MEN WRITING WOMEN: MALE AUTHORSHIP, NARRATIVE STRATEGIES, AND WOMAN’S AGENCY IN THE LATE-VICTORIAN NOVEL

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation considers the late-Victorian novel in light of the relationships among literary mode, gender, and the marketplace. I examine how four male authors--George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, and George Moore--negotiated the late-Victorian market as they wrote “woman-centered” novels and entered a public debate about the cultural status of real-life women. These authors not only had to negotiate the influence of literary modes such as French naturalism, Jamesian psychological realism, and the “new realism” (of which some of them were clear proponents) but also liberal-feminist realism, which was predicated on realistic representation of woman’s agency in literary works.

As feminist periodicals such as Shafts and The Woman’s Herald show, liberal-feminist realism required representation of the difficult conditions women faced living in Victorian culture and the triumphs of some (but not all) women over these difficult cultural conditions. Further, this definition of realism places strong emphasis on the connection between form and content; to triumph over difficult conditions, real-life women needed to assert agency through three methods: consciousness, the spoken word, and physical actions. These methods of asserting agency correspond to three narrative strategies: internal perspective, dialogue, and description of characters’ actions. According to the feminist aesthetic of the day, effective literary representations of woman’s agency combined these three narrative strategies.

Both directly and indirectly aware of the criteria for realism set up by liberal-feminist periodicals, Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore negotiated the requirements of this literary mode in varying degrees. As the individual chapters of my dissertation show, each author made his own decisions about how thoroughly to incorporate the
tenets of liberal-feminist realism. Nevertheless, all four authors were subject to similar cultural conditions and, as a result, incorporated this mode at least to some degree. In doing so, these authors helped shape a literary mode that acted as a stepping stone from mid-Victorian realism to modernism. Rather than seeing the transition from realism to modernism as a rupture, in which modernists primarily react against Victorian conventions, we should view this transition as more gradual, in which an interplay between realist and anti-realist narrative strategies exists.
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INTRODUCTION

“I HAVE COME HERE TO DEFEND MY LIFE”: MALE AUTHORS AND FEMALE CHARACTERS AT THE FIN DE SIECLE

In the last year of George Moore’s life, when he was asked to write a preface to the 1932 American edition of his most popular novel Esther Waters (1894), he strongly resisted the request that he add anything more to the novel that had brought him his greatest literary and commercial success. Moore finally wrote the preface, though he claims that he threw away nearly twenty versions before hitting upon one he liked. The preface he ultimately chose, titled “A Colloquy: George Moore and Esther Waters,” is one in which the female protagonist of the novel, Esther, appears to Moore as an apparition and urges him not to write the preface at all, for she believes he no longer has the authority to assert control over his creation. “I have come here to defend my life,” Esther says to her creator. “Every living thing hath the right to defend the life given it to live” (viii).

This example of a male author and his almost “real-life” relationship with one of his female characters illustrates well the focus of my dissertation: the relationship between male authors and their female characters in novels written at the end of the nineteenth century. I am particularly interested in those authors writing in the late 1880s and early 1890s, during the overlap between two popular novel forms, the predominantly mid-Victorian “fallen woman novel” (in which a woman’s sexual fall leads to her ostracization from Victorian society) and the 1890s “New Woman novel” (in which new-found sexual independence is seen in the woman who is able to move freely in the public sphere). Although these forms cannot always been seen as entirely separate, since they have in common the vilified, outcast woman, it is in the overlap
between them that an especially interesting array of representations of women appears.¹

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, even the works by canonical male authors, not always perceived as portraying women in a complex manner, contain compelling representations of women. Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, George Moore, and George Meredith all put at the center of their work the late-Victorian woman who struggles with her subjectivity in a culture in which marriage had been absolutely vital to notions of the individual subject but is now on the decline. Hardy, in such well-known novels as *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), relies on the markers of “fallen woman” and “New Woman” but puts emphasis on the larger issues of fate and its role in shaping subjectivity. Gissing, in works such as *The Odd Women* (1893) and *In the Year of the Jubilee* (1894), situates women not always easily identifiable as simply “fallen” or “New” but with affinities to both types within ensemble casts, in which women and men are often willing to merge their subjectivities in the union of marriage but usually end up searching to find happiness in such a union. Moore writes a series of woman-centered novels with woman-centered titles in the 1880s and 1890s—*A Mummer’s Wife* (1884), *Esther Waters* (1894), *Evelyn Innes* (1898).² In these works, Moore experiments with narrative strategies to create stories in which female characters encounter a variety of social contexts and personal relationships, all of which require them to confront the issue of how to express agency. And Meredith, with his comedy-of-manners style in novels such as *Diana of the Crossways* (1885) and *The Amazing Marriage* (1895), takes the view that the struggle for subjectivity within marriage is literally a “battle of the sexes,” in which people can rarely be happy.³

To write about strong female characters at the end of the Victorian period was to respond to a literary market in which the stories of women were welcome fare. While stories about women had been popular throughout the nineteenth century, the increase in the number of women participating in public life at the end of the century made stories about strong women especially appealing during this period. Still, for male authors, writing these stories meant entering public debates about gender difference, which often created divisiveness among authors, publishers, and readers over what should be written, how it should be written, and who should write it. As a result, authors such as
Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore found themselves in uneasy positions, caught between composing texts that would appeal to and also might offend their reading public. My research shows how these male authors negotiated the 1890s literary market, with emphasis on the different ways in which they approached their negotiations. Though all four participated in a cultural climate that required male authors to defend their positions of authority in a gendered market, each author made different decisions about how to go about participating in this market.

By looking at the negotiations staged by these male authors, I believe we can see more fully the complexity of the representation of women in literary texts at the end of the nineteenth century. How women remain individuals within and outside of marriage is debatable at the fin de siècle, and rather than assuming that the markers, and even stereotypes, of the “fallen woman” and the “New Woman” can suffice, we need to expand our understanding of these representations by looking at the overlap between these two. Specifically, I am interested in looking at how particular narrative strategies employed by Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore contribute to this complexity of representation. Much work has been done on methods of asserting woman’s agency, both in literary studies (where the focus is on representations of women) and in women’s studies (where the emphasis is on real-life women), but this work has often failed to bring together in any explicit manner the connection between representation of woman’s agency and the cultural status of real-life women.

My use of the term “woman’s agency” needs some explanation, since it may be confusing to some readers, and for at least two reasons. First, it suggests that there is some type of action, an expression of independence and selfhood one might say, that is unique to women and which all women share. I do not advocate the essentialist stance suggested by this objection; in fact, much of my work is aimed at combatting such a stance in literary studies because of its effect on real-life women. I do believe, however, that given the historical context in which the novels I examine were written, a discussion of the concept of woman’s agency is appropriate. The novels I examine in this dissertation were written during a time in which few people had an understanding of such a concept as socially-constructed, and, even as the Victorian notion of separate
spheres was breaking down, the notion of the Victorian woman as pure, motherly, and submissive to her husband was replaced with other essentialist concepts: for example, the single woman asserting new-found sexual independence, which was based to some degree on the notion of woman’s innate passion. Here and throughout the dissertation, I am looking at the essentialist concept of woman’s agency from a non-essentialist point of view. I will use quotation marks when referring to woman’s agency specifically as a term, but I drop the quotation marks elsewhere, with the understanding that I am not advocating an essentialist stance.

Second, the term “woman’s agency” raises issues about the knotty problem of the relationship between “artistic representation” and “historical reality.” In particular, one might ask whether it is possible for a fictional character to “assert agency” and also whether, when I discuss a fictional moment when a central female character “asserts her agency,” I am referring to a woman’s resistance to cultural norms that support the subordination of women or resistance to specific narrative strategies. The confusion pointed out by both of these objections lies, I believe, in the fact that a woman’s resistance often happens through language and that language is the very basis of representation. The following model may be of help in understanding the space in which I wish to work, a space in which the interdependence between representation and the cultural status of real-life women can be emphasized rather than placed into rigid separate spheres. I work under the assumption that two “worlds” exist: the “historical world,” in which real-life Victorian women sometimes resisted certain cultural norms, and the “story world,” where we find the representation of such acts of resistance. While the boundary between these two worlds is necessarily slippery, acknowledging the existence of these two worlds can be helpful in terms of talking about the assertion of agency by fictional characters. It is not that a fictional character literally asserts agency, but within the story world such resistance is possible. When I discuss women’s acts of resistance, then, I am referring to resistance to cultural norms that support the subordination of women rather than resistance to specific narrative strategies.

Finally, the previous paragraph should make it clear that when I write of assertions of agency, I am primarily interested in assertions through resistance to cultural
norms rather than *willingness* to embrace these norms. While it is true that willingness (to enter into marriage, intimate relations, or other interactions with men) can be as much an assertion of agency as resistance is, discussion of resistance is more appropriate to the way in which assertion of agency is represented in the late-Victorian novel. Women living during the Victorian period were subject to great pressure to conform to the cultural norm of marriage with strict boundaries about the type of behavior acceptable within that institution, and the two figures around which the late-Victorian novel revolves, the fallen woman and the New Woman, have in common their resistance (whether intentional or not) to these cultural norms. The two signposts of the fallen woman novel and the New Woman novel, then, suggest a model in which resistance to cultural norms is the rule, so I have focused primarily on resistance as a sign of asserting agency. That said, there are some intriguing exceptions to the rule, some of which I will consider in this dissertation.

Generally, I believe we can identify at least three methods through which women express agency: consciousness, the spoken word, and physical action. Corresponding to these methods are specific narrative strategies: internal perspective, dialogue, and description of characters’ actions. These methods and narrative strategies are worth glossing briefly, in order that readers understand how I am using these terms and how these methods and strategies often appear in literary works. Consciousness is best represented by the narrative strategy of internal perspective (or “focalization,” as narratologists call it), which involves tracking shifts in vision within narratorial discourse, especially shifts from the narrator’s vision to characters’ visions but also shifts from one character’s vision to another character’s vision. A narrator’s or character’s vision can simply reflect what he or she sees, but it is often the case that the feelings of the narrator or character also appear as part of this vision, indicating the narrator’s or character’s thought processes, or “consciousness.” When I speak of the literary representation of a narrator’s or character’s “consciousness,” I mean the narrator’s or character’s thought processes; the use of this term should not be confused with the term “reader’s consciousness,” which exists outside the world of the story. While the novels with which I am concerned often succeed in raising readers’
consciousnesses, and part of the point of this dissertation is to show how this happens, when I speak of “consciousness,” I mean one of the three methods through which characters in novels might assert agency.

That said, it is important to acknowledge that consciousness alone does not necessarily result in assertion of agency according to the 1890s liberal-feminist ideal. In fact, it is increased consciousness, especially the awareness that one’s personal life is connected to the political sphere, that is necessary for feminist assertion of agency. Typical scenes in which increased consciousness is represented through internal perspective are “awakening” or “epiphany” scenes, when the character in question experiences new awareness about his or her cultural status. In successfully feminist novels, the awakening scene features the female character realizing her own subordinate position in a patriarchal culture, and it is often after this awakening that she decides to speak out or take action. My analysis of Nancy Lord, in Gissing’s Jubilee, for example, stresses Nancy’s realization early in the novel that she is living a life she despises. Once she has this realization, she quickly takes steps to try to change her situation, insisting that she be able to go to the Jubilee celebration, an event where she can experience the freedom she desires, even though her father insists that she not go. In this dissertation, I refer to “consciousness” when I am discussing characters’ thought processes in general, and I use the term “increased consciousness” when it is evident that a character possesses an awareness of the connection between the personal and the political.

In addition to acknowledging the difference between the terms “consciousness” and “increased consciousness,” it is worth noting the difference between internal perspective and stream-of-consciousness technique, since both are discussed in close relation to each other in this dissertation. Both strategies might be considered sites for locating expression of agency by women, since internal perspective reveals the thought processes of particular characters within narration and since stream-of-consciousness shows the interior thoughts of characters in a more overtly psychological manner. While expression of woman’s agency through internal perspective can be found in works published long before the fin de siècle (Jane Austen is an excellent example), stream-of-consciousness technique before this period is much more rare, since our very definition of
stream-of-consciousness is predicated on a technique we most readily associate with the modernist period. Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* is perhaps an exception, though it might be argued that it has only the *spirit* of stream-of-consciousness and not the technique, which we usually define as strictly modernist. Furthermore, any *spirit* of stream-of-consciousness in *Shandy* certainly does not extend to its female characters; the stream-of-consciousness spirit in *Shandy* is evident in the narrator’s tendency to jump from one topic to another, sometimes in mid-stream of thought. Generally, late-Victorian authors choose to use internal perspective instead of stream-of-consciousness technique (though Meredith’s *One of Our Conquerors* is perhaps one exception, though, again, its use of stream-of-consciousness is more evident in its male protagonist than in its female characters), but their use of internal perspective is beginning to blur the boudaries of these categories, primarily through their increased attention to representation of women’s thought processes in their works. Still, late-Victorian male authors more often than not fail to use internal perspective in a manner that fulfills feminist ideals for representation of women’s thought processes. As I show in this dissertation, the desire among feminists for increased use of internal perspective, and even stream-of-consciousness technique, is stronger than its practice.

The second method through which characters assert agency--spoken word--is best represented by the narrative strategy of dialogue, especially the “heteroglossic” moments in dialogue in which characters engage competing ideologies about the role of women in culture. My methodology when looking at dialogue is influenced by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose theory about “Discourse in the Novel” also provides the foundation for my decision to focus solely on the novel rather than other genres employed by Hardy, Meredith, Gissing, and Moore, such as poetry (Hardy and Meredith) and autobiography (Moore). I focus exclusively on the novel because I believe Bakhtin is correct when he asserts that, among literary genres, the novel offers the best opportunity for the presence of a “diversity of social speech types,” a presence particularly important to my conception of woman’s agency. Assertion of agency within the story world often occurs in the moments when the female protagonist, desirous of speaking up about the difficult conditions of her life, is able to mount resistance to
language that attempts to categorize and vilify her, moments I like to see as first
“heteroglossic” and then potentially subversive, when the opportunity opened up by
heteroglossia can turn into more concrete displays of resistance, in defiance of the social
apparatuses described by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge, Discipline and
Punish*, and other works. These scenes occur, for example, in Hardy’s *Tess*, when Tess
resists Angel Clare’s categorization of her as a fallen woman, and in *Jude*, when Sue
resists Phillotson’s wish that they remain married despite Sue’s unhappiness in the
marriage.

Finally, the third method of expressing agency--physical action--is best
represented by the narrative strategy of description of characters’ actions, typically
description of these actions by the narrator. According to both the feminist ideal of the
1890s, as well as current feminist ideals, the way for women to change their subordinate
position is through action. From the anti-crinoline campaign waged by Henrietta
Stannard in the 1890s and the arrests of suffragettes in the early 1900s to the bra-
buring demonstrations of the 1970s and the counterdemonstrations to pro-life
advocates at abortion clinics in the 1980s, physical action has often provided the
foundation for feminist resistance. When female characters in literary works, then, resist
cultural norms that support their subordination through action, they participate in this
feminist tradition. For example, when Carinthia Kirby, in Meredith’s *The Amazing
Marriage*, flees a marriage in which she is neglected by her husband, or when Esther
Waters, in Moore’s novel by the same name, refuses to work for an employer who does
not respect her status as a mother, they are participating in actions of feminist
resistance.

These narrative strategies, while they represent a traditional way of analyzing
character, become more transgressive when considered in light of recent discussions of
woman’s agency, especially post-structuralist perspectives on this issue. Amanda
Anderson, whose discussion of agency in *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of
Fallenness in Victorian Culture* (1993) I will return to in depth in the conclusion to this
dissertation, has shown how difficult it is to reconcile feminist criticism’s need for the
self-determined subject with post-structuralist perspectives that accept the death of the
subject. By focusing on traditional feminist assumptions about subjectivity and methods of asserting agency, as well as traditional narrative strategies for analyzing character, I show how post-structuralist theory must more thoroughly explicate its own assumptions about the post-modern subject. Further, while it could be argued that looking at narrative from this perspective, where the emphasis lies on the thoughts, words, and actions of primarily the female protagonist, limits the degree to which I can assess narrative as a whole, a focus on female protagonists remains the best approach for understanding past and present conceptions of woman’s agency. In light of this, I have chosen to focus primarily on male authors’ representations of female protagonists, sometimes at the expense of other narrative issues. However, I have attempted to include discussion of other characters in relation to female protagonists, since asserting agency is not simply a matter of confronting generalized cultural norms that support the subordination of women but also of interacting with others who are often as intent on asserting agency as the female protagonist is.

Ultimately, all four authors I discuss in this dissertation strive for representations of women constructed through a combination of all three narrative strategies, and their attempts to achieve this balance can be connected to the specific cultural conditions of the period in which they were working. In the late-Victorian period, male authors were confronted with issues related to literary mode. Not only did they have to decide to what degree they would retain the realist approach of their mid-century predecessors, such as Charles Dickens and Anthony Trollope, who represented human life through detailed external description of a multitude of characters, but also they had to confront new variations on mid-nineteenth-century realism, such as French naturalism and Jamesian psychological realism. Out of these encounters, they developed the “new realism,” which sought more thoroughly and more honestly to represent human experience by focusing on the “relations of the sexes,” to use Hardy’s phrase from “Candour in English Fiction” (16-17). In this respect, the new realists were similar to the French naturalists, since they emphasized human “nature” (i.e., physical, sexual nature). Still, at least some of the new realists also wanted to make naturalism more palatable to the British public and, so, distanced themselves from the highly scientific approach of
French naturalism. Further, though they shared with Henry James frustration over the risks of writing about sexuality in the Victorian period, they separated themselves from James on the strategy of giving greatest emphasis to the interior thoughts of characters, choosing instead a broader approach to building characters.

Still, late-Victorian male authors’ negotiations with realism are not limited to their encounters with naturalism and psychological realism; they also encounter the liberal-feminist definition of realism. This definition, which shares with the new realism an interest in the “relations of the sexes” as central to human experience, holds that realistic literary works should show the difficult conditions women face in patriarchal culture and the triumphs of some (but not all) women over these difficult cultural conditions. Further, this definition places strong emphasis on the connection between form and content; to triumph over difficult cultural conditions, real-life women need to assert agency through all three methods described above, so effective literary representations of woman’s agency combine the three narrative strategies that correspond to these methods.

As I show in this dissertation, the liberal-feminist definition of realism is best articulated in two explicitly liberal-feminist periodicals of the time, Shaft and The Woman’s Herald. I identify these magazines, and the philosophy they espouse, as specifically liberal feminist rather than more generally “feminist” because underlying their analyses of women’s issues, and more specifically their analysis of literary representations of women, is the equality doctrine, the belief that the best route to emancipation for women is the achievement of equal political and legal rights. This form of feminism is perhaps best understood in contrast to difference-based forms, such as conservative feminism and radical feminism. In the nineteenth century, difference-based feminism is most evident in conservative feminism, which was informed by the evangelical movement and in which woman’s biological difference is celebrated and constitutes a justification for the separate spheres doctrine. Whether a conservative approach to women’s issues should be considered “feminism” is debatable, but as literary historians have come to understand the burgeoning women’s rights movement, and especially the role of “purity feminists” in this movement, conservative feminism
has gained credibility. The important point here is that liberal feminism differs significantly from this form of difference feminism, since the equality doctrine demands that the separate spheres philosophy no longer apply.

In the late-nineteenth century, there is also another form of difference feminism from which liberal feminism differs. This form of feminism cannot be called radical feminism because it lacks the strong analysis of cultural difference that defines twentieth-century radical feminism. Still, this form anticipates radical feminism of the twentieth century, in which woman’s difference is celebrated for entirely different reasons than it is in conservative feminism, mainly woman’s ability to live separately and independently of men. It is sometimes found in tandem with liberal feminism in some nineteenth-century feminist periodicals, and, recently, literary critics have relied on this form of feminism to justify an alternative literary canon, in which the work of women writers is central. For example, Rita Kranidis’s reliance, in *Subversive Discourse: The Cultural Production of Late Victorian Feminist Novels* (1995), on Adeline Sergeant for “feminist” criticism of male authors of the 1890s shows the way in which difference feminism was developing out of the left as well as the right in the late-nineteenth century. In “George Meredith’s Views of Women by a Woman” (1889), Sergeant argues that while Meredith’s female characters are preferable to those drawn by most male authors, his ideas about the role of women in the future are less than liberating. While Meredith believes that women should strive to become “equal” to men (210), Sergeant believes that this goal is one according to men’s standards, where women end up only the “rib of Adam” (211). Sergeant believes that a better approach is to recognize woman’s differences—physical, intellectual, and temperamental—since the “sooner women grant that there are moral and mental as well as physical differences between the sexes, the sooner will their freedom be achieved—the freedom to live their own lives, and satisfy the individual needs of their several natures” (213).

This approach to the liberation of women has none of the moral judgments of conservative feminism, but it does have an emphasis on biological difference that separates it from liberal feminism of the late-nineteenth century. Similar ideas are echoed in the other “feminist” critic Kranidis cites in her book, Edith Slater, and Kranidis’s use
of such critics places her work in a more separatist camp than I occupy. While I appreciate the work of literary critics such as Kranidis to bring women writers into the canon, I believe that liberal feminism, because of its foundation in equality rather than difference, is the more liberating form of feminism and the form most important to the development of literary modes at the end of the nineteenth century. I use the term “liberal feminist,” then, to denote a type of feminism that focuses on the political and legal rights of women without necessarily adopting the stance on sexual morality advocated by conservative feminists or the separatist vision espoused by predecessors of twentieth-century radical feminism. Hereforward, I will use the term “liberal feminist” sparingly; instead, I will refer to these magazines, and the philosophy they promote, as “feminist,” with the assumption that I am referring to a liberal-feminist perspective.

Feminist periodicals such as The Woman’s Herald and Shafts developed a systematic reviewing apparatus, built primarily by employing the same women on a regular basis to review novels. Through this reviewing apparatus, these magazines promoted their particular definition of realism and, as a result, exerted a strong influence over what constituted realism in the 1890s. At times, their systematic approach is not unlike “prescriptive” feminist criticism of the 1970s, which I will discuss in further detail later in this chapter and which lays out specific criteria for representations of women in literary texts. The central argument of the dissertation is that, however prescriptive feminist realism of the 1890s was, it significantly shaped the decisions male authors made about their own work at the fin de siècle. By concentrating on the role of feminist ideals in shaping the work of these four authors and others working in the same literary market, and by detailing how Hardy, Gissing, Meredith, and Moore constructed representations of woman’s agency through specific narrative strategies valued by feminists, I draw attention to the intersections among literary mode, gender, and the marketplace. While I do not advocate “prescriptive” literary criticism, I acknowledge its important role in the development of late-century realism.
I.

The cultural context for this project is rich; in this chapter, I discuss this context as background for the individual-author chapters that follow. First, I discuss late-Victorian masculinity, especially the degree to which the anxiety felt by male authors as they negotiated the literary market played a role in such negotiations. I also discuss notions of professional authorship specific to the late-Victorian period, which were shaped by the gendered market, especially as seen through the contrast between the ideals expressed through the masculinist Society of Authors and its publication *The Author* and those seen in the major feminist periodicals, *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald*. Finally, I discuss developments in realism as a literary mode, especially the ways in which the feminist definition of realism influenced male authors whose work was perceived more often through traditional definitions of the genre, mainly mid-Victorian realism but also late-Victorian variations on mid-century realism, such as French naturalism and psychological realism. By intentionally using particular narrative strategies valued by feminists in the 1890s, late-Victorian male authors created a necessary stepping stone between mid-Victorian realism and early-twentieth-century modernism. While they retained some aspects of mid-century realism (such as the narrative strategies of dialogue and descriptions of characters’ actions), they anticipated early-twentieth-century modernism by placing more emphasis on the interior thoughts of characters (as seen in the narrative strategy of internal perspective). While this constitutes a quantitative rather than qualitative change in literary technique, it is the quantitative change that opened the door for qualitative change after the turn of the century.

Victorian masculinity, as Herbert Sussman points out in *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (1995), has become an increasingly popular subject in literary studies as the late-twentieth century has come to a close. Previously considered a subsection of “Women’s Studies,” by the mid-1990s, the study of masculinities had firmly established itself as its own discipline, while still acknowledging its debt to its sister discipline (7-8). Such an intellectual endeavour, especially as it carves out its own space in Victorian studies, encompasses both
representations of masculinity in literature and studies of male authors and issues related to their positions as authors. By the end of the nineteenth century, notions of Victorian masculinities already had been in development for forty years, and many of the central issues regarding gender identity were already well considered. Men had already spent several decades adjusting to their roles within the ever-important male-headed Victorian family, and Victorian male writers were further occupied balancing their assumed masculine authority as heads of households with their positions in an occupation that assumed at least some performance of feminine characteristics. What was new in the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, was that professional authorship was now being defined by a more thoroughly consumer-based market than the mid-Victorian market had allowed, since consumers could now purchase books directly from publishers rather than going through circulating libraries that exerted control over what readers were “allowed” to read. Further, authors’ relationships with others working in the same market were now constituted differently, with the author-agent-publisher triangle gradually replacing the more direct author-publisher relation. This new relationship between publisher and author put authors in a better position to bargain for pay, since the literary agent helped establish commonly accepted practices for business transactions.

The four authors discussed in this dissertation were among those negotiating this new phase of professional authorship, and, as critics such as Kranidis, Elaine Hadley (Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace 1800-1885, 1995), Talia Schaffer (The Forgotten Female Aesthetes, 2000), and Gail Cunningham (The New Woman and the Victorian Novel, 1978) have shown, these authors experienced a high degree of anxiety about their own financial and cultural status as they entered the 1890s, not only because of the new conditions previously stated but also because of their awareness that their gender in this market was an issue about which to be concerned. Hadley, in a study that covers much of the nineteenth century, devotes the last chapter of her book to use of the melodramatic mode by male intellectuals in the 1870s and 1880s, especially how their use of this mode points to their anxiety about their own cultural status. Situating the work of Meredith with that of Walter Bagehot on
the Parliament and John Morley’s editorship with the *Fortnightly Review*, Hadley asserts that Meredith, like Bagehot and Morley, appropriated the feminine form of the melodramatic in order to uphold his own masculine position of authority (184). Like Hadley, I believe that authors such as Meredith were subject to a cultural atmosphere in which male authority was threatened and needed defense in order to remain intact, though of all the authors I discuss, I find Meredith to be the least subject to these pressures. By the mid 1880s, Meredith’s reputation was strongly established, and that relieved much of the anxiety of encountering the late-Victorian market. As I show in this study, if Meredith experienced anxiety, it was much earlier in his career, in the 1860s.

Schaffer, in a study that focuses on the *fin de siècle* only, argues that many male authors working the 1890s directly appropriated the works of forgotten female aesthetes. Though Schaffer’s study covers a wide variety of authors, perhaps most relevant to the topic of this dissertation is her argument that Hardy directly appropriated the work of Lucas Malet, rewriting her novel *The Wages of Sin* (1890) in his own *Jude the Obscure* (1895) and even condensing particular passages in Malet’s novel in *Jude* (220-38).12 Schaffer’s study suffers somewhat from an intense focus on direct influence, but well taken are her points that men and women writers were working in a market in which they were acutely aware of each other’s presence and that the role of women writers in the development of late-Victorian literary modes needs more attention.

Cunningham, who examines the work of Hardy, Meredith, and Gissing but not Moore in her study, argues that these authors, writing in a decade in which the New Woman became a “focal point” for a number of controversial issues discussed in the 1890s (1), were strongly influenced by the lesscanonical and primarily female New Woman novelists, such as Sarah Grand and Mona Caird, to the degree that only a study of these “minor novelists” can show “how far major novelists were responding to the radical feminist thinking of the time” (19). And Kranidis, who examines all four authors in a chapter titled “Defining the Political: The ‘Realistic’ Appropriation,” argues that Meredith, Hardy, Moore, and Gissing appropriated the New Woman novel to serve their own non-feminist, realist, and sometimes aestheticist agendas. While these authors were “remarkable” for producing novels with the New Woman type, given that they did not
explicitly support feminist ideals and claimed an aesthetic that privileged “non-partisan” observation (107), Kranidis finds their appropriation of the New Woman type to do harm to the feminist movement of the late-nineteenth century, since it sabotaged the “realistic imperatives” of feminist literature (109).

Like Cunningham and Kranidis, I believe that Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore were all influenced by the less-canonized female New Woman writers, but I find more differentiation among them in their acceptance of this influence and their adjustments to the gendered market than Cunningham and Kranidis do. Cunningham’s and Kranidis’s overarching interests cause them to examine all of these authors in essentially the same light. Cunningham’s study paints Hardy, Meredith, and Gissing as perhaps more feminist than they really were, since Cunningham is intent on showing how the New Woman novelists positively influenced canonical male authors. Kranidis paints all four authors as necessarily anti-feminist, due to their realist agendas.13

This project, then, seeks to emphasize the differences among Gissing’s, Hardy’s, Meredith’s, and Moore’s negotiations of the 1890s market, all the while acknowledging the ways in which their decisions were subject to similar cultural conditions. Gissing, as the youngest and most inexperienced writer of the four, reacted to issues of literary mode, gender, and the marketplace more seriously than the other authors did in the 1890s. Caught between the ideals of his male colleagues and those of feminists, Gissing tried to write novels that appealed to both audiences, but his own sense of literary aesthetics, particularly his belief that novels were built on the construction of characters through dialogue, prevented him from achieving complete success with either audience. Hardy and Meredith, though they certainly resented much of the criticism of their work, were in better positions in terms of finances and had more stable reputations than Gissing as he entered the 1890s market. Hardy took risks, especially with dialogue, that a younger, less experienced author might not have taken. While these risks appealed to feminists more than they did to traditional realists, feminists remained divided about the believability of Hardy’s use of physical actions as a method for women to assert agency.
Meredith also was in a position to adapt to the 1890s market with more ease than Gissing did, and, in fact, Meredith’s work turns out to be as much an influence on feminist ideals as vice versa. Unlike Hardy, who never quite proved himself with feminists of the period, Meredith proved himself early, and feminists reacted by embracing the work that met their expectations and simply ignoring those works that did not. Finally, Moore, as a young but particularly confident author, approached the 1890s market in a pro-active manner. Turning away from the strong naturalism he had employed in his works of the 1880s, Moore crafted his most successful novel, *Esther Waters*, to appeal both to the general public (because of its British rather than French realism) and to feminists (because of its combination of narrative strategies to represent assertions of agency by women). Once successful through this novel, Moore took steps to ensure his continued success and place in the early-twentieth-century literary canon, a step that none of the other authors took with quite the same vigor as Moore did.

II.

As authors who knew, or at least knew of, each other, Meredith, Hardy, Moore, and Gissing worked in a common cultural atmosphere, which included specific institutions that both emphasized and criticized their male authorship. To understand this cultural atmosphere, and the institutions that created this atmosphere, we should turn first to a discussion of the Society of Authors, the late-Victorian institution most directly involved in emerging ideas about late-Victorian authorship and an institution to which all four authors belonged at some point in their careers. Founded in 1884 by Walter Besant, the Society was, by the 1890s, a central force in public discussion of authorship issues. As an advocate for authors especially on the issues of fair contracts and international copyright, by 1893 it had over 1000 members (Bonham-Carter 151). These members looked to the Society for important information and support on these issues (distributed through the Society’s journal *The Author*) and also for social opportunities (the Society’s annual dinners are especially well known).

Meredith and Hardy both served as the organization’s President, Meredith from 1892 to 1909 and Hardy from 1909 to 1928, and both men used the Society’s legal
resources to further their own careers, especially in the latter years of their lives. Files in the Society’s archive at the British Library show that Hardy used the Society to help prevent the translation of his works into other languages without his permission (Ms. 56721), and Hardy’s and Meredith’s letters show that both men employed the Society’s literary agent William Colles to help them acquire higher prices for their work in the mid-1890s (Hardy, *Collected* 2:5-6 and others; Meredith, *Letters* 2:1127 and others). Both Hardy and Meredith also seemed to understand the importance of the social aspects of the Society, though they perhaps did not attend social events as often as they should have, given their positions in the Society. Hardy attended at least two of the annual dinners, in 1884 and 1889 (*Collected* 1:128, 197); he allowed his name to be included on the stewards’ list when he could not attend (“Annual Dinner” [1899] 260); and he sent his regrets to the Society when he had to back out at the last minute (*Collected* 1:178). Meredith usually did not attend the annual and special dinners, but that was due to his poor health (*Letters* 2:970, 993). Like Hardy, he often sent his regrets by mail; at the 1894 special dinner for Besant, the Chairman read a letter from Meredith, in which he expressed such regrets and told of his “great esteem” for Besant (“Banquet” 67).

Moore was more fully involved in the social events of the Society. He participated in its hosting of Emile Zola during his trip to London in 1893 (Hone 188), and he attended the annual dinners in 1890, 1891, and 1894 (“Annual Dinner” [1890] 91; “Annual Dinner” [1891] 70; “Annual Dinner” [1894] 39) and a special dinner for Besant in 1895 (“Banquet” 66). Later in his career, Moore also would make use of the Society’s legal services as Meredith and Hardy had. Moore’s file in the Society archive shows that, in 1914, he contacted Herbert Thring, the Society’s administrator, about a dispute over one of his manuscripts. Charles Heartman, a New York-based collector, had put up for sale an unfinished chapter from Moore’s *Memoirs of My Dead Life*, and Moore wanted to stop the sale of it (Ms. 56757). Then, in 1917, Moore again contacted the Society, asking for help with a libel suit brought against him and his publisher Heinemann by Louis James Seymour, who claimed that Moore had slandered his name by writing the book *Lewis Seymour and Some Women* (1917). The Society was especially interested in this suit, since Moore and Heinemann were fighting over who would pay
the court costs for the case and the dispute appealed to the Society’s commitment to fair practices in the relation between publishers and authors. After the Society intervened on Moore’s behalf, Heinemann agreed to split the costs with Moore rather than force Moore to pay all the costs himself (Ms. 56757).

Of the four authors, Gissing had the most tenuous, but perhaps the most interesting, relationship with the Society. He avoided joining for years because he thought the subscription rate too high for young authors (Collected 3:310); he disliked Besant, whom he found a weak writer and misinformed about the relation between publisher and author (4:291, 5:89); and he believed that the Society was for authors with commercial rather than literary aspirations (5:149, 163). Eventually, Gissing did join but only because he felt he had to in order to stay competitive with other authors. On June 13, 1893, Gissing told his brother Algernon, who was also a young novelist, about the Society’s literary agent service and said that he thought he might “have to try them myself very soon, for mere bread and cheese” (5:116). In September of the same year, Gissing contacted Colles and gave him five short stories to place with periodicals (5:145). Still, Gissing was never thrilled about being a member of the Society. He grudgingly admitted his membership to his friend Eduard Bertz when he finally sent in his first dues (5:175), and he did not attend the annual dinner in 1894 (5:200-01), claiming that his reason for not going was his “fear of crowds” (5:212). Further, Gissing adamantly refused to join the Authors’ Club, a club associated with the Society and for men only (5:251), though he did attend the club as an invited guest once (5:250).

In addition to the direct involvements Gissing, Moore, Meredith, and Hardy had in the Society, these authors kept up with the Society’s activities and issues by reading the organization’s journal *The Author*. Since all members of the Society received a subscription to the journal, we can assume that Meredith, Hardy, and Moore received it in the early- and mid-1890s, when issues such as the role of women as members of the Society, and as authors participating in the same market as their male colleagues, were discussed. There is direct evidence that Meredith and Hardy read the journal (Meredith, *Letters* 2:1133; Hardy, *Collected* 2:39), and Gissing’s letters show that he at least read the articles about his work that appeared in *The Author* (4:306, 5:285). All four authors
were highlighted in the journal from time to time, and although the journal did not regularly run extensive reviews of members’ work (choosing instead to run short notices in the columns “At the Author’s Head” and “Book Talk”), several of their works received lengthy reviews. Meredith’s poetry (“Nature” 319-21; C. F. 327), Hardy’s Tess (“Magnificent” 268-69), and Moore’s Esther Waters (“Esther Waters” 430-32) were all reviewed favorably by the journal. In this respect, the journal encouraged and upheld the authorship of these four particular men.

Still, it is worth noting that a member’s literary reputation also could be challenged within the pages of *The Author*. Moore, for example, was criticized for his support of Henrik Ibsen in an article that ran in the June 1891 issue (“Mr. Moore and Herr Ibsen” 26-28), and Gissing, though not a member of the Society at the time, had his views on realism in *New Grub Street* (1891) questioned by Andrew Lang in an article that ran in the July 1891 issue (“Realism in Grub Street” 43-44). Gissing, infuriated by the criticism, went so far as to pass on the clipping to Eduard Bertz permanently, saying that the clipping was so “valueless” to him that Bertz could keep it (*Collected* 4:313). These examples show that, along with camaraderie and support, there existed a competitive atmosphere among members of the Society, and the suggested hierarchy of writers seen in these articles becomes even more important when one considers the Society’s relationship with its female members.

III.

It is within the pages of *The Author* that we find a number of controversies with underlying gender issues, especially the issue of whether professional authorship should be open to women or whether it should remain a domain for men only. These controversies provide an entry point for understanding the degree to which gender factored in male authors’ negotiations of the literary market. Though the Society’s statement of purpose claimed that it was an organization devoted to the interests of literary men and women, there was also a certain level of anxiety about the presence of women in the Society and within the wider profession of working authors. The most obvious sign of this anxiety can be found in the debate at the end of 1890 over
establishing an Authors’ Club or an Author’s House, which would be a smaller social organization associated with the Society. Until this time, when the issue was first raised by Besant in the pages of *The Author*, the Society had functioned primarily as a business organization, with offices in Portugal Street (Bonham-Carter 129) but with no space for activities that most London clubs had. Generally, the Society borrowed space, such as Willis’s Rooms and the Criterion restaurant, for large social events, and smaller social gatherings simply did not take place (134, 142).

Besant, who had started *The Author* in 1890 in part because business meetings of the Society were not well-attended (Colby 113), suggested the possibility of opening a club or a house. Just as the establishment of *The Author* had been an attempt to increase the sense of unity among members, the establishment of such a space might be another way to achieve this goal (“News and Notes” [Dec. 15, 1890] 200). Besant laid out a possible plan for an Authors’ Club, which would include a modest dining room, writing and reading rooms, a library, a smoking room for men, a conversation room for women, and perhaps rooms for other activities, such as billiards (201). An Authors’ House, Besant then explained, would differ in that there would be fewer common rooms, probably just a dining room and a library with writing tables, but there would be a number of private rooms for rent, which members could use as work spaces (201). Although Besant remained neutral on whether the Society should choose a club or a house, his explanation of the two options makes clear the financial ease of the House option and the more weighty financial burden that would be associated with the Club. Also in his explanation, Besant recognizes that women’s membership in the club might be an issue, and he takes steps to ensure that the club, should it be chosen as the best option, would be open to both men and women. “It would have to be a club of men and women,” Besant writes, citing the Albemarle Club as a model for such an endeavour (200).

Though Besant himself realized the delicate gender issues involved in such a proposal, not everyone was as accommodating as he. When he asked members for feedback on the issue, by including cards for them to fill out and return to the Society, the results showed that male members overwhelmingly preferred the Club option while
female members were split between the Club and the House options. 60% of the members who voted wanted a club, while 30% wanted a house. Further, “[m]ore than one-third of those who have voted for the House were ladies; more than five-sixths of those who have voted for a Club were men” (“Notes and News” [Feb. 16, 1891] 252). These results indicate that 10% of the total membership, who happened to be female, wanted a House; 10% of the total membership, who happened to be female, wanted a Club; 20% of the total membership, who happened to be male, wanted a House; and 50% of the total membership, who happened to be male, wanted a Club. Clearly, men were more interested in having a Club than women were. Further, the exclusive attitude of the men with regard to the Club came out in the voting. As Besant points out, “The ladies who voted for a Club did not raise a word against the admission of men, but many of the men, speaking for a club, urged strongly upon us the necessity of excluding ladies” (252). Ultimately, a subcommittee of Besant and six other men decided that the club would be for men only, with women admitted on Wednesday afternoons and for special events (“Authors’ Club” [Aug. 1, 1891] 85-86; “Authors’ Club” [1 Apr. 1893] 401).

There is no record in The Author of the female members’ reactions to this decision, but it seems as though Besant needed to appease female members, since in his August 1, 1891 “Notes and News” column, he stated that the subcommittee was undecided about the admission of women into the club but that he was committed to “at once proceed[ing] to the establishment of the Authors’ House, a scheme in which I place great faith. This House would be especially useful to ladies” (83). Presumably, Besant wrote his “Notes and News” column before the meeting of the subcommittee on July 23, since the subcommittee’s decision to exclude women is reported in the same issue, only three pages after Besant’s claim that they were still undecided. Further, in October 1891, only two months after the decision to exclude women from the club, The Author reported that a number of women writers had met in the Society’s offices to discuss starting their own club, and the meeting was led by Henrietta Stannard, a member of the Society (“Ladies’ Club” 134). Stannard, who wrote novels under the pseudonym “John Strange Winter,” also would speak in favor of electing women to the
Society’s Council in 1896 (“Society” 224), and she had been active on the issue of women’s participation in the Society as early as 1889.\footnote{17}

It is impossible to know what position, if any, Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore took on the issue of establishing an Authors’ Club, short of our knowledge that Gissing refused to join the following year, but, surely, the tension between men and women in the Society must have been evident to these authors, given Besant’s articulation of it in the pages of \textit{The Author}. There were other controversies within the Society that also contributed to the cultural atmosphere in which they worked, and the issue of “Women in Journalism” was an especially important one, since it spread beyond the pages of \textit{The Author} to other publications, including the feminist periodicals. This controversy is also important because it illustrates well the limits of Besant’s support for women, which sometimes seeped through in his editorial oversight of \textit{The Author}. In July 1892, less than a year after Stannard and other women writers formed their own club, someone writing under the pseudonym “X. Y. Z.” wrote an article on the topic of women in journalism for \textit{The Author}. In the article, X. Y. Z. claims that the “invasion” of women in journalism in the late-nineteenth century had been bad for the profession, since it had resulted in the bulk of journalism focusing on the empty subjects of fashion, cooking, and home decoration (“Women in Journalism” 63). Further, X. Y. Z. argues, women are not cut out for the demands of the profession--“the constant wear and tear of reporting, night work, severe physical strain”--and these are precisely the demands that keep the profession respectable (63).

X. Y. Z.’s article prompted a number of responses, some of which ran in the August 1892 issue of \textit{The Author}. Mary Frances Billington, a journalist herself, objected to many of X. Y. Z.’s points but she upheld the idea that the number of good women journalists was limited (102-04). However, Grace Gilchrist, who later wrote an article about George Eliot for the magazine, and a person writing under the initials “L. F. S.” took stronger stances against X. Y. Z.’s argument. They maintained that X. Y. Z. was wrong even to suggest that the number of women in journalism constituted an “invasion,” and they took issue with the argument that women readers actually want to read, and women writers want to write, what the papers insisted on printing (104-05).
While Besant presumably was not the author of the “Women in Journalism” article, he did write articles that suggest that women are better suited for non-professional roles. In an article entitled “On Literary Collaboration,” Besant suggests that every literary man find a young woman who will help him develop his characters but will not demand payment for her help. Arguing that “Woman does not create, but she receives, moulds, and develops” (328), Besant articulates his vision of woman as “man’s best partner” rather than independent inventor, a vision with which feminists would take issue throughout Besant’s career. Henrietta Stannard, for example, responded strongly in her own periodical Golden Gates, saying, “One would not have expected that Mr. Walter Besant, who is supposed to be as full of chivalry as he is generally full of common sense, would have let his latest advice to young authors appear in the full light of day” (“Editor’s Thoughts” [19 Mar. 1892] 338). Stannard then quotes Besant’s comments about the necessity for male authors to find a female collaborator and refutes Besant’s statement that women do not create. She argues that one can easily match the three best male novelists (Scott, Thackeray, and Dickens, in her opinion) with three superb female novelists: Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, and Eliot. These women, says Stannard, are as “realist” in their depiction of human life as are the male novelists (338).

Not only did Besant cause controversy with his article on literary collaboration, but, in 1894, he would take a stance on the “women in journalism” issue that was remarkably similar to that of X. Y. Z. When The Woman’s Herald interviewed Besant and put to him a number of questions about the status of women in society, he took the position that women were impinging on men’s territory by working outside the home. Asked his position on the presence of women in the “business and professional sphere,” Besant replied,

Well, many women when new fields of work are opened to them make much of it, but I have pointed out again and again that for every place taken by woman a man is displaced. . . . The woman drives out her own or somebody else’s husband, and there is consequently a destitute family. Then they take small salaries and so lower wages. . . . In journalism the
entry of women is proving most disastrous for that very reason. They take half the pay of men. That must be stopped somehow. (Parker [8 Feb. 1894] 86)²⁰

Taken with the negative comments Besant made on other issues concerning women--such as women as administrators and women’s suffrage--it is not surprising that feminists saw Besant as an opponent of their cause and spokesman for more widespread hostility on the part of men toward working women.²¹

*The Woman’s Herald* was not the only feminist periodical to pick up on ideas antithetical to feminism that had been expressed in *The Author. Work and Leisure*, a feminist periodical with a focus on work issues and only nominal attention to literary issues, responded directly to X. Y. Z.’s article when it ran “Journalism for Women” in its November 1892 issue. In this article, the author “Kirkee” summarizes the responses to X. Y. Z. in *The Author* and asserts that these responses “contain much that is helpful and suggestive” (288). Kirkee acknowledges Billington’s response but points out that Billington is “no advocate for the assumption by women of the duties of men journalists” (288). She then moves on to L. F. S.’s comments about the woman writer’s requirement to “satisfy her editor” by writing the kinds of stories editors think appeal to women. Agreeing with L. F. S.’s assessment that editors mistakenly assume that women readers want a particular kind of story, Kirkee writes,

> There has certainly appeared to be this tendency of editors . . . to underrate the intelligence and interests of women, a tendency which is dying out but is not yet dead. Still there are to be seen “ladies’ columns,” dealing exclusively with dress. . . . [W]ere it called a “fashion column,” it would still attract dressmakers and others, to whom its information would be useful . . . and would not foster the lowering opinion now frequently held of women’s literature. (289)

In other words, Kirkee says that editors should recast women’s journalism into commentary that is useful and takes into account the realities of women’s lives, including their work in the public sphere. In making such a statement, Kirkee exposed the real gender bias in the “Women in Journalism” controversy that had originated in the
pages of *The Author*, under Besant’s direction.

The degree to which male authors such as Hardy, Meredith, Gissing, and Moore had knowledge of such gender controversies, especially as they played out in the feminist periodicals, cannot be traced directly, but it is certain that these authors had at least some knowledge of the content of feminist periodicals, since they all had at least loose ties to these periodicals. Gissing, for example, read at least one of the reviews of his work that ran in *The Woman’s Herald*, and, at that time, he saw the contents of an entire issue of the magazine (*Collected* 5:120). Hardy knew M. E. Haweis, who wrote for *The Woman’s Herald*, and he apparently attended some of her popular lecture-luncheons and afternoon teas, which covered an array of women’s topics but also anti-vivisection, in which Hardy had a special interest (*Collected* 2:36, 59, 154, 5:349). Further, as I show in this study, all four of the authors had women friends who put them in touch with the issues discussed in feminist periodicals, and all four of these authors clearly participated in this debate through the novels they produced in the 1890s, many of which were reviewed by feminist periodicals.

IV.

As Kate Flint, in *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914*, argues, it is in periodicals such as *Shafts* that we first see a fully articulated feminist literary aesthetic, in which literary representation and the interests of real-life women have a reciprocal relationship (151-52). Further, *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald* (see figures 1.1 and 1.2) offer a new perspective on late-Victorian realism, and this development in the broader debate over realism played a significant role in Gissing’s, Hardy’s, Meredith’s, and Moore’s negotiations of the market. Just as male authors had to decide where they stood on the issue of naturalism and psychological realism in the late-1880s, and to what degree these forms of realism would play in their work, they had to decide whether and how to incorporate the newly emerging feminist definition in the 1890s. Kranidis and Cunningham, in their studies of these authors, choose not to discuss the role of these periodicals; instead, they locate feminist influence on these writers in their knowledge of individual New Woman novelists. Kranidis more fully locates this influence in a
Figure 1.1 Cover page, *Shafts*, 3 Nov. 1892
Figure 1.2 Cover page, The Woman’s Herald, 4 Apr. 1891
developing feminist literary aesthetic, which is found in specific novels by women writers of the time, such as Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and Mona Caird’s *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), and select reviews by women writers such as Adeline Sergeant and Edith Slater, but even she does not explore the presence of a systematic feminist reviewing apparatus, a phenomenon I believe is worth examining in depth. *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald* (also called *Women’s Penny Paper* and *The Woman’s Signal*) constitute a rich source of this aesthetic, and I want to show exactly how these periodicals viewed the relationship between literary representation and the cultural status of women.

For these two magazines, “realism” meant the realistic representation of women and the conditions of their lives, especially the difficult conditions of living in a patriarchal culture. However, realism also meant the representation of some (but not all) individual women triumphing over these conditions, so feminist realism was both critical and utopian. This definition was distinctly different from more traditional definitions of the word. As recent critical studies of nineteenth-century realism show, the more dominant definition of realism was one with a somewhat broader vision of human experience, represented through detailed, external description. Still, as George Levine argues in *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterly* (1981), the term “realism” should not be defined so narrowly. Levine, who recognizes the importance of poststructuralist theory but also its tendency to unfairly characterize realists as upholding a view of the world overly concerned with “truth,” believes that realism is not an effort to avoid the indeterminacy of human experience (and, hence, a form of literature antithetical to modernism) but an attempt to engage this indeterminacy (and, hence, anticipatory of the subjective perspective seen in modernist literature). Nineteenth-century realists engage indeterminacy by trying to reconcile “the monstrous” with the more balanced, “civilized” lives they believe they should be living. Writes Levine of realism of this period,

> It was not a solidly self-satisfied vision based in a misguided objectivity and faith in representation, but a highly self-conscious attempt to explore or create a new reality. . . . In the integrity of its explorations, realism
increasingly imagined the limits of its power to reform, the monstrous possibility of the unnameable, the likelihood that the monstrous lurked in its very desire to see and to make the world good. (19-20, 22)

Seen through this more flexible definition of realism, feminist realism of the 1890s does have a place in the history of realism as a particular literary mode, and it even plays a significant role in the transition from Victorian high realism to early-twentieth-century modernism. In fact, feminists of the fin de siècle argued that the “broad vision” of human experience typical of traditional, mid-century realism was far from complete, since it routinely ignored the conditions of women’s lives, especially the lives of modern women. It was only through the tension between traditional definitions of realism and the definition expressed by feminists of the 1890s that perspectives on what constituted realism began to change and even anticipate the strong emphasis on subjective experience found in early-twentieth-century modernist literature. As this project illustrates, late-nineteenth-century feminist realism was a necessary stepping stone from mid-Victorian high realism to early-twentieth-century modernism.

Liberal feminism, as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, is a form of feminism originating in the nineteenth century, when the equality doctrine was especially important to thought about the cultural status of women, and it is the form of feminism best understood and practiced, though in varying degrees, by the four authors examined in this dissertation. Meredith and Gissing especially seem to have grasped the foundations of this type of feminism. Meredith’s strong emphasis on the intellect of women in his Essay on Comedy suggests his commitment to an equality-based form, since comedy as it is used by women is rooted in reason. “[C]omedy,” writes Meredith, “lifts women to a station offering them free play for their wit, as they usually show it, when they have it, on the side of sound sense” (433). Similarly, Gissing’s discussions with his friend Clara Collet, a social investigator who specialized in women’s issues, about the benefits of educating women show his belief that women were capable of the same intellectual achievement as men. Therefore, it is not surprising that Shafts uses Meredith as an exemplar of the tradition of liberal-feminist men of the nineteenth century who took an active role in seeking equal status for women while The Woman’s Herald uses
Gissing as their central example.

In the first issue of Shafts, along with a number of other articles aimed at articulating their main purpose, the magazine includes an article on Meredith, titled “Mr. George Meredith on Women’s Status.” In this article, Shafts compares Meredith to J. S. Mill, perhaps the most famous liberal-feminist man of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Written in the unabashedly intellectual style typical of Shafts’s articles, this article begins: “Diogenes ordered himself to be buried with his face downwards saying, the world would turn upside down, and then he would be in his right place. According to our grandmothers’ and even mothers’ views of things, this process is certainly going on now as regards women’s position” (8). The author of this article, “Dole,” identifies Meredith as “one who is helping Progressive Women” and is “a friend of woman’s liberty quite as hearty as J. S. Mill,” and Dole claims that “Since Mill died, no man’s heart has felt so strongly, nor man’s brain expressed with equal force and wit the disabilities of women” (8). Dole then analyzes Meredith’s literary work, admiring him for his ability to combine artistic style and socially-aware content, a central tenet in the feminist literary aesthetic. Meredith’s novels, according to Dole, are both books with “narrative form” and “philosophical treatises on life” (8). Shafts’s placement of Meredith within a tradition of men committed to advancing the equality doctrine helps establish the magazine as promoting a particular type of feminism. Further, by using Meredith as its prime example, Shafts establishes itself as promoting a specific view on the ways in which equality can be achieved: primarily by recognizing that women are as intelligent as men. One of the reasons Dole respects Meredith so much is because he “lays great stress on the intellect of women” (8), and this emphasis on woman’s intellect becomes even more important when Shafts promotes a specific vision for the representation of woman’s agency, an issue I will discuss momentarily.

The equality-based feminism of Shafts is shared by The Woman’s Herald, though it is true that the Herald seems to appeal to a slightly broader audience and, therefore, a wider range of ideologies can be found in its pages. Initially, The Woman’s Herald seems not as bold or liberal as Shafts, though, in the lead article of its first issue, the magazine claims a “progressive” policy for expressing the interests of women. Arguing that other
magazines aimed at a female audience have taken “conservative” and “mechanical” approaches, this magazine promises a new way of analyzing the world. “We look to reproducing the ideas of the day in their freshest and newest form,” the staff states in the first issue, “to creating a newspaper which shall reflect the thoughts of the best women upon all subjects that occupy their minds” (“Our Policy” 1). This mission, like that of Shafts, puts emphasis on the primacy of women’s intellectual abilities and, also like Shafts, locates this quality in the works of certain male authors as a strong indication of realistic representation of women’s lives.

The Woman’s Herald staff saw novelists as an important source of support for and promotion of their ideals, and they highlighted Gissing as one such supporter and promoter. In their review of Gissing’s The Odd Women, in which they go so far as to say that Gissing’s work is even more realistic than even Sarah Grand’s The Heavenly Twins, they write:

No novel perhaps, not even “The Heavenly Twins” . . . has treated more exhaustively and more adequately the whole position of women. . . . It is a real environment, a living circle of characters, to which Mr. Gissing introduces us. His characters are not the animated abstractions, the wire-pulled puppets, which so often make up the dramatis persona of the novelist with a purpose. . . . Mr. Gissing is a realist, a faithful--perhaps an overfaithful--painter of the manners and lives of a certain section of our present-day society. . . . But, with all his minuteness of vision . . . Mr. Gissing is never really prodigal of detail or wearisome in his realism. His are the secrets of selection and of suggestion. (“A Study in Average Women” 281)

Interesting is the reviewer’s distinction between the “realist” novelist and the “novelist with a purpose,” since this distinction illustrates the reviewer’s belief that novels meeting the feminist ideal should not simply be feminist in content but also feminist in form. While the reviewer could designate Gissing a novelist with a purpose, the decision to call him a realist instead indicates the reviewer’s desire to legitimize feminist novels. Feminist novels should not be dismissed as simply didactic but be seen as worthy of the
same respect accorded realist novels. Realism is feminist, implies the reviewer.

One of the central issues for feminist realism is woman’s agency, since to represent women is to engage the issue of their agency, and, again, periodicals such as Shafts and The Woman’s Herald provide clear definitions about what constitutes realistic representation for novelists working in the period. Working under the assumption that increased intellect had to be the primary site for development of woman’s agency in the nineteenth century, given the way in which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society had ignored the systematic education of girls and women, Shafts and The Woman’s Herald lay out the three methods for expressing agency and show how these methods correspond to specific narrative strategies.

Shafts articulates this three-part definition of agency as early as its first issue, in the article on Meredith’s contributions to and support for the feminist movement. Not only does “Dole” commend Meredith for his attention to women’s intellect, but he is praised for the way in which he allows readers to hear women’s “internal sentiments,” a more general word for internal perspective (8). Further, Dole tells us that Meredith “does not admire” the “Womanly Woman,” who “occupies herself merely in picking up the dropped stitches of other people, or in lubricating the wheels of her domestic machinery,” suggesting that Meredith values action on the part of women (8), and he even suggests that women are capable of fighting in war (8). Finally, Dole indicates that Meredith understands the importance of the spoken word in expressions of woman’s agency, since his “beautiful rebel” Diana “rebukes” those women who are content to cave in to the oppressive conditions of the present and states her opinions about this clearly (8). This definition of agency, and its correspondence with particular narrative strategies, can also be found in the reviews written for Shafts by Gertrude Kapteyn, who wrote about several of the novels discussed in this study and whose reviews I analyze in depth in later chapters.

The Woman’s Herald, too, articulates this three-part definition, perhaps most clearly in an article on “Women in Fiction” by M. H. Krout. Krout sketches out a literary tradition devoted to the accurate representation of women, within which Meredith is included. In sketching this tradition, Krout identifies Jane Eyre as the first heroine in
nineteenth-century British literature who “thought and spoke and conducted herself in fiction as a flesh-and-blood creature would have been apt to do in like surroundings and under like circumstances” (485). This description, with its emphasis on thought, speech, and action expresses well the three-part definition seen in Shafts, and similar expressions of this definition can be found in The Woman’s Herald’s reviews of novels discussed in this project.

Of course, the feminist perspective on realism has its limitations. As I have already mentioned early in this introduction, this perspective on realism has a tendency toward prescriptiveness and, in fact, shares this tendency with second-wave feminist literary criticism of the 1970s. “Prescriptive” feminist criticism of the 1970s, as it was called by its own proponents, was first defined by Cheri Register, in her essay “American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction.” This essay, one of six in the 1975 anthology Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory, lays out specific criteria for successfully feminist literature, and these criteria are remarkably similar to that advocated by feminists of the 1890s. The text must first be “authentic,” not necessarily “politically orthodox” but certainly a “realistic representation of ‘female experience,’ ‘feminine consciousness,’ or ‘female reality’” (Register 12). Further, the text must be one judged “authentic” by the “female reader, who is herself familiar with ‘female reality’” (13). While Register recognizes that this particular judgment test is “dangerously narrow,” since there is no one reality all women experience, she believes that this form of criticism starts with readerly identification and then moves to more productive analysis, such as analyzing the importance of female reality in a particular text even if it is not similar to the reader’s own experience (13). Having set out these criteria for prescriptive feminist criticism, Register then identifies five specific things prescriptive feminist criticism should do. It should “serve as a forum for women,” especially by providing perspectives not usually seen through works written by men; “help achieve cultural androgyny,” by cultivating social values not normally recognized by mainstream culture; “provide role-models,” by representing women who do not emulate only traditional feminine roles; “promote sisterhood,” by encouraging women to support each other in their endeavours to change oppressive societal norms; and
“augment consciousness-raising,” by illustrating the connection between literary representation and real-life issues without being overly didactic (19-23).

What is striking about the similarities between prescriptive feminist criticism of the 1970s and feminist realism of the 1890s is the emphasis on realistic representation and the balance between the critical and utopian aspects of this aesthetic. As I have mentioned already, I do not advocate “prescriptive” criticism, but I do recognize the importance of this type of criticism to the development of certain literary aesthetics, particularly late-nineteenth-century realism. Further, as a reader who believes in feminist ideals, I acknowledge my own tendency sometimes to read according to similar criteria, especially readerly identification, despite my scholarly awareness that one must supplement such reading with an understanding of how women’s experiences may differ and how they fit into a broader human experience, which includes the realities of men’s lives. At times, my analysis of particular texts by the authors discussed in this dissertation does overlap with that of 1890s feminist critics; for example, when discussing Moore’s *Esther Waters*, my analysis is both strengthened and informed by that of Gertrude Kapteyn, reviewer for *Shafts*. But, rather than suppress my own feminist ideals in my analysis of texts, I have let them remain apparent, with the hope that doing so will make show the connections between feminisms of different historical periods.

In addition to its tendency toward prescriptiveness, feminist realism of the 1890s, by focusing so narrowly on a traditional method of character analysis (how characters think, speak, and act), ties itself to a specific type of representation (realism) and could be seen as inhibiting the shift to modernism as much as it enables this move. As Talia Schaffer points out, anti-realist schools such as aestheticism may be more responsible for the shift than variations on traditional realism are. Still, the move from mid-Victorian realism to modernism is perhaps better proven by attention to the feminist realists than to the female aesthetes, since the feminist realists’ use of internal perspective directly links the literary mode of the *fin de siecle* to easily identifiable modernist narrative strategies, such as stream-of-consciousness technique. Further, when we look at the narrative strategies used by both male and female realists of the period, we find as many similarities as differences. In the afterword of this dissertation, I
discuss in more detail the specific strategies employed by female realists, but it is worth mentioning briefly how these strategies appear in the work of Sarah Grand, since her novel *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) was one of the most popular New Women novels by a woman writer. Also, I refer to this novel frequently in this dissertation, so a brief summary of the novel and discussion of Grand’s narrative strategies is necessary here.

*The Heavenly Twins* tells the stories of three women: Evadne Frayling, Edith Beale, and Angelica Hamilton-Wells. Evadne is the central figure at the start of the novel, which traces the development of her intellect and her awareness of the conditions of her life. Unfortunately, Evadne’s development as independent woman is cut short by her marriage to Colonel Colquhoun, whose disreputable past comes to light only after the marriage ceremony. Stuck in this unsatisfying marriage, in which Evadne insists on celibacy and Colquhoun insists that she not be active in public life, Evadne stagnates. Eventually, she is freed from the marriage by her husband’s death, and she develops an attachment to Dr. Galbraith, who uses his knowledge of medicine and psychology to save her from depression and attempted suicide. Galbraith and Evadne marry, but, at the end of the novel, Evadne still struggles to retain her spirit to live. In contrast to this exposé of the difficult cultural conditions women must endure, Grand also tells the more uplifting and amusing story of Angelica, whose family is close to Evadne’s parents. Angelica, who has a male twin named Diavolo, is an independent, happy young woman, though she and Diavolo are both aware that she sometimes experiences constraints because of her sex. While they do everything they can to trouble traditional gender roles, Angelica quickly sees that it would be better for her to “buy a boy” and raise him to her liking than to marry a contemporary man (251). Still, she eventually marries a friend, Mr. Kilroy, but insists on complete freedom within the marriage. In an attempt to find intellectual companionship with a man, Angelica takes up crossdressing and finds friendship with a man called the Tenor. When she accidentally reveals that she is not a man by falling into a river and losing her disguise, their friendship ends. Shortly after, the Tenor dies from pneumonia, which he caught while trying to save Angelica from drowning.
Feminists of the 1890s embraced wholeheartedly Grand’s novel, and the novel remains of interest today, in part because it illustrates the two-fold agenda of the feminist literary aesthetic. While Grand’s portrayal of Evadne can be faulted for overemphasizing the negative cultural conditions women encounter, her exposé of these conditions appealed to the critical side of the feminist aesthetic and her use of internal perspective to show Evadne’s increased consciousness early on appealed to the utopian side of the aesthetic. Further, Grand’s more positive portrayal of Angelica appealed even more to the utopian side of the aesthetic, since, through Angelica, Grand successfully combines the three narrative strategies valued by feminists for representation of woman’s agency. Not only does Grand’s attention to Angelica’s youthfulness and her relationship with her twin brother allow readers to see the development of her consciousness, but also the scenes of Angelica’s crossdressing adventures make good use of expression of agency through the spoken word and physical action. I discuss these scenes in further detail in my afterword.

To return to the possible limitations of feminist realism, another objection is that feminists seem to define realism as simply reflecting what they hoped to find in the texts they read. That is, feminists wanted to see representations of women’s lives that looked like what their lives already were, or what they hoped their lives could become. This suggests that the term “realism” was used to reflect one’s own point of view or agenda. While this is true, I believe that it does not reveal the weakness of feminism but the weakness of the term “realism,” since long before the 1890s, Victorian authors, critics, and the public had already used the term to denote representations they hoped to find in literary texts. Anthony Trollope’s use of the term, for example, performs a similar move. In An Autobiography (1883), Trollope writes of his own The Warden (1855) as a novel in which the characters, which readers find to be “life-like,” were drawn not from Trollope’s observations of real people but from his expectations about how these characters “should be” (93). And Trollope’s expectations, as he explains when discussing a number of his other novels, are that “strength and virtues” generally triumph over “faults and vices” (181). Writes Trollope, “if I have not made the strength and virtues predominant over the faults and vices, I have not painted the picture as I
intended” (181). This notion that realist fiction is that in which the virtuous gain reward and the vicious are punished is an equally subjective use of the term, and one that is used even into the 1890s by critics such as Margaret Oliphant, as we will see in my chapter on Hardy. So while feminists’ use of the term exposes a certain degree of subjectivism, this subjectivism is not new to the debate over realism. Further, the subjectivism of the feminist definition of the term works to open up the definition of realism and help change the way this literary mode operates. Late-nineteenth-century feminism, then, works within the system to create change, whereas the forgotten female aesthetes Schaffer discusses in her study work outside the system to do the same.

V.

The three-part definition of woman’s agency articulated by Shafts and The Woman’s Herald is not unlike that of late-twentieth-century feminism’s definition, and the link between the two centuries is important, since it can help us historicize current discussions of woman’s agency and subjectivity in general. By looking at the connection between the two centuries via narrative theory, as this study does, we can more clearly see the ways in which our own assumptions about agency, which are rooted in poststructuralist theory, do not adequately address the ways in which agency operated in the late-nineteenth century and continues to operate today. In the last decade, discussions of agency have been strongly shaped (and sometimes threatened) by poststructuralist critiques of the subject. Post-structuralist critics have done much to point out the problems of individual subjectivity, but while many of them are comfortable with declaring the “death of the subject,” feminist critics have a more difficult time abandoning the notion of subjectivity, since the very goals of feminism suggest sympathy for (and perhaps the necessity of) expression of agency by women.

The difficulty of finding a way to “do feminist criticism” in the post-structuralist world is expressed well by Judith Butler, in “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism,’” the first of some twenty essays in the collection Feminists Theorize the Political (1992). Butler argues that while postmodernist critiques of the subject are assumed to negate the subject entirely, in fact, such critiques only question
the subject’s construction as a given premise (9). Further, while it is assumed that all political criticism must uphold the existence of the subject, it is possible to do political criticism that questions such assumptions (1-2, 8). Post-structuralist feminist political criticism involves an understanding of subjectivity and agency as the subject-who-acts-is-already-acted-upon; that is, no subject’s actions can be independent of actions that have come before, and, therefore, intentionality, while it may be assumed by the subject and others who perceive the subject, is displaced by the multiple layers of actions that have come before (10). That said, to see the subject as such does not mean that one cannot discuss agency, only that one must think about it in different terms: when subjects feel “excluded,” as women often do, it is because they are a part of a system of “domination” rather than because they lack individualized power (13-14). Butler cautions against a form of feminism that relies wholly on “identity,” or the achievement of individual power for all those who identify as women as the means for emancipation (15), and she advocates an approach that relies less on universal experience and more on the “rifts” within the movement. This approach is better, claims Butler, because the possibilities for women may be increased only through a deconstruction of the very term “woman” (16). This approach, of course, involves “risk,” especially the risk that antifeminist agendas will be served by the deconstruction of such terms, but Butler believes that such a risk does not put feminist “practice” in jeopardy, only its “foundation” (16-17).

Butler’s ideas about the intersection of post-structuralist and political criticisms do much to offer a new way to approach feminism, but even Butler recognizes one of the main problems with her analysis: that it locates any possible expression of agency wholly within the deployment of language. In her closing example about the ways in which masculinist language about rape is used to overdetermine the actions possible for women, Butler refutes other critics’ charges that she ignores the “material violence” perpetuated against women, but her refutation of these charges acknowledges her dependence on language as the site for assertion of agency (17-18). For Butler, language itself acts. She writes, “The very terms by which the violation is explained enact the violation, and concede that the violation was under way before it takes place as a
criminal act” (19). While Butler gestures at the connections between language and action, and while her discussion in this closing example seems to suggest that she understands the importance of the subject’s intellectual development in carving out a space for agency in the post-structuralist world (since to figure out how to use language is to learn how to change one’s life), she could do more to show the connection between thought, language, and action, even for the postmodern subject.

By looking at representations of woman’s agency in late-nineteenth century novels, this study aims to supplement post-structuralist theories about agency by grounding these theories in historical context. My approach is informed by works by two groups of critics: historicists such as Cunningham, Kranidis, Anderson, Nina Auerbach (Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth, 1982), Ann Ardis (New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism, 1990), Elaine Showalter (Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle, 1990), and Sally Ledger (The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle, 1997), and formalists with interests in the connection between narrative strategies and historical context, such as Robyn Warhol (Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel, 1989), Susan Lanser (Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice, 1992), and Alison Case (Plotting Women: Gender and Narration in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century British Novel, 1999).

Certainly, both types of criticism have contributed significantly to our comprehension of women’s agency in the late-nineteenth century, but our understanding would be enhanced by more thoroughly bringing together these two types of criticism. This dissertation, then, ties together these two approaches more fully, showing specifically how particular narrative strategies were discussed in the feminist critical apparatus of the 1890s and, of course, how these strategies were used by male authors of the period. The three-part definition of woman’s agency articulated by late-nineteenth-century feminists is one I believe is worth retaining as we continue to debate how women negotiate their subject positions in the world. Further, discussion of the corresponding narrative strategies should also have a place in our debate, since representations of woman’s agency have an impact (though not always intentional, as Butler has shown us) on real-life expressions of agency.
Consciousness is key to such expressions, and this is especially true in literary representations of agency, since readers often want to understand characters and their motives. Consciousness as shown through internal perspective is a direct line to characters’ motives. In fact, there is, among recent feminist readers and their late-nineteenth-century predecessors, a “readerly wish” for representation of consciousness through internal perspective, and, as I show in Chapter 1, which focuses on Gissing’s use of this narrative strategy, that readerly wish plays a significant role in feminist reception of male authors’ novels. I argue that although Gissing negotiated the feminist definition of realism, his own ideals about literary style prevented him from fully engaging their ideals. Though the degree of internal perspective Gissing uses increases dramatically between the publication of his last thoroughly working-class novel, *The Nether World* (1889), and his very middle-class novel, *In the Year of the Jubilee* (1894), his portrayal of the middle-class New Womanish Nancy Lord in *Jubilee* falls short of feminist ideals of the time. Although Gissing attempts to appeal to feminists through representation of consciousness, this method as a marker of woman’s agency is not sufficient on its own, and one of the purposes of this project is to give equal attention to other narrative strategies, such as dialogue and description of characters’ actions. In light of this, my other chapters examine male authors’ use of other narrative strategies. Of course, all four authors use all three narrative strategies to some degree, but certain narrative strategies emerge as more prominent and more illuminating in particular authors’ work. While I have attempted to discuss as many strategies as possible within each chapter, the scope of the project demands particular emphasis within each chapter as well.

