compelling characterizations made *Rutherford and Son* one of the greatest successes of London’s 1912 theatrical season. It was J. H. Leigh, manager of the Royal Court Theatre, who gave the play its premiere on the 31st of January 1912 as part of a short series of matinee performances. The press immediately recognized the play’s merit and began writing positive reviews about the dismal realistic tragedy, but what ultimately made it popular with the press and public was the sense of mystery surrounding its author.
Fig. 2. Rutherford and Son Poster

Sowerby was a reserved woman, even with her own daughter (Riley 92), so it is not surprising that she was reluctant to speak candidly with the public. She practiced the art of concealment at the beginning of her theatrical career by having her name appear on the program of *Rutherford and Son* as “K. G. Sowerby” in an attempt to hide her gender. The ruse was unsuccessful, and soon the press headlines began to reflect astonishment at the revelation that the “Identity of K. G. Sowerby” (*Yorkshire Evening Post*) was that of a woman and further surprise that she could have written such a compelling and yet lugubrious play. The enigma of Sowerby continued to enthral the press for the entirety of the play’s run, as people searched for answers to questions that Sowerby was unwilling to answer. She intentionally kept to herself and refused most interviews. On the rare occasions that she did accept interviews, she masterfully deflected questions about her
creative process and intent in writing the play, often using traditional feminine stereotypes to her advantage. In one interview, the reporter expressed his frustration and wonder with Sowerby’s detached attitude toward her “marvelous” play, of which the reporter said:

You would think it ten times as marvelous if you could see that composed young English miss shielding her pretty face from the heat of the fire with her muff, and hear her deploring the fact that some of the characters should be so horrid to one another (“When Lovely Woman Turns to Playwriting”).

Fig. 3. Portrait of Katherine Githa Sowerby
The media’s preoccupation with Sowerby, who was viewed as a strange anomaly in a time when women did not often make offstage careers in the theatre, speaks to the inequalities in public perception of gender roles in late-Edwardian London. Sowerby’s assumed indifference toward the press suggests she was familiar with the stereotypes inherent in gender, particularly stereotypes of women writers who were often classified as radical feminists. By behaving in a way that conformed to the norms of a proper young English woman, Sowerby helped prevent her play from being rejected by the mainstream public as another work by a radical suffragist. She clearly understood the ways in which conforming to gender stereotypes could be an advantage within a separate-sphere culture when used to ingratiate oneself with the very people whose opinions one hopes to influence. She wrote female protagonists much like herself in that respect: women who were able to recognize gender inequalities and find ways to seize advantage of their otherwise inhibited position within those unequal power structures. Although Sowerby’s women do not fully emancipate themselves from their personal entrapment within a sphere ideology, they engender the possibility of future emancipation by challenging the education inculcated in them by a capitalist patriarchal society.
II. Sphere Ideology and Education
In Victorian and Edwardian England, gender roles were separated into two distinct categories, or spheres, as a result of an all-encompassing patriarchal view. Using language from Alexis de Tocqueville, separation of male and female roles into “spheres” is the result of a young woman’s marriage, after which time “the inexorable opinion of the public carefully circumscribes [her] within the narrow circle of domestic interests and duties and forbids her to step beyond it.” In the eyes of male authority, this is the practice of rendering the sexes as equal in importance but in two separate realms of existence that are never shared. The duties of men consist of the public concerns of family, business, labor, and politics; the duties of women are limited to a specific circle of domestic duties, the circumference of which encloses her and separates her from the ‘outward’ life that men inhabit.

One means of transforming the abstractness of this gender sphere ideology into a tangible metaphor is to envision it in terms of public vs. private spheres. Modern awareness of the existence of a public sphere and the sociological ramifications of its existence in post-industrial revolution politics of democracy comes from the work of Jürgen Habermas in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). In this work, Habermas traces the development of the new social order that allows for a bourgeoisie public sphere back to the emergence of trade capitalism and the subsequent changes to socioeconomic power structure (14). This ‘public sphere’ he references consists of private individuals who band together to form a “public” social body, particularly for the purpose of holding domination by the governing body in check (27) through means of a democratic political structure. Habermas is particularly focused on the development of a
political public sphere, the creation of which is justified by the creation of a public body
is that such an equal and representative public group will serve as a place in which
“public opinion” may be understood and expressed in order to align the governing body
with the needs of society (31). In optimistic theory, this bourgeois political public sphere
that existed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries functioned as an equalizer by
being all-inclusive to any male individual from any social class who wished to be a part,
but in reality, “the public very much assumed its specific form; it was the bourgeois
reading public of the eighteenth century” (85). This façade of equal inclusion for all men
began to fade in the mid-nineteenth century and precipitated the end of the political
public sphere as it had previously existed.

The inequalities inherent in this concept of the eighteenth century political public
sphere, in the form of socioeconomic exclusion, may also be viewed in terms of gender
exclusion, as “women and dependents were factually and legally excluded from the
political public sphere” (56). The uprising of the Chartist Movement in the mid-1800s
brought about the downfall of the political public sphere as a separate entity for the
bourgeois by allowing the inclusion of men from other social classes, but did nothing to
alter the exclusion of women. There was no consideration of the inclusion of women in
the public sphere until the suffragist movement began to gain momentum in Great Britain
at the end of the nineteenth century, and it was not realized until fulfillment of the
suffrage cause in 1918.

The political public sphere at the time of Rutherford and Son was therefore still
the sphere of men. The issue of spheres is more complicated than assumed duality of
public vs. private spheres, however. The private sphere, in contrast to the public, consists of the areas of life intended for service of the self or the immediate nuclear family, separate from society. Habermas is particularly focused on the influence of capitalism on the public sphere, which, in its exclusivity, leaves out members of society who are uneducated or do not hold property. This leaves a gap in understanding the influence of capitalism within the converse private sphere.

Habermas makes a brief mention of this capitalistic effect on the private bourgeois family:

[The family] played its precisely defined role in the process of the reproduction of capital. As a genealogical link it guaranteed a continuity of personnel that consisted materially in the accumulation of capital and was anchored in the absence of legal restrictions concerning the inheritance of property. As an agency of society it served especially the task of that difficult mediation through which, in spite of the illusion of freedom, strict conformity with societally necessary requirements was brought about. Freud discovered the mechanism of the internalization of paternal authority . . . the independence of the property owner in the market and in his own business was complemented by the dependence of the wife and children on the male head of the family. (47)

By means of advantageous marriages for reason (be it economic or social advantages) as opposed to love, the conjugal and filial relationship could become another capitalistic commodity. This was a common practice in England’s industrial era and occurred in Sowerby’s own family. Her grandfather, John, secured one such advantageous marriage
between his daughter, Isabella, and Hugh Andrews, a wealthy ship-owner who owned coal mines. Hugh Andrews became an ally of the Sowerby family and their Ellison Glassworks, eventually became a member of the board, and when he died he had accumulated an estate of nearly £500,000, equivalent to many millions in 21st century purchasing power. The capitalistic control of familial relationships not only served economic stability but also ensured the continuation of the aforementioned paternal authority and patriarchal lineage.

The maintenance of this private bourgeois family within a domestic setting was not a gender-specific action, since men could freely interact with the private affairs of the family. Thus, men could freely transition between the public and private domains, while married women (or any other women who were subservient to a family patriarch) were enclosed within the private sphere. Importantly, the public sphere was not necessarily gender exclusive, as a woman who was not bound to a man by marriage, who was not still within the care of her father, and who was capable of supporting herself financially could exist outside of the private sphere. However, when considering the main female characters in *Rutherford and Son*, Mary and Janet, Sowerby is decidedly seeking to comment on the female entrapped within private domesticity.

The set of *Rutherford and Son* is a perfect physical representation of this gender-power structure. The set never changes location and each act is placed within the large, uncomfortable living room in the Rutherford household. The room is furnished in dark mahogany with red walls and is an oppressive and uncomfortable space, despite being the hub of the house. A large painting of the late John Rutherford is hanging above the
sideboard, directly facing the audience, and establishes this household as one dominated by patriarchal values. The room itself, ironically called the “living room” though presided over by an image of a deceased man (Sowerby 1), contains elements of both the public and private spheres; public because of its function as Rutherford’s office and a space in which the family entertains guests but private because of its position within the household and its use as the space in which all major familial decisions are made.