In Chapter 2, I examine Hardy’s use of dialogue to show how expressions of agency through the spoken word were represented in the 1890s, and I argue that Hardy’s use of dialogue in *Tess* and *Jude* points to his own ambivalence about feminist issues, especially suffrage. Though expression of agency by women in his novels is found in dialogue, many of these expressions fail to produce tangible results for the female characters involved. In Chapter 3, I look at Meredith’s description of characters’ actions to show how expressions of agency through physical actions were represented during the period. For an author who was thoroughly criticized for his inability to write novels with
ample plot, Meredith’s description of actions is more extensive than one might expect. Looking at Meredith’s building of plot through the feminist lens of the period illuminates the complexity, and the feminist quality, of his use of this narrative strategy. Finally, in Chapter 4, I discuss the success experienced by Moore after writing *Esther Waters*, a novel feminist periodicals praised precisely because Moore had achieved a balance of all three strategies. By examining the success of Moore after the publication of this novel, I show the ways in which late-Victorian feminist ideals about the use of narrative strategies had a lasting impact into the early-twentieth century, since Moore’s attempt at ensuring the life of his work beyond his own death illustrates his desire to be remembered into the modernist period, in which the narrative strategies employed by authors would change radically.
Toward the beginning of In the Year of the Jubilee, George Gissing’s 1894 novel about a young, middle-class woman who struggles with her identity in a non-traditional marriage, the narrator draws for his readers a picture of the heroine, Nancy Lord. Through his external view of her, the narrator characterizes Nancy as healthy and presumably happy, “a well-grown girl of three and twenty, with the complexion and the mould of form which indicate, whatever else, habitual nourishment on good and plenteous food” (12). From this view, Nancy seems content, but once the internal perspective shifts from that of the narrator to that of Nancy herself, a somewhat different picture emerges: “Nancy hated it,” the narration reads. “She would have preferred to live even in a poor and grimy street which neighboured the main track of business and pleasure. Here she had spent as much of her life as she remembered,--from the end of her third year” (14). Living in a middle-class world where there are few opportunities for single women other than marriage leaves Nancy feeling confused and frustrated about her future. Despite her education at a well-reputed day-school, she is subject to her father’s ideals about societal roles for women, and as he imposes his plan that she will be supported by him until she marries, Nancy realizes that this way of living is unacceptable to her. While she is unsure about how to live her life as an independent women, she does know one thing. “All she knew was, that she wished to live, and not merely to vegetate” (14).
Given this early focus on Nancy’s awareness of the conditions of her life and her attempt to assert agency in a world that does not value her independence, Gissing’s representation of woman’s agency through Nancy should be central to current literary criticism about Jubilee. Yet the limited criticism about this novel more often focuses on Gissing’s satire of middle-class life than on Nancy’s role in this satire, and when these articles do discuss Nancy’s status, they usually characterize her as a female character who fails to assert agency in any significant manner. The sole exception to this general trend in Jubilee criticism is Constance Harsh, who in her 1994 article “Gissing’s In the Year of the Jubilee and the Epistemology of Resistance,” reads the novel as a more sympathetic representation of woman’s agency than most critics acknowledge. Harsh’s article does much to shift the attention of Jubilee criticism to a detailed discussion of Nancy’s agency, but, by limiting its discussion to this novel only, rather than Gissing’s development of female characters over the course of the late 1880s and the early 1890s, Harsh’s article ultimately characterizes Nancy as possessing perhaps more agency than she actually has. By contextualizing Gissing’s representation of woman’s agency through Nancy in at least two ways—in relation to the other novels he wrote in the late 1880s and the 1890s and in relation to his negotiations of the literary market of the period, especially the feminist perspective on realism—we can see that Gissing takes a decidedly middle ground in Jubilee, backing away from a full embrace of feminist ideals about woman’s agency.

Further, we can see the level of authorial anxiety felt by Gissing at the fin de siècle as he negotiated the 1890s literary market, an anxiety that sometimes paralyzed him to the point of constructing texts that emphasize complete neutrality on the subject of gender politics. Faced with various perspectives on realism in the 1890s, Gissing tried to rework his approach to representation in order to appeal both to his male colleagues and to feminists, but his own sense of literary style, established early in his career, prevented him from fully embracing forms of realism other than his own. Although Gissing temporarily embraced the feminist ideal that representation of woman’s agency should be achieved through a balance of narrative strategies in The Odd Women (1893), by the next year, with the publication of In the Year of the Jubilee, Gissing had retreated
from this aesthetic to a form of realism more firmly rooted in his own literary ideal: that characters are best built through dialogue rather than through other narrative strategies. While Gissing exhibits strong use of internal perspective in conjunction with dialogue early in *Jubilee*, his use of this essential combination in representing agency falls off as the novel progresses, as he retreats to his preferred narrative strategy of dialogue only.

I.

As I have shown in my introductory chapter, male authors’ negotiations of the late-nineteenth-century literary market were deeply influenced by gender issues of the period. Not only were male authors acutely aware of the ways in which their work was in competition with the work of women writers, often more popular and more commercially successful than their own, but also male authors felt much pressure to produce a particular literary mode, according to the ongoing debate over what constituted the realist novel. For Gissing, negotiating the debate over realism certainly involved encountering, and appropriating to some degree, naturalism and psychological realism, two extreme forms of realism that are helpful in establishing a spectrum upon which to consider the various forms of realistic representation. Gissing consistently read the works of both Emile Zola and Henry James, those authors most readily associated with naturalism and psychological realism respectively. Gissing’s letters and diary indicate that, over the years, he had read Zola’s *La Débâcle*, *Le Docteur Pascal*, *L’Argent*, *Rome*, and *Paris* and James’s *Partial Portraits*, *The American*, *The Tragic Muse*, *The Princess Casamassima*, and his short stories.

Of Zola, Gissing rarely had anything negative to say, despite his dislike for some of Zola’s disciples, especially Moore. In fact, letters show that early in Gissing’s career, when his work was being compared to Zola’s, Gissing was disappointed when he did not receive more attention from critics because of this association. Further, throughout Gissing’s career, he maintained a consistent curiosity about Zola. Still, Gissing recognized the masculinist extremism of Zola; he was shocked to see a number of women in the audience at a 1889 lecture about Zola (*Collected Letters* 4:44-45), and, in 1893, he promised Clara Collet that he would “never have thought of” sending her books by Zola.
By 1900, Gissing had “grown to abhor Zola’s grossness” and decided not to read *Fécondité* (8:74). Even as early as 1894, Gissing would make the remark to Eduard Bertz that Zola’s method was too “mechanical” for his taste, a statement that is quite similar to that James had made about Zola in his review of *Nana* (5:175).

Just as Gissing seemed to realize the danger of associating oneself too closely with the naturalism of Zola, he recognized problems with James’s psychological realism as well. While Gissing’s opinion of James in the early years is difficult to track, simply because the references to James in the letters and diary are rare and usually limited to short notations about the books was reading, after 1900, Gissing developed an acquaintanceship with James through H. G. Wells. All the letters between Gissing and Wells, and the occasional letter between Gissing and James, indicate that Gissing had great admiration for James, but Gabrielle Gissing’s notebook suggests that Gissing was sometimes less impressed by James than one might have thought. Not only did he criticize James for his treatment of Wells, but he also criticized James’s style; he believed that James’s “psychology” was “[v]ery subtle . . . even too subtle sometimes” (*Collected Letters* 9:276).

In addition to his awareness that naturalism and psychological realism were schools he must confront, Gissing also tried to separate his version of realism from that of his mid-century predecessors, especially Dickens, whose work Gissing certainly admired but did not take for a model. Gissing’s comments about realism, in his 1898 study of Dickens, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, are well-known. In evaluating Dickens, Gissing praises the author for his use of description and his development of characters with whom his audience could sympathize, but he also makes it clear that there are significant differences between mid- and late-century realism. The late-century realists, in Gissing’s view, do not take as their task the “moral veracity” seen in the work of Dickens—they do not have the “idealism” that Dickens’s work possesses—and this means that their approach puts less emphasis on *telling* about human life and more on *showing* this life, a distinction that becomes important when applied to specific narrative strategies, especially general narratorial comment (of which internal perspective and description of characters’ actions are elements) and dialogue.
Such a view of late-century realism, as a school that took as its method a less directive technique, is supported by Gissing’s own view, found in his letters to his brother Algernon, who also made his living as a novelist in the latter part of the century. In numerous letters, Gissing tells Algernon that the directive narration of these earlier novelists is to be avoided, and that, ultimately, “[T]he secret of art in fiction is the indirect. Nothing must be told too plumply” (Collected Letters 2:178-79). One particular letter from Gissing to Algernon, written on November 9, 1883, expresses well Gissing’s philosophy that character building was essential to the development of a realistic story, and that one should build character through a particular approach: combining use of dialogue with sparse, non-directive narratorial comment. In the letter, Gissing claims that he can judge Algernon’s work “without presumption” because he is currently finishing his third novel (2:178), and he responds to Algernon’s draft of the first chapter of this novel. Gissing focuses primarily on character and its relation to the development of the plot of the story and suggests to Algernon that, instead of including long descriptions of characters, he should allow dialogue between two characters, Lucy and Miss F., to start the story.

Let it [the first chapter] be the first day after Lucy’s arrival . . . and let Miss F. be describing the associations of the scene to her . . . pointing to Holy Island, to the Farnes, to the Cheviots. Let her be an enthusiast for Scott, and full of quotations from him. This will help to give her character. . . . I would in short let this first conversation contain only hints of the personal circumstances of each. . . . Now, only in the next chapter I would describe Lucy and her circumstances in detail. . . . In fact, unless you have some very extraordinary character, it’s better not to give a set description of face, etc., but to let hints come out now and then. Of course enough must be given from the first to let the reader know age and general character. Try and make Lucy a very distinct character; work out the effect of an original nature repressed under conventionality. Show how timid she is at first with her aunt, and how she expands as they discover similarity of tastes. (2:178)
This feedback from Gissing illustrates well his commitment to limiting long descriptions of character and commentary from the narrator. Shortly before these passages on character, Gissing has already told Algernon that he should be sure to “omit the instructive part of the description” of setting (2:177), and his remarks about character here seem to support a minimalist approach to commentary on everything the reader sees, whether it be setting or character. Although Gissing never refers to late-century realism directly in this letter, his approach to building character suggests that he is separating his approach from that of his mid-century predecessors. Further, he seems to be negotiating a middle ground between the two extremes of realism: naturalism, where description of character would include narratorial commentary about the character’s struggle to survive in the world in addition to any dialogue used, and psychological realism, where the internal perspective of the character, rather than dialogue alone, would be used to develop a sense of this particular person.

The importance of character dialogue in Gissing’s approach becomes even more clear when we look at his comments, often to Algernon, about the work of Hardy. Hardy, whose claims that realistic representation must include depiction of “the relations of the sexes” (“Candour” 16-17) and that an artist’s “sincerity” should be part of the criteria for judging their work (“Science of Fiction” 318) would become the core of the late-century “new realism,” was an important personal, professional, and artistic model for Gissing and his brother. While Gissing did not think Hardy a model realist (in 1894, he agreed with Algernon that Hardy was “not a realist” but one who wrote “fantasies on the rural theme” [5:224]), he did look to Hardy for his ability to build character through dialogue. Gissing’s letters to Algernon from the late 1880s and early 1890s include a significant number of references to Hardy’s strength in depicting characters, especially rustics. On January 31, 1887, Gissing writes to Algernon from Eastbourne, where he has been staying, and tells Algernon that he has met a shepherd whose “talk is pure Hardy” (3:79). Gissing has, of course, “made many notes” about this shepherd’s speech, and he vows to see the shepherd again before leaving Eastbourne. In the following year, in March, Gissing remarks about Algernon’s new manuscript, Joy Cometh in the Morning, that Algernon’s rustics are “second only to
Hardy’s” (3:195), and, by 1889, after reading the first volume of Algernon’s next novel, *Both of This Parish*, Gissing thought Algernon’s rustic characters to be “as good as Hardy, in places” (4:90). Finally, in 1893, Gissing reported to Algernon with happiness that a “most laudatory” review of Algernon’s *Between Two Opinions* had appeared in the *Saturday Review* and included a comparison of Algernon’s writing to Hardy’s (5:102-03).

Still, Gissing did not think that Hardy’s characters were perfect; he faulted Hardy’s ability to develop characters of the higher classes, claiming that they could not compare to his rustics. On September 3, 1889, Gissing tells his sister Ellen, who has apparently asked about Hardy’s work, that his “range is narrow,” and, while he captures rural life well, he is unable to do anything outside this genre. Of characters not rustic, Gissing writes, “Whenever he deals with people of the higher classes, his work becomes valueless. In this way he has spoilt a great deal of his last book ‘The Woodlanders’; it contains some of his finest country scenes, and also some of his most futile efforts to depict the character of intellectual people” (4:105). Likewise, Gissing faults Algernon when he does not use dialogue to its best extent. Writing of Algernon’s *Joy Cometh in the Morning*, Gissing iterates the strength of the rustics and then advises Algernon to be careful about overexpression of character through dialogue, that he should use “restraint” in using “violent” language to express a character’s emotions through dialogue, as he has with the character Reginald (3:195).

Despite Hardy’s inability to develop certain types of characters through dialogue, Gissing’s choice of him as model for his own writing (and Algernon’s) is significant, since such a choice might be attributed precisely to the fact that Hardy does not represent an extreme choice on the realism spectrum, as associating himself with Zola or James would have been. Though Hardy and Gissing have very different styles, they are similar in the sense that both were clearly situated somewhere in-between Zola and James in terms of literary mode, rather than firmly aligned with either writer’s dominant mode. Hardy, because of his unique style and especially his reliance on dialogue, could play a much larger role in Gissing’s thinking on the debate over realism than either Zola or James could. If nothing else, Hardy offered yet another variation of late-century realism from which Gissing and other male authors could work as they

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negotiated the complex market of the time.

II.

Still, it was not only Gissing’s sense of mid-Victorian realism and its late-century variations, such as those seen in the work of Hardy, Zola, and James, that influenced his thinking about literary modes. The pressure to produce a particular mode was intensified by the presence of women writers in the market and also by the influence of newly-emerging feminist periodicals, which reviewed books according to their own standards and, thus, contributed an increasingly important perspective to the debate over realism. While Gissing’s work was not reviewed by Shaftes, as I indicate in my introductory chapter, it was reviewed by The Woman’s Herald. In fact, Gissing read and was pleased with the magazine’s review of The Odd Women (Collected Letters 120), which they saw as at least as realist as Grand’s The Heavenly Twins. This comparison was a fine compliment, considering the regularity with which The Woman’s Herald wrote about and praised Grand’s novel. 35

In The Woman’s Herald’s review of The Odd Women, the reviewer not only compares Gissing’s novel to The Heavenly Twins but also praises Gissing’s tendency to build character through dialogue rather than through action, a compliment he surely would have appreciated, given his own investment in this method of building character. 36 Writes the reviewer, “The action proceeds in the slow, seemingly inevitable manner which marks the movement of nature itself. The characters have not to subordinate themselves to the necessities of the plot, but work out their destinies in a manner perfectly compatible with their circumstances and their individualities” (281). Then, describing the plot for the reader, the reviewer emphasizes Gissing’s use of dialogue, especially as a means for women to discuss the conditions of their lives. First, the reviewer cites a conversation between Virginia and Alice Madden, who discuss how to live on the meagre savings they have (281), and then the reviewer turns to Rhoda Nunn, who not only can talk about the desperate conditions of women’s lives but also do something about it. “This Miss Nunn,” writes the reviewer, “is the most striking character in the book--one of the most striking characters in recent fiction. . . . A keen
opponent of marriage, she was never tired of preaching the personal completeness of every woman; and the conversations in which she shares are as suggestive and stimulating as anything upon the subject of woman’s position that has lately appeared” (281).

The reviewer iterates the importance of dialogue when summing up the novel. It is the “conversations—conversations which, although almost entirely polemical, seem, nevertheless, for some reason, never to overstep the limits of the novelist’s art” (282) that are the most important aspect of the book, more important than the tragedy of the unhappy marriage of Monica Madden and her husband. Ultimately, the reviewer says, all the “incidents and episodes” of the novel, including the marriage of Monica and her husband, are used to capture the lives of the characters in the novel. Gissing does this so well that the reviewer believes The Odd Women to be “as rich and varied a picture of modern life as any novelist has given us” (282). The attention given in this review to dialogue, especially as a method for resisting cultural norms that support the subordination of women, shows the importance of particular narrative strategies to the new realistic mode advocated by feminist literary critics. Although this particular review does not articulate the three-part feminist definition for successful representation of woman’s agency, it does thoroughly address one aspect of this definition.

In addition to the review in The Woman’s Herald, The Odd Women was also reviewed by Clementina Black for the Illustrated London News. While the Illustrated London News was a decidedly mainstream magazine, Black herself had strong ties to the feminist community. Known for her advocacy on working-class women’s issues especially, Black often expresses a perspective in her reviews that is as feminist as those found in deliberately feminist periodicals. In her review of The Odd Women, Black not only addresses Gissing’s use of dialogue to promote a feminist message to readers but also connects his use of dialogue to his use of the other methods of expressing agency, including increased consciousness and physical actions. Black opens her review with the claim that The Odd Women is “a distinct advance upon anything which [Gissing] has done yet” (222), in part because he covers such a wide array of odd women, some of whom have unhappy lives but others who “make the bright spot in a gloomy picture”
because they are able to work together and support themselves (223). Black then draws
attention to Gissing’s use of dialogue, especially between these successful women, as one
of the real achievements of the novel. She writes:

In the conversations of these women is contained the argumentative kernel
of the book; and Mr. Gissing has succeeded in the feat, so often
attempted in the modern novel, but so seldom achieved, of giving to
discussions of social problems the twofold interest attaching to them in
real life—an interest, namely, in the thing said, for its own sake, and an
interest in it as a display of character on the part of the person saying it.
(223)

In other words, as Gissing himself hoped, dialogue becomes a way of building character,
though, as Black points out, it also retains its own worth—in this case, the ability to
express a feminist message.

Despite Black’s praise of Gissing’s use of dialogue, she takes issue with his
characterization of Rhoda Nunn’s actions as the novel progresses. While the
conversations between Rhoda and her unconventional love-interest Everard Barfoot are
an example of Gissing’s ability to bring the “twofold interest” to readers, Black is
disappointed in Gissing’s failure to bring these two characters together in what she
believes would be a “real marriage—that is to say, an equal union, in which each would
respect the freedom and individuality of the other, and in which each would find the
completest development” (223). Black thinks Gissing’s description of Rhoda’s actions to
be “gravely out of character” (223). Rhoda, Black explains, would not have reacted to
the news that Everard has engaged in suspect behavior with another woman as she
does; that Gissing has Rhoda act in the manner of a young, immature woman rather than
her usual mature manner is a mistake. Further, in making Rhoda a woman who cannot
bring herself to admit her temporary immaturity to Everard, Gissing depicts Rhoda as
“an ungenerous, a selfish, and especially an undisciplined woman, and it is out of
keeping with all the previous history of Rhoda Nunn. It would almost seem as if hatred
of the conventional ‘happy ending’ had led Mr. Gissing to that same sacrifice of truthful
portraiture into which so many of his predecessors have been betrayed by their love of

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it” (224). In questioning Gissing’s depiction of Rhoda’s actions, Black, though unmindful of the way in which Rhoda consistently values her important feminist work over a personal relationship with a man, does draw attention to the connection between consciousness, spoken word, and physical actions in expressions of woman’s agency. It is Rhoda’s intellectual development, Black suggests, that Gissing forgets in the course of writing the novel, and it is the connection between spoken word and physical action, which enables women to create new definitions of already-existing institutions such as marriage, that Gissing fails to achieve in *The Odd Women*.

Both of these reviews of *The Odd Women*, then, thoroughly cover Gissing’s strong use of dialogue in building character, which shows that Gissing’s own ideal about realism was not so far from the feminist ideal. Still, one point I want to make about the feminist definition of realism, as articulated in *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald*, is that dialogue alone cannot adequately represent woman’s agency. In fact, the review of *The Odd Women* in *The Woman’s Herald* could say more about the other narrative strategies employed by Gissing, for he does achieve a fairly strong balance of internal perspective, dialogue, and description of characters’ actions in the novel, and Clementina Black’s review could, by looking more closely at the ways in which specific narrative strategies work, uncover a more sympathetic reading of Gissing’s characterization of Rhoda’s actions. If we turn to a brief analysis of the text, we can see how these feminist reviews might have been more complete in their analyses.

*The Odd Women* is remarkable, from a feminist perspective, for Gissing’s successful combination of narrative strategies to represent successful assertion of woman’s agency on the part of Rhoda Nunn. Gissing employs an especially tight rhetorical style in this novel that is not present in many of his other novels concerned with woman’s agency—*The Unclassed* (1884), *The Nether World* (1889), and *In the Year of the Jubilee* in particular. While the connections between the various narrative strategies tend to be loose in these novels, in *The Odd Women*, Gissing’s use of Rhoda’s internal perspective is consistently and effectively tied to resistance through dialogue and physical actions. Gissing’s use of Rhoda’s internal perspective early in the novel is sparse, but this use of it makes sense, given that Rhoda is presented as a woman of
action, already confident in her feminist beliefs and focused on implementing these beliefs in a practical manner through her work at Mrs. Barfoot’s school. Though there are brief instances of Rhoda’s internal perspective early on, as when she goes to see Virginia Madden about opening a preparatory school and perceives that such a project is beyond Virginia’s scope of vision (25-26) and when she and Mrs. Barfoot argue over the “character” of Bella Royston, a pupil who has left the school and become a “kept” woman (61-68), it is more common to see Gissing’s use of internal perspective to depict Monica Madden early in the novel. Monica, who works for a draper, engages in significantly more reflection early in the novel, since she is unsure about her future and doubtful about her chances of marrying. Given this need for reflection, it is not surprising that Monica’s internal perspective is highlighted, whereas Rhoda’s is not. We first see Monica’s internal perspective in Chapter 4, titled “Monica’s Majority,” in which Monica reflects on her life in comparison to her sisters’ lives and in which she first encounters the man, Edmund Widdowson, she will eventually marry. In addition to focusing on Monica’s thoughts in Chapter 4, her internal perspective is also the main method of narration in Chapters 7 and 12, points in the story where Rhoda’s internal perspective is still not present and development of Rhoda’s character occurs through speech and actions instead of interior thoughts.

To ignore Rhoda’s internal perspective early in the novel makes sense, then, given the different personalities of Rhoda and Monica, and Gissing continues this method of developing Rhoda’s character primarily through speech and actions rather than her interior thoughts until approximately halfway through the novel. It is only after Rhoda’s relationship with Everard Barfoot has progressed significantly and Rhoda has developed a “plan” to convince Everard to ask for traditional marriage rather than a free union that Gissing begins to use Rhoda’s internal perspective. In Chapter 14, titled “Motives Meeting,” Rhoda finally decides that she will let Everard pursue her, but only because she wants to reject him and make her own belief in living the life of the odd woman stronger. At the beginning of the first sustained section of narration through Rhoda’s internal perspective, she reflects, “No man had ever made love to her; no man, to her knowledge, had ever been tempted to do so. In certain moods she derived
satisfaction from this thought, using it to strengthen her life’s purpose” (166). After a long monologue on her “complex” feelings for Everard, in which she recognizes that she at least “regard[s] him with sexual curiosity,” Rhoda thinks that she can make Everard ask her to marry him, in the traditional manner rather than in the “free union” style he advocates.

If he loved her, these theories would sooner or later be swept aside; he would plead with her to become his legal wife. To that point she desired to bring him. Offer what he might, she would not accept it. . . . To reject a lover in so many respects desirable, whom so many women might envy her, would fortify her self-esteem, and enable her to go forward in the chosen path with firmer tread. (168)

This sustained moment of internal perspective makes clear the plan Rhoda has in mind, and from this moment, Gissing effectively couples internal perspective with direct speech and action, as Rhoda resists cultural norms that support the subordination of women through her relationship with Everard. For example, when Everard confesses his love to Rhoda in Chapter 17, titled “The Triumph,” she firmly rejects him, politely saying, “It is usual, I think--if one may trust the novels--for a woman to return thanks when an offer of this kind has been made to her. So--thank you very much, Mr. Barfoot” (207). When Barfoot refuses to accept her polite rejection, begging her to speak to him in “plain, honest words” (207) and claiming that it is her “womanly resistance” that appeals to him (209), she declares that she “never shall [marry],” for “[i]t would interfere hopelessly with the best part of my life,” her life at the school (209). These moments of resistance through direct speech, as well as her action of standing up so that Everard will leave (210), is coupled with Rhoda’s internal perspective, which explains to readers her thoughts after Everard has left. “She had gained her wish, had enjoyed her triumph. A raising of the finger and Everard Barfoot would marry her. Assured of that, she felt a new contentment in life” (213).

This effective combination of narrative strategies appears at other times in the novel, as in Chapter 21, “Towards the Decisive,” in which Rhoda’s internal perspective reveals that she suspects Monica Madden of having an affair with Everard (in fact, it is
another man, named Bevis) and prompts Rhoda to take action by going to confront Monica (249). It also appears in Chapter 25, “The Fate of the Ideal,” in which Rhoda’s internal perspective reveals her decision to spend time with Everard, despite her continued suspicion that he is having an affair with Monica, in order to convince him to propose to her (291). These instances of dialogue and/or description of actions coupled with internal perspective serve to iterate the first sustained instance of Rhoda’s internal perspective, in which her plan to control Everard becomes central to her thoughts. It is striking, given Gissing’s effective combination of narrative strategies, that the two reviews of *The Odd Women* discussed earlier do not include more discussion of internal perspective as a narrative strategy, and looking to reviews of women writers’ novels in the feminist periodicals is helpful in sorting out why this is the case.

Unlike the reviews of *The Odd Women*, in which internal perspective is not emphasized as much as it might be, many of the feminist reviews of novels by women writers do include special attention to internal perspective, which is perhaps the most important narrative strategy for developing successful representations of woman’s agency according to the feminist ideal. Though feminists never refer to internal perspective explicitly, it is clear from these reviews that they had a “readerly wish” for representation of agency through internal perspective. This readerly wish is rooted in the belief that certain types of thought could change the world, and this belief is seen in an article that ran in the first issue of *Shafts*, titled “Shafts of Thought.” Though its claims about the power of thought look pseudo-scientific now, this article captures the real belief in the power of thought of the time, especially by feminists intent on making the world a better place for women. Arguing that many significant scientific discoveries, such as steam, electricity, and ether, are concerned with “the realm of thought, and point to the existence of psychic powers” (2), author Edith Ward explains that people have yet to understand how their own thoughts can be used to change the world, as well as how their thoughts can be influenced by the thoughts of others. Ward especially sees women as pioneers in the field of “thought-influence,” for she states: “The female figure who hurls the shafts of light into the dark places of sin, injustice, and ignorance typifies the position in which every human soul stands, whose thoughts are pure and true, and
whose will is strong to follow the path of duty” (2).

This statement suggests that speech and action are not simply the active results of thoughts, though Ward herself does articulate this position, when she writes, “[I]t is the belief of many wise minds that we are on the verge of discoveries which will prove that thought creates on the ethereal plane vibrations which travel until they are neutralised by transformation into action on the material plane” (2). Ward goes beyond this argument, to say that thought has its own power. “Every human soul,” explains Ward, “is constantly engaged in creating and throwing off germs of thought, good or bad, exactly as germs are being created and thrown off by the physical system[;] these traverse the ether as microbes traverse the atmosphere, and fall upon the soil of other minds as physical germs upon the body” (2). The result of this, Ward continues, is full of terrible significance. . . . It means that each one of us who is living a life of apparent honour and respectability may be responsible to a greater or less degree for the sinking of some erring brother or sister into the slough of actual crime. . . . But, on the other hand, we have the glorious assurance that every pure unselfish aspiration streams forth no less potently to aid and strengthen the struggles of upstriving souls. (2)

Although Ward does not address the role of the writer in this design, her concluding paragraph, with its emphasis on “women and men engaged in active work” (2), suggests that the writer does have a role, and in Shafts’s review of Sarah Grand’s The Heavenly Twins, which ran approximately six months after Ward’s “Shafts of Thoughts,” the anonymous reviewer credits Grand with doing precisely the work of thought-influence advocated in Ward’s article. Beginning with the quotation “Once in a lifetime is uttered a word / That is not forgotten as soon as ’tis heard,” the reviewer declares,

“\n
These words and deeds are so rare, so full of living energy, gather, gather like the stars in the firmament of time as the ages roll along, and make the lights and the worlds of future generations. This book will take its place among that deathless company; it will accomplish the work for which it has been sent forth; those who read it will have themselves to blame if
Not only does the reviewer suggest that books operate in a manner similar to people, sending particular thoughts through the ether to influence the minds of others, but also the reviewer implies that Grand, as an author, participates in this process, by imparting thoughts to her characters, which are then passed on to readers.

[S]o skilfully has the clever author brought her art to bear upon each chapter, incident, and individual character combining to make up the wondrous whole, that readers are under the pleasing delusion that they make their own deductions. . . . Has the writer intended all this, or has she imparted to each character and incident some of her own marvellous creative force, so that thoughts and deductions flow from all continously, with immortal power. . . . The personalities [in the novel] . . . create within us thoughts that breathe and burn, thoughts that grow, stretching forth as they take into themselves the nourishment here supplied. (268)

The perspective expressed in Shaws highlights the degree to which feminists of the 1890s valued increased consciousness and looked for it in literary representations.

The Woman’s Herald review of The Heavenly Twins is somewhat more traditional in its approach to literary analysis, but it shows clearly how increased consciousness is expressed through specific narrative strategies. Though The Woman’s Herald reviewer does not use the term “internal perspective,” it is clear that the reviewer’s admiration for Grand can be attributed to the author’s attention to the female protagonist’s consciousness. In the first part of the reviewer’s discussion of the novel (which is summarized in detail, in part because the magazine is aware that the popularity of the novel is making it difficult for readers to obtain), the reviewer emphasizes the development of Evadne’s mind. The reviewer says that “her mind was prone to experiment with every item of information it gathered” (123) and that Evadne’s traditional father’s ideas about the role of women in society “fired whole trains of reflection, and lighted her to conclusions quite other than those at which he had arrived himself” (123). Telling of Evadne’s decision to keep a Commonplace Book, in which she records ideas about all the books she has read, the reviewer reminds readers that one of
the books Evadne assesses is Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, which Evadne believes illustrates the “self-interest and injustice of men” and the “fatal ignorance and slavish sympathy of women” (123). In the next installment of the review (it spanned four issues altogether), the reviewer informs readers that Evadne’s assessment of *Tom Jones* has become a topic of debate in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which also reviewed Grand’s novel. Apparently, the *Pall Mall* reviewer had stated that Sarah Grand herself should “study life from the standpoint of Tom Jones” (qtd. in “Marriage” 140), since his standpoint was one worth adopting. To this suggestion, W. T. Stead had written in, pointing out that were Grand to do this, she would be adopting the perspective of “a libertine who, after an immoral intimacy with a girl of sixteen, commits adultery with a Mrs. Waters, and afterwards becomes a mercenary paramour of an old lady of fashion” (140), a standpoint Stead (and, presumably, many feminists) clearly would not advocate.

This attention to the issue of perspective, as a way to re-enter discussion of the novel, is significant, since it highlights the effect perspective can have on representations of human life. In fact, it is Evadne’s feminist perspective, used by Grand in lieu of a Tom Jonesian perspective, that impresses the reviewer for *The Woman’s Herald*. When Evadne loses this feminist perspective part of the way through the novel, the reviewer comments on this development. Regarding the moment in the text when Evadne promises her husband that she will not participate in “public movements,” including the women’s rights movement, the reviewer writes, “From that moment Evadne ceases to be the Evadne of the first volume, and shrivels into an atrophied, listless, indifferent woman of fashion” (186). The reviewer bemoans this moment, saying, “This is the greatest improbability in the story... The defect in Evadne, as a study of female characters, is the lack of emotion, of what may be called distinctively womanliness. There is in her the anatomy of a fine woman, but the flesh is withered, and the skin is dry and parched” (186). This commentary on the “improbability” of this retrogression of Evadne’s mind (she also stops reading when she marries) is stated in much the same language used by mainstream reviewers when assessing the realism of the work of authors discussed in this dissertation, indicating that, for *The Woman’s Herald* reviewer, to consistently show the intellectual development of central female characters is to fulfill at least part of the
Why *The Woman’s Herald* and Clementina Black do not make more of Gissing’s use of internal perspective in their reviews of *The Odd Women* is difficult to pinpoint, but, as I will show in succeeding chapters, it is true that feminist reviewers had a tendency to be somewhat less critical of male authors than they were of female authors; as long as male authors fulfilled feminist ideals to some degree, the reviewers praised them for their effort. Meredith, for example, published novels in the 1890s that certainly fell short of feminist ideals, and, yet, feminists were happy to keep attention on past accomplishments by Meredith, such as his very popular *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), rather than fault him for his more recent failures. Here, it is perhaps the case that the feminist reviewers are simply drawing attention to what they found especially good in Gissing’s work, rather than emphasizing what might be less-than-perfect in their view (such as his description of characters’ actions, as Black’s review points out).

It is also true that many feminist magazines supplemented their equality-based philosophy with articles expressing difference-based forms of feminism, which claimed that realistic representation of woman’s agency, especially through internal perspective, was more likely to occur in the work of female authors than in the work of male authors. I have already cited M. H. Krout’s article on the literary tradition committed to accurate representations of women, which Krout characterizes as including both men and women writers, but there are many other articles that focus only on women writers, who were thought by some feminists to bring special womanly insight to literary texts in a way male authors cannot. For example, “Is the Present Increase in Women Authors a Gain to Literature?,” which ran in *Shafts*, characterizes women writers as responsible for bringing a modern tone to literature. Since the lives of women writers have been concerned primarily with domestic detail rather than with the larger world, the author of the article claims, they are more likely to write “from inside” rather than as “on-lookers” (240). Hence, they have contributed a “psychological” quality to the literary tradition, especially the “introspection of character and motive” (240), which cannot be found as easily in the works of men. While the author of this article admits that it is often impossible to separate the work of a man from that of a woman, and while members of
both sexes can write in a powerful and realistic manner, it is “in subtle touches, rare intuition, that the woman is revealed” (240). The author of this article goes so far as to say that, through the work of women writers, “The novel has from mere story-telling developed into a study of life. We no longer read either poetry or novels for the simple pleasure of verse and tale. We have, in accordance with the spirit of the times, come to search for truths behind show, for soul beyond flesh, and it is women authors who have brought about this change” (240). This attitude toward the role of women writers in the literary tradition may help explain why we often find discussion of the importance of consciousness in reviews of women writers but find it less regularly in reviews of books by male authors.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is true that feminists of the period, not to mention mainstream critics, were just beginning to articulate literary terminology for certain narrative strategies. This is especially true for internal perspective, since although it is not the same as “stream of consciousness,” the advent of this modernist technique did help draw attention to narrative strategies that depict characters’ interior thoughts. Generally, George Egerton’s *Keynotes* (1893) is considered the first example of a late-Victorian work that pays close attention to the consciousness of female characters, and, as Sally Ledger points out in *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (1997), it is precisely Egerton’s “protomodernist” mode that makes *Keynotes* such a clear example. Interestingly, neither *Shafts* nor *The Woman’s Herald* pays much attention to Egerton, perhaps because Egerton was associated with decadent, “yellow book” writing, something with which these feminist periodicals were not quite ready to associate themselves. To embrace the work of Egerton would have meant to privilege consciousness/internal perspective over the spoken word/dialogue and physical actions/description of characters’ actions. While *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald* show a distinct interest in the representation of woman’s agency through consciousness, they are not prepared to embrace protomodernist technique fully; instead, they want to retain a realist approach to representing woman’s agency through a balance of narrative strategies.
III.

If we turn to analysis of Gissing’s *Jubilee*, we can see the ways in which his representation of woman’s agency varied over the course of the 1890s and how he responded to the feminist aesthetic. As is typical of Gissing’s novels, *Jubilee* focuses on an ensemble cast of characters, many of whom are characterized through internal perspective early in the story. But, as I detailed at the beginning of this chapter, it is Nancy Lord whose sustained internal perspective is shown in the novel first, making her a potentially central character of the novel. Internal perspective, of course, is not the only criterion for establishing centrality; the relationship between characters and instabilities in the story is another factor, and, in fact, the first instance of Nancy’s sustained internal perspective is preceded by scenes in which she is introduced through the dialogue of other characters, who see Nancy as a part of a conflict between her family and theirs (8-9), as well as through the perspective of the narrator, who characterizes her as a young woman wearied by her middle-class lifestyle (12-13). Still, to use Nancy’s internal perspective so early in the novel is significant, since it seems to answer the feminist ideal that to represent human life in the late-Victorian period, one needed to show women’s consciousness as well as men’s. Further, in contrast to the male/female relationships depicted in *The Nether World* (Sidney Kirkwood and Jane Snowden) and *The Odd Women* (Everard and Rhoda), where the internal perspective of the male half of the pair introduces the relationship and typically dominates scenes in which the emotions of the relationship are the focus, in *Jubilee*, it is Nancy’s internal perspective that introduces the relationship between her and Lionel Tarrant, suggesting that perhaps *Jubilee* will be even more feminist than Gissing’s previous work. However, that turns out not to be the case, and, by examining how Gissing uses internal perspective in the scenes between Nancy and Lionel, as well as how he uses it in conjunction with other narrative strategies, we can see why this is true.

Nancy’s first significant encounter with Lionel occurs along the beach while she is on holiday with her friend Jessica Morgan and Jessica’s mother Mrs. Morgan. The scene begins through the narrator’s perspective, and Nancy’s actions, rather than her thoughts, dominate. She is somewhat startled by Lionel’s presence and remains quiet during the
conversation the other women have with him. Yet, as soon as Lionel departs, the perspective shifts to that of Nancy, and readers learn her thoughts about Lionel and their coincidental meeting. Not only does Nancy wonder whether Lionel has purposely come to meet her, but also she ponders how she feels about him. Although she has previously thought Lionel too pompous to waste her time on him, the “physical attraction of which she had always been conscious in Tarrant’s presence seemed to have grown stronger since she had dismissed him from her mind. Comparing him with Luckworth Crewe, [a man who has been courting Nancy in London,] she felt only a contemptuous distaste for the coarse vitality and vigour, whereto she had half surrendered herself, when hopeless of the more ambitious desire” (113). Now, more open to a relationship with Lionel, the next time Nancy sees him she still notices his air of superiority and at first utters hostile replies to his questions, which are narrated once again through her internal perspective. But remembering that Lionel is a better catch than Luckworth, and upon hearing Lionel flatter her intelligence, Nancy warms to him. “Nancy yielded to the charm of his voice and conversed freely. It began to seem not impossible that he found some pleasure in her society” (114). Still, some uncertainty about Lionel remains, and, during another early meeting with him, Nancy’s internal perspective reveals this uncertainty. When Lionel asks whether Nancy will walk with him alone in the country, an act that might be frowned upon by Mrs. Morgan, a shift from the narrator’s internal perspective to Nancy’s highlights this uncertainty.

In this moment her thoughts had turned to Luckworth Crewe, and she was asking herself why this invitation of Tarrant’s affected her so very differently from anything she had felt when Crewe begged her to meet him in London. With [Crewe] she could go anywhere, enjoying a genuine independence, a complete self-confidence, thinking her unconventional behaviour merely good fun. Tarrant’s proposal startled her. She was not the mistress of the situation, as when trifling with Crewe. A sense of peril caused her heart to beat quickly. (118)

Nancy’s internal perspective is more prevalent than Lionel’s in the early depictions of their relationship, with Lionel’s character remaining largely undefined until
after he proposes marriage, an event occurring nearly 150 pages into the book. Still, it is true that following the narrator’s characterization of Lionel at the beginning of Part III, appropriately titled “Into Bondage” to capture what marriage will mean for both Lionel and Nancy, Lionel’s internal perspective begins to dominate in the scenes between him and Nancy. This shift in internal perspective validates the charge by literary critics such as Selig, Sloan, and Harman that Gissing lets a male character usurp the power of his female protagonist, and from this point to the end of the novel, the struggle between Nancy and Lionel, and their perspectives on marriage, intensifies. While I agree with Constance Harsh’s argument that the usurpation of Nancy’s perspective by Lionel Tarrant is not absolute, and that the narrator’s acceptance of Nancy’s perspective, expressed through internal perspective, is significant to our understanding of the degree of agency Nancy possesses, I believe that it is the combination of internal perspective with other narrative strategies, especially dialogue, rather than the instances of internal perspective alone, that initially makes Nancy a “center of consciousness” in the novel. I will return to the issue of whose perspective controls the ending of the novel later, but, for now, I would like to discuss in detail how Gissing moves from Nancy’s internal perspective to her dialogue early in the novel, since the movement between those two narrative strategies shows why we might expect Nancy to assert agency throughout the course of the novel.

As I have already explained, Gissing’s use of internal perspective to introduce Nancy Lord is one factor marking her as a potentially central character of the novel, and, as we learn from his description of her, another reason for readers to think she might be central is because she is the one character depicted at the beginning of the novel who feels compelled to resist middle-class life. Early in the novel, Nancy’s resistance to cultural norms that support the subordination of women is aimed directly at her father, who seeks to keep Nancy close to home so that she will marry his business partner, Samuel Barmby. Having established Nancy’s independence of mind through use of internal perspective, Gissing then uses dialogue to build her character, and he uses internal perspective and dialogue in combination to effective ends, showing that agency can, and sometimes must, be expressed through multiple methods. The introduction of
Nancy through internal perspective is quickly followed by a scene in which Nancy discusses the difficulties with her father with her friend Jessica Morgan and her wish to break out of her everyday world by attending the Jubilee celebration (17-18) and then a scene in which Nancy confronts her father directly about going to the Jubilee (27-29). In other words, the confidence gained by Nancy through her awareness of the conditions of her life, shown through internal perspective, is a precursor to her acts of resistance through the spoken word. She thinks before she speaks and acts, and it is the thoughts about the conditions of her life that compel her to plan and then execute resistance to her father’s wish that she not attend the Jubilee.

This pattern, in which internal perspective and dialogue are used in conjunction with each other to show how expression of agency occurs, is typical early on in *Jubilee*, but it does not guarantee that assertions of woman’s agency are always successful. While Nancy strongly resists her father’s attempt to keep her at home and while she convinces him to let her go to the Jubilee, she also is willing to compromise with her father, since she agrees to let Barmby accompany her to the event. Nancy’s willingness to compromise suggests that she is one who goes for long-term results over the short-term effects. She temporarily concedes power to her father, recognizing that all change does not happen through the spoken word alone, and waits for a later moment, at the Jubilee, to assert agency in a stronger, more action-oriented way. When Nancy arrives at the Jubilee celebration, she quickly loses Barmby and walks alone through the crowds, in what is depicted as a moment of complete freedom for Nancy. As Nancy and Barmby walk along the street,

Nancy looked eagerly about her, impatient for the dark, wishing the throng would sweep her away. In Pall Mall, Barmby felt it incumbent upon him to name the several clubs. . . . As he stood staring in doubt at one of the coldly insolent façades, . . . Nancy saw that her moment had come. She darted off. . . . She had escaped to enjoy herself, and the sense of freedom soon overcame anxieties. (67-68)

This moment is one in which consciousness, and the resulting action from this consciousness, is temporarily valued over the power of the spoken word; to tell Barmby
that she wants to walk alone would involve, at best, compromise and, at worst, submission to his judgment of the situation, which one imagines would be along the lines of her father’s—a definitive “no.” In choosing not to engage Barmby in conversational debate before deserting him, Nancy seems to recognize that her willingness to talk things out with people who hold opposing opinions often puts her in the situation of compromising; here, she decides to circumvent such compromise in order to achieve the results she wants. Nevertheless, Nancy’s tendency to compromise with her father early in the novel seems to foreshadow the kind of compromising Nancy will do with Lionel Tarrant over the concept of the “free union” later in the novel.

Nancy’s resistance to Lionel is best divided into two parts: the resistance she exhibits before Lionel goes to the Bahamas and “abandons” her, and the resistance she exhibits after Lionel returns to England and attempts to negotiate a non-traditional marriage with her. The resistance she exhibits before Lionel’s departure is fairly muted, in part because she is falling in love with Lionel and finds his non-traditional perspectives on marriage charming. Also, despite Lionel’s objections to traditional marriage, he goes along with the notion of being married with relative ease, making it unnecessary for Nancy to resist too much at this point. Still, the occasional moments of resistance by Nancy early in their relationship are important, since Nancy’s relationship with Lionel seems to take on many of the qualities of her relationship with her father. Further, the early conflicts between Nancy and Lionel establish the dynamic that will characterize their relationship once they attempt to negotiate a non-traditional marriage later in the story.

When Lionel visits Nancy while she is on holiday at Teignmouth, not only do they argue over which paths to take while out walking together (120-21) but also encounter conflict in their perspectives on education. When Nancy chooses Helmholtz’s “Lectures on Scientific Subjects” instead of a “pretty” novel at the local lending library, Lionel first exclaims, “Merciful heavens! You mean to read that?,” and then asserts that one would spend one’s time better reading poetry. In fact, Nancy has chosen the Helmholtz because she wants to show Lionel that she has the ability for “severe reading” (120), a decision indicated to readers through her internal perspective. When
Lionel questions her choice, the narrator shows Nancy’s tendency to resist by stating, “On an instinct of resistance, Nancy pretended that the exact sciences were her favourite study” (121). While Lionel knows Helmholtz (“I used to grind at science because everybody talked science,” he says) and while he lets Nancy read him a section of Helmholtz on their walk, he follows her reading up with the poetry of Keats, whom he thinks is the better choice for reading on a romantic walk (124-25). This conflict between Nancy and Lionel over reading material is significant, for it illustrates their tendency to disagree on most matters early in the relationship.

Although Nancy submits to Lionel’s opinion that Keats is better than Helmholtz, as well as many of Lionel’s other opinions as he courts her, when she learns that Lionel is going to leave England for the Bahamas shortly after marrying her and learning that she is pregnant, her resistance to Lionel is much stronger. Nancy pleads with Lionel to stay in England, even if it means that she must come clean about her marriage to him and lose the money her father has bequeathed her, on the condition that she not marry before age twenty-six (195-96). This resistance from Nancy is again set up by representation of her interior thoughts by the narrator. When Lionel suggests that he may have to do something Nancy will not like, the narrator comments, “For Nancy, the pause [in conversation] was charged with apprehensions; she seemed to discover in her husband’s face a purpose which he knew could exact her resistance” (194). Although Lionel eventually convinces Nancy that he must leave the country in order for them to have any chance at supporting themselves, Nancy later resists this decision by adopting the attitude that as long as Lionel is gone, she will once again be “independent” of him. “If you choose to go away,” she tells him, “I choose to think as little of you as possible. That’s common sense, isn’t it?” (206). When Lionel replies by saying, “Be as independent as you like . . . only keep your love for me,” Nancy’s reply points out his double standard. “Oh, indeed! It’s your experience, is it, that the two things can go together? That’s the difference between man and woman, I suppose. I shall love you just as little as possible--and how little that will be, perhaps I had better not tell you” (206-07).
The conflict set up between Lionel and Nancy before he leaves, especially in terms of their differing views on the way relationships should work, carries over to the resistance Nancy exerts after Lionel finally returns to England, a year after leaving Nancy and long after Nancy has decided that she has been abandoned by him. The turning point for Nancy seems to come after one of Nancy’s neighbors learns of Nancy’s pregnancy from Luckworth Crewe and confronts Nancy about it. In a moment of self-reflection, expressed narratively in a section in which Nancy’s internal perspective dominates, Nancy comes to the conclusion that she has never been Lionel’s wife but only his mistress. “[S]he looked back in the stern spirit of a woman judging another’s frailty. . . . Tarrant never respected her, never thought of her as woman whom he could seriously woo and wed. She had a certain power over his emotions . . . but his love would not endure the test of absence. . . . One night about this time she said to herself: ‘I was his mistress, never his wife’” (290). After this realization, Nancy’s resistance to Lionel after he returns is not just resistance to the cultural norm that women should be subordinate to their husbands, the “angel in the house” trap, but to the idea that women are either “angels” or “whores.” While one might argue that Nancy does not resist the cultural norm that supports the subordination of women because she pushes for a traditional marriage, she does resist the angel/whore dichotomy, which is equally responsible for the subordination of women.

Aware of the deeper implications of Lionel’s unconventional attitudes toward marriage, Nancy adopts a new strategy for resisting Lionel’s ideal when he returns to England. When Lionel insists on separate living quarters upon his return to London, Nancy counters his ideal with practical solutions—first, that they live together because it will be less expensive than if they live apart (408), and, second, that they purchase a larger house so that Lionel will not feel as though his freedom has been taken away if they live together (409). But in each case, Lionel refuses Nancy’s reasons and characterizes her ideas as impractical, the result of idealizing marriage, and the result of an unhealthy attachment to social convention. Of course, it is arguable that Nancy has developed an unhealthy attachment to social convention, for she seems to want a traditional marriage, but Nancy has not given up the ideal of individual freedom over
social convention, only that the notion of individual freedom has changed for her as the result of having a child. In fact, Nancy believes that the same sort of personal freedom Lionel wants is impossible for a woman with a child. In a conversation that takes place shortly before her argument with Lionel, Nancy says to Mary Woodruff, their long-time housekeeper and now Mr. Lord’s companion, “It comes to this. Nature doesn’t intend a married woman to be anything but a married woman. . . . [S]he must either be the slave of husband and children, or defy her duty. She can have no time to herself, no thoughts for herself. . . . I should like to revolt against it, yet I feel revolt to be silly. One might as well revolt against being born a woman instead of a man” (404).

Given this new awareness of the conditions of her life, Nancy finds that it is simply not worth the effort always to defy Lionel, and their argument about the possibility of living together ends with Nancy good-naturedly acquiescing to Lionel’s wishes. Still, despite Nancy’s tendency to resist and then acquiesce, the novel ends in the midst of yet another argument between Nancy and Lionel on the subject of living together. Having received half of her brother Horace’s money after he dies of consumption, Nancy once again suggests that she and Lionel purchase a house. Though Lionel refuses to move in (442), he does agree to make the appearance of living with Nancy. When she asks, “Will it be known to everybody that we don’t live together?,” Lionel replies, “Well, by way of example, I should rather like it to be known; but as I know you wouldn’t like it, let the appearances be as ordinary as you please” (442). Though Nancy wishes that she could push Lionel further--“She had a struggle with herself,” the narration reads, letting readers know that Nancy is tempted to ask for more from her husband--she knows that she already has reached a new point of compromise with Lionel, one that brings him closer to her ideal for their life together.

Although Nancy does fall short of consistently asserting her agency with tangible results, at the end of the novel it is clear that she continues to try to achieve the life she wants rather than always adhering to Lionel’s standards. There is the sense that the conflict between them over living together will continue, with small sacrifices on the part of both in the future. While critics such as Selig, Sloan, and Harman are correct to see Nancy’s perspective usurped by Lionel’s at particular points in the story, and while
Harsh is correct to point out those places where the narrator seems to accept Nancy’s perspective rather than Lionel’s, it is perhaps most significant that the ending of the novel seems relatively even-handed, weighted toward neither Nancy’s nor Lionel’s perspective. The internal perspective of neither character is present, with Gissing using only dialogue and the briefest description of characters’ actions to show the scene, showing that Gissing’s own ideal about building character through dialogue has resurfaced and receives precedence over the feminist ideal of combining narrative strategies. In the dialogue at the end of the novel, both Nancy and Lionel seem free to express their differing opinions (“I think we ought to take a house. . . . You won’t live with me?” says Nancy, to whom Lionel replies, “You know my view of that matter” [442]), and the narrator does not assert authority in favor of either perspective. While Nancy and Lionel argue, both seem to believe that they have matured as individuals and as a couple, as indicated by their references to how they used to be (“a notable young lady of Camberwell” and “a notable young fool of nowhere at all” [443]), and, perhaps more importantly, neither seems ready to give up his or her method of quarrel and compromise.

Still, the presence of Nancy’s sustained internal perspective early in the novel remains on the minds of many readers, especially feminist readers, as they encounter the ending, since even sparse use of internal perspective for female characters shapes significantly the way in which readers react to the story, as evidenced by Gissing’s use of it in The Odd Women. Without the establishment of Nancy’s sustained internal perspective early in the novel, the conflict of the marriage would not come across as clearly as it does. In fact, without the emphasis on Nancy’s internal perspective early on, there would be no premise for the main plot of the novel--two people struggling to find a form of marriage that works for both. The ending of Jubilee, then, has the residual of Nancy’s perspective, but the immediate scene cannot be said to emphasize Nancy’s perspective.

The middle ground taken by Gissing in his representation of woman’s agency in Jubilee is heightened when one looks at the novel in comparison to The Odd Women and The Nether World. I have already detailed Gissing’s use of internal perspective in The
Odd Women, showing that, although his use of it is sparse, it is sustained across the course of the novel and used in close connection to resistant speech and action from Rhoda. Gissing’s use of sustained internal perspective to show Nancy’s thoughts at the beginning of Jubilee is similar, with her thoughts immediately followed by direct speech or action, but as Jubilee progresses, that correlation falls off, with Nancy more often falling silent in Lionel’s presence than resisting his ideals. While it is not uncommon for readers to compare Nancy Lord to Rhoda Nunn of The Odd Women, since both women are involved with men who advocate the free union instead of traditional marriage, it is perhaps better to compare Nancy to the other main female character in The Odd Women, Monica Madden. Both Nancy and Monica actually marry men with ideals different from her own, while Rhoda’s resistance to cultural norms takes place within a more casual courting relationship rather than within legal marriage. Just as Gissing uses internal perspective to depict Nancy’s frustration with her marriage, he uses it to show Monica’s frustration with her marriage, but both women become less assertive as their respective stories progress.

Looking at Gissing’s use of specific narrative strategies suggests, then, that his representation of woman’s agency through Rhoda, but not Monica, in The Odd Women is stronger than his representation of it through Nancy in Jubilee, but when one turns to The Nether World, the degree of agency given to Nancy in Jubilee becomes even more clear. More clearly influenced by Zolaesque naturalism, and with a story more strongly controlled by a narrator with close ties to the central male character of the novel Sidney Kirkwood, The Nether World indicates clearly the limits of Gissing’s use of internal perspective to show the thoughts and feelings of female protagonists. In The Nether World, Gissing’s use of internal perspective to develop the male character Sidney Kirkwood is common, but he rarely uses this narrative strategy to develop the character of the female protagonist, Jane Snowden. In contrast to Jubilee, where Nancy’s internal perspective appears in the third chapter, the first few chapters of The Nether World are controlled by the naturalist narrator and the internal perspectives of the yet-to-be-identified Michael Snowden, grandfather of Jane, and the strongly masculinized Clementina Peckover. When Jane’s internal perspective is present in these early chapters,
it functions either in submission to the narrator’s naturalist comments or as an indicator of her inability to assert agency.

This suppression of Jane’s internal perspective in favor of the narrator’s naturalist commentary or the perspectives of other characters continues throughout most of the novel. It is not until late in the novel, after Jane’s grandfather has taken her out of the Peckovers’ home and she is living a less poverty-stricken life, that there are any sustained sections of her internal perspective. In Chapter 25, readers finally are allowed to observe Jane’s thoughts as she considers the changes to her life upon learning that her grandfather has more money than anyone imagined and that he wants Jane to use that money productively by doing philanthropic work. Additionally, Jane has learned from her grandfather that Sidney, someone Jane has considered her good friend for many years, is interested in marrying her someday. The narration begins through the narrator’s vision, but then shifts to Jane’s.

For Jane, as we know, the marvels had already begun. She came back from Danbury not altogether like herself. . . . The immediate effect of the disclosure made to her by Michael . . . was to overwhelm her with a sense of responsibilities, to throw her mind into painful tumult. Slow of thought . . . she could not at once bring into the control of her reflection this wondrous future to which her eyes had been opened. (222)

While readers see Jane’s perspective here, shortly after this section, the narrator reasserts his authority. “Try to read her mind,” he states, using direct address to build his own authority. “The world had all at once grown very large, a distress to her imagination; worse still, she had herself become a person of magnified importance. . . . She had been an ill-used, ragged, work-worn child, and something of that degradation seemed, in her feeling, still to cling to her” (224). While the phrase “in her feeling” suggests that Jane’s perspective is present, albeit through the narrator’s voice, the context of the narrator addressing the reader directly rather than Jane’s perspective being heard through her voice shows that the narrator retains more authority in the narrative than Jane does. Later, at the end of this chapter, the narrator reminds us that he understands Jane’s feelings better than she does herself, a move that undermines any
effect of the earlier use of Jane’s internal perspective. “[T]hough Jane did not acknowledge to herself that she regretted the old state of things,” the narrator tells us, “still less that she feared the future, it was undeniable that the past seemed very bright in her memory, and that something weighed upon her heart, forbidding such gladsomeness as she had known” (230). Again, Jane’s perspective is present, in the phrase “in her memory,” but Jane’s thoughts are expressed in the narrator’s voice and vision, as indicated by the phrase, “it was undeniable.” Any internal perspective by Jane, then, is tempered on a continual basis by the perspective of the narrator, and at the end of the story, though the narrator seems to respect Jane for her struggle to overcome the conditions of her life, she remains someone who has not been able to assert agency often and who, when she has, has not been successful. Jane has, for the most part, played the role of a young woman controlled by the men who surround her and by the class hierarchy that limits her choices.

Still, it is arguable that Jane is less assertive partly because she is hardly more than a child, age thirteen, when the novel begins and still a teenager when the story ends. Yet, when one looks at the other important female character in the novel, Clara Hewett, one sees a similar trend in terms of the amount of narrative space given to her internal perspective. The first sustained instance of Clara’s internal perspective comes in Chapters 9 and 10, appropriately titled “Pathological” and “The Last Combat,” in which Clara’s life while working as a bar-maid is described. Although the chapter begins with a paragraph that emphasizes Clara’s perspective, through the narrator’s voice and not Clara’s own, the narrator quickly takes control of the narrative, infusing the description of Clara’s work with strong naturalist language and the use of direct address. The second paragraph of the chapter begins in this way: “Yes; but you must try to understand this girl of the people, with her unfortunate endowment of brains and defect of tenderness” (79). This use of direct address and naturalist language continues for a good ten paragraphs, with only short snatches of Clara’s internal perspective in these paragraphs, and then primarily in the narrator’s voice. Although Clara ultimately rebels against her working conditions and quits her job, readers’ sense of why she quits is shaped primarily by the narrator’s perspective. Furthermore, Clara’s resistance in these
two chapters can be tied directly to her conflicts with her father, who, earlier in the story, tries to convince Clara to stay at home instead of going to work in the bar. Ultimately, Clara’s rebellion is punished in a particularly naturalist manner; in a fit of jealousy over losing an acting part to Clara, Clara’s friend Grace throws acid in Clara’s face, disfiguring her and leaving a physical mark to signify the consequences of Clara’s attempt to escape the nether world. Though Clara’s internal perspective re-emerges in the narrative after this incident occurs, like some of the rare instances of Jane’s internal perspective, Clara’s perspective operates primarily as a way to show her inability to assert agency. Clara wears a veil over her face and refuses to be seen in the light, and even after Sidney asks her to marry him, she remains distant from him and others.

In comparison to *The Nether World*, then, *Jubilee* emerges as a novel in which the female protagonist does possess a certain degree of agency, if not as much as feminist critics of the 1890s would have liked. Still, we cannot rest our judgment about Nancy’s agency on the role of internal perspective and other narrative strategies alone, since to do so is to unnecessarily separate form from content. As Constance Harsh points out, certain themes in the novel—the association of Nancy with modernity and the theme of “women’s biological destiny”—contribute to the way we view Nancy’s character and her independence. While Harsh reads Nancy’s embrace of motherhood and the domestic sphere as evidence of Nancy’s agency, or at least the failure of the masculinist order to control the narrative (872), I believe that Nancy’s embrace of such a life illustrates the limits of her agency. As feminist ideals of the 1890s show, to express agency within the domestic sphere could not have the same effectiveness as assertion of agency within the public sphere. For these feminists, it is Nancy’s decision to write a novel that offers her the best opportunity to resist the masculinist ideals held by Lionel. Still, as my analysis shows, Nancy’s move toward speaking and acting in the public sphere through her novel is easily trumped by Lionel, providing more evidence that Nancy fails to assert agency on a consistent basis.

For Gissing to make Nancy a novelist, especially in the midst of trying times, is a move suggesting Nancy’s potential for asserting her agency in a concrete, lasting way. Were she to become the successful woman writer she imagines she might be after reading
a novel in which the heroine “discovered with notable suddenness the path to fame, lucre, and the husband of her heart: she became at a bound a successful novelist” (298), Nancy would be on her way to solid independence, independence that might allow her to support herself and her child without Lionel’s involvement. Although Nancy presents her decision to write the novel as one aimed at helping Lionel rather than herself and her child, it is clear that Nancy understands the financial opportunities possible through professional authorship. Equally, Lionel is threatened by such possibilities. Not only does he return to Nancy’s lodgings after only four days (instead of the usual ten they take between visits) to discuss her novel, but his rationale for not publishing the novel is not that it is poorly written but that it is a “private,” “domestic” story, not meant for public consumption (427-28). This suggests that Lionel is worried both about the world’s knowing his wife’s story and about the good chance that Nancy will be published and become successful as an author.

Nancy resists Lionel’s suppression of the novel, arguing that the qualities that make Lionel want to keep the book from the public are precisely those qualities Lionel admires in published books. After her husband says that the novel “isn’t literature, but a little bit of Nancy’s mind and heart,” Nancy states, “Lionel, if it is a bit of my mind and heart, it must be a good book. You have often praised books to me just on that account--because they were genuine” (428). In addition, when Lionel suggests to Nancy that she should be focusing on their child instead of writing books, since bearing children is the more proper method of creation for women, Nancy again resists and her reaction reveals her awareness of the power of authorship for women. Of bearing children, Nancy says, “Oh, every woman can do that,” and when Lionel retorts that many women cannot bear children, much less bring them up “rightly,” and that Nancy should simply relax and spend her time reading, Nancy says indignantly, “I wanted to do something. . . . I have read enough” (429). Nevertheless, Lionel has the last word and succeeds in convincing Nancy to “seal up” her novel and save it for her elderly years, when the two of them will look over it again and “drop a tear from our old dim eyes” (430).

That Gissing chooses to have one of his male characters suppress the creative work and the voice of the same central female character to whom he has given more
sustained internal perspective elsewhere creates an interesting dilemma for literary interpretation. There is nothing in *Jubilee* to indicate Nancy’s literary technique in her novel (whether it is in third- or first-person, for example), but one might imagine that it is written in first-person, in the tradition of *Jane Eyre*, or in third-person but with more significant attention to the internal perspective of the heroine rather than just the hero. This assumption seems reasonable, given Lionel’s characterization of Nancy’s novel as “a little bit of Nancy’s mind and heart” (428). Assuming that Nancy’s novel is more sensitive to the heroine’s perspective than Gissing’s text is, one might ask: why does Gissing suppress Nancy’s voice through the actions of Lionel at the same time he gives her a voice through attention to her internal perspective? In part, it illustrates the difference between Lionel’s perspective on marriage (that he wants a “free union” that is “free” only for him) and Gissing’s own perspective (which is less clearly identifiable but seems at least more complex than Lionel’s), and, in this light, the suppression of Nancy’s novel by a male character versus the encouragement of Nancy’s internal perspective by the author himself represents two levels on which the literary text works: as a story and as a constructed text.

The first level refers to the represented reality of the narrative (the story told to readers by Gissing), and the second level refers to Gissing’s specific construction of that represented reality. As readers, we are in the position to see both levels at which the text is working: the suppression of Nancy’s novel is a “story” concern, whereas the use of Nancy’s internal perspective is a “discourse” concern, to use Seymour Chatman’s terms for distinguishing *what happens* in a narrative from *how* it is told. Those who want to see Gissing as identifying strongly with his male characters might argue that Gissing puts into the text what he wishes to do but cannot do in his own life—suppress the voices of women. But those who recognize the ambiguity of Gissing’s gender politics will take a different view. Although Gissing could not bring himself to create a male character who might encourage his wife to publish her novel, a story line that would have appealed to feminists of the period, he does create competing ideas about woman’s agency at the story and discourse levels of the text. A narratological reading of Lionel’s suppression of Nancy’s novel might point out that the discourse element of the text (Nancy’s internal
perspective) should at least be recognized as equally important to that of the story element (the suppression of Nancy’s novel), but this reading might also point out that story elements often have a larger impact on flesh-and-blood readers than discourse elements do. The suppression of Nancy’s novel serves as an excellent illustration of the story/discourse distinction, since it is a one-time event that easily becomes symbolic of the more general pattern of resistance and subordination by Nancy throughout the novel. Understanding Gissing’s use of Nancy’s internal perspective, then, supplements the more striking symbolic moments in the text, such as the suppression of Nancy’s novel.

In sum, Gissing’s representation of woman’s agency through Nancy in *Jubilee* is ambiguous, especially when seen in the context of representations of woman’s agency in his other works. In contrast to earlier work, such as *The Nether World*, Gissing appears to be closer to a feminist ideal with *Jubilee*. Yet, in comparison to *The Odd Women*, *Jubilee* had to have been something of a disappointment to feminists of the period. In fact, *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald* did not review *Jubilee*, nor are there reviews by feminists in the mainstream magazines, and this suggests that perhaps feminists did not find *Jubilee* as compelling as *The Odd Women*.

It is certainly true that because feminist periodicals had only limited space for reviews and tended to review female authors rather than male authors already covered by the mainstream press, they typically reviewed only those male-authored texts that they found most compelling. Even then, their reviews often appeared some months after the novel had been published. That feminist periodicals did not review *Jubilee* is not surprising, especially given its only mediocre success in representing woman’s agency according to the feminist aesthetic. In fact, when feminists might have been writing about *Jubilee*, at least one of them was still writing about *The Odd Women*. In early December 1896, Gissing received a clipping of a newspaper article from Mary H. Krout, presumably the M. H. Krout who had written “Women in Fiction” for *The Woman’s Herald* in 1893, the article in which the feminist definition for representing woman’s agency had been so well defined. The clipping sent to him in 1896 by Krout was her own article, “Woman’s Kingdom: ‘The Odd Women’ and its Influence in England,” which had been recently published in a Chicago paper, *The Daily Inter Ocean*, and which emphasized the popularity of the novel in England.
IV.

As issues of literary mode, gender, and the marketplace collided in the early 1890s, then, Gissing remained uncertain about how extensively to incorporate the feminist definition of realism into his writing practice. While *Jubilee* indicates a return to his own ideals about realism, a maneuver confirmed by a letter from Gissing to his friend Eduard Bertz in which he claims that *Jubilee* is a “reversion to my old style” (*Collected 5:114*), it is worth taking a closer look at how Gissing negotiated competing views on realism in the 1890s, as evidenced by his letters to male colleagues and feminist friends. Certainly, Gissing’s interest in the market was less intense than that of other late-Victorian male authors, especially Moore, and Gissing more intently focused on classic literary achievement rather than commercial popularity. Still, Gissing had a certain degree of anxiety about criticism of his work. That anxiety is evidenced in his interactions with close male colleagues and his feminist friend Clara Collet, each of whom embodied different perspectives on the realist debate at the *fin de siècle*. By looking at Gissing’s letters from the period, we can see how Gissing found himself caught between different views of realism and how, ultimately, he let his own aesthetic ideals play as much a part in his negotiation of the literary market as did the perspectives on realism expressed by his male colleagues and feminist friends.

Around the time Gissing was preparing to write *The Odd Women*, he went through something of a crisis concerning male colleagues’ opinions of his work, especially their assessment of his work in light of realism. With the publication of *New Grub Street* in 1891, which took Gissing from being “known” to being “popular” (Halperin 154), and *Denzil Quarrier* in early 1892, which despite its mediocrity was generally well-received by male critics (168-69, 175), Gissing was beginning to build a serious reputation for himself. Although he was not making more money as a result of his success, thanks to the “cut-throat” attitudes of his publishers and the fact that he had been selling copyrights outright, he at least believed that his growing reputation warranted better pay for his work (155-56). Surprising it was to Gissing, then, when he discovered that
his own friend, Morley Roberts, had written a review of his work that was less than high praise. Although some late-twentieth-century critics have characterized this review as less damaging than Gissing perhaps thought it to be (Halperin 175-76), for Gissing, the article raised fears about a possible decline in his reputation. To Algernon, Gissing wrote, “Roberts has sent me a draft of his paper on me for the Novel Review. I am sorry to say that it is not worth much. In the face of this, it does not grieve me to hear that there is uncertainty about its being accepted” (Collected Letters 5:29).

In fact, the review did run in the May 1892 issue of the Novel Review, and it obviously touched a delicate nerve in Gissing, perhaps because Roberts’s criticisms went right to the heart of the debate over realism. Roberts claimed that Gissing was “of the order of realists whose work, whether they knew it or not, is neither more nor less than the study of disease in one form or another” (“Morley Roberts on George Gissing” 210). Further, he claimed that it was Gissing’s commitment to realism, to be “absolutely honest in his delineation of all he sees,” that kept Gissing from developing characters and themes that would have any appeal to readers, who needed something slightly more “hopeful” than what the author had to offer them (210). Roberts even went so far as to say that since the publication of Isabel Clarendon (1886), a novel that Roberts believed reflected the “subtler” style toward which Gissing should have been working, Gissing had been “consistently hopeless; consistently careless of criticism; consistently pathological” (210). Specifically, Roberts found Gissing’s characters, especially his male characters, to be weak.

Gissing was further frustrated by the fact that his friend Bertz voiced a similar criticism as well. In a letter to Bertz from May 20, 1892, Gissing’s response makes it clear that Bertz had the same concerns as Roberts about Gissing’s male characters. To Bertz, Gissing wrote,

[I]t is probable that you have been misled by the fact that the character of Godwin Peak [of Born in Exile] is obviously, in a great degree, sympathetic to the author. But you will not find that Peak’s tone is henceforth mine--do not fear it. Indeed, it seems to me that the tone of the whole book is by no means identical with that of Peak’s personality;
certainly I did not mean it to be so. . . . I understand very well the fear that has been excited in you, for you are well aware of those parts of my character on which Roberts has laid stress. (*Collected Letters* 5:36)

Here, Gissing is not only trying to convince Bertz that Roberts has overemphasized the weakness of his male characters, but he is also trying to make clear that one should not assume that the perspective of the author aligns exactly with the perspective of a particular male character, a mistake critics continue to make with Gissing’s work, as Constance Harsh has pointed out.

The criticism of Roberts and Bertz is especially important to the way Gissing’s realism was developing because, according to them, it is Gissing’s close identification with his male characters that prevents him from developing a truly realistic picture. This approach to realism, which required remaining “objective” in the opinions of Roberts and Bertz, was one Gissing decided to adopt as he started writing *The Odd Women*. Despite Gissing’s defense of his male characters to Bertz in the letter from May 20, 1892, in the same letter, Gissing promises Bertz that he will do things differently with *The Odd Women*. “I hope to be more and more objective in my work; I hope to and mean to,” he writes. “Already I have begun my new book [*The Odd Women*]. . . . This book will appeal to your sympathies” (5:36).

In addition to feeling pressure from his male colleagues, Gissing was negotiating the feminist perspective on realism, most directly through his acquaintance with Clara Collet, a social investigator who had worked on Charles Booth’s *Life and Labour of the People in London* and was a well-known expert on women’s issues, especially working-class women’s issues. In February 1892, about the same time Gissing was listening to the criticism of Roberts and Bertz and trying to figure out how to reform his approach in order to please them, Collet gave a lecture on the value of Gissing’s novels. While Gissing would not meet Collet until the fall of 1893, nearly a year after the publication of *The Odd Women*, it was in the middle of composing this novel that he learned of Collet and her interest in his work.

Although much current literary criticism either overlooks Collet’s influence on Gissing or argues that there could be no direct influence by Collet on *The Odd Women*
because Collet and Gissing did not meet until a year after the composition of it, I believe that Collet’s work, if not her person, did have an influence on Gissing’s thinking as he wrote *The Odd Women.* Although Gissing had not met Collet at the time of composition, he did know about her interest in him and had probably read at least one of her articles before he started composing *The Odd Women.* Gissing’s knowledge of Collet’s work at this crucial moment in his life is significant, since next to the criticism of Roberts, reading of Collet’s praise and her belief in his work must have been something of a comfort to Gissing. From the letters, we know that Gissing learned of the lecture Collet had given about his novels about a month before he read Roberts’s draft of the *Novel Review* article. It was his sister Ellen who informed him about the lecture, and, upon hearing of it, Gissing asked Ellen to find the exact number of the magazine so he could read the report himself (*Collected Letters* 5:18-19). In April, around the same time Roberts sent a draft of his article to Gissing, Gissing obtained a copy of the *Queen* and read the report. Though the report was quite short and somewhat sketchy, according to a letter Gissing sent to his sister Ellen on April 11, 1892, he understood that Collet thought his novels the work of a “healthy” rather than a “morbid” mind, as some others believed (5:28).

In addition to reading the report of Collet’s lecture, Gissing very likely read one of Collet’s articles around the same time, since in the letter to his sister, he mentions that Collet “has a sociological article in the current Nineteenth-Century” and that she is “[o]bviously a woman of brains” (5:28). This sociological article, “Prospects of Marriage for Women,” addresses issues remarkably close to those addressed by Gissing in *The Odd Women.* In “Prospects,” Collet takes the 100-year anniversary of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and the approaching centennial of Maria Edgeworth’s *Letters to Literary Ladies* (1795) as a good occasion to assess the progress of women’s rights, especially women’s attitudes toward marriage. Reading Collet’s article next to Gissing’s *The Odd Women,* one is struck by the similarities between the two. While *The Odd Women* certainly does not contain the detailed statistics of Collet’s article, early in the novel, Rhoda Nunn tells Monica Madden that “there are half a million more women than men in this happy country of ours” (41), a ratio confirmed by at least some of the data provided by Collet, whose tables, based on the
1881 Census, show that in Kensington, for example, the number of marriageable women to marriageable men is 152.2 to 100 (538). In addition, Rhoda tells Monica that there is “no making a pair” with these odd women and that rather than viewing them as “useless, lost, futile lives” as the “pessimists” do, Rhoda sees the odd women as “a great reserve,” to be trained to “provide a substitute for the world’s work” whenever another woman “vanishes in matrimony” (41). Rhoda’s opinions are not unlike the statements Collet makes in her article, such as “[M]y object is not to point out how marriageable women may get married, but to show that a considerable number of women must remain unmarried” and “In this class [the lower-middle class, consisting of the daughters of clerks and professional men] . . . the inequality of the sexes is greatest, and the probability of marriage least. . . . [T]herefore, the importance of an industrial training which shall enable women to earn a competency through all the active years of their life . . . is greater than in any other” (541).

Of course, I am not arguing for a direct influence of “Prospects” on The Odd Women, since many other publications dealing with similar issues would have been available to Gissing at this time, but I do want to point out that it was Gissing’s acquaintance with Collet that brought the feminist perspective to him in a personal and direct way. Just as male colleagues such as Bertz and Roberts exerted influence on Gissing as he wrote in the early 1890s, Collet, too, played a role in his negotiation of issues of the day. In Gissing’s letters to Collet, we find discussion of women’s issues in particular; for example, in a letter to Collet from September 14, 1893, Gissing expresses his real admiration for Collet’s knowledge of eighteenth-century literature on social issues such as the education of women, and it seems that, only shortly after meeting Gissing, Collet convinced him to read the work of Maria Edgeworth (Collected Letters 5:141).

There is little in Gissing’s letters or diary to suggest what he was thinking as he wrote Jubilee, but it is clear that Gissing again was adjusting his approach in order to accommodate his male colleagues’ opinions. In a letter to Bertz of June 2, 1893, Gissing writes that Jubilee would be a “reversion” to his “old style,” but he emphasized that he was steering clear of the pessimistic view with which Bertz and others associated him.
“It will be a reversion to my old style without the socialist spirit; indeed, I hope without any spirit,—but that of art” (5:114). Still, Gissing also recognized that feminist realism was a legitimate perspective through which Jubilee would be judged, even as he wanted to avoid such a characterization. Shortly before the publication of Jubilee, Gissing and his publisher decided to change the title of the novel from “Miss Lord of Camberwell,” a decidedly woman-centered title, to In the Year of the Jubilee. Gissing justified the change to Collet, who thought the new title a poor one, by saying that “People are getting tired of the ‘woman question’ novel, and I don’t want this book to be regarded in that light” (Collected Letters 5:229).

Despite all Gissing’s adjustments to his approach in the early 1890s, on some level, he still believed that his version of realism should be accepted by his male colleagues, feminists, and anyone else who happened to read his work. On May 19, 1895, Gissing submitted a letter to the editor of the Humanitarian, who had solicited submissions for a symposium on realism. In this letter, sometimes referred to by critics as “The Place of Realism,” Gissing argues that the term “realism” has been so grievously mauled,” so distorted through its association with taking a moral stance, that it should “never again be used, save in their proper sense by writers on scholastic philosophy” (Collected Letters 5:333). Still, Gissing believes that if the term must be used, a better definition is one based on the author’s intention, especially his or her “sincerity.” Since realism began as a “revolt against insincerity in the art of fiction,” Gissing argues, to judge according to the narrow definition of “representation of fact” is wrong; instead, the author’s sincerity or “spirit” should be judged, and judged separately from technique (333-34). Realism, Gissing asserts, “signifies nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life; it merely contrasts with the habit of mind which assumes that a novel is written ‘to please people,’ that disagreeable facts must always be kept out of sight, that human nature must be systematically flattered, that the book must have a ‘plot,’ that the story should end on a cheerful note, and all the rest of it” (335).

The fact that Gissing still believed that he should be accepted on his own terms shows the degree to which negotiating issues of literary mode, gender, and the market in
the 1890s was a source of anxiety for him. Still, his strong aesthetic ideals, which had guided him from the beginning of his career, continued to shape his decisions through the 1890s. It is not surprising that, having temporarily embraced feminist ideals in *The Odd Women*, he backed away from these ideals and returned to his own as he wrote *Jubilee*. Nevertheless, that Gissing felt he could propose his own unorthodox definition of realism at the end of the century shows the degree to which narrow definitions of the term had been challenged by the intersection of such elements as literary mode, gender, and the market. Even if Gissing could not consistently embrace feminist ideals to the full extent, the feminist literary aesthetic had clearly exerted influence on the general cultural atmosphere, making it possible for Gissing to speak as he did on the issue of realism in 1895.
“[Y]OU MUST OFFEND YOUR CONVENTIONAL FRIENDS”:
THOMAS HARDY, AUTHORIAL ASSERTION, AND THE SPOKEN WORD
IN TESS OF THE D’URBERVILLES AND JUDE THE OBSCURE

In September 1893, when Thomas Hardy was reading the work of Florence
Henniker, with whom he would write the short story “The Spectre of the Real,” he wrote
to his soon-to-be collaborator about her approach to authorship in the 1890s literary
market.

I do sigh a little; over your position less than over your conventional
views. I do not mind its results upon the present little story (which please
alter as you like)—but upon your future literary career. If you mean to
make the world listen to you, you must say now what they will all be
thinking and saying five and twenty years hence: and if you do that you
must offend your conventional friends. (Collected Letters 2:33)

Hardy then continues, contrasting Henniker’s supposedly conventional approach to
writing to that of the wildly popular Sarah Grand. “‘Sarah Grand,’ who has not, to my
mind, such a sympathetic and intuitive knowledge of human nature as you, has yet an
immense advantage over you in this respect—in the fact of having decided to offend her
friends (so she told me)—and now that they are all alienated she can write boldly, and
get listened to” (Collected Letters 2:33).

That Hardy advised Henniker to be bold to the point of offending her
conventional friends is intriguing, given Hardy’s own insecurities about criticism of his
work but also because it points to Hardy’s acute awareness of the influence women
writers had in the literary market at the fin de siècle. However much Hardy thought
Henniker should offend others in order to establish long-term literary fame, his own experience writing about controversial material shows that offending one’s conventional friends did not ensure one’s success. As critics such as Gail Cunningham and Penny Boumelha have shown, male authors such as Hardy were aware that women writers of the 1890s were making waves with the New Woman novel and knew they would need to alter their own literary modes in order to accommodate this new condition of the market. Nevertheless, when Hardy did speak out on controversial issues by publishing *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, the resulting criticism drove him to abandon novel-writing altogether in favor of writing poetry.

Hardy’s letter to Henniker creates an interesting space for understanding the ambivalent position Hardy would take with regard to the gender, literary mode, and the market during the 1890s. Unlike Gissing, whose lesser reputation and ideals about realism compelled him to try to appeal to multiple audiences while not embracing fully liberal-feminist ideals, Hardy used his position as established author to walk a fine line between advocating complete “candour” when discussing sexuality in literature and a more low-profile position, avoiding comment on public issues involving direct political stances on women’s issues, such as the suffragist cause. In occupying this uneasy position, Hardy maneuvered his literary mode in order to retain both traditional concepts of realism, especially the description of rural scenery and characters, and to present new ideas about realism, especially its role in the depiction of the “relations between the sexes,” as he phrased it. Still, Hardy had much ambivalence about speaking out about any subject that might be perceived as a political issue, and this ambivalence caused him to rely on an aestheticist stance in order to avoid being perceived as a political writer who used the written word to make didactic statements. As Hardy would have put it, it was important to avoid becoming a writer with a “purpose.”

Hardy’s ambivalence toward the the spoken word as a method of resistance is seen both in his encounters with late-nineteenth century feminism, where speaking out is symbolically captured in feminists’ attempts to secure voting rights for women, and his representations of women in his two most well-known novels, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, where the female protagonist (in the case of *Tess*) and the female
characters (in the case of Jude) use the language of resistance, through dialogue, to assert their agency and resist cultural norms that support the subordination of women. In this chapter, I argue that Hardy’s own ambivalent voice on late-nineteenth-century feminist issues might be seen as parallel to his ambivalent use of the language of resistance in Tess and Jude. Further, his ambivalent use of this language in these novels anticipates well his decision to abandon the novel and leave the literary market that had been so influenced by feminist ideals, turning instead to poetry, a genre less likely to force him into an uncomfortable position regarding women’s rights. “Spoken word,” in its various meanings and contexts, becomes a metaphor through which to assess Hardy’s negotiation of fin de siècle issues concerning literary mode, gender, and the market.

I.

As critics have pointed out, figuring out where Hardy stood on the issue of women’s rights is difficult, in part because Hardy didn’t voice his opinions readily. Instead, he often claimed that he was unable to take a position, either because he did not believe in the cause or simply because he did not care to become involved in political matters. As I explain at the end of this chapter, Hardy consistently refused the pleas of suffragists that he join their cause, but his reticence extends beyond taking a stance on women’s issues; he also refused to take positions on other issues, such as the censorship of plays (Collected Letters 4:200-201, 202-203) and even the killing of animals, something to which he personally objected vigorously. In 1896, when the secretary of the Humane Diet Committee, Maude Hadden, wrote to Hardy, asking him to help the cause against cruelty to animals, he said he would consider it but felt that it was better for authors to steer clear of politics.

I think that a writer of fiction (unlike other people) is more likely to exercise an influence for humanity in any given direction by belonging to no Committee pledged to a course, as he then escapes the charge of exaggerating for a purpose. For instance, if the pig-killing scene in ‘Jude’ did any good at all in the Cause for which you are working, it was through being obviously written as merely a faithful description of such
The wide scope of Hardy’s refusals suggests that he was not simply opposed to certain causes, such as women’s rights, but that he opposed mixing artistic expression with a political agenda. He believed that the role of the artist was distinctly different from that of the average citizen, who could (and perhaps even should) be politically active. Nevertheless, there were times when Hardy’s passion for particular issues, especially anti-vivisection, made it impossible for him to separate the two roles. Although he turned down Hadden’s request in 1896, he often obliged those who wanted his support on the animal cruelty issue. Among other things, he allowed the pig-killing chapter from Jude to be reprinted in a Society for the Protection of Animals publication (2:97), held an anti-vivisection meeting at his home (2:157), notified the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals when he thought animals were being mistreated at the Alhambra Theatre (3:213), wrote a letter about the cause to The Humanitarian (4:90, 96-97), and even served on the Committee of the Council of Justice to Animals (4:143).

While Hardy’s position on the mixing of art with “purpose” is fairly clear, even if he did not follow his own beliefs to the letter and if he was less clear on the issue of women’s rights, trying to uncover Hardy’s position on realism can be more difficult. One can read his published essays on the subject, but only three essays (“Profitable Reading of Fiction” [1888], “Candour in English Fiction” [1890], and “The Science of Fiction” [1891]), all solicited by magazine editors, make up the whole of Hardy’s writings on fiction during the period with which we are concerned. Still, these essays offer a starting point for understanding Hardy’s perspective.

From “Profitable Reading of Fiction,” we learn that, by the late-1880s, Hardy had already established in his mind some of the ideals that would shape his approach to this debate. While this essay focuses on novel reading for pleasure rather than critical purposes, Hardy’s admonishment that the reader should put absolute faith in the author anticipates well his later views about the importance of authorial intention. He writes: “In reading for hygenic purposes it is, of course, of the first consequence that the reader not be too critical. In other words, the author should be swallowed whole, like any other alternative pill. He should be believed in slavishly, implicitly” (“Profitable,” Thomas
Hardy’s Personal Writings 111). Hardy distinguishes this approach from that of the critics, saying that readers should “reverse the attitude of a certain class of critics,” who can only doubt the efforts of authors and question whether their results are in line with “personal experience” (111-12). In “Profitable Reading of Fiction,” Hardy also anticipates his more thorough discussion of naturalism in “The Science of Fiction” by stating that writers should reject this school and even softer forms of realism in favor of idealism (117-18). Further, they should avoid writing “purpose” novels:

> It may seem something of a paradox to assert that the novels which most conduse to moral profit are likely to be among those written without a moral purpose. But the truth of the statement may be realized if we consider that the didactic novel is so generally devoid of *vraisemblance* as to teach nothing but the impossibility of tampering with natural truth to advance dogmatic opinion. Those, on the other hand, which impress the reader with the inevitableness of character and environment in working out destiny, whether that destiny be just or unjust, enviable or cruel, must have a sound effect, if not what is called a good effect, upon a healthy mind. (118)

In 1890, with “Candour in English Fiction,” Hardy would lay out his priorities in more detail and more firmly within the already ongoing debate over realism. In this essay, written as part of a symposium in the *New Review* for which Walter Besant and Eliza Lynn Linton also wrote, Hardy responds to the criticism that English fiction of the period suffers from a “lack of sincerity” and argues that such criticism often overlooks cultural reasons, such as modes of production in nineteenth-century publishing, for the qualities found in fiction of the period. Defining a “sincere school of Fiction” as one that realistically represents the life of the current time period, especially through a method both “impassive in its tone and tragic in its developments” (15-16), Hardy argues for better reception of the new realism. His emphasis on the life of the time period is important since he can then assert that the relations of the sexes are part of this life and that they are a legitimate subject for realist fiction (16-17). Still, Hardy links his version of realism to the high tragedy of Shakespeare’s day, a form he particularly likes because
it aims to show “Nature’s unconsciousness” rather than a world in which laws of “social expediency” rule (16-17, 19). Hardy’s attention to “the relations of the sexes” is an attempt to focus on laws of Nature rather than the social conventions of England, the focus of traditional, mid-Victorian realism. In discussing Shakespeare and asserting that new realism shares the tragic qualities of Shakespeare’s plays, Hardy connects his version of realism to the wider canon of British writers, a move that gives more authority to the new realists than usually given them by the wider public. Hardy’s apparent preference for what we might think of as “idealist” fiction, in which characters are “made too real to be possible” (“Profitable” 118), suggests that Hardy’s form of realism is more closely connected to tragedy than the works of other new realists are and that Hardy has left ample room to distinguish himself from the more naturalist new realists, such as Moore.

Finally, in “The Science of Fiction,” yet another contribution to one of the New Review’s symposia, Hardy further distances his work from that of the naturalists by arguing that the science of fiction and the art of fiction are two different things, with the “science” being the observation of life needed in order to construct a story and the “art” being the actual construction of the story (315-16). Though this might be considered a misreading of the naturalists, since, in “The Experimental Novel,” Zola argues that the naturalist is not just an observer but also an experimenter, Hardy defines the new realism as different from naturalism because it retains a sense of the author’s “sincerity,” especially the “conscientious and well-intentioned” author’s ability to see the whole of humanity, the “ethereal characteristics” of humanity, rather than just external realities, as the naturalist does (318). No doubt, Hardy’s contrast is meant to bring credibility to the new realism, since, as Hardy points out, the term “realism” has derogatory connotations and has come to denote those who simply copy or those who focus on sexual issues in their work without adopting the particular stylistic approach advocated by the new realists (317).53

Despite the specificity of Hardy’s arguments in these essays, the essays exhibit an unusually abstract quality not found in the non-fictional writings of other late-Victorian realists such as Gissing and Moore. The essays, while they make good
philosophical treatises, do not explain how to write new realist novels in straightforward terms. One can read Hardy’s letters, looking for more explicit advice, but this endeavour also proves unsuccessful. Unlike Gissing, whose letters to his brother Algernon make up a running narrative on Gissing’s position on realism, Hardy did not have a male colleague to whom he could write about such subjects. While the musician and poet Horace Moule might have become such a confidante, Moule’s suicide in 1873 cut short any such possibility. Even when Hardy wrote to others in the publishing business, there is personal distance in his letters, and one senses that he reveals only business-related information and not his own personal thoughts on realism, or even fiction in general.

Interestingly, where Hardy seems to reveal his feelings about the debate over realism is in his reactions to criticism of his novels. Margaret Oliphant’s “Anti-Marriage League” article, in which she characterizes *Jude the Obscure* as yet another of the New Woman novels set on critiquing the institution of marriage, is perhaps the most well-known criticism of Hardy’s work, and an account of Hardy’s strong reaction to Oliphant’s criticism is evident in his letters. Although Hardy had not read Oliphant’s review on January 5, 1896, he wrote to his friend Sir George Douglas and said: “I hear that a rival novelist in *Blackwood* sneers at my letting *Jude* appear in Harper’s” (2:105), referring to Oliphant’s objection that Hardy had published *Jude* in a family-oriented magazine. “As a matter of fact I tried to withdraw it . . . but it was found impractical. The truth is that an author’s means should be judged by the light of his aim and end. If I say to a lady ‘I have met a naked woman’ and no more, it is indecent. But if that is only a part of what I say, and I add, ‘she was mad with sorrow,’ there has been no indecency” (2:105). By January 7, Hardy had read the review, and he wrote to Grant Allen, complaining about Oliphant’s charge of indecency. “Talk of shamelessness: that a woman who purely for money’s sake has for the last 30 years flooded the magazines and starved out scores of better workers, should try to write down rival novelists whose books sell better than her own, caps all the shamelessness of Arabella, to my mind” (2:106).
Hardy’s defensive reaction to Oliphant’s review reflects a more general pattern of strong reactions from him to criticism of his work, and a closer examination of the criticism of *Tess* and *Jude*, and Hardy’s reactions to it, should help us begin to unravel Hardy’s negotiation of the debate over realism and its intersection with gender and market issues at the *fin de siècle*. Hardy’s reactions reveal that Hardy felt caught between traditional definitions of realism and his own ideals about what constituted literary style. Critics with traditional views thought realism should paint a picture that reflected human experience but did not offend Victorian sensibilities, whereas Hardy felt that only by revealing previously taboo aspects of human experience could one represent life accurately.

Writing to Walter Besant on January 17, 1892, shortly after the publication of the book-length version of *Tess*, Hardy reacts strongly to the first of many articles about *Tess* that would accuse Hardy of an unbelievable, even “unnatural,” story line. “My dear Besant,” wrote Hardy to his friend and colleague,

> I have just been put into a very awkward position by the notice of my novel ‘Tess’ in yesterday’s Saturday Review. . . . If you have not read the book I may tell you that the review is an absolute misrepresentation, by which I am made to say and suggest all sorts of things that I do not say or suggest--the whole article being devised with almost fiendish ingenuity so as to contain a sort of half-truth in every sentence, while remaining a lie.

*(Collected Letters 2:252)*

Hardy continues to say that, after reading this fairly early review of the novel, he is concerned about visiting the Savile Club, since many members of the *Saturday Review* staff belonged to the club. Knowing that he is sure to meet his “attacker” while dining at the club, Hardy asks Besant whether he thinks it best for him to resign his membership.

The review in the *Saturday*, which Hardy believed had been written by George Saintsbury, claims that “there is not one single touch of nature” in *Tess* or any of the other characters in the novel. Instead, the reviewer finds the characters artificial, of the sort one might find in a play, and he believes that Hardy does better when representing *scenes of nature*, “in which his imagination has something to go on,” than he does when
representing the nature of characters in the novel (Cox 188-89). Interestingly, the reviewer points to one of the three methods of asserting agency I have identified in this dissertation, that of physical actions, and argues that Hardy’s representation of this method is where the author disappoints his readers most. Tess’s return to Alec, the reviewer says, is simply not believable. “The impression of most readers,” writes the reviewer, “will be that Tess, never having cared for D’Urberville even in her early days, hating him as the cause of her ruin, and, more so, as the cause of her separation from Clare, whom she madly loved, would have died by the roadside sooner than go back and live with him and be decked out with fine clothes” (191). In other words, Tess’s actions are simply not consistent with her character as Hardy has previously drawn it.

While Hardy ultimately decided not to resign his membership over this review, the tone of his reaction reveals the paranoia Hardy often felt when his work was criticized, and this paranoia was only increased by the publication of a review by Mowbray Morris a few months later. To the poet Roden Noel, Hardy would write, in April 1892, “Have you seen the attack on ‘Tess’ in the Quarterly? It is amusing and smart, entirely at the expense of truth—however” (Collected Letters 1:264). And, several days later, Hardy wrote to J. Stanley Little, “The review in the Quarterly is, after all, a mere manufacture, to suit the prejudices of its fossilized subscribers and keep the review alive upon their money” (1:265). Finally, after re-reading the review, Hardy would tell Noel that he was “struck more than I was at first with its mendacity. The fact is he says inartistic when he means unorthodox, and uncleanly when he means unfavorable to the vested interests by which he thrives. Moreover, if the motives in Tess are not at all those of the Periclean and Elizabeth tragic dramatists—however weakly developed in the novel—I should like to know what they are” (1:265).

Morris’s review is interesting for several reasons. First, as already stated, the review takes a similar line to that of the Saturday, arguing that Tess’s return to Alec in the latter part of the novel is not believable, and this confirmation of other critics’ opinions helped build the common perception of Tess as a novel in which Hardy had failed to draw convincing characters. Second, Morris adopts language very similar to that used in the Saturday Review piece, echoing its “Mr. Hardy . . . tells an unpleasant
story in a very unpleasant way” (Critical Heritage 190), with lines such as “It is a queer story and seems to have been published in a queer way” (217) and “[I]n his own interests, [Mr. Hardy] has gratuitously chosen to tell a coarse and disagreeable story in a coarse and disagreeable manner” (220). Finally, Morris highlights the issue of authorial intention and sincerity. Picking up on Hardy’s declaration in the Explanatory Note to the First Edition of Tess, Morris writes, “Mr. Hardy assures us that ‘The story is sent out in all sincerity of purpose, as representing on the whole a true sequence of things.’ We have no wish to doubt him, but we could wish that he had made his qualifying phrase clearer by explaining where the sequence of things was not true; without this knowledge his purpose must necessarily remain somewhat doubtful” (217). Morris continues on to discuss Hardy’s “purpose,” a catch-phrase that would come to irritate Hardy more and more as his career progressed, especially after Jude was classed a “purpose novel.” Morris argues that while Hardy’s “purpose” may have been to present Tess as an “honest woman,” who “through the adverse shocks of fate, eventually rise[s] to higher things,” he is unable to follow through with this purpose, since Tess ultimately “rises” only through “seduction to adultery, murder and the gallows” (218). While Hardy, like Gissing, tries to open up the definition of realism to allow for the artist’s vision, something I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, reviewers such as Morris hold on to their more traditional definitions of what it means to represent human life.

Between the publication of these two reviews in The Saturday and The Quarterly, Margaret Oliphant had published an equally critical review of Tess in Blackwood’s. “The Old Saloon,” as it was called, appeared in March 1892 and anticipates much of what is to come in Oliphant’s later article on Jude. In this article, Oliphant confirms the opinions of The Saturday and The Quarterly and adds her own perspective on realism, mainly that stories focusing wholly on sexual behavior do not accurately represent late-Victorian life. Like the Saturday Review writer, Oliphant expresses a preference for more traditional forms of realism early in her review. Commenting that although she has “a great many objections to make to Tess,” she also recognizes the greatness of Hardy’s skill in representing nature, especially in contrast to the skill seen in David Grieve by Mrs. Humphry Ward, which is also reviewed in the article. “[W]hat a living, breathing scene,”
Oliphant writes of *Tess* as a whole, “what a scent and fragrance of the actual, what solid bodies, what real existence, in contrast with the pale fiction of the didactic romance! We feel inclined to embrace Mr. Hardy, though we are not fond of him, in pure satisfaction with the good brown soil and substantial flesh and blood, the cows, and the mangel-wurzel, and the hard labour of the fields— which he makes us see and smell” (204). Oliphant also defines the type of world Hardy should be representing, “a world which is round and contains everything, not ‘the relations between the sexes’ alone” (203), a remark aimed at criticizing Hardy’s claim that “the relations of the sexes” could be the legitimate subject of realist fiction.

Having recognized Hardy’s definition of realism, Oliphant then sides with the *Saturday Review* and *Quarterly Review* critics, pointing to the unbelievability of Tess’s actions over the course of the novel as the major flaw of the book. Of Hardy’s decision to have Tess return to Alec, Oliphant, writes, “We do not for a moment believe that Tess would have done it. Her creator has forced the rôle upon her, as he thinks (or says) that the God whom he does not believe in, does. . . . But whatever Mr. Hardy says, we repeat that we do not believe him” (212-13). And of the beautiful clothes Alec offers Tess, Oliphant asserts that the “real Tess,” as she has referred to Tess earlier in the review, “would have flung them out of the window” (213). In addition, the “real Tess” would have never ended up in this situation in the first place, since she would have taken advantage of the opportunity she was given to escape Alec at the moment of her seduction. “[B]ut then, “ Oliphant asks earlier in the review, “where would the story have been . . . ?” (207), indicating that as much as she opposes Hardy’s use of Tess in the role of mistress, she recognizes that the author must have certain elements in his fiction to appeal to his readers.

Although there is no mention of Hardy’s reaction to Oliphant’s article in his letters (in contrast to his clear annoyance with her when “The Anti-Marriage League” comes out), this article by Oliphant, along with the *Saturday Review* and *Quarterly Review* pieces, serve as a beginning point for understanding a larger debate over the late-Victorian novel, one that highlights competing views of realism in the 1890s and Hardy’s attempt to position himself in regard to these views. These three reviews are striking
because they carve out a very narrow definition of realism, one Hardy would consistently resist even as he continued to employ certain aspects of its method, especially the inclusion of rural subject matter. Yet, it is clear that there were other opinions of Hardy’s work in the critical discussion of the time, and this indicates that Hardy need not cater only to the traditionalists such as Oliphant. While Shafts did not review Tess, The Woman’s Herald did, as did Clementina Black, in The London Illustrated News. These reviews show that just as Hardy felt caught between traditional definitions of realism and his own ideals, he also felt caught between the feminist definition of realism and his own ideals about literary style. Unlike feminists, who wanted a strong connection between form and content, one so strong that the result would be a polemic for women’s rights, Hardy preferred a more aestheticist approach. While he believed that the relations of the sexes should be central to realism, his interest lies in showing aspects of life previously taboo in literary representation. While many feminists shared this interest with Hardy, their primary interest lay less in explicit sexual freedom and more in the achievement of equal legal and political rights, especially suffrage.

Clementina Black’s review of the novel is remarkable for its strong contrast to the reviews that ran in the Saturday, the Quarterly, and Blackwood’s. First, Black’s review is deeply rooted in the feminist assumption that good books challenge the idea that women are subordinate to men and, instead, draw attention to the difficult social conditions women face in patriarchal cultures. Touting Tess as the “finest” novel Hardy has produced, Black paints the “conventional” reader as one who likes to be “excited” but not “disturbed,” and one who dislikes unhappy endings because it requires one to use one’s “conscience” and reconsider the “traditional pattern of right and wrong.” “Yet more, of course, does he [the traditional reader] detest an open challenge of that traditional pattern,” writes Black, “and Tess of the d’Urbervilles is precisely such a challenge” (186). Black then continues to say that like Meredith’s Diana of the Crossways (a novel also admired by many feminist reviewers), Tess is a book “founded on a recognition of the ironic truth” that the “most direct, sincere, and passionate” woman is often the “most liable to be caught in that sort of pitfall which social convention stamps as an irretrievable disgrace” (186-87).
In addition to establishing distinctly different criteria for judging novels, Black’s review acknowledges the various ways in which women assert agency, confirming the model that *Shafts* sets up for the link between representation and the cultural status of real-life women. Black suggests that it is Tess’s confession to Angel, her spoken word, that establishes her “sincerity” as a character (187), a comment that acknowledges the complexity of expressions of woman’s agency in a way the more traditional, action-focused conceptions of woman’s virtue, such as Oliphant’s, do not. Finally, Black rejects the usual tendency of critics to find Hardy’s redemption in descriptions of rural scenery. Though the descriptions are “wonderful,” Black writes that “characteristic as they are,” they “are not the essence of the book. Its essence lies in the perception that a woman’s moral worth is measurable not by any one deed, but by the whole aim and tendency of her life and nature” (187), a comment that brings readers back to the point that a more complex understanding of woman’s agency is essential to understanding Hardy’s aim, something even female reviewers such as Oliphant cannot see.

The review of *Tess* that ran in *The Woman’s Herald* is somewhat more moderate than Clementina Black’s, since it acknowledges and even agrees with the more conservative view that Hardy’s rural landscapes are his saving grace and that Hardy’s character building is not always consistent. “His perception of human character seems to me less decided, and a little warped in unexpected places,” writes Haweis. “It is difficult to believe that so noble a woman as Tess would have really killed the feeble reptile that besmirched her life, after long shewing strength of brain, body and heart” (10). Yet Haweis also seems to recognize the connection between form and content, especially content that focuses on the expression of agency by women, that is so important to the feminist perspective. In a rhetorically effective move, Haweis begins the review with the statement that the appearance of *Tess* at this particular time in history, when it seems as though the prospects for women are improving, is especially inspiring. Haweis then makes the connection between form and content clear.

There is not a syllable in “Tess” about woman’s physical equality with men; though in the sore winters of her husband’s desertion Tess at the swede-cutting . . . worked as well as any man. . . . There is not a syllable
in “Tess” about the Suffrage, nor the right of heroic, magnificent, injured human creatures to be taken legal account of in the country they help run. . . . It is merely the story of a girl’s virtue bearing up like a rock against an ocean of natural disadvantages, from early neglect and uninstruction to the unbearable pains of desertion, starvation, insult, temptation, and repeated deceptions. (10)

Haweis’s point—that although Hardy never states his agenda directly, he succeeds in articulating his point—shows the degree to which realistic representation of women’s lives was important to feminist critics. Hardy shows assertions of agency by women, claims Haweis, rather than simply telling us about it, indicating that although the feminist definition of realism allowed for polemic, it also sought more than just polemic content.

While there is no evidence in Hardy’s letters that he specifically knew of the reviews in The Woman’s Herald or The London Illustrated News, he did know Haweis and was invited to gatherings at her home (Letters 2:36, 59, 154, and 5:349). Also, Hardy knew that women were reading and admiring Tess, since he states, in a letter to Edmund Gosse, that he received numerous letters from women about the book. “[T]he sex [has] caught on with enthusiasm,” he writes, “as I gather from numerous communications from mothers (who tell me they are putting ‘Tess’ into their daughters’ hands to safeguard their future) and from other women of society who say that my courage has done the whole sex a service (!)” (1:255). The second half of this statement, punctuated by Hardy himself by the inclusion of the exclamation point, suggests that it was not just women, but politically active women, who were reading the novel. In fact, Hardy received letters from some well-known women who identified as feminist, and this suggests that even as Hardy felt pressure to appeal to the traditionalists such as Oliphant by including descriptions of rural scenes in his work, he also was aware of the opinions of the feminist portion of his audience. Among those who read the book were Millicent Fawcett, the famed suffragist leader, who wrote to praise Tess and ask Hardy to do more for the feminist cause in his writing (1:263-64).
What is interesting about Hardy’s replies to feminists such as Fawcett is that although Hardy is not always particularly enthusiastic about these women and their causes, he always expresses his gratitude for their admiration. This confirms my earlier claim that while Hardy and feminists shared similar interests, their priorities remained different, with feminists committed to a full integration of feminist content into literary representation and Hardy committed to privileging form over content. That is, while Hardy wanted to represent the “relations of the sexes” in literature, he did not want to discuss it in venues outside literature, where content would be privileged over form. In his reply to Fawcett, who suggested that Hardy should write a short story for “working boys and girls, about the dangers of treating love lightly,” Hardy writes, “I am much gratified to learn that so good a critic as yourself has found interest in Tess—a book which, like so many books, comes far short in its execution of what I had hoped beforehand to make it” (Collected Letters 1:264). Hardy then rejects Fawcett’s short story idea, on the basis that he does not think it worthwhile to pursue such a controversial topic.

With regard to your idea of a short story showing how the trifling with the physical element in love leads to corruption: I do not see that much more can be done by fiction in that direction than has been done already. You may say that the treatment hitherto has been vague and general only, which is quite true. Possibly on that account nobody has profited greatly by such works. To do the thing well there should be no mincing of matters, and all details should be clear and directly given. This I fear the British public would not stand just now; though, to be sure, we are educating it by degrees. (1:264)

Hardy’s rejection of Fawcett’s idea for a short story that would benefit the feminist cause is significant, since while Hardy would have no problem a year later telling Florence Henniker to be so bold as to offend her conventional friends, in this situation he is unwilling to do the same. Whether it is a feminist polemic that Hardy wants to avoid or too much realism with regard to sexual relations or simply didactic stories can be difficult to discern, given that Hardy presented himself as someone who opposed
limited representation of sexuality and didacticism in general rather than feminism itself. Nevertheless, even if Hardy only feared thoroughly candid realism and didacticism, his fear had implications for politically based literary aesthetics, including the feminist aesthetic.

Interestingly, while Hardy would not write the didactic story Fawcett wanted, he did write a different story shortly after the publication of *Tess*, titled “An Imaginative Woman.” This story illustrates well Hardy’s complex ambivalence about didacticism and feminism, since it seems to acknowledge the influence of a feminine audience on Hardy’s writing but falls short of taking up any feminist causes directly. In this story, Ella Marchmill, an amateur poet who writes under a male pseudonym, falls in love with the more established poet Robert Trewe, whose volume *Lyrics to a Woman Unknown* comes under attack in the “______ Review.” While on a family holiday, Ella stays in lodging rooms previously occupied by Trewe and, while doing so, learns much about the poet from the landlady. Ella is even able to obtain a photograph of Trewe, but when she arranges a meeting with Trewe, he backs out at the last minute. Shortly after, Trewe kills himself. The narrative suggests that had Trewe known Ella and her “sympathetic” voice, he would not have killed himself. Doubling the tragedy of Trewe’s death is the aftermath of his death, in which Ella’s husband discovers the picture of Trewe and a lock of hair from his and Ella’s child. He mistakenly believes that Ella had an affair with Trewe and that Trewe is the biological father of their child.

Hardy’s focus on the gender politics of the ending of the story seems a clear statement of appreciation for the feminine support of Hardy’s work. Further, his decision to directly steer readers to see Ella’s husband’s mistake suggests that Hardy did want to appeal to feminist readers, since the depiction of injustices suffered by women was important in the feminist aesthetic. Still, in this story Hardy seems to back away from embracing fully feminist ideals, as Fawcett would have liked. Instead of writing a story that could serve as a positive example (say, in which Trewe does meet Ella and experiences her feminine influence or, even better, in which Ella is able to develop her writing into a professional career, as important as Trewe’s career is), Hardy chooses to write a story that centers primarily on Trewe and his misery, showing that his
interest in the relations of the sexes serves a different purpose than that of feminists.

II.

When *Jude the Obscure* was published at the beginning of November 1895, the mainstream reviews followed much the same pattern as those for *Tess*. The early reviews were generally negative; most commented on the extreme “gloom” of this novel, and many associated it with the work and aims of Zola (Gerber and Davis 67-71). Hardy assessed some of these early commentaries in a letter to Sir George Douglas, written at the end of the first month after *Jude* came out, saying, “[C]an you imagine my surprise at the *Guardian* saying that everything sacred is brought into contempt, etc. in the novel! Did you see that *The World* nearly fainted away, and the *Pall Mall Gazette* went into fits over the story?” (*Collected* 2:98). By January 1896, Oliphant’s “Anti-Marriage League” had appeared in *Blackwood’s*, and Hardy was even more irritated, especially by Oliphant’s claim about the serialization of the novel. Although Oliphant begins the review by reminding readers of her earlier assessment of *Tess* in “The Old Saloon” and expressing a slightly more favorable opinion of the novel this time around, she iterates that it was the rural scenery in *Tess* rather than the characters and their actions that made her admire Hardy. She then asserts that, unlike *Tess*, in which the rural scenery redeemed the novel, there is little to redeem *Jude* from the “grossness, indecency, and horror” it represents (“Anti-Marriage” 138). Oliphant believes that Hardy’s mistake is believing that his fame has come from this element of his writing rather than from his rural landscapes: “Nothing, I think, but a theory could explain the wonderful want of perception which induces a man full of perceptions to make a mistake so fundamental; but it is done--and thus unconsciously affords us the strangest illustration of what Art can come to when given over to the exposition of the unclean” (138).

Oliphant then associates what Hardy does in *Jude* to the work of Zola, confirming that, for Oliphant anyway, the only type of realism that is acceptable is that which she has already narrowly defined as depictions of rural landscape and/or display of free will on the part of humans. Though she acknowledges that Hardy is not as “disgusting,” “impious,” or “foul” as some followers of Zola, she suggests that
Hardy comes as close to Zola’s technique in Jude as a “Master” of fiction can. Further, Oliphant makes it clear that Hardy fails because he does not emphasize free will. Hardy’s fate-based philosophy, where the actions of individuals cannot be linked to a logical moral consequence as they can in Oliphant’s theory of human experience, irritates Oliphant to no end. In characterizing Jude and his story, Oliphant argues that Jude is “an attractive figure at his outset,” for his aspiration to become educated and the obstacles that stand in his way offer an opportunity for Hardy to represent humans attempting to improve themselves. Yet once Jude meets Arabella and Sue, says Oliphant, he “is made for the rest of his life into a puppet flung about between them.” He is “always the puppet, always acted upon by the others” (139).

With this assessment of Jude, as one who would be more realistic had he been able to exert his free will throughout the novel, it is not surprising that Oliphant is even more critical when assessing the women of the story. Oliphant first characterizes Arabella, calling her a “fleshy animal,” a “native product of the fields, the rustic woman, exuberant and overflowing with health, vanity, and appetite,” whose discussions with other characters bring “shame to the language in which it is recorded and suggested” (139), and then she describes Sue, characterizing her as the “other” woman who “completes the circle of the unclean” and “makes virtue vicious by keeping the physical facts of one relationship in life in constant prominence” (140). Oliphant then continues to list all of Sue’s actions, in a somewhat condescending manner--“She marries to save herself from trouble; then quits her husband, to live a life of perpetual temptation and resistance with her lover; then, marries, or professes to marry,” and so on--and she then sums Sue up this way: “This woman we are required to accept as the type of high-toned purity” (140). Finally, she assesses the women in the novel in general, saying, “It is the women who are the active agents in all this unsavoury imbroglio” (140), a statement that might be glossed as yet another indicator of Oliphant’s strong commitment to a philosophy that emphasizes free will. Interestingly, however, this free-will philosophy only works for Oliphant when women act in a particular manner and uphold Oliphant’s traditional expectations about the role of women. Since Hardy does not follow her model, she accuses him of challenging the appropriate way for human life.
to be represented in fiction.

Oliphant’s review reveals how clear the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of definitions of realism become, especially when her review is set next to those written by liberal feminists, whose philosophical and ideological commitments emphasize more fully the role of social conditions on expressions of individual agency and the importance of this tension when representing women. In contrast to Oliphant’s review, the assessment of Jude found in Shafts is significantly more sympathetic to Hardy, arguing that most critics have overlooked the importance of the subtitle of the novel, “The Letter Killeth,” and, therefore, have missed not only the irony and tragedy of the lives represented by Hardy but especially his genius in drawing the character of Sue. Writes the reviewer, the well-known suffragist Dora B. Montefiore,

It is needless to say when writing of a novel of Mr. Hardy’s that all the characters are drawn with a master-hand; but in the case of Sue Bridehead the novelist has well nigh excelled himself. She is the type of the upward struggling woman, unconscious almost yet in her struggle, and feebly armed it may be against that terrible “letter” which in the end shall kill her delicate ideal purpose. (12)

Like the feminist reviews of Tess, Montefiore’s review acknowledges the role cultural conditions play in shaping a woman’s life and the tension between representing these conditions and showing how women resist such conditions. Though Montefiore questions Hardy’s decision to have Sue return to Phillotson and see through “her self-abnegation to the uttermost debasement that a woman can endure,” since it seems unlikely that a woman who had been described by Jude as one “whose intellect was to mine like a star to a benzoline lamp” would hardly “take such an entirely debasing course” (12-13), she ends the review on a positive note. If one looks at Jude and Sue up close, “as we would look at the microbes in a drop of water under a powerful magnifying lens,” Montefiore says, they do look flawed. But if one looks at them from a wider perspective, “in relation to Humanity and its solidarity of real . . . interests and aspirations,” they can be seen more clearly. “[W]e begin to see beneath the fret and jar, the ironies and apparent failures, and to recognise the story of their lives as the perfectly
told history of an infinitesimal part of a great whole” (13). In other words, if one judges Hardy’s characters only according to their specific actions, one might take Oliphant’s view of the novel, but once one widens one’s view of realism to include more than a character’s actions, it is easier to see clearly Hardy’s remarkable achievement with Jude.

While it appears that The Woman’s Herald, now called The Woman’s Signal and under new editorial direction, did not review Jude within a year of its publication, around the same time the newspaper might have reviewed the novel, early 1896, the “morality” of Hardy’s work, especially in Tess, comes up in a discussion initiated by readers of the magazine. As a note from the editor, Florence Fenwick Miller, indicates, shortly after the newspaper runs a cover story on Olive Schreiner, a reader writes in, threatening to end her subscription because of the attention given Schreiner. In this reader’s opinion, Fenwick Miller reports, Schreiner’s The Story of an African Farm is “immoral” and should not have received attention in the newspaper’s pages (Miller 123). This report from Fenwick Miller prompts another reader to bring up Hardy’s Tess, as part of a larger question about the “morality or immorality of certain books now before the public” (Moulder 318). Writes the reader,

I should very much like you to give me your opinion on the subject . . . as I must confess to having received rather hazy ideas on this question. . . . Now, I have only read one of Olive Schreiner’s works, namely, ‘The Story of an African Farm,’ and so cannot claim to be a competent authority; but, certainly, I never thought that that particular book had an immoral tendency. (318)

The reader continues to say that he or she has read other books that have been classified as immoral, such as Tess and Grand’s The Heavenly Twins. The reader did not find Tess particularly interesting and, upon discovering a review of the novel that identified it as “brilliantly fascinating but obscene,” was somewhat surprised. “I found it anything but fascinating,” says the reader, “and most certainly I should never have dreamt of calling it filthy. That I received any possible harm from the book I cannot see, for not one passage in the volume made any lasting impression” (318). Of Grand’s The Heavenly Twins, the reader writes, “I have heard ‘The Heavenly Twins’ abused a great deal at
different times. Shall I shock you very much if I confess to having cordially liked that much abused book?” (318).

*The Woman’s Signal’s* response to this letter is interesting, since their response is a satirical article about the topic, called “Truth-Telling or Vicious?” In this satire, three people—the “utterer of false coin,” the “echoing booby,” and the “just thinker”—have a conversation about distinguishing truth-telling from viciousness and indelicacy, a third term that the “just thinker” seems to think is applied unfairly to women writers. While much of the satire is concerned with this issue of unfair standards for women writers (the “coiner” and the “booby” argue that it is worse for women to write “indelicate” books because women are supposed to be “our moral tone-givers”), at the end of the article, *The Woman’s Signal* seems to answer the letter writer’s question directly.

“Where do you draw the line?” suddenly asked the coiner, having nothing to advance.

“Between viciousness and indelicacy do you mean? a story that appeals suggestively to the lower impulses is vicious, when no object but passing excitement is held in view, and when altogether unnecessary situations are introduced. Some readers might stigmatise as coarse, or indelicate, ‘The Heavenly Twins,’ but no human being could dare to describe it as vicious; and whatever hyper-sensitive delicacy may object to, every true woman must be grateful that such a work has been produced. Third or fourth rate male authors issue vicious books, either for pay or owing to aimless low mindedness; but great souled writers of both sexes produce books that may be called ‘unveiled’ rather than coarse, not because they enjoy doing so, but because they consider the showing up of wrongs a righteous necessity.” (Nelham 310)

While Hardy’s *Tess* is not discussed directly here, as *The Heavenly Twins* is, it seems as though *The Woman’s Signal* is suggesting that Hardy might fall under the “great souled writers,” those who write what some might find “indelicate” or even “coarse” because they are attempting to expose some wrong, such as the injustice of the double-standard applied to women’s sexuality in the late-nineteenth century. That *The Woman’s Herald*
publishes this statement around the time Hardy’s *Jude* is being roundly criticized is
significant, even if it does not publish a review of the novel itself.

As was the case with the reviews of *Tess* that ran in feminist periodicals, there is
no evidence that Hardy knew of the discussion of his work in *Shafts* and *The Woman’s
Herald/Signal*, but among the many letters that “flowed in” during the first two months
after its publication (Collected Letters 2:100) was at least one from a woman, George
Egerton, author of *Keynotes* (1893). Egerton writes to Hardy to express her approval of
the novel; she states that she thought Sue Bridehead “a marvellously true psychological
study of a temperament less rare than the ordinary male observer supposes” (2:102).

Hardy’s response is as follows:

Dear Madam:

Your letter has been forwarded to me. My reading of your
“Keynotes” came about somewhat as yours did of “Jude.” A friend had
it presented to her, and after reading it with deep interest she sent it on to
me with a request that I would tell her what I thought of it. I need hardly
say what my reply was: and how much I felt the verisimilitude of the
stories, and how you seemed to make us breathe the atmosphere of the
scenes.

I have been intending for years to draw Sue, and it is
extraordinary that a type of woman, comparatively common and getting
commoner, should have escaped fiction so long.

I congratulate you on the little boy. My children, alas, are all in
octavo.

Yours sincerely

Thomas Hardy.

What is interesting here is how Hardy, who had remarked to Henniker only two years
earlier that he was “not greatly curious” about Egerton as a writer (2:47), is remarkably
admiring of her here, and, more significantly, how he shifts his definition of realism to
accommodate Egerton’s more feminist take on fiction, one in which the psychological
aspects of a woman’s character rather than just the tragic aspects are emphasized. Such
a shift in Hardy’s definition, at least for this particular letter, suggests that he was trying to appeal to a feminist audience."

Still, Hardy’s comments to feminists such as George Egerton must be taken in conjunction with other, more cautious comments about Jude, which indicate that Hardy was trying to negotiate a position in regard to the realist debate, one in which he would be admired by feminists but also maintain a more mainstream audience. This attempt to walk a fine line is apparent when one concentrates on how Hardy’s rhetoric about Jude changes dramatically once the critics react to it. As Hardy’s letters to Florence Henniker reveal, before its publication, Hardy perceived and talked about Jude as a woman-centered novel, in which Sue was the primary focus. On January 15, 1894, Hardy writes to Henniker, “I am creeping on a little with the long story, and am beginning to get interested in my heroine as she takes shape and reality: though she is very nebulous at present” (2:47). Then, on August 12, 1895, he writes and says that “I am more interested in this Sue story than in any I have written” (2:84). That Hardy speaks of Jude as a woman-centered novel at this point, much like he spoke of Tess as he was composing it (in fact, Tess was called “The Body and Soul of Sue” at one point [1:194]), is significant, especially since after the publication of Jude, Hardy adopted a remarkably different rhetoric when speaking of the novel.

Suddenly, he was of the opinion that the story was really about Jude not Sue, or at least about two people rather than just one. To Edmund Gosse, Hardy would write on November 10, 1895,

It is curious that some of the papers should look upon the novel as a manifesto on “the marriage question” (although of course, it involves it)—seeing that it is concerned first with the labours of a poor student to get a University degree, and secondly with the tragic issues of two bad marriages. . . . I suppose the attitude of these critics is to be accounted for by the accident that, during the serial publication of my story, a sheaf of “purpose” novels on the matter appeared. (2:93)

This sort of commentary Hardy repeats over and over in the days following the publication of Jude, repeating the same opinion to Henniker herself, Lady Jeune, and Sir
George Douglas. Hardy even makes the claim, to Edward Clodd on November 10, 1895, that the “purpose” novels with which *Jude* has been classed were written well after he composed *Jude* (2:92-93), a claim that probably needs some support to be believed. In fact, the association of Hardy as a writer with a “purpose” had begun in 1891 with the publication of *Tess*, and Hardy’s resistance to such a label had begun then as well, so Hardy’s characterization of himself as one who is “accidentally” part of the anti-marriage league is suspect. Further, that Hardy does sometimes adopt a more fully feminist stance, as in his letter to Egerton, indicates that Hardy knew he had more than one audience to which he needed to appeal. Still, the ambivalence of Hardy’s position on realism, and by extension on the cultural status of real-life women, suggests that Hardy knew how to manipulate the spoken word to place himself in an especially neutral, safe position. He understood when and how to speak out, to remain silent, and even to let others speak for him.

And there were people eager to speak for Hardy; Grant Allen wrote “Fiction and Mrs. Grundy,” a defense of *Tess* that appeared in *Novel Review*, and Edmund Gosse wrote a positive review of *Jude* in the *Cosmopolis* that went to great lengths to differentiate Hardy from Zola. While there is no evidence that Hardy was directly involved in the composition of these defenses, he certainly expressed his appreciation to both Allen and Gosse (1:277, 2:93). Furthermore, we might look to his collaboration with Agnes Grove--known for her book *A Human Woman* (1908), a collection of essays about women’s suffrage written in the 1890s and 1900s--to see one instance where his involvement in the composition of work in which he had vested interest does seem direct.

Hardy met Grove right around the time *Jude* was published, and first attempted to help her publish a reply to the Bishop of Albany’s article “Why Women Do Not Want the Ballot,” though this attempt at publication was unsuccessful (2:91, 101). Although Hardy always presented himself as one interested in Grove’s suffragist essays for purely literary, rather than political, reasons, in the same letter in which Hardy acknowledges receipt of Grove’s “Reply,” he tells her that he is sending a copy of *Jude* to her, for he states, “You are, I know, sufficiently broad of view to estimate without bias a tragedy of
very unconventional lives” (2:91). This suggests that despite Hardy’s ambivalence about women’s suffrage, he did look for people with whom he shared some common views, even if they might differ on the issue of suffrage.

Apparently, after reading Jude, Grove expressed interest in the conversation Sue Bridehead has with Father Time right before his suicide, which prompted Hardy to suggest, in a letter dated December 20, 1895, that Grove write an article entitled “What should children be told?” (2:101). Ultimately, this article, which had two parts, “On Religion” and “On Physiology,” ran under the title “Our Children: What Children Should Be Told” and was published in the July 1896 issue of The Free Review. In the article, Grove first argues that adults should not rely on dogma when teaching their children about religion, but should instead focus on achieving “true religion,” which is free of “hypocrisy” (393-97), ideas Hardy would have looked upon favorably. Then, Grove continues to discuss what mothers should tell their children about sex. Grove asserts that mothers should take a middle ground, somewhere between “the ‘gooseberry bush’ theory, and complete candor,” an interesting phrase, given Hardy’s use of the word in his article “Candour in English Fiction” (398). Grove then evokes Jude, stating that when mothers are asked where babies come from, they can tell their children specific information, without the “fear of this middle course producing in an ordinary child such lamentable results as its readers will remember when produced by Sue’s fatal conversation with the child in ‘Jude the Obscure’” (398).

That Grove appears to be somewhat critical of Sue here is significant, especially since in one of Hardy’s letters to Grove, after he had looked at proofs of the article, he writes about deleting and restoring lines in the article. While he writes of deleting one line (“I have taken the liberty of deleting one sentence, for purely ‘Mrs. Grundian’ reasons; but you can, of course, restore it” [2:122]), he also restores the line about Jude (“The sentence you wrote about Sue is restored as you will see” [2:122]), which had obviously been removed at some earlier point. Whether this restored sentence about Sue is the same item referred to in an earlier letter, in which Hardy wrote, “My opinion is (if you care to have it) that this insertion will not improve the essay” (2:116), one cannot know, but it is clear that the sentence about Sue was an issue of debate at some point, for
someone, presumably Hardy. One imagines that Hardy did not expect Grove to be so critical of Sue and that he would have seen this criticism as Grove placing an unnecessary moral judgment on his artistic work.

As was the case with Fawcett’s response to *Tess*, Hardy again takes a rather ambivalent approach to the feminists who respond favorably to his work, first encouraging Grove to publish on a topic pertinent to his novels and then trying to control the content of Grove’s essay when she takes a position that might be damaging to his reputation. Still, despite the possibility that Hardy and Grove had disagreed about this particular section of the article, Hardy continued to help Grove with her essays as late as the year 1910 (4:88-89), many of which took a pro-suffrage stance. Though Hardy always seems to be generally supportive of Grove in his letters to her, there is a point at which Hardy’s frustration with Grove’s assumptions about his politics boils over. In 1909, having read a draft of Grove’s preface to T. W. Berry’s *Professions for Girls*, and having apparently replied to Grove with comments on the draft, Hardy writes to Grove, “Now here is a misunderstanding. I read your cogent arguments, and had no other idea than that I was to digest them, and when I had digested them, and become quite convinced that you were right, I was to reply like a lamb. I felt sure that you did not want me to write and say merely that I was not convinced. But evidently I was wrong” (4:3). Hardy then continues to comment on what are apparently a number of points about suffrage Grove has made in her letter.

I will not attempt to answer all your arguments even now. I never, as you know, take any active part in politics, having only just sufficient energy to do one sort of work in one little groove. And I have thought that it would be really injuring the woman’s cause if I were to make known exactly what I think may be the result of their success—a result I don’t object to, but which one half your supporters certainly would; and hence might withdraw their support. (4:3)

Hardy’s choice of words in responding to Grove seems somewhat odd. When he writes, “I never, as you know, take any active part in politics,” he is employing a phrase that had become common in his letters by this point in his career, but this was a phrase
he typically used with feminist acquaintances, who were writing to ask him to contribute to this or that cause, rather than with friends such as Grove. His use of it with Grove suggests the extreme anxiety Hardy had about involving himself in the politics of the day, especially after the controversial receptions of *Tess* and *Jude*.

III.

In light of Hardy’s ambivalent position on feminist causes of the 1890s, *Tess* and *Jude* emerge as novels fraught with the similar issues of ambivalence toward the spoken word as a method for women to assert agency; in *Tess* and *Jude*, female characters’ attempts at asserting agency become sites for understanding Hardy’s unease about women’s issues, especially the suffrage movement. Well-known is the comment made by general readers, “Tess doesn’t even get to tell her own story,” which often is used to characterize their reactions to the break between Phases 4 and 5 of *Tess*, during which Tess tells Angel Clare about her relationship with Alec d’Urberville after hearing Angel’s confession of his own sexual indiscretion. These readers are right to point out how the structure of the narrative encourages sympathy with Angel while discouraging sympathy with Tess, since Tess does not tell her story directly. But, as narrative theory helps us understand, our readerly reactions can sometimes be mitigated by looking closely at the rhetorical effects of the narrative; that is, it is also possible to see the silencing of Tess as a move to build sympathy for her character. Still, even among feminist literary critics, well versed in the subtleties of narrative, there is little agreement about the degree of agency asserted by Tess in the confession scene, not to mention across the course of the novel. Some poststructuralist feminist critics interpret Hardy’s suppression of Tess’s narrative as the indicator of her lack of agency, while others argue that Tess does assert agency in the novel, though it is usually through strategies other than the language of resistance; Tess’s ability to “return the male gaze,” an act closely associated with consciousness, is one often-mentioned strategy.

What I want to suggest is that subversive moments in Hardy’s texts are more likely to occur when female characters express agency through a method other than that of consciousness, especially when they express it through the spoken word, as seen in
the confession scenes in *Tess* and *Jude* where dialogue is the dominant narrative strategy. My analysis, with its emphasis on the spoken word, is influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia; assertion of woman’s agency through dialogue often occurs in the moments when female characters are able to mount resistance to language that attempts to categorize and vilify them, moments I like to see as first “heteroglossic” and then potentially subversive, when the opportunity opened up by heteroglossia can turn into more concrete displays of resistance, in defiance of the social apparatuses described by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge, Discipline and Punish*, and other works. But it is also true that these heteroglossic moments do not always become fully subversive, and the reasons for this--attributable to the way in which female characters use language, and to whom they speak--is part of my focus here.

This is not to say that other methods of asserting agency, especially physical actions, are not used to good effect in *Tess* and *Jude*. In fact, we might argue against late-nineteenth-century critics such as Oliphant and point out that some of the most convincing scenes in Hardy’s novels emphasize the actions of female characters: for example, the baptism of Tess’s baby and the stabbing of Alec d’Urberville in *Tess*. Further, a scene such as the baptism of Tess’s baby involves all three methods of asserting agency. Though the actual baptism and Tess’s conversation with the parson are told primarily through the internal perspective of the narrator, the narration leading into the scene, in which we are told of Tess’s return to the fields to work after having her baby and of her need to “be useful again” (110), is told through Tess’s perspective. After the narration shifts back to the narrator’s internal perspective (“Whatever Tess’s reasoning . . .”), description of her actions dominates the narration. We are told of her “rushing downstairs” to see if someone can bring the parson before the baby dies (111) and of her lighting a candle and preparing the baptism water when her father refuses to let the parson come (112). Finally, the baptism itself, and Tess’s plea for a Christian burial of her baby are told primarily through dialogue, and this dialogue clearly shows Tess resisting cultural norms that subordinate women, since the Church’s policy against Christian burial for illegitimate children is both a comment on the status of the child and a condemnation of the unmarried mother.
Likewise, when Tess takes the bold step of stabbing Alec d’Urberville and then fleeing the scene, her assertion of agency involves spoken word and physical actions, though no narratively apparent consciousness. In fact, Tess’s consciousness is distinctly absent in this scene, and this absence might be seen as evidence of failed resistance. That is, without increased consciousness, Tess chooses a form of resistance that ultimately will not be effective. I will discuss this point in more detail later; for now, it is enough to note that Angel’s internal perspective filters the initial meeting with Tess at the lodging-house, and the perspective of the lodging-house owner, Mrs. Brooks, filters the remainder of the scene, including the discovery of Tess’s actions against Alec. Still, Tess’s use of speech and action to resist Alec is clear, though both are narratively masked to some degree. Tess’s actions take place off-stage, with the reader knowing that she stabbed Alec only because of the blood stain on the ceiling (370). Tess’s speech is obscured by the fact that the scene is filtered through Mrs. Brooks, who witnesses the interactions between Tess and Alec through a key-hole rather than in full viewing and hearing range. Further, Mrs. Brooks’s observation of Tess’s speech and action is cut short by her fear that someone will catch her watching the scene (369).

While all three methods of expressing agency can be found in Tess, then, the confession scene is the best representative of effective use of the spoken word to assert agency. Spoken word in the stabbing scene is obscured, so readers do not know the full extent of Tess’s verbal resistance, and, while the baptism scene highlights the Church’s role in condemning fallen women through the denial of their children’s rights to burial, the more direct condemnation of Tess by Angel, and his attempt to directly limit her future opportunities through this condemnation, is a more overt example of the type of resistance I am interested in. Further, given that late-nineteenth-century feminist criticism of Hardy focuses on assertion of agency through speech as a positive example, as in Clementina Black’s review, in this reading I focus on the spoken word primarily. The confession scene includes the most extensive resistance through spoken language staged by Tess in the novel.

Useful to my argument about assertion of agency through the spoken word is the work of Beth Kalikoff and Jeanette Shumaker, both of whom address the issue of
woman’s agency by looking at the confession scene but take opposite views of this scene. In “Victorian Sexual Confessions” (1990), Kalikoff argues that Tess is one in a long line of fallen Victorian women who, by confessing, are seen as powerful, more powerful than the institutions that “coerce” them to confess. Shumaker, on the other hand, believes that the tragedy of Tess’s fate undermines Kalikoff’s reading of her expressions of agency, and in “Breaking with the Conventions: Victorian Confession Novels and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*” (1994), Shumaker asserts that although Tess may be considered heroic by those outside the text, within the world of the story, Tess is unsuccessful at asserting agency, in part because she uses her confession to try to create romance with Angel. I agree with Shumaker and other critics who believe that Tess (and Sue too) do not express agency on a consistent basis, and that the overall effect in both novels is the suppression of woman’s agency. But the confession scenes in Hardy’s fiction are moments where female characters do take control, if only momentarily, and where Hardy represents such assertions through a narrative strategy often overlooked by mainstream late-nineteenth- and late-twentieth-century literary critics. As I have asserted elsewhere in this dissertation, late-twentieth-century literary critics, especially narratologists, have not adequately addressed representation of woman’s agency in late-nineteenth-century texts, in part because narratologists have focused too closely on narratorial discourse and not enough on narrative strategies on the “story” side of the story/discourse distinction. In addition, once we historicize current narrative theory by looking at the comments of late-nineteenth-century mainstream literary critics, we realize that criticism of the time also overlooked the importance of spoken word in representations of woman’s agency, since these critics usually focused on physical actions.

While the suppression of Tess’s narrative by Hardy is disturbing to feminist sensibilities, the confession scene that follows Tess’s suppressed narrative is one moment in the novel when Tess does assert agency, and the fact that she uses the spoken word to do it is significant, since other methods, especially silence and fleeing the scene, have been unsuccessful earlier in the story. Tess’s moment of resistance through the spoken word, and Angel’s absorption of this resistance through dialogue
with her, is best understood as a reflection of Hardy’s ambivalence over authoring stories of women’s resistance in a period in which his support of women’s voices might be taken as a direct political stance on women’s issues, especially women’s suffrage. Further, when we turn from *Tess* to *Jude*, Hardy’s ambivalent use of the language of resistance in representing Sue’s attempts at asserting agency confirms his anxiety about the literary market in which he was writing. While Sue’s attempts at asserting agency are initially more successful than Tess’s, in part because her use of New Woman language is convincing to those with whom she uses this language, Sue is like Tess in that she suffers from the same loss of confidence that keeps both women from asserting agency on a consistent basis. Further, Sue’s initial assertion of agency and subsequent loss of confidence provides an interesting contrast to assertions of agency by the other prominently female character in *Jude*, Arabella. Arabella certainly asserts agency, but she does so in a manner that might be classified as feminine rather than feminist, according to the feminist ideal of the 1890s.

The confession scenes and female characters’ use of the spoken word in them cannot be discussed without first acknowledging and understanding the role representations of woman’s consciousness through internal perspective plays in the novels. No one will argue with the idea raised by critics that Hardy’s interest in consciousness, especially through “the gaze,” is incessant. Both the gaze of Fate over the lives of average human beings and the gazes between these human beings are a recurrent theme in Hardy’s work, and such an incessant interest in this particular theme suggests that internal perspective will be important in Hardy’s work. But as Bernadette Bertrandias points out in “Jeux de focalisation et problematique de la figuration dans *Tess*” (1988), it is the limited degree of Tess’s internal perspective rather than the abundance of it that makes the difference in Hardy’s representation of women in *Tess*. Bertrandias argues that Tess ultimately loses the role of focalizer in the novel to other characters, especially Alec and Angel, and the perspective of the narrator, whose discourse suggests that Tess has little power against the larger forces of Fate, which always seems to dominate.
If we turn to a discussion of Tess Durbeyfield and Sue Bridehead as focalizers, we can see how inadequate consciousness becomes as a method of expressing agency in these novels. In both Tess and Jude, internal perspective is dominated from the beginning by narrators with a subtle but consistent control over the telling of the story. Hardy’s narrators tend not to be overly intrusive in presenting stories, instead using straightforward descriptions of people or landscapes in the early pages rather than some strong moral or social commentary, as in Jane Austen’s famous opening line of Pride and Prejudice: “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” Still, Hardy’s narrators do infuse straightforward description with subtle commentary, often on the physical qualities of the person or place. Tess begins, for example, with a description of John Durbeyfield, whose legs are “rickety” and who has a “bias in his gait which inclined him somewhat to the left of a straight line” (31), and Jude begins with the description of several characters, all of whom are taking certain actions that reflect something about their characters on the day the schoolmaster Phillotson leaves the village. These openings are in line with others written by Hardy, such as Far From the Madding Crowd and Return of the Native, where such subtle but consistent control by the narrator is also present.

From the liberal-feminist perspective, what also is interesting about the openings of Tess and Jude is that female characters are either passed over as focalizers, as in the case of Tess Durbeyfield, or simply not present until well into the novel, as in the case of Sue Bridehead. Sue appears about one-third of the way into the novel, when Jude sees her for the first time in one of the shops in Christminster, and when she does finally appear in the novel, it is only through Jude’s internal perspective. At the moment Jude first sees Sue, we learn that Jude “felt very shy of looking at the girl. . . . [S]he was so pretty that he could not believe it possible that she should belong to him” (138). Shortly after, we learn that Jude is following Sue around the city, attending the church she goes to, but his attraction to Sue and his awareness that she is his cousin controls her representation in the story at this point. Jude feels, we are told through his internal perspective, that “[t]o see her, and to be himself unseen and unknown, was enough for him at present” (138). While it might be argued that Sue should not appear early in the
novel, given the title and focus on Jude, we know from Hardy’s letters that he thought about the novel as a woman-centered work during the composing process and also was well aware of the other choices available to him as a writer competing in the 1890s literary market. That Hardy made the choice to withhold Sue and her internal perspective from the story until one-third of the story had already been told supports my argument that Hardy had much ambivalence toward the feminist perspective on real-life women’s issues and fictional representations of woman’s agency. On the one hand, Hardy wanted to write the “Sue story,” as evidenced by his comments in his own letters. On the other hand, Hardy ended up writing a novel in which the “relations of the sexes,” for both women and men, is the focus. That Jude is only partially woman-centered points to the difference between the feminist position on realism and Hardy’s own position.

In contrast to Sue, Tess is present from nearly the beginning of the novel, as is appropriate, given the title and focus of the novel. Still, Hardy again falls short of 1890s feminist ideals about narrative strategy by passing over Tess as a focalizer of impressions of John Durbeyfield in the second chapter of the book. As Durbeyfield, in his drunken but proud state, approaches his daughter and the other club-walkers that have just been described by the narrator, readers are given the following account:

They [the club-walkers] came round by The Pure Drop Inn, and were turning out of the high road to pass through a wicket-gate into the meadows, when one of the women said--

“The Lord-a-Lord! Why, Tess Durbeyfield, if there isn’t thy father riding hwome in a carriage!”

A young member of the band turned her head at the exclamation. She was a fine and handsome girl—not handsomer than some others, possibly—but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to color and shape. She wore ... (38)

And the narrator goes on with his description of Tess and the scene. Instead of shifting to Tess’s internal perspective in the sentence following, “A young member of the band turned her head at the exclamation,” a logical point for Tess to become a focalizer, the
narrator retains control of the perspective on the scene, and, in doing so, creates more
distance between the reader and Tess by describing her externally. Hardy’s decision to
pass over Tess as focalizer is important, for had he made her a focalizer, the way in
which the story develops might be, perhaps would have to be, different. Were Tess to
focalize here instead of the narrator retaining control of the perspective, readers would
more quickly gain access to the thoughts and feelings of a woman who continually
struggles to assert agency. To give Tess thoughts and feelings early on, regardless of
what they might be, would lay the foundation for a character who might assert agency
more often and more successfully, according to the feminist assumption that
consciousness is necessary for meaningful assertion of agency.

Despite the lack of internal perspective by Tess and Sue early in the novels, their
internal perspectives do become important at certain moments in the story, though in
very different ways. The first significant evidence of Sue’s internal perspective occurs
immediately following Jude’s attendance of a church service, where he hopes to catch
sight of Sue. Having just told of Jude’s attempt to see her through narration emphasizing
Jude’s internal perspective (138-40), Hardy inserts a line break and begins again, this
time recounting an earlier incident in which Sue walks in the country by herself.65 This
new section is told first from the perspective of the narrator, and then from Sue’s
perspective. “Some little time before the date of this service in the cathedral the pretty,
liquid-eyed, light-footed young woman Sue Bridehead had an afternoon’s holiday, and
leaving the ecclesiastical establishment in which she not only assisted but lodged, took a
walk into the country” (140). The narration continues to describe the country scene, and
then focuses on Sue’s perceptions and, later, her thoughts. “On the other side of the stile,
in the footpath, she beheld a foreigner with black hair and a sallow face. . . . When [the
objects] were paid for, and the man had gone, she began to be concerned as to what she
should do with them” (140-41).