Fig. 4. Press Picture from the Cheltenham Looker-On.

The male characters are able to use this spherical duality of the space both by interacting with the women within the private family sphere and also inviting public visitors within the space. The first time Martin enters the space he does so at Rutherford’s side while discussing business matters. Another non-family member who enters during the play is Mrs. Henderson, a lower-class woman who comes to try to save her son’s job at the Works after Rutherford caught him stealing money. Mrs. Henderson visits only
because Richard invited her to the house, and he and Rutherford are the only people who interact with her onstage.

In contrast to the male characters’ freedom within the space, the women are able to use the same room as a private sphere only. In a physical fulfillment of this, the play opens with Mary and Ann sitting by the fire engaged in their respective feminine employments of sewing and knitting. When Janet then enters and brings bread to set the table for dinner, the three form a physical “circle” of female occupation. This distinction of public and private spheres is broken only when the male characters interrupt this circle of female employment and impose the public world of business within it, and even when this happens the women never step from private to public employments in the same way the men are easily able to do. The women remain engaged in their feminine occupations and private conversations because they are unable to emancipate themselves from their given sphere.

Act I reveals abundant evidence supporting the conclusion that the characters were indoctrinated into sphere ideology, meaning that existing inequalities within the family are inculcated rather than inherent. Beginning with the oldest generation, it may be presumed that Aunt Ann and Rutherford, being siblings, were raised with similar ideologies about gender and familial relationships. Although Ann is an unmarried woman, she is still dependent on her brother for financial support. As a result of this relationship, throughout the play we see evidence that Ann’s chief concerns are for Rutherford and his wishes. In Act I, she frets about the dinner being exactly the way Rutherford likes it. In contrast, Janet cares little about Rutherford’s opinion of the dinner.
When Janet comments that Susan, the kitchen servant, forgot to pour out the cream, Ann worries because she knows “he’s so particular about his cream,” to which Janet replies, “He’ll have to do without for once” (4). Ann further chastises Janet for setting the entire loaf of bread on the table when “you know weel enough that gentlefolk has it set round in bits” [sic] (6), which emphasizes Rutherford’s desire to elevate his family from the middle class to an upper echelon of society. Ann also sympathizes about how Rutherford will surely be cold when he returns from the Works and criticizes Janet for not taking care to lay out Rutherford’s slippers by the fire to warm properly. Ann respects the patriarchal authority in the household and takes care to ensure that the present status quo is maintained by making sure that everything is done to Rutherford’s liking.

Further, Ann obviously doesn’t question this indoctrination of a gender hierarchy. She obeys the system willingly and frequently makes comments to the younger women concerning their obligation to abide by the rules of the household. She reprimands Janet in particular for not conforming to her position in the household and behaving like a servant rather than a lady even though Rutherford has expressly forbidden Janet to do things like a servant. Ann sees no point in any frivolous things like the “butterfly bows” that Mary uses to decorate a cap for Tony, because they do not serve a purpose toward the Rutherford cause. She ascribes to the same rules as Rutherford: “plain and lasting—that’s the rule in this family, and we bide by it, babies and all” (5). She can not understand how Mary has lived there for three months and has not yet assimilated into the Rutherford family’s rules and instead wastes her time “making a bit of trash fit for a monkey at a fair. A body would think [she] would ha’ learned better by now” (6). It is
noteworthy that Ann uses the word “learned” in this context, because it underscores the fact that ideal behaviors in this family are taught through the power hierarchy.

Other evidence of the indoctrination of unequal public vs. private spheres is revealed through the stark differences between Mary’s background and the Rutherford family’s background. After Ann finishes berating Mary’s frivolity, Ann then admits that she does not blame Mary for her perceived faults, because it is not her fault that she “weren’t born and bred in the north country” (6), and undoubtedly she must be “a bit saft wi’ livin’ in the sooth” [sic] where “there’s a deal of sunshine and wickedness” (7). Mary then compares her childhood to her present situation. She recalls that in Devonshire, where she lived as a child, “everywhere there were lanes” and responds to Ann’s criticisms of the South with an observation that “the people are happier, I think” (7). Mary’s remembered image of lanes is one of freedom and mobility, things that she no longer has as a woman living within a patriarchal capitalist environment. Instead she is entrapped on the moor, where “it’s all so old and stern” and she sees “the trees—all bent one way, crooked and huddled” (7), in much the same way that the people living there have been bent to the will of the system in which they live.

Mary’s different education not only sets her apart from the Rutherford family, but also creates a rift between her and her husband. Mary does not fully understand why Rutherford is still so angry about their marriage and why he entirely ignores her presence. John, however, understands his father’s actions perfectly because he has grown up with them. He defends Rutherford, saying that Mary is imagining things, because “the Guv’nor’s like that with us all—it’s always been so; besides, he doesn’t like women—
never notices them” (9). Mary retaliates against the entire household, saying, “it’s like a prison! There’s not a scrape of love in the whole house. Your father!—no one’s any right to be what he is—never questioned, never answered back—like God!” (11). John continues to defend the way he was raised by saying, “you don’t make excuses for family life—everybody knows it’s like that more or less” (12). Mary accurately realizes that this view is the result of an inscribed education and tells John as much, saying, “And you’ve lived with it always—you can’t see it as I do” (12). She is the only one removed enough from the situation to see the negative cycle of the Rutherford family, a cycle in which each generation is educated in the same class- and gender-based hierarchy as the previous generation in order to ensure the continuation of the current family business and power structure.

This destructive intergenerational cycle is best described by John in Act I using an idolatrous metaphor:

But have you ever heard of Moloch? No. – Well, Moloch was a sort of a god – some time ago, you know, before Dick and his kind came along. They built his image with an ugly head ten times the size of a real head, with great wheels instead of legs, and set him up in the middle of a great dirty town. [Janet, busy at the table, stops to listen, raising her eyes for almost the first time.] And they thought him a very important person indeed, and made sacrifices to him – human sacrifices – to keep him going, you know. Out of every family they set aside one child to be an offering to him when it was big enough, and at last it became a sort of
honor to be dedicated in this way, so much so, that the victims gave
themselves gladly to be crushed out of life under the great wheels. That
was Moloch. (22)

John mixes his metaphors in this description, as his version of sacrifice by being thrown
under the wheels of a great cart is much closer to the Indian rituals surrounding the
Juggernaut than the sacrifice-by-fire that is associated with Molech worship in the Bible.³

However, knowing the true origin of the Molech myth makes the metaphor more
apropos. Ancient worshippers of Molech would sacrifice their own children by
immolation to the god in order to prevent destruction by forces outside of their control.
Rachel Muers considers the significance and hypocrisy behind undertaking a “covenant
with death” in order to prevent immediate destruction. The fallacious logic behind
Molech sacrifice was that one could avoid an “overwhelming scourge” that could destroy
the entire family by sacrificing one child. Muers argues that this kind of idol worship
“can be understood as a process of protecting oneself and one’s ‘posterity’, and
paradoxically thereby a means of binding oneself, and one’s posterity, to death” (553).

This account of sacrifice has a significant similarity to the sacrifice practiced by
Rutherford. It is analogous both metaphorically and literally. It is identical in its
fundamental purpose to Rutherford’s metaphorical sacrifice of his children to the family
business. Rutherford has entered into an intergenerational covenant with death, just as his
own father did, and therefore expects the next generation to continue along the same line
of sacrifice. The assumption is that by sacrificing an individual to the greater cause, in
this case the business, it will ensure continued survival, paradoxically to the benefit of
future generations. So Rutherford, by “throwing” his children into the fires—a literal metaphor of the glass manufacturing process that relies on coal fires—is symbolically sacrificing them to the very fires by which the glass is made.

The intergenerational elements of the sacrifice are what makes the Moloch metaphor germane to the theme of an indoctrinated gender education. *Rutherford and Son* is not a play merely about a tyrannical father who sacrifices his own family for personal gain. Instead, it concerns a father who is sacrificing his children to the same Works that he was himself sacrificed to in his youth. Rutherford’s actions are the result of what he learned in his own past:

RUTHERFORD. Your father has lived here, and your grandfather before you. It’s your inheritance—can’t you realize that?—what you’ve got to come to when I’m underground . . .