This account establishes Sue and her internal perspective as independent from
Jude and his perspective. While one could argue that such a presentation of Sue’s
character indicates that she is a New Woman type likely to resist cultural norms that
support the subordination of women, this argument is mitigated by the fact that Jude, a
man who sympathizes with Sue’s position on the institution of marriage, is the person with whom Sue is establishing a relationship. In a strong contrast to the first significant representation of Sue’s internal perspective, Tess’s internal perspective becomes significant in relationship to Angel Clare’s rather than separate from his. The shifting back and forth between Tess and Angel’s internal perspectives in chapter 19, when the two are working at the dairy farm and slowly growing to love each other, is particularly important, since it mirrors the development of Tess and Angel’s relationship. As they become acquainted and eventually love each other, their internal perspectives become intertwined, to the point that, at the end of chapter 19, the narrator’s commentary shows their actions (“They met continually; they could not help it” [145]) and their internal perspectives (“they seemed to themselves the first persons up of all the world . . . as if they were Adam and Eve” [145]) completely merged. Once Tess begins to focus on romance, her internal perspective is possible only in conjunction with her male partner’s.

Arabella, though she is ultimately not as important a character as Sue, provides another point of comparison for thinking about Hardy’s use of internal perspective. Unlike Sue and Tess, who eventually have roles as focalizers, Arabella never becomes a strong focalizer. Yet her presence through other methods of asserting agency, especially the spoken word and physical actions, is strong. Her first appearance in *Jude* occurs in Chapter 6, when Jude, walking along a road, finds a piece of pig flesh thrown at him (80). Upon seeing the women who have thrown the piece of flesh at him and are now laughing about it, Jude focuses in on Arabella, who is described in distinctly physical terms. “She whom he addressed was a fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance. . . . She was a complete and substantial female animal—no more, no less” (81). Arabella, while not overtly aggressive with Jude, does take advantage of the opportunity he offers for her to flirt with him, and, by the end of chapter, Arabella has plans to pursue Jude for marriage.

While Arabella asserts agency, her assertions should be seen as feminine rather than feminist, according to the ideal articulated by feminists of the 1890s. The difference between feminine and feminist agency is important. Feminine agency often does not
entail resistance to cultural norms that support the subordination of women but only a
direct payoff for the individual asserting agency, a payoff that is typically within the
system that oppresses women. Feminist assertion of agency involves resistance to such
oppression and such resistance has the potential to extend beyond the individual to do
something to change the cultural status of a broad group of women. While Arabella
asserts agency, she does not do so in a meaningful way, according to the feminist ideal.
What Arabella lacks, it seems, is the increased consciousness required to make
meaningful assertions. Arabella has consciousness; otherwise she would not be
described as an intentionally scheming person: she experiences “a little glow of triumph”
when she gets Jude to call on her (83), is called “a careless woman who sees she is
winning her game” when she takes Jude to the inn for tea/beer (89), and is described as
a woman whose consciousness is raised by her friends, who know that the “right way”
to attract a man is to trick him into marriage with a faked pregnancy (93). But Arabella
does not have the increased consciousness required for feminist agency.

With Arabella in mind as a useful point of comparison, we can now focus on Sue
and Tess. While internal perspective plays an important role of establishing the
relationships between both of them and their romantic partners, and while the first
instance of Sue’s internal perspective anticipates to some degree her later resistance to
cultural norms that support the subordination of women, these instances of internal
perspective rarely play a role in the direct resistance these female characters put up to
oppressive cultural norms. As I illustrated in the previous chapter, this is in contrast to
the central female characters in the novels of Gissing, where internal perspective and
dialogue work more closely in conjunction with each other as narrative strategies that
represent expressions of woman’s agency. Later in this dissertation, we will see yet
another contrast, since in Esther Waters Moore succeeds in representing a more thorough
balance of the three different methods valued by late-nineteenth-century feminists. In
order to see how resistance to cultural norms that support the subordination of women
occurs in Hardy’s novels, and the narrative impact of this expression of woman’s agency
through dialogue, we should turn to the confession scenes and their aftermaths.
After Tess tells the story of her “fall,” one that the narrator tells us contains “no exculpatory phrase of any kind,” the reaction from Angel Clare is one of shock and then disgust. “Am I to believe this?,” he says to Tess, “From your manner I am to take it as true. O you cannot be out of your mind! You ought to be! Yet you are not . . . My wife, my Tess--nothing in you warrants such a supposition as that?” (232). When Tess tries to employ the “language of sympathy,” a type of language well-established by the late-Victorian period, Tess asks Angel to “Forgive me as you are forgiven!,” but Angel only replies, “O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another. My God--how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque--prestidigitation as that” (232). While Tess’s initial reaction to Angel is to defer to her husband and his “language of logic,” as we might classify his language under the Bakhtinian rubric, once Tess realizes that neither her deference to Angel nor her pleas for forgiveness will work, she becomes more assertive and uses the spoken word to resist. Taking the opportunity of a moment in which a number of ideologically-inflected languages are at play (in addition to Angel’s language of logic, we find the languages of religion, innocence, experience, duty, and desire, among others), Tess pleads with Angel: “What have I done--what have I done! I have not told of anything that interferes with or belies my love for you. You don’t think I planned it, do you? It is in your own mind what you are angry at, Angel, it is not in me. O, it is not in me, and I am not that deceitful woman you think me” (235). When Angel replies in his language of logic, “H’m--well. Not deceitful, my wife; but not the same. No, not the same. But do not make me reproach you. I have sworn that I will not; and I will do everything to avoid it,” Tess continues to plead her case, saying, “Angel!--Angel! I was a child--a child when it happened! I knew nothing of men” and “O Angel--my mother says that it sometimes happened so!--she knows several cases where they were worse than I, and the husband had not minded it much--has got over it at least. And yet the woman has not loved him as I do you!” (235-36).

While Tess’s assertion of agency through the spoken word has little effect on Angel, who is wedded to his own logic about Tess’s fall, for Tess even to speak in defense of herself is a significant step, since in the past she has more often responded to cultural norms that support the subordination of women through silence or fleeing the
scene. This is especially true of her response to Alec d’Urberville, as seen in her refusal to speak to Alec after he kisses her in the carriage, which is quickly followed by her scramble from the carriage (76), and in her initial refusal to return to Trantridge with Alec on the night he seduces her (86). Unlike Tess’s relationship with Alec, where the spoken word as a form of resistance is rarely possible, the nature of Tess’s relationship with Angel is such that deep conversation between man and woman is not only possible but expected. Tess’s voice, in fact, is what attracts Angel to Tess in the first place; he hears the sound of her voice as she talks about the possibility of ghosts with the other workers at Crick’s dairy (136).

Still, despite Tess’s attempt at asserting agency through the spoken word, Angel cannot find a way to forgive her, primarily because he, despite his rejection of cultural norms such as traditional religious values, is still wedded to norms that support the subordination of women. In each case, Angel answers Tess in the language of logic, making it clear that it is not so much the act of sexual intercourse that matters to him but the fact that Tess has presented herself in one way and is actually another. When Tess makes her case for husbands forgiving wives who have been much worse than Tess has been, Angel accuses Tess of presenting herself as “an unapprehending peasant woman, who have never been initiated into the proportions of social things” and as someone whose “want of firmness” can be associated with her declining family line: “Here was I thinking you a new-sprung child of nature; there were you, the belated seedling of an effete aristocracy!” (236). Later, when Tess again tries to assert her agency and confirm that she was straightforward with her husband by saying, “I told you I thought I was not respectable enough long ago--and on that account I didn’t want to marry you, only--only you urged me!,” Angel again replies with the language of logic, “It isn’t a question of respectability, but one of principle!” (243).

Of course, we are meant to read Angel’s language of logic ironically, especially given Hardy’s own perspective on Tess’s fallenness, stated quite clearly in the subtitle of the novel, “A Pure Woman.” But while Angel’s inability to accept Tess’s faults is evident, Angel is not an entirely unlikeable character, especially when one considers him in light of his rejection of traditional religious values, an aspect of his character Hardy
surely wants to be taken seriously. Since Angel is likeable in some respects, his verbal combat with Tess in the confession scene also must be taken seriously, at least at some level. While Tess’s use of the spoken word to resist Angel might be considered futile, that she even attempts a defense of her person is worth discussing in detail.

At the end of the conversation between Angel and Tess, the narrator confirms that what readers witness is an example of competing languages and competing ideologies, and, more specifically, that Angel is too logical but that there is enough sympathy in him that he might be convinced to love Tess, if only she can evoke that sympathy. While Tess cries, her tears cannot convince Angel to relent from his rigid position. States the narrator,

She broke into sobs, and turned her back to him. It would almost have won round any man but Angel Clare. Within the remote depths of his constitution, so gentle and affectionate as he was in general, there lay hidden a hard logical deposit, like a vein of metal in a soft loam, which turned the edge of everything that attempted to traverse it. It had blocked his acceptance of the Church; it blocked his acceptance of Tess. (243-44)

Though the narrator believes that there is a “back current of sympathy” in Angel, which Tess might have uncovered at this point, Tess’s confidence is so low that she cannot resist Angel anymore (244). The heteroglossic moment has passed, and Angel’s language of logic, however illogical it may be, dominates again. Although the narrator has told readers what to think of Tess and Angel, it is important to point out that readers do not need the narrator’s commentary to know how to feel. We know from the dialogue that Angel is overly logical, but that he is also sympathetic at times, and we know that Tess falls quiet too often in this conversation. She has a valid case to make and states it most clearly when she reminds Angel that she admitted her lack of respectability long ago, but she also allows Angel’s language of logic to affect her level of confidence.

The narrator’s sense, and our own, that Angel is one who might be convinced through the spoken word, were it not for his overly logical approach to the world, is confirmed in one of the last scenes between Angel and Tess before they part for good. In the night between their decision to part and their actual parting, Tess has the strange
experience of seeing Angel sleepwalk into her room, pick her up off her bed, and carry her out of the house, across a nearby river, and into a church graveyard, where he deposits her in an open grave. Tess, knowing that Angel is likely to freeze to death if she does not get him back to the house, tries to decide what to do. In a statement that reveals the tendency of Tess to think before she takes action or even speaks a word, the narrator states,

It suddenly occurred to her to try persuasion; and accordingly she whispered in his ear, with as much firmness and decision as she could summon-- “Let us walk on, darling,” at the same time taking him suggestively by the arm. To her relief, he unresistingly acquiesced; her words had apparently thrown him back into his dream, which thenceforward seemed to enter on a new phase, wherein he fancied she had risen as a spirit, and was leading him to Heaven. (251)

Angel, in a subconscious state and free of the language that typically shapes his interactions with others, is much more open to Tess’s persuasion, and it is clear, from what happens the next morning, that Tess knows that Angel is more impressionable than he believes. Describing Tess’s thoughts as Angel prepares to leave the house and the marriage, the narrator states, “Tess was on the point of revealing all that had happened; but the reflection that it would anger him, grieve him, stultify him, to know that he had instinctively manifested a fondness for her of which his common-sense did not approve; that his inclination had compromised his dignity when reason slept, again deterred her” (252). In addition, as the narrator indicates, such a revelation would open up discussion, once again, of whether or not Angel might forgive Tess, and it might also trigger a heteroglossic moment in the text, in which Tess’s language of sympathy might more effectively combat and defeat Angel’s language of logic. “It crossed her mind, too, that he might have a faint recollection of tender vagary, and was disinclined to allude to it from a conviction that she would take amatory advantage of the opportunity it gave her of appealing to him anew not to go” (252). It is clear here that Tess possesses the strategies for asserting agency, especially the tool of the spoken word, but that what she perhaps lacks is the increased consciousness needed to implement these strategies.
As someone who possesses the strategies for resistance but not the belief that her resistance is justified, Tess misses many opportunities of which other late-Victorian heroines might take advantage in more urban settings, where ideas about the cultural status of women are somewhat more flexible. The tension between Tess’s possession of such strategies and her belief that she is not justified in using these strategies is seen yet again when Tess and Angel separate at the end of the ruined honeymoon. Reverting to the language of logic, Angel initiates their separation, saying, “Now, let us understand each other... There is no anger between us, though there is that which I cannot endure at present. I will try to bring myself to endure it. I will let you know where I go to as soon as I know myself. And if I can bring myself to bear it—if it is desirable, possible—I will come to you. But until I come to you it will be better that you should not try to come to me” (254). Tess agrees to the conditions, but, as the narrator points out, “If Tess had been artful, had she made a scene, fainted, wept hysterically, in that lonely lane, notwithstanding the fury of fastidiousness with which he was possessed, he would probably not have withstood her” (255). Though the narrator’s perspective is not one we would label “feminist,” since to make a scene, faint, and weep hysterically is more stereotypically “feminine” than it is feminist, his perspective does suggest that Tess has strategies she does not use here. Angel’s openness to Tess in the sleepwalking scene suggests that he perhaps would be more open to a woman’s persuasion than he lets on, and Tess’s consideration of using Angel’s talk while sleepwalking to convince him to stay with her suggests that she knows she has the strategies to at least assert agency in a feminine, if not a feminist, manner. As my analysis of Gissing’s *In the Year of the Jubilee* shows, feminine resistance is not as favorable as feminist resistance, but some resistance still is preferable to none.

Still, it is the confession scene in which Tess comes closest to feminist agency. In confessing to Angel, Tess seeks the same kind of acceptance a fallen woman would from a larger community, the kind of acceptance that might result in the community’s changing its opinion about the low status assigned to all fallen women. In fact, Tess has enough awareness about the power of sympathy to change the cultural status of women that she later plans to use the same language of sympathy she used with Angel to try to convince
his parents that she should be forgiven and accepted by them. However, lack of access
to the Clares and an encounter with Angel’s brothers and Mercy Chant cause Tess to shy
away from asserting her agency fully and once again prevents her from asserting the
feminist agency needed to change the status of fallen women in the larger community.

Tess first seriously considers going to Angel’s parents once she has heard Izz’s
account of Angel asking Izz to go with him to Brazil, an account that makes Tess realize
that “there was a limit to her powers of renunciation” (292), a limit to the degree to
which she will go to protect Angel and his reputation. Whereas before hearing Izz’s
story, Tess believes that she “morally” has “no claim” upon Angel (291), once she
knows of Izz’s encounter with her husband, she becomes determined to “win the heart of
her mother-in-law, tell her whole history to that lady, enlist her on her side, and so gain
back the truant” (293). At the start of her journey to Emminster Vicarage, Tess believes
that she has a right to assert herself, and she knows that the language of sympathy is
especially appropriate to use with Angel’s parents, whose religious leanings make them
especially open to hearing Tess’s story. But, as the narrator points out, as Tess nears the
vicarage, as “the mileage lessened between her and the spot of her pilgrimage, so did
Tess’s confidence decrease” (294). Still, she pushes on, until, upon running into Angel’s
brothers and Mercy Chant, and hearing them speak disparagingly of poor people (296),
she loses her confidence entirely and does not speak to any one. “Tears, blinding tears,
were running down her face. She knew that it was all sentiment, all baseless
impressibility, which had caused her to read the scene as her own condemnation;
nevertheless she would not get over it; she could not contravene in her own defenceless
person all these untoward omens. It was impossible to think of returning to the
Vicarage” (297). Ironically, the narrator then informs us, had Tess approached the
Clares, she probably would have met with success, for “[h]er present condition was
precisely one which would have enlisted the sympathies of old Mr. and Mrs. Clare. Their
hearts went out of them at a bound towards extreme cases, when the subtle mental
troubles of the less desperate among mankind failed to win their interest or regard”
(297).
Again, it is clear that Tess understands the power of the spoken word and is prepared to use this method of asserting agency but fails to do so because she does not have the increased consciousness needed to believe in her grounds for resistance. Further, it is clear that the heteroglossic moment necessary for a woman effectively to assert agency closes up, preventing Tess from becoming subversive in any concrete way. What is striking about Tess’s journey to the vicarage and her encounter with Mercy and Angel’s brothers is the silence that overtakes Tess during the course of the scene. Whereas Tess imagined this scene as one in which she would speak, using the spoken word to resist the cultural norms that allow Angel to simply desert her and to ask for another woman’s love even as he is married, the scene turns out just the opposite, with Tess speaking only to herself in the end (297). Hardy, of course, attributes such a shift to fate, and that is seen in the commentary from the narrator about what Tess might have accomplished had she spoken to the Clares, but given Hardy’s anxiety about women speaking out and asserting their agency in the early 1890s, it is evident that fate is appropriated in convenient ways in Tess.

Once Tess reverts to silence and physical actions instead of spoken word as methods of resistance, which culminate in the killing of Alec d’Urberville and fleeing the scene of the crime with Angel, she becomes even less effective in her resistance to cultural norms that support the subordination of women. The association of the physical with Alec is strong, especially in the scenes in which Tess tries to resist returning to him when Angel does not return from Brazil in due time. Not only is Alec described as someone who has been physically transformed by his repentance (300), but, when he gives up his high moral ground and this is physically evident (“he had restored himself . . . to the old jaunty, slap-dash guise under which Tess had first known her admirer” 321), Tess resists Alec’s advances with silence and a slap to his face (324). Further, Tess recognizes her own violent acts will be received with retribution, for she cries out: “Now, punish me! . . . Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim--that’s the law!” (324). When Tess later resists Alec’s control over her by killing him, her punishment is indeed physical, showing that certain types of extreme resistance, such as the taking of another life, may have
immediate results but ultimately fail because they cannot improve the more general cultural conditions under which women live.

The law has recourse against a woman who takes actions such as the killing of her lover, whereas it does not have strong recourse against a woman who simply speaks out against injustice, though it is possible that a woman could be classified as insane by the law. 70 Still, the relationship between the law and a woman who speaks out against oppression is significantly more ambiguous than the relationship between the law and a woman who acts out by killing her lover. Although Tess’s attempts to assert her agency through the spoken word over the course of the novel ultimately fail, these attempts should be recognized for their role in the representation of woman’s agency. Once recognized by those developing a framework for understanding representations of agency, we can more clearly see how spoken word contributes to the complexity of woman’s agency in a period in which women are only just achieving the legal right to make their opinions and desires count. Though the novel obviously is set in a time earlier than its publication date (the references to Tess’s education under the Revised Code sets the novel in the early 1870s at earliest), women already had gained some rights by this time, including the right to file for divorce (though their husbands had to be guilty of adultery and one other offense, such as bigamy or incest) and the right to have access to their children after a divorce (though they would not have custody rights until late in the century).

Sue Bridehead’s confession to her husband, Richard Phillotson, in Jude provides a similar example of how female characters’ attempts at asserting agency through the spoken word contribute to a complex understanding of the narrative strategies employed by late-Victorian authors at a time when they were acutely aware of the influence of feminist ideals. Upon returning to Phillotson after attending the funeral of Jude’s aunt and after confessing to Jude that she is miserable in her marriage, Sue begins her resistance to cultural norms that support the subordination of women, and much of this resistance occurs through the spoken word. “Richard--,” Sue says to Phillotson upon her return, “I let Mr. Fawley hold my hand a long while. I don’t know whether you think it wrong?” (281), a comment that starts Phillotson thinking about the current state
of his marriage and leads to a more heteroglossic moment later in the text, where competing languages bring competing ideologies about marriage to the surface. When the state of their marriage arrives at the point that Sue locks herself in a room full of spiders at night rather than sleep next to her husband, Sue finally makes a more forceful verbal argument to Phillotson. “Richard . . . would you mind my living away from you?” (284), she asks, beginning a conversation in which Sue’s use of the language of the New Woman is central to her argument for leaving Phillotson and going to live with Jude.

Acknowledging that her request is “irregular,” she argues that “Domestic laws should be made according to temperaments, which should be classified. If people are at all peculiar in character they have to suffer from the very rules that produce comfort in others!” (285). She continues that these laws are no good, especially “when you know you are committing no sin” (285).

By making such a claim, Sue questions both legal and religious doctrines of the nineteenth century, and she tries to establish a different moral code, one that is not based on religion or current law but on the principle of individual happiness and equality for women. “Why can’t we agree to free each other?” she says to Phillotson when he objects to her request. “We made the compact, and surely we can cancel it--not legally, of course; but we can morally, especially as no new interests, in the shape of children, have arisen to be looked after” (285). Sue then adopts language that is thoroughly New-Womanish, since she claims J. S. Mill as her authority for ending the marriage contract: “She, or he, ‘who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation.’ J. S. Mill’s words, those are. I have been reading it up. Why can’t you act upon them? I wish to, always” (286). Despite Phillotson’s indifference to the ideas of Mill (“What do I care about J. S. Mill!” he says to Sue at this point in the conversation), Sue’s resistance through the spoken word has an effect on her husband, and he eventually agrees to at least let Sue live separately within their own home. Still, Sue’s New Womanish language has only a limited effect, since it is ultimately Sue’s physical actions, specifically her decision to jump out a window when Phillotson accidentally enters her bedroom one night, that convince her husband that Sue was right to ask for permission to leave the
house entirely. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that Sue’s early attempt at convincing Phillotson of the logic of separating has some effect on his decision to let her go, since when Phillotson seeks the counsel of his friend Gillingham after Sue’s jump out the window, Phillotson himself adopts Sue’s language in order to convince Gillingham that it is right to let Sue go.

Claiming that “it is wrong to torture a fellow-creature” and that he does not want to be an “inhuman wretch” by forcing Sue to remain with him, Phillotson says to Gillingham,

I know I may be wrong--I know I can’t logically, or religiously, defend my concession to such a wish of hers; or harmonize it with the doctrines I was brought up in. Only I know one thing; something within me tells me I am doing wrong in refusing her. I, like other men, profess to hold that if a husband gets a so-called preposterous request from his wife, the only course that can possibly be regarded as right and proper and honourable in him is to refuse it, and put her virtuously under lock and key, and murder her lover perhaps. But is that essentially right, and proper, and honourable, or is it contemptibly mean and selfish? (293)

Like Sue, Phillotson seems to accept the idea that there is perhaps a moral code based on some principle other than the current law or religious beliefs, and Phillotson iterates this to Gillingham after Sue has left the house, when he says, “I was, and am, the most old-fashioned man in the world on the question of marriage--in fact I had never thought critically about its ethics at all. But certain facts stared me in the face, and I couldn’t go against them” (299).

The language Sue uses with Phillotson is one she has been developing for some time, but, until her return from the funeral of Jude’s aunt, she is only able to use it with Jude, who sympathizes with her views even though he does not always hold exactly the same opinions. Before Sue confesses to Phillotson, she explains her unhappiness to Jude, using the language of the New Woman to do so. Broaching the subject of her own marriage, Sue says to Jude, “Is it wrong . . . for a husband or wife to tell a third person that they are unhappy in their marriage? If a marriage ceremony is a religious thing, it is
possibly wrong; but if it is only a sordid contract based on material convenience . . . why surely a person may say, even proclaim upon the housetops, that it hurts and grieves him or her?” (270). In this passage, not only does Sue establish the two models for marriage--religious and legal--against which she will argue later, but also she makes clear her belief that assertion of agency--in this case, proclaiming one’s unhappiness from the housetops--is valid.

Later, after Sue has made it clear to Jude that it is she who has an unhappy marriage, her comments to him iterate that it is primarily religious ideals against which she is rebelling. Worried that she has “disturbed” Jude’s religious ideals by confessing to him that adjusting to her marriage has been similar to adjusting to a wooden leg or arm (273), a fitting metaphor since the loss of a limb might be equated to the loss of agency, Sue says to Jude, “It would have been wrong, perhaps, for me to tell my distress to you, if I had been able to tell it to anybody else. But I have nobody. And I must tell somebody! . . . I am certain that one ought to be allowed to undo what one had done so ignorably! I daresay it happens to lots of women; only they submit, and I kick” (276). Understanding the ideological roots of the language Sue uses can help us understand why Phillotson’s use of similar language with Gillingham is so important, since it indicates that transformation of cultural values is possible through the spoken word. One wonders whether Tess, had she practiced her confession to Angel on a more sympathetic audience before encountering Angel himself, might have had more success in her resistance of cultural norms that support the subordination of women.

While Sue’s resistance through a combination of spoken word and physical actions successfully convinces Phillotson to let Sue go and gives readers a clear instance of assertion of woman’s agency, as is typical in Hardy’s novels, expressions of woman’s agency rarely serve as the last word. Sue’s own awareness of the larger community’s views about her and Jude prevent her from living free from shame after she leaves Phillotson, a shame that is most apparent in two scenes: the scene in which Sue and Jude are fired from their job repairing the Ten Commandments posted on a church wall and the scene in which Sue bemoans the miserable conditions of their lives to Father Time. In the church scene, Sue asserts none of the language of the New Woman she has used
successfully in the past; here, the only language she can muster is that of self-pity: “How could we be so simple as to suppose we might do this!” she says to Jude. “Of course we ought not--I ought not--to have come!” (373). And in the scene with Father Time, a conversation that occurs after Sue and Jude are unable to find lodging for the entire family because they are not married and the conversation Sue believes is the “main cause” of Father Time’s suicide, there is more evidence of Sue’s loss of confidence and inability to consistently assert agency. When Father Time says to Sue, “It would be better to be out o’ the world than in it, wouldn’t it?,” Sue can only answer, “It would almost, dear” (406), and instead of explaining to Father Time the injustice of the way the family is treated, Sue allows the child to think that it is children that people find bothersome. “Y-you must forgive me, little Jude!,” she says to the child, “I can’t explain--I will when you are older. It does seem as if I had done it [decided to have another child] on purpose . . . But it--is not quite on purpose” (408).

In both novels, attempts at asserting agency through the spoken word are ultimately undermined by competing languages, languages infused with ideologies that support the subordination of women. Sometimes these languages are used overtly and clearly in dialogue with the fallen woman or New Woman, while at other times, it is simply the woman’s awareness of this competing language that results in her lack of confidence. More specifically, part of the reason Tess fails to convince Angel and others of her purity is because she does not infuse her language with the ideology of religious repentance but uses language that only evokes general sympathy or pity, and part of the reason Sue cannot effectively combat language that vilifies her is because combating language means combatting religious ideology that has the support of much stronger institutions than liberal feminism. But it also is true that Tess and Sue fail to transform ideas about the cultural status of women because they cannot attain access to those who might sympathize, as in the case of Tess, or, because they voice their beliefs only to those with whom it is safe to speak frankly rather than to those in the wider community, as in the case of Sue.

Expression of woman’s agency in Hardy, then, complicates significantly those assumptions about methods of expression and their corresponding narrative strategies.
In Hardy, consciousness on the part of female characters does not dominate, and when we turn to other methods of expressing agency, especially the spoken word, we find that female characters’ use of the spoken word has limited effectiveness. Still, I emphasize the moments when the spoken word is used because, when we privilege consciousness and internal perspective in literary criticism, our tendency will be to read Hardy’s novels as stories in which Fate overrides any possibility of asserting agency. However, if we recognize more fully the heteroglossic moments in the text, when assertions of agency through the spoken word can and do occur, our interpretation may be somewhat different. Through this lens, it is possible to read the concluding words of *Tess*—“‘Justice’ was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess . . .”—as even more ironic than previously acknowledged, since we can more clearly see that there were some opportunities for female characters to assert agency even more strongly than they did but that their awareness of competing ideologies discouraged them from doing so. The end of *Jude* suggests something similar, for the novel ends with two competing views of the New Woman: Widow Edlin’s belief that Sue will find peace before death, a belief we might associate with the more sympathetic view of the New Woman, and Arabella’s belief that Sue will not find peace before her death, when she can once again be with Jude, a belief we might associate with a more judgmental or romantic view of the New Woman. That the novel ends with two pieces of dialogue, expressing nearly opposite opinions, is fascinating, for it suggests that the word on the New Woman and how she should be perceived by society is still unresolved. It also suggests that there was room in the society in which Sue lives for a New Woman to make her case for a different way of living, including one in which marriage is not a requirement for women.

Still, Tess’s and Sue’s inability to use language effectively can be tied to social circumstances, and those circumstances, as feminist perspectives of the late-nineteenth-century show, are significant. What I want to emphasize here is *not* the inadequacies of Tess and Sue but, instead, the rhetorical choices made by late-Victorian authors. That Hardy’s female characters do not possess particular types of languages through which they might combat cultural norms that support the subordination of women, and that
they do not take advantage of particular rhetorical situations when they do possess such language, in the way that heroines in other late-Victorian novels do shows how it is that different authors make different rhetorical choices. This lens suggests that Hardy’s representations of women were, to at least some degree, purposeful, and when Hardy withheld the power of certain types of speech from his female characters (not speech itself, as some feminists have claimed, particularly about Tess), he created female characters with especially ambiguous subjectivity. Only by looking more closely at the rhetorical choices Hardy made, especially how he used internal perspective and dialogue in relation to each other, can we see the connection between his rhetorical choices and the resulting representations of women in his novels.

IV.

While Hardy recognized the right of women to use the spoken word to assert agency, he, like Angel Clare, had extreme anxiety about the implications of such assertions. If we turn back to Hardy’s negotiation of feminism of the 1890s and its influence on the conditions of the literary market of the time, we can see that his novels of the period not only reflect his anxiety about his own authorship but also inform this anxiety. As I have already discussed, Hardy’s tendency upon learning of the support of feminists for his work, as in the case of Fawcett and Grove, was to return their admiration but to take an ambivalent position in regard to their causes. But Hardy did not simply remain ambivalent on feminist matters. When pressed to become directly involved in feminist causes, he consistently refused, signalling a stance that was not simply ambivalent but even hostile to feminism. When Alice Grenfell, secretary of the Women’s Progressive Society and occasional contributor to The Woman’s Herald, wrote to Hardy in April 1892 to ask him to serve as a Vice-President of the Women’s Progressive Society, which was active on a number of issues but whose main cause was suffrage, Hardy’s reply was a straightforward refusal: “I must unfortunately decline the honour, one reason against it being that I have not as yet been converted to a belief in the desirability of the Society’s first object. Should such a conversion take place I shall have much pleasure in informing you--and with much sympathy with many of your objects”
And when Helen Ward, member of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies, wrote to Hardy in 1908, asking him to contribute to a new weekly newspaper committed to the suffrage cause, Hardy replied,

I regret to reply to your letter concerning the prospective “Coming Citizen” paper by saying that I feel unable to let my name appear as one of the possible contributors.

Though I hold, as you may know, that women are entitled to the vote as a matter of justice if they want it, I think the action of men therein should be permissive only—not cooperative. I feel by no means sure that the majority of those who clamour for it realize what it may bring in its train: if they did three-fourths of them would be silent. I refer to such results as the probable break-up of the present marriage-system, the present social rules of other sorts, religious codes, legal arrangements on property, etc (through men’s self protective countermoves.) I do not myself consider that this would be necessarily a bad thing (I should not have written “Jude the Obscure” if I did), but I deem it better that women should take the step unstimulated from outside. So, if they should be terrified at consequences, they will not be able to say to men: “You ought not to have helped bring upon us what we did not foresee.”

Hence, considering also that I have as many interests in hand as I can cope with at my time of life, I am not disposed to be active in the cause. (3:360)

What is striking about this letter to Ward is that Hardy adopts the same sort of rhetoric, the language of logic, that Angel Clare uses to shut down Tess’s assertion of agency through the spoken word in Tess. When Hardy tells Ward that he thinks women should fight for the right to vote on their own and claims that he is “by no means sure that the majority of those who clamour for it realize what it may bring in its train” (Collected Letters 3:360), his reversion to “reason” points to his real fears about the power of women once they have the vote. While Hardy claims not to oppose “the probable break-up of the present marriage-system, the present social rules of other sorts,
religious codes, legal arrangements on property, etc” (360), his final words to Ward, “I deem it better that women should take the step unstimulated from outside. So, if they should be terrified at consequences, they will not be able to say to men: ‘You ought not to have helped bring upon us what we did not foresee’” (360), Hardy reveals himself to be, like Angel, one who cannot bring himself to fully support the rights of women and uses the language of logic to oppose such a development.

According to Hardy’s letters, he also refused to involve himself in the suffrage cause on at least two other occasions, showing that he eventually established a consistent position on the issue: that of silence and non-participation, a tactic not undertaken by other writers of the time. In 1909, when Henry Nevinson, an essayist and journalist, asked Hardy to sign a letter protesting the criminal sentences assigned to two suffragists who had participated in a hunger strike, Hardy wrote,

I am honored by being asked to sign this paper; but I cannot enter into the practical business of woman’s suffrage as you can. As you know, I think the position of women one of the ninetynine things in a hundred that are wrong in this so-called civilized time, and that the vote is theirs by right (though whether it will be for their benefit at first I have some doubt); but I fancy the tactics which were a help to them when a novelty are now doing their cause harm. (4:39)

And, in 1916, when the journalist and activist Evelyn Sharp wrote to ask Hardy to become part of the National Council for Adult Suffrage, Hardy said, “I am sorry to have to tell you in reply to your letter on Adult Suffrage that I am not able to be a member of the Council for advocating it. I may say that, apart from the question itself, I have never taken any practical part in controversial politics; and if I had it would now, alas, be time to give up” (5:186). This letter, with its brevity and the phrase, “I had never taken any practical part in controversial politics,” sums up well the strategy Hardy adopted in his later career to the suffrage cause, and this strategy, viewed in light of the controversy over *Tess* and *Jude*, as well as Hardy’s ambivalent use of voice in the novels themselves, illustrates well Hardy’s anxiety about embracing direct assertions of woman’s agency, either by fictional characters or real-life women.
Hardy’s strategy of aestheticism, while not adopted by all writers, is consistent with his character, including his decision, in the late 1890s, to abandon novel-writing altogether. When his previously serialized book *The Well-Beloved* was released in novel form in 1897 and was criticized for many of the same reasons *Jude* had been two years earlier (Millgate 382-83), Hardy decided that he had had enough of the genre that Bakhtin tells us holds the most potential for capturing the competing ideologies intrinsic to human life. While Hardy had been writing, but not publishing, poems throughout his novel-writing career, it was at this point that he turned his attention to publishing in a genre less infused with competing ideological languages and less subservient to the demands of realism. In light of this decision to leave novel-writing altogether, Hardy’s increasing reluctance to embrace feminist causes in the 1890s might be assessed this way. Ultimately, to have offered his support to the suffragist cause in the early 1890s, Hardy not only would have offended his conventional friends but also the conventionality within his own heart. In late-Victorian society, to offend one’s conventional friends by writing about dangerous women was not nearly as risky as offending one’s conventional friends by offering support to the political causes of real-life women. Writing *Tess* and *Jude* was the closest Hardy could come to taking a stand on women’s rights, and when that ambivalent stance was criticized, Hardy retreated even more fully from engaging public debate. Still, feminists of the time knew that they needed any support they could get, and their praise for Hardy’s novels in the early 1890s was as much praise for what they hoped for from Hardy as it was for what Hardy had already given them.
CHAPTER 3

“IT IS IMPOSSIBLE NOT TO LOVE DIANA”: GEORGE MEREDITH’S MODEL NEW WOMAN AND DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS’ ACTIONS IN DIANA OF THE CROSSWAYS AND THE AMAZING MARRIAGE

The making of plot has been a central issue in discussions of George Meredith’s novels for over a century. Readers of Meredith still complain that his stories lack the amount of plot expected from a Victorian novel, and this complaint echoes those voiced by late-nineteenth-century critics, who claimed that Meredith’s dense and difficult style often interfered with readers’ basic understanding of the plots of his works. By 1895, with the publication of Meredith’s last novel, The Amazing Marriage, critics were especially frustrated. Wrote Edmund Gosse in the St. James’s Gazette, “[T]he Alexandrian extravagance of Mr. Meredith’s style has now reached such a pitch that it is difficult to enjoy and sometimes impossible to understand what he writes” (429). Likewise, the anonymous reviewer for the Pall Mall Gazette complained, “That which on the whole is most to be regretted is an increasing tendency to shirk the crucial scenes and episodes of the story, and to vouchsafe but the vaguest of allusions and sketchiest of accounts, introduced into the casual talk or letters of outsiders” (442). Finally, J. A. Noble of the Spectator went so far as to say that there was almost no story at all in Meredith’s last novel.

The story--if story it can be called--has just three landmarks, the marriage itself, . . . the birth of a mysterious and unaccountable baby, and the final retirement of the incredible husband into a monastery. In the intervals a number of people pop in and out, or hold the stage for a time, with the apparent purpose of providing material for Mr. Meredith’s Meredithisms.
of epigram or paradox; for they are bodiless phantoms which give us no feeling of flesh and blood. (452)

This sort of harsh criticism Meredith claimed to ignore. As early as 1864, he indicated that he preferred to be away when reviews of his novels came out, since the result was often “knocks on the head” (Collected Letters 1:252). By the late 1870s and early 1880s, Meredith had become more aggressive about his dislike for critics. To the poet James Thomson, he wrote in 1879, “Criticism in England gets no farther in expression than the half-surfeited boy in a sock-shop: he likes this bun, he hates that tart. For an author to hear that he is wonderful, but a donkey, is not instructive to him. . . . I have never paid much heed to the literary judgements of the English, but real criticism, though it should include reproof, I am very glad to have” (2:583). Then, in 1883, Meredith wrote to his friend Augustus Jessopp, regarding the discrepancy between Jessopp’s encouragement of his poetry and the discouragement found in Theodore Watts-Dunton’s review of Poems and the Lyrics of Joy, “You praise, and the world ‘lays on.’ I have been well-kicked for it, and have tasted the cold-fish English critic’s sneer again” (2:711).

Such negative comments from Meredith about both the critics and the English public, which he found “hopeless” (2:983) among other things, would continue throughout his career (2:713, 2:720, 2:944, and so on). Still, the fact that Meredith mentioned the critics as often as he did in his letters suggests that he was not completely unyielding to their criticism of his work, and he sometimes did make changes in order to adapt his style to the demands of the critics and the public. For example, when composing Harry Richmond in 1870, Meredith told Jessopp that he was attempting to write a novel people would like. “The general public will not let me probe deeply into humanity,” he wrote, “You must not paint either woman or man: a surface view of the species flat as a wafer is acceptable. I have not plucked at any of the highest or deepest chords. (Hence possibly) those who have heard some of the chapters say it must be the best novel I have written” (1:413). Similarly, when Meredith was worried about the possible poor reception of One of Our Conquerors (1891), he told Clement Shorter that he felt “bound” to produce something for Chapman and Hall that would actually sell--
something, Meredith points out in his letter, “more generally readable” than One of Our Conquerors (2:1030).

Despite Meredith’s struggles with his critics and the general public over style, he received something of a respite from one particular portion of his late-nineteenth-century audience, the liberal-feminist critics who found his work both intellectually interesting and inspiring to their cause. It is their reactions to Meredith’s work I focus on in this chapter, since their comments can help take Meredith criticism in a new direction, away from the complaints about his difficult style and toward an understanding of the way in which he used plot effectively, primarily to show how the actions of female characters were central to strong representations of woman’s agency. Unlike mainstream critics of the late-nineteenth century, who were continually disappointed with Meredith’s privileging of eccentric style over straightforward plot, feminist critics, because of their investment in changing the definition of realism to better connect with the representation of women in literary texts, often found ways to explain away Meredith’s stylistic idiosyncrasies and even praise his use of plot. For example, Arabella Shore, whose 1879 article on Meredith in the British Quarterly Review is one of the earliest feminist appreciations of his work, asserted that Meredith’s “indirect” expressions were only “occasional” and “always worth making out,” so much so that “we love the work the more for the trouble it has given us” (192-93). Similarly, Gertrude Kapteyn, writing about Diana of the Crossways in Shafts, praised Meredith for his realistic approach to representing women and excused any difficulties readers may have had in accepting the actions of female characters in the novel. Describing Diana’s selling of Dacier’s government secret to a journalist for her own profit, one of the actions mainstream critics of the time took issue with, there is no indication in her summary that such actions were a major issue for Kapteyn. Further, Kapteyn was able to reconcile Diana’s marriage to Redworth, the other aspect of plot mainstream critics found difficult to accept.

The respite given Meredith by feminists of the 1890s is significant, since, as I have shown in previous chapters, other male authors did not always receive exactly the same treatment. While feminists appreciated the work of all four authors discussed in this dissertation, they clearly had a special liking for Meredith. Hence, when it came to
negotiating the specific conditions of the 1890s market, especially the tension between traditional definitions of realism and those of feminists, Meredith held a distinct advantage over other late-Victorian authors. Further, unlike Gissing and Moore, who were just establishing their careers in the 1890s, Meredith entered this decade having already negotiated many aspects of the market, especially the degree to which he would succumb to critics’ and the public’s demands for traditional realism, including his use of straightforward plots and attention to characters’ actions to represent realistically human life. And, unlike Hardy, who had yet to definitively prove himself with feminists, Meredith had already won their support by publishing *Diana of the Crossways* in 1885; *Diana* was wildly popular with feminists and remained so long beyond its publication year. While other male authors sometimes needed to alter their literary modes significantly to accommodate the feminist definition of realism, Meredith had no need to make such alterations in the 1890s. By looking at *Diana* and Meredith’s last novel, *The Amazing Marriage*, we can see how description of characters’ actions figures in representations of woman’s agency. What feminist critics recognized about Meredith’s work was that underneath his dense and difficult style was a commitment to showing women in control of their lives and capable of taking the actions needed to change their lives, characteristics that could be found in Meredith’s description of actions as an essential element of plot.

I.

In order to understand the relative ease with which Meredith negotiated feminism at the fin de siècle, we should turn to a discussion of his early career of the 1860s, since it was the working out of authorship issues in this decade that put Meredith in a relatively secure position well before the 1890s. While Meredith did face many of the same struggles with the literary market other writers experienced in the 1890s, he also had encountered similar obstacles several decades earlier. He initially struggled over whether he should privilege character over plot, and while he ultimately decided that character was the more important of the two, Meredith’s results show that plot was equally important to his representations of woman’s agency, since assertion through physical
actions could be depicted through plot points.

In the 1860s, working for Samuel Lucas’s *Once a Week*, the rival magazine to Dickens’s *All the Year Round*, Meredith tried to define his own style of writing, one that was distinctly different from the realism of Dickens. Unlike Gissing, who articulated his definition of realism against that of Dickens retrospectively, Meredith needed to engage Dickens’s realism directly, since Dickens was one of Meredith’s main competitors. In a letter to Tom Taylor, staff member for *Punch* and apparently the person who put Meredith in contact with Lucas, Meredith makes it clear that he and Dickens are competitors but have radically different writing styles. Noting that he has not yet heard from Lucas about work for *Once a Week*, Meredith writes, “When he writes I suppose he will give me an idea of the kind of tone he intends to adopt in the new serial. If it is of the character of *Household Words* [Dickens’s former magazine], I am not suited to contribute” (1:35-36). As it turned out, Lucas seems to have wanted a style that could at least compete with Dickens’s style, if not mirror it, and soon into their working relationship, Meredith and Lucas were at odds about how much plot Meredith should include in his stories. In two letters, Meredith makes it clear that his Christmas stories, written to compete with Dickens’s in 1859, contain less plot and are less traditionally realistic than Dickens’s. On December 6, Meredith tells Lucas that, in his stories, there is “no ghost-walking and picturing of the season” (1:47), a clear allusion to Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* and one that emphasizes both the sentimentalism of Dickens (seen in the phrase “ghost-walking”) as well as his realism (seen in the phrase “picturing of the season”). Then, in a letter to Lucas written a week later, Meredith indicates how his work is different from Dickens’s. He says, “My work is at present a study: the incidents shape and are dependent on character” (1:47); this approach, character over plot, rather than the other way around, would become Meredith’s hallmark over the course of his career.

Though Meredith seemed determined to establish his own style as one that valued character over plot, and while Lucas seemed content to accept Meredith’s work rather than to force him to imitate Dickens, shortly after the discussion about the Christmas stories, Meredith still would feel the pressure to produce stories that
emphasized plot rather than character. Only a week after the letters concerning the Christmas stories, after Lucas had apparently read some of the early installments of *Evan Harrington* and suggested that Meredith incorporate more plot, Meredith responds to these suggestions. He again contrasts his style to that of Dickens, this time by referring to Wilkie Collins, whose *Woman in White* was currently running in Dickens’s new magazine, *All the Year Round*. “[P]lease don’t hurry for emotion,” he tells Lucas. “It will come. I have it. But--unless you have mysteries of the W[ilkie] Collins kind--interest, not to be false and evanescent, must kindle slowly, and ought to centre more in character--out of which incidents should grow” (1:49). A week later, Meredith has more to say on this subject: “I am rather upset by what you say about lack of interest in the progress of the story. Doubtless in a ‘Serial’ point of view, there may be something to say; but I fancy I am right in slowly building up for the scenes to follow, and the book will, as a whole, be better for it” (1:49).

Meredith’s conflict with Lucas over style, which ended in part because Lucas seems to have stopped contacting Meredith to write for the magazine (1:95-96), illustrates well the uneasy position in which Meredith found himself in the early 1860s, when, as a young author, he felt the pull between establishing his own style and pleasing editors, the public, and, in time, the critics. While Meredith wants to establish his own style, he also is aware that to be successful, he may have to incorporate at least some of the techniques demanded by the public. For instance, in one letter to Lucas, Meredith argues that while his writing style differs from Dickens’s, he thinks Dickens has the right idea in starting each number of his magazine with a serial by a well-known author, since such a strategy appeals to the public (1:54). Given that these well-known authors were often Dickens himself or authors whose style was comparable to Dickens’s, such as Collins, this comment by Meredith suggests that he understands the public’s need for plot. Further, though Meredith stuck fast to his ideals when speaking of his own work, his advice to other authors emphasized appealing to the public by favoring plot over character. Well-known is Meredith’s work, beginning in 1862, as reader for Chapman and Hall, and equally well-known is the fact that Meredith tended to tell the authors whose work he had read that they should emphasize plot. Even if Meredith did not
mean for authors to take him entirely seriously, some did; Hardy, for example, took Meredith’s advice that his manuscript *The Poor Man and the Lady* suffered from lack of plot “all too literally” and wrote *Desperate Remedies*, which was “heavily plotted and deliberately sensational” (Millgate 117).

Meredith’s tendency to emphasize the necessity of plot when speaking of work other than his own can also be seen in some of the earlier letters Meredith sent to his friend and novelist Frederick Maxse, and these letters are useful in terms of understanding the criteria Meredith was developing for his own literary style. In September 1859, Meredith wrote to Maxse,

> As to the question of Plot:—would you set about building a house without a design? . . . Plot keeps you to nature: that is, to the amount of nature originally conceived in your plot. It keeps you from dwelling too long and wearisomely on favourite scenes: it pushes you ahead: it shows you something to attain to, in the final development. Where there is no plot, no story, the author generally maunders. Look at the *Virginians*, where [Thackeray] is forced to depend entirely upon character, and overworks it, distends it, makes it monstrous. (1:41)

Of course, Meredith balanced this advice with his own sense that many authors rely too much on plot (“so that the blood of this world has no free space to circulate, and the whole creation becomes cramped and stiff,” he tells Maxse), and he also acknowledged that he often did not follow his own advice. “The best plan is, to know clearly what you are going to do when you sit down to write, to be quite certain you are going to do something, and to have something in your eye. There can be no harm in sketching it out. . . . I fancy all great works to have to have been so composed. . . . Do I give advice I do not myself pursue? None the less do I see what should be” (1:42).

Despite his defiance of the demands of the market, Meredith believed that he had adopted a style that balanced plot and character well, and he seems to have been working up a broader philosophy of fiction from which he would draw, one that comes out of his advice to authors about plot versus character. The broader implications of Meredith’s advice to Maxse include the degree to which artifice and the concrete should
factor in artistic works. After Meredith finishes discussing plot versus character in his letter to Maxse, he sums up his advice by saying, “As a last counsel, follow (to use the Germanism) the Objective rather than the Subjective in your art: aim at being concrete rather than abstract. Solid stuff endures, while flimsy ideas rapidly return to their element” (1:42). This advice aligns plot (and traditional realism) with the Objective and the concrete, and character (and more progressive definitions of realism) with the Subjective and the abstract. The need to balance the abstract and the concrete are more fully developed in Meredith’s mind by the 1860s and can be seen in Meredith’s letters to Augustus Jessopp. Writing to Jessopp in 1864, Meredith claims that good writing incorporates both realism and idealism, and, in fact, the two are not incompatible. Meredith states,

Between realism and idealism, there is no natural conflict. . . . Realism is the basis of good composition: it implies study, observation, artistic power, and (in those who can do more) humility. Little writers should be realistic. They would then at least do solid work. They afflict the world because they will attempt what is given to none but noble workmen to achieve. A great genius must necessarily employ ideal means, for, a vast conception cannot be placed bodily before the eye, and remains to be suggested. (1:161)

Having set up a hierarchy of writers, Meredith goes on to say that geniuses still use realism--“Men to whom I bow my head (Shakespeare, Göthe; and in their way, Molière, Cervantes), are Realists au fond” (1:161)--but they also use idealism. “[T]hey have the broad arms of Idealism at command. They give us Earth; but it is Earth with an atmosphere” (1:161).

Given these statements, one can see why Meredith told other authors exactly the opposite advice he might give himself. Meredith viewed his work with other authors as helping them reach the first class of writer discussed, the writer who simply aims to produce solid work, rather than the second class of writer, the genius, who, like Meredith himself, needed idealism to achieve such a high aim. This broader vision articulated by Meredith encompasses the debate over plot versus character, for once
Meredith has embraced the idea that it is acceptable to represent the world through realism and idealism rather than in a traditional, straightforward, purely realistic manner, he gives himself the room to interpret events broadly, to give the time and space needed to give his readers “Earth with an atmosphere” rather than just Earth as seen through the concrete, as occurred in works using traditional realism. Nevertheless, as feminist criticism of the 1890s shows, Meredith did not abandon plot altogether. Instead, he managed to balance the various aspects of style in order to appeal to mainstream and feminist critics, if not to the plot-obsessed general public.

II.

As I have already mentioned, the mainstream press’s reaction to Meredith’s approach to fiction was less than positive in the early years of his career, and it remained mixed throughout his career. In addition to the comments made by those critics reviewing The Amazing Marriage in 1895, it is worth looking at some of the comments made earlier in Meredith’s career, especially those that address the ongoing debate over realism. Some of the more significant pieces of Meredith criticism are Margaret Oliphant’s reviews of Harry Richmond (1871) and The Egoist (1879), since we can see the reaction of someone who clearly identified with the principles of traditional realism and applied those principles across authors. Many of the same principles Oliphant uses to judge Thomas Hardy’s work in the 1890s, which I have discussed in the previous chapter, can be seen in her earlier reviews of Meredith’s work. In her review of Harry Richmond, which is relatively short but sets up well the longer and fuller analysis found in the review of The Egoist, Oliphant praises the first part of the novel, which she finds “charming, full of easy power and delightful absurdity,” but harshly criticizes the second half of the book (166). While she likes Meredith’s use of Harry’s perspective—as well as his “strange bits of description,” “gleams of insight,” and “quaint clever sayings”—she is frustrated by the “thicket” of events in the latter part of the book, which are told in a less-than-straightforward style (166). This less-than-straightforward approach to plot Oliphant describes as what happens when “the luxuriance of unrestrained imagination runs riot,” which occurs to the degree that “it is very difficult
to trace out the meaning of the latter part [of the novel], or not to believe that all the personages [in the novel] have gone mad together” (166).

In her review of *The Egoist*, Oliphant’s initial comments are similar. She praises Meredith’s prelude, since it “claims to represent to us the leading qualities of the human race in an exceptionally clear and animated way” (236), a claim that suggests an attempt at realism, even if it is one made through the genre of comedy, but she criticizes harshly what happens as the novel progresses. Meredith’s use of the comic tradition, she asserts, becomes “an appalling ordeal for a book in three large volumes, with scarcely an incident from beginning to end, all turning upon the question who is to marry Sir Willoughby Patterne, and occupied with the exhibition of that gentleman’s character to the world” (236). Ultimately, Oliphant continues on to say, the novel is nothing but “three huge volumes made up of a thousand conversations, torrents of words in half lines, continued, and continued, and continued, till every sentiment contained in them is beaten to death in extremest extenuation, and the reader’s head aches, and his very bones are weary” (237). Oliphant concludes that had Meredith written the story as a play, in “three moderate Acts, instead of three large volumes,” everything would have been fine, but to promise “condensation” and then deliver “a thousand pages of long-winded talk” is a “barefaced contradiction” (236).

While Oliphant’s criticism of Meredith differs from her comments on Hardy in that she initially focuses on lack of plot rather than unbelievability of plot, when her discussion turns to the characters of Willoughby and Clara, she does criticize Meredith for the unbelievability of his characters, if not the plot itself. She is especially disturbed by the “universal abandonment of the hero” by all the other characters; she states, “Mr. Meredith has fallen into the reverse error from that of those novelists who blacken all their secondary characters in order to have an intense white light of perfection upon their hero or heroine. All the people surrounding Patterne House . . . see through the hero. This seems to us as little true to nature as the existence of one black swan among a multitude of crows” (239). Similarly, Oliphant takes issue with Meredith’s construction of Clara Middleton, whom she finds “wearisome in the perpetual twitter and flutter of her wings, as she struggles for the release [Willoughby] will not give” (238). Rather than acting
quickly and with the right morals, as Oliphant also would claim Hardy’s Tess should have done, Clara is a character, in Oliphant’s opinion, who simply talks and talks and talks. In commenting on Clara this way, Oliphant once again reveals her narrowly constructed definition of realism, where the importance of struggle within a marriage, resistance through the spoken word, is ignored, in favor of plot--and particular types of plot, at that.

That said, not every reviewer writing for mainstream magazines criticized Meredith as harshly as Oliphant did. Ioan Williams points out, in Meredith: The Critical Heritage, that W. E. Henley was “Meredith’s most indefatigable partisan,” whose support Meredith appreciated greatly in the early years (206). But even Henley always acknowledges Meredith’s faults, especially his tendency for including too much talk in his novels and his inability to structure stories in a way to keep his reader’s attention. In one of the three reviews of The Egoist written by Henley for three different papers, Henley characterizes Meredith as such:

Extremely clever, he seems to prefer his cleverness to his genius. He is usually so bent on giving full play to his intellectual activity as to seem to ignore the novelist’s main function and to do his best to misuse the novelist’s best gifts. He fatigues and bewilders where, if he so willed it, he could more easily attract and explain. . . . Of course it is a good thing to be the author of . . . so many works of genius . . . [b]ut it would have been a better thing so to have written them as to have made them intelligible to the world at large. (215-16)

Henley shares Margaret Oliphant’s sense that Meredith has not presented what he promises in the prelude to The Egoist, for he writes, “It is . . . by no means certain that [The Egoist] is a proof that he has put his theory altogether into practice. . . . The plot of The Egoist is comic . . . [b]ut has Meredith rejected ‘all accessories in the exclusive pursuit’ of his characters and their speech? . . . Unluckily, there is much that is superfluous in The Egoist” (209). Still, Henley recognizes what Margaret Oliphant cannot: that Meredith is both an idealist and a realist; in more than one review, Henley says that Meredith has both imagination and keen observation skills (206, 215). Further,
Henley recognizes that realism alone does not always capture human life in the way idealism and realism do in combination. In one review, he writes, “Mr. Meredith is not at all intent upon painting the real. His intention is not naturalistic, it is comic” (216), and in another review, he writes, “To live with [Meredith’s characters] you must leave the world behind, and content yourself with essences and abstractions instead of substances and concrete things; and you must forget that such vulgar methods as realism and naturalism ever were” (223).

In contrast to the comments of mainstream critics, feminist critics seem to have been much more accommodating of Meredith’s approach to fiction, and even accepted it as a new version of realism, something Henley could not bring himself to do. One reason for this must certainly be the fact that feminists were able to appreciate Meredith’s idealism, and in a way that tied it to realism, since they were looking for idealized, even futuristic, portrayals of women but also the realistic representations resulting from emphasis on the present conditions of women’s lives. Though the number of feminist reviews increase significantly after the publication of Diana in 1885, there are some early appreciations of Meredith’s work by critics we might acknowledge as liberal feminist.

As I have already mentioned, Arabella Shore’s 1879 article in the British Quarterly Review is one such review. Not only does Shore explain away Meredith’s idiosyncrasies. She addresses aspects of Meredith’s writing not found in mainstream reviews of the time, especially his ability to realistically represent women. Discussing Meredith’s portrayal of Emilia in Emilia in England, she writes, “The object of Emilia in England is to paint a being accidentally evolved and developed, under no conventional constraint, of absolute naturalness, and with the addition of one splendid faculty. . . . [Emilia] is at once vividly real, and singularly difficult to define. We feel only a strong and constant attraction, as if we were always watching some object of curious study” (194-95). In addition to this praise for Meredith’s realistic representation of women, Shore includes a detailed discussion of Meredith’s focus on “that most fruitful of subjects--the social relations of the sexes” in her evaluation of Beauchamp’s Career (199). While Shore faults Meredith for letting one of the female characters in the novel “retrograde into what the hero and we imagine the author would regard as the
prejudices of more commonplace women,” she is heartened by the fact that another female character experiences significant “intellectual growth,” and she concludes that Meredith “is no friend to that ‘hard and fast line’ which would deny to women, and to women only, all those potentialities of growth” (200).

The anonymous review of *Emilia in England* (1864) in *Victoria Magazine* (founded by the well-known feminist Emily Faithfull in the early 1860s) is another example of early feminist assessment, if not thorough appreciation, of Meredith’s work. The reviewer praises Meredith for his portrayal of the protagonist Emilia, whom he draws in a “beautiful and original” manner (184), but takes issue with Meredith’s depiction of many of the other female characters in the novel. Writing of the Pole sisters, who provide a contrast to Emilia, the reviewer states, “The three sisters . . . are probably meant to be typical rather than individual, and the author’s intention might be frankly accepted, if the ideal was a true one. But it is not so. It may be safely affirmed that there is no class of women moving in society whose type of characters is fairly represented by the Poles” (184). Likewise, the reviewer hopes that Lady Charlotte, whose “healthy nature” is ruined by the “evils” of English society, is a type “not common enough to deserve to be treated as typical” (184). Still, the reviewer acknowledges that Meredith is no more tender to his male characters than to his female ones. “If Mr. Meredith makes his women contemptible,” the reviewer states, “he does not make it up by showing favour to the men” (184).

In raising issues such as the representation of women in Meredith’s fiction, this review indicates that, as early as the 1860s, a feminist literary aesthetic was developing, though it would not become fully developed until the 1890s, when explicitly liberal-feminist periodicals such as *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald* were present in the market. In the 1860s, Meredith himself also was aware of the role a feminine, if not feminist, aesthetic might play in shaping his views of his own work. In May 1864, a review written by Mary Hardman, wife of Meredith’s friend William Hardman, was published in the *Saturday Review*. Interestingly, Hardman’s review raises some of the same issues brought out in the *Victoria Magazine* piece, especially the issue of Meredith’s portrayal of the Pole sisters. Essentially, Hardman finds nothing natural about the Pole sisters (“The
whole set of people seem to live in a kind of cloudland, and to behave as no English
families ever behaved or thought of behaving,” she states [115]), but she excuses this
portrayal on the basis that she believes Meredith is trying to create a satire. Still, like the
Victoria Magazine reviewer, Hardman is unsure that Meredith articulates his point by the
end of the novel (118). Further, Hardman asserts that, according to the general public’s
expectation that plot will be privileged over character, Meredith’s novel is a failure
(114). “If a novel is bound to be amusing,” writes Hardman in the opening sentence of
her review, “and to make a man read on until, as Sydney Smith said, he forgets to dress
for dinner, either this is not a novel or it is a failure. It is not in the least amusing, and it
might easily inspire a sense of pleasure when the dinner hour came, and it was time to
leave off reading it” (114). Hardman continues to address the issue of plot versus
character. “The fashion of the day is to put all thoughts into the shape of fiction, and to
devote a large portion of thought to the analysis of contemporary English society. . . .
The question is, which shall be the bread and which the sack--shall it be principally
analysis, or principally adventure and love-making? The market, we believe, says the
latter; but authors are quite at liberty to ignore the market” (114).

Distressed by Mary Hardman’s criticism, Meredith wrote to William Hardman,
asking him to tell Mary that he planned to do things differently in the future, specifically
to write more realistic characters but also to make money doing it. “I hope to get Emilia
in Italy into the Cornhill,” he tells Hardman. “Tell my dearest D[emitroïa, Mary’s
nickname] that she will be launched on a sea of adventure and excitement. . . . But (tell
her this) there’s an end now to my working with puppets. I enter active life with my
people, and am resolved to merit money--which should mean, to make it” (Letters
1:257). In the several days following this letter to Hardman, Meredith also wrote to
Maxse twice, making statements that were clearly in response to Hardman’s review. On
May 30, he declares, “Emilia in Italy goes on most rapidly: not simply because money is
a necessity, but I have a double force in me. I hope to get her into the Cornhill, Smith
willing. Such adventures and romantic scenes, my dear fellow! They shan’t say this isn’t
a novel, or amusing” (1:258). And on June 1, he says, “Emilia in Italy goes on
swimmingly. . . Mazzini is going to give me an interview next week, to help me in Emilia.
In Italy, she moves like a fire of the skies: and they shall say of her, there, that she does animate a novel. I long to read you some of the chapters” (1:261).

Early feminist reviews of Meredith’s work, then, found his novels to be more realistic than many mainstream reviews did, and they were more patient with his use of plot than were the mainstream reviews. Further, Meredith adjusted his literary mode to accommodate these early feminist reviews, setting him up for wide acceptance by feminists in the 1890s. The adjustments made by Meredith early on suggest that while he valued character over plot, he was willing to incorporate more plot when needed. He was especially willing to incorporate more plot when he could do it through depicting more active characters. That Meredith promised Mary Hardman a female character who “moves like a fire of the skies” confirms his understanding that the actions of women, if not heavily plotted stories, were important to at least one portion of his audience.

III.

By the 1890s, the burgeoning feminist literary aesthetic of the 60s, 70s, and 80s had developed into a fully articulated literary criticism. The reviews of Meredith’s work in Shafts and The Woman’s Herald indicate that, with the publication of Diana of the Crossways, Meredith established himself as a strong model for the late-Victorian feminist novel. I have already mentioned in my introduction the fact that Shafts thought Meredith’s work important enough to include an article about his novels in the first issue of the magazine in 1892, in which they praise Meredith for his ability to combine artistic form with socially-aware subject matter. Also in this article, they praise him for his attention to the three methods used to capture woman’s agency: consciousness, spoken word, and physical actions. While this article is a general assessment of Meredith’s work and not a review of one particular work, discussion of Diana plays a prominent role in the article.

In addition to this general overview of Meredith’s work, Shafts ran a two-part review of Diana of the Crossways in 1895, in response to a reader who had questions about the relationship between literary representation and present-day politics, especially the cause of emancipating women. This review shows the prominent place
Meredith’s work had in feminist realism, and it emphasizes Meredith’s description of characters’ actions as a narrative strategy for representing woman’s agency. In May 1895, a reader identified as “A Modern Woman” wrote, “The question I wish to bring before the readers of your paper is: ‘Does the modern type of novel help or retard the cause of woman?’—meaning by the modern type, those that bear upon the question of woman’s position, and especially upon marriage and sexual topics” (31). The reader continued to name those novels she believed fit in the first category, such as Caird’s *The Daughters of Danaus* and Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*, since the first shows the suffering many women face and the second questions the purity of men rather than just that of women (31). She then named those that fit in the second category, citing primarily Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* and Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm*, since they advocated free-love rather than the sacredness of marriage (31).

While several other readers responded to this letter in July 1895, *Shafts* waited until November 1895 to run its response, claiming that the letters from readers had “awakened a desire” in the reviewer, Gertrude Kapteyn, to discuss *Diana*, since Kapteyn believes that the novel deserves a “front place in the fiction devoted to the modern woman’s cause” (109). In the review, Kapteyn emphasizes that Meredith should be admired for his realistic, but not naturalistic, approach to the novel (109), and, in a series of rhapsodic paragraphs, she characterizes Meredith as one who can depict realistically the modern woman as few others can.

Diana! The very name is suggestive! suggestive of a keen, rich temperament, of a wide awake soaring spirit . . .

But Diana was not the hunting goddess of placid Greece. Diana was a human being, not only a woman, but essentially a *modern* woman . . .

How G. Meredith loves the type, how he realises it, how he understands it, how subtly he analyses it!

How he tells her story, shows us her position . . . Shows this, shows her, yes, as perfect artist-showman, cool, but not cold; analytical, but rich in deepest sympathy; sceptical, but not without generosity;
lashing society, our so-called civilisation, not her, the woman, for the risks she invites, the mistake she makes, the race she runs. (109)

Kapteyn’s assessment of Meredith as “cool, but not cold; analytical, but rich in deepest sympathy,” and so on, makes clear the type of realism feminist critics and readers were looking for in late-nineteenth-century works. While Kapteyn does not mention explicitly the naturalist approach to fiction, her dismissal of the “cold” and wholly “analytical” approach here suggests that Shafts was looking for realism that separated itself from the more hard-line naturalism.

In addition, as Kapteyn summarizes and analyzes large portions of the novel, she discusses directly the three narrative strategies important to feminist definitions of realism. Referring to the presence of Diana’s internal perspective in the scene of “re-awakenening” at Lugano, Kapteyn quotes sections from the last few pages of the chapter and comments: “Listen to Meredith’s splendid understanding of that feeling of the loss of girlhood, so tragic in every married woman’s existence” (110). Further, Kapteyn says of the scene at Lugano, “I know hardly any page in the other novels of Meredith which surpasses or even equals this page of descriptive psychology with its poetic vision of the human soul. Vittoria, The Egoist, Richard Feverel or any of the later novels, in none do we find a more striking testimony of that characteristic power of the author to show us the inward throbbing life” (111). In other words, Meredith does internal perspective well, and Kapteyn feels the same about his use of dialogue as a narrative strategy for showing woman’s agency. Especially striking to her is his use of Diana’s “own words” in Chapter 1 of the novel, where, having shown what the diarists say about Diana, he turns to her own thoughts about her life. “She says of her life,” writes Kapteyn, “‘When I fail to cherish it in every fibre, the fires within are waiting.’ ‘If I can assure myself of doing service, I have my home within,’” and so on (109). Then Kapteyn stresses the importance of Meredith’s use of the spoken word, saying, “Thus quoting from her own words, written diaries and notes, Meredith gives his readers at once the true glimpse of the soul, whose history is his theme” (109). Here, Kapteyn suggests that it is through a woman’s own words that we best understand her “soul,” or her inner life.
While Kapteyn does not have the critical jargon we have today, which might replace the word “soul” with “subjectivity,” she is clearly aware that certain qualities result in a female character who seems true to life to readers, and this true-to-life impression is what constitutes realism for feminist critics of the period. In addition to recognizing Meredith’s use of consciousness and the spoken word as methods of asserting agency, Kapteyn indicates that Meredith also uses the third method needed for realistic representation of woman’s agency: physical actions. Not only does she describe Diana as a contrast to Emma Dunstane because of her “action,” which is “a tonic, like a flood of blazing sunlight” that must be “tempered” by her friend’s “reflection” and “contemplation” (109), but also she focuses on the implications of Diana’s actions, especially her decision to sell government secrets known by her lover Percy Dacier and her decision to marry Thomas Redworth. As I will show later in this section, Meredith’s inclusion of these actions became one of the great debates about Diana, and it is interesting to note that, for Kapteyn, if not for other critics, Diana’s actions were easily reconciled. When Kapteyn describes Diana’s selling of Dacier’s secret, there is no indication in her summary that such actions were a major issue for Kapteyn, as they were for some other readers, and when Kapteyn describes Diana’s marriage to Redworth, she explicitly states, “We can feel reconciled to her marriage because . . .” (126). Kapteyn then continues to quote a section of the novel in which Redworth’s belief in Diana is emphasized.

In Shafts’ review of Diana, then, we see the way in which a late-Victorian male author helped shape the feminist definition of realism, rather than feminist ideals influencing the work of the male author, and this is one of the significant differences between Meredith and other male authors of the time. Since Meredith came into the 1890s literary market having already negotiated the major issues of authorship, he was in a better position to have authority with feminists of the 1890s. While Gail Cunningham places Meredith within the rubric of male authors influenced by the New Woman novelists, Meredith’s publication and reception history indicates that he was as much an influence on the New Woman novelists as they were on him, and this particular review in Shafts shows how that reversal of influence occurred at the most specific level--
that of narrative strategies and their use in representations of woman’s agency.

Like Shafts, The Woman's Herald published several articles on Meredith and his work in the early 1890s, and these articles also emphasize Diana of the Crossways in Meredith’s body of work and present Meredith as a realist who earns this title because of his attention to woman’s agency rather than his adherence to the more traditional rules of realism. In “George Meredith’s Heroines,” which appeared in the March 1893 issue, John Little states that it is Diana’s comment, “Who can think, without thinking hopefully?” that sums up Meredith’s “ideal of women, which in the thirteen volumes he has written, he holds up before English society” (34). Further, Little says of Meredith,

[I]t may be said of [Meredith] that he is a realist, but a realist in the best sense of that much-abused word, a realist in the sense that he appeals to the truth, the reality of things. . . . Better, he seems to cry—better that a woman should forge for herself her own character from the iron of experience, even though the iron bruise her in the process, than that she should remain cramped by “the infinite grossness of the demand for infinite purity, spotless bloom.” (34)

Like “Dole” and Gertrude Kapteyn, Little realizes that realism can be defined more broadly than as straightforward, external description of character, coupled with straightforward, progressive plot. Further, like Arabella Shore, Little mitigates Meredith’s faults, especially those concerning his use of plot. Little acknowledges that, in The Egoist, “The plot is slender enough,” but he excuses this quality of the plot, on the basis that “It is rather the swift, incisive utterance of the needs of a woman’s soul and the defects in a man’s way of meeting them that creates the main interest of the story” (34).

While Little’s article lays out some of the foundation for a feminist perspective of Meredith’s work, “Woman in Fiction,” the article by M. H. Krout I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, articulates the feminist criteria more clearly, by describing Jane Eyre as the first fictional heroine to think, speak, and act as a real woman would. While this article does not discuss Diana specifically, it does place Meredith within a literary tradition devoted to the accurate representation of women’s
lives. In fact, according to Krout, Meredith is one of the greatest in this tradition. Beginning with the assertion that literature, as much as the laws of a particular period, shows the degree to which women have achieved “liberty” and “individuality,” Krout reviews the developments in literary heroines, from the “swooning” and “weeping” Clarissa; through the heroines of Jane Austen’s fiction, who develop into women with “greater intelligence”; to Jane Eyre, the first heroine who “thought and spoke and conducted herself in fiction as a flesh-and-blood creature would have been apt to do in like surroundings and under like circumstances” (485). Recent writers to contribute to this tradition, states Krout, include George Eliot, Mary Ward, and Meredith. Of Meredith, Krout writes that he is the “greatest of all novelists,” able to “comprehend woman in her full mentality and her spirituality” (485). “Fifty years from now,” Krout concludes the article by saying, “Meredith will be accepted as the one impartial judge, the one just critic, the foremost teacher of true morality, and the bitter foe of mischievous sentimentality; and his best advocate will be the heroine as he has rescued her from the injudicious, the malicious, and the blind, rehabilitating her in new honour, new power, and full liberty—the sentient genius of the present” (485).

Krout’s article directly points to the new status Meredith had, at least with liberal feminists, by the 1890s; he was someone who was to be admired not only for his representations of women in specific novels but also for the larger role he was playing in establishing a tradition of works that represent women well. In the articles on the literary tradition found in the 1860s, such as those in Victoria Magazine, it is evident that Meredith is not yet part of the canon (Dickens and Thackeray are most often cited in such discussions instead), whereas in the articles that appear in the 1890s, such as Krout’s, it is clear that Meredith had become part of the canon. What is even more interesting about these articles is that, although Meredith was publishing fiction throughout the 1890s, feminist periodicals chose to focus primarily on Meredith’s place in the canon or on Diana of the Crossways rather than reviewing Meredith’s newer work. While there are a few references to the novels of the 1890s—One of Our Conquerors in the Dole article, for example—the primary focus is not on these newer works. One reason for this is certainly that the heroines of his 1890s novels could not compare to Diana, but
also, having proven his commitment to women’s rights with a novel like Diana, Meredith did not need to prove himself further. While feminists obviously did not want Meredith to write novels that were less feminist than Diana, they seemed happy to take his already published work and use it to advance the more concrete and immediate cause on their minds—gaining the vote—rather than worry about whether or not Meredith remained “feminist enough” for their tastes. This attitude suggests that feminists of the 1890s might have been somewhat blind to Meredith’s faults, especially when one sets their criticism next to that found in mainstream magazines, but the tendency of feminists to place Diana (and Meredith) on a pedestal soon spilled over into the mainstream press, showing that it was not simply feminists who embraced Meredith on the basis of selected novels rather than the entire body of his work.

IV.

The appearance of Diana and Meredith’s feminism as forces in the mainstream press comes in 1896 and 1897, when there is a resurgence of Diana criticism, and also articles about Meredith’s women characters generally. Forman’s Meredithiana reveals that in 1896 and 1897 alone, there were ten articles with titles specifically about Meredith’s women characters, and many of these appeared in mainstream periodicals. Garnet Smith’s “The Women of George Meredith,” which appeared in the mainstream periodical Fortnightly Review in May 1896, begins with the assertion that because present conditions are so difficult for women, the possibilities for representing heroic women are limited to the realist novelist. Nevertheless, Smith argues, women naturally rebel against their constraints, meaning that while their agency is limited by social conditions, there is still room for them to be heroic. Smith discusses in detail many of Meredith’s heroines, including Sandra Belloni (formerly Emilia of Emilia in England and Emilia in Italy), Rhoda Fleming, Clara Middleton, Diana, and others. Though Smith seems to suggest that Diana’s marriage to Redworth is an example of “ girlish” acquiescence, he also paints Diana as “the most virile of Meredithian women,” made to “bear . . . the traces of the tyrannous Turkish training imposed, it would seem, by men upon them” (783). Further, Diana provides a measure by which many of the other heroines are discussed by Smith;
while he seems to give equal weight to each heroine, Diana plays a prominent role in comparisons within these individual portraits.

W. L. Courtney’s “George Meredith’s Heroines,” which appeared in the mainstream newspaper The Daily Telegraph in July 1897, places Diana in an even more prominent position within Meredith’s work. Courtney contrasts the “new type” of woman found in Meredith’s novels to the early Victorian, or “Hanoverian” type, angelic and prone to stick to her duties rather than assert agency, as seen in Thackeray and even to some degree in Eliot, says Courtney. He then claims that Meredith’s heroine is “wholly different” and “essentially modern . . . the woman in revolt” (12). Of this modern woman, Courtney says that she is one to “demand freedom of thought and action,” picking up on two of the three methods of expressing agency discussed in this dissertation, and he claims that he hardly needs to cite examples of this type of woman in Meredith’s work, though he includes “Janet Ilchester; Rhoda Fleming; to some extent the Princess Odillia” and “above all, perhaps, Diana Merion” (12). Further, in his overall assessment of the modern woman as one who would be a better “helpmeet” to men if she were recognized as an intellectual equal, he pulls in the famous quotation from Diana about the thinking and attitudes of men: “He has rounded Seraglio Point, he has not yet doubled Cape Turk” (12). Courtney then discusses briefly two of the three novels Meredith published in the 1890s, Lord Ormont and His Aminta and One of Our Conquerors but not The Amazing Marriage, with favorable comments for both, and he concludes the article with the overall assessment that Meredith is “philosophical and critical, balancing probabilities, always trying to draw an impartial picture--but throughout understanding the feminine nature as no other novelist has done in recent times” (12).

In addition to the articles by Smith and Courtney, articles about Meredith’s female characters appeared in the magazines Woman and Great Thoughts, neither of which were explicitly feminist but are better classified as small but mainstream periodicals. Woman began as a “moderate” feminist magazine but quickly became a “fashionable ladies’ magazine” (Doughan and Sanchez 14), and Great Thoughts was eclectic in terms of the ideologies expressed in its articles, perhaps because the magazine’s main premise was “great thoughts from great minds,” an approach that
encouraged a wide variety of ideologies. Interestingly, these small but still mainstream magazines hired feminist writers to write about Meredith. Clementina Black authored “Women Under Victoria: Women in the Literature of the Reign,” which ran in Woman in May 1897; Black was well-known for her involvement in working-class women’s issues and, as I have already discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, wrote reviews of Gissing’s and Hardy’s work for the Illustrated London News. Frances E. Ashwell, author of the six-part series “George Meredith’s Heroines” that ran in Great Thoughts in 1896 and 1897, is less known, but my research suggests that she was a reader of The Woman’s Herald, since a Frances E. Ashwell wrote a letter to the magazine concerning “The Influence of the Feminine Novel” in August 1894. In this letter, Ashwell defends Meredith and Ibsen from the charge that they “write of an abnormal class who are unnatural, in so far as they repress the angel in the animal” (124) and argues that, to the contrary, these two writers exhibit the “healthy-body-healthy-mind view of human well-being,” in which the angel is made to “illumine” and “purge” the animal, since “real progress” is dependent on the two types working in unison (124). That Woman and Great Thoughts hired feminist writers is significant, since it shows that the interest in Meredith and his feminism had spilled over into the more mainstream press by the late-1890s. 

The resurgence of Diana criticism in 1896-97, which provides the first indicator that Meredith’s feminism had been accepted in the mainstream press, continued even after 1897. Forman’s Meredithiana lists thirteen articles written between 1898 and 1909, the year of Meredith’s death, that specifically refer to Meredith and women in the titles, and two highlights of this critical work are the prize-winning essays on Diana published in The Lady in 1900 and Herbert Bedford’s 1914 book The Heroines of George Meredith. The prize-winning essays in The Lady, written by readers of the magazine, show the degree to which Diana had become a cultural icon, for The Lady was not an especially feminist magazine but one aimed at the middle-class, educated, even “genteel” woman reader (Riley 105), similar to the audience for Woman magazine. Bedford’s book also indicates the degree to which Meredith’s feminism had been incorporated into print venues aimed at mainstream audiences. With its coffeetable-book appearance, and the individual portraits and large-print commentaries on each of the twenty heroines
discussed in the book, it is clearly aimed at a general audience familiar with Meredith’s popularized reputation rather than the more negative reputation expressed by mainstream critics of the late-nineteenth century.

The essays in *The Lady* were part of the magazine’s weekly literary competitions, sponsored by *The Lady’s* “Literary Society,” a society established to encourage the study of English literature. The essays are written by “average” people, usually but not exclusively women, writing under pseudonyms such as “Amaryllis,” “Broad Arrow,” “Mustard Seed,” “Rotha,” and others. The competitors were given specific topics each week, in this case, “Write an analytical essay on the women in George Meredith’s ‘Diana of the Crossways.’” Of the essays written on this topic, the judge “Hypatia” states that “Most of the papers sent in this time are truly excellent, though that was only to be expected, with such a magnificent subject” (“Lady”172). Hypatia relates her own perspective on the topic, waxing poetically about Diana and her friend Emma Dunstane. “Naturally enough, Diana and Lady Dunstane, ‘Tony and her Emma,’ are the two [women] on whom we have to concentrate our thoughts. . . . [T]he few other women [in the novel] are mere sketches, brilliant, life-like, convincing, it is true, but still sketches, while Diana and the friend of her soul are finished and superb portraits” (172).

Nevertheless, Hypatia recognizes that some readers have found faults in Diana, and, unlike the more thoroughly liberal-feminist perspectives on the novel already discussed, which are able to reconcile Diana’s actions, Hypatia’s perspective shows that she was unsure about her own feelings on this matter. Hypatia wonders whether Diana’s actions can be forgiven, writing, “It is impossible not to love Diana--perhaps we love her most when we feel most inclined to blame her, save only when she performed the only deliberately dishonourable action of her life, and sold the secret Dacier confided in her. I must confess that her conduct on this occasion has always been, and will always be, inexplicable to me. . . . It is difficult indeed to forgive her for being so false to her true self, impossible until we see her absolutely prostrated with anguish as the horror of the treachery comes over her” (172). Then, connecting her reaction to a fictional character to similar situations in real life, Hypatia speculates on what she would do in real life should she meet someone like Diana. “[H]ow is it when we come across the Dianas of
real life, when perforce we know--can know--only a little, and must take the rest on trust? Do we give them the benefit of the doubt, or do we condemn them from our poor jealous little standpoint? I wonder!” (172).

The prize-winning essays, by “Rotha” and “Mustard Seed,” seem divided on the issue of Diana’s actions. While neither writer addresses the question as directly as Hypatia does, Rotha seems to say that she would have a hard time forgiving Diana for selling Dacier’s secret. While she claims that Meredith helps readers sympathize with Diana at this point in the novel, she also emphasizes Diana’s faults and ends her essay with the statement, “Through the women of his book Meredith conveys the teaching that lack of feeling is not a virtue, that the truly good woman is not she who does not know, but she who stoutly resists temptation” (172). Mustard Seed, on the other hand, seems thoroughly capable of forgiving Diana, since she writes, “True, she errs, but in her own grand way, and she errs in exactly the way in which a woman of Diana’s warm heart and vivid imagination would do. . . . She has nothing of the coquette in her, albeit she once verges terribly near it, but that is when she is striving to keep Redworth’s love at bay” (172). Despite some disagreement on the issue of Diana’s actions, both essays share a belief in the power of Diana as a heroine and in Meredith’s ability to depict women’s lives realistically. Rotha characterizes the novel as a “very elaborate attempt to portray an actual woman of real flesh and blood, and to study the actions of this woman in various difficult situations from an entirely unprejudiced standpoint,” while Mustard Seed describes Meredith’s characters as “above everything else creatures of flesh and blood,” not “mere puppets” but so realistic that they seem to do things themselves rather than doing things at the direction of their author (172). Further, Rotha characterizes Diana as “palpably intended as a direct and vivid contrast to the conventional heroine of fiction. She is a bold and original creation,” who is a character we need not be convinced is real by the author, since her strengths--wit, charm, talent--are abundantly shown rather than told to readers (172). Mustard Seed confirms such a view of Diana, asserting that “Even among his [Meredith’s] women, Diana stands unrivalled for her wit, her beauty, and her charm,” and she closes her essay with the praise, “Truly, a wonderful picture-gallery of all sorts and conditions of women does
this master of novelists give us in this work!” (172).

The “picture-gallery of all sorts and conditions of women” Mustard Seed writes of comes into concrete existence with Bedford’s book. Bedford’s introduction begins with a quotation from The Egoist but makes good use of Diana’s place in Meredith’s body of work as well. Bedford points out that “of all the Meredith heroines, [Diana] is the only one possessed of beauty on strictly classical lines” (18), and he draws attention to the passage in Diana in which the heroine is described in her lavender dress as evidence of Meredith’s ability to “dress a damsel” (18-19). While attention to Diana’s beauty and clothing, and the decision to paint portraits of Meredith’s heroines in the first place, might be seen as tempering Meredith’s feminist tendencies, a closer examination of the book shows that Bedford wants to play up, rather than play down, the connection between Meredith and feminism, and this indicates the degree to which Meredith’s feminism had been accepted by the mainstream. Bedford’s introduction, divided into sections with specific headings, begins with the section “George Meredith’s Allegiance to Feminism,” and many, though not all, of the other headings pick up on themes evident in feminist criticism of the 1890s. There is a section on “Their Gift of Brains,” which includes Diana’s wit as one of its examples of Meredith’s commitment to portraying women as intelligent (22), and “Friendship between his Women,” which naturally includes reference to Diana and Emma’s friendship, which Bedford characterizes as the “most outstanding” of Meredith’s female friendships (29). Interestingly, the section on “Meredith’s Literary Style” is pushed to the end of the introduction, and, in it, Bedford acknowledges Meredith’s critical reputation as one that has kept “scores” of readers from access to Meredith’s heroines: these women are “merely names” to such readers (31). Bedford defends Meredith’s style, saying that he sees it as the style of a “poet free as air. Difficult it occasionally may be; but difficult only from excess of meaning, never from confusion of thought, and always with a sense of the poetic values that is unerring” (31). Bedford also quotes several of the critics who recognized the merits of Meredith’s style, and he says that he is “content to forget those of that species of writer that centres his attention so keenly upon his critical nostril, sniffing for defects, that he unconsciously closes his eyes and becomes blind to the
beauties” (32-33).

Bedford’s individual portrait of Diana, which is placed close to the end of the book, begins with his painting of her, in which her dark hair is highlighted by the white background and her white clothes, and her side profile emphasizes her Grecian features. Bedford supplements this pictorial image with commentary, in which he tells of how his fascination was aroused by the discovery, in Chapter 1 of the novel, that Meredith is writing of the “Warwick-Dannisburgh affair.” “Is this the lady?” writes Bedford, indicating that the real-life connection between Caroline Norton and Diana Merion, its role in realistic depiction, is one strength of the novel. Bedford continues to include praise from Henley (131-32), who we will remember was Meredith’s “indefatigable partisan” (Ioan Williams 206), and Bedford’s own commentary is not unlike that of feminist appreciations of the novel. Like Gertrude Kapteyn, he includes a section on the heroine’s own words. “And now let me gather together a few sayings from Diana’s own lips,” writes Bedford toward the end of his essay, “words that have carried her charm abroad, and helped to make her famous.” (132). Bedford then lists a number of quotations from Diana, including “On Poetry--Those that have souls meet their fellows there” and “On Life--When I fail to cherish it in every fibre, the fires within are waning” (132).

The sustained attention to Diana, and to Meredith’s heroines in general, in the 1890s and beyond suggests that Meredith’s acceptance by feminists of the 1890s contributed to his overall popularity in a way not experienced by some of the other authors discussed in this dissertation. Certainly, the case can be made that Meredith was simply better at representing women with full agency than other authors were, but, as I will show in Chapter 4, Moore’s Esther Waters possesses many of the same qualities found in Meredith’s Diana and required for representation of woman’s agency according to the feminist ideal, and yet Moore’s overall reputation was significantly less than Meredith’s. Still, it is important to remember that Meredith’s widespread popularity grew primarily at the end of the 1890s and into the early twentieth century, perhaps as a result of lucky circumstances, the collision with attention to women in both literature and politics, rather than any particular natural development in Meredith’s body of
work. Likewise, Moore’s reputation increased after the turn of the century, but, as I will show in Chapter 4, his reputation grew in part because of his efforts to keep his most woman-centered novel, *Esther Waters*, in the minds of the public through numerous revisions, including the especially woman-centered 1932 preface to the novel. However, in the late-twentieth century, both authors’ reputations have waned significantly, Moore because of his uneven development as an author and Meredith because of the perpetual thorn-in-his-side that plagued his early career, the dense and difficult style that impedes the reader’s understanding of plot, a problem to which we should return.

V.

If we turn to formal analysis of *Diana* and *The Amazing Marriage*, we can see that Meredith’s narrative strategies, especially his description of characters’ actions as an integral component of plot, remains an important issue in current interpretations of his later work. Late-twentieth-century criticism of these novels of course makes mention of Meredith’s reputation as a stylist who emphasizes character rather than plot, and character built through representation of thought processes; Meredith himself claimed that, in the process of creating Diana from his real-life model Caroline Norton, he had needed to “endow her with brains” (*Letters* 2:731). Still, many recent critics also discuss in detail Meredith’s description of actions, which suggests that while Meredith’s work is certainly about assertion of agency through consciousness and speech, it is also about assertion through physical actions. This strand in criticism of *Diana* no doubt has something to do with the ties the novel has to the real-life story of Norton, whose actions in her divorce scandal, particularly her apparent affair with Lord Melbourne, are well-known. Further, the attention to actions in *Diana* can be attributed to the mythological basis of the novel; the modeling of Diana Merion after the female hunter goddess implies that the active woman is an important figure in novels concerned with woman’s agency. Finally, the attention to actions by recent critics might be attributed to critics’ hopes that they can make Meredith’s work more palatable to a wider audience. My reading of Meredith certainly is aware of the competing strands in Meredith criticism and aims to show how the various methods of representing woman’s agency work.
together rather than separately.

Within criticism that discusses the role of physical actions in Meredith’s work, especially in *Diana*, are early feminist interpretations by Gillian Beer (“*Diana of the Crossways*: The Novelist in the Novel,” 1970), Lois J. Fowler (“*Diana of the Crossways*: A Prophecy for Feminism,” 1972), and Judith Wilt (“The Meredithian Subplot,” 1975). These articles examine how Diana’s actions, especially the selling of Dacier’s secret and the marriage to Redworth, reflect Diana’s psychological development over the course of the novel, a subject that is closely linked to that of woman’s agency. Beer, in particular, argues that Meredith explores issues of selfhood and the artist’s responsibility to society by making Diana a novelist similar to himself, and she asserts that he abandons the theory of congruous character, which cannot contain Diana’s actions. Instead, Meredith adopts the theory that characters can act in contradictory ways. Adopting this theory, which flies in the face of traditional Victorian ideas about why people act as they do, allows Meredith to develop more complex characters and show the degree to which people’s actions are determined by societal conventions. While Beer believes that Meredith’s realism is limited by his love for Diana, once one understands that Meredith is working with a different theory of character, it is easier to accept Diana’s actions. Likewise, Fowler and Wilt both provide sympathetic readings of the novel that emphasize Meredith’s description of characters’ actions. Fowler argues that Diana’s refusal to be sexually emancipated through her relation with Dacier, her act of not having sex with him, works in tandem with her need for Dacier’s forgiveness, which, if granted, would allow Diana to accept sexual emancipation. Wilt argues that while *Diana* addresses three specific audiences—the shallow critics, the morality-obsessed “world,” and the plot/romance-obsessed “base” public—by creating a fourth audience, the “civilized” reader who identifies with Diana, Meredith creates space for readers to understand Diana’s actions. As long as the civilized reader sees that Diana’s decision to marry Redworth is a personal one, her character is not inconsistent.

More recent readings of Meredith’s description of actions are found in Waldo Glock’s “Theme and Metaphor in *Diana of the Crossways*” (1985) and Gayla McGlamery’s “In His Beginning, His Ends: The ‘Preface’ to Meredith’s *Diana of the*
“Crossways” (1991), both of which perform closer analysis of narrative strategies that influence the presentation of plot than do the earlier articles. Glock argues that while Meredith often overcontrols plot by inserting an overabundance of metaphorical language, the use of such language points to, and supports, the main dramatic action of the novel. Glock’s argument does much to make clear the relationship between metaphor and plot, but, in its attention to metaphor and its attempt to justify Meredith’s lack of straightforward description of actions, it neglects to develop fully the implications of Meredith’s narrative strategies. Like Glock, McGlamery attempts to explain away readerly objections to the novel, primarily by claiming that Chapter 1 of the novel (or the preface, as McGlamery refers to it) shows readers how to interpret Diana’s character. While Chapter 1 includes a number of instructions about how to read the rest of the novel, the most important point, according to McGlamery, is that Diana is pictured as someone who is far from perfect and still in need of maturation (478). Given this information, McGlamery believes that we can understand Diana’s seemingly inconsistent actions later in the novel. In addition, McGlamery points out that Meredith constructs the novel so as not to excuse Diana’s selling of Dacier’s secret (484), and she reminds us that, throughout the novel, Meredith indicates that Redworth, not Dacier, is the appropriate partner for Diana (485).

While McGlamery’s argument is quite strong, her analysis is devoid of any historical context, and that makes her reading of the novel incomplete and slightly distorted. As I have already indicated, particularly through my analysis of Kapteyn’s two-part review of Diana, at least some nineteenth-century readers did not question Diana’s actions in the way some late-twentieth-century critics, such as McGlamery and Elaine Hadley seem to assume all readers do. By adding the historical evidence I have included in this chapter, we can see more clearly how narrative strategies worked on people reading the novel at the time of its publication and how this historical context might shape our current readings of the novel. In addition, the role narrative strategies, especially description of actions, play in the late-Victorian period becomes clearer when we combine narrative and historical theories of literature.
Meredith’s novels show that expressions of woman’s agency are represented through a range of narrative strategies, and, in the cases of Diana and The Amazing Marriage, these expressions happen as often through the actions of the female protagonists as they do through other methods. Further, Meredith’s later novels show that even within a particular method of expressing agency, there is a range of possible expressions; in the case of physical actions, there are many options: to go somewhere, to stay where one already is, to flee, to escape, to stand by and wait, and so on. These actions typically can be categorized in one of two ways: actions associated with being present or actions associated with being absent (or present in another place). One of the striking themes in both Diana and The Amazing Marriage is that of “fleeing,” and, in fact, actions associated with absenting oneself become key to acts of resistance by the female protagonists in both novels. When Diana first learns that she is to be divorced from her husband, she considers fleeing England in order to escape the embarrassment of facing the public, and, from then on, fleeing becomes an important option for Diana in dealing with the difficult circumstances she faces. In Diana, to flee—to be absent—is not always an act of cowardliness, nor is staying—remaining present—always proof of assertion of agency. In The Amazing Marriage, fleeing becomes an even more overt act of resistance; while the female protagonist Carinthia adopts actions associated with both presence and absence as she resists her husband’s attempts to control their marriage, ultimately she finds actions associated with absence to be the more effective strategy. By placing emphasis on actions associated with being absent, Meredith expands the range of actions available to women for resistance to cultural norms that support their subordination. While feminist theory often assumes that actions associated with being present are the most effective for creating change, Meredith’s novels show that the range of options is broader than even feminists might expect.

I will begin with an analysis of Diana, since it was published first and also sets up well the more overt resistance seen in The Amazing Marriage. Diana’s dilemma about how to act first becomes significant in Chapter 8 of the novel, when her friend Emma sends Thomas Redworth to Diana’s family home, The Crossways, in the Sussex Downs, to find and retrieve her. Having received the notice that her husband is filing for divorce
and has accused Diana of adultery with Lord Dannisburgh, Diana has fled to The Crossways from London in order to prepare for her departure from England. It is Redworth’s job to convince her to remain in the country. Redworth, who sees Diana as a “warhorse . . . beset by battle” (88-89) rather than as someone who is avoiding contact with the world, gives Diana the letter Emma has written, which begs Diana not to leave. After giving Diana time to read and digest the contents of this letter, Redworth initiates the following conversation, in which the options for action are first explored.

“You have read Lady Dunstane’s letter,” he began.

She nodded. “I have.”

“Can you resist her appeal to you?”

“I must.”

“She is not in a condition to bear it well. You will pardon me, Mrs. Warwick . . .”

“Fully! Fully!”

“I venture to offer merely practical advice. You have thought of it all, but have not felt it. In these cases, the one thing to do is to make a stand. Lady Dunstane has a clear head. She sees what has to be endured by you. . . . Consider a moment: to your friends you are the Diana Merion they knew, and they will not suffer an injury to your good name without a struggle. But if you fly? You leave the dearest you have to the whole brunt of it.”

“They will [take the brunt], if they love me.”

“They will. But think of the shock to her. Lady Dunstane reads you. . . . She reads you as clearly in the dark as if you were present with her.”

“Oh! why am I not ten years older! . . . Ten years older, I could discuss my situation, as an old woman of the world, and use my wits to defend myself.”

“And then you would not dream of flight before it!”

“No, she does not read me: no! . . . no one but myself can see the
wisdom of my holding aloof, in contempt of this baseness. . . . Go I must, I cannot turn back. . . . Who but I can see the wisest course for me!” (93-94)

This passage, in which the issue of flight and an independent woman’s knowledge of what is best for her are central, highlights Diana’s dilemma over how to act under difficult circumstances. While Redworth and Emma appear to have better knowledge about the effectiveness of certain actions here, for they are able to see that the situation calls for “taking a stand,” readers are aware that other factors are at work in Diana’s mind as she considers what to do. Redworth and Emma do not know, for example, that Emma’s husband once tried to seduce Diana and that his attempt at seduction is in part responsible for Diana’s quick marriage to Warwick. Though this memory from the past should have no bearing on the divorce proceedings, in Diana’s mind and in the minds of readers, Diana’s past justifies her fear of the future and fleeing appears as legitimate an option to the current situation as remaining in England.

Even if readers do not immediately accept Diana’s decision to flee, in the following chapter, her perspective on assertion of agency through physical actions is clarified as she thinks through her decision. In this section, it becomes clear, to Diana anyway, that fleeing is as much an expression of agency as standing by and waiting is. Diana thinks,

The unfriendliness of the friends who sought to retain her recurred. For look--to fly could not be interpreted as a flight. It was a stepping aside, a disdain of defending herself, and a wrapping herself in her dignity. Women would be with her. She called on the noblest of them to justify the course she chose, and they did, in an almost audible murmur. And O the rich reward. A black archway-gate swung open to the glittering fields of freedom. (95-96)

While Meredith himself may be skeptical about Diana’s logic (the phrase “to fly could not be interpreted as a flight” might be seen as Diana’s attempt to rationalize her own actions), for Diana, to flee means to gain freedom, while to stay in England means to be chained not only to her husband’s control over their relationship through the divorce
proceedings but also to the wishes of her friends, who are thinking about their own desires, even if they are presenting their case as one concerned about Diana’s needs. Reflecting on Emma’s wishes that she stay in England, Diana believes that Emma sees the world through the eyes of an “invalid” and cannot understand “the blessedness of the prospect of freedom to a woman abominably yoked” (96). To think of her fate if she stays in England is like thinking of being burned at the stake, and Diana’s skin actually burns as she reflects on her earlier interview with Redworth. “It was the beginning of tortures if she stayed in England,” the narrative reads. “By staying to defend herself she forfeited her attitude of dignity and lost all chance at her reward” (96). To Diana, to flee means keeping her dignity intact, whereas to remain in England suggests exactly the opposite.

Still, Diana ultimately decides to stay in England, choosing her friends’ definition of dignity over her own. Nevertheless, it is clear that this decision does not bring Diana the personal freedom fleeing England might have. Diana expresses regret over her decision to stay, saying to Emma, who wonders how Diana could even consider leaving her husband’s charge of adultery unanswered, “What does it matter? I should have left the flies and wasps to worry a corpse. . . . perhaps once on foreign soil, in a different air, I might--might have looked back, and seen my whole self, not shattered, as I feel it now, and come home again compassionate to the poor persecuted animal to defend her” (109). Here, Diana suggests that what fleeing might have given her is the perspective needed to separate her sense of herself from the person her husband’s charge of adultery has created, and having that perspective might have made a significant difference in the way she would approach defending herself in the public sphere. In other words, Diana might have been able to keep her sense of her self intact. Further, Diana asserts that her own “instinct,” even if it is different from the instincts of her friends, is worth listening to. “I fled [to The Crossways] on instinct,” Diana tells Emma, “often a good thing to trust” (109).

McGlamery is correct to point out that Meredith characterizes Diana as a young woman still in need of maturation, and the thoughts of Diana described above capture the immaturity on her part. One imagines that Meredith, like readers of the novel and
even other characters in the book, sees the flaws in Diana’s thinking at this juncture in the story. It is not surprising, then, that once Diana decides to stay in England, she wholeheartedly embraces different types of actions, actions associated with presence, as a method of resistance. This suggests that Diana is a woman who is learning to use whatever physical actions are available to her to their fullest extent. When Emma suggests that Diana stay at Copsley, in Surrey, rather than return to London, Diana refuses, saying, “If I am to fight my battle, I must be seen; I must go about--wherever I am received. So my field must be London” (112-13). Further, Diana is redescribed (and, hence, inscribed) as one who does battle through actions associated with presence rather than those associated with absence, a description that contrasts to that presented by Redworth when he first goes to The Crossways to find Diana and interprets Diana’s absence not as a fault but as preparation for the battle. The inscription of Diana as one who will do battle through remaining in England rather than fleeing comes at the beginning of Chapter 14 and reveals the calm stature Diana takes on as she prepares for her trial. “As the day of her trial became more closely calculable,” the narrative reads, Diana’s anticipated alarms receded with the deadening of her heart to meet the shock. She fancied she had put on proof-armour, unconscious that it was the turning of the inward flutterer to steel which supplied her cuirass and shield. The necessity to brave society, in the character of honest Defendant, caused but a momentary twitch of the nerves. Her heart beat regularly, like a serviceable clock; none of her faculties abandoned her save songfulness, and none belied her, excepting a disposition to tartness almost venomous in the sarcastic shafts she let fly at friends interceding with Mr. Warwick to spare his wife, when she had determined to be tried. (123)

After the trial, Diana continues to use actions associated with presence to fight her battle, though now she remains present in the minds of the English public in a more subtle way, by writing novels rather than by being seen in society. As an author, Diana can be present and absent simultaneously. With The Princess Egeria, she critiques aristocratic society and uses “stinging epigrams” aimed at “discernible personages”
(164), which shows Diana’s refusal to back down from the society types who often condemn her. Diana also does battle with another of her novels, _The Young Minister of the State_, by writing personally about her new friend Percy Dacier, a move that shocks English society. “ANTONIA’s [Diana’s pseudonym] hero was easily identified. THE YOUNG MINISTER OF THE STATE could be he only who was now at all her parties, always meeting her; had been spied walking with her daily in the park near her house, on his march down to Westminster during the session. . . . What effrontery of the authoress, to placard herself with him in a book!” (199-200). In other words, Diana remains present, despite her physical absence, in order to make her perspective clear to the society that shuns her, and they respond by buying up her books in mass (169).

Perhaps the best symbol for Diana’s approach to the world becomes the mask, first mentioned in Chapter 11, when Diana claims that she will not wear the mask that women must wear when married.

“Let me be myself, whatever the martyrdom!” she cried, in that phase of young sensation when, to the blooming woman, the putting on of a mask appears to wither her and reduce her to the show she parades. Yet, in common with her sisterhood, she owned she had worn a sort of mask; the world demands it of them as the price of their station. That she had never worn it consentingly, was the plea for now casting it off altogether, showing herself as she was, accepting martyrdom, becoming the first martyr of the modern woman’s cause--a grand position! (99)

Later, in Chapter 14, when the narrator describes Diana’s life in London in the days of the trial, he acknowledges that Diana has put the mask back on, but he again explains that the mask is a necessary device for women in the situation of defending themselves to the world. “She discovered the social uses of cheap wit; she laid ambushes for anecdotes. . . . These were Diana’s weapons. She was perforce the actress of her part. . . . It is a terrible decree, that all must act who would prevail; and the more extended the audience, the greater need for the mask and buskin” (124-25). The mask, a symbol that implies both presence and absence, comes into play more symbolically when Diana leaves England but continues to remain in the English public’s minds through her writing.
Since Diana is often abroad as she writes her novels, Redworth is the one physically present in London and the one to keep Diana’s name circulating in the public sphere, by spreading rumors of ANTONIA’s real identity as a way of ensuring her success as an author (164-65). Through both the literal and the symbolic mask, Diana manages to be present yet absent, as circumstances require.

As the novel progresses, Diana seems to balance actions associated with presence and those associated with absence with more and more ease, and the rest of the book displays an interplay between these two categories of actions. Among the highlights are Diana’s decision to be present at Lord Dannisburgh’s death bed, despite grumbling from the family (Chapter 19-20); Diana’s refusal to reconcile with Warwick, an act of resistance that others believe cause Warwick to fall ill (Chapter 23); Diana’s thoughts of fleeing England with Dacier, an action that would ensure freedom from Warwick who continues to pressure Diana to reconcile (Chapter 25); and Diana’s decision to remain in England because Emma must undergo surgery, an action confirming Diana’s commitment to her female friend and her refusal to let even Dacier control her movements (Chapter 26). In the end, Diana chooses permanent presence in England through her marriage to Redworth, but their marriage promises many trips to Ireland, a symbol for Diana’s desire for complete independence. At the end of the novel, to flee is to go to a place she loves, Ireland, with a husband who understands her, and all of this is possible because of the help of her friend Emma, who has given Diana the ability to see clearly again. Telling Emma of a dream she has the night before her wedding, Diana says,

Who can really think and not think hopefully? You were in my mind last night, and you brought a little boat to sail me past despondency of life and the fear of extinction. . . . I heard you whisper, with your very breath in my ear: “There is nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit by.” That is Emma’s history. With that I sail into the dark; it is my promise of the immortal: teaches me to see immortality for us. It comes from you, my Emmy. (413)
The boat in which Diana flees now is both Redworth’s schooner and Emma’s “little boat” of emotional support, which help her achieve the independence she craves. This notion of a boat that supports stands in sharp contrast to the schooner-yacht “Clarissa,” which, at the end of Diana’s divorce trial, had taken her away from England to the Mediterranean under much different circumstances, specifically “the terrific net of the marital law brutally whirled to capture her by the man her husband” (135). The contrast between the “Clarissa,” clearly a reference to Richardson’s novel and the flight of a woman who meets with rape and death, and the boat of emotional support Diana has now is significant, since it shows the positive potential of flight for strong minded women.

VI.

It is clear from the movement of plot within Diana and the use of both categories of actions by Diana that Meredith’s understanding of the methods of expressing agency is quite complex, and this understanding of physical actions as a method of expressing agency carries over to his last novel, The Amazing Marriage. The limited late-twentieth-century criticism on the novel is mixed in its opinion, both on the general issue of Carinthia’s overall degree of agency and on the specific issue of her marriage to Owain Wythan. Gillian Beer, in “The Amazing Marriage: A Study in Contraries” (1970), takes the view that as the amount of internal perspective granted Lord Fleetwood over the course of the novel increases, it becomes more and more difficult to sympathize with Carinthia (170). While we know not to align ourselves entirely with Fleetwood because we receive some of Carinthia’s internal perspective early in the novel, maintaining a balance of sympathy between the two characters becomes impossible in the end. When Carinthia refuses to reconcile with Fleetwood after he realizes that he has been wrong to shut her out, readers are disappointed by Carinthia’s decision to reject his repentance (172). While Beer’s analysis traces well the developments in internal perspective across the course of the novel, her analysis is not as complete as it might be, since she ignores other methods of asserting agency. Further, Beer’s claim that Carinthia is “uncivilized” and “instinctive” seems overstated, and Barbara Hardy, in “Lord Ormont and His
Aminta and The Amazing Marriage” (1971), picks up on this distorted characterization.

Though Hardy addresses more than just Beer’s views in her article, arguing that Meredith is at his best with The Amazing Marriage because he manages to avoid the sentimentalism found in some of his other novels, especially Lord Ormont, she spends significant time voicing specific objections to Beer’s characterization of Carinthia (Hardy 307). Rather than seeing Carinthia as Beer does, Hardy asserts that “By the time she [Carinthia] comes to refuse her bed—‘I guard my rooms’—to Fleetwood, she has learnt not to react instinctively and spontaneously, but to analyse, judge and defend herself by the use of her considerable intelligence” (307-08). Unlike Beer, who seems limited by the focus of her analysis on internal perspective, Hardy seems to understand that assertions of woman’s agency come in multiple forms. By touching on Carinthia’s resistance through speech, “I guard my rooms,” and the physical action that accompanies this speech act, Hardy sees the complexity of Meredith’s representation of agency. Still, Hardy acknowledges that Meredith backs off from making Carinthia a fully developed subject at the end of the novel. While The Amazing Marriage is “a major feminist triumph” in Hardy’s opinion, it also “has its sadness” (311). Carinthia’s “capacity to endure,” writes Hardy, is, in the end, “limited,” and a novel that begins with “really creative and strongly affined people” ends with the same people “just giv[ing] up” in some respects (311).

I agree that The Amazing Marriage is less feminist than Diana, but close examination of the novel shows why, like feminists of the 1890s who accepted Diana’s marriage to Redworth, it is possible for early-twenty-first-century feminists to accept at least some of Carinthia’s actions at the end of the novel. It is, in fact, relatively easy to accept Carinthia’s decision to become a nurse in the Carlist War in Spain, once one acknowledges the way in which the narrative anticipates such a decision. While it is more difficult to accept her decision to marry Wythan after her return from Spain, by looking at Meredith’s use of actions associated with presence and absence in the novel, a strategy not addressed explicitly by late-twentieth-century critics such as Beer and Hardy, we can see why it is more difficult to accept Carinthia’s marriage to Wythan than it is to accept Diana’s marriage to Redworth.
Unlike *Diana*, in which the internal perspective of the female protagonist plays a minimal role, in *The Amazing Marriage*, there is more emphasis on the “problem” of a young woman’s independence, and we see Carinthia thinking through this problem in a way Diana seems not to. Though it takes three chapters for Dame Gossip to sort through the story of Carinthia’s parents, whose May-December marriage is legendary and paints Carinthia’s mother as a Diana-like figure (1:1), as soon as Carinthia comes into the story, her internal perspective is foregrounded. Reflecting on her brother Chillon’s decision that they will leave Austria and go to England, where Chillon’s bride-to-be waits for him, Carinthia’s perspective is that of reluctance. “She felt herself midswing across a gulf that was the grave of one half, without a light of promise for the other. . . . England, though she was of British blood, was a foreign place to her, not alluring. . . . The thought that she was bound thitherward enfolded her like a frosty mist. . . . [S]he had no choice, she must go” (1:36). Early on, then, Carinthia reflects on her own situation in life, and, soon after, she also reflects on her life options now that she is going to live in England. While her brother advises her to marry as soon as possible, so as to avoid being a burden to him (1:51) and in order to escape from her uncle’s house, where she will be living (1:55), Carinthia believes that she is unlikely to find a man who will accept her. Contrasting herself to her beautiful Diana-like mother, Carinthia thinks, “But who would marry me! . . . Her father had doted on her face; but, as she argued, her father had been attracted by her mother, a beautiful woman, and this was a circumstance that reflected the greater hopelessness on her prospects. . . . No, she thought, a plain girl should think of work, to earn her independence” (1:55-56). And Carinthia continues to tell her brother of her dream of being a nurse to men at war.

These early thoughts on marriage and work from Carinthia, in conjunction with her contrast of herself with her mother, perhaps help explain the difference in Meredith’s use of internal perspective in *Diana* and *The Amazing Marriage*. Women like Carinthia, because of their lack of beauty, tend to think through the issues of marriage and work in a way women like Diana, who possess the beauty needed to ensure marriage, need not. Still, as Carinthia’s story progresses, the amount of internal perspective granted her decreases dramatically as that granted to Fleetwood increases, as Beer points out so
well (1:170). In fact, from the end of Chapter 7, in which Carinthia reads the letter from Chillon’s bride-to-be concerning the social happenings in England, until the middle of Chapter 9, when Carinthia and Fleetwood meet for the first time, Carinthia is entirely absent from the story. At this point, her absence can be attributed to the development of other characters in the novel, but later actions associated with absence become an important strategy for asserting agency. Meanwhile, until Carinthia decides to employ this strategy, readers are left wondering why, despite Carinthia’s revived presence in the story beginning with Chapter 9, her thought processes are absent at certain key points, such as her engagement to Fleetwood, which is related to readers through a letter from Henrietta to Chillon (Chapter 12), and her marriage, which is told to readers by Dame Gossip and the wedding guests (Chapter 13).

It is worth noting, in terms of Meredith’s use of internal perspective, that, in Chapter 9, when Carinthia and Fleetwood meet for the first time, the narrative briefly brings the focus back on Carinthia without granting her internal perspective (1:127-29) and then quickly shifts to Fleetwood’s internal perspective at the moment they meet (1:130-31). In this scene, Fleetwood’s perspective, while detailed in its description of Carinthia, increasingly paints her as an abstract, idealized figure, a move that absents her even as she is present.

Fleetwood had turned and followed, merely for the final curious peep at an unexpected vision. . . . And now a shameful spasm of terror seized him at the sight of a girl doing what he would have dreaded to attempt. She footed coolly, well-balanced, upright. She seated herself.

And there let her be. She was a German girl, apparently. She had an air of breeding, something more than breeding. . . . Her face and bearing might really be taken to symbolize the forest life. She was as individual a representative as the Tragic and Comic masks, and should be got to stand between them. . . . There was in it [Carinthia’s face] a savage poignancy in serenity unexampled among women—or modern women. One might imagine an apotheosis of a militant young princess of Goths or Vandals, the glow of blessedness awakening her martial ardours.
through the langour of the grave. (1:130-31)

Though Fleetwood’s move to absent Carinthia is disconcerting, once readers later learn of his similar tendency once they are married, this moment fits into a larger theme that can be traced across the novel.

Married, Carinthia finds herself the victim of Fleetwood’s own absence, since he deserts her for all practical purposes; while he attends balls and other parties with friends, Carinthia stays at home alone. Fleetwood justifies his absences when questioned by Lady Arpington, one of the few people from whom Fleetwood will take criticism (1:240), by presenting his estrangement from Carinthia as one according to her “choice,” a characterization he uses earlier with Carinthia when she attends events he assumes she would rather not. “You have chosen,” he says to her when she says that she would rather see a fight between two light-weight champions with him than be alone (1:176), and “You choose it,” he says when she refuses his offer to have someone to take her home in the midst of the fight (1:178). In adopting this rhetoric, Fleetwood assigns Carinthia more agency than she has, and this assignment of power comes in retaliation for other displays of agency by Carinthia immediately following their marriage.

Carinthia’s first act in marriage is to refuse Fleetwood’s hand when stepping into their carriage. Although Fleetwood seems to accept this display of independence—“he did not visibly wince” (1:158)—his new wife’s independence clearly rubs him the wrong way soon after. When Carinthia refuses Fleetwood’s offer to hire a maid for her, saying “I am not used to attendance on me. . . . I had no maid at home. I can do for myself. Father and mother liked me to be very independent” (1:170), Carinthia’s speech, which Fleetwood has begun to perceive as that of a child (1:168, 1:184), thoroughly irritates him. “He supposed he would have to hear her spelling her words out next” (1:170), the narrator tells us, and Fleetwood’s response is to shut Carinthia’s speech down. First, Carinthia realizes from Fleetwood’s reactions that “she spoke foolishly to her husband’s ear, so she kept her mouth shut” (1:179), and then she “learn[s] that, for some reason, allusions to her father were not acceptable” (1:183). When Fleetwood decides to abandon Carinthia for the company of friends on their honeymoon, she remains silent, despite her distress (1:190-96).
Having been shut down within the marriage, Carinthia’s first significant act of resistance—one that takes advantage of actions associated with absence—comes swiftly and decisively after the birth of their child, the conception of whom was logically impossible until Meredith made revisions to the novel after the publication of the first edition (Wilt 225). When Fleetwood wants to see the child, Carinthia allows him to do so, but she leaves the castle in Wales where she and the baby are staying while he visits (2:63). Until this moment, Carinthia has worked under the assumption that actions associated with presence will be most effective; she has demanded a meeting with Fleetwood in an attempt to convince him to fulfill his marital duties, and she has refused to leave Wales without a significant amount of money from her husband—“some hundreds,” Henrietta reports to Chillon (2:47). Until now, presence has been the standard by which the effectiveness of people’s actions are judged, and at the end of Chapter 25, the first chapter of Volume 2, each person’s presence is accounted for and the battle of the sexes, of which Carinthia and Fleetwood’s marriage is a suggestive example, is characterized as one based on presence. “Lady Arpington had counselled Carinthia to stay where she was, the Fates having brought her there. . . . My lord was at Esslemont two days; then established his quarters at Scrope’s hotel, five minutes’ walk from the wedded lady. . . . Such a squaring for the battle of spouses had never—or not in mighty London—been seen since that old fight began” (2:14).

Once Carinthia is in Wales, however, her strategy for resisting Fleetwood begins to shift from actions associated with presence to those associated with absence, just as Fleetwood begins to see that his presence rather than his absence will be to his advantage. Readers learn of Fleetwood’s shift in strategy at the end of Chapter 27, when he realizes that “a man must fly, or stand assailed by the most intolerable of vulgar farces” from the public if he remains separate from his wife (2:34), as well as at the end of Chapter 28, when he realizes that Carinthia is challenging his ideas about how to act. Though Carinthia is not literally present, her “unacknowledged influence” sends him to Sarah Winch’s shop, where he learns that Carinthia and the baby are in Wales (2:52). Suddenly, Fleetwood seems much more concerned about Carinthia’s whereabouts, and he seems ready to change the frequency and quality of his interactions with her. Yet, in
the following chapter, readers learn that Carinthia, too, has had a change of heart.

She felt herself an elder daughter of the beloved old father, as she breathed it in full volume from the billowy West one morning. . . . This elder daughter had undergone a shipwreck; but clear proof that she had not been worsted was in the unclouded liveliness of the younger one gazing forward. . . . Only the gazing forward had become interdicted to her experienced self. Nor could she vision a future having any horizon for her child. She saw it in bleak squares, and snuggled him between dangers weathered and dangers apprehended. The conviction that her husband hated her had sunk into her nature. . . . The time for the weaning of the babe approached, and had as prospect beyond it her dull fear that her husband would say the mother’s work was done, and seize the pretext to separate them. (2:52-55)

Having realized Fleetwood’s hatred, Carinthia then refuses to stay at the castle when Fleetwood comes to visit (2:60) and goes to stay at the Wythans’ home instead (2:74), an act that enrages Fleetwood (2:79-80), particularly since he has gone out of his way to be in the same place as Carinthia.

Over the course of the next two chapters, Carinthia’s use of actions associated with absence to resist Fleetwood becomes stronger, and it is important to note Meredith’s description of characters’ actions as the primary narrative strategy for showing this. When Fleetwood tires of waiting for Carinthia to return to the castle, as she promised she would, and prepares to leave Wales altogether, Meredith constructs the scene so that Carinthia’s actions appear to mean one thing when they actually mean another. Fleetwood, on the verge of driving away from the castle, sees Carinthia and her entourage approach from afar. Given Fleetwood’s earlier reference to the possibility of Carinthia’s appearance—“She might choose to come or choose to keep away” (87)—the appearance of Carinthia at the top of the hill suggests that she has come to reconcile with her husband, and perhaps even to go away with him. The narrative reads,

The carriage was ready. Gower cast a glance up the hill. Three female figures and a pannier-donkey were visible on the descent. He
nodded to Edwards, who took the words out of his mouth. “Her ladyship, my lord.”

She was distinctly seen, and looked formidable in definition against the cloud. Madge and the nurse-maid Martha were the two other young women. On they came, and the angry man seated in the carriage could not give the order to start. Nor could he quite shape an idea of annoyance, though he hung to it and faced at Gower a battery of the promise to pay him for this. (2:89)

The slow, detailed description of Carinthia’s descent down the hill as it occurs sets up well the surprise of the scene: that Carinthia has come not to reconcile with Fleetwood or to go away with him but only to wish him goodbye, something we and Fleetwood do not learn for another page, after watching the entirety of Carinthia’s descent down the hill (2:90). While Meredith is often criticized for skipping over, or drastically summarizing, key events in the story and playing up seemingly less important events, his writing of this scene shows the effectiveness of extending what initially appears to be an unimportant plot development. After a page or two of discussion of the baby, who is with Carinthia but sleeping, and of possible names for this child, we learn that Carinthia has no plans to go with her husband but, instead, wants to know if he will agree to give her money--about £2000 per year!--before leaving Wales (2:93). Meredith’s strategy of revealing the motives behind Carinthia’s actions only after they have occurred—as opposed to, say, giving us her internal perspective or even narratorial commentary on her motives previous to the actions seen here–heightens the tension between Fleetwood and Carinthia and emphasizes the ways in which actions associated with presence and absence play off each other as multiple options for expressing agency. Now, even when Carinthia is present, she is equally absent, withholding what Fleetwood wants (her subordination to him) and prioritizing her own needs (finding money for her child).

In the midst of negotiating the £2000 allowance, events occur that cause Carinthia’s resistance through physical actions to become even more concrete. When a rabies-infested dog enters the scene, Carinthia turns her attention from Fleetwood to the dog, which succeeds in biting a child in the vicinity. In this scene, the role reversal in
Carinthia and Fleetwood’s relationship that has been hinted at in previous scenes becomes thoroughly represented. Upon seeing the dog, Carinthia “gathered up her skirts,” giving her the movement normally accorded men but not women, and runs about, yelling for the children in the area to go inside (2:94), while Fleetwood, characterized in the traditionally feminine role of passivity, “hovered helpless as a leaf on a bough” (2:95). Further, once Carinthia goes into the home of the child who has been bitten, her assertion of masculine authority and Fleetwood’s submissiveness are iterated. “Go,” says Carinthia to Fleetwood when she realizes she needs someone to act as an interpreter between her and the child’s family, “order me a speaker of English and Welsh,” a command to which Fleetwood “spun round, sensible of the novelty of his being commanded, and submitting . . . much like the boy we see at school, with a strong hand on his collar running him in” (2:98). When Fleetwood tries to return gender roles to the traditional norm by ordering Carinthia to leave the home of the bitten child when the family becomes “excitable,” Carinthia refuses, saying that the situation is “life and death” and that she “must not be commanded” (2:101).

Choosing to remain at the scene when Fleetwood would prefer that she flee, Carinthia shows how adept she has become at picking the type of action that best suits her needs and also resists her husband’s domination. At Carinthia’s refusal to leave, Fleetwood tries to convince Gower to persuade Carinthia to abandon the rescue, but to no avail, since Gower “think[s] with Lady Fleetwood” (2:101). Fleetwood’s lack of success in gaining domination leads him to the conclusion, at the end of Chapter 33, that Carinthia is now in control of their relationship. Fleeing the scene of the dog-bite in order to regain his sense of self and his manhood (2:103), Fleetwood reflects:

[H]e was reduced to admire her act; and if he admired, he could not admire without respecting; if he respected, perforce he reverenced; if he reverenced, he worshipped. Therefore she had him at her feet. . . . [F]or him to be dominated was to be obscured, eclipsed. A man may outrun us; it is the fortune of war. Eclipsed behind the skirts of a woman . . . --no, that ignominy is too horribly abominable! Be sure, the situation will certainly recur in some form; will constantly recur. She will usurp the lead;
she will play the man. (2:104-05)

The battle between Fleetwood and Carinthia continues through the rest of the novel, and actions associated with presence and absence remain important options for expressing agency. In Chapter 34, immediately following the dog-bite scene and Fleetwood’s realization that Carinthia controls the relationship, Fleetwood again presses Carinthia to leave Wales, and Carinthia continues to resist, citing a friend’s illness as the reason for her delay (2:107-08). Eventually, Carinthia does return to England and resides with her baby and her maid at Esslemont, owned but not occupied by Fleetwood. Though Fleetwood lives away from Esslemont, he sometimes comes to the house on business, and Carinthia is conveniently absent, usually at Croridge, where her brother resides (2:133, 2:181). While Carinthia ideally wants to live with her brother rather than at Esslemont (2:149), she stays on at Fleetwood’s house, especially after one of Fleetwood’s friends commits suicide and Carinthia thinks it inappropriate for her to leave. Still, though Carinthia is more lenient with Fleetwood after Mallard’s suicide (she even agrees to let Fleetwood stay overnight, though in separate quarters [2:188]), Carinthia makes it clear that she still controls the degree of contact between the two of them. In the famous “I guard my rooms” scene, Carinthia tells Fleetwood that should he enter the house, something to which he is entitled as owner, she will “guard [her] rooms” (2:150), implying that she fears being sexually threatened by Fleetwood. This statement of resistance from Carinthia becomes a refrain that stays with Fleetwood, angering him whenever he thinks of it (2:189, for example).

Carinthia’s statement of resistance also signals the beginning of yet another strategy employed by Carinthia to resist Fleetwood’s attempts to subordinate her: emotional absence. That is, Carinthia learns to use absence in such a way that she can be in the same house as Fleetwood and still be emotionally, if not physically, absent. After Fleetwood reestablishes his own rooms at Esslemont, a step he takes, Carinthia believes, in order to “feel her presence in her absence” (2:189), he is immediately aware that there is a distance, a “fixed” distance, between them. “She was Arctic,” he thinks, “and Antarctic he had to be, perforce of the distance she had put between them” (2:188). Further, when Carinthia goes to Croridge to help her brother, whose enemies are causing
problems for him, a brief return to Esslemont to view the week’s bills shows Carinthia’s skill at using emotional absence with Fleetwood. When he insists on walking Carinthia back to Croridge, she agrees, with the narrator noting a physical action, “Her head assented,” and then Fleetwood’s reaction: “There was nothing to complain of, but he had not gained a step” (2:203). Although Carinthia’s physical action, nodding her head, suggests that she will be present during the walk, it is clear from Fleetwood’s reaction that he has not moved any closer to Carinthia than before; she is only physically and not emotionally present as they walk.

Although Fleetwood goes to great lengths to open new lines of communication with Carinthia, even reading the work of her father because he knows of his wife’s respect for him (2:203), Carinthia still refuses to change her mind about Fleetwood, and, toward the end of the novel, she contemplates a flight to Spain, to work as a nurse with those men, including her brother, who are going to fight in the Carlist War (2:220). Carinthia’s decision to go to Spain with her brother might be seen as an act of subordination to men, since Chillon seems to exert as much control over Carinthia’s life as Fleetwood—especially once one realizes that Chillon defends Carinthia’s decision to go to Spain because Fleetwood once hit him in a jealous rage over his marriage to Henrietta, whom Fleetwood once loved. But Carinthia’s decision to be a nurse, a somewhat conventional role for a woman now and even in the 1890s, really cannot be questioned by feminists of either time, given the way in which Meredith presents this type of work earlier in the novel. When Carinthia initially tells her brother of her dream of nursing men at war, such work by a woman of the 1830s is painted as unconventional, since women can only go to war if they are accompanying a brother (1:56). Similarly, when Fleetwood goes to see Lady Arpington about Carinthia’s decision to stay in Whitechapel with her maid, Carinthia’s work with the poor there is characterized by Lady Arpington as unconventional as well (1:242). Then, in the dog-bite scene, nursing is once again presented as a profession that brings Carinthia a feeling of independence that she cannot find through marriage.

Unlike Carinthia’s decision to become a nurse, which is supported by earlier characterizations of this profession as unconventional and as one that gains Carinthia
independence, her decision to marry Wythan is not explicated well, through internal perspective, dialogue, or description of characters’ actions, and that lack of explication is part of what causes the controversy over the end of the novel and the degree of agency Carinthia possesses. Further, as Judith Wilt points out, in “The Survival of Romance” (1975), Carinthia’s marriage to Wythan is told through the perspective of Dame Gossip rather than the more analytical Modern Novelist narrator, who has done his own battle with Dame Gossip to retain control of the narrative, and this also helps explain why it can be difficult to accept Carinthia’s decision to marry. Referring to the sudden shift in narration in the last chapter of the novel (2:278), Wilt writes,

The Modern Novelist ends his task with the cessation of mental change in his characters, the setting of attitudes. The Dame wants to follow the action to its end. The trouble is that with the Modern Novelist withdrawn the Dame is free to do her worst to the story, and she does. . . . Carinthia went to Spain, returned with her brother, and married her dog-like Welsh squire after Fleetwood’s death, but what were her deeds in Spain and her thoughts on second marriage we know better from our assessment of her character than from the thrilled enthusiasm of the Dame. (239)

While other interpretations of the struggle between Dame Gossip and the Modern Novelist exist (for example, that Meredith cannot be aligned fully with the Modern Novelists and that Meredith moves more toward Dame Gossip’s method as he revises the novel, showing his acceptance of a woman’s way of writing), I believe Wilt is correct in her interpretation of the effect of the end of the novel on readers. We do not understand why Carinthia chooses Wythan because Dame Gossip rushes through the action without explicating Carinthia’s decision to marry, suggesting that readers who align Meredith with the Modern Novelist and see Dame Gossip as a competing narrator have most thoroughly grasped Meredith’s use of narrative strategies. Further, readers can see how Meredith succeeds in combining description of actions with other narrative strategies, especially consciousness. That is, the two important strands in Meredith’s writing—a focus on the mind through his difficult style and attention to plot in order to show active women—can be seen as a strength of Meredith’s writing rather than as a
weakness and an issue that divides critics. Had Meredith told the entire story through the perspective of Dame Gossip, emphasizing plot over character, the narrative might have appealed to the general public, but it would lack the connection between actions and other methods of expressing agency that was so important to feminists of the time. While Dame Gossip might be female, her approach to story-telling is too feminine for feminists of the 1890s. By associating himself with the Modern Novelist and against Dame Gossip (in a letter to Robert Louis Stevenson, Meredith wrote, “Dame Gossip pulls one way and I another, and whether the drunken couple will ever come to a haven I don’t know” [Letters 3:1153]), Meredith places himself in the feminist camp rather than in the overly feminine camp.

The lack of explication concerning Carinthia’s decision to marry might be contrasted to the more thorough explication of Diana’s decision to marry Redworth at the end of Diana of the Crossways. Part of the reason feminists were, and are, able to accept Diana’s actions is because her thinking on the matter is more fully developed than Carinthia’s ideas as she makes her decision. Nevertheless, Wilt’s suggestion that we should be able to make some assessment of Carinthia’s decision to marry on the basis of “what we know” about her character still raises problems for the reader. What we know about Carinthia is that she has matured dramatically over the course of the novel, developing her analytical skills to the degree that she successfully resists Fleetwood’s attempts to pull her back into a marriage in which she would be subordinate. Yet we also know that Carinthia is the sort of woman who seems dependent on male companionship, whether it is a husband, a brother, or a male friend, and this need for male companionship connects back to her relationship with her father. With this knowledge, we can imagine that Carinthia marries either because she has a more equal relationship with Wythan or for emotional comfort rather than love.

VII.

It is hard to know exactly what the 1890s feminist perspective on The Amazing Marriage was, outside the hints provided by Frances Ashwell in her series on Meredith’s heroines. But it is clear that feminists did not go out of their way to fault Meredith for
his representation of woman’s agency in this novel. While the end of the novel might have raised some of the same questions it raises for feminists today, feminists of the 1890s were glad to focus on the decidedly positive work Meredith had already produced, especially Diana, and to seek his support for their most immediate cause, gaining the vote. In 1903, having temporarily dispensed with his usual rule that he would speak about the world through fiction rather than through direct political statements, George Meredith granted an interview to Manchester Guardian reporter, Harold Owen, in which he spoke about a wide range of topics, including the issue of women’s suffrage. Speaking of the imperialist alliance among England, Australia, and Canada, Meredith said,

We call ourselves Imperial, and we believe that we are allied to the Australians and the Canadians, but apparently there is no Parliamentary notion, or even any public recognition, of what forces and principles animate and move those colonial democracies. They are moving ahead of us in certain directions, and can we, if we are to maintain a close relation with them, remain as we are? In Australia, for instance, they have given the suffrage to women. Are we going to do the same here? I can’t see how we are to keep united in a great Imperial system unless there is a very close agreement between our separate political systems. And this question of the position of women is one of those matters that ought to awaken the country if people are really as patriotic as they say . . . (5)

This move by Meredith, speaking out on women’s suffrage in a manner in which he had previously not done, a move not made by other famous authors such as Thomas Hardy, elicited the thanks of Elizabeth C. Wolstenholme Elmy, whose work on the suffragist cause in the mid- and late-1800s had been extensive. “As one who for nearly forty years has been working to secure that recognition of the equal humanity of woman with man which in a truly civilised State involves of necessity her equal citizenship,” Elmy wrote to the editor of the Guardian, “I wish to express my warmest gratitude to Mr. George Meredith for his strong words as to the position of women” (5).
For feminists living in the years after the 1890s, when the realistic representation of modern women in fiction helped establish a tangible connection between art and politics, to have the public support of a well-known male author was significant, especially since women’s suffrage was now a practical, achievable goal. It is true that Meredith did not take a public stand until long after he had written novels supporting the women’s rights movement, and that shows the limits of his willingness to connect—in a personal and direct way—artistic form with present-day politics. Yet Meredith finally did take the step, one that not all male authors of the late-nineteenth century were willing to take, and that speaks to his commitment to feminist ideals. Further, while feminists of the 1890s may not have fully realized it, Meredith’s expansion of their own assumptions about physical action and its role in expression of agency contributed significantly to the feminist cause. By portraying the wide range of methods of resistance open to women, including actions associated with both presence and absence, Meredith helped dismantle the narrow definitions of realism that had governed much of nineteenth-century fiction. The early-twentieth-century novel, well anticipated by Meredith in his novels of the 1880s and 1890s, offered the opportunity, if not necessarily the reality, of a new, feminist friendly approach to representing agency.
CHAPTER 4

“A LITTLE NEARER THE SUMMIT OF PARNASSUS”: GEORGE MOORE’S QUEST FOR CANONIZATION AND ESTHER WATERS AS FEMALE HELPMATE

In the introduction to George Moore on Parnassus, the collection of letters from the last portion of Moore’s life, Helmut Gerber draws attention to Moore’s quest for canonization with the following anecdote. In 1912, after publishing two volumes of his magnum opus autobiographical work Hail and Farewell (1911-13), Moore wrote a letter to Edouard Dujardin celebrating his success, saying, “I am a little nearer the summit of Parnassus,” a statement Gerber believes Moore could write with at least “some justice” (22). By 1900, Moore was fairly well established in the literary world and had moved into a period in which he could capitalize on his achievements, of which Esther Waters (1894), the story of a servant raising her illegitimate child in a society that ostracizes her for her “fallen” status, was one such success. In adopting the ascent of the mythical Parnassus as a symbol for the struggle authors face, Moore painted a picture of himself as one who had struggled to write good literature and, as a result, was a step closer to achieving the status of a great artist. Further, in using this image on a fairly regular basis, he linked himself to a tradition of strong men, since the image recalls Apollo standing on Parnassus and since Apollo himself is associated with the passage from youth into manhood, especially through the role of warrior and poet.

Moore’s use of the image of Parnassus suggests that he saw himself as part of a tradition of male authorship that could be traced back to the ancients, but a shorter yet equally significant tradition of male authorship was also at work at the end of the nineteenth century. In the late-Victorian period, novelists such as Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore were working within a tradition of British male authorship that
was approximately 150 years old, traceable to the early male novelists of the eighteenth century, especially Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Daniel Defoe. This tradition has been analyzed by twentieth-century literary criticism, most notably in Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), and it has been the subject of revision by a number of critics interested in the development of the novel. While these critics have shown that the British novel can be traced back much farther than the mid-eighteenth century, late-Victorian authors often saw their own work as growing out of the Richardson tradition. For example, Moore’s autobiographical *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888) details his immersion in English literature upon his return to London from Paris in the early 1880s, and, as Moore’s career matured, he would become increasingly interested in the history of English literature. This increasing interest in authorship and canon issues as Moore’s career progressed is evidenced by articles such as “Some Characteristics of English Fiction” (1900), in which Moore lays out his own interpretation of the history of English literature, and “An Imaginary Conversation: Gosse and Moore” (1918-19), a two-part essay in which Moore, with Gosse’s assistance, tells the story of the development of the novel. Through these articles, Moore marks his alliance with the masculinist British literary tradition.

Nevertheless, while late-Victorian authors such as Moore viewed their work as part of this shorter British masculinist tradition, the debate over authorship in the late-nineteenth century is hardly so straightforward. Influenced by several ideas—a more than century-long battle over the “gender of the novel,” the flourishing of the fallen woman novel across the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the heyday of the New Woman novel in the 1890s—male authors at the *fin de siècle* participated in a literary marketplace where the terms “feminine” and “masculine” were central to authors’ perceptions about their own work and their expectations about authorship for all writers of the period. Furthermore, as I have shown in previous chapters, definitions of literary modes had been gendered by the debate over realism, and male writers’ negotiations of authorship issues included negotiation of these gendered definitions. George Moore—with his complex feelings about the relationship between men and
women and his love for the genre of autobiography and use of it as a performative art--figured out how to construct novels with the type of realism needed to appeal to multiple sections of the reading public and then capitalize on this success by writing himself into the canon with his woman-centered novel.

In this chapter, I examine how Richardson’s position as the founding father of British male authorship shaped Moore’s expectations for his career and made him embrace the same woman-centered subject matter that had brought Richardson the literary success Moore hoped to achieve. I also describe how the more direct influence of Emile Zola refined Moore’s specific approach to the late-Victorian market, convincing him to market his novels even as he was composing them. With the influences of both Richardson and Zola at work, Moore reached his desired commercial success in the early 1890s, with the publication of Esther Waters, by applying a softer, more English form of realism to the woman-centered subject matter he had already used in his earlier, more naturalist novels. Like the woman-centered novels by Gissing, Hardy, and Meredith, Esther Waters was reviewed favorably by liberal-feminist critics of the time, who found the novel especially remarkable in its balance of the three narrative strategies needed for successful representation of woman’s agency. Having realized the success of Esther Waters with a wide audience, Moore, despite his familial ties to Ireland, used his success with the woman-centered novel to achieve a place in the British masculinist canon, by using all the strategies available to him: revision of the text itself, the printing of “fine” editions of the novel, and the writing of a preface that emphasized the woman-centered subject matter of the novel. Moore’s attempt to canonize himself through Esther Waters illustrates the ways in which the intersections among literary mode, gender, and the market at the end of the nineteenth century created situations for male authors that did not exist a century earlier.

I.

In order to understand Moore’s expectations about authorship as he worked on Esther Waters in the early 1890s, it is necessary to examine with more specificity the British masculinist tradition associated with Samuel Richardson and Moore’s
understanding of it." As late as 1903, Moore claims that he had not read any Richardson ("Clarissa Harlowe in how many volumes of letters?," he comments skeptically in Hail and Farewell 460), but in Confessions of a Young Man, Moore follows the chapter on his immersion into English literature upon returning from Paris (which included the reading of James, Meredith, Hardy, Blackmore, Thackeray, Stevenson, Braddon, and others) with an interesting reference to Richardson. Speaking of ideal literary characters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Moore writes:

Each century has its special ideal, the ideal of the nineteenth century is a young man. The eighteenth century is only woman--see the tapestries, the delightful goddesses who have discarded their hoops and heels to appear in still more delightful nakedness, the noble woods, the tall castles, with the hunters looking round. . . .

The position of the young man in the nineteenth century is the most enviable that has ever fallen to the lot of any human creature. He is the rare bird, and is fêted, flattered, adored. The sweetest words are addressed to him, the most loving looks are poured upon him. The young man can do no wrong. Every house is open to him, and the best of everything is laid before him; girls dispute the right to serve him; they come to him with cake and wine. . . .

In a society so constituted, what a delightful opening there is for a young man. He would have to waltz perfectly, play tennis fairly, the latest novel would suffice for literary attainments; billiards, shooting, and hunting, would not come in amiss, for he must not be considered a useless being by men; not that women are much influenced by the opinion of men in their choice of favourites, but the reflex action of the heart, although not so marked as that of the stomach, exists and must be kept in view, besides a man who would succeed with women, must succeed with men; the real Lovelace is loved by all. (176-77)

This reference to the young man of the nineteenth century as the "real Lovelace" is intriguing; not only does it confirm Moore’s awareness of the importance of
Richardson to the development of literary ideals across a century and a half, but also it suggests that Moore knows the power, and the occasional necessity, of gender-bending, a notion that will be important in responding to the feminist definition of realism in the 1890s. Here Moore describes the nineteenth-century Lovelace as one who embodies both “feminine” and “masculine” qualities because the conditions of the time demand it. Nevertheless, despite the blurred gender boundaries Moore is playing with, there is still a glimmer of the old, masculine Lovelace here. Continuing on about this new hero of the nineteenth century, Moore writes,

In manner Lovelace is facile and easy; he never says no, it is always yes, ask him what you will; but he only does what he has made up his mind it is his advantage to do. Apparently he is an embodiment of all that is unselfish, for he knows that after he has helped himself, it is advisable to help some one else, and thereby make a friend who, on a future occasion, will be useful to him. (178)

This Lovelace, who makes friends in order that they may help him out, applies a similar tactic with women. “Put a violinist into a room filled with violins,” Moore writes, “and he will try every one. Lovelace will put each woman aside so quietly that she is often only half aware that she has been put aside” (178). This is a new, less overtly masculine Lovelace, no doubt, but the old, egotistical, controlling Lovelace--the one who does only what “it is his advantage to do”--is still present.

Moore’s commentary on the shifting literary ideals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries--from a woman-centered ideal to a somewhat effeminate masculine ideal--foreshadows Moore’s later writing about the English canon, in which he seems to understand well the gender biases of the process of canonization. In these later writings, mostly in articles he wrote for periodicals after 1900, Moore’s references to Richardson are often marginal, but the very marginality of Richardson seems to suggest something important about gender biases of canonization. For example, in “Some Characteristics of English Fiction,” in which Moore’s larger aim is to boost the reputation of the undervalued genre of prose against the more thoroughly valued genre of poetry,
focuses on Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and credits it with “dictating the form which the English novel was to take down to the present day,” primarily a comedic form in Moore’s opinion. Moore contrasts Fielding’s comedic form to that of Richardson’s more tragic form, as seen in *Clarissa*. This more tragic form, Moore argues, has been less important in the English tradition, since it looks back at what literature already had been rather than looking forward to something new (507). Further, Moore claims that while the English adopted Fielding’s approach, essentially the novel of manners, which looks only at the surface of life, the French took Richardson’s tragic approach, with his influence on the French coming through the translations of his work by L’Abbé Prévost (509).

By classifying the history of the novel along such strict genre lines, Moore understates the influence of Richardson’s work, especially the woman-centered *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, on nineteenth-century literature and his own writing, but Moore’s marginalization of Richardson and closer attention to Fielding also seems to point to Moore’s ambivalence toward the masculinist canon. Though Moore does not turn to Richardson’s more “feminine” approach to literature in articles such as “Some Characteristics of English Fiction,” and in fact mentions Richardson only in contrast to Fielding, in these articles, he often associates his own work with that of other “feminine” writers, both male and female. He reveals that he admires Jane Austen for her ability to represent domestic life, and his favorite English authors are people typically seen as less masculine than his least favorite writers. For Moore, the less overtly masculine Walter Pater, Thomas De Quincey, and Walter Savage Landor are always favored over the more “manly” Fielding and Walter Scott.

In “Some Characteristics of English Fiction,” then, Moore rewrites the canon as overtly masculinist, precisely so he can redefine the canon and masculinity through his own work and the work of others—the French writers, especially Balzac; Pater, Landor, and other English favorites; and even Richardson, though only implicitly.” Ironically, in “Some Characteristics of English Fiction,” the masculinity of *Tom Jones* ends up aligned with the women writers of the nineteenth century, including writers such as Eliot, whom Moore criticized elsewhere for her excessively masculine approach to the novel. Claiming that Eliot is one of the many women writers who have “created nothing” but, instead,
“hideously and most mournfully parodied the art of men” (“Sex in Art” 227), Moore says, “George Eliot is one in whom sex seems to have hesitated, and this unfortunate hesitation was afterwards intensified by unhappy circumstances. She was one of those women who so entirely mistook her vocation as to attempt to think, and really if she had assumed the dress and the duties of a policeman, her failure could hardly have been more complete” (227). On the other hand, Moore’s characterization of Fielding as excessively masculine aligns Moore’s own work with the more feminine tradition of Richardson. Ultimately, Moore always seems aware that the English canon is neither strictly masculine nor exclusively feminine but that it takes a delicate interplay between the two to achieve canonization, and this recognition is important in terms of understanding Moore’s ability to adapt to the gendered market of the 1890s. That Moore is flexible on the issue of gender, and even seems to delight in the blurring of gender boundaries, will put him at an advantage when he negotiates his position in the fin de siècle market.