JOHN. Well, after all, I can’t help what you and grandfather chose to do.

RUTHERFORD. Ch o s e to do! [sic] There’s no chose to do. The thing’s there. You’re my son—my son that’s got to come after me (38).

Rutherford implies a lack of choice on his part in the past, just as he perceives that John should have no choice. The inheritance of the business is a duty that the family heir must assume. As one *New York Times* critic said: “Rutherford was a man with an ideal” ( “New Author Wins Favor”). He commits tyrannical acts in order to continue the family name and business because he feels that he must as part of the patriarchal family line.
III. A Restrictive Education and “New Woman” Emancipation
Rutherford and Son is thematically about more than just the intergenerational education of idolatrous sacrifice. Sowerby also suggests an implied intergenerational education concerning the balance of power and gender within the family. The play contains specific symbolism that may be used to prove that there are restrictions imposed on the characters by the indoctrination of a gender-biased education. The most obvious of these restrictions is the previously discussed female entrapment within the private sphere, which is shown in the play by means of Mary and Janet’s physical entrapment within the Rutherford house. Throughout the play, the window serves as the symbol through which both Mary and Janet are able to express their unhappiness. Both women are clearly unsatisfied with their private existence, and both express their desires to supersede the limitations of the private sphere by means of the window through which they see the public sphere. In the opening scene of the play, Mary goes to the window and looks out at twilight (6), when time is on the cusp between day and night. Mary, too, is on the cusp between worlds at this point, both because she embodies a duality as a member of the family and yet an outsider and also because she physically stands at the edge where the private sphere ends and looks out on the public sphere that she is not allowed to inhabit.

The window is a restrictive physical barrier between spheres but it allows for hope by nature of its transparency. Windows allow light to enter and give the enclosed women a view of what they long for. Part of Janet’s triumph after her argument with her father is not only the idea that she is gaining her freedom, but also that she will never again “sit the long afternoon through in the window” (80). At that moment she is envisioning a future wherein she will finally be a part of the public world on the opposite side of the
glass. When she leaves and slams the door behind her, she finally physically surmounts the entrapment of the space in a way that echoes Nora’s famous slamming of the door in her departure from *A Doll’s House* (128). However, Janet’s departure is more ambiguous than Nora’s because it leaves the audience unaware of whether Janet is running toward freedom or toward her demise. The fact that she leaves the private sphere is indisputable, and we may assume that she will be unable to comfortably exist within the public sphere because she has no experience or skills outside of the bourgeois patriarchal family. There is no indication within the play as to what exactly becomes of her, although there were reviews at the time that argued in favor of the opinion that she leaves to commit suicide.\(^4\) Furthermore, there are some slight hints in the text that indicate the possibility that she could be pregnant, although the press never commented on such a controversial possibility as her having a child out of wedlock.\(^5\)

No matter what fate befalls Janet, her disappearance from the action is evidence that *Rutherford and Son* is a play that offers no real hope of full emancipation from the enclosed private sphere for the women in the Rutherford family. The men have viable means of escape from the tyranny within the house because they are men who can take part in the political public sphere and who can presumably fend for themselves financially. Janet and Mary have no such options. The women’s only means of escape are entirely dependent on male orchestration. When Mary asks Janet where she will go when Martin comes for her, Janet’s replies “I don’t know yet. He’ll say what to do” (82). Then, when Martin chooses loyalty to Rutherford over a life with Janet, she is left with uncertainty. She doesn’t know of anywhere to go outside of her private existence and she
refuses any money from Martin (90), the denial of which supports the possibility that she doesn’t intend on surviving by her own means. It may be assumed that when Janet rushes out and shuts the door behind her, she trades her life of imprisonment within the four walls in exchange for a lack of independent existence outside of them.

Textual ambiguity makes possible an argument that Janet’s exit is less grim and instead truly is an escape from her imprisonment. In that version, her act of leaving becomes the source of her catharsis and makes her an embodiment of feminism (Farnell 516). If so, it would support an argument that Mary and Janet are actually able to overcome gender restrictions as a direct result of their power as New Women. As Farnell argues, the play’s feminist leanings are best understood when Mary and Janet are recognized as New Women. Farnell’s discussion centers on the not-oneness, metaphorically and literally, of the two leading female characters and their consequent shared characterization in the play.

In order to call Mary and Janet New Women, we must first establish a definition of what a New Woman is. Historically, the “New Woman” of the fin-de-siècle was the female character type who embodied the revolutionary ideas of forthcoming feminism. Sarah Grand first created the term in 1894 in “The New Aspect of the Woman Question.” To Grand, the New Woman was an entity of superior intellect who “solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere, and provided the remedy” (271). By that simple definition, Mary and Janet are easily seen as New Women since they both openly question the sphere ideology of their society. However, the definition of what constitutes a New Woman changes often and at the
discretion of individual authors, and therefore whether or not Mary and Janet are conclusively New Women is difficult to conclusively determine.

In Farnell’s argument, the standards of behavior for a New Woman predominately include “prioritizing the importance of bringing up and educating children in such a way as to exert a long-range influence on the development of society itself” (512), being “life-affirming (hopeful to the race)” (515), traversing their sense of imprisonment at home (516), possessing “autonomous egos” (518), and, above all, fashioning themselves as new (514). Farnell makes a case that Mary and Janet together fulfill these standards and are thus conclusively New Women.

The most important aspect of Farnell’s conclusion is the idea of Mary and Janet being entirely individual, or possessing autonomous egos, while also existing together as a singular symbol of femininity. To Farnell, this “woman-is-several” powerfulness allows them to overcome, not just subvert, Rutherford’s patriarchy (518). Therefore, not only do Mary and Janet as characters fashion themselves as “new,” but they also exist in the play in a “new” fashioning of feminism by means of the singular women. Farnell notes how unusual it was at the time for there to be two New Women in a single play, and this strangeness gives *Rutherford and Son* itself “newness” in terms of its feminism.6

This female camaraderie and companionship in the play gives Janet the opportunity to develop into an emancipated character. As Farnell states, Mary functions as a character who brings about change in other women (517). The introduction of Mary into the Rutherford household is the catalyst that prompts every subsequent action in the play. After all, Janet did not begin her affair with Martin until “when Mary and Tony
came” (73), which implies the sudden awakening of sexuality in Janet was precipitated by Mary’s arrival in the house.

Mary is not only a catalyst, but also a teacher for Janet. When considering the educational theme running through the play, Mary is undoubtedly the most important educator on the side of the women’s cause. Her first pupil in the Rutherford family is Janet, for whom Mary fills a void created by the lack of a mother figure in the house (an issue to which I will return). Janet garners the courage to embark into the unknown outside of the Rutherford family as a direct result of her time spent with Mary. This togetherness is apparent in the opening of Act III. Immediately following Janet’s confrontation with Rutherford at the end of Act II, the curtain opens on two women, Mary and Janet, conversing calmly at the table center stage. They speak together as friends, and Mary has shows Janet the importance of the feminine bond by revealing that she has known about the affair for a long time but told no one. Mary is undoubtedly the wiser of the two and, after Janet finishes fantasizing about the perfect life she envisions for herself and Martin in the future, Mary tells her, “if the time ever comes when you want help—and it does happen sometimes even to people who are very happy—remember that I’ll come when you ask me—always” (82). Mary accurately predicts that Janet’s future is not going to be as idyllic as imagined and she chooses to exhibit solidarity with her fellow woman. The ambiguity in Janet’s choice in the end makes it impossible to know whether she becomes a true New Woman by means of her emancipation or whether she finds herself unable to exist outside the bourgeois private sphere. Either way, Janet shows throughout the play that she has at least begun the
process of learning to become a New Woman, and consequently, under Mary’s tutelage, subverts the education that has been inculcated in her by her patriarchal upbringing.

Mary further embodies the New Woman in her abilities to be “life affirming” and rear her child with the long-term intent of changing the societal status quo in spite of the fact that her position within the society of patriarchal capitalism forces her into a situation where she is left with limited options. She could attempt to live with her husband, a scenario that would force her to work to support all three of them and that would damn her son into being like the other children in London who are “taught to work before they’d had time to learn what work means—with the manhood ground out of them before ever it came” (11). Alternatively, she could be like Janet and attempt to face the unknown world of existence outside the private sphere, which holds no foreseeable positive future for a woman on her own. Certainly, Mary chooses the best option for herself and her son by assuming the masculine role of a hardhearted businessman and bringing the public sphere into the private sphere as heretofore only males in the Rutherford family could:

RUTHERFORD. What ha’ ye got to ask of me?

MARY. To ask—nothing. I’ve a bargain to make with you.

RUTHERFORD. [half truculent] Wi’ me?

MARY. You can listen—then you can take it or leave it.

RUTHERFORD. Thank ye kindly. And what’s your idea of a bargain?

MARY. A bargain is where one person has something to sell that another wants to buy. There’s no love in it—only money—money that pays for life. I’ve got something to sell that you want to buy.
RUTHERFORD. What’s that?

MARY. My son. [Their eyes meet in a long steady look. She goes on deliberately.] You’ve lost everything you have in the world. John’s gone—and Richard—and Janet. They won’t come back. You’re alone now and getting old, with no one to come after you. When you die Rutherford’s will be sold—somebody ‘ll buy it and give it a new name perhaps, and no one will even remember that you made it. That’ll be the end of all your work. Just—nothing. You’ve thought of that. I’ve seen you thinking of it as I’ve sat by and watched you . . . Give me what I ask, and in return I’ll give you—him. On one condition. I’m to stay on here. I won’t trouble you—you needn’t speak to me or see me unless you want to. For ten years he’s to be absolutely mine, to do what I like with. You mustn’t interfere—you mustn’t tell him to do things or frighten him. He’s mine. For ten years more.

RUTHERFORD. And after that?

MARY. He’ll be yours.

RUTHERFORD. To train up. For Rutherford’s? You’d trust your son to me?

MARY. Yes.

RUTHERFORD. After all? After Dick, that I’ve bullied till he’s a fool? John, that’s wished me dead?
MARY. In ten years you’ll be an old man; you won’t be able to make people afraid of you any more. (104-106)

Although Mary claims that her bargain has no love in it, her business transaction is, in fact, founded on love. It seems cold to even discuss the possibility of selling one’s child, particularly to such a destructive institution as the Works, but by doing so she is making the best choice for the benefit of her child. Even though she is still sacrificing her child, she does so in the hope that she will be able to educate Tony in a way that will subvert the indoctrination of Rutherford’s patriarchal-oriented sphere theory.

Farnell considers Mary a “life-affirming” New Woman because she makes this hard bargain that benefits both herself and her son while effectively predicting the end of Rutherford’s patriarchy. Mary’s resolve in standing up to Rutherford is courageous, especially considering that this is the first time Rutherford has spoken a civil word to her. Mary makes Rutherford listen and establishes herself as his equal by facing him across the table, as depicted in this promotional photo from the play’s run at the Little Theatre. Even the ruthless Rutherford begrudgingly concedes, “You’ve got a fair notion of business—for a woman” (106). Mary replies, “I’ve earned my living. I know all that teaches a woman.”
Here, Mary at last directly acknowledges the underlying theme throughout the play of female education, and she does so in a way that reminds us that, unlike Janet or Ann, she has previously existed within the public sphere. During the time she and John lived in London, she was the primary financial support for the family, and their lower socio-economic status meant she was not circumscribed within the bourgeois-constructed private sphere. Mary’s choice in the end is a direct result of the education that patriarchal capitalistic society has given her in terms of what powers a woman may use to her advantage. Direct confrontation with the patriarchy, with the intent of solving its inherent sexist problems, would never work in her case, because the patriarch holds the ultimate
authority as the only figure between the two of them who can inhabit both spheres. However, Mary is intelligent enough to know that she can affect gender spheres through her son and thus may be able to eventually bring down Rutherford’s patriarchal regime. Mary takes advantage of the best option of those she was given, the only choice that has the potential to change the current imbalanced status quo.

Mary and Janet, while perhaps not definitively so, both at least have the potential to be New Women. The system of patriarchal capitalism has taught them how to restrict their choices in order to ensure its own continuation. But this education is not entirely successful, as both women are able to hold on to their independent sensibilities in their everyday actions and speech and both also learn how to manipulate the strict classifications within the system to their own advantage.

In the process of learning how to be New Women, we see Mary and Janet learn to accept one of two inevitabilities: they must either integrate themselves within the system (like Mary) or remove themselves completely from both the public and private spheres (like Janet). Although neither of those endings brings about a means for them to provide a remedy for the woman’s sphere problem, both show a means by which the women traverse their imprisonment.

Mary’s motivation for her opposition against capitalistic patriarchy comes partially from her understanding of economic inequality from her previous life in a lower socio-economic class, but a more significant portion of it comes from her status as a mother. Like the patriarchal Rutherford, she is prepared to use her son as a sacrifice to achieve an end. Whether she will succeed in that endeavor or not is unclear and there are
two possible outcomes: either her son will be educated by the capitalist patriarchy in the same way Rutherford was or Mary, in the ten years she will have with her son as part of the bargain, will efficaciously educate him herself in a way that will allow him to subvert Rutherford’s reign of power.

In support of the former outcome is the fact that Rutherford’s is not a place in which a child cast into the furnace at the heart of patriarchal capitalism has ever managed to reemerge a better man. There has been no precedent to support the idea that one generation can change the balance of power because every child in the play who has been sacrificed before Tony has either been devoured by the system or fled into the sphereless, and therefore nonexistent, world outside of it. Rutherford himself was indoctrinated into the system in much the same way he had intended for John. He speaks of how he also once made an invention of worth, but how that invention was appropriated by other companies and he ended up never making any money off of it (41). Rutherford once had creativity and hope for economic independence from the Works, much like John, but when his hopes were destroyed by capitalist greed he willingly cast himself into the fires of the Works until he turned into the tyrannical man we see in the play. Mary holds on to a hope that Rutherford will be too old in ten years to pull Tony into the fires after him, but Rutherford will not be the only one educating him. Tony will be educated by the patriarchal capitalist system—the men at the Works, the board of directors, and old man Rutherford himself—and the ten short years he will spend with his mother may have no real effect on the outcome of his education. If this is the case, capitalistic patriarchy will continue and Mary’s choice will not be beneficial to her cause, but rather will be the
product of what the patriarchy has taught her: that the only means she has of rebellion against Rutherford is to become like him. In this scenario, though Rutherford and Mary have different intentions, the result would be the same: both commit their children to the fires of Moloch.

Whether Sowerby intended such a bleak end for her characters. Farnell believes she instead wanted to impart hope for a more positive future. His thesis is founded on an interpretation of the ending as being in Mary’s favor, where Tony “will always be his mother’s son . . . so that even when . . . he becomes Rutherford’s ‘son’ as the one to take over the running of the glassworks, he will not be dominated by Rutherford” (511). Mary’s ten-year influence may have the effect she desires and keep her son from becoming another tyrant in the Rutherford line.

I argue that Sowerby used religious iconography to support this more positive outcome. We have already seen Sowerby use religious iconography in this play by means of the Moloch metaphor. Building upon that image, Rutherford is posited as an idolatrous man who worships the Works in the same way that the Canaanites worshipped Moloch. Significantly, Sowerby gave the only matriarchal figure in the play the name “Mary.” She functions as the antithesis of Rutherford’s idolatrous acts because she is *Rutherford and Son*’s version of Mary, mother of Jesus. Mary Rutherford bore a son and is willing to sacrifice him for the ultimate good cause, redemption of the sinful acts committed at Rutherford’s.