Of course, Richardson can only be seen as an indirect influence on Moore, especially since Moore himself writes only marginally about Richardson’s work, but when one considers the specifics of Richardson’s and Moore’s careers, the similarities between the two men are striking: both seem to have had a strong identification with women, sharing a similar sort of temperament that made it as easy for them to spend time with women as with men, and both seem to have used novel writing as a method for accessing the feminine voice. The close relationship Richardson, as a child, had with neighborhood women, his role as reader of stories and writer of their love letters, is well known, and as Richardson grew older, this early identification with women turned into a reliance on them for inspiration and support during the writing process, with the group of women correspondents Richardson engaged after the publication of Clarissa the most well-known example of this (McKillop 6-7, 189). Like Richardson, Moore’s early years found him in deep identification with women; in Confessions of a Young Man, he would write of himself as one borne from a womb in which there had been great confusion about his sex:
Never before me has the soul of a man been so embroiled with that of a woman, and to explain the abnormality of my sexual sympathy for women, I can only imagine that before my birth there was some hesitation in the womb about the sex. Nevertheless . . . once I had a horse between my legs or a gun in my hands, I left behind all these morbid imaginations, all strange desires to travesty women, to wear their little boots and peignoirs. (qtd. in Frazier, George Moore 156)

Furthermore, just as Richardson found his relationships with women to be useful to his writing process, Moore’s identification with women would also grow into a dependence on them for support while composing novels. Moore always seemed to have a female friend with whom he corresponded about his latest work, and typically this woman would change from novel to novel.91 While Rachel Brownstein claims, in Becoming a Heroine, that only Wordsworth had the “need and ability to attract a company of female satellites” as extensive as the coterie that surrounded Richardson (61), Moore certainly seems to be in the running for such a distinction.

The female-friendly temperament Richardson and Moore appear to share has been well exploited by contemporary literary critics working in an age where gender-bending as subversive power is a popular approach. Madeline Kahn’s Narrative Tranvestism and Frazier’s “Queering the Irish Renaissance,” for example, develop strong theses on the ways in which male authors access the feminine voice in order to explore their own gender-identity issues.92 Criticism of this sort comes out of both poststructuralist and queer theory notions of gender-bending but has ties to an earlier body of criticism, the “heroine criticism” of 1970s second-wave feminism, which places strong emphasis on the power of women. Critics such as Ellen Moers (Literary Women, 1976), Elaine Showalter (A Literature of Their Own, 1977), and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (Madwoman in the Attic, 1979) showed how early-twentieth-century literary criticism ignored the role of women writers in the development of the novel, and out of their work sprung an entire body of criticism that addresses issues of women and the novel. Nancy K. Miller (The Heroine’s Text, 1980), Rachel Brownstein (Becoming a Heroine, 1982), and Susan Morgan (Sisters in Time, 1989), for example, all consider the character 197
of the heroine in the tradition of the novel. While the power of individual female characters is debated, and the degree of power they possess is sometimes linked to the sex of the author, the inherent power of women is assumed.

While this body of criticism rewrites literary history in order to account more fully for writers previously ignored, work that is certainly important to the well-being and longevity of literary studies, its commitment to the ideal of the power of femininity sometimes results in dehistoricized accounts of the novel, where the discussion of the power of femininity overrides the historical detail. While Kahn’s and Frazier’s gender-bending arguments about Richardson and Moore make a stronger effort to historicize the theme of accessing the feminine voice, their historicization tends to focus on individual biography rather than broad cultural movements, resulting in a lack of explanation about how use of the feminine voice functions as a cultural phenomenon, and especially how an analysis of the writing of the woman-centered novel by male authors must include a discussion of the conditions of the literary marketplace. In contrast to Kahn and Frazier, my argument about Richardson, Moore, and the male authors who come between them is that writing the woman-centered novel is not simply about identifying with women or accessing the feminine voice. It is all that, but it is also about the connection between personal issues (an identification with women because of temperament, an impulse to access the feminine voice, a need to explore gender identity, etc.) and public issues, most notably male authors’ negotiations of the literary marketplace in a particular historical time. In other words, connections between gender and materialist issues are essential to a rich understanding of the workings of the novel and authorship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

It is useful, then, to turn to the conditions of the literary marketplaces in which Richardson and Moore were working, since doing so can help us see why the woman-centered novel as potential classic novel was so important to Moore. As someone who was striving for what I like to call “classic-status,” or literary success, Moore saw the woman-centered novel as his ticket to this type of success. Richardson, writing in the eighteenth century when the novel was not yet the dominant genre of literary expression
and when the notion of the “classic” novel had not yet developed, had none of the
worries about canonization that Moore and other late-nineteenth-century authors would
experience. While the differences between the mid-eighteenth-century market and that of
the late-nineteenth-century are significant, as are the differences between Richardson’s
and Moore’s positions in these respective markets,“the two authors’ approaches to
advertising their woman-centered novels bear some interesting likenesses. Although the
necessity of advertising simply did not exist for Richardson in the way it would for
Moore 150 years later, once Richardson realized that he could advertise, he did with
some vigor. When, before the publication of Pamela, Richardson’s friend Aaron Hill, who
had read the novel in its manuscript form, asked Richardson about the origins of the
story and suggested that perhaps people would want to know them, Richardson noted
that “little did I think to make a story of it to the press” (McKillop 26). Yet, after
hearing Hill’s suggestion, Richardson realized that the needs of his audience were
important and that he might capitalize on those needs in order to further the popularity
of his books. Not only did Richardson come up with the origins of Pamela when Hill
suggested it, but realizing the opportunity to shape their reaction to the novel, he sought
help from his friends in advertising the book. One friend wrote a letter to Mr. Hooker of
the Weekly Miscellany, telling Hooker of the novel Richardson had completed and urging
its publication as soon as possible. “I chuse this publick Manner of giving the Author my
Sentiments upon it,” writes the friend, “in hopes by this Means to quicken the
Publication of it, and excite Peoples Attention to it when it does come out” (42). This
letter, which would be included in the novel as an afterword, appeared in the Miscellany
(43).

The advertising campaign that came out of Hill’s suggestion that readers might
want to know the origins of the story of Pamela indicates that the reaction of
Richardson’s audience would become increasingly important to the author, and this
concern for audience is not unlike that of Moore, whose own advertising strategy places
strong emphasis on molding his audience’s reaction to his work before the work was
actually published. Moore learned this strategy, which involved writing about his own
novels in popular periodicals well before the books were published, from Emile Zola.
Zola encouraged Moore to take a four-step approach to achieving success in the literary market. First, one should choose subject matter that marks out new territory for the novel, primarily by writing about groups of people not normally covered in novels. Second, one should prepare one’s audience for the novel before they read it, by writing about unpublished work in nonfiction venues, such as the periodicals. Third, one should “take the higher ground” when criticized by others, relying on the notion of “truth” to prove others wrong. Finally, one should take an “aggressive, audacious attitude,” always carving out a space separate from the dominant (and “common”) opinion of the majority (Frazier 106-07). As I will discuss later in this chapter, Moore’s use of the second strategy, writing about one’s novels before they were published, would become central to his success with *Esther Waters*.

Of course, one must consider the differences between Richardson’s and Moore’s beliefs and positions in their respective markets in order to understand how they used advertising, but even such differences help illuminate the similarities among the two authors. It seems clear that both men understood the importance of advertising as a strategy; as Rachel Brownstein puts it, it was Richardson’s “business sense” that compelled him to write *Pamela* (60), and while it was not “business sense” of the same stripe that compelled Moore, it certainly was the sense that writing the woman-centered novel might bring him classic- and commodity-status. The strategy of preparing one’s audience for particular subject matter was especially important to writing a successful woman-centered novel, which was always subject to controversy simply because it focused on the relations of the sexes, and although Richardson and Moore adopted different philosophies on the “nature” and position of woman in their respective historical times, both men recognized the way in which representation of such issues was influenced, though certainly not subject to, authorial control. It appears that to write the woman-centered novel was inevitably to become involved in issues of realistic representation and authorial control, including control of the conditions of the marketplace.
II.

To see how writing the woman-centered novel inevitably draws male authors into a public debate about controversial subject matter, and brings them into a negotiation of market conditions that sometimes worked against their own ideas about such subject matter, let me turn to the case of Moore’s strategy for the composition and publication of *Esther Waters*, his most successful novel and one often viewed as a radical departure from the typical fallen woman novel of the Victorian period. The fact that the composition and publication of *Esther Waters* occurs at the end of the nineteenth century is important, since, as Guinevere Griest’s *Mudie’s Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (1970) shows, it emphasizes both the role the novel played in breaking down the fallen woman stereotype and its role in challenging the “young lady” standard of the circulating libraries. Further, as George Watt points out in *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (1984), *Esther Waters* achieves what many other fallen woman novels, including Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, Gaskell’s *Ruth*, and even *Tess*, cannot. Specifically, Watt argues that what Moore does differently is to take away the element of shame in the fallen woman narrative. Esther’s “lack of shame” is what makes her such a successful heroine. Writes Watt, “No other fallen woman in the nineteenth century has been so sure of herself, so direct, and so definite about justifying the repudiation of her sin” (170-71).

While the place of *Esther Waters* in the fallen woman tradition is important, perhaps more important to the work I do in this dissertation is the timing of *Esther Waters* within Moore’s career, for the novel is one of several woman-centered books Moore writes over a span of two decades, as his approach to writing such a novel shifts from strictly naturalistic approach (*A Mummer’s Wife*, 1885) to a more impressionistic English realism (*Esther Waters*, 1894) and finally to a symbolist, myth-influenced approach (*Evelyn Innes*, 1898). This shift in method can be seen in Moore’s representation of the female protagonists in these novels: Kate Ede, in *A Mummer’s Wife*, dies a sad death from alcoholism, not unlike that of Zola’s Nana; Esther Waters is remarkable for the way in which she succeeds in bringing up her child, despite the class and gender prejudices of the world in which she lives, and her ability to sacrifice her
own inner life in order to raise her child successfully; and Evelyn Innes is thoroughly introspective, searching for a spiritual foundation through which to deal with the conditions of her life. When one looks at the development of Moore’s woman-centered novels and the shifts in his approach to writing these novels, one can see how the conditions of the literary marketplace work in conjunction with the more personal investment Moore had in the woman-centered novel.

The place of *Esther Waters* in Moore’s larger body of work is of interest to all Moore scholars, but it is covered in the most depth in two areas of Moore studies: the biographical work and the collections of letters. Until recently, these two areas have taken one of two approaches to Moore’s career. The first approach primarily focuses on Moore’s individual, personal relationships, as in Joseph Hone’s 1936 *The Life of George Moore* and in the letters published by their recipients or close friends or family members of the recipients, such as John Eglinton (*Letters from George Moore to Edouard Dujardin, 1886-1922*, 1929) and Nancy Cunard (*G. M.: Memories of George Moore*, 1956). The other approach focuses on Moore’s place in the public sphere, especially the literary market, as in Helmut Gerber’s two editions of letters, *George Moore in Transition* (1968) and *George Moore on Parnassus* (1988). With the publication of Adrian Frazier’s very recent biography *George Moore, 1852-1933* (2000), these two approaches to assessing *Esther Waters* in Moore’s larger body of work are more thoroughly fused, since Frazier employs both approaches to bring together nicely the private and public lives of Moore.

It is clear that Frazier accepts the general outline of Moore’s life as established in Hone’s biography, but Frazier’s interest in issues of masculinity in general, and Moore’s ambiguous sexuality specifically, as well as his position as an early-twenty-first-century critic with more authority than Hone had in the 1930s to discuss such issues, means that Frazier can contextualize culturally the relationships Moore had with women and men more thoroughly. While Frazier makes it clear that he departs from a strictly materialist approach like that used by Gerber, his biography does include enough detail about composition and publication to connect Moore’s personal life to his public authorial persona. More specifically, Frazier’s attention to detail expresses well the nuances of
Moore’s approach to writing the woman-centered novel as it shifts over the course of two decades, and how the shift that occurs between the writing of *A Mummer’s Wife* and *Esther Waters* is meant to help Moore appeal to a wide audience that could not accept the naturalism of his earlier work. Still, Frazier’s commitment to the traditional role of the biographer rather than that of the literary or critical biographer (xviii), as well as the practical implications of covering the enormous amount of material included in this biography, limits his opportunities to develop strong theses about the connection between materialist concerns and gender issues in Moore’s career. My assessment of Frazier’s discussion of Moore’s development as a writer is aimed at doing just that: bringing together materialist concerns and gender issues with specific emphasis on the way Moore tried to canonize his most successful woman-centered novel.

Frazier’s analysis of Moore’s development revolves, at least in part, on the author’s relationship with Zola, and by looking at Zola’s influence on this development, we can see the ways in which Moore’s circumstances were different from those faced by Richardson 150 years earlier. It was in Paris, as Moore was exploring the possibility of becoming a painter rather than going to university, that he met Zola at a costume ball in honor of the author’s book *L’Assommoir* in 1878 (Frazier 61). Even early on, Moore’s affiliation with Zola was uneasy, since Moore also was friends with the painter Manet, and Manet and Zola took distinctly different artistic approaches, with Manet insisting on an approach much less “doctrinal” than Zola’s approach (63). At this time, Moore was vacillating between becoming a writer or a painter (though he knew he had little chance of succeeding in the latter profession), and his parallel vacillation between Zola’s and Manet’s philosophies captures well his uncertainty about his own philosophy of artistic representation. Nevertheless, by 1884, Moore had affiliated himself more thoroughly with Zola, and what had been something of a joke in the English press—that Moore had heard that “London is in want of a writer like Emile Zola” and was “endeavouring to prove that he is that man” (86)—had become a plan for taking the British public by storm. In a letter to Zola, detailing his plans for *A Mummer’s Wife*, Moore claimed that he wanted to “plant a dagger in the heart of the sentimental novel and bring about a change in the literature of his country,” to be “*un ricochet de Zola en*”
Angleterre’--a ricochet of Zola in England” (104). However, Moore’s commitment to naturalism was “disturbed” even before the publication of A Mummer’s Wife, by his reading of Huysmans’s A Rebours, which Moore respected for its lack of progressive politics, advocacy of general social pessimism, and commitment to form (108), showing that Moore, even before he moved away from Zola’s influence, sometimes privileged form over ideology. Even if he could not pull away from Zola entirely at this point, by the fall of 1885, Frazier explains, Moore had revised A Mummer’s Wife “into something more like Flaubert in its finish than like Zola,” and he would try to “remake Zola too,” by characterizing, in a newspaper article, Zola’s forthcoming book L’Oeuvre as less naturalistic than it was. In fact, Moore hadn’t yet read the book; he had only heard Zola’s summary of it (132-33).

Though Moore’s separation from Zola can be attributed to many factors--Zola’s criticism of Manet in L’Oeuvre, Moore’s residual desire to be a painter and a nostalgia for the less doctrinal approach to representation of his painter friends, Moore’s public denunciation of Zola in Confessions, and so on--the straightforward material reason is often overlooked: the novels Moore wrote after A Mummer’s Wife simply didn’t sell as well as he would have liked, in part because the public perceived Moore as one of Zola’s disciples. When A Mere Accident, which Moore intentionally wrote in the tradition of Huysmans rather than Zola, sold poorly because it was perceived as naturalist by some critics (Hone 130; Frazier 155), and when Mike Fletcher experienced a similar fate, being perceived as “in want of order and development” (Hone 161) and as at least a “cynical” if not a naturalist work (Frazier 194), Moore recognized that he was going to have to change his mode radically (and convince the English public that he had radically changed it) in order to get anyone to fully appreciate his work. This is precisely what Moore set out to do with Esther Waters, with the most famous vocalization of his intent these lines from an 1889 letter to Clara Lanza: “My next book will be more human: I shall bathe myself in the simplest and most naive emotions, and shall not leave them—the daily bread of humanity” (Hone 161; Frazier 194). Although Esther Waters often still receives the characterization of “naturalist” when it is actually a more thoroughly English version of realism, it is clear that by the time Moore wrote the novel, he had
thoroughly dissociated himself from Zola and had moved away from naturalism in his own writing, even if the English public did not recognize it.

Still, it is certainly true that Zola should be seen as a much more direct influence on Moore than Richardson ever was, and Moore’s dissociation from Zola is better characterized as slow and gradual than as something that happened quickly and for only one reason. In 1893, for instance, Moore was not so distanced from Zola that he would not attend a dinner for the author sponsored by the Society of Authors (Hone 188; Frazier 137). But Moore knew that he had to distance himself from Zola to some degree, or risk always being labeled a decadent “Frenchy” by the English public.*

Frazier’s account of Moore’s development as a writer is useful for its detailed account of the direct influence Zola had on Moore, but I believe that while Moore’s relationship with Zola fuels much of his decision-making in the early years, we should supplement this reading of Moore’s development as one of direct influence with a reading that emphasizes the cultural clout the broader masculinist tradition had with late-nineteenth-century male authors and Moore’s goal of placing himself within this larger tradition of British male authors. At the heart of Moore’s marketing of his early novels, and especially the marketing of *Esther Waters*, is the drive to make himself into a Samuel Richardson, a Walter Scott, or a Charles Dickens. Frazier himself recognizes Moore’s craving for authorial status when he refers to Moore as embarking, in the 1880s, on a “lifelong project of constructing the ‘author function’ ‘George Moore’ as his chief creation” (166), but Frazier’s account does not acknowledge as fully as it might the role of the English canon in this project.

For example, Frazier’s characterization of Moore’s four-step approach to his novels, which I have already discussed, can be supplemented by an acknowledgment that, at about the same time Zola was passing on this approach to Moore, Moore was immersing himself in the tradition of English literature, as documented in the aforementioned Chapter 10 of *Confessions of a Young Man*. And even as Moore used Zola’s four-step approach, he seems to be using it precisely to gain entry into the tradition of English literature. Of the four steps, it is the second step--writing about one’s novels in periodicals before they appear--that is most important to understanding
the success Moore achieved with *Esther Waters*. By the time Moore published *Esther Waters*, he had for more than a decade been writing about upcoming novels in periodicals, and in the six years in which Moore composed the novel, a long composition period for him, he did not turn away from the public to reform his mode but wrote many articles for periodicals, not a few of which were aimed at developing a strong English realist tradition in art (Hone 178-80; Frazier 200), a school that would advocate the same principles Moore was now using in his own writing.

Furthermore, while Zola’s four-step approach includes no direct mention of its function in establishing Moore in the British masculinist tradition, when one looks at the gender issues implicit in Zola’s advice to Moore, it becomes clear that Zola’s advice was aimed at helping Moore achieve such status. For Zola, male authors had to take an aggressive approach to advertising their work, in part because of the proliferation of women writers in the late-nineteenth-century literary market. As Frazier puts it: “There was more than a trace of masculine, scientific, research-oriented contempt for naturally prolific female scribblers in Zola’s attitude” (104), and he continues on to cite Moore’s characterization of Zola, in “My New Novel by M. Zola” as one who resents women writers immensely. Of the “absolute state of decay that of late years English fiction has fallen into,” Zola is said to have stated,

> Any story is good enough provided it be sentimental enough. Neither poetry of language nor observation of life and manners is asked for. The work is, I hear, done chiefly by women who produce their two or three books a year. Ah! how I do admire their facility. Here am I, just come back from Azin, where I have been for the last two months compiling notes, and I can barely complete three pages a day. Never have I gone through such difficulties with a book. At first it seemed to me impossible to put myself *en rapport* with these miners, and adequately realize their lives. (*Pall Mall Gazette* 6)

Although it is possible to read this passage as one about Zola’s own artistic “difficulties” ("Never have I gone through such difficulties . . ."), it is clear that Zola believes that the *kind* of writing he is doing is significantly different and more difficult,
because it involves realism and not just sentiment, than the kind of writing being done by women. Moore’s presentation of Zola here is not overtly sympathetic, but he does follow the above passage with a detailed description of the five hundred pages of notes and the two hundred pages of novel synopsis he sees on Zola’s desk before leaving, which suggests an endorsement of Zola’s approach to the novel over that of the so-called sentimental woman writers.

Moore’s own contempt for women writers surfaces in articles such as “Sex in Art” (1893), in which Moore argues that while women “succeed as queens, courtesans, and actresses,” in “the higher arts . . . their achievements are slight indeed--best when confined to the arrangements of themes invented by men--amiable transpositions suitable to boudoirs and fans” (226). Further, in this article, Moore states that were society to remove all the art created by women, “it cannot be maintained, at least not seriously, that if these charming triflings were withdrawn there would remain any gap in the world’s art to be filled up. Women have created nothing, they have carried the art of men across their fans charmingly . . . and they have hideously and most mournfully parodied the art of men” (226-27). While Moore appreciates the work of Jane Austen, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Charlotte Brontë because their femininity is evident in their work, he is especially critical of George Eliot, whose work he finds overly masculine, and George Sand, whose work he describes as “sexless, and therefore lifeless” (227). This sort of attitude toward women writers, especially the hatred for androgyny, follows Zola’s way of thinking. As Bernice Chitnis shows in Reflecting on Nana, Zola was particularly disturbed by androgyny, as evidenced by his reaction to the French courtesan of his time, whom he resented for her ability to control the rich men she served, especially since she could convince them to dress in women’s clothing (9-12).

Still, Chitnis believes that Zola’s relationship with women was ambivalent; though he tried to create the character of woman-as-simply-sexual-being in Nana, stating so in his “preliminary plan” for the novel, he ended up with a female character who embodied the androgynous ideal, an ideal abhorred by Zola but not necessarily by his readers (19-20). Such an ambivalence--especially in the tension between artistic intention and execution--can be seen in Moore as well. Moore seems to have had respect for many
of his female contemporaries and held an interest in women’s issues in general, yet set
next to public statements such as those in “Sex in Art,” Moore’s relationship with
women certainly has a double edge. While Frazier does not always capitalize on the
ambivalence of Moore’s relationships with women as much as he might, he does capture
well Moore’s complicated relationship to women during the publication of *A Drama in
Muslin* (1886), often cited as the novel by Moore most directly aimed at addressing “The
Woman Question,” since Moore wrote an article (now lost, according to Frazier) on the
subject in the year before the novel’s publication.*

Moore’s feminist ideal, as detailed in the article and the novel, put him in direct
conflict with the more puritan feminists, who were fighting primarily for the acceptance
of women in the public sphere and often advocated sexual abstinence in order to achieve
this goal. Moore’s ideal was a compromise between “those in favor of emancipation
(university education and professions for women) and those who were stuck in the old
grooves (home is the only place for women). . . . Moore’s notion of a golden mean was to
grant to young women the freedom both to labor and to love” (118). For Moore, sexual
freedom for women was as important as acceptance of women in the public sphere, and
this feminist ideal sometimes troubled his friendships with women. For example, around
the time Moore was finishing up *Drama in Muslin*, his friendship with Eleanor Marx
would be disturbed by their competing ideologies on women’s issues. Marx, who had
translated Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* and staged a reading of it at her home in 1885, invited
Moore to the reading, but attending the reading only served to remind Moore how much
the “feminist rejection of sex” irritated him (Frazier 127). While the emphasis on sexual
freedom in Moore’s ideal is much more fully accepted among early-twenty-first-century
feminists, his ideal is one still easily subject to criticism, since it seems to be rooted in an
idealization of woman as sexual being, which is only a stone’s throw from the
objectification of women that has been the attention of late-twentieth-century critics,
especially those in art history and film theory.

In this context, seemingly feminist moves made by Moore are almost always more
complex than they appear. For example, his decision to use *Esther Waters* as the title for
his “servant book,” as he liked to call it, came only after he realized that using a
woman-centered title would make clearer to his audience his intention to respond
directly to Hardy’s *Tess* (Frazier 226). Until then, he had planned to call the novel
*Mother and Child*, a title that still focuses on “woman” but not to the degree that *Esther Waters* does, since it does not evoke the long tradition of novels named for a single
woman. In choosing *Esther Waters* as the title, Moore was negotiating a number of late-
nineteenth-century cultural factors, including straightforward financial concerns (how
could Moore be as successful as Hardy, his other male contemporaries, and the
numerous women writers of his time, and how does the use of a woman-centered title
contribute to this goal?), artistic concerns (including those rooted in debate over the
nature of male authorship, such as using the title to refer to the larger tradition of
woman-centered novels written by men or the need to establish oneself as more or less
masculine than one’s contemporaries through one’s artistic mode), and late-nineteenth-
century feminism (what stand would Moore take on women’s issues, and how does the
use of a woman-centered title signal his stance?).

III.

Indeed, Moore’s establishment of himself as an English writer would come
through his success with the woman-centered *Esther Waters*. Critics make much of
Moore’s own account of the inspiration for writing *Esther Waters*, the reading of a
newspaper article about servants as well as his experiences with his own servant,
“awful Emma,” and some have pointed out that, in writing *Esther Waters*, Moore
continued to draw on the woman-centered approach of *Drama in Muslin*.” Not only did
he read the article about servants while finishing *Drama in Muslin* (Communication 64-
65), but he wrote a letter to his brother Maurice, claiming that “*Esther Waters* is Alice
Barton in another form” (Hone 187). Furthermore, in *A Communication to My Friends*,
Moore presents himself as someone with the intention to write a woman-centered novel
when he started working on *Esther Waters*, and his commentary on his choice of subject
for the novel suggests that he adopted the woman-centered novel precisely because he
understood the power of such a novel on the public. Of his search for the ideal subject
for *Esther Waters*, Moore writes,

I was asking myself whether the hero of my book should be a footman, or should I take a cook for a heroine, and before I reached the Law Courts I decided that it could be neither. A footman would not be a pleasing object in the love passages and it is hard to think of a good-tempered cook, though no doubt there are such beings. A cook is too old, but not a scullery-maid. Ah, there I have it! A scullery-maid, said I, she shall be.

(65)

This comment about the suitability of a scullery-maid versus that of a cook is telling, since it shows that only particular types of women were appropriate for the protagonist position in a woman-centered novel. Since a cook is “too old” for such a position, we can infer that the woman-centered novel needs a younger woman in part because discussion of female sexuality is central to this type of novel. The cook, who would most likely be married or widowed (as is the cook in *Esther Waters*), cannot bear the weight of the issues expected in a woman-centered novel, but the young and often virginal scullery-maid can. In fact, if we review the woman-centered novels discussed in this dissertation, many feature women in difficult class positions and all are assumed to be sexually inexperienced but sometimes aware of the new sexual freedom available to them.

While the conditions of composing *Esther Waters* and the role of woman-centered material in that composition are fascinating topics, what I would like to emphasize in this section is what happened after Moore published *Esther Waters*. Not only was there widespread praise of *Esther Waters* from the mainstream press (Langenfeld 43-52), but perhaps most importantly, Moore received praise from feminists. Sarah Grand wrote a letter to the *Daily Chronicle* in favor of lifting the ban on Moore’s novel, arguing that the novel should be available in “every library in the kingdom” (“Letter” 3), and the Women’s Progressive Society set up their own library, which included books banned from the larger lending libraries because of their “liberal nature” (Langenfeld 49). In addition to this support, Moore received praise from *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald*. 210
The Woman’s Herald’s review of Esther Waters was written by Florence Fenwick Miller, later the editor of the magazine and already a well-known suffrage activist. In the review, Miller claims that though Moore’s writing is flawed by “crudity of expression” and a tendency to overdescribe scenes that need not be described at all, Esther Waters is “a powerful and remarkable book. It is one in which a man makes an effort to look at life from the woman’s standpoint” (296). While Moore’s effort to “realise the woman’s mind” cannot match the efforts of Shakespeare, Meredith, or Zola (interestingly, Miller is more open to Zola than most feminist critics of the time), Miller acknowledges that “Mr. Moore has earnestly endeavoured” to represent the world from a woman’s perspective, and “that alone is much” (296). Miller does not discuss specific narrative strategies used by Moore, focusing instead on content details of the novel that she judges according to her own ideas about the amount of suffering women have endured, but the review of Esther Waters in Shafts does address specific narrative strategies in some detail. Their review shows that, according to the feminist definition of realism, Moore had made a remarkable achievement. In the review, Gertrude Kapteyn writes that Esther Waters is “the realistic method in its best expression,” since it avoids the pitfalls of both naturalism and aestheticism, in which the “humanity” of characters is lost in overemphasis on either external realities (naturalism) or form and language (aestheticism) (24, 26). In addition, though Kapteyn does not use the analytical language of current literary critics but a more characteristic nineteenth-century style of discussing books, she makes clear the effectiveness of particular narrative strategies employed by Moore, especially his use of internal perspective, dialogue, and description of characters’ actions.

Of Moore’s use of internal perspective, Kapteyn writes,

With utmost delicacy the author indicates the downward slide which takes [Esther] quickly to her fall, and we can hardly conceive anything more impressive than the way in which is described Esther’s first realization of the terrible consequences of her weakness. ‘She (Esther) sat on her wooden chair facing the wide kitchen window. The glow from the fire showed on her print dress. And it was in this death of active memory
that something awoke within her. . . . The truth shone upon her like a star” (24).

Though Kapteyn chooses a passage from the novel so infused with the language of the narrator that one might consider the internal perspective here to belong to the narrator rather than Esther, Kapteyn’s emphasis on the passage as one in which Esther’s “first realization” of her situation occurs suggests that, from Kapteyn’s point of view, Moore has effectively captured the consciousness of Esther. It is true that there is less of Esther’s internal perspective than perhaps her resistance to cultural norms through spoken word and action begs for, but Kapteyn succinctly points out how Moore at least acknowledges the importance of depicting woman’s consciousness, whether it be through internal perspective, the narrator’s perspective, or thematic devices.

Kapteyn also points out Moore’s use of dialogue as a strategy for representing assertion of woman’s agency, for she refers to the resistance Esther puts up to cultural norms that support the subordination of women in the scene in which Fred Parsons, the Brethren lay minister who tries to “save” Esther by marrying her and adopting her child, chastises Esther for her return to her “seducer,” William Latch. Kapteyn writes,

> Touchingly, she herself expresses the main motive which keeps her afloat . . . when Fred reproaches her with having changed so much. “No, I’ve not changed, Fred, but things has turned out different; one doesn’t do the good that one would like to in the world, one has to do the good that comes to one to do. I’ve my husband and my boy to look to. Them’s my good. At least that’s how I sees things.” So says Esther, and how many of her sisters in suffering with her? (25)

In the last sentence of this passage, Kapteyn makes it clear that Esther is a successful heroine precisely because she speaks out in the same way real-life women were speaking out about the conditions of their lives in the 1890s.

Finally, Kapteyn suggests Moore’s skill at describing characters’ actions. Commenting upon Moore’s presentation of the story after Esther’s “first realization” scene, Kapteyn writes,
From this moment the author evolves his story in sober intense earnestness through all the sorrowful and tragical details which naturally must follow the pitiful act. First Esther’s coming home . . . where the drunken father insults, then follows the hospital, where she shrinks from the cruel coldness with which they handle human beings . . . [t]he horrible experience in trying to find nursing for her child . . . and at last the oasis in the house of Miss Rice. . . . [T]he author is perfect in his picturing of the unfaltering perseverance and self-denial, the love and passion characteristic of true motherhood. (25)

Although Kapteyn might have discussed Moore’s description of characters’ actions more specifically, since she sounds as though she is providing plot summary rather than analysis of literary technique and as though she is praising Moore’s intention (or spirit, as Gissing likes to call it) rather than his technique, her reference to his depiction of Esther’s “unfaltering perseverance and self-denial” toward the end of the passage, at the end of a series of plot points, suggests that she recognizes Moore’s description of actions as an artistic element in his work.

In addition to the points Kapteyn makes in her review, perhaps the other striking element of Moore’s presentation of Esther’s story, which Kapteyn refers to only briefly and with little analysis of its narrative significance, is the opening of the novel, which emphasizes Esther’s internal perspective and which Moore repeats in the third-to-last chapter of the book, when Esther returns to the house where she worked as a domestic servant and where the story of her “fall” began. “She stood on the platform watching the receding train,” reads the opening, told first from the narrator’s perspective and then, several paragraphs later, from Esther’s perspective. “She had been in service in such houses,” reads the narration as it shifts to Esther’s perspective, “and knew that a general servant was kept in each. But the life in Woodview was a great dream, and she could not imagine herself accomplishing all that would be required of her” (2). From the second page of the novel, the earliest for any of the late-Victorian novels I have examined, Esther’s internal perspective is at the forefront, and when Moore repeats this opening at the end of the novel, with variation to it after the first paragraph, it is clear
that Esther’s consciousness has matured. Shifting once again from the narrator’s perspective to Esther’s as she looks out at the same landscape after eighteen years, the story reads, “[S]he noticed that the line of little villas had not increased; they were as she had left them eighteen years ago. . . . Eighteen years had gone by, eighteen years of labour, suffering, disappointment. . . . And now it all seemed like a dream. . . . [H]ow had she done it? How often had she found herself within sight of the workhouse?” (376-77).

Also striking is how rarely the internal perspective of other characters is used, especially the internal perspective of Esther’s male partners and her female employers, people Esther comes into conflict with over the choices she makes about raising her child and remaining a single mother for much of her life. Not only are the first two chapters of the novel dominated by Esther’s internal perspective, with ample supplementary description of the scene from a fairly unintrusive narrator, but even when other characters’ perspectives come into the scene, they are used sparingly and with practicality in mind. For example, when Esther tells William’s mother, the cook of the house, that her son looked handsome as he prepared to go to the races, the narration reads, “Mrs. Latch moved about rapidly, and she opened and closed the oven; then, seeing that the other women were still standing in the yard and safely out of hearing, she said . . . .” (51), and when Mr. Leopold, the lead male servant of the house, tells the story of what has happened at the races that day, the narration reads, “Mr. Leopold looked round, and seeing every eye fixed on him he considered how much remained of the story, and with quickened speech continued . . . .” (58).

This sparse use of internal perspective is especially important when one looks at the characters of Esther’s male partners, the biological father of her child William Latch and the Brethren lay minister Fred Parsons who wants to marry Esther despite her status as a single mother, since one might expect Moore to use more of their internal perspectives. Look, for example, at the first love scene between Esther and William, which takes place on the downs of Woodview, the house Esther and William serve. Unlike other love scenes in late-Victorian novels, where the man’s internal perspective often introduces and controls the scene, here, Esther’s perspective is the more dominant,
and William’s perspective enters only once. After telling us that Esther is “weary” for a male companion, the narrator shifts to Esther’s perspective as she walks on the downs. “Margaret [one of the other servants] had gone down to the Gardens with her young man,” thinks Esther, “and one of these days a young man would come to take her out. Now what would he be like? She laughed the thought away, for it did not seem likely that any young man would bother about her. But at this moment, she saw a man coming through the hunting gate. His height and shoulder told her that he was William” (42).

Even after William enters the scene, Esther’s internal perspective continues to be the more dominant, with lines such as “She was glad of the chance to get a mouthful of fresh air,” when William suggests that they walk out a bit from the house, and “For something to say, and hoping to please, Esther asked him where the racecourse was,” when they are out of the immediate vicinity of the house (42, 43). The only time William’s perspective enters the narration is in the line, “Esther looked at William in silent admiration, and, feeling that he had secured an appreciative listener, he continued his monologue regarding the wealth and rank his family had formerly held” (44, my emphasis). How different this use of internal perspective is from that of Gissing’s use in In the Year of the Jubilee, where Lionel Tarrant’s perspective dominates the scenes between him and Nancy. Given Esther’s seemingly strong interest in William and her voluntary participation in activities such as this walk and dancing and drinking with him at a ball, it is much more difficult to see William as her seducer, either when he first kisses her (“She listened just as if she understood, for it mattered to her little what he talked so long as he was talking to her. . . . William’s allusions to the police . . . frightened her; but her fears died in the sensation of his arm about her waist, and the music that the striking of a match had put to flight began in her heart, and it rose to its height when his face bent over hers” [46-47]) or when he and Esther have sexual intercourse (“In the evenings when their work was done Esther and her lover lingered about the farm buildings. . . . [O]ne evening, putting his pipe aside, William threw his arm round her, whispering that she was his wife. The words were delicious in her fainting ears. She could not put him away, nor could she struggle with him, though she knew that her fate depended on her resistance, and swooning away she awakened in
pain, powerless to free herself” [73]).

This pattern of sparse internal perspective is paralleled in scenes between Esther and her second male partner, Fred Parsons. In the first chapter that focuses on the relationship between the two, the internal perspective of either Esther or Fred is rare, with the fairly unintrusive narrator describing the scene and setting up the dialogue. Still, Esther’s emotions do come across in the narration at least three times. When it is clear that Fred does not approve of Miss Rice’s novel-writing, we learn that Esther “would have liked to tell him that her mistress was not one who would write anything that could do harm to anybody” (187), and when Esther realizes that her relationship with Fred cannot be romantic due to her child, we hear Esther’s thoughts in the narration: “Sooner or later he would find out that she had a child, then she would see him no more. That child came between her and every chance of settling herself. It were better to break with Fred. But what excuse could she give?” (189-90). Finally, at the end of the chapter, after Esther has told Fred about her child and he still wants to marry her, we learn that “in that moment she felt that she almost loved him” (192). In addition to these brief moments of Esther’s internal perspective, this chapter also include an interesting instance in which the narration seems to be from Fred’s perspective but then is clarified as Esther’s perspective. The narration describing Fred’s disapproval of Miss Rice’s novel reads as follows: “Fred did not approve of novels--Esther could see that--and she was sorry; for he seemed a nice, well-spoken man” (187).

In Esther’s interactions with her male partners, then, her internal perspective is the more dominant one outside that of the unintrusive narrator, and even in Esther’s scenes with her female employers, many of whom hold quite different views about the role of working-class women in society and the degree of agency they have, the perspective of the scene shifts to the female employer on only the rarest occasions. For example, when Esther confronts her first employer, Mrs. Rivers, who has hired Esther to nurse her child while Esther’s baby is put out to nurse at a baby farm, about the conditions under which she must work, Mrs. Rivers responds by giving Esther an ultimatum--follow the house rules, which prohibit Esther from visiting her own child, or be put out into the street. In this scene, Mrs. Rivers’s internal perspective appears only
when it is necessary to show that she knows Esther to be right, right after Esther reminds Mrs. Rivers that every time she hires a new wet-nurse, she is taking the life of another woman’s baby, since babies that go to the baby farm almost always die from malnutrition. “A strange look passed over Mrs. Rivers’s face,” reads the narration, shifting over from the narrator’s perspective to that of Mrs. Rivers, “She knew, of course, that she stood well within the law [in throwing Esther out], that she was doing no more than a hundred other fashionable women were doing at the same moment; but this plain girl had a plain way of putting things, and she did not care for it to be publicly known that the life of her child had been bought with the lives of two poor children” (150).

Our sense, then, is that the novel is really Esther’s story and not one belonging to someone else—Esther’s male partners, her female employers, or any of the other characters in the novel—and this effect of the narrative can be connected directly to Moore’s use of internal perspective. Still, while Esther’s consciousness of her own situation matures and expands over the course of the novel, she is not a woman with overabundant interiority. It is more the fact that none of the other characters receive sustained internal perspective than that Esther receives a significant amount that keeps the focus of the narrative on Esther. In addition, it seems to be the narrator’s impartiality—one moment of direct address, “Hers is a heroic adventure if one considers it . . .” (172) is the exception—that helps keep the focus on Esther as well. All this makes Esther a successful heroine in the context of the 1890s literary market. Esther thinks, but she also speaks out and acts, and this combination makes her expression of agency quite effective in the course of the novel.

By looking at Moore’s use of dialogue and description of actions, we can see how Moore achieves a balance of narrative strategies and a successful representation of woman’s agency, according to the feminist ideal. Esther’s use of the spoken word is especially effective as a means of resistance in the novel, since Esther continually confronts people who believe that she should have no more agency than that of an animal. As I have already mentioned in discussing the rare instances of internal perspective through Esther’s female employers, Esther often does battle with these employers over cultural norms that support the subordination of women. That Esther
directs her resistance toward middle-class women, who themselves are subject to at least some of the cultural norms that oppress women but also generally uphold the dominant Victorian perspective on gender issues, makes her resistance especially effective. For example, when Esther confronts Mrs. Rivers about her double standard (that middle-class woman should have access to their babies but working-class women should not), Esther’s use of the spoken word runs as follows:

One afternoon, after having put baby to sleep, [Esther] said to Mrs. Rivers, “I hope, ma’am, you’ll be able to spare me for a couple of hours; baby won’t want me before then. I’m very anxious about my little one.”

“Oh, nurse, I couldn’t possibly hear of it; such a thing is never allowed. You can write to the woman, if you like.”

“I do not know how to write, ma’am.”

“Then you can get someone to write for you. But your baby is no doubt all right.”

“But, ma’am, you are uneasy about your baby; you are up in the nursery twenty times a day; it is only natural I should be uneasy about mine.”

“But, nurse, I’ve no one to send with you.”

“There is no reason why anybody should go with me, ma’am; I can take care of myself.”

“What! let you go off all the way to--where did you say you had left it--Wandsworth?--by yourself! I really couldn’t think of it. . . . [I]f you like I’ll write myself to the woman who has charge of your baby. I cannot do more, and I hope you’ll be satisfied.” (145-46)

Immediately following this resistance through the spoken word, readers hear Esther’s thoughts, through her internal perspective: “By what right, by what law, was she separated from her child? She was tired of hearing Mrs. Rivers speak of ‘my child, my child, my child,’ and of seeing this fine lady turn up her nose when she spoke of her own beautiful boy” (146). Moore effectively combines dialogue, internal perspective and description of actions to illustrate how Esther asserts agency in the situation. At the end
of Esther’s thoughts about the injustice of the situation, the narrator tells us that Esther “experienced the sensation of the captured animal, and scanned the doors and windows, thinking of some means of escape” (146). Further, after Mrs. Spires, the baby farmer, comes to tell Esther that her baby is ill, Esther takes action, leaving the house despite the fact that she will lose her job by doing so.

Moore’s combination of narrative strategies here is striking, as are certain qualities of Esther’s dialogue, and these qualities should be investigated further, since they reveal that some literary texts of this period made use of competing ideologies about the cultural status of women. While Esther’s language over the course of the novel has a number of underlying ideologies (religious, economics-oriented, sympathy for the suffering of women and the poor, etc.), it is worth noting that the language she uses with Mrs. Rivers is that of motherhood, a language Mrs. Rivers is likely to find appealing, given that she too is a mother. When Esther justifies her concern for her own child to Mrs. Rivers by saying, “But, ma’am, you are uneasy about your baby; you are up in the nursery twenty times a day; it is only natural that I should be uneasy about mine” (145 my emphasis), she implies that there are emotions all mothers feel, regardless of their class status or the legitimacy of their children. Further, when Mrs. Rivers tells Esther that it would be “cruel” for Esther to leave Mrs. Rivers’s baby without milk, Esther responds practically, saying, “Why couldn’t you [nurse it], ma’am? You look fairly strong and healthy” (150), a response that again suggests that she and Mrs. Rivers share the experience of motherhood, even if they do not share the same class background. By using the language of mothers with Mrs. Rivers and other female employers, Esther attempts to break down class distinctions that contribute to the strong judgments made about “fallen” women.

In addition to employing the language of mothers to create social change, Esther also employs the language of religion to do the same. While it might be argued that religious language must always support institutional power, Esther’s use of it shows that a wide variety of opinions can be found within religious language and that religious language itself can be shaped in new ways to change perceived notions about individuals such as fallen women. Because religious language has concepts such as
“repentance” and “forgiveness,” the use of it in discussing the issue of fallen women can create more sympathy for women who are labelled as such. Through the language of religion, then, Esther has a set of tools she can use when confronting people who might judge her because of her fallen status. For example, when Esther confronts Mrs. Barfield, the mistress of the house at Woodview and also a member of the Plymouth Brethren church, about her pregnancy, Mrs. Barfield reacts in a radically different manner than the other female employers Esther encounters. Asking Esther why she has done something a “good girl” should not do and why she has deceived the household by concealing her pregnancy for seven months, Esther is immediately apologetic, saying that she “hated being deceitful” but that she could no longer “think of myself. There is another to think for now” (87-88). When Mrs. Barfield presses Esther in specifically religious language, saying, “But, Esther, do you feel your sin? Can you truly say honestly before God that you repent?” (91), Esther responds by stating, “Yes, ma’am, I think I can say all that,” and by kneeling in prayer with Mrs. Barfield (91).

Likewise, when Esther confesses her sin to Fred Parsons, the Brethren lay minister who asks Esther to marry him, it is their shared religious background and understanding of religious language that allows Fred to accept Esther, despite her fallen status. After hearing Esther’s confession, Fred says, “But you’ve repented, Esther?” (190), and receiving an affirmative answer from her, he speaks sympathetically, stating, “I know that a woman’s path is more difficult to walk than ours. It may not be a woman’s fault if she falls, but it is always a man’s. He can always fly from temptation” (191). Later in the novel, the shared religious language Esther and Fred speak provides fodder for Esther’s resistance to cultural norms that support the subordination of women. After Esther returns to William, the father of her baby, and marries him, Fred tries to use the language of religion to convince Esther that she has “fallen” once again. When Fred, preaching against gambling in the Salvation Army tent at Derby Day, sees Esther at the races with William and their friends, he questions Esther’s religious commitment, saying, “You haven’t forgotten your religion, I hope?” (280). Esther defends her decision to return to William, despite his gambling habit, using the language of religion to do so. “I haven’t forgotten God, but I must do my duty to my husband. . . .
A wife that brings discord into the family is not a good wife, so I’ve often heard. . . . It would be wrong of me to set myself against my husband. . . . I do not forget Christ. He’s always with me” (280).

While Esther’s use of religious language is effective in her confrontation with Fred, use of this language does not guarantee acceptance by others for Esther. When Mrs. Trubner, one of Esther’s female employers, learns that Esther has an illegitimate child, she is less than sympathetic upon hearing Esther’s story, even though she seems to understand and value religious language. Esther tries to explain that she is the “thoroughly religious girl” Mrs. Trubner expected and that she has “suffered a great deal” because of her sin (169), but Mrs. Trubner refuses to hear out Esther and quickly dismisses her from service. Even when Esther asks Mrs. Trubner, “Then don’t you think, ma’am, there is repentance and forgiveness? Our Lord said--” (169), Mrs. Trubner refuses to sympathize, leaving Esther befuddled and mumbling under her breath, “It is a strange thing that religion should make some people so unfeeling” (171). Still, despite this one unsuccessful attempt at resistance through the use of religious language, Esther is fairly successful overall in her attempts to convince others that a fallen woman need not be doomed for life, and this makes Esther a good contrast to Hardy’s Tess, who, as I have shown in Chapter 2, is significantly less successful at using this language to convince others of her worth. What makes Esther so successful, I believe, is that she is persistent (she confronts one female employer after another who judges her because of her past) and that she uses the language of religion in tandem with other types of language that can evoke sympathy, particularly the language of motherhood.

Moore’s construction of Esther’s dialogue, then, is quite effective, and that he combines it well with description of Esther’s actions strengthens our sense that she successfully resists cultural norms that support the subordination of women. Now, we should turn to a more in-depth discussion of Esther’s resistance through physical actions, since this element of resistance completes the three-method feminist ideal. As I have already explained, when Esther resists Mrs. Rivers’s orders that she sacrifice her own baby in order to remain in service, Moore emphasizes Esther’s action of leaving the house immediately after her dialogue with Mrs. Rivers. This pattern of resistance through
the spoken word followed by related physical actions is also found in the scene at Mrs. Spires’s house in which Esther resists the baby farmer’s suggestion that Esther give her £5 to take the baby “off her hands” (157). Caught in an argument with Mrs. Spires and her husband about whether this means putting the baby up for adoption or letting them murder the child, Esther escapes from Mr. Spires’s strong grasp.

“Help, help, murder!” Esther screamed. Before the brute could seize her she slipped past, but before she could scream again he laid hand on her at the door. Esther thought her last moment had come. “Let ‘er go, let ‘er go!” cried Mrs. Spires. . . . “We don’t want the perlice in ‘ere.” . . . With a growl the man loosed his hold, and feeling herself free Esther rushed into the area and up the wooden steps. (158)

Esther’s actions of resistance here recall actions by her described earlier in the novel, which suggest that Esther often acts out when she believes she is in physical danger. When Esther’s mother, who is pregnant with at least her fifth child at the time Esther is pregnant with her son, tells Esther about her husband, Esther’s stepfather, hitting her, we learn that Esther, too, has been his victim in the past and resisted his violence. “It was only the other day,” Esther’s mother says, “just as I was attending to his dinner--it was a nice piece of steak, and it looked so nice that I cut off a weeny piece to taste. . . . ‘Well, then, taste that,’ he says, and strikes me clean between the eyes” (97). To this, Esther replies, “You was always too soft with him, mother; he never touched me since I dashed the hot water in his face” (97).

While Esther does not face physical violence with either of the men in her life, William and Fred, there are times when Esther uses physical action, especially turning away, to resist their attempts to categorize her in ways she finds false. The categorization of Esther by these men is yet another specific aspect of the subordination of women, albeit it a more subtle and less directly threatening form. It is interesting, then, that Esther adopts a strategy of resistance that can be linked to her reaction to overt violence yet is more subtle (in line with the more subtle form of subordination) as well. When William returns and tries to convince Esther not to marry Fred and to live with him instead, Esther resents that she must become an adulterer once again just to support
her child. When William reaches for her arm, in an attempt to convince her that he will
give up gambling if she moves in, she pulls away, combining resistance through the
spoken word and action. “Don’t touch me,’ she said surlily, and drew back a step with
an air of resolution that made [William] doubt if he would be able to persuade her”
(235). Then, when Fred confronts Esther at Derby Day, she resists his judgments about
her marriage to William by ending the conversation when she wishes, and by “mov[ing]
away” before he can convince her to leave William and come back to him (281). Further,
when Fred comes to William’s public-house to warn Esther that the police are going to
charge William with selling bets in the bar, she again ends the conversation when she
tires of Fred’s judgments, “turn[ing] her face from him” to show her resistance (304).

Interestingly, Esther’s resistance through physical actions encompasses a variety
of specific aspects of the broader issue of the subordination of women--violence against
women, violence against children, the subtle but dangerous judgments placed on women
who are not the norm, the implementation of a class system that prevents women from
individual agency, etc.--and the breadth of her resistance to these specific aspects is
impressive. It is not surprising, given this breadth, that Esther’s last action in the book--
returning to Woodview after William’s death in order to avoid going to the workhouse--
is an action taken out of necessity but also for her own pleasure. Realizing that she must
do some work to support herself and her son, now almost a man but still not old enough
for steady work, Esther chooses to go into service in a house she loves and with a
mistress she adores. With Mrs. Barfield, Esther is able to transcend the role of servant,
for “the two women came to live more and more like friends and less like mistress and
maid” (388). Importantly, Esther is assertive about returning to Woodview; with her
son’s help, she writes a letter to Mrs. Barfield to inquire about a position rather than
waiting for someone to come to her about work (381), and the end of the novel also
suggests that it is action through which women assert agency, for Esther’s view is that
her life’s work--supporting her son--has been important. “She was only conscious that
she had accomplished her woman’s work--she had brought him up to a man’s estate;
and that was her sufficient reward” (394). While it might be argued that to live through
and for one’s son is to live without agency and in subordination to a man, as I have
argued to some degree in my discussion of Nancy Lord’s attachment to motherhood in Gissing’s Jubilee, Esther’s relationship with her son seems to move beyond that of Nancy’s with her baby. Unlike Nancy, whose story ends with her locked in marital struggle with Lionel, Esther’s story sees her outliving her husband and finding a way of living on her own that seems to make her more happy than ever before.\textsuperscript{100}

IV.

Having received praise from feminist periodicals in the wake of Esther Waters’s publication, and for precisely the reasons I have included in my analysis of the novel in the previous section, Moore continued to use woman-centered material in works following Esther Waters, such as “Mildred Lawson” (of Celibates, 1895) and Evelyn Innes (1898). Of Evelyn Innes, Moore wrote to Clement Shorter, “I am hesitating about the subject of a long novel. . . . So much depends on the choice of subject and I intend to write more deliberately than ever. If I am lucky in my choice I shall do better than Esther Waters” (qtd. in Frazier 249). Furthermore, after the success of Esther Waters, Moore took the necessary steps to keep the novel in the minds of critics and the wider public and to try to do the same with his other less well-received works as well, based primarily on his success with Esther Waters. I have already mentioned Moore’s interest in establishing “classic-status” for himself, but this desire for literary success was heightened in the years following the publication of Esther Waters. What is striking about Moore’s attempt to canonize Esther Waters is how deeply rooted it is in the connection between aesthetic and material concerns, which come together in the representation of woman. As I show in this section, Moore’s negotiations with T. Werner Laurie for a “fine” edition of the novel illustrate the degree to which Moore defined aesthetics and material concerns through women.

For Moore, the aesthetic pleasure of a woman and the aesthetic pleasure of the book are closely wedded. I will discuss this concept in more detail in part V of this chapter, but, for now, let me briefly highlight Moore’s own writing on the woman-as-book, book-as-woman trope. This trope first appears toward the beginning of Confessions of a Young Man, when Moore writes of the experience, at age eleven, of hearing his
parents speak of, and then reading himself, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*. This book evokes for Moore “echo-augury,” a term he borrows from De Quincey and uses to describe the moment when one hears, among the many “cries” that fill one’s head, a more “persistent” cry, the cry that one follows faithfully and keeps one from straying. This persistent cry is like a “voice of conscience,” which pulls a person out of a “perplexed state” and gives him or her direction (49-50, 76, 233), and, for Moore, this cry is often associated with the feminine. In describing the echo-augury evoked by *Lady Audley’s Secret*, Moore explains that early in life he was prone to pursuing many paths, and he claims that he might have just as easily become a Pharaoh, an ostler, a pimp, or an archbishop as become a writer. But at age eleven, he begins to follow one voice.

I was eleven years old when I first heard and obeyed this cry, or, shall I say, echo-augury?

Scene: A great family coach, drawn by two powerful country horses, lumbers along a narrow Irish road. The ever recurring signs—long ranges of blue mountains, the streak of bog, the rotting cabin, the flock of plover rising from the desolate water. Inside the coach there are two children. . . . Opposite the children are their parents, and they are talking of a novel the world is reading. Did Lady Audley murder her husband? Lady Audley! What a beautiful name; and she, who is a slender, pale, fairy-like woman, killed her husband. Such thoughts flash through the boy’s mind; his imagination is stirred and quickened, and he begs for an explanation. (49-50)

Though different types of literature would evoke echo-augury in Moore, it is not surprising that it is Lady Audley who first stirs this feeling in Moore, for in *Confessions of a Young Man*, Moore often writes of women and books as similar entities: living, breathing, vital. “Books are like individuals,” he says, “you know at once if they are going to create a sense within the sense, to fever, to madden you in blood and brain, or if they will merely leave you indifferent, or irritable, having unpleasantly disturbed sweet musings as might a draught from an open window. Many are the reasons for love, but I confess I only love woman or book, when it is as a voice of conscience, never heard
before, heard suddenly, a voice I am at once endearingly intimate with” (76). Given this connection between books and women for Moore, it is not surprising that Moore’s most vigorous attempt to canonize his work comes in the form of a fine edition of *Esther Waters*.

*Esther Waters* was published in March 1894 and accepted for circulation by Mudie’s Library, but little attention was given to the book before the end of spring, when Smith’s library decided to ban the novel because of “about twenty lines of Pre-Raphaelitic madness” (Griest 153). Apparently, at least one reader objected to the scene in which Esther gives birth to her baby boy. However, when Prime Minister Gladstone gave his approval of the novel, Smith’s reversed its decision, so the novel was more widely available. The controversy over the banning of *Esther Waters* resulted in a flurry of reviews (Langenfeld 43-52; *Transition* 90-92), and *Esther Waters* sold 24,000 copies in less than a year (Hone 205). Although these sales cannot compare with the sales of books by some women writers (Corelli’s *Sorrows* sold 25,000 copies in one week), they were significant for Moore, who happily claims finally to have made a yearly salary of over £600 once *Esther Waters* was published (Hone 193). Further, Moore’s earnings with *Esther Waters* made his success comparable to those of his late-Victorian male contemporaries. Hardy is said to have made £550 on the serial version of *Tess* (Feltes 75), and Gissing, who was always less established than Hardy, Meredith, or Moore, apparently sold the rights to *New Grub Street* (1891) to Smith, Elder and Company for only £150 (Bergonzi 14). These figures show that Moore was at least moderately successful with the sales of *Esther Waters*, and Joseph Hone confirms that Moore himself was satisfied with his new income. According to Hone, Moore claimed that the success of *Esther Waters* “had done him evil by withdrawing him from poverty and from contact with the poor, yet he had a great great love for his chairs [which cost eight guinea apiece], his Aubusson carpet, his pictures [including a Manet, a Monet, and a Morisot] and his china,” indicating that Moore’s standard of living rose after the publication of the novel (212). Moore is also said to have been pleased with the news that Smith’s library lost approximately £1500 because of the ban on *Esther Waters*; the author even hired an accountant to do the estimations of Smith’s loss (205).

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Moore’s attention to the financial aspects of his success with *Esther Waters* is not unusual for the author, since he generally paid close attention to financial matters and was always trying to figure out ways to make more money. He constantly negotiated with publishers about his earnings: in fact, he gave up working with the publisher Walter Scott (no relation to the Romantic novelist) because Scott was too cheap (*Transition* 52) and transferred to T. Fisher Unwin, who was not much better, since he had the reputation for giving generously of his time but not of his money (27). One specific issue that highlights the stinginess of Moore’s publishers and Moore’s increasing frustration over this is the “cheap look” of Moore’s novels, a problem that no publisher seemed to be able to fix to Moore’s liking. Moore’s frustration over this issue highlights his general tendency to negotiate with publishers over every little detail, but it also draws attention to Moore’s obsession with the aesthetics of his books, especially the connection between the aesthetics of outward appearance, similar to the aesthetics of a woman’s appearance in Moore’s thinking, and inner aesthetics, the quality of the contents of a particular book. After 1910, most of Moore’s work was being published by Heinemann, but in 1916, without abandoning Heinemann as his primary publisher, the author arranged for T. Werner Laurie to publish *Brook Kerith*. Moore also began negotiations with Laurie for a “fine” edition of *Esther Waters*, which came out in 1920 (the same year Heinemann published the regular edition, the revised third edition), as well as better editions of several other of the earlier novels (*Parnassus* 43, 362).

The letters from Moore to Laurie regarding the 1920 edition reveal the author’s persistence in negotiations as well as his desire to achieve classic-status through the woman-centered novel. In this particular set of letters, Moore’s concern over the appearance of the book illuminates some of the expectations he had of “classic literature,” which he hoped *Esther Waters* would become. Beginning with the letters written in 1918 and 1919, which focus primarily on the sales from *Story-Teller’s Holiday* and the upcoming publication of *Avowals* (which Moore suggests should be accompanied by advertising that emphasizes the “ornamental” nature of a “well-bound” book), Moore repeatedly mentions a proposal for a “fine” edition of *Esther Waters*. In a letter from the early fall of 1918, Moore writes, “I do not pretend to be as good a judge as you...”
in these matters but I cannot rid myself [of] the belief that an expensive edition of *Esther Waters* would find subscribers” (384). Moore mentions the project again in a letter dated October 15, 1918 and in one from the spring of 1919. In this last letter, Moore writes: “I wonder if you could see your way to an expensive edition of *Esther Waters*. I think there would be a demand. But the paper? How much will there be left after *Avowals* is printed? Not enough for *Esther Waters* but there might be enough for a small edition of *The Lake*. Will there?” (414-15). Already, Moore sees on the horizon a whole collection of “fine” editions of many of his works, which would spring from the *Esther Waters* project and eventually be produced in the uniform edition by Heinemann.

By 1920, discussion of minute details—what type to use, how the corrections on the proofs were to be done, and how many free copies of the edition Moore would receive—dominates Moore’s letters to Laurie. In a letter dated April 21, 1920, Moore claims to “never interfere in any business matters,” but he has ample advice for Laurie on how to obtain permission to use type from another edition as well as whom they should hire to do the corrections (461). He is concerned that the type will not look appropriate for a fine edition but finally agrees to let Laurie and Pawling, who has the type from a past edition, “wrangle” with each other (464). While there are no apparent comments on the typeface used in the better edition of *Esther Waters* in Moore’s letters to Laurie after the edition appears, Moore was extremely disappointed with the fact that the paper had been cut instead of being left with rough edges. In a letter dated October 3, 1920, Moore claims that “*Esther Waters* is in appearance a mere enlargement of the ordinary 6/ or 7/6 novel” and asks that the pages on *Héloïse and Abélard* be “rough like the edges of *Avowals* and not chopped like the edges of *Esther Waters*” (480). Moore then launches into a lengthy discussion of the problems a publisher encounters: he “sympathizes” with Laurie’s troubles but refuses to let his sympathy excuse the appearance of the edition. “I keep my eyes fixed on the ultimate success of the whole series,” Moore writes, suggesting that he has far more invested than simply the commercial success of one book.

It is therefore necessary for me to come to an understanding with you regarding this new question—the rough edges . . . I know it is very difficult
to get the paper but almost any other plan would be better than to offer the public *Héloïse and Abélard* in form that would be practically *Esther Waters* over again. On points of this kind I think my opinion is worth consideration for my whole life have [sic] been given to questions of taste. (480)

Moore’s emphasis on “taste” here accentuates his philosophy on how classic-status might be achieved, since “taste” is both a feminine term and a class-inflected one. In the nineteenth century, to have taste, especially for men, meant taking on a slightly feminine, upper class air, and Moore’s claim that he has devoted his “whole life” to this endeavor shows the degree to which he craved classic-status. Although Moore’s letters to Laurie are almost always strictly business-like, with little mention of the “womanliness” of books, this letter is one in which the connection between books and women seems to seep in more thoroughly. By far the longest letter in this series from Moore to Laurie, and the most personal in tone, it continues this way,

I have no knowledge why you ordered the chopping of *Esther Waters* but I assume there were reasons; it could not have been natural preference on your part for I found you by no means in love with *Esther Waters*, when the first copies came in. . . . [I]t may be that the thick paper folds into a slightly larger book . . . and that the pages were chopped to equalize the size; if that was the reason I think that it was a bad one and that it would be better to issue *Héloïse and Abélard* in a slightly larger form unchopped. You will not think that I am raising difficulties that need not have been raised I am sure of that. You have not forgotten that I am responsible for the shapeliness of these books. (480 my emphasis)

Here, the words “in love” and “shapeliness” stand out, for they are not typical of the language Moore uses when writing to Laurie, and they reveal the investment Moore has in books as living entities, entities that can be loved and, perhaps more importantly, will ensure that Moore’s reputation lives on after his death. Throughout this letter, Moore asserts that he is above mere commercial success, that he is striving for long-lasting artistic success, and that a book’s appearance (much like a woman’s appearance) goes a
long way toward ensuring success of the book and its author.\textsuperscript{103}

More evidence of Moore’s attempt to achieve classic-status along with commodity-status can be seen in some of the revisions the author made on subsequent editions of *Esther Waters*, which seem aimed at appealing to the public’s expectations about classic literature. As aforementioned, Moore’s reformation of his literary mode when writing *Esther Waters*, from a strictly naturalistic mode to one of English realism, is significant, and one common statement made about *Esther Waters* is that it is the most “English” of his novels. By this, people meant that the novel was, first and foremost, different from the naturalistic novels Moore had been writing in the early days of his career, but, more specifically, this meant that the setting, characters, and theme of *Esther Waters* was more suited to English middle-class taste. For example, that *Esther Waters* is set, at least at the beginning and at the end, at an upper-class country home instead of in a lower-middle class boarding house, as *A Mummer’s Wife* is, indicated that Moore wanted to appeal to middle- and upper-class readers even though he would continue to make working-class characters the center of the novel. In addition, the characters and theme, especially the Plymouth Brethren in conflict with the gambling culture at Woodview, indicate Moore’s attempt to write something with a stronger emphasis on morality than he had in the past.

While it is true that *Esther Waters* was “more English” than *A Mummer’s Wife* or some of Moore’s other early novels, *Esther Waters* seems to have gotten more and more overtly “English” across later editions. The subtitle “An English Story” was added to Heinemann’s regular third edition, as was a dedication to Moore’s friend T. W. Rolleston, which replaced the original dedication to Moore’s brother, Maurice (Gilcher 46). In this new dedication, Moore emphasized that Rolleston was an Irishman who could “always love Ireland without hating England” and that he respected Rolleston for this, a statement that confirms Moore’s interest in appearing friendly to the English.\textsuperscript{104} These “English” revisions are included in the fine edition of 1920, and the canonization of *Esther Waters* continued as the 1920 edition was reprinted in the United States and Ireland. Further, in 1932, Heinemann published the *Esther Waters* volume of the uniform edition Moore had so hoped for. Finally, *Esther Waters* was also marketed as a play,\textsuperscript{105}
some portions of the novel were used in the “George Moore calendars,” and, perhaps most importantly in terms of Moore’s status as a literary figure, Moore continued to write himself into the English canon in his own autobiographical works.

The last of his autobiographical works, *A Communication to My Friends*, was written in the last few weeks of Moore’s life and, in fact, was unfinished at the time of his death. What is striking about *A Communication to My Friends*, which grew out of the introduction to Heinemann’s uniform edition of Moore’s works, is the increased emphasis on authorship, Moore’s place in the canon, and the masculinity associated with the canon, especially when one compares *Communication* to Moore’s earlier autobiographical works, especially *Confessions*. In Chapter 10 of *Confessions*, Moore details his reading of English works, but at this point in Moore’s career, it is too early for him to see himself as part of this tradition. It is clear that he would like to be a part of it, but it is not clear how that will happen. In *Communication*, however, Moore emphasizes how it was that he tended to separate literature itself from the material conditions of the marketplace early in his career. Further, in *Confessions*, Moore characterizes his reading of *Lady Audley’s Secret* as a moment of “echo-augury,” and in *Communication*, Moore revisits this story in order to emphasize his development from one who ignores material conditions for the love of literature to one who more clearly understands the connections between the two entities.

Telling how, when he arrives in London from Paris, he meets Tinsley, publisher of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, and is surprised to have a conversation primarily about conditions of the market rather than the love of literature (14-21), Moore emphasizes how his thinking about the relationship between literature and the marketplace has changed. Whereas the echo-augury of *Lady Audley’s Secret* was once a strong memory for Moore, strong enough that he felt compelled to write the scene of hearing his parents speak of the novel while riding in a coach in *Confessions*, now that scene is only a “faint memory.” The more “distinct memory” of *Lady Audley’s Secret* at the end of Moore’s life is that of meeting Tinsley, hearing him talk about the material conditions of the market when he had hoped to talk of specific works of literature, and at the end of this meeting mentioning to Tinsley that Braddon’s book was the one that sparked his interest in
literature in the first place and ultimately brought him to reading Shelley, another writer who evoked echo-augury in Moore. That Moore rewrites his impressions of Braddon’s novel to emphasize his initiation into the commercial aspects of literary production shows readers the way in which Moore’s thinking on achieving both classic-status and commodity-status was heightened over the years.

In addition to this sort of commentary on his own development as a writer negotiating his own love of literature with the conditions of the marketplace, in Communication, Moore emphasizes more thoroughly his goal of becoming part of the masculinist canon by including an account of a conversation he had with Zola about “great writers.” Upon being asked by Zola whom he believes are the three greatest English writers, Moore names Shakespeare, Milton, and, interestingly, Walter Savage Landor, whom Moore claims should be among the three greatest because he is the “eternal masculine,” who will be the same one thousand years later as he is in the present, in opposition to someone like Ernest Renan, whom Moore believes has “a good deal of the woman, or if not of the woman, the ecclesiastic” in him (55). Given that Moore also identifies Landor as less masculine than writers such as Scott and Fielding, a point I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, we can see that Moore continually blurs the boundaries of traditional gender markers in his attempt to write himself into the canon. Here, Moore’s belief in the “eternal masculine” seems an attempt to create space for the effeminate man in the masculinist canon, without creating the same space for women writers. Further, Moore’s commentary might be read on several different levels: Moore’s own wish to become part of the masculinist tradition, Moore’s interest in appealing to Zola through identification with Zola’s masculinist approach, and even Moore’s rewriting of the canon to make it more masculine.

V.

Moore’s position in the English canon at his death, then, is due in part to the way in which he presented himself to and then rewrote himself for the British public. The revisions he made to Esther Waters over the course of almost four decades, especially those revisions that appealed to his public’s sense of nationality, are the most
straightforward evidence of Moore’s interest in establishing his own literary success before his death in 1933. Yet, this is not the entire story of Moore’s attempted canonization of *Esther Waters*. I would like to return to some of the issues raised early in this chapter, particularly the idea that the British masculinist tradition of the novel has a strong interest in and reliance on woman as subject matter, something I have touched on but not yet fully developed in this chapter. Here, I argue that Moore’s addition of a particular preface to the novel, the preface to the 1932 American edition of the novel not usually included in late-twentieth-century editions, is as important a revision as those I have already discussed, precisely because this preface exposes the woman-centered roots of the British masculinist tradition.

This preface, titled “A Colloquy: George Moore and Esther Waters,” presents itself as a dialogue between the author and his female character. As I have already mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, the preface centers on Esther’s appearance as an apparition, who urges Moore not to write the preface, for she believes that Moore is no longer in control of his creation. This preface illustrates well Moore’s deep investment in women and in his female characters, and to place this preface after the epistle dedicatory to Rolleston suggests that it is not simply nationality--the book’s “Englishness”--that provides the basis for its canonical status; it is also its subject matter--the female hero--that makes it part of the British masculinist tradition. But what is even more striking about this preface is the content and presentation of the dialogue, for it raises issues about the correlation between the objectification of women, certainly a danger in the woman-centered novel, and the abstract quality of books. I have already touched on the importance of the woman-as-book, book-as-woman trope in Moore’s writing, but by looking at this preface, we can more fully understand Moore’s use of this trope, his ambiguous attitude toward women, and his methods of representing women.

In the preface, it is not always clear whether it is Esther-the-person or Esther-the-book who/that appears to Moore as he tries to compose. Of the moment Esther appears, Moore writes:

I heard the noiseless approach of a new thought. On velvet pads it moves out of the subconsciousness; a moment more and it will begin to speak its
message; and it was whilst I was thinking that nothing could befall which would restore me to my lost faith in life that I heard my visitor proclaim her mission:

I have come here to defend my life.
Thy life? cried I.
Every living thing hath the right to defend the life given it to live. (viii)

In this moment, Moore characterizes the apparition as Esther-the-person, a “living thing” who has the right to defend her own life. “She” has come to defend “her” life, not “it” has come to defend “its” life, as would a book. Yet, as Moore continues, the author in him must acknowledge that Esther is not a real person but a book.