These opposing forms of worship have markedly different intentions. While Rutherford is willing to sacrifice all his children for the ensured continuation of the
Works, Mary is prepared to sacrifice her only son in the hope of securing the best possible future for him, and eventually for the entire family, out of her limited available options. Selling her son in the end is a cold act, but it is also the most protective choice she can make for him. She stipulates in the bargain that Rutherford must give her son all the best things: clothes, protection, and a good education. In return, he receives a new heir to train up for the continuation of the family business. Rutherford, unable to understand sentiment or love unless it serves the Works, presumes that she has selfish intentions and is bargaining for “a roof over your head—the shelter of a good name—your keep—things not so easy to come by” (106). Rutherford is incapable of understanding her true intentions and does not realize that she views the outcome of this deal as a personal imprisonment, not as a means to a comfortable life for herself. She reveals the truth of her pain in her slow reply, “there’ll be a woman living in the house—year after year, with the fells closed round her. She’ll sit and sew at the window and see the furnace flare up in the dark; lock up, and give you the keys at night” (106). We once again see an image of Mary as a woman who sits in the window, on the verge of achieving a public existence but hemmed in literally by Rutherford’s glass and figuratively by his entire glassworks. To Mary, the bargain is more like a prison sentence than salvation. Despite the fact that she ultimately damns herself and that her son’s future is uncertain, Mary remains Sowerby’s positive parental figure in the play; she is the matriarch who is willing to give up her personal freedom and any hope of escaping from the private sphere within the Rutherford household to ensure the best possible support and future of her child.
In sharp contrast to Mary’s strong presence as a matriarchal figure is the noticeable absence of Janet’s mother. Rutherford barely mentions her, and on the rare occasions he does it is always in an accusatory manner. At one point he goes so far as to say he believes John’s “a fool because his mother made him one, bringing him up secret wi’ books o’ poetry and such-like trash” (68) instead of teaching him to be a businessman like his father. Furthermore, Janet makes an ominous reference to her mother in Act I, where she talks about how Rutherford deals with people who stand up to him: “they get so knocked about that they don’t matter anymore. . . Oh I don’t mean he hits them, that’s not his way,” and when John accuses her of exaggerating she retorts, “Exaggerate—look at mother!” (44). Nothing more on the subject is mentioned, but the veiled accusation hangs in the air, along with the palpable void of the missing matriarchal figure.

This lack of a matriarch, and the subsequent ubiquitous control of a tyrannical patriarch, has trapped both John and Janet in a perpetual state of childhood because they have never been allowed to exert agency as adults. John particularly reverts to childishness whenever he is forced to confront his father. In those moments, Rutherford speaks to him as if he still were a child, and John reciprocates by fulfilling that role, “his manner gradually slipping into that of a child afraid of its father” (33). Janet is similarly stuck in perpetual childhood for as long as she remains trapped within the walls of Rutherford’s house, because without a mother or motherly figure to guide her in the ways of womanhood she has had no opportunity to grow into her own female sexuality. Her affair with Martin is more idealized than realized, made obvious by her Romantic notions
of how she and Martin will be able to escape together and live a perfect life “in a place wi’ flowers, in the summertime, white and thick like they never grow on the moor” (81). Janet’s fantasy is destroyed by Martin’s refusal to disobey Rutherford, the master, and she is brutally shoved out of her comforting childhood ideal of love and into the reality that her beloved has more esteem for Rutherford than for her.

In the same way her affair with Martin is based on her childish fantasies, Janet’s existence in the household is similarly situated within a childish game of make-believe. Since there is no mother, and Janet lacks the maturity or sexuality to legitimately fill that role, she instead pretends to fill the gap by imitating the behaviors of the only domestic female she knows: the Rutherford’s servant woman. But when Janet does so, she does not have any intrinsic motivation to fully fill the domestic role, as all of her movements are “slipshod and aimless” (2), like the haphazard way she drops Rutherford’s slippers by the fire, one by one without stooping to arrange them (3). Janet is not a true housekeeper in actions or treatment; after all, she is not paid to behave like Susan. Janet is simply imitating the behavior without full understanding, in the same manner that a young girl imitates her mother’s behavior by playing house.

Like Janet’s attempt to “play” mother, John’s version of make believe is his attempt to imitate their father. During the big argument between the two in the first act, Rutherford says, “I’m a businessman, and I like to know where I stand” (32-33). Later in the scene, John tries to repeat the same line back to his father in an attempt to garner some respect, but it comes out in a “high-pitched, nervous voice” (35). Rutherford then laughs in John’s face at his juvenile pretense of being his father’s equal.
The evidence of make believe establishes John and Janet as extremely child-like in their behavior, but the two also exhibit it frequently in their language. The verbal arguments between Janet and John are exactly like squabbles between children. Ann drives the point home, accusingly saying “One would think you’d never grewed up” [sic] (23), and really, they have not. John petulantly believes success should be simple and easy to achieve, and lacks any maturity to restrain him from acting as a spoiled child. Janet, on the other hand, is the daughter who was never allowed to leave home and, consequently, never learned how to grow up. Through the juvenile behavior of the adult children and their tragic endings of running out alone into the bitter cold of the real world, Sowerby argues that the lack of a matriarchal figure leads only to misfortune for the family, thus establishing both the Rutherfords’ patriarchy and the public sphere that excludes women as flawed systems.

The unequal sphere ideology that exists in the play is clearly detrimental to the women trapped within it. Mary, even after her bargain for the future, is left trapped. She is forced into a constraining sphere, symbolized literally in the claustrophobic living room within the unfriendly Rutherford house, that she is unused to as a working-class woman. Not only is she physically trapped, but she is also left on her own because John leaves. However, Mary bravely endures her misfortunes, all for the sake of her son and their potentially better futures. Janet is trapped in the beginning of the play because she is forbidden to work like she wishes but she was also unwilling to subscribe to the role of a lady as defined by the patriarchy. Her only solution in the end was to leave to an unknown fate. The ideology’s detrimental effect on Aunt Ann is less overt but is just as
restrictive as the effects on Mary and Janet. Ann’s detriment is the fact that she is, in fact, the perfectly educated female within the ideology. She is accepting to the point that she no longer speaks original or self-concerned thoughts and instead speaks only out of concern for Rutherford or what his wishes are.

Interestingly, Sowerby wrote the play in a way that shows how this taught ideology is detrimental not only to the female characters, but also to the characters of both sexes. Richard is unappreciated and nearly forgotten by Rutherford because he does not serve a purpose in the larger scheme of Rutherford’s capitalistic enterprise. John is tolerated within Rutherford’s ideology only so long as he is useful—either as heir or as an inventor—and when he loses his usefulness by being too self-serving and not sacrificing for the business he is bullied into making a rash decision to emigrate and leaves his family behind in his haste. Martin’s detriment is much like Ann’s, because he does not realize that he is a perfectly educated follower of Rutherford. Martin obeys Rutherford and his will to the point that it prevents him from making individual decisions. Martin was only going to marry Janet because he thought that was what Rutherford would want from him, and when Janet leaves he does not seem to care, which is a sharp contrast to his distraught behavior when he thinks that Rutherford is going to fire him from the Works. Martin is more emotionally “married” in terms of commitment to Rutherford and the Works than he ever is with Janet. He says, in a broken voice, “I’d rather ha’ died than he turn me away. I’d ha’ lost everything in the world. . .” (85), including Janet.
Even Rutherford himself, although he is the character who personifies all that the capitalist patriarchal ideology is, is not invulnerable from the detrimental effects of the system. He is another individual who has been perfectly taught to exist within that ideology. He has also been taught how to perpetuate that ideology without regard for anything else, which leaves him with few meaningful relationships. He is willing to do anything if it means that Rutherford Glass will continue to be successful and carry on his name. Although the other characters often blame him and Mary even refers to him as a pagan “God” whom they all worship, Rutherford is actually the most faithful servant of them all to the idol of capitalism he serves.

Thus, neither gender is better off than the other under Sowerby’s lens. But, like all true feminists, her play is about more than just the status of women. She is much more explicit in the play about her political leanings and her opinions about industrial capitalism and, rather than making her play into a direct confrontation, she uses both to attack patriarchal inequality in a more indirect way. Her Fabian socialism is evident in the means that Mary uses to finally subvert the system, not by a sudden and complete overhaul by means of revolt but rather by implementing a gradual change from within the very institution that is being affected. This puts Sowerby in contrast to many feminist playwrights of the same time, especially suffragist writers, who used extraordinary situations and overt propaganda in their plots to cause their opposing characters to quickly go from the side of anti- to pro-suffrage. Sowerby’s unusual approach to gender on the stage follows a similar vein as other socialist writers who were her predecessors and contemporaries.
IV. Edwardian Social Drama: A Comparison of Themes to *Pygmalion*
Leading up to the Edwardian era, theatre as a form of common social entertainment amongst the bourgeois class grew in popularity. As evidence of Victorian theatre’s increase in popularity, a comparison between the number of theatres successfully operating in London in 1850 and then 1899 reveals an increase of over 200% in the course of those 50 years. This influx of a new, middle class audience and the subsequent increase in venues in the Victorian era precipitated the development of a new form of drama. Prior to the latter decades of the nineteenth century in England, the most common forms of dramatic writing being performed on the stage were melodramas and well-made-plays. Although both of those continued to be popular through the Edwardian era, a new type of drama also became popular in the form of stage naturalism.

The development of naturalism cannot be traced to a single catalyst, but there are a few important historical events that precipitated its development. The first of these was the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859). The new theory of evolution he proposed sparked an onstage interest in the influence of heredity and environment on a character’s actions. Emile Zola was the most well known practitioner of this new style of theatrical naturalism and in 1880 he wrote an essay on it entitled *Naturalism on the Stage* in which he enthusiastically argued the necessity of naturalistic theatre in order to move beyond the “contrived formulas, the tears and superficial laughs” of conventional Victorian theatre and instead “have the unimpeachable morality of truth and to teach us the frightening lesson of sincere investigation” (6). Because *Rutherford and Son* is so concerned with heredity through intergenerational patterns of education, with the
negative effects on those who must remain within the Rutherford family environment, and with being verisimilar to reality, it falls under this genre of naturalism.

This naturalistic theatre was just a subgenre under the broader genre of Realism, a movement that directly challenged the Romantic Movement popular in the first half of the century. The practitioners and followers of theatrical realism believed that they were part of a campaign toward a more ‘intellectual’ theatre that used realism to confront society and its problems. The development of this new drama is largely credited to Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen and the first English-language productions of his plays in Great Britain: *A Doll’s House* (June 1889) and *Hedda Gabler* (April 1891).

The introduction of these two plays by Ibsen to the English stage is notable from a feminist perspective because it was led by the work of two female actresses: Janet Achurch and Elizabeth Robins. These women were often in conflict with the popular actor-manager system used by most of the popular commercial theatres in London, in part because Ibsen’s plays were seen as too female oriented for the male actor-managers to want to stage. When Robins attempted to convince some actor-managers to stage *Hedda Gabler*, “their response was a variety of ‘There’s no part for me?’ and ‘But this is a woman’s play, and an uncommon bad one at that’” (Stowell 10). As a result, Ibsen’s feminist drama was often performed in smaller venues outside the major playhouses of the period.

One way of producing theatre outside of the actor-manager system in this way was by creating theatrical societies for the purpose of advancing new dramatic ideas. Two examples of these from the last decade of the nineteenth century were the Independent
Theater, founded by Dutch-born theatre critic J.T. Grein in 1891 and which brought Ibsen’s *Ghosts* to the public’s attention, and the Incorporated Stage Society, more commonly referred to as just the Stage Society, established in 1899 and which “aimed principally to correct defects in the current theatrical régime” (Nicoll 54) by staging private performances of plays that were banned by the Lord Chamberlain’s Office.

During this time of theatrical change, women began to enter the theatre world in unprecedented ways. They created their own, female-oriented, theatre associations including the Actresses Franchise League (AFL) and the Pioneer Players. Women in the theatre world became more important as the fight for suffrage continued and the social dramas became more about gender roles. As Julie Holledge argues that there is a direct link between Edwardian theatre and the suffrage movement. Holledge’s research focused on the women involved directly with producing theatre, particularly those who were part of the AFL and other women-centered theatrical organizations.

In the same way that the Independent Theatre and the Stage Society were created to fill a void in theatrical thought, the AFL was established in 1908 to support the suffrage cause through theatre. However, despite its undisguised suffrage intentions, the AFL as an organization did not subscribe to any particular political party or viewpoint on the suffrage issue (Holledge 53). This nonpartisan stance was intended to prevent dissent amongst its members, and as a result the AFL had to find other ways of supporting the cause than the usual methods of supporting one particular suffrage organization. Fortunately, the solution to that dilemma was easily reached, as the AFL was largely comprised of actresses who, in judgmental terms, were “unlike more ‘respectable’
women, . . . had the self-confidence, stage presence, and performance skills needed to negotiate effectively public space,” (Tilghman, 343) and were consequently recruited by other suffrage organizations to give speeches and talks at events. Over time, the AFL women began not just to speak at events, but also to recite suffrage poetry, which eventually evolved into acted monologues. As a result of the incorporation of more theatrical-based performances into their public appearances, the AFL decided to establish a play department. Inez Bensusan became head of this department and she began actively searching for playwrights, male or female, who were willing to write monologues or plays for the League to perform (Holledge 62). Performances were given on Sundays during the day, so as not to interfere with actresses' rehearsal schedules for their professional performances. The plays were carefully chosen so that they did not represent any particular suffrage party and instead confronted the more general sexual inequalities of the period (Holledge 64).

These suffrage plays, and the AFL, were part of the same vein of theatrical thought as the 1904-1907 Court theatre venture under Vedrenne-Barker. As Holledge notes of the AFL’s performances, “the theatrical style of these plays was derived from the social dramas of Granville Barker and Shaw, which attempted to expose social ills in an ultra-naturalistic form” (65). In fact, one of the AFL's most popular productions was *Press Cuttings* by Shaw himself, which the AFL took on tour in 1909, following its first performance at the Royal Court earlier that year. The Vedrenne-Barker venture was notable because it created a public theatrical venue known for advancing the same “intellectualism” as the private theatre societies. Bernard Shaw’s popularity in the early
twentieth century can be directly attributed to the production of his plays at the Court Theatre during those three years.

The AFL did at times branch away from the popular Ibsen- and Shavian-influenced naturalistic style, as in Cicely Hamilton's farce *How the Vote was Won* and her allegorical *A Pageant of Great Women*. However, even when the plays produced by the AFL were not naturalistic they still overtly confronted social problems of the period, particularly those related to gender inequality. Most importantly, the AFL gave many women who otherwise would never have had the opportunity a chance to be involved in many aspects of theatrical production and help affect social change. Although the overwhelming majority of their plays were not literary masterpieces, the production of suffrage drawing-room theatre helped break down strict delineations between amateur and professional theatre (Holledge 72). The AFL encouraged women to strive for an equal place in the male-dominated worlds of both theatre and society.

Holledge was the first modern scholar to study either Githa Sowerby or *Rutherford and Son* in publication (134-136). Holledge was not entirely accurate in her account of the play’s production at Gertrude Kingston’s Little Theatre, however, as she mistakenly gives Edy Craig credit as director and attempted to link the play directly to the Pioneer Players (Stowell 130). But, despite her erroneous facts regarding the play’s production, Holledge is rightly credited for recognizing the feminist aspects of the play and raising it from the obscurity it had fallen into over the course of the century since its first production.
Rutherford and Son confronts the ways in which capitalistic patriarchy teaches women certain behaviors within the confines of their given sphere. It shows the ways in which women either must learn to accept oppression in the private sphere and use it to their advantage as much as possible or must leave the comfort of their known sphere in favor of the unknown and unmanageable public sphere. Sowerby was not the only successful Late Edwardian playwright who approached the issue of female education within a male-oriented and capitalist structured society. Shaw considers many of the same problems in Pygmalion (1914). Like Mary, Eliza Dolittle is a female protagonist who is appropriated and educated by men in order to better function within the private sphere in a gender and class biased society. In Liza’s case, the education takes a much more literal form than it does for Mary. Liza intentionally takes lessons in order to learn how to function amongst the classes above her own. While she is on the surface being taught lessons of verbal eloquence and diction, one can see ways in which she is also being taught ‘proper’ modes of female behavior within bourgeois society.