Given it to live, I repeated, amazed at hearing a book speak so clearly.

I was thine in the beginning, but as soon as a book is written all right passes from the author to the book itself.

Thou wouldst have me believe, then, that the creator passes into nothingness and the thing created lives on?

About that there can surely be no doubt. A man’s life is brief; a book’s life may be prolonged century after century. (vix)

Having acknowledged Esther as a book, Moore and Esther-the-book continue on to debate the limits of a book’s ability to act as a living thing, with Moore asking the question, “But can a book create a human soul?” and Esther answering, “Books like me are doing that every day” (vix). They also debate the limits of an author’s control, especially through revisions. “I have revised thee many times without protest,” claims Moore, to which Esther replies, “Thy revisions were limited to the smoothing out of a rugged sentence, and not wishing to seem unfilial in thine eyes, I let thee have thy way with me as a dandy might allow his valet to remove a speck from his embroidered waistcoat, but beware! any larger license I cannot permit” (vix). Yet, as the preface comes to a close, Esther-the-book is suddenly confused with Esther-the-person again. To Moore’s proclamation that Esther “hast lost trust” in the one who created her comes the 234
That question has already been debated, she answered. To debate it again would be superfluous. Thou hast suffered enough in the last month and I would save thee further mental suffering if I may. Return to thy stories and leave Liveright to his own devices. And I beg of thee, if I should have occasion to visit thee again, that thou wilt, out of mere courtesy, refrain from the word “Prefacer.” I have little liking for that word. (x)

Once again, Esther is “she,” a “living thing,” the person who wants to control her own destiny.

Although this preface, in which Moore shifts from Esther-the-person to Esther-the-book and back again, can be explained as a fairly straightforward example of the personification of books, the fact that the dialogue is written without tags for most spoken statements makes it a somewhat odd construction, calling for more detailed analysis of Moore’s use of grammar rather than just an acknowledgment of the rhetoric of personification. “I have come here to defend my life,” Esther’s first statement, stands on its own, with neither “she said,” nor “it said” to identify Esther as person or object, and Esther’s other statements stand on their own as well. Yet, Moore’s narration directly before Esther’s first statement, “I heard my visitor proclaim her mission” (my emphasis), indicates that it is not unreasonable to perceive Esther as a person rather than as an object at the beginning of the conversation. And although the reader is forced to identify Esther as a book in the middle of the conversation, cued by Moore’s statement that he is “amazed at hearing a book speak so clearly,” by the end of the conversation, Esther can again be seen as a person, for Moore refers to Esther as “she” in the statement, “That question has already been debated, she answered.”

This detachment of dialogue from an identified speaker can and should be attributed to Moore’s tendency to conflate woman and book, since Moore makes a similar move in A Communication to My Friends when discussing the difficulty of finding a name for the female protagonist of Esther Waters. Comparing his still unnamed character to Eliot’s Hetty Sorrel, from Adam Bede (1859), Moore says, of Hetty and her
name, “We owe a great deal to Hetty Sorrel, but the name is trivial. I want a graver name, and it will come in the course of writing. . . . I would like a humble one, beautiful in its simplicity. A name will continue to beckon me all the way, and if I hit upon a good name it will lead me by the hand, and I shall follow, obedient as the child she carries in her arms” (66-67 my emphasis). Here, the name (“it”) is conflated with the person (“she”), much in the same way woman and book are conflated in the 1932 preface. Also, we can see how either object or person can evoke “echo-augury,” for it is the name that “beckons,” the name that “will lead [Moore] by the hand,” much in the way a person does.

The notion of woman-as-book, book-as-woman of course is not original to Moore’s work. Though a number of mid- and late-Victorian writers--such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Aurora Leigh), Barry Cornwall (“Diego de Montilla”), Henry James (The Portrait of a Lady) and Edmund Gosse (“The Cast”)--use this trope, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s poem “Jenny” is the most often cited instance, and Moore’s Memoirs of My Dead Life includes a direct reference to Rossetti’s poem, though not the particular lines in which the speaker characterizes Jenny as a book. Recent critics interested in women’s issues in the Victorian period have made much of the woman-as-book trope, especially Rossetti’s use of it, and this work is useful in terms of capturing the complexity of woman’s agency in Victorian writing and helping us understand Moore’s position on woman’s agency. Both Amanda Anderson (Tainted Souls and Painted Faces, 1993) and Kathy Psomiades (Beauty’s Body, 1997) interrogate the relationship between the woman-as-book image and issues of woman’s agency and argue that although the characterization of Jenny as book tends to abstract her and place her in a passive position, incapable of expressing her agency, this abstraction itself also creates opportunities for such expression.

The degree to which the woman-as-book trope denies or affirms agency is the lens through which to view Moore’s use of the trope, though the result of his use of it is not always straightforward and clear. In Confessions, Moore’s use of the trope shows that, on the one hand, women are books, much in the same way Rossetti’s Jenny is a book, a rose, or other art object, to be viewed as inanimate and passive. Speaking of Emma,
the servant often cited as the model for Esther Waters, Moore writes, “I studied the horrible servant as one might an insect under a microscope. What an admirable book she would make, but what will the end be? if only I knew the end!” (191). Although Emma is not objectified for her beauty in the way Jenny is, this comment by Moore makes clear the ease with which he does objectify women, seeing them as books to be written rather than as individuals to be understood on their own terms. Yet, on the other hand, the connection between women and books is not simply the objectification of women, for when Moore speaks of books, he speaks of them as vital, complex living beings, entities with which women might want to be associated. As I have already mentioned in this chapter, Moore believes that books “are like individuals” and that both books and women (the more human of the two sexes for Moore) share the ability to be “voices of conscience,” as Lady Audley and Esther Waters do for Moore.

To claim that Moore’s use of the woman-as-book trope is only about the straightforward objectification of women, then, is to miss the complexity of his thought, or at least the ambiguity of his thoughts about women, and Moore’s discussion of women in Memoirs of My Dead Life adds support to such an argument. In addition to the passage that refers to Rossetti’s “Jenny,” Moore addresses the issue of the aestheticization of women when he tells the story of his painter friend Octave Barris, who is completing a portrait of Marie Pellegrin. When Moore sees the painting, he is immediately in awe of it and Marie. But while Octave has a purely aestheticist approach to Marie’s portrait, Moore vacillates between aestheticizing Marie and feeling compelled to know and recognize her individuality. Upon first seeing the painting, Moore thinks, “[W]ho was this, this olive-skinned girl who might have sat to Raphael for a Virgin? Or for a Spanish Princess to Goya” (50), a comment suggesting that, like Octave, Moore immediately aestheticizes Marie. Yet this comment is quickly followed by a question that points to Moore’s interest in Marie’s individuality. “What might her history be?” Moore wonders, pointing out the difference between what a painting, especially a portrait, can capture and what a narrative, especially a woman-centered novel, can reveal. “And burning to hear it, I wearied of Octave’s seemingly endless chatter about his method of painting” (51). For Octave, painting Marie is only about capturing her outward
appearance, whereas Moore believes that to depict a woman is to attempt to capture her soul (56). But it is true that even as Moore strives to learn Marie’s story, first by pressing Octave to tell it and then by meeting Marie, he continues to both aestheticize and individualize her. Upon meeting Marie, Moore acknowledges that “[s]he was very like her portrait,” but he also recognizes that “[s]he was her portrait and something more, for Octave had omitted her smile, a wayward, sad little smile in keeping with her grave face” (54 my emphasis).

Moore’s approach to Marie Pellegrin contains some degree of aestheticization, and even the recognition of woman’s individuality might be seen, especially from a early-twenty-first-century perspective, to be a form of idolizing women or patronizing women, since man seems to retain the power to bestow agency on woman in this scenario. The more important point here, however, is the vacillation in Moore’s position, for it shows that Moore is not simply objectifying women in the manner often attributed to the speaker in Rossetti’s “Jenny.” Seeing Moore’s use of this trope in his autobiographical works helps illuminate the ambiguity in the preface in which Esther appears as an apparition (how Esther can be both book and person is more evident) and puts into clearer perspective the steps Moore took to canonize *Esther Waters* (by using such a trope in his revisions). My argument is that we must see the attempted canonization of *Esther Waters* as one in which financial matters (as seen in Moore’s comments about his own standard of living and such), artistic concerns (as seen in the discussions of the importance of a book’s appearance), and the interweaving of femininity and masculinity (for example, the centrality of the woman-centered novel in the masculinist tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) are all significant factors. To view the canonization of *Esther Waters* through only one of these factors is to ignore the complexity of the process of canonization, and the link between classic-status and commodity-status.

VI.

But was Moore unusual, given his position in the late-Victorian period? Or is his case typical of the period? On the one hand, Moore was like his male contemporaries in
that they were all working under similar conditions. They all needed the woman-centered novel to achieve success in the 1890s for three reasons: their awareness of the tradition of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century male authorship in which they were working and the reliance of that tradition on the woman-centered novel; the fact that the market had changed dramatically by the end of the nineteenth century, with women writers receiving as much if not more attention than male writers; and, finally, the fact that they were entering a period of transition in which narrative technique was evolving from high realism, in which supposedly objective depiction of mostly external features was most appropriate, to modernist technique, in which individual, subjective experience was privileged over depiction of external features.

On the other hand, Moore’s position is unusual next to the positions of his contemporaries, since, going into the 1890s, he occupied a position of only moderate literary and commercial success. Hardy and Meredith, coming from an older generation and having come into their careers in the mid-Victorian period rather than the late-Victorian period, seem to have been able to establish themselves under slightly less hostile conditions than Moore did, though Hardy especially perceived himself as one who had suffered because of the demands of the marketplace. Still, Hardy’s popularity, well-established before the 1890s, is what allowed him to withdraw from the novel market and turn to poetry instead. Moore has more in common with Gissing, who, as the youngest of this group of authors, was least confident about his social standing, was most wedded to his own principles about realism, and had the most difficult time establishing himself in the late-Victorian period. Like Moore, Gissing needed the woman-centered novel to succeed in the 1890s marketplace, and while Gissing attempted to develop this genre with novels such as *The Odd Women* and *Jubilee*, he did not find the same commercial success Moore did.

Moore’s position in the 1890s marketplace was also unique in that he needed the woman-centered novel to ensure his success because it was what would stabilize his reputation. Unlike Hardy, Meredith, and Gissing, who were perceived as writing in fairly consistent modes, Moore had been extremely experimental in his early days and would continue to be after the publication of *Esther Waters*, and that earned him the reputation
of one who could not write in a consistent mode. Since consistent writing was an important requirement for a place in the canon, Moore needed to compensate for this inconsistency, and rewriting his career so that he would be remembered for the mode of Esther Waters became the solution to Moore’s problem. From Moore’s perspective, his inconsistency in terms of literary modes would not matter much if people remembered him primarily for the mode seen in Esther Waters, and if people continued to read Esther Waters beyond his lifetime. For Moore, it was reaching the summit of Parnassus that mattered most, and, because of his reputation as an inconsistent stylist, only the woman-centered novel could take him there. Still, Moore’s current status as a writer on the margins of the canon indicates that his strategy of writing himself into the canon has had its limitations; it was successful as long as early-twentieth-century conceptions of the canon remained intact. As the canon has been refigured under different criteria in the late-twentieth-century, the man who thought he had ensured his own reputation beyond his lifetime is once again on unstable ground.
The argument of this dissertation has been that Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore, faced with negotiating the 1890s literary market, seriously engaged the liberal-feminist literary aesthetic of the time, and they both adopted and informed this aesthetic to varying degrees. The implications of this argument are at least three-fold. This afterword examines these implications, showing how the argument I have been making requires us to rethink our ideas about late-nineteenth-century realism, especially the transition from mid-century realism to early-twentieth-century modernism; our ideas about male authorship, especially how such authorship required negotiation with feminist form as well as feminist content; and our current assumptions about subjectivity and agency, especially the issues involved when looking at these concepts from multiple critical perspectives: narrative theory, feminism, and post-structuralism, each of which locates authority in a different area of the reader-author-text-context relationship.

I.

As mentioned in my introduction, even recent studies of nineteenth-century British realism continue to define realism as a highly detailed, external description of a broadly conceived nineteenth-century society, a view of human experience that often ignored the experiences of women in that particular culture. But as the variations on realism grew in the latter part of the century, this definition of realism was not the only one at work. British authors encountered other versions of realism, such as French naturalism and Jamesian psychological realism, and, as part of their encounters with these variations, they developed their own form, the “new realism.” The new realists, as I have shown in my introduction and my chapter on Hardy, were not identical to the
French naturalists, since they placed less emphasis on a scientific approach to representation and more direct emphasis on “the relations of the sexes” as a way to capture the reality of human experience. Nor were they disciples of Henry James; while they shared his frustration over the difficulty of writing about sexuality for Victorian audiences, they did not focus as intently on representing the interior thoughts of characters as James did.

Out of these negotiations with late-century variations on realism, then, the male authors I have discussed in this dissertation forged their own literary modes as the century came to a close. Still, developing the new realism did not mean that male authors were free from further negotiations with competing forms of realism. As Jane Elridge Miller, in Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel (1997), explains, the 1890s market featured tension between the generally male-dominated new realism and the generally female-dominated New Woman novelists (though, of course, there were members of both sexes in each group), and, as this dissertation has shown, feminist periodicals such as Shafts and The Woman’s Herald consistently reviewed novels by authors in both groups. As Miller points out, the new realists had a complex relationship with the New Woman novelists. While they tried to distance their work from the “romantic” and “feminine” qualities of the mid-Victorian novel, they did have an interest in retaining a feminine audience. Miller cites Moore as one who especially thought women and girls should be reading the new realists, precisely because their work avoided romanticized ideas about love (11-12). Miller further explains how the new realist and feminist definitions became intertwined in the 1890s, through the appropriation of the new realism by New Woman novelists. Just as the new realists were influenced by the feminist content of the New Woman novelists, the New Woman novelists adopted the new realists’ formal conventions (14, 17). Perhaps most importantly, the two groups already had similar interests, primarily the realistic portrayal of human life through frank discussion of sexuality (15-16).

It is, in fact, striking that works by the new realist male authors and those by New Woman women writers share as many similarities as they do differences when it comes to the use of particular narrative strategies to represent woman’s agency, and
these similarities help clarify the degree to which male and female authors of the 1890s both contributed to the transition from mid-nineteenth-century realism to early-twentieth-century modernism. Some critics, such as Sally Ledger in The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle (1997), want to emphasize the differences between male and female authors, in order to make the point that women writers could more readily depict “woman’s experience” than male authors could. In the last chapter of her book, Ledger explores the idea of a subtle transition from realism to modernism, one that hinges on the use of proto-modernist narrative strategies by women writers of the 1890s to bridge Victorian realism and twentieth-century modernism. Explaining that modernism has been revived as a form of “women’s writing” by late-twentieth-century feminist critics, especially the French feminist critics (180), Ledger argues that the proto-modernist narrative technique of some late-Victorian women writers shows the degree to which realism and modernism are linked.

Ledger focuses on the work of George Egerton, whose short stories put special emphasis on the interior thoughts of women, using a technique that anticipates modernist stream-of-consciousness. Contrasting Egerton’s “Wedlock,” in which a mother kills her three stepchildren after her husband refuses to allow her biological child to live with the family, with Hardy’s Jude, Ledger argues that the proto-modernist technique employed by Egerton allows her to represent the experiences of women, especially the “enigma” of the “modern woman” (187, 190) in ways that Hardy and other new realists could not do, precisely because they were using worn-out, conventional narrative techniques. In drawing attention to Egerton’s technique, Ledger lays out well a gradual transition from realism to modernism. Unfortunately, she mistakenly concludes that modernist narrative technique is somehow more feminist than late-Victorian realist technique and, in doing so, undermines her argument for a gradual shift from realism to modernism. While Ledger acknowledges that Egerton’s work might be better classified “feminine” than “feminist” (192), and while she also recognizes that realist women writers of the 1890s did produce feminist writing without employing proto-modernist techniques (194), in the end, her suggestion that literature has the potential to become fully feminist only in the modernist period pushes aside the
achievements of the realist work of the 1890s, by both women and men.

In fact, there are many women writers of the 1890s whose novels do not emphasize woman’s consciousness to the extreme that Egerton’s work does, and, yet, these women writers successfully represent woman’s agency, in part because they understand that consciousness alone does not necessarily result in social change. For example, Sarah Grand’s The Heavenly Twins does not emphasize consciousness to the extreme that Egerton’s work does but instead focuses on the three narrative strategies valued by liberal feminists and found in the works of the new realist male authors. While Grand perhaps does put somewhat more emphasis on female characters’ increased consciousness than does Hardy in Tess or Jude, simply because there are more central female characters in the novel than there are central male characters, her use of the internal perspectives of female protagonists is not more prominent than Moore’s use of it in Esther Waters. Yet, as I have shown in my introduction, Grand succeeds in representing woman’s agency to its fullest extent, particularly through the character of Angelica, one of the three important female characters in the novel.

Angelica’s crossdressing, which I already have mentioned as an expression of agency, should be discussed in more detail here. Dressed as her twin brother Diavolo, Angelica meets the Tenor on the street one evening and begins a friendship that ends only after she falls into a river, loses her disguise, and inadvertently discloses that she is a woman (446). Telling the Tenor of her decision to dress as a man, Angelica reveals that she dressed up for her own reasons, long before she met him. Initially, she simply wanted to see the marketplace at night, something she could not do as a woman, but then the disguise became an addiction for Angelica. “[H]aving once assumed the character,” she says to the Tenor, “I began to love it; it came naturally; and the freedom from restraint, I mean the restraint of our tight uncomfortable clothing, was delicious. I tell you I was a genuine boy. I moved like a boy, I felt like a boy; I was my own brother in very truth” (456). That we learn Angelica’s thoughts about the crossdressing only after she has revealed her identity to the Tenor and through her own speech indicates Grand’s use of new realist narrative strategies rather than proto-modernist ones, since a proto-modernist would more likely show Angelica’s thoughts first and then show the resulting
action. Further, that Angelica’s resistance to cultural norms that support the subordination of women happens primarily through action, and one that indicates loyalty to equality rather than difference, shows the degree to which Grand was working within the realist tradition.

While Grand’s representation of woman’s agency through Angelica is remarkable, it must be acknowledged that, in some ways, the ending of the novel disappoints, and this disappointment shows the limits of the realist approach to representing woman’s agency. Unlike Angelica, who successfully resists cultural norms that support the subordination of women, the story of one of the other female protagonists, Evadne, is less successful. Evadne begins as a woman strong in her own beliefs and abilities, but, by the end of the novel, she hardly believes that her own life is worth living. In fact, Evadne’s consciousness seems to decrease as the novel progresses, and, by the end of the story, it is only the efforts of Dr. Galbraith (who marries Evadne after the death of her more traditional first husband) that keep Evadne from committing suicide. Still, as this dissertation shows, the liberal-feminist aesthetic does not insist on only positive representations of woman’s agency; if a novel presents the difficult conditions that keep women from asserting agency, the story might be seen as successful for precisely this quality. However, if this is Grand’s intention, she might have presented the entirety of Evadne’s story through her internal perspective, or even stream-of-consciousness technique as a more proto-modernist writer might, rather than through Galbraith’s perspective, whose professional narrative about Evadne as a psychological subject makes up the last sixth of the novel. In addition to adopting something other than the proto-modernist narrative strategies seen in Egerton’s work, Grand chooses to discuss modern psychology in a traditionally realist manner, making Dr. Galbraith a representative of this institution rather than incorporating psychology directly into the form of the novel. In other words, Grand chooses psychological content over psychological form in her portrayal of Evadne’s depression, and this choice has a strong impact on the effect of the narrative on readers.

Like The Heavenly Twins, Mona Caird’s The Daughters of Danaus stops short of the psychological realism seen in works by women writers such as George Egerton and,
instead, retains a balance of narrative strategies. In particular, in this novel, philosophical dialogue about the specifics of the women’s rights movement plays as important a role in the female protagonist’s resistance to cultural norms that support the subordination of women as does her increased consciousness or her physical actions. Hadria Fullerton, whose story centers on her disastrous marriage to Hubert Temperley and her decision to leave him for the freedom of Parisian life, certainly has increased consciousness, since she spends much of her time debating women’s rights issues with her friends, but this consciousness is expressed primarily through dialogue rather than internal perspective. For example, it is Hadria’s discussions with Valeria du Prel, the writer whom Hadria admires immensely, that lead Hadria to consider a mode of living other than one in which her primary role is serving her parents (67-72). Though this initially causes Hadria to accept Temperley’s proposal of marriage, later, Hadria makes the more radical decision to leave for Paris and live freely.

Nevertheless, while dialogue is privileged over other narrative strategies in this novel, Caird balances it well with at least some attention to Hadria’s internal perspective, especially once her marriage turns for the worst. For instance, Caird uses internal perspective when Hadria arrives in Paris and finds herself enjoying her freedom, albeit with some struggle to reconcile this new freedom with her past mode of living.

Having been, from childhood, more or less at issue with her surroundings, Hadria had never fully realized their power upon her personality. But now daily a fresh recognition of her continued imprisonment, baffled her attempt to look at things with clear eyes. She struggled to get round and beyond that past-fashioned self. . . . It was sweet to stretch one’s cramped wings to the sun, to ruffle and spread them, as a released bird will, but it was startling to find already little stiff habits arisen . . . that made flight in the high air not quite effortless and serene. (307)

Further, Caird uses internal perspective when Hadria makes one of the most important decisions in her life, to adopt a baby girl, but, here, Caird combines internal perspective with description of action in a particularly effective way. While she shows readers Hadria’s thoughts about adopting the child (187), she does not reveal these thoughts in
a way that the other characters in the story know what Hadria is thinking. Rather than present her decision through one of the many philosophical dialogues Hadria participates in, Caird simply describes Hadria’s decision and the reactions of others. “It would have puzzled the keenest observer to detect the unorthodox nature of Mrs. Temperley’s reflections, as she leant over the child, and made enquiries as to its health and temperament. . . . About a week later, Craddock Dene was amazed by the news that Mrs. Temperley had taken the child of Ellen Jervis under her protection” (187-88).

Finally, in Henrietta Stannard’s *A Blameless Woman*, a lesser known realist work but one that is equally important given Stannard’s role in authorship issues of the 1890s, the internal perspective of the female protagonist Margaret North is emphasized, but so are her speech and her actions. Although many of Stannard’s earlier stories focus on the military, in which the internal perspectives of female characters are not dominant, here Stannard has approached new subject matter in a different way. While not embracing the psychological realism associated with writers such as Egerton, Stannard does put more emphasis on the increased consciousness of female characters; when Margaret learns that the man she thought she married and has lived with for two years staged the ceremony and is actually married to another woman, her thoughts on her own “fallen” status are expressed through internal perspective. In fact, any resistance on Margaret’s part at this point must be expressed through internal perspective, since her “husband” is in Berlin while she has returned to England to cope with her situation. Still, resistance through internal perspective changes to resistance through dialogue once a former suitor, Captain Stewart, begins courting Margaret once again. Rebuffing Stewart’s advances for fear that she will have to reveal her fallen status, Margaret says to him, “[A]ll the cajoling in the world won’t get me to walk from one end of [the promenade] to the other this morning, thank you. I am a complacent woman, I know, but I am not always to be controlled by other people” (86). When Stewart presses Margaret to marry him, she responds by saying that she is “not a marrying girl” and “shall never marry” (93).

Margaret’s resistance to cultural norms that would label her “fallen,” should she reveal her secret, finally turn to action when her own adopted daughter, Effie, figures out Margaret’s secret and threatens to reveal it. Margaret first considers sending Effie out of
the house in order to protect her secret (207), but recognizing that controlled action is better than “hysteric” (219), Margaret allows Effie to stay, even after her former lover comes to London with a friend and his presence threatens to expose Margaret’s secret. Though Margaret’s secret is ultimately told by Effie, and Margaret and Stewart go through a bitter divorce trial in which Margaret is blamed for the failure of the marriage, at the end of the novel, Margaret is praised for her struggle to resist cultural norms that support the subordination of women. Says Laura Escourt, the one person who stands by Margaret through the trial, “When I think of that dear saint . . . and compare her with that brainless thing at Claverhouse [Stewart’s new wife], it makes me ill. . . . Margaret’s whole life was a protest against what the two men who loved her forced her against her will into being” (315).

Like Grand and Caird, Stannard does not embrace proto-modernist technique to represent woman’s agency, and, yet, she succeeds in representing it well through realist narrative strategies. While critics such as Ledger may fault late-Victorian realist fiction for not being “modernist enough,” to view realism at the fin de siècle as such is to miss the complexities of the transition from mid-century realism to modernism. It is easy, especially in a time when the self-determined subject is no longer assumed the norm by literary criticism, to take such a position, but as George Levine points out in The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterly (1981), our thinking about the function of realism tends to be extremely narrow. Rather than seeing realism as an effort to avoid the indeterminacy of human experience (and, hence, a form of literature antithetical to modernism), Levine argues that realists of the nineteenth-century actively engaged the issue of indeterminacy by struggling to reconcile “the monstrous” with the more balanced, “civilized” lives they thought they should be living. Writes Levine, “We need to shift the balance in our appraisal of realism. It was not a solidly self-satisfied vision based in a misguided objectivity and faith in representation, but a highly self-conscious attempt to explore or create a new reality. . . . In the integrity of its explorations, realism increasingly imagined the limits of its power to reform, the monstrous possibility of the unnameable, the likelihood that the monstrous lurked in its very desire to see and to make the world good” (19-20, 22).
As Levine shows in his analysis of texts by Mary Shelley, Austen, Thackeray, Trollope, Hardy, and others, the goal of realist representation of human experience often is to control and suppress the monstrous, but realism also inevitably reveals its own limitations. While the degree to which different authors embrace “the monstrous” varies, and while the way in which the monstrous is defined across the course of the century changes, realists consistently express an awareness of the limitations of their chosen genre. Levine’s analysis is useful, I believe, in understanding the type of realism practiced by a number of male and female novelists in the 1890s. Although Levine does not discuss the new realists specifically, focusing instead only on Hardy and his work as a reversal of traditional realist conventions, it seems to me that, for the new realists, the monstrous is embodied in the relations of the sexes, since it certainly was perceived as such by more traditional Victorian society. The “truth” about the relations of the sexes—that they cannot be adequately represented by the conventional “happy marriage” plot—shows the limits of how human experience was represented earlier in the century. In engaging the relations of the sexes, even through the realist tradition, male and female novelists of the 1890s highlight “the monstrous” and make it central to the representation of human experience. It is, then, the very act of working within the mainstream tradition, and transforming it into something new, that makes the new realists’ and their female counterparts’ efforts so effective.

By adopting Levine’s more open view of realism, we can see that the type of realism practiced by many male and female authors of the 1890s should be seen as a necessary stepping stone between its mid-century predecessor and modernism, as important to this transition as the so-called proto-modernism of writers such as Egerton. Further, by acknowledging the multiple variations of nineteenth-century realism as this dissertation has done, we can see that feminist definitions were as much a part of the realist tradition as other variations were.

II.

In addition to helping us reassess our ideas about late-nineteenth-century realism and its place in literary history, this dissertation encourages us to reconsider Victorian
masculinity, especially as it pertains to male authorship of the last decade of the century. As is evident in the individual chapters on Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore, each author negotiated the 1890s literary market in different ways, showing that these authors were neither overtly feminist nor necessarily anti-feminist, as previous studies of these authors have argued. Still, it is clear that these late-Victorian authors were generally more feminist than their mid-century predecessors, such as Dickens and Trollope. For Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore, women’s perspectives were central to their definitions of realism in a way they were not for Dickens and Trollope, whose definitions of realism were more focused on a traditional view of morality, in which those who exhibit traditional Victorian values were rewarded for their virtue. In an attempt to illustrate the role of morality in human life, Dickens and Trollope both present a wide range of characters, against which readers are meant to assess their own values.

While Dickens and Trollope did not see women’s perspectives as central to their definitions of realism, they certainly represented women in their novels, albeit not in the same way the late Victorians do, and these representations illustrate well the differences between realism of the mid-century and that of the late-century. In Dickens, we generally find a lack of development of female characters; they come and go like so many of Dickens’s male characters, but they differ from these male characters in that they rarely occupy the prominent positions some male characters--Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, Pip Pirrip, and David Copperfield--do. This lack of development is perhaps most evident in David Copperfield, where the overwhelming emphasis on David’s perspective results in a lack of attention to the perspectives of female characters, and where those perspectives, when present, are filtered through David’s own view of the world. As critics such as Audrey Jaffe, John O. Jordon, Mary Poovey, and Amanda Anderson have pointed out, the relationships between David and other characters in the novel show how David’s anxiety about his own identity controls the narrative. Perhaps most relevant to understanding the role David’s anxiety plays in how women are represented is Anderson’s reading. She argues that it is precisely through controlling the narratives of a specific group of characters--the fallen women Little Em’ly, Martha Endell, and Annie
Strong—that David is able to build and preserve his own identity; “David achieves a consolidation and recovery of self,” Anderson writes, “largely by defining himself against (but also more self-consciously through) versions of fallenness” (94).

While *David Copperfield* illustrates the extremity of Dickens’s lack of representation of woman’s agency, the obvious exception to this general rule is Esther Summerson, in *Bleak House*, whose first-person narrative might be seen as a site for successful representation of woman’s agency. Unfortunately, Esther’s narrative upholds the submissive Victorian woman rather than the type of woman most prominent in late-century representations, the woman who resists cultural norms that support her subordination. While Judith Wilt argues that Dickens, by writing in the feminine voice, “found himself committed to the wider anxieties of the Self-Other relationship, which are the female’s lot in the world” and is “shown . . . a new horizon” by Esther through her refusal to “close in on judgment” (57-58), one cannot ignore that Dickens’s portrayal of the Other in Esther shows little evidence of resistance to the traditional Victorian housewife type. Over and over, Esther maintains that the story she tells is not the “narrative of her life” but one in which she provides the support and trust needed by a range of other characters. Even at the end of her narrative, Esther remains focused on those she supports rather than herself. When her husband asks whether she knows that she is “prettier than you ever were,” Esther responds by thinking, “I did not know that; I am not certain that I know it now. But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen; and that they can very well do without much beauty in me—even supposing—” (770).

This tendency to focus on beauty only through those she supports is acknowledged even by Wilt in her more positive reading of Esther, for Wilt writes of Esther’s “imperfect yes” at the end of the novel but sees it as movement toward something positive rather than evidence of Dickens’s tendency to uphold the status quo. Alex Zwerdling, in “Esther Summerson Rehabilitated,” however, sees more clearly the connection between realism and representation of woman’s agency that I have established in this dissertation. Though Zwerdling argues that Esther illustrates the
complexity of Dickens’s view of the self, he also believes that Esther is in no way a liberated woman. The restoration of her beauty and her marriage to Allan Woodcourt are, to Zwerdling, “sheer fantasy” (53), evidence that Dickens’s “detailed realistic observation stops short at the borders of despair” (55). Furthermore, Zwerdling points out that Dickens’s need to uphold the image of the perfect Victorian woman is so strong that the “inner history” of Lady Dedlock must remain untold (44), something one would find more readily in the work of late-Victorian realists.

Like Dickens, Trollope confines himself to only a few major female characters, in part because he, too, aims at presenting as many characters as possible in each novel in order to capture the “truth” of human experience. However, *The Eustace Diamonds*, with its emphasis on the story of Lizzie Eustace and her “stolen” diamonds, provides an opportunity for exploring Trollope’s representation of woman’s agency. Certainly, it is arguable that Lizzie Eustace, with her strong opinions and ability to manipulate others, asserts agency. However, she does not assert agency according to the liberal-feminist ideal of the 1890s, though Trollope provides interesting commentary on the issue of feminism in the novel. Before looking at this commentary, we should turn to the more general narrative practices of the novel and analyze them in relation to the balance of narrative strategies seen in the novels of the late Victorians discussed in this dissertation. In *The Eustace Diamonds*, we see Trollope using significantly more intrusive narratorial comment on the “heroine” of the story. That is, while the late Victorians tend to be fairly subtle and sparse with commentary directed at the reader, Trollope tends to address the reader often and without subtlety.

As early as the first page of the novel, the narrator tells us, “We will tell the story of Lizzie Greystock from the beginning, but we will not dwell over it at great length, as we might do if we loved her” (1:1), and, having skimmed over her early years and told of her marriage to Sir Florian Eustace, who dies less than a year after marrying her, tells us quite clearly that we are not to trust Lizzie. Remarking on Lizzie’s attempt to convince Eustace to pay for childhood jewels she had taken out of hock before the wedding, the narrator states, “She gave a false account of the transaction, and the lie was detected. I do not know that she cared very much. As she was utterly devoid of
true tenderness, so also was she devoid of conscience. . . . Before the end of the spring he was dead. She had so far played her game well, and had won her stakes” (1:9).

Given this introduction to Lizzie, readers are unlikely to engage her as a sympathetic character, and the generally conservative and moralistic narrator ensures that this will not be the case. Having focused on Lizzie for the first two chapters of the novel, the narrator opens Chapter 3 by promising readers that “that opulent and artistocratic Becky Sharp” will not “assume the dignity of the heroine in the forthcoming pages” (1:19). In fact, this novel is different from Thackeray’s well-known *Vanity Fair* in that it will not permit “dangerous” women such as Becky and Lizzie to become the center of attention. Though the narrator ultimately changes his mind about this—on page 359 of the second volume of the novel, he claims that Lizzie “has been our heroine, and we must see her through her immediate troubles before we can leave her”--his early insistence that Lizzie is not worthy of heroine status suggests that we are not meant to sympathize with her or look at her assertions of agency as admirable.

The bias set up by the narrator does find an oppositional voice, in the character of Lady Glencora, a powerful Liberal socialite who defends Lizzie after the second robbery of her jewels (and tries to defend her after the first robbery but must retract her support when the rumor-mill suggests that Lizzie herself participated in the robbery). While Lady Glencora sticks to her defense even after Lizzie confesses to lying about the diamonds and calls her a “God-send” at the end of the novel, when everyone issues their opinions about the “heroine,” the narrator clearly does not advocate that this position be taken by readers. Instead, he suggests that they should take the position of the Duke of Omnium, who observes that Lizzie has a difficult time ahead of her, now that she has confessed to lying. This observation, while not a direct condemnation of Lizzie, implies that Lizzie has been fairly punished for her sin, since her difficult time is the result of her decision to marry Joseph Emilius, whom Lizzie has married for his money. The narrator’s concluding remark, “In this opinion of the Duke of Omnium’s, readers of this story will perhaps agree” (2:375), iterates his own position on the matter, which he expresses earlier in the story, when Lizzie appears in court and faces tough questions (2:320). Even if we do decide to read against the narrator and see some of
Lizzie’s actions—the withholding of information that makes Lady Glencora declare her a “God-send” or her performance for Camperdown that makes John Eustace declare that she, “if the sex could have its rights, would make an excellent lawyer” (2:302)—as strong assertions of agency, we must acknowledge that, ultimately, Lizzie’s view of woman’s power is a conservative one. She believes that women assert power through money and their husbands (2:363), and this view is one that benefits primarily herself, rather than benefitting womankind, the perspective encouraged by liberal feminists of the 1890s. Lizzie has consciousness, no doubt, but she does not possess the increased consciousness needed to fulfill the liberal-feminist ideal.

Compared to the realistic approach of mid-century male authors such as Dickens and Trollope, the approach of the late-Victorian male authors discussed in this dissertation is more clearly focused on exposing an aspect of human experience not often discussed in earlier realist works. While actual sex is glossed over—Moore inserts ellipses at the moment Esther and William engage in sexual relations in *Esther Waters* and Alec d’Urbervilles’s seduction of Tess takes place in the hazy fog of the forest—sexual relations are addressed in a more direct manner than in earlier works, and this focus on sexual relations marks a new approach to what constitutes human experience. Though writers such as Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore were often ambivalent about how sex and gender might shape cultural conditions—a point on which liberal feminists of the 1890s had little ambivalence—they did succeed in drawing attention to the issues involved, even if they did not always take an overt political stance. Their perceptions of authorship, then, were significantly different. While they shared with their mid-century predecessors the understanding that authors had to negotiate their positions as presenters of the human experience, in which issues of morality and ethics inevitably came into play, their ideas about what moral or ethical position was most appropriate differed. Writers such as Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore understood the important issues of their time, including the increased attention to women’s rights, and they knew that they had to incorporate this issue into their fiction. While they often claimed an aestheticist stance, making it appear as though they had little investment in women’s rights, their willingness to represent women through types that reflected their
times rather than through types employed by their mid-century predecessors shows that they were not anti-feminist, even if they did not achieve that level of feminism hoped for by some feminists of the day.

Despite the differences between mid- and late-century definitions of realism, then, Trollope’s and Dickens’s definitions do share with the late-century definitions a commitment to some type of morality or ethics. As Levine puts it, Trollope’s view of the artist is that his or her “major responsibility is not to an ideal of art but to life itself” (189), and feminists of the 1890s seem to share this perspective. But the definition of realism espoused by Trollope is altogether more conservative—amounting to the idea that the virtuous are always rewarded and the vicious always punished. This idea of a “moral realism” is articulated in detail in Trollope’s well-known autobiography: for example, when Trollope writes of the composition process of *The Warden*, in which he produced a “life-like” archdeacon not by directly observing and talking to one but by his own “moral consciousness,” i.e. expressing what he thought an archdeacon “should be” (93). In Dickens’s and Trollope’s novels, there are positive alternatives—in *The Eustace Diamonds*, the positive alternative to Lizzie’s corrupt marriage to Mr. Emilius is Lucy’s and Frank’s marriage for “true love”—but these alternatives are far from those craved by liberal feminists: the “equal partnership” modelled by J. S. Mill in his 1851 marriage letter, “Statement Repudiating the Rights of Husbands,” increasingly sought by women as the century progressed, and more clearly articulated in the works of the new realists of the 1890s. Further, what mid- and late-century definitions of realism have in common is that they are highly subjective, showing that defining realism was itself an act of changing literary history and ideas about the essence of human experience.

George Levine’s *The Realistic Imagination* is again useful for understanding the complexity of realism over the course of the nineteenth century. Not only does he claim that his study is about the “elusiveness” of the term, but he also makes it clear that later variations of realism rely on the earlier forms to break down the term itself (7). When the new realists began articulating a definition of realism distinctly different from that of their mid-century predecessors, they enabled the work of politically active women intent on developing a correspondence between literary form and cultural conditions. It is by
working within the system—changing the way we look at human experience by transforming what constitutes realism—that late-Victorian realism became a step away from mid-century realism and a step toward twentieth-century modernism. Further, by engaging the feminist perspective on realism, male authors of the 1890s changed the expectations for authorship at the fin de siècle. While it was certainly possible to write novels that did not address the Woman Question, and while it was possible to hold the view that female authors did not have a place in the field of professional authorship of the period, it did become more difficult to uphold the status quo without scrutiny from female authors and the general public.

III.

Having supplemented historicist work on male authorship and realism in the 1890s, this dissertation also helps us better understand the stakes of at least two other forms of literary criticism: narrative theory, especially contemporary narratology, and feminist theory. While these two schools of criticism are increasingly combined, and both share a willingness to acknowledge the role of authorial intention in creating representations of women, their different emphases—narrative theory’s attention to locating authority within the text, and feminist theory’s tendency to grant authority to the reader—require some negotiation, especially concerning the representation of agency in literary texts. I believe that narrative theory is improved by the influence of feminist theory, since feminist theory can clarify the limits of narratology as it is currently practiced by some in the field. With its tendency to locate authority in the text and to privilege discussion of focalization, contemporary narratology often locates authority in narratorial discourse. This dissertation has shown that narratorial discourse alone cannot capture representation of woman’s agency, and that woman’s agency is best understood by examining both sides of the story/discourse distinction. By acknowledging multiple narrative strategies as markers of agency, this dissertation offers new directions for narrative theory, especially the advantages of crossing the discourse/story boundary. Further, by recognizing authority and agency in the combination of consciousness, speech, and action, this dissertation indicates the ways in
which fictional representations correspond or do not correspond to real-life situations and suggests that authority in literary interpretation should be more fully balanced between the text and the reader."

Ultimately, our understanding of a multifaceted definition of agency should remain situated in a fully feminist context, especially the liberal-feminist view that the relationship among the three aspects of agency is often (though not always) causal: speaking and acting out follows from increased consciousness. Given this assumption of feminist theory, it is no surprise that there exists the “readerly wish” among feminist readers of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that internal perspective be the key narrative strategy for feminist novels. Though it is arguable that increased internal perspective does not ensure more assertive women in stories that contain such a strategy, the readerly wish for such a correspondence is grounded in real-life examples: the effect of higher education on women’s political, economic, and social power in the twentieth century; the influence of second-wave feminism’s “consciousness raising” on changes in women’s health care in the United States in the late-twentieth century; and the role of formal and informal education in the recently documented phenomenon of lower birth rates in non-Western countries, such as India, Brazil, and Bangladesh, where information sharing about birth control has prompted population experts to reassess projected population figures for the twenty-second century.

The importance of increased consciousness to feminist theory can be better understood by a broader discussion of the implications of this project for poststructuralist theory about agency and subjectivity. This is perhaps the most important work done by this project, since current discussions of agency will have a significant impact on the ways in which we view future representations of women in literary texts, as well as the relationship between these representations and the cultural status of real-life women. Amanda Anderson’s Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Culture (1993) offers an extensive discussion of representations of woman’s agency in mid-Victorian texts, via the fallen woman, and her study also offers useful commentary on poststructuralist discussions of agency. By tracing the various perspectives discussed by Anderson, beginning with her own, we can
see the contribution this dissertation makes to such discussions: mainly, that we must continue to historicize our ideas about agency or risk ignoring important aspects of the concept, especially the workings of the mind in relation to the voice and the body.

Anderson, having presented her argument that representations of fallen women in Victorian literature are markers of the Victorian middle-class’s need for models of selfhood that place too much emphasis on self-determination, turns, in her afterword, to a discussion of poststructuralist theory in order to contextualize the Victorian perspective on selfhood. While Anderson finds poststructuralist critiques of the self-determined subject to be useful (201-02), she believes that such criticism “can itself end up reifying subjectivity in its more extreme constructionist formulations” (203), and she clearly differentiates her own perspective on subjectivity from other poststructuralist approaches, such as the linguistic indeterminancy model and the psychoanalytical model, both of which assume a disruptive potential within systems that guarantees resistance by the subject; the “double gesture” model, such as that employed by Gayatri Spivak through the term “strategic essentialism”; and constructionist political approaches, such as Judith Butler’s model (205-06). As people working in fields with an interest in “lived experience” or autobiography have shown, argues Anderson, the need for models of selfhood that acknowledge both social construction and the subject’s participation in such constructions is great. Writes Anderson, “[W]e need to elaborate conceptions of subjectivity and social interaction that remain constant with the normative principles that guide practices of interrogation and transformation” (203).

Anderson’s alternative, a revised version of Habermas’s theory of communicative action, offers yet another way to begin reconciling the constructed aspects of subjectivity and the space in which the subject takes part in this construction, since, in this model, the subject (which, in fiction, would be the characters in the story, especially the female protagonist) participates in social constructions of the self by way of “mutual understanding,” an element already present in language. Just as systems of domination work to “undermine, distort, or even foreclose” the opportunity for dialogue, according to Anderson, language also contains the potential for dialogue that creates change through “recognition and respect” (207). In offering this alternative, Anderson gives us a
way to continue to discuss agency, but like Butler’s model, her approach relies heavily on only one possible site for expressing agency: language. Still, Anderson’s model does offer somewhat more recognition of the relationship between language and thought, since Habermas’s theory of communicative action focuses on “mutual understanding,” a concept that extends beyond the realm of language to that of thought. In fact, Anderson claims,

Habermas’s account of the relationship of reciprocity and recognition that are presupposed in any action oriented toward reaching understanding disallows the radical rupture between ethics and epistemology. . . [His] discourse ethics insists that the higher level of argumentation required in any self-reflexive democratic process is an extension of the more primary mode of action that is oriented toward reaching understanding. (222)

In other words, direct resistance through language extends into realms of more indirect resistance, such as the realm of thought. For Habermas, and Anderson, the “speech act” alone cannot suffice; it is the “ideal speech act” (Habermas’s term) one needs.

Nevertheless, though Anderson does important work in her revision of Habermas’s model, to include more concrete forms of ethics within Habermas’s overly abstract model (225), Anderson’s revision still does not address as fully as it might how the relationships among thought, speech, and action play out in specific examples. For this, we should turn to work on the materiality of the body, which continually reminds us of the connection between mind, voice, and body and can provide specific examples of the workings of thought, speech, and action. Daniel Punday, in “Narrative Order and Representing the Body in The Talking Room” (1998), summarizes well the shortcomings of poststructuralist theory from a materialist point of view, especially its tendency to exclude discussion of the body in favor of discussion of language and representation, or to cast the body as necessarily resistant to--and even to be “conquered” by--language and representation. Punday argues that the body/language duality should be dismantled, both by those working primarily on the language side of the binary and by those working on the body side of the binary (33). Once this occurs, one can see the body as a space that shapes possible actions within narratives (35), and also as a site
for subjectivity, since the body is the space from which “an animate voice” arises (39).

Still, Punday ultimately analyzes the role of the body along the same lines that poststructuralists such as Butler, concerned primarily with language and representation, analyze the role of the spoken word in subjectivity: as shaped by citational power, in which the layers of words (or relationships between bodies, in Punday’s analysis) determine the individual’s current words (or actions). Nevertheless, like Butler’s analysis, which focuses on one method of asserting agency but gestures at the relationship between different methods, Punday’s analysis cannot discuss one method without reference to others. On the margins of his analysis of action lurks the third method of asserting agency—consciousness. Writing of Marianne Hauser’s representations of the body in The Talking Room (1976), Punday states, “Explaining how the body functions as a kind of space means understanding the importance of hearing and voice in The Talking Room. Voices are evidence of the subjectivity of others, but Hauser describes these voices through how they echo within other kinds of space. The result is an understanding of mind and body that emphasizes an individual’s place within the exterior world, within a network of spaces that define one’s narrative ‘situation’ in a particularly complex and rich way” (39-40). Punday’s acknowledgment that there is, through voice, a relationship between mind and body is significant, since it suggests that one can still talk about “consciousness” within a poststructuralist approach to agency.

Later in his article, Punday again gestures at the role consciousness plays in expression of agency, when he writes of the theme of public and private spaces in Hauser’s novel and, in doing so, provides the specific examples Anderson does not. Telling of the way Hauser contrasts the two female characters in the novel, “V,” who loves the domestic sphere, and “J,” who prefers to live her life in primarily public spaces (44), Punday indicates that each character chooses her way of life, even if these choices are shaped by cultural forces (45). Punday’s gestures to the role consciousness plays in expressions of agency show that, although many poststructuralists think that consciousness is no longer a relevant aspect of discussions about subjectivity, such theory cannot fully expunge consciousness from such discussion. Poststructuralist theory
has not yet figured out how to discuss “what happens in the mind” (if “consciousness” is a term too laden with the theory of self-determination) in relation to speech and action, but it is clear that we must figure out how to analyze the relationships among mind, voice, and body within a poststructuralist view of subjectivity, especially if we want adequately to analyze subjectivity and agency as they relate to women.

“What happens in the mind” remains key to understanding the ways in which female subjects participate in the world. While women can resist cultural norms that support their subordination without increased consciousness and through ignorance, to do so means little in terms of changing these cultural norms. Liberal-feminist theory reminds us that to resist with awareness of our resistance is better than resisting without knowledge of what one is doing. Though the women writing for Shafts take this to an extreme when they explain that “every human soul [creates] by its inmost thoughts an actual influential force which goes forth for good or evil” and that “thought creates on the ethereal plane vibrations which travel until they are neutralised by transformation into action on the material plane” (Ward 2), they did recognize the importance of the relationship among mind, voice, and body in a way that poststructuralists do not. Further, they recognize that changes to the cultural status of women involve thought, even if they are not determined by thought, and until we find a way to discuss the relationship between thought and more direct methods of expressing agency for the postmodern subject, we must continue to emphasize the history of liberal-feminist thought. Not to do so means risking the loss of one significant aspect of agency, an aspect that simply has slipped off the radar of poststructuralist literary theorists in their attempt to articulate the power of language and representation.

IV.

This dissertation, then, shows that when we engage the topic of late-Victorian male authorship, as seen in the careers and works of Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore, we engage a host of other important issues. While the male authors discussed here perhaps did not anticipate all of the broad implications their work would have more than a century after it was produced, they certainly understood the importance of
male authorship in their own time and its potential for ensuring their success beyond the spans of their own lives. With this in mind, I return to the example of George Moore’s almost real-life relationship with his female character Esther Waters, which has been the impetus for my engagement with the topic of male authorship in the 1890s and its implications beyond the *fin de siècle*.

In 1933, the year of Moore’s death, the author included in his book of memories about his own life and achievements, *A Communication to My Friends*, one last comment on the conflated woman-book that represented his first commercial success and his hope for a literary reputation after his death. In telling this story, part of a larger section about a conversation he had with his friend Edmund Gosse about his desire for literary reputation, Moore recognized not only the strength of Esther’s story to carry him forward into literary greatness but also the controversy it provoked upon its publication and how this controversy contributed to Moore’s anxiety about male authorship at the *fin de siècle*.

Writing of his ongoing, and largely unsuccessful, search in newspapers of the day for evidence that the public thought of him as an established and excellent author, Moore relates his conversation with Gosse, in which he said to his friend, “I search the papers, of course, for my name, just as you search for yours, only you find your name and I do not find mine--that is the difference” (80). Moore then says to Gosse, “I can prove to you that I am right” (80), and he turns to his remembrance of the exclusion of Esther Waters from an anthology on maid-servants in the mid-1890s, a remembrance he tells in present tense, as though he (and we) have returned to the year 1896 and stand amid all the conditions of the *fin de siècle* market.

It is now two years since the publication of *Esther Waters*, and when it was still selling briskly, a young woman bethought herself of compiling an anthology of all that has been said about servant-maids. She searched literature in every direction and found many passages, but no space for a mention of Esther Waters. Her absence was not an accident. The girl may have had doubts about mentioning a book that was not to be had at Smith’s Select Library. In her perplexity she consulted her publisher. He
would like to have had a figure so dignified and authoritative as Esther Waters, but he would not like to prejudice the sale of the book. The anthologist had collected a large number of passages from authors whose names were known to the generality of readers and she would be on safer ground if she left out Esther Waters. It was difficult to decide whether her inclusion would do more harm than good on the bookstalls. (80-81)

Having told the story of Esther Waters’s rejection with as much emphasis on Esther-the-woman as on Esther-the-book, Moore relates Gosse’s reaction. “I could see that Gosse had come over to my way of thinking when he admitted that it was easier to create a prejudice than to remove one. Eventually he said, ‘Prejudice will die down, and people will wonder, as they have often wondered before, how it was that they ever could have thought, and thought sincerely, that Esther Waters was not a book for the bookstalls’” (81). To this reaction, Moore could only write: “So do our lives end in indecisions. I cast no blame on the publisher of the anthology or its compiler. I remember that Manet . . . remained nearly all his life without a buyer. . . . I went away hoping that my persecution would not be as long as Manet’s” (81-82).

Whether the story of Esther Waters’s rejection is true, whether the anthology on servant-maids even existed, cannot be known, and the possible existence of the anthology is not the reason for relating this story at the end of a dissertation on the broad implications of late-Victorian male authorship. The point, of course, is that, at the end of Moore’s life, the cultural conditions of writing the woman-centered novel in the 1890s were still fresh in the author’s mind, and the ambiguity of those conditions was still having an impact on the way in which representations of women contribute to the reputations of authors and the public’s understanding of the literary canon. Almost seventy years after Moore’s death, representations of women--and their intersection with the concept of male authorship--are still relevant to our discussion of the literary canon and the multiple, complex issues that surround its making.
NOTES

1. In fact, women in novels from the 1880s and 1890s are often both “fallen” and “New.” See, for example, Olive Schreiner’s The Story of an African Farm (1883), Grant Allen’s The Woman Who Did (1895), and Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897). The works I discuss in this dissertation also contain characters who have characteristics of both types.

2. My use of the term “woman-centered” deserves some explanation, since it has been argued by Nancy Armstrong, in Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel (1987), that the genre of the novel is necessarily woman-centered, focused on the representation of feminine subjectivity. I do not take issue with Armstrong’s argument; in fact, her argument raises interesting issues about my reasons for studying the late-Victorian novel, especially whether there is anything distinctive about the late-Victorian novel, or whether it is simply a continuation of a longer tradition that has always focused on feminine subjectivity. In this dissertation, I discuss how the work of the late-Victorians about whom I am writing, especially the work of George Moore, might be seen as part of this larger tradition of novels necessarily about women, but I also believe that acknowledging distinctions within this tradition is important. Even Armstrong herself seems interested in the nuances within the tradition of the novel. Though she does not discuss at length works of the late-Victorian period, she does suggest that significant changes occur in the conception of subjectivity at the end of the nineteenth century, the primary one being the reuniting of masculine and feminine subjectivities into a Freudian concept of “one consciousness” with masculine and feminine attributes (225-26).

My use of the term “woman-centered,” then, has a double meaning, one that emphasizes the universality of woman-as-subject-matter in the novel genre and one that emphasizes the specificity of representations of women at the end of the nineteenth century. The woman-centered novels by Gissing, Hardy, Moore, and Meredith have much in common with the New Woman novels of the 1890s; that is, they focus on the problems faced by “modern” women, as defined in this particular period. But we also know woman-centered novels by the ways in which their authors speak about the characters in them: as though they are talking about real women rather than constructed characters. As I indicate in future chapters, Hardy refers to Jude as “the Sue story,” Gissing’s In the Year of the Jubilee was originally titled “Miss Lord of Camberwell,” and Moore writes the 1932 preface of Esther Waters as though Esther were a real person. Further, Meredith speaks of Diana of Diana of the Crossways as though she is a living being in a letter to Lady Ulrica Duncombe, who found Diana unappealing (3:1440), and he sometimes refers to real women as though they are characters in his novels (3:1630). Such references to characters as though they are real women, and women as though they are constructed characters, suggest that the novel is necessarily about feminine subjectivity.

3. A word of explanation concerning my choice of four male authors. While this choice may appear to resist current disciplinary practice of focusing on non-canonical women writers rather than traditionally canonical male authors, like other third-wave feminists,
I am interested in exploring both sides of the masculine/feminine binary, and particularly the inadequacy of the binary itself. My work on male authors, then, is part of a continued critique of the literary canon, a critique that acknowledges that literary texts by male authors both contribute to and sometimes resist patriarchy.

In addition, I choose these four male authors because Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore make up a particularly fascinating “web” of writers, to use a term Bonnie Kime Scott employs in *The Gender of Modernism*. All four writers interacted with each other through professional acquaintanceship and sometimes personal friendships, and these connections are important in terms of illustrating the discussion late-nineteenth-century authors had about representing women and woman’s agency. Gissing, Hardy, Meredith, and Moore, while they did not often correspond directly with each other, did write in response to each other through their novels (as in the case of Moore’s *Esther Waters* commenting on Hardy’s *Tess*), and, always, they were writing more indirectly to each other through a literary culture formed, in part, by each others’ works. By focusing on a close-knit group, I believe I can illuminate the cultural conversation about the representation of woman’s agency at the *fin de siècle* that might not be possible with a group of less directly connected authors or with a larger number of authors.

Although the focus of this dissertation is the work of four male authors, there is room for discussion of women writers within this project, particularly in terms of the intersections among their work and the work of the four authors I have chosen. For example, while I discuss Moore’s *Esther Waters* as a response to Hardy’s *Tess*, a fact we know from Moore’s writings about the conception of his best-known novel, it is arguable that Marie Corelli’s *The Sorrows of Satan*—currently a lesser-known work but one that was certainly as, if not more, popular during the 1890s—is as much a response to *Tess* as *Esther Waters* is. Other women writers—such as Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, and Henrietta Stannard—also figure in this dissertation. While I do not discuss their novels extensively, I do write about them in conjunction with gender issues in the literary market and in connection to the liberal-feminist literary aesthetic discussed in this dissertation.

4. Given the numerous ways in which the term “discourse” is used in current critical theory, my use of it may be confusing to some readers, so some explanation and clarification is necessary. The rhetoric-based approach used by narratologists defines “discourse” according to Seymour Chatman’s story/discourse distinction, in which “story” indicates events of the narrative and “discourse” indicates the way in which the events are told within the narrative. For more on this, see Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (1978). The Foucauldian approach used by most cultural critics defines “discourse” as language tied more strictly to cultural forces, especially institutional forces that limit the subject’s ability to express agency. These definitions are complicated when one considers Bakhtin, whose interest in the connection between language and social ideologies and analysis of this connection through narratological method creates something of a hybrid definition of the term “discourse.” I am working with at least an acknowledgment of all of these models, so it is possible for me to recognize the term “discourse” as fulfilling all of the definitions above. In addition, there are times when discourse simply means “language,” “dialogue,” “conversation,” “discussion,” “debate.” In order to avoid confusion, I have chosen to use the term “discourse” only as it is used by narratologists, and even then, I use it sparingly. In all other cases, I have found other words—language, types of language, dialogue, discussion, etc.—which express my meaning as well as, if not better than, the word “discourse” would.
5. As Northrop Frye argues in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), realism is one of the five traditional fictional modes, specifically the “low mimetic” mode.


7. There is still much work to be done on the individual identities of the reviewers who worked for *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald*. Since some, such as “Dole,” wrote under pseudonyms, it is difficult to know how these writers came into contact with the editors of the magazines, but it seems as though a number of them had ties to the magazines through their associations with various political organizations. For example, Dora B. Montefiore, who reviewed *Jude the Obscure* for *Shafts,* was a well-known suffrage advocate, and M. E. Haweis, who reviewed *Tess* for *The Woman’s Herald,* was active in the anti-vivisection organizations highlighted by the magazine. Further, while circulation numbers for *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald* are uncertain, one main source of their readership would have been women who were members of political organizations, especially suffrage societies, since the magazines ran minutes from the meetings of these organizations. In fact, when Florence Fenwick Miller was editor of *The Woman’s Herald,* 500 copies of each issue were distributed to members of Central National Society for Women’s Suffrage, of which Miller was a member (Crawford 413-14). Additionally, it is clear that the editors of *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald* knew of each other (Crawford 413-14) and that editors of other periodicals received copies of the magazines and sometimes mentioned them in columns about the press, a common practice in nineteenth-century periodicals. For example, when *Shafts* first began publishing, Henrietta Stannard mentioned the magazine in her editor’s column in *Golden Gates* and wished the editor, whom she oddly assumed was a man, good luck (“Notes” 449).


9. For more on the balance of masculine and feminine roles required of male writers of the period, see Danahay and, of course, Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1989).

10. For more on the consumer-based approach to authorship in the late-Victorian period, see James Hepburn’s *The Author’s Purse and the Rise of the Literary Agent* (1968), Guinevere Griest’s *Mudie’s Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (1970), and N. N. Feltes’s *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels* (1986). Though not particularly recent, all are still useful guides to understanding the late-Victorian market.
11. See also Annette Federico’s *Masculine Identity in Hardy and Gissing* (1991), a study of representations of masculinity in works by Hardy and Gissing that shows the results of male authorship, if not the professional struggles of such authorship.

12. Schaffer also discusses the influence of forgotten female aesthetes on Meredith. While she does not argue that Meredith directly appropriated the work of any particular woman writer, she does assert that he “inherited the aesthetic novel developed by Ouida” (122) and that Ouida should be considered as much the inventor of the epigram as Meredith is (138).

13. For example, Cunningham’s claim that Hardy comes to his depiction of women “by a very different route” than that of the New Woman novelists (primarily through his concern for broader sexual freedom rather than distinctly feminist concerns) is quite accurate, as is her claim that Hardy tried to distance himself from the association between his work and the New Woman novelists (104-05). But her lack of discussion of Hardy’s unwillingness to engage feminists, especially suffragists, directly indicates that she places him in a position more favorable than he perhaps deserves. As my analysis of Hardy in this dissertation shows, his continual refusal to lend support to suffragists, especially when seen in light of his use of the “spoken word” in his representations of woman’s agency, shows the limits of his feminism. Likewise, Cunningham’s discussion of Meredith and Gissing, whom she identifies as “champions of women,” overlooks Gissing’s especially high anxiety about the debate over realism, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 1. Cunningham claims that the rise and fall in Gissing’s feminism over the course of the 1890s is due primarily to the influence of the New Woman novelists (151), but, as I show, the waxing and waning of his feminism should be attributed to a more complex negotiation of the debate over realism, in which feminist influence was one of several factors.

While Kranidis is correct to see realism as the hegemonic perspective of the time, despite its outsider status in relation to mid-Victorian literary modes (110), her analysis overlooks significant differences in male authors’ negotiations of the market. For example, by emphasizing so strongly Moore’s status as an appropriator of women’s experiences, Kranidis reads his 1932 preface to *Esther Waters* as purely an attempt to excuse his appropriation of Esther’s story (117) rather than recognizing it as the capstone to Moore’s elaborate negotiation of the market, as I read it in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Kranidis is correct to see the strategic and opportunistic aspects of Moore’s personality, but to paint Gissing, Meredith, and Hardy in a similar light (118, 121, 123) is to miss the nuances of their individual careers. Further, Kranidis’s claim, in the conclusion on her chapter about the realists, that “[t]he contrasts between feminist and Realist novels are remarkable” (127) seems debatable. If anything, reading the work of women writers of the 1890s, such as Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* and Mona Caird’s *The Daughters of Danaus*, confirm for me the similarities between the novels of both sexes, a point about which Cunningham and I seem to agree (Cunningham 106).

14. Certainly, it is the case that women writing for feminist periodicals of the time would not have identified themselves with the label “feminist” until at least the mid-1890s. As Barbara Caine’s *English Feminisms 1780-1980* (1997) shows, and as the *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms, the first use of the term “feminism” in print was in 1895, in the *Athenaeum* (Caine xv). (The *OED* places the first use of the word “feminist” a year earlier, in the *Daily News.*) Still, in the early 1890s, women were identifying themselves as a particular type of woman, not unlike the type captured in the term “feminist.”
1892, Shafts used the term “Progressive Women” to identify women committed to principles of sexual equality (Dole 8), and even J. S. Mill, in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), identifies a particular type of woman, “[w]omen who read, much more women who write” (56), as especially suspect to those who held traditional Victorian values. This type of women anticipates well the “Progressive Women” referred to in the pages of *Shafts*, since *Shafts* puts especially high value on the intellectual abilities of these women.

15. The results of the voting point to interesting attitudes toward the public/private binary. Although women were increasingly finding public spaces in which they could participate in the late-nineteenth century, their interest in both the Authors’ House and the Club indicates the continued need for more public places in which they would be able to interact with others in the profession. Still, the interest women members had in the House option also reveals their need for private spaces not associated with their duties in the domestic sphere. Since women writers were often married and had children, they tended to write at home, but with all the interruptions and distractions one would expect in a busy house. The opportunity to lease work space in an Authors’ House would have had a special appeal to women writers. Perhaps even more telling is the male members’ interest in a Club, and one that would exclude women; this preference indicates an overwhelming belief that men belonged in the public sphere and women should remain in the private sphere. For an interesting discussion of the role of men’s clubs in the late-nineteenth century, and especially Besant’s use of the men’s club as a model for the Society of Authors, see Simon Eliot’s “Sir Walter, Sex, and the SoA” (2001). Also, for analysis of the number and types of clubs, including men’s and women’s clubs, in London in the late-nineteenth century, see Besant’s *London in the Nineteenth Century* (1909), which has a chapter titled “Societies” and one titled “Clubs.”

16. I assume the club that was formed is the Writers’ Club, since sources show that it was formed around the same time and that Stannard was its first President (Wills 318; Blaine 1176). Also, Stannard’s own periodical *Golden Gates* (also called *Winter’s Weekly* and *Winter’s Magazine*) includes a number of articles on the Writers’ Club (“Editor’s Thoughts” [14 Nov. 1891] 19; “Editor’s Thoughts” [13 Feb. 1892] 242-43; “Editor’s Thoughts” [15 Oct. 1892] 371; “Indoors and Out” [25 Mar. 1893] 235). For more on clubs for women in the late-nineteenth century, see Wills, Anthruther, and Levy. And for a convenient alphabetized list of over 60 clubs formed in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, see Crawford. Also of interest is the article, “The Women Writers’ Dinner,” which appears in the June 7, 1894 issue of *The Woman’s Herald*. This article includes a seating chart from the fifth annual meeting of the Writers’ Club, and the article seems to mimic those published in *The Author* for the Society of Authors’ annual dinners (396).

17. Although Teresa Mangum claims in her book about Sarah Grand, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (1998), that Besant had to be persuaded to accept women into the Society (20), letters from the Society’s archive show that Besant at least made a concerted effort to draw women into the organization in the late-1880s, by querying Henrietta Stannard about specific women who might like to join. On May 31, 1889, Stannard wrote to the Secretary of the Society, S. Squire Sprigge, who seems to have written to Stannard on Besant’s behalf, with a list of writers for her to look over. “I would gladly do anything to oblige the Society,” writes Stannard in her response, “I give you my opinion of the chance of them joining” (Ms. 56865).
Stannard continues to list thirteen women, including Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Rhoda Broughton, Olive Schreiner, and Mary Ward, and her opinion about the likelihood of them joining. She then concludes, “If you will take a woman’s advice don’t have any lady novelists enlisted. Write to ask them to become members in the name of the Society—nothing fetches a woman so thoroughly as that form of invitation. It implies a recognition of genius which is irresistible” (Ms. 56865). Besant’s uneasy relationship with women writers—his concern about their presence in the public sphere, including the literary market, and his belief that women should work only when absolutely necessary—has been well-documented, as in Earl A. Knies’s article “Sir Walter Besant and the ‘Shrieking Sisterhood’” (1993), but on the issue of including women in the Society’s activities, Besant seems to have understood that to alienate women writers would have done more to hurt the organization than to help it.

18. I assume X. Y. Z. is not Besant because, in 1896, X. Y. Z. writes a column for *The Author* called “New York Letter,” in which the writer tells of events he witnesses while living abroad. Clearly, this could not be Besant, since he was still editing the magazine in London.

19. _Golden Gates_, while not explicitly feminist in the way _Shafts_ and _The Woman’s Herald_ are, is a good source for understanding women’s issues in the 1890s. Initially, the magazine was fairly sentimental, with Stannard’s discussions in her editor’s column focusing on such banal topics as “Bores,” “Babies,” “Fussy Friends,” and “Boasting.” But as the 1890s matured, and Stannard’s editorial approach did as well, the magazine more often covered political issues, including those directly affecting women. In 1892 and 1893, Stannard’s editor’s column discussed a wide range of political topics, such as “The Ragged School Union,” “Cruelty to Animals,” “Funeral Reform,” “The Fees System in Theatres,” and a number of women’s issues, such as “Employment of Women” and “Why Women Drink.” Further, in 1893, Stannard devoted ample space to her favorite women’s issue, the “Anti-Crinoline League,” an organization she founded to discourage women from wearing crinolines.

20. It should be noted that a week after the interview with Besant ran, _The Woman’s Herald_ printed a revised version, which Besant had edited but had not returned to the journal before the original interview went to press. The basic content of the interview and Besant’s positions on specific issues remain the same. For Besant’s revisions, see Parker, “‘All Sorts and Conditions of’—Women,” [15 Feb. 1894].

21. For more on the tension between Besant and *The Woman’s Herald*, as well as Besant’s confrontations with feminists in his weekly column in the magazine *Queen*, see Knies.

22. Such recent studies include Michiel Heyns’s _Expulsion and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: The Scapegoat in English Realist Fiction_ (1994), Katherine Kearns’s _Nineteenth-Century Literary Realism_ (1996), Alison Byerly’s _Realism, Representation, and the Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature_ (1997), Tom Lloyd’s _Crises of Realism: Representing Experience in the British Novel, 1816-1910_ (1997), and Harry Shaw’s _Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot_ (1999). To classify these studies as projects that rely on the more traditional definition of realism, however, is not to say that they do not make interesting, or reformative, claims about realism. In several of these studies, the realist novelist’s interest in rendering the external world is seen as part of a larger contradiction in realism: its equal claim to rendering a “moral” world (Heyns), its tendency toward
“artistic allusion,” which works against its realist goal (Byerly), and its inclination to suppress experience even as it tries to “domesticate the monstrous” (Lloyd).

23. Shaft’s tendency toward intellectualism can be seen throughout the first issue of the magazine. The magazine’s cover image of a woman shooting “shafts of light—wisdom, justice, and truth” under a banner “Light comes to those who dare to think,” and Margaret Sibthorp’s explanation, in her first editor’s column, of the magazine’s aim to encourage free thought, especially that of women and working-class people, makes clear the magazine’s commitment to intellectual pursuits, including the reading of literature. Among the regular features of the magazine was a column titled “Influential Lives,” about women and men contributing to the changes needed for a new society, and this column often featured those involved in education and the writing of literature. Another regular feature was “The Steadfast Line,” a column announcing the work of women who “contribute to the cause,” especially women writing for the cause.

24. It should be acknowledged that Butler has worked at making her theory of agency more comprehensive since the writing of this article. Her most direct response to the materialist critique of her work is, of course, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex” (1993), but, more recently, in her dialogues with Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek in Contingency, Hegemony, and Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left (2000), she also addresses the charge that her perspective on agency is that it is always asserted through language. She writes, “It would be a mistake to imagine that a political claim must always be articulated in language; certainly media images make claims that are not readily translatable into verbal speech. And lives make claims in all sorts of ways that are not necessarily verbal. There is a phrase in US politics, which has its equivalents elsewhere, which suggests something about the somatic dimension of the political claim. It is the exhortation: ‘Put your body on the line’ . . . It is not easy, as a writer, to put one’s body on the line, for the line is usually the line that is written, the one that bears only an indirect trace of the body that is its condition” (178). While Butler is more specific about the multiple ways in which agency can be asserted, her examples remain limited to speech and action rather than thought, speech, and action. As is evident by her questioning of Zizek’s psychoanalytical approach to the issue of subjectivity, Butler remains strongly rooted in a theory in which the subject is determined by social and cultural forces rather than actively engaging culture in a “conscious” way.

Like Butler, Leigh Gilmore, in Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation (1994), offers a solution to the problem of doing feminist criticism in the post-structuralist world, and she does so in perhaps a more straightforward manner. As someone working in the field of autobiography, Gilmore recognizes the problems of studying a genre that traditionally has been defined by its “truth-telling” concerns (ix), and she also acknowledges the added difficulties of studying women’s autobiography, which must deal with the issue of sexual difference on at least some level (x). In negotiating women’s autobiography, Gilmore turns to Althusser’s concept of the interpellated subject to resolve the issue of subjectivity, agency, and authorial intent in the post-structuralist world. Althusser, Gilmore reminds us, believes that “self-recognition” is the key element in the interpellation of the subject; being “hailed” by another and returning that recognition from others with a wave of the hand is ideology at work (20). Noting that Teresa de Lauretis has applied Althusser’s concept to the gendered subject—who recognizes and knows herself, at least to some extent, through her culture’s gender codes but also can critique these codes and read gender as a construction (19-20)—Gilmore shows how space for a culturally-constructed subject
exists and is useful for feminists working in a field where “identity,” one of those terms Butler hopes to deconstruct and Gilmore recognizes as an ever-changing construction rather than a fixed signifier, is still a relevant issue.