The issues involved for women trying to transcend a structured class hierarchy are a central part of both Mary and Liza’s stories. Both of them previously existed as inhabitants of the public sphere (though not the public political sphere, because they lacked any voting agency) wherein they worked to financially support themselves as members of a low socio-economic class. Mary worked in poor conditions in an office in London in order to support both John and herself, since John “couldn’t find work” (10). Mary financially supported their existence for five years, and that time spent as a
breadwinner gave her a degree of agency within the public sphere that women in higher socio-economic classes were not afforded from within their private domestic sphere.

Similarly, Liza also financially supported herself in the beginning of *Pygmalion*. Unlike Mary, she did not have any steady employment, but she also didn’t have any other people who depended on her financially. She earned money by selling bunches of flowers to passers-by at the corner of Tottenham Court Road, and all of the money she earned was used to support herself. Though Liza was limited by her financial circumstances, she was at the same time liberated by the absence of any other person to instruct her on how to live her life. She was uneducated not only on formal use of the English language but also on gender-normative behavior. Since her position as a poor, unmarried woman in the public sphere kept her from receiving instructions on bourgeois societal expectations, she was free from having to follow them.

Mary and Liza end up being appropriated by the patriarchy and forced inside the restrictive bourgeois private sphere and both women thus intentionally allow themselves to be acted upon by the patriarchal figure in their respective private spheres. Mary intentionally inserts herself into the Rutherford household in an attempt to care for her child, because she understands that she needs to work alongside the patriarchy in order to give her son the best chance at receiving a comfortable life and education, even though that chance may come at the cost of intergenerational perpetuation of patriarchal ideals. Liza also intentionally inserts herself into the private sphere by seeking out Professor Higgins at his house. She does so because she wants to be taught to speak English in a way that will allow her to get a steady job and better support herself financially. They
understand that the best way to achieve financial security is to follow patriarchal expectations.

Liza’s situation is much more explicitly about female appropriation than Mary’s because she allows Higgins, the patriarch of the house, to assume ownership over her. Higgins’ language suggests extreme feelings of possession over Liza and begins to assume authority over her body by ordering Mrs. Pearce to “Take her away and clean her. . . . Take all her clothes off and burn them. . . . If she gives you any trouble, wallop her” (303). He assumes this ownership on the basis that Liza is from a low socio-economic class and, because she is unmarried and does not live with her parents, she does not “belong to anybody” else (304). Mrs. Pearce and Colonel Pickering are more uncomfortable with Higgins treating Liza as property at the beginning of Act II. Mrs. Pearce tries to reason with him, and remind him of the sanctity of humanity, by telling him that he can’t pick up people in the same way one would pick up a pebble on the beach (304). Liza, also uncomfortable with Higgins’ behavior, attempts to leave midway through the conversation. She is first convinced he is crazy (304) and then that he is selfish and unfeeling (305). However, Higgins lures her back with the promise of material desires. He offers her chocolates and tells her to think of “taxis, and gold, and diamonds” (306). He then goes on the explicitly tell her the circumstances of their new arrangement:

. . . you are to live here for the next six months, learning how to speak beautifully, like a lady in a florist’s shop. If you’re good and do whatever
you’re told, you shall sleep in a proper bedroom, and have lots to eat, and
money to buy chocolates and take rides in taxis. (306).

Higgins is blatantly tempting her with the luxuries of bourgeois society that she doesn’t have access to in her present lifestyle. Liza does not immediately accept his offer, but eventually she does agree to receive an education under his conditions because it promises her future financial security, despite its cost to her liberties.

Once both Mary and Liza enter the private sphere they begin to learn a new “accepted” mode of behavior for women within the capitalist patriarchy. A portion of this education comes in the form of an older female character who has had the customs of patriarchy deeply ingrained in her. In *Rutherford and Son*, querulous Aunt Ann is the only adult female who lives in the household, and the opening of the play is partially centered on the vast cultural differences between her and Mary. Aunt Ann is much more conservative than Mary and makes known her dislike of Mary’s ways. Mary had been living in the house for five months prior to the beginning of the play, and Ann thinks that Mary should have learned better after that time (6). Mrs. Pearce is the older female figure who instructs Liza on the ways of being a lady, and the first instruction she gives her is “do as you’re told” (301). Mrs. Pearce also takes it upon herself to ensure that Liza doesn’t imitate any of Higgins’ crude male behavior by reminding him that he must lead by example (308–309).

These two plays demonstrate women who are educated in a way that removes their independence in order to assimilate them into the bourgeoise private sphere. Liza even loses the agency to choose and purchase her own clothing. Despite that, both plays
remain feminist because neither Mary nor Liza becomes so integrated into the system that they blindly accept patriarchal authority, like their older counterparts Ann and Mrs. Pearce. They both learn to navigate within it and follow the rules as long as it serves to their advantage to do so, but they both also continuously prove the existence of their independent spirits by at times refusing to conform to the roles they are being taught. Mary does so within her marriage by refusing to play the part of a dutiful wife when she is alone with her husband. She irritates John by openly questioning his authority and the validity of his invention (13-14). Liza learns very well and quickly the proper way to dress and how to speak with “pedantic correctness of pronunciation and great beauty in tone” (322), but during her first public outing in her new role she inadvertently speaks very crass and unladylike language (323-324).

Both eventually learn to rein in their independent spirits and behave exactly as expected. The education supplied by the patriarchy teaches them the proper way to be a lady in the private sphere, and both excel at it. Liza becomes a resounding success at the Ambassador’s party and wins Higgins’ bet. Pickering compliments her on being even better at performing her role than people who are raised in the upper class, because “they think that style comes by nature to people in their position; and so they never learn,” while Liza has been meticulously taught how to conform. Mary also learns to excel at pretending to be the dutiful wife her husband wants. In their final moment together, just before John leaves, she begins by opposing him and his choice in a desperate attempt to keep him there with her and Tony. She pleads with him, because she believes that their last chance at happiness depends on the decision he makes at that moment, but he
dismisses her opinion and says that she just doesn’t understand. That is the precise moment that she decides to stop questioning him and to start playing the part of the understanding and obedient wife. She talks “in a changed voice” and suggests that he go on his own since she and Tony would be “rather a burden” if they went with him (98). She stops trying to have any command over the future of their relationship and instead coddles him “as if he were a child” (100) who needs her to reassure him of the validity of his ideas.

After they go through the steps of learning the rules and then mastering them, both women go on to fulfill their purpose as feminist characters by using their given roles to their advantage. Liza refuses to accept a place in Higgins’ house if she continues to be viewed as an object or otherwise less than human. When Higgins suggests that she could get married in response to her worries about her future, she balks: “we were above that at the corner of Tottenham Court Road . . . I sold flowers. I didn’t sell myself. Now you’ve made a lady of me I’m not fit to sell anything else” (333). Liza recognizes that her new education has reduced her to nothing more than an object. She has become a doll for Higgins and Pickering to dress up and invent new versions of (327). The source of Liza’s resentment is exposed during her argument with Higgins at the end of Act IV, when she asks Higgins if anything, even her clothes, actually belongs to her. The only item she knows for sure belongs to her is a little ring that Higgins bought for her as a gift, and she angers him by trying to give it back. Paradoxically, his anger makes her happy, as it makes her feel as though she’s “got a little of [her] own back” (334). Liza leaves that night, and we find out in Act V that she has gone to the house of Mrs. Higgins, Henry’s
mother, for refuge. Mrs. Higgins is the play’s example of an older and more emancipated woman, unlike the straitlaced sensibilities of Mrs. Pearce. Mrs. Higgins understands Liza’s need for freedom within the private sphere and she chastises her son for his treatment of Liza “as if she were . . . an umbrella, or something” (336). Another large part of the problem is Higgins’ inability to see Liza as elevated above the low socio-economic class where he found her in Act I. Although it is clear to us that the patriarchy has educated her well and assimilated her into its regime, Higgins still sees her as a “squashed cabbage leaf” (342). The only way Liza manages to at last prove to him that she has evolved into a woman is by threatening to go out and advertise her story and teach others his methods for turning flower girls into duchesses (350). Higgins is angry at the suggestion, but he acknowledges that this powerful version of Liza is much better than the version “snivelling; better than fetching slippers and finding spectacles” as she had been taught to do in Higgins’ house. The play ends with Liza and Higgins on perfectly equal footing, with neither superior to the other in terms of class, power, or respect.

Although *Pygmalion* ends happily for Liza, it still makes the point that even strong female characters must learn to accept and function within the private sphere or else return to a life in the unmanageable public sphere. In order to reach financial security, Liza has no choice but to join the system and play her role. But Liza does not allow that to overpower her independence because she learns how to manipulate the role she is given. Mary also manipulates the system and proves herself equal to the patriarch in order to get what she wants, but for Mary the motivation is much different. While Liza is
able to make choices solely for herself, Mary is a mother who feels it necessary to put the security of her child above her own emancipation. Liza is able to gain independence back in the end because she has nothing on the line but her own future and security, but the added role of “mother” means that Mary feels the need to sacrifice her own independence for the benefit of her son’s future.

The parallels between *Rutherford and Son* and *Pygmalion* in their shared themes, the education of gender constructs for the purpose of furthering patriarchal ideals and the consequent subversion of that education by intelligent female protagonists, establish Sowerby as an equal in this regard with the most popular social dramatist of the era. *Rutherford and Son* is similar in plot construction and writing to Shavian social drama, which accounts for its public popularity at the time. It is in this way that Sowerby and her play were elevated to a level of acclaim at the time that the small, strictly-suffrage, private performances of plays by women couldn’t reach.
V. Lessons from Githa
For Sowerby, intergenerational education imparted by means of assimilation into an existing social system had the potential to influence and even create the foundation of social structure. It was only by means of securing independence from the destructive cycle of repetition that emancipation could be obtained, particularly for women who were entrapped within the system by social spheres. In *Rutherford and Son*, up until the introduction of Mary, that education had been imparted through means of the sacrifice-like indoctrination of perpetual patriarchal order. With the introduction of a strong woman who has the potential to teach her own son a different system of power, that education has the potential to change the basic structure of the heretofore capitalist and patriarchal power arrangement and thereby emancipate the entire family.

By exposing the importance of education as the root of change within the Rutherford family, Sowerby is able to also make allusions to the potential for education to influence change within society as a whole. Just as proper education can break the cycle of patriarchal control that keeps women entrapped in their domestic sphere in the Rutherford house, so too might proper education in larger society lead to female enfranchisement and the introduction of women to freedom within the political public sphere. Far from being gender specific, however, the lessons Sowerby imparts about the significance of education are thematically well-rounded. She is not only speaking to the importance of education of equalizing gender differences but also to its importance in subverting the perpetuation of damaging politics and the greed of industrial capitalism.
Sowerby’s focus on education, like the majority of *Rutherford and Son*’s themes, was a direct result of her own life experiences. It was only by means of her own education in the form of her writing skills that Sowerby was able to gain her own financial independence as a young woman. The fact that Sowerby’s books were for children and taught moral lessons in the forms of fairy tales and allegories is further evidence that she viewed education as a priority for children. Her frustrations, the result of her own lack of formal education and the expectations of proper behavior that were placed on her as a child, are reflected in the play through Janet’s similar complaints. Sowerby felt imprisoned within her own house by her place in society and her duty to become a lady of the upper-middle class, and like Janet questioned the notion of a woman’s place, for “what do ladies think about, sitting the day long with their hands before them? What have they in their idle hearts?” (77). The thoughts of Sowerby’s own idle heart come through in the play, which is perhaps what makes *Rutherford and Son* so emotionally compelling. It is not merely a work of dramatic fiction, it is more an autobiographical expression of the struggles of women entrapped in the private sphere. Sowerby not only imagined the struggles of the Rutherford family, she lived through many of them. Writing *Rutherford and Son* was a way for her to share what she learned from her own sphere-based existence.

It is unfortunate that there are not more social dramas by Victorian and Edwardian female playwrights who could share their personal experiences with gender inequalities, but it is not difficult to understand why Sowerby was a professional anomaly. The
production of Rutherford and Son was itself the result of mere good luck. Sowerby claimed to have written the play for herself in her free time and without the intent of professional production. It was only because of Sowerby’s friendship with actress Thyrza Norman that Rutherford and Son was ever finished and then produced (Riley 18). Women were not encouraged or expected to pursue a career in commercial playwriting, even in the field of progressive social drama. Women who did attempt to do so could not escape being put into a separate category from their male counterparts. Even through Rutherford and Son was on par, thematically and structurally, with popular male-written dramas like Pygmalion, the press has difficulty objectively separating commentary on the play from discussions of Sowerby’s gender.

After Rutherford and Son opened in New York in the winter of 1912, the New York Times stated, despite the obvious success of Rutherford and Son, that “even with Miss Sowerby as a shining example, we do not feel that the playwriting instinct in young ladies calls for immediate or emphatic encouragement,” because such a playwright as Githa Sowerby “is decidedly the exception, not the rule” (“When Lovely Woman Turns to Playwriting”). It is unfortunate that this expression of blatant gender assumptions does not come as a surprise, and it at least partially explains why there is a dearth of commercially successful female playwrights from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

However, the scholarly resurrection of Githa Sowerby and the few other female playwrights like her is essential in order for there to be a more complete understanding of
the complicated relationship between the political importance of feminism and theatre in the Edwardian era. While using theatre to directly support the suffrage cause was common and it is the most obvious way in which theatre was used for feminist purposes, it was also incredibly polarizing. Introducing such a volatile political topic into the main theme of the plays distanced them from the general public. The presentation of socially conscious dramas that did not directly confront political controversies was essential in order for feminist ideals to be represented on the public stage and in a way that was accessible to a bourgeois audience. To a Fabian like Sowerby, it is through this connection with the ‘common man’ that theatre was most effective as a force of social change. The stage was an ideal public platform for women to exert their influence, particularly if done using subversively powerful heroines, like Mary and Liza. Though many playwrights of the Edwardian era wrote social dramas with powerful female roles during the first two decades of the twentieth century, many of them have been forgotten in the same way that Sowerby had been until recently. Fortunately, through the efforts of many theatrical groups and organizations with a focus on the importance of theatre history, these playwrights are becoming better known and receiving the scholarly attention they deserve as female pioneers in their field\textsuperscript{10}. 
NOTES

1. These included Annie Besant, George Bernard Shaw, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, H. G. Wells, and Margaret Cole.

2. The painting parallels a similar feature in Ibsen’s feminist play *Hedda Gabler*, which was first produced in London by Elizabeth Robins in 1891.

3. “Moloch” and “Molech” are alternative spellings of the same name. Molech worship is condemned in the Bible: “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God” (Lev. 18:24).

4. *The New York Times* (18 Feb 1912) and *The New York Dramatic Mirror* (1 Jan 1913) both made reference to the possibility of Janet’s suicide, with the second paper going so far as to outright claim that she “drowns herself.”

5. Janet says she gave him “Everything in the world” and in reply Martin makes the somewhat odd remark that she was “ready” and “gave the bitter with the sweet” (85), both of which allude to the possibility of a sexual relationship. Furthermore, Martin later tells her, “It’ll be a hard life for you, and you not used to it. Work early and late—wi’ a bairn mebee” [sic] (90), implying that he thinks she is with child.

6. As opposed to more popular feminist character types such as the “Woman with a past” of Pinero’s *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1894) who are usually the only character in their respective plays that embody New Woman ideals.
7. Allardyce Nicoll states in *A History of Late Nineteenth Century Drama, 1850-1900* that there were 19 successfully operating theatres in London in 1851 which increased to 61 by 1899.

8. Mary never specifically describes the nature of her former employment beyond a few negative remarks about the “crowded train morning and night—bad light—bad food” (11).

9. Despite his demand in Act I that Liza must remember that she is “a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech” (296), by Act IV he calls her “insect,” “creature,” and “cat” (331).

10. One such organization is the Shaw Festival, which often produces plays by ‘forgotten’ women writers from Shaw’s period and has produced three of Sowerby’s plays since 2004.
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Gateshead Map (1858), Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, Newcastle upon Tyne.


Portrait of Katherine Githa Sowerby, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, Newcastle upon Tyne. JPEG file.


Rutherford and Son Poster, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, Newcastle upon Tyne.