25. Critics who read the novel primarily as a satire of middle-class life include Robert L. Selig, “A Sad Heart at the Late-Victorian Culture Market: George Gissing’s In the Year of the Jubilee” (1969); Cora Robey, “In the Year of the Jubilee: A Satire on Late Victorian Culture” (1972); John Sloan, “The ‘Worthy’ Seducer: A Motif Under Stress in George Gissing’s In the Year of the Jubilee” (1985), reprinted in George Gissing: The Cultural Challenge (1989), by Sloan; and Alison Cotes, “Gissing and Camberwell” (1985). Only Selig and Sloan discuss in any detail the issue of Nancy’s agency.

Selig argues that it is Gissing’s view of popular culture that prevents Nancy Lord from being the sustained focal point of the novel. Gissing’s preference for high culture over low, Selig asserts, leads him to condemn Nancy for her obsession with low culture and to praise Lionel Tarrant, Nancy’s husband, for his commitment to high culture. This turn, Selig believes, works against all the sympathies of Gissing’s readers, who expect Nancy to remain the central, and most sympathetic, character in the novel. “Gissing spoils it,” writes Selig, “by shifting the point of view from Nancy’s perceptiveness to Tarrant’s moral obtuseness. In the last sentence of Part 5, Chapter 5, we are told that Tarrant ‘... went home to a night of misery’ ... Yet our interest is not in him, the lesser character, but in Nancy. What did she go home to? It is in Nancy that the human values of Jubilee reside” (719).

Sloan focuses on the role the fallen woman tradition plays in the novel, an emphasis that, as Amanda Anderson’s Tainted Souls and Painted Faces has shown, can be an important site for discussion of woman’s agency. Sloan argues that while the setting of the novel in middle-class Camberwell suggests that Nancy might experience freedom not afforded the working class, Nancy is portrayed as a “wanton” woman who should be judged for her displays of independence (357). Further, when Nancy displays her independence in her relationship with Lionel Tarrant, her assertions of agency are ineffectual because she receives little support for these acts of independence from the narrator (361).

Barbara Leah Harman, in “Going Public: Female Emancipation in George Gissing’s In the Year of the Jubilee” (1992), moves away from the general trend of looking primarily at Gissing’s use of satire and focuses instead on issues of agency, but Harman is, for the most part, in line with those who see Nancy’s agency as severely limited. In Jubilee, Harman argues, Gissing proposes an alternative to conventional marriage that keeps intact individual freedom without forcing individuals into positions of isolation. By proposing such an alternative, Gissing complicates the issue of Nancy’s independence, since her acquiescence to Tarrant’s “free union” idea might be read as an act of self-control rather than submission. However, Harman believes that the actual conditions of Nancy’s life in this alternative marriage do not match up with the theoretical ideal, making Nancy much less liberated than Rhoda Nunn of The Odd Women, who is able to achieve a psychological freedom through her understanding of the theoretical concept of the free union.

26. Correctly characterizing most criticism of Gissing’s work as obsessively occupied with establishing a “stable authorial point of view” for Gissing through biographical criticism that identifies Gissing with his male characters, Harsh argues that, in Jubilee, we
see how the lack of narrative control most critics attribute to Gissing’s strong identification with his male characters actually functions to create space for expression of agency by Nancy. Harsh identifies three ways in which Gissing makes Nancy the central character in the book, as central as her male partner Lionel Tarrant: he thematically associates Nancy with modernity through her attendance at the Jubilee celebration, which suggests that she is capable of feminist revolt; he builds her character through “free indirect discourse,” which results in an “epistemology of resistance” on the part of Nancy; and he depicts Nancy as essentially female, aware of “woman’s biological destiny,” which becomes a way for her to resist Lionel Tarrant’s masculinist perspective at the end of the novel.

27. Grand made £18,000 from sales of The Heavenly Twins over the course of her lifetime (Mangum 88), and, as I note later in this dissertation, Marie Corelli’s The Sorrows of Satan sold 25,000 copies in the first week (Federico 7). While I do not have figures for Mona Caird’s novels, her 1888 article “Marriage” in The Daily Telegraph prompted 27,000 responses from readers (Gullette 494).

28. Certainly, there are other forms of realism at work in the late-nineteenth century, perhaps most notably historical realism. But, as Valerie Minogue, in “James’s Lady and Zola’s Whore: The Inscription of the Heroine in The Portrait of a Lady and Nana” (1990), illustrates well, naturalism (as seen in the work of Emile Zola) and psychological realism (as seen in the work of Henry James) can stand in as two extreme ends of a spectrum of variations on traditional mid-century realism. By acknowledging the parameters of this spectrum, we can better judge the subtle variations on traditional realism employed by the authors discussed in this dissertation.

Especially interesting about Minogue’s article is its focus on the different approaches to the woman-centered novel in each of these schools of realism. Focusing on the different manners in which James and Zola present their heroines in the opening chapters of their respective novels, Minogue argues that Zola, on the one hand, introduces Nana through a multilayered, shifting focal view, involving men who have heard about Nana before seeing her, as well as the wider audience that fills the theatre to see Nana on stage and has also already heard about her. Zola’s emphasis on the eager men and the theatre audience, with the narratorial eye watching the men and the theatre audience watching Nana, makes Nana’s exterior rather than her interior the focus of the scene. By the time Nana appears on stage, she is already a thoroughly physical presence (Minogue 252-53). James, on the other hand, emphasizes the interiority of his heroine by introducing Isabel through a narratorial voice friendly to the reader and through the conversation of some of the male characters in Portrait, but he makes it clear that the heroine’s mysterious identity can be clarified only by Isabel herself. It will “be up to Isabel to supply the missing content” (259), states Minogue. Unlike Nana, who is all body, when Isabel takes over as perceiver of the scene, she is “bodiless: a consciousness, the idea of an interesting woman rather than a physical female presence” (260).

It is not just late-twentieth-century criticism that sees the contrast between James and Zola as one around which a spectrum of realism might be defined. James himself wrote several significant pieces in which he contrasted himself to Zola; the most important of these is his review of Nana, which he wrote just as he was preparing to compose Portrait, perhaps his best known work in terms of woman’s consciousness, for serial publication. As critics have pointed out, this review reveals that while James admires Zola’s method, he objects strongly to his subject matter. “On what authority,” James writes, “does M.
Zola represent nature to us as a combination of the cesspool and the house of prostitution? On what authority does he represent foulness rather than fairness as the sign that we are to know her by?” (“Nana” 92). Although James focuses primarily on Zola’s assumptions about what constitutes nature, the type of woman Zola portrayed seems to have been part of the problem for James. Moving from a discussion of the portrayal of nature to commentary on the portrayal of character, and then to Nana specifically, James states: “The human note is completely absent, the perception of character, of the way that people feel and think and act, is helplessly, hopelessly at fault. . . . Nana, with the prodigious freedom that her author has taken, never, to my sense, leaves for a moment the region of the conventional. The figure of the brute fille, without a conscience or a soul, with nothing but devouring appetites and impudences, has become the stalest of the stock properties of French fiction” (95-96). It is telling, I think, that James characterizes Nana as a woman “without a conscience or a soul,” since as James was writing this review, he was developing Isabel Archer, whose conscience, often shown through internal perspective, would be the primary aspect of her character. The contrast between Zola and James, acknowledged by James himself, had to have been on the minds of other writers of the late-nineteenth century as they were developing their own literary modes in relationship to the debate about realism.

29. Gissing attended a lecture about Zola in 1889 (Collected Letters 4:44-45), was disappointed that his own fear of society prevented him from seeing Zola when he came to England in 1893 (5:149-50), and in 1899, wanted to meet Zola but his feelings of social inadequacy prevented him from pursuing the meeting seriously (7:363).

30. Also interesting in Gissing’s discussion of Dickens’s work are his comments on Dickens’s technique for building characters. In addition to the charge that Dickens’s idealism often caused him to misrepresent the “social facts” of his characters—for example, by letting working-class characters speak like middle-class characters, Dickens misses the opportunity to show the conditions of working-class characters’ lives (86-87)—Gissing also charges Dickens with rarely building characters through their specific circumstances, as expressed through dialogue between them and other characters (109). As I will show in this chapter, Gissing put strong emphasis on such a method of building character, using dialogues between characters rather than heavy narratorial comment. Still, it is interesting that Gissing sets himself and other late-century realists apart from Dickens through the realist/idealist dichotomy, since one of the criticisms of Gissing himself was that he was too idealist and not realistic enough.

31. The personal model Hardy provided Gissing and Algernon is best seen in a letter from Gissing to his brother on March 3, 1888. With this letter, Gissing includes a cutting from the Star, which the editors of Gissing’s letters identify as a paragraph about Hardy that ran in the paper’s gossip column. The paragraph is a short description of Hardy, focusing on his physical features, his “pallid face” and “dark, grey eyes” (3:189), and what is striking about Gissing’s inclusion of this paragraph in the letter to his brother is the fanatic-like quality of Gissing’s relationship to Hardy. To send Algernon a clipping about Hardy that focuses primarily on his physical attributes suggests that Gissing was interested in Hardy as a person, not just a writer. Gissing’s strong personal interest in Hardy would last until 1895, when a visit to Hardy’s home caused Gissing to reassess his opinion of the author. Seeing Hardy in his daily life decreased Gissing’s respect for him, as both an author and a man (6:27-28). The strong attachment Gissing felt for Hardy, and his tendency to mirror Hardy, also shows up, for instance, in 1892, when Gissing tells Algernon that he has read that Hardy uses copying ink and a press to make
duplicates of pieces he has written. After reading this, Gissing acquires his own press so that he can do the same, but, unfortunately for Gissing, his writing is too “small and fine” to copy well (5:44-45). One has the sense that while Gissing is disappointed because he has wasted money on the press, which cost 13/6, he is also disappointed that his attempt to imitate Hardy has failed.

On the professional level, Gissing also thought Hardy a good model for himself and Algernon as well. In a letter from August 3, 1893, Gissing tells Algernon of his own sales of *The Odd Women* and then mentions that there will be a new edition of some of Hardy’s work out soon, since the copyright is about to end for one publisher and begin for another. “So, you see,” he tells Algernon, suggesting that perhaps they should follow Hardy’s example, “Thomas did not sell his copyrights” (5:125). Still, Gissing realized that Hardy’s subject matter often put him at a disadvantage in the marketplace, and in this respect, Gissing once again identifies with Hardy professionally. In a letter to Algernon from January 19, 1891, Gissing writes, “You remember Hardy’s complaints. To my mind the marvel is that Hardy was able to sell many of his books at all. . . . Hardy is so strong in some respects that he has got into Cyclopaedias, Reviews, and so on. I, on the other hand, am never referred to save when a book of mine is reviewed. And if Hardy cannot get more than trifling sums, how can I expect more?” (4:259). Like Hardy, Gissing felt he struggled more than an author should have to, and yet he saw this struggle as part of the role of an artist, one Algernon would have to take on if he expected to be a novelist. Especially when Algernon faced rejection, as in the case of his second novel, *Both of This Parish*, rejected by Macmillans and Bentley before its acceptance by Hurst and Blackett (3:211, 297), would Gissing dwell on the dismal fate of the novelist.

32. Just as Gissing was reading Zola and James in the early years of his career, he was also reading Hardy, and with more vigor than he read the other two. Although the first documented reference comes in 1887 in Gissing’s diary, where he indicates that he was reading *The Woodlanders* (*London and the Life* 24), we know that Gissing had read Hardy before that time. In 1886, Gissing arranged to call on Hardy (*Collected Letters* 3:42), and after this visit, Gissing sent a follow-up letter, in which he thanked Hardy for his time and stated, “[I]n your books I have constantly found refreshment and onward help. That is much needed now-a-days by anyone who wishes to pursue literature, as distinct from the profession of letters. In literature my interests begin and end; I hope to make my life and all its acquirements subservient to my ideal of artistic creation” (42). This letter, with its characterization of “literature” as distinct from “the profession of letters,” indicates well Gissing’s interest in establishing himself within a particular literary tradition, one that seems to be limited to nineteenth-century authors (since, as Terry Eagleton points out in *Literary Theory*, “the profession of letters” is an eighteenth-century concept) and one that seems immune to the demands of the marketplace (in a nineteenth-century context, the term “profession of letters” is associated with the more derogatory term “scribblers,” to denote women writing for a living). For Gissing, Hardy was representative of such literary success. Early on, then, Gissing seemed to have felt a close bond with Hardy, and Gissing’s diary reveals that Gissing continued to read Hardy’s work with much more regularity than he did that of either Zola or James, and even Meredith, whom Gissing would later come to believe was a better novelist and certainly more intellectual than Hardy (*Collected Letters* 9:278, 6:27-28). In addition to *The Woodlanders* and *Wessex Tales*, both of which Gissing read in 1887, he would read another seven novels by Hardy in 1890 and 1891 alone (*London and the Life*).
33. It should be noted that Gissing is incorrect about Hardy’s dialect corresponding with that of an Eastbourne shepherd. Hardy’s dialect is southwest, while the Eastbourne shepherd would speak a southeastern dialect.

34. Gissing’s belief that thorough development of all characters, regardless of class standing, is one aspect of writing in which Gissing is stronger than Hardy, and this ability allows Gissing to critique the class system in a manner Hardy cannot. Although Gissing is now usually seen as a very serious writer, with little humor in his works, Gissing saw himself as a somewhat ironic writer. Ultimately, it would be Hardy’s inability to portray educated characters and his overwhelming pessimism that would make Gissing turn away from Hardy’s work. Gissing had mixed feelings about *Tess* and strongly disliked *Jude* (*Collected Letters* 6:49, 62, 76; 9:26), since he believed that Hardy’s pessimism had forced the author into outright “inartistic” moves. The inclusion of Father Time’s murder of his siblings in *Jude*, for example, was especially appalling to Gissing (9:278).

35. In the few months surrounding the magazine’s review of *The Odd Women*, Grand’s novel was featured more than once. In the April 13, 1893 issue, *The Woman’s Herald* includes a note titled “Madame Sarah Grand,” about an interview with Grand conducted by the *British Weekly*. Also in this issue is the first installment of a four-part review of *The Heavenly Twins*, titled “Marriage and the Modern Woman” for the first two installments and “The Story of Evadne” for the third and fourth installments. The July 6, 1893 issue includes another, shorter review of *The Heavenly Twins* in an article entitled “Two Women Who Write,” and in the August 17, 1893 issue, the magazine published its own interview with Grand, titled “Sarah Grand: A Study.” It ran as the front page story.

36. This sort of discussion of the novel differs from that found in mainstream reviews, which generally focused on the perceived “polemic” nature of the novel. Several of the twenty-some mainstream reviews written shortly after the novel came out characterize *The Odd Women* as more journalistic than artistic, and quite a few object to the types of women portrayed by Gissing in the novel. That said, a number of the reviews praise Gissing’s efforts at tackling an important social issue, and the review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* touches on Gissing’s use of dialogue, saying that it distinguishes “good from bad realism” (220). However, this review also seeks to separate *The Odd Women* from those in which the characters simply talk about social issues instead of living them (219). Given the reviewer’s references to New Woman novelists in the review, this seems an attempt to distinguish Gissing from the New Woman novelists, while the reviewer’s mention of Gissing’s success with dialogue is meant to separate him from naturalist novelists, who are also referred to in the review. For summaries of other mainstream reviews of *The Odd Women*, see Joseph J. Wolff’s *George Gissing: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings About Him* (1974), 46-50.

37. Here, it is worth noting the way in which Rhoda and Everard’s relationship develops, since this development is closely linked to Gissing’s use of narrative strategies, especially internal perspective, to represent woman’s agency. In Chapter 8, titled “Cousin Everard,” Rhoda and Everard meet for the first time, but unlike the meeting between Monica and Edmund, which is represented primarily through Monica’s internal perspective, the meeting between Rhoda and Everard is told primarily through Everard’s internal perspective, as well as dialogue between the two characters. There is a distinct lack of internal perspective from Rhoda in the early days of their relationship, but this
lack is appropriate, given that Rhoda does not want a relationship with Everard. At one point the narrator even comments on the lack of Rhoda’s interior thoughts on this possible relationship. Having gone into great detail about Everard’s feelings from his perspective, especially his desire for a nontraditional marriage in which there would be no children or a shared home (147-48), the narrator states, “Rhoda Nunn, if she thought of such things at all, probably desired a union which would permit her to remain an intellectual being. . . . As likely as not, however, she was perfectly content with single life” (148).

38. This readerly wish is one way to see a connection between feminist literary aesthetics of the 1890s and today, since current feminist critics continue to use the centrality of female characters and instances of their internal perspective as grounds for the feminist content of the novel. One such example, Gillian Beer’s “The Amazing Marriage: A Study in Contraries” (1970), receives analysis in my chapter on Meredith.

39. For other reviews that focus on the consciousness of female protagonists, see “Reviews: The Wing of Azrael by Mona Caird” and “Marcella: Mrs. Humphry Ward’s New Novel,” both of which ran in The Woman’s Herald. In the review of Caird’s The Wing of Azrael, the reviewer notes that the “real skill” of the book is “the elaborate tracing of Viola’s mental development” (10), and in the review of Ward’s Marcella, the reviewer draws attention to the moment when Marcella “becomes conscious of a completed scheme of life” (228).

40. This “womanly” type of realism, which one might see as leaning toward but not fully associated with psychological realism, is not contrasted directly to masculine forms, such as naturalism, here, but at one point, Shaftes does suggest that naturalism is an especially masculine form of writing. In 1893, when a discussion about what girls should read develops among readers in the letters to the editor section, and several readers warn against letting girls read naturalist work, especially the work of Zola. When this discussion arises, Sibthorp does not comment directly on the thread of this discussion about the vice or virtue of Zola’s novels, but she does add an editor’s note to the end of one of the letters, in which she seems to accept the charge that Zola is inherently masculinist and then comments on the role of the mother in helping girls know what to read. If properly advised, Sibthorp believes that girls will grow up to “find vice distasteful and hideous” and will “live lives of virtue because they love virtue and elect to follow its happy dictates” (253).

41. Other women critics did write about Egerton, characterizing her work as somehow “truly” feminine. Laura Marholm Hansson, in her 1896 book Six Modern Women: Psychological Sketches, writes of Egerton’s Keynotes: “There are very few men who have sufficiently keen appreciation for a woman’s feelings to be able to put their own minds and souls into the swing of her confession, and to accord it their full sympathy. . . . ‘Keynotes’ is not addressed to men, and it will not please them. It is not written in the style adopted by the other women Georges,—George Sand and George Eliot,—who wrote from a man’s point of view. . . . There is nothing of the man in this book” (62).

42. There are certainly other women in Jubilee who resist cultural norms that support the subordination of women. Nancy’s own mother, who disguises herself as Mrs. Damerel in order to become close to her children, is one such character, and her resistance appears mainly through the spoken word and physical actions, rather than consciousness. But Mrs. Damerel’s resistance through these methods of expressing agency does not mitigate
the feminist ideal about using a balance of all three methods. From the feminist perspective, Mrs. Damerel’s resistance is primarily self-serving, not aimed at helping change the status of all women. Mrs. Damerel is similar to Arabella in Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, whom I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter and who also resists through the spoken word and physical actions but does so in order to help herself rather than womankind. In *Jubilee*, Jessica Morgan also appears ready to resist cultural norms that support the subordination of women, especially since she has been well-educated, a social advantage feminists especially valued. But Jessica Morgan exhibits many of the same signs of self-interest Mrs. Damerel has, making her assertions of agency valid but not indicative of the feminist ideal.

43. In Nancy’s relationships with both her father and Lionel, “superiority,” who holds the power in the relationship and how that power is based on financial and social standing, plays a major role in their interactions. Nancy’s perspective is that her father holds control over her through his financial support of her (15), while Mr. Lord’s perspective is that Nancy seems to think herself “superior” to him and that it is his duty to remind her of her place (80-81, 140), and, in Nancy’s relationship with Lionel, there is a similar dynamic at work. Unlike Nancy’s sense of confidence when she is with Luckworth Crewe, when she is with Lionel, she feels herself unable to exhibit the same independence (117-18). Lionel himself perceives her as “his inferior” (145), making the power dynamic between the two of them much like that Nancy experienced with her father.

In addition, both Mr. Lord and Lionel find fault with women because of their education, a view that further enforces a superior/inferior dynamic between man/woman. When Lionel finally begins to accept Nancy for who she is and begins to see her as a potential mate, he does so because he is able to chalk her “affectation of intellectual superiority” up to a “sham” education (145-46). Likewise, Mr. Lord faults his former wife, now posing as Nancy’s “aunt” Mrs. Damerel, for her lack of education, which he claims “didn’t amount to much” (141-42). Mr. Lord’s attitude is that he saved his wife from a miserable life on the streets and gave her a more comfortable life but she showed no gratitude for what he had done for her.

Late in the novel, after the death of Mr. Lord and after Nancy has begun to think that her father was perhaps right about many things, Nancy even compares Lionel to her father. In response to Lionel’s assertion that he could live with his wife if he were rich and able to purchase a very large house in the country, Nancy says to Lionel, “Your thoughts are wonderfully like my father’s sometimes,” to which he replies, “From what you have told me of him, I think we should have agreed in a good many things” (411). The similarities between Mr. Lord and Lionel, then, make it easy to understand why, as Lionel and Nancy’s relationship develops, there are moments of resistance from Nancy even as she is falling in love, since the way she interacted with her father serves as the model for her interaction with Lionel.

44. Lionel’s reading of Keats might be seen as a feminizing move on Gissing’s part, but this feminization of Lionel is lessened by historical context about Gissing’s attitudes toward education. As Selig points out, Gissing strongly valued humanist education for both men and women over a more technical and scientific education (706-07). Interestingly, the latter type was more popular with New Women at this time, since the technical and scientific education offered more practical opportunities for women who were trying to make a living on their own. Given that context, Lionel’s reading of Keats is
less a feminizing move on Gissing’s part than an attempt to show his interest in implementing a humanist agenda for both sexes.

45. It is worth mentioning the remarkably close correlation between the events of the story in Jubilee and those in Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles, especially since we know of Gissing’s strong identification with Hardy. Not only is Lionel’s abandonment of Nancy reminiscent of Angel’s abandonment of Tess, but there are other similarities between the two novels as well. The courting scenes in Tess and Jubilee both emphasize nature, and the eating of blackberries by Nancy and Lionel during one of their walks has the same sensual quality seen when Alec and Tess eat strawberries together. During another walk, Lionel “crowns” Nancy’s head with a wreath of ivy, a look that Lionel thinks is perfect for her because of the “Greek way” in which she arranges her hair. This idolizing of Nancy by Lionel is reminiscent of Angel’s idolizing of Tess, and Lionel and Nancy’s frolicking on a bank near the woods, with Lionel’s exclamation that Nancy is a “feather weight,” easily carried through the brushwood and into the forest, is reminiscent of Angel’s carrying Tess across the creek when she and her friends are unable to cross. Interestingly, there is also a reference to Alec in this scene, since Lionel carries Tess “into the shadow of the trees” (133), which is the same place Alec’s seduction/rape of Tess takes place, and the worry Jessica Morgan’s mother expresses over Nancy’s absence from dinner that evening suggests that perhaps Nancy has experienced the same fate in the woods where Lionel takes her. Lionel Tarrant, then, emerges as something of a combination of Alec and Angel, both the bad and the good seducer, and Nancy is not unlike her heroine-predecessor Tess, since, like Tess, she is not clearly “fallen” nor definitively “pure.” Tess and Nancy also share the tendency to resist their seducers’ unrealistic ideals about women; for more on Tess’s use of the spoken word to combat Angel’s ideals, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

46. Furthermore, Nancy and Monica are in similar economic situations, dependent on their fathers or husbands for support unless they choose to take jobs normally occupied by young single women; Rhoda, on the other hand, is represented as a woman in a slightly more stable position, since her position at Mrs. Barfoot’s school seems unlikely to change, so long as the two women can negotiate their different approaches to feminism.

47. Making a distinction between “vision” and “voice” rather than lumping the two together under “internal perspective” is worthwhile here, since there is a distinct “voice” of the narrator, marked by naturalist language. As James Phelan shows in critical analyses such as Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology (1996), internal perspective, or focalization, is not always adequate for explaining the shifts in narration. Talking about “vision” and “voice” separately can be helpful in capturing the complexity of the narration.

48. For summaries of the mainstream reviews of Jubilee, see Wolff, 51-64. These reviews were mixed, with comments ranging from mostly positive to decidedly negative. A few reviews do consider Nancy’s position of heroine, but none discusses it in terms of specific narrative strategies.

49. For example, Katherine Linehan, in “The Odd Women: Gissing’s Imaginative Approach to Feminism,” states that the feminist content of The Odd Women cannot be attributed to the influence of Collet because the two did not meet until after the novel’s publication (373), and Jacob Korg, in George Gissing: A Critical Biography (1980),
longingly wonders whether Collet’s 1890 paper, “The Economic Position of Educated Working Women,” might have been an inspiration for The Odd Women (192). Halperin’s account of the composition of The Odd Women might also suggest to some readers that Collet could not have been a direct influence, since Halperin states that Gissing began The Odd Women on February 19, 1892 (174); only several pages later does Halperin clarify that Gissing began the novel seven times, and, only at the end of July, 1892, was he able to make serious progress (179).

50. The Queen’s summary of Collet’s lecture is, indeed, rather sketchy. But one aspect of its report that Gissing’s letter to his sister does not capture is Collet’s argument that, over time, Gissing’s work had become more realist. Describing Gissing’s progression over the course of ten years, Collet said that “As George Gissing goes on with his work we get less of theorising and more of realism” (“Women” 395).

51. “Their [women’s] position in industry,” Collet writes in the opening paragraphs of her article, “is so vitally affected by their attitude towards marriage, and by the attitude of those around them . . . that before all things it is necessary to see on what the expectation of marriage is grounded and the effect produced by it on efficiency and wages” (537). Having established this premise for her article, Collet continues to provide detailed statistics about the probabilities that women will marry and the effects of class standing on these probabilities; she also provides data on different groups of women—factory workers in the poorest classes, domestic servants and other workers from the artisan classes, and lower-middle class workers such as shop assistants and school teachers—that focuses on the typical attitudes of their families toward work and marriage.

Collet’s data show that the probability that some women must remain unmarried is higher than a straight statistical approach suggests, due to social factors such as men’s preference for younger women, but even if one looks only at the statistics, the uneven distribution of men and women in particular sections of London, such as Kensington, where the number of women employed by the domestic service industry prevents women who have interest in doing so from marrying. In fact, approximately 20% of women of marriageable age in London remain unmarried, according to Collet’s data, and the rate was higher in areas such as Kensington (537-40). Given this data, Collet argues that women should be encouraged to put aside the belief that they will eventually marry and leave the job market (542). In her analysis of the different groups of women, Collet argues that different solutions are appropriate to each group, mainly because of factors such as class limitations and current educational levels, but, ultimately, Collet puts heavy emphasis on changing the way women and their families think about marriage and on the increased education of all women.

For example, Collet argues that for women factory workers of the poorest classes, what is needed most is education about the domestic sphere. Since most women in this situation have children and are married or in a “less binding union” by age twenty-one, and usually return to work in the factory immediately after marriage and childbirth, these women tend not to have the time, the money, or the educational background to improve their home lives. For these women, Collet actually recommends withdrawal from the labor market if at all possible, since the long-term effect would be improved conditions for children and higher wages for men and single women still working in the factories (543-45). For the second group of women, domestic servants and other workers of the artisan class, Collet recommends education about their own working situations,
since many of them believe they will marry. This leads them to consider their work a
temporary occupation until marriage, accept low wages because of these beliefs, and end
up in desperate straits when they fail to marry (545-47). And for the last group of
women, especially the school teachers, Collet believes that they must be especially
strident about holding out for better wages and even pursuing an education that will
lead to other careers, such as technical or scientific careers, since paying teachers good
wages is highly unlikely, given that they are not paid for the worth of a particular
product but according to standard of living (547-51).

52. Cunningham argues that, of the three authors she discusses (Hardy, Meredith, and
Gissing), Hardy undergoes the most significant change in response to the 1890s women’s
movement. But Cunningham believes that it is not so much the content or form of his
novels that changes as it is his personal involvement in women’s rights. According to
Cunningham, only in the 1890s did Hardy make public statements about “The Woman
Question”; for most of his career, he had been fairly silent on the issue. While
Cunningham may be correct to say that Hardy made more public statements in the
1890s, these statements seem not to constitute the positive achievement Cunningham
accords them. Also, statements by Hardy in his letters indicate that his public
statements were not always consistent with his private beliefs.

Unlike Cunningham, who sees little connection between the New Woman novelists and
the content and form of Hardy’s novels, Boumelha, in Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual
Ideology and Narrative Form (1982), argues that Hardy was influenced by them in terms
of content and form. Boumelha believes that Hardy’s narration, in particular, is where
one can see the effects of constructing stories around female characters, since his
narration becomes more “androgynous” in these texts. Boumelha’s focus on narration is
useful to my own project, since internal perspective is one of the three narrative
strategies I focus on; still, her narrow focus also limits her analysis. For example, when
she claims that “the difference between Tess and George Moore’s Esther Waters (1894)
resides partly in this question of the maintenance and manipulation of points of view”
(67), her assessment of the two novels is skewed by the focus on narration and absence
of discussion of other narrative strategies.

53. Like Gissing, Hardy embraced the idea that an author’s intention could be a criterion
for judging the success of his or her work. However, it is important to note that Hardy’s
perspective on authorial intention is not quite the same as Gissing’s. Whereas Gissing
seems to see authorial intention, or the artist’s “spirit” as he likes to call it, as a guiding
principle for assessing an author’s work, especially assessing it in terms of realism,
Hardy seems to use authorial intention as a defense against criticism of his work, since
he claims that it is the critic’s duty to figure out the author’s intention. Still, in “Candour
in English Fiction,” Hardy seems to come closest to Gissing’s view of the role of
authorial intention in literary criticism, since, as I have already pointed out in this
chapter, he clearly links the “sincerity” of authors to a particular type of realism. For
Hardy, as for Gissing, execution alone cannot provide the means for judging a work.
Instead, one must look at the connection between intention and execution, with more
emphasis on intention than most critics afford authors of the period.

For more on Gissing’s ideas about authorial intention and sincerity, see chapter 1 of this
dissertation. For more on Hardy’s, see Collected Letters 1:277, where Hardy thanks Grant
Allen for his defense of Tess in the Novel Review. “I am overpowered by a sense of having
obtained from your generous pen much more than my merits would warrant. If the story
of Tess had been executed up to the level of its first imagining, it and myself might have been worthy of your allusions. It is that intended story, which your vivid imagination has read behind the written one, that you have really criticized, unconsciously adding out of your own nature all that was necessary to fill up the deficiences in my production” (277). Such words of praise from Hardy for critics who did understand his intentions were not uncommon.

54. Hardy did try to withdraw Jude from the American market, but only after the New York World ran such a scathing review, before publication of the American version of the novel, that Hardy feared what would happen if the novel came out in the United States (2:103).

55. Over the next several days, Hardy would also write to Edmund Gosse and Edward Clodd, echoing his concerns about running into the Saturday Review critic at the Savile Club and going into more detail about his concerns about the review. To Gosse, he writes: “Have you any idea of the writer of the review of Tess in the Saturday? I ask because what he has done has never before come within my experience” (2:253). Hardy continues on to say that he is angered by the reviewer’s “rearrangement of words” in the preface of Tess that make Hardy sound one way when he intended another; by the “suppression” of the subtitle of the novel; by the critic’s misunderstanding of “an obvious misprint”; and so on. “I won’t bore you with any more of it,” Hardy says at the end of the letter. “Only I should like to know who my gentleman is—to shake his hand at the Savile” (2:253). Hardy’s comments to Clodd are much the same, with Hardy assessing the Saturday Review as a “mean” newspaper that seized on a misprint in the text as “an opportunity of attack” (2:254).

56. The Guardian assessed Jude as a novel in which “a great many insulting things are said about marriage, religion, and all the obligations and relations of life which most people hold sacred” (Lerner and Holmstrom 112). The World, which was published in New York and was responding to the publication of the American version of the novel, said that although Hardy admitted that Jude was a novel for adults and not young people, “that is no excuse for demanding of his reader the gastric imperturbability of a well-seasoned pork-butcher. . . . Humanity, as envisaged by Mr. Hardy, is largely compounded of hoggishness and hysteria” (113). And the Pall Mall Gazette, perhaps the most even-handed of the three periodicals, still said that “to us who have admired and even loved Mr. Hardy in the past, this last production of him is worth a weeping, and but little more. . . . Mr. Hardy, don’t disappoint us again. Give us quickly another and a cleaner book to take the bad taste out of our mouths” (111).

57. This association of Hardy with Zola is rebutted by Edmund Gosse in his review of Jude, which ran in the January 1896 Cosmopolis. Though Gosse admits that there are “not a few” passages in Jude that invite comparison to passages in Zola’s La Terre, Gosse asserts that these are “doubtless by a pure accident” and that, when Hardy is comparable to Zola, “[t]he parallel is always in Mr. Hardy’s favour; his vision of the peasant is invariably more distinct, and more convincing than M. Zola’s. He falls into none of the pitfalls laid for the Parisian romancier, and we are never more happy than when he allows us to overhear the primitive Wessex speech” (Critical Heritage 266). As usual, Hardy was pleased to have someone else defending his work. On January 4, 1896, he wrote to Gosse to say how much he appreciated the good review (Collected Letters 2:105), just as he had on November 10, 1895, after reading Gosse’s first review of the novel, which ran in the St. James’s Gazette (2:93-94).
58. Contrast this interpretation of “The Letter Killeth” to that of Oliphant, who writes, “The motto is, ‘The letter killeth’; and I presume this must refer to the fact of Jude’s early and unwilling union to Arabella, and that the lesson the novelist would have us learn is, that if marriage were not exacted, and people were free to from connections as the spirit moves them, none of these complications would have occurred, and all would have been well” (141). Again, Oliphant wants to emphasize the importance of free will for Jude, whereas the feminist reviews more thoroughly acknowledge Hardy’s emphasis on social conditions outside the individual.

59. For more on Egerton as an example of a writer who emphasized consciousness to an great degree, see my afterword. Also, my reading of Hardy’s interaction with Egerton should be contrasted to that of Cunningham, who writes of Hardy’s notations about Egerton’s Keynotes in his “Literary Notebooks,” now published in book form by New York University Press and edited by Lennart Björk. Cunningham claims that Hardy was “sufficiently impressed” by Egerton to “copy out lengthy passages into his notebook” (Cunningham 103), and she continues to tie these passages to concepts that appear in Jude, which Hardy was writing at the time. While the presence of Egerton’s passages in the literary notebooks certainly can be used to show the influence of the New Woman novelists on Hardy, the passages copied into the literary notebook are simply copied and not commented upon by Hardy, suggesting that it is difficult to draw any conclusions about Hardy’s attitude toward Egerton. Further, the other pieces of evidence regarding Hardy’s opinion of Egerton suggest that Hardy’s interactions with Egerton were negotiations rather than simply a one-way direct influence, as Cunningham argues. This example highlights Cunningham’s tendency to see Meredith, Hardy, and Gissing as perhaps more feminist than they were.

60. The focus on whether or not Hardy’s novels were “purpose” novels is interesting, since the term “purpose” seems to intersect with the term “intention” in significant ways. “Purpose” novelists were assumed to have specific agendas in mind as they wrote and were supposedly aiming at articulating those purposes in their representations. While Hardy seems to be saying much the same thing about his own work when he writes about “intention,” he remains adamant about separating “purpose” from “intention,” but without ever articulating this clearly. See note 62 for more on the idea that “intention” is about the writer’s aesthetic choices rather than his or her social agenda.

61. Perhaps Hardy’s most well-known instance of remaining silent was when Jeanette Gilder, critic for the New York World, approached him about “setting the record straight” on Jude. Gilder’s two reviews of the novel, “Hardy the Degenerate” and “Thomas Hardy Makes New Departure,” written in November and December 1895, were what prompted Hardy to consider withdrawing Jude from the American market, a request Hardy says Harper’s denied (2:103). When Gilder wrote to Hardy, asking him if he would like to do an interview with her, he replied, “I have to inform you in answer to your letter that ever since the publication of Jude the Obscure I have declined to be interviewed on the subject of that book; and you must make allowance for human nature when I tell you that I do not feel disposed to depart from this rule in favour of the author of the review of the novel in the New York World. . . . At the same time I cannot but be touched by your kindly wish to set right any misapprehension you may have caused about the story. Such a wish will always be cherished in my recollection, and it removes from my vision of you some obviously unjust characteristics I have given it in

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my mind” (2:126). The choice by Hardy not to speak in public, when he was saying so much in private, is significant, since it indicates that Hardy understood that one could exert one’s influence in a variety of ways, and that sometimes it was better to stay silent than to speak out.

62. Interestingly, the letters to both Allen and Gosse emphasize the recipient’s ability to understand Hardy’s intention rather than just focusing on his execution. To Gosse, Hardy wrote, “It required an artist to see that the plot is almost geometrically constructed . . . . You have hardly an idea how poor and feeble the book seems to me, as executed, beside the idea of it that I had formed in prospect” (2:93). And for his response to Allen, see note 53, second paragraph.

63. Grove’s preface is a bit strange, as prefaces go, for while Grove praises Berry in the first two paragraphs of her commentary, she spends that remainder of her six-page essay refuting one specific point Berry makes—that the salary for women teachers at the turn of the century is “good.” Fearing that young women who read Berry’s book might mistakenly think that a career in teaching will provide them with ample pay, Grove provides comparison figures for male and female teachers, which show that women are paid less throughout their careers, and she refutes the typical reasons for paying women less, such as a male teacher’s responsibility to provide for an entire family rather than just for himself. While Grove’s points are well taken, it is also clear that she uses the writing of the preface as an opportunity to present her own interests rather than to introduce Berry’s ideas.

64. The work of Penny Boumelha, Kaja Silverman, Margaret Higgonet, and Diane Sadoff provides a representative spectrum of interpretations concerning Tess’s assertion of agency across the course of the novel, and these interpretations are useful in terms of setting the context for my discussion of female characters’ use of the spoken word as a method of asserting agency. Higgonet’s argument in “A Woman’s Story: Tess and the Problem of Voice” (1990) lies in the middle of the spectrum of critical opinion and is perhaps closest to my position on Tess’s agency because of its focus on “voice.” Higonnet argues that Hardy is ambivalent on the issue of Tess’s agency because while he codes her voice as “feminine,” making her representative of women, he also tries to individuate her.

Still, although Higgonet’s argument is closest to my own position, all four articles show awareness of the tension between masculine dominance and feminine resistance in the novel, even if they all do not focus on Tess’s use of the spoken word to assert agency. Boumelha (Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form, 1982) and Silverman (“History, Figuration and Female Subjectivity in ‘Tess of the d’Urbervilles,’” 1984) fall more firmly on the side of arguing for little or no agency for Tess. Boumelha argues that the “androgyneous” method of narration that works well for Hardy in earlier novels cannot adapt to the representation of woman’s consciousness in Tess and Jude, and, as a result, creates ample masculine dominance and little feminine resistance in the two novels.

Likewise, Silverman asserts that the male narrator is responsible for the usurpation of Tess’s story, but Silverman, working with the notion of the male gaze, argues that it is the tension between the figural and the non-figural in the narrator’s discourse that prevents Tess from asserting agency. Sadoff (“Looking at Tess,” 1993), on the other hand, argues for assertion of agency by Tess, though with more emphasis on Tess’s
return of the male gaze and consent to participate in the “system of looks,” as J. Hillis Miller has characterized the gaze, than on her use of the spoken word to resist masculine dominance.

65. See the 1896 Osgood, McIlvaine, and Company edition for confirmation that the line break is in the earliest editions of the novel (111).

66. For more on the language of sympathy in the Victorian period, see Audrey Jaffe’s *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (2000), in which Jaffe covers a wide range of texts and their different representations of sympathy.

67. It is also true that, from the beginning of the novel, Tess is characterized by the narrator as one who has the language to speak in a way previous generations of women have not be able to speak. Of Tess and her mother, the narrator states, “Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed” (46). Despite having the knowledge and language to deal with the Victorian period, Tess is not always successful in her attempts to do so.

68. Here, Tess’s actions, had she been “artful” as the narrator suggests, fall into the same realm of those Arabella exhibits in *Jude*.

69. It is worth pointing out that it is Alec d’Urberville who makes the best use of the language of sympathy as it is associated with nineteenth-century Christianity. His confession at the preaching tent, which reveals that Angel’s father is the one who has converted Alec (299, 302), has all the language of repentance needed to effectively gain sympathy and forgiveness from the wider society. Still, it is important that Tess at least initially sees through Alec’s facade. We are told by the narrator that the sight of the new Alec “appalled” Tess, especially when she realizes that “He who had wrought her undoing was now on the side of the Spirit, while she remained unregenerate” (301), and Tess’s conversation with Alec after his preaching ends confirms this (302-07). Tess’s reaction points out well her awareness of the double standard applied even within the language of repentance, and suggests the societal limitations to expressions of woman’s agency that continually work against Tess’s confidence in herself.

70. It was not until 1890 that the law formalized admission procedures for asylums in order to prevent the illegal confinement of people simply thought to be insane (Skultans 147). While asylums, mandated by the Lunacy Act of 1845, were originally established in good faith, as a way to keep poor mentally ill people from being housed in workhouses (Skultans 98), by the 1860s and 70s, it had become evident that many people, especially women, were being declared insane without sufficient proof. The 1859 and 1877 Reports of the Commissioners on Lunacy highlighted this problem (Skultans 122, 126-27), and, in 1890, the law tightened restrictions by requiring a magistrate’s approval of a person admission to the asylum.

71. We might contrast Sue’s compromise with Phillotson to that of Nancy Lord’s compromises with her father and her husband in Gissing’s *Jubilee*. While Nancy is rarely successful in her compromises with the important men in her life, Sue is more successful
here, since she attains concrete changes in her relationship with Phillotson, primarily relief from the duty of having sexual intercourse with him.

72. Interestingly, Phillotson also argues for an even more radical way of living—the matriarchy—for he says to Gillingham, “I am all abroad, I suppose! . . . I was never a very bright reasoner, you remember . . . And yet, I don’t see why the woman and the children should not be the unit without the man” (295). When Gillingham asks whether this is Sue’s perspective too, Phillotson replies, “O no. She little thinks I have out-Sued Sue in this—-all in the twelve hours!” (295).

73. To Clement Shorter, in 1909, Hardy provided a similar rationale, but in more brusque language. “I do not object to the coming of woman-suffrage—for a reason you evidently have never thought of. As soon as women have the vote and can take care of themselves men will be able to strike out honestly right and left in a way they cannot do while women are their dependents, without showing unchivalrous meanness. The result will be that all superstitious institutions will be knocked down or rationalized—theologies, marriage, wealth-worship, labour-worship, hypocritical optimism, and so on. Also some that women will join in putting down: blood-sport, slaughter-house inhumanities, the present blackguard treatment of animals generally, etc, etc. End of my sermon” (4:21).

74. There are differing opinions about the date at which Meredith occupied a secure position in the literary market. Some critics cite the year 1875, with publication of Harry Richmond (Ioan Williams 8, David Williams 127), while others believe that Meredith achieved a significant level of popularity in 1885, with the publication of Diana of the Crossways (Harris 4). Regardless, by the 1890s, Meredith was receiving significant earnings for his novels. He asked William Colles, literary agent for members of the Society of Authors, to attain at least £1200 for the serial version of The Amazing Marriage, presumably because past earnings suggested that he would be able to attain this much for the novel (Letters 2:1127).

75. It is worth noting that Arabella Shore and her sister, Louisa, actually corresponded with Meredith in the mid-1870s. In March 1876, Meredith replied to a letter from Louisa, usually writing for both sisters, in which she and Arabella had apparently complimented him on his recent work. In the letter, Meredith thanks Louisa for her compliments and asks that she be patient with future work, since publishers sometimes influence the subject matter of his novels. He also assures her that he has two novels about the “destinies of women” in mind but is not prepared to write them at present (Letters 3:1704).

In another letter to Louisa, Meredith comments on her and her sister’s interest in his poem “A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt,” which appeared in the August 1876 issue of the Fortnightly Review. In this letter, Meredith expresses his support for the suffrage movement, for the “advancement of the race,” which will happen only once “women walk freely with men,” though Meredith believes that educating women rather than “besieging Parliament” is the appropriate action for the times (1:520-21). Such a statement of support should have pleased Louisa and Arabella, since both women were active in the suffrage movement; Arabella belonged to a number of suffrage societies, and both women wrote published pamphlets on the issue (Crawford 635-36).

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76. As I have stated elsewhere, Kate Flint is correct to locate the development of a consistent, fully developed feminist literary criticism in the 1890s magazine *Shafts*, since feminist periodicals of the 1860s tend to focus on non-fiction texts rather than fiction, or politics rather than texts. *Victoria Magazine* includes many articles on women’s suffrage, but few of these articles include discussion of literary representation of this topic or other women’s issues, and this is true of other magazines of the 1860s, 70s, and 80s, such as *The English Woman’s Journal* and *The Woman’s Suffrage Journal*, both of which ran reviews primarily of non-fictional works, and *Work and Leisure*, which had a policy of not running reviews except in exceptional circumstances, such as Millicent Fawcett’s *The Woman Question in Europe* (1884).

Still, *Victoria Magazine* did have a regular “Literature” section that includes some reviews of novels and poetry, and the magazine had the occasional longer article on literary issues. Some articles expressing feminine, if not always feminist, concerns in literature include “Mrs. Crowe’s and Mrs. Gaskell’s Novels,” by P. Quin Keegan; “Shakespeare’s Heroines,” by Edward R. Russell; and articles on Louisa Alcott and Sara Coleridge. Further, if there is a feminist literary aesthetic in *Victoria Magazine*, it is expressed perhaps best in a review of Charlotte Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865), in which the reviewer argues that Yonge fails to present women whose thoughts, words, and actions come together fully (574). These criteria, so much like those expressed by *Shafts* and *The Woman’s Herald* in the 1890s, shows that some form of feminist literary criticism, if not a fully developed one, was at work before the 1890s.

77. The arguments by Black and Ashwell are worth summarizing, since they highlight both the breadth and depth of Meredith’s representations of women. Black places Meredith at the end of a long period of slow improvement in the realistic representation of women in literature. Arguing that fiction at the beginning of the Victorian period had little to say about the lives of women, she shows how the representation of women’s lives moved from showing little or no intellect in women (as seen in Dickens and Thackeray) to making women the center of attention and showing how their ideas and actions develop (as seen in Brontë and Eliot). In the late-Victorian period, Black continues, works such as those by Eliza Lynn Linton have marked a “retrogression” in the realistic representation of women’s lives, but such as Meredith, on the other hand, have helped women progress remarkably. According to Black, Meredith is “[t]he writer who in our time has best understood and expressed the need . . . of freedom and development for women. . . . [C]arinthia Jane in *The Amazing Marriage*, Nesta in *One of Our Conquerors*, and Diana--finest and greatest of all--are women of a strictly modern type. . . . I suspect that *The Egoist* and *Diana of the Crossways* have opened almost as many eyes as Mill’s *Liberty* and *Subjection of Women*” (11).

Ashwell provides fairly wide coverage of Meredith’s heroines in her six-part series, with each installment covering one of his female characters. Those featured are Lucy Desborough, Rhoda Fleming, Sandra/Emilia Belloni, Clara Middleton, Carinthia Jane, and, of course, Diana Merion. Ashwell begins the first installment with an overview of Meredith’s place in the literary tradition, arguing that it is with Meredith’s *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* that the appreciation of women in fiction is taken seriously, as “justly” and “generously” as the appreciation of men in fiction (3). Then, in her installment on *Diana*, the fourth in the series, Ashwell states, “Although the novels which preceded ‘Diana of the Crossways’ offer an abundance of sane and critical sympathy to womanhood, it is in this particular novel that we find the full fruition of Mr. Meredith’s early determination to portray women as justly as men” (271). Ashwell summarizes
much of the novel, commenting especially on the complexity of Diana’s character (271) and Meredith’s ability to represent “real” women, even if it means portraying them a bit harshly (272), and she concludes the article by suggesting that Diana is, in fact, the “spokeswoman” of Meredith’s thoughts on liberty for women (272).

78. In the tradition of Fowler, Jenni Calder’s “Cash and the Sex Nexus” (1984) locates the feminism of Meredith in his decision to present a couple such as Diana and Dacier, where sexual attraction is the sole basis for their relationship.

79. Hadley, whose “‘Blows into Whispers’: The Melodramatic Mode and Intellectual Culture in the 1870’s and 1880’s” is another example of late-twentieth-century criticism that ends up with a somewhat distorted view of Meredith’s feminism because the critic assumes that all readers react in a similar manner. Viewing Diana through her interest in the melodramatic mode, Hadley argues that Meredith’s novel is an example of late-Victorian male writers’ attempts to protect the “liberal cultural elite male” through use of the melodrama, since in Diana Meredith appropriates the melodramatic mode and then makes melodrama into a form of hysteria (217-18). By putting down the melodramatic mode in the opening of the novel but then making the gossip that Caroline Norton sold government secrets the central plot of the novel, Diana becomes a melodramatic text that allows Meredith to remain popular in a literary market that favored women writers (204-205).

While Hadley’s discussion of the general market conditions under which Meredith and other male authors worked is strong, her lack of attention to the way in which Meredith’s work was received, especially by liberal feminists, results in a slightly distorted reading. I agree that Meredith shared the anxiety felt by other male authors (this is seen especially in his reaction to Mary Hardman’s criticism of his work), but his reputation in the late 1880s and 1890s and the reception of his work--it is admired for its realism not its melodramatic aspects--temper the degree to melodrama is formally at work in Diana. Interestingly, both Hadley and McGlamery inadvertently end up closer to the views of late-nineteenth-century mainstream critics than they perhaps intend; they share with mainstream critics the assumption that readers could not read past Meredith’s particular use of description of characters’ actions.

80. Penny Boumelha’s “‘The Rattling of her Discourse and the Flapping of her Dress’: Meredith Writing the ‘Women of the Future’” (1991) illustrates well the important relationship between narrative theory and historicist criticism by applying such a combination to Diana, though on somewhat different terms than I use here. Boumelha argues that Diana explores the possibilities and limitations of narrating “specific” and “generic” women, and, in doing so, she shows how narrative features, such as the development of plot, are connected to historical context, in this case the disruption of narrative order by feminine forces at the fin de siècle. On the one hand, says Boumelha, the “ease and readability of realist plotting” in Diana “calls upon and calls up a consensual agreement of reader and text that the individual life is comprehensible and meaningful on the basis of a shared narrative structure” (197). On the other hand, “evolutions and causalities are undermined, arguably by that irruption of the feminine that contemporaries felt marked the fin de siècle as a whole” (197).

In addition to showing how conditions of the late-Victorian period shaped this new type of narrative, Boumelha’s perspective helps us understand issues of woman’s agency in Diana by showing how agency exists for fictional characters. There is agency shown
through the focus on individual life, says Boumelha, but “social plot” also controls what can and cannot happen in the text, which tempers the degree of agency possible (198). While Diana begins as a “specific” woman, by the time she sells Dacier’s secret, she becomes “generic” woman (200). Still, Diana is different from other women in the novel, who more readily fit into “the familiar plots of the nineteenth century” (202), and, even in Diana’s marriage to Redworth, the heroine is not undertaking a “wholehearted capitulation to romance” (206). Despite the strength of Boumelha’s argument, her article does not capture the specifics of physical actions as a method of asserting agency, nor does it address the feminist reception of Meredith’s work in the 1890s; her interesting criticism of the novel can be supplemented by the work I do in this chapter.

81. I have not yet discussed in detail Meredith’s use of internal perspective and dialogue in Diana, so let me say a few words here. Like some of the other novels I have discussed in this dissertation, Diana is not heavy with instances of internal perspective from the female protagonist. Even in Chapter 4 of the novel, whose title “Containing Hints of Diana’s Experiences and of What They Led To” suggests that perhaps Diana’s internal perspective will be emphasized, Diana’s thoughts are more often described through the narrator’s internal perspective, identifiable through Meredith’s stylistic tendencies across the other novels.

For example, the first time we see Diana’s perspective on anything, it is her reaction to Lady Dunstane’s worry about the reputation of her home, Copsley, abroad. However, none of the key “emotion” indicators needed for a shift in internal perspective appear, so it is evident that sustained internal perspective from Diana has been passed over, much in the same way Tess’s internal perspective in the opening of Hardy’s Tess is passed over. Reads the narration in Diana: “Copsley was an estate of nearly twelve hundred acres, extending across the ridge of the hills to the slopes North and South. . . . Dirty, dilapidated, hung with weeds and parasites, it would have been more tolerable. She [Emma] tried the effect of various creepers, and they were as a staring point. What it was like then, she had no heart to say. One may, however, fall on a pleasurable resignation in accepting great indemnities, as Diana bade her [Lady Dunstane] believe, when the first disgust began to ebb. ‘A good hundred over there would think it a Paradise for an asylum:’ she [Diana] signified London. Her friend bore such reminders meekly” (38-39).

A page later, Diana contemplates her own leadership abilities, and her internal perspective is again usurped by the narrator’s. “Thus far in their pursuit of methods for the government of a nation, to make it happy, Diana was leader. . . . But she reflected. She discovered that her friend had gone ahead of her. The discovery [that Lady Dunstane was a better leader than Diana] was reached, and even acknowledged before she could persuade herself to swallow the repulsive truth. O self! self! self! are we eternally masking in a domino that reveals your hideous old face when we could be most positive we had escaped you? Eternally! the desolating answer knelled” (40). While it is arguable that Diana’s wits are such that the statement, “O self! self! self! . . .” could be her internal perspective, and it is true that there is a more formidable attempt to include Diana’s perspective than in the earlier example, the statement “O self! self! self! . . .” is stylistically so much like the typical Meredithian narrator that, at the very least, one questions whether this is Diana’s voice (if it is indeed her perspective).

In the absence of sustained internal perspective from Diana in the early chapters of the novel, one might turn to dialogue and description of characters’ actions to understand
Diana’s character and how her agency is represented in the text. While Diana’s witty dialogue appears earlier than her internal perspective, in Chapter 2, and provides readers with a sense of Diana’s tendency to resist even as she entertains others with her wit (20), it is also not until Chapter 4, with Sir Lukin’s offensive proposition to Diana, that Diana’s tendency to resist through the spoken word is evident. Having been told that Diana is a woman “at war with herself,” who wants “external life, action, fields for energies, to vary the struggle” (40-41), it is not surprising to find the narrator describe Diana’s actions when Lukin makes his advancements as such: “the tigress she had detected in her composition did not require to be called forth; half a dozen words, direct, sharp as fangs and teeth with eyes burning over them, sufficed for the work of defence” (46-47). Interestingly, here and later in the chapter, when Diana uses “flash[es]” of her “matchless wit” to reduce Lukin to “that abject state of man beside the fair person he has treated high cavalierly” (48), Diana’s speech is action. However, later in the novel, it will be actions other than speech that dominate her method of resistance, as she contemplates fleeing as an option for expressing agency.

82. In her installment on Carinthia, Ashwell argues that while the women in Meredith’s later novels are not as powerful as Diana or Rhoda Fleming, of the heroines in Meredith’s three novels of the 1890s, Carinthia is the strongest (407). Personally, Ashwell seems to like Carinthia, but her assessment of Carinthia within Meredith’s body of work seems to suggest that even she could not compare to Diana, which helps explain why feminists preferred to talk about the earlier heroine throughout the 1890s.

83. Moore’s use of the image of Parnassus includes the article “Cheap Tripping to Parnassus” (1886), which exposed the corruption of achieving success, as shown by Julien, owner of the studio Moore attended while living in Paris, and “The Decline of the Drama” (1921), in which Moore writes about the frustration of theatre critics upon seeing the work of playwrights who seem not to have lived up to the expectations set by drama of the 1890s, when it seemed as though “Ibsen had hit upon a dramatic road that would lead every body to Parnassus who cared to go there” (1). In both of these cases, Moore uses the image in a somewhat derogatory manner, and yet, he seems not to discuss his own struggle to reach Parnassus in anything other than positive terms.

84. Among those critics who have revised Watt are John Richetti (Popular Fiction Before Richardson: Narrative Patterns 1700-1739, 1969, rep. 1992), Nancy K. Miller (The Heroine’s Text: Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782, 1980), Michael McKeon (The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740, 1987), Nancy Armstrong (Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel, 1987), Margaret Anne Doody (The True Story of the Novel, 1996), and Josephine Donovan (Women and the Rise of the Novel, 1405-1726, 1999). While Richetti and McKeon have done much to question Watt’s omission of a discussion of the romance in his account, most useful to my work here are the studies by Miller, Armstrong, Doody, and Donovan. Their studies address directly the masculinist assumptions of a traditional history of the novel (Miller and Armstrong) and the overlooked contributions of early women novelists (Doody and Donovan). These revisions to the history of the novel make clearer the strong investment nineteenth-century male authors had in building and sustaining a masculinist tradition.

85. I use the term “masculinist” to denote that, as the notion of a canon developed over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and as the idea of professional authorship became more important, women were increasingly shut out of this tradition. As the sources cited in note 84 show, by the mid-twentieth century, the literary canon
was comprised primarily of works by male authors. Further, as the introduction to this dissertation shows, even in the late-nineteenth century, the acceptance of women in the field of professional authorship was uncertain.

86. On the struggle to define the novel as either “masculine” or “feminine,” see sources listed in note 84, as well as sources specific to the nineteenth-century novel. See Robin Gilmour’s *The Novel in the Victorian Age* (1986) and Harry E. Shaw’s *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (1999) for their focus on the “realism” of the nineteenth-century novel, a concept that was closely connected to the “gender” of the novel. See Elaine Showalter’s *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Brontë to Lessing* (1977), Robyn R. Warhol’s *Gendered Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (1989), and Susan Sniader Lanser’s *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (1992) on the ways in which “feminine” writers (female, in Showalter’s and Lanser’s studies; female and male, in Warhol’s study) were marginalized by the masculinist tradition.

Highlights of the struggle over the “gender of the novel” include the marginalization of eighteenth-century women writers, especially Gothic women writers, by their male contemporaries; Walter Scott’s attempt in the Romantic period to “masculinize” the novel in order to carve out a space for himself in a market dominated by male poets such as Byron; the adoption of male pseudonyms by Victorian women writers such as the Brontës and George Eliot in order to establish authority in the literary market; and the move by late-Victorian adventure novelists, such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Rider Haggard, to remasculinize the novel once again.

On the fallen woman tradition, see Nina Auerbach (*Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, 1982), George Watt (*The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*, 1984), Susan P. Casteras (*Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art*, 1987), and Amanda Anderson (*Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Fallenness in Victorian Womanhood*, 1993). These studies show how it was that the fallen woman became a figure for both male and female authors to discuss a wider range of issues, especially issues of social responsibility and the class hierarchy.

On the New Woman novel, see Ann Ardis (*New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism*, 1990), Elaine Showalter (*Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, 1990), and Sally Ledger (*The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*, 1997).

87. Certainly, one could argue that the works of other eighteenth-century authors, such as Defoe, are as important in terms of the woman-centered nature of the novel as Richardson’s works are. Defoe’s Roxana and Moll Flanders are transgressive heroines that might also have influences Moore’s thinking as he wrote *Esther Waters*, but a direct influence is not documented in Moore’s writings. While writers such as Gissing, Hardy, and Meredith read widely in the British canon, this is less true of Moore.

88. For more on this, see Adrian Frazier’s reading of this passage in *George Moore 1852-1933*, which emphasizes the “queer” quality of it. Frazier asserts that “Lovelace” is not meant to be seen as Moore himself, as some critics have suggested, but as Moore’s male love interest. In making this argument, Frazier reminds readers of Marc-André Raffalovich’s 1886 “plausibly homoerotic” poem, “Lovelace,” which might have been Moore’s inspiration for this passage (157).
I believe it is not necessary to see this passage as either about Moore himself or his male love interest, nor is it necessary to see the passage as one about only the real-life events of the nineteenth century. Instead, in the context of the type of material Moore is discussing when he employs this example, a series of musings about literature, and in the context of Moore’s concerns about establishing himself in the British masculinist tradition of the novel, this passage serves as an illustration of the bind of the late-nineteenth-century male author, who must create a Lovelace that appeals to both men and women readers.

89. For more on Balzac as a writer who combines feminine and masculine qualities in his prose, see Moore’s “Some of Balzac’s Minor Pieces” (1889), in which Moore characterizes Balzac as one who works in the tradition of the drawing-room novel, the origins of which Moore will attribute to Austen in later writings, but also one who represents the drawing-room in such a way that he goes beyond the surface of life there. “Balzac goes deeper; he saw that the drawing-room is perhaps the last expression of an exhausted civilisation” (495), Moore writes. What is interesting about Moore’s commentary on Balzac is that Moore appears to set Balzac against the woman writers of the nineteenth century, women whose adoption of the novel of manners can be attributed to a “masculine” origin (Fielding), yet even as Moore sets Balzac up as more masculine that the women writers, his attention to Balzac, a French writer, has connections to the more feminine approach of Richardson.

90. Moore’s discussion of Richardson in the two-part “An Imaginary Conversation: Gosse and Moore” is equally marginal. In this article, Moore again attributes the shaping of the English novel to Fielding rather than Richardson, but his comments about Jane Austen as the founder of “a new medium of literary expression . . . whereby domestic life may be described,” a form of expression to which “every one of us” is “indebted” (780-81), suggests that Moore recognized Richardson’s role in the development of the genre.

91. Often the woman Moore wrote to at any given time was also the woman he was currently pursuing romantically. Lena Milman, who was fancied by both Moore and Thomas Hardy, was Moore’s source of support during the writing of Esther Waters, with Pearl Craigie succeeding her in the midst of publication of the novel. Craigie’s letters to Moore, which begin while Esther Waters was in proofs, have been preserved because Clement K. Shorter copied the originals while he had them on loan from Moore. What is interesting about these letters is how quickly the relationship between Moore and Craigie seems to have developed and how thoroughly their personal and professional relationships were intertwined.

Reading these letters, one must wonder the degree to which gender played a role in the development of their relationship, since the letters reveal a real ambivalence about gender on the part of Craigie. For example, although Craigie claims in a letter from January 11, 1894 that gender is never a factor in her critical commentary on Moore’s writing (“I do not say this [how wonderful Esther Waters is] because you are a man and I am a woman,” she writes), in other letters, it seems as though Craigie does defer to Moore on the basis of gender. In a letter from January 21, 1894, in which Craigie first praises Esther Waters and then follows this praise with critiques of two very specific points in the story, she ends her letter with a clear deferral to Moore, the question “Are
you angry with me?,” indicating that she is very aware that her commentary may hurt Moore’s ego.

Overall, Craigie seems to have established a fairly traditional male/female relationship with Moore, which no doubt is a result of her somewhat conservative views on relationships, especially compared to those of late-Victorian liberal-feminists. In a letter from January 30, 1894, Craigie’s conservative views are evident, for she claims that she has “such a primitive instinct about the superiority of the masculine intellect” that she “could make mistakes all day for the mere pleasure of being corrected.” She then worries that perhaps Moore will think her “weak” for making this comment, suggesting that Craigie was aware of the New Woman ideology and how it differed from her own. Craigie even sets herself apart from liberal-feminists directly in these letters. On February 25, 1894, she expresses her annoyance upon seeing a clipping in the Academy that associates her with George Egerton (“I wish they would not always speak of Egerton with me--as though we were in sympathy”), and, in mid-March 1894, she is somewhat amused when a gossip column in Truth mistakes her for Sarah Grand when writing of Moore’s association with her. “Sarah Grand in arm of George Moore!,” Craigie writes. “They meant J. O. H. [John Oliver Hobbes, Craigie’s pseudonym] of course.” For full text of these letters and others, see Ms. 2135 in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

92. Kahn’s book focuses on Richardson’s use of the first-person feminine narration in Clarissa and its connection to his correspondence with women about the novel, and Frazier argues that Moore’s use of the feminine voice in Evelyn Innes (1898) allowed him to express his homoerotic feelings for W. B. Yeats without acting on these feelings in his real-life relationship with the poet.

93. The other type of success desired by Moore was commercial success, or what I like to call “commodity-status,” which is measured through sales in pounds, editions issued, and number of copies sold. Certainly, both classic- and commodity-status were necessary for achieving a lasting reputation in a market where literary and commercial success were linked. I employ the terms “classic-status” and “commodity-status” to link two concepts, classic and commodity, to the more important concept of “status”; “classic” and “commodity” are terms which exist only to serve the concept of “status” that nineteenth-century English society had deemed so extremely important.

In creating these terms, I am indebted to N. N. Feltes, who, in Modes of Production in Victorian Novels (1986), executes a similar rhetorical move of creating two terms in relationship to a root word in order to emphasize the privileging of the concept common to both terms. Feltes employs the terms “commodity-book” and “commodity-text” to designate two types of products. The first, “commodity-book,” existed in the precapitalist, late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century mode of production, in which the book as object and status symbol, especially the three-decker, was the primary commodity of the period. The other, “commodity-text,” existed in the fully capitalist Victorian mode of production, in which the “text” (appearing in serial form) replaces the “book” as the primary commodity. By creating the two terms from the root word “commodity,” Feltes can emphasize the ways in which both products were first and foremost commodities meant to turn a profit for the entity controlling the market.

94. The differences in the general conditions of the marketplace between Richardson’s and Moore’s milieus cannot be overlooked. As Richard Altick explains in The English
Common Reader (1957), the number of people reading, the reasons they were reading, and the manner in which material was published and distributed changed significantly between 1740 and 1890, with the rise of the circulating library playing a significant role in this change. When Richardson published Pamela in 1740, the circulating library had not yet been established, though the poet Allan Ramsey had started the practice of renting out books from his shop a good fifteen years earlier and other borrowing arrangements similar to the circulating libraries were becoming more common, at least in the cities. Also at this time, the number of books printed in an edition was still relatively low; figures for Pamela are unknown, but the general figures in the 1740s run around 4,000 copies for a single edition and 9,000 copies for all contemporary editions (49-50). By the end of the nineteenth century, figures would be in the tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands, depending on the type of novel and the length of its run. The number of books sold by sensationalist women writers were particularly high, with hundreds of thousands being sold in a year (381-86). This shift in the number of books being published and bought shows the extent to which the selling of books became a huge industry; the competition to do well in this industry increased dramatically the pressure on authors to appeal to the book-reading public through advertising.

In addition to the differences in the general conditions of the market across two centuries, Richardson’s and Moore’s respective positions in these markets affected their approach to marketing their novels. Richardson’s position as a well-established printer at the time he wrote Pamela gave Richardson a distinct advantage in negotiating the literary marketplace; not only did he have access to a circle of supportive friends and colleagues who were able to give him advice about the publication of his novels, but, in fact, he wrote Pamela because his friends in the printing business encouraged him to do it. Richardson’s printing business also gave him the advantage of not suffering financially as many authors did. Moore is like Richardson in this respect. As the child of an Irish landlord, Moore did not need to work for a living, though his income from tenants once his father died was significantly smaller than his father’s income had been, mainly because of resistance from the tenants. Yet, Moore’s position in the British literary market was as an outsider, in part because of his Irish heritage but also because he did not have connections to those involved in the business aspect of the market. Most of Moore’s connections were to other authors and some publishers, though he tended to establish ties to both authors and publishers on the fringes of the mainstream and often worked to challenge the mainstream values of the market.

95. While such a view of Esther Waters perhaps relies too much on a chronologically progressive view of the development of the novel, this characterization of Esther Waters is supported by evidence that the novel was a direct response to Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles and even by some of the themes of the novel itself. My own MA thesis, “‘Hers is a heroic adventure if one considers it’: Discourse Communities in George Moore’s Esther Waters and Their Considerations of the ‘Fallen’ Woman Issue,” examines the ways in which Moore’s attention to particular communities in the novel helps create competing views of the fallen woman and ultimately result in the unraveling of any one dominant view of the ostracized woman. Furthermore, Esther’s transformation of the language of the Plymouth Brethren to maintain her membership in their community, despite her fallen status, shows the possibilities for deconstructing the fallen woman stereotype.

96. Interestingly, even in Zola’s supposedly Francophone approach to literature, we can see the traces of the masculinist English canon at work. One of Zola’s strongest and
earliest influences was Hippolyte Taine, author of The History of English Literature (1863-64; translated into English 1871), whom Zola encountered very early in his career, while working for Hachette, the publisher of Taine’s multivolume work. As Frederick Brown makes clear in Zola: A Life, Zola’s decision, in the early 1860s, to abandon poetry and write prose fiction instead is a move toward embracing masculinity, especially the positivist, scientific approach of Taine (107-08).

Also relevant here is the more general interplay between the French and English traditions. While most studies of the two traditions focus on similar themes rather than materialist analysis of their influences on each other, or focus primarily on the French influence in England rather than the other way around, M. G. Devonshire’s The English Novel in France (1929) provides interesting information on the material reality of the influence of the English novel in France. Devonshire’s study covers the years 1830-70, which includes the early years of Zola’s career. In this study, Devonshire suggests that from 1830-48, the French had a strong interest in the English novel but published translations somewhat sparingly. The exception to this was the translation of Walter Scott’s work, which was significant and which encouraged interest in the eighteenth-century classics. The general political situation (the waning of English-French antagonism after the fall of Napoleon) also contributed to interest in the English novel during this period. In the period from 1848-70, Devonshire’s study suggests, the French novel was in a lull, which encouraged the French to read English fiction, and the growth of the English novel during the Victorian period resulted in good availability of the translations of contemporary authors, including Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Kingsley, Gaskell, Reade, Eliot, and the Brontës. According to Devonshire, Taine’s attention to Dickens and Thackeray in The History of English Literature gave their work added prestige. See also, Harold Wade Streeter’s The Eighteenth Century English Novel in French Translation (1936), which provides a good overview of the way the English novel came to France; Streeter focuses exclusively on eighteenth-century translations, ending his study at the year 1805.

97. A review of the many articles Moore wrote during this period, especially those published in The Speaker, reveals that Moore was working hard to establish an English realist tradition of art and that he would go to great lengths to emphasize English nationality and criticize the French tradition in order to achieve his goal. Also interesting is the fact that the articles that appear in The Speaker, read in chronological order, are clearly one larger argument for the necessity of an English realist tradition. Each article plays directly off the last, and as one reads further into the articles published in 1891, one sees Moore expanding his discussion of realist principles to include literature as well as the visual arts.

The first few articles in the series, “A Lesser Light,” “A Great Artist,” and “A Modern Artist,” compare particular painters (Diaz, Charles Keene, and Alfred Parsons respectively) to Moore’s standard, based on the degree of realism in their painting but also on a sort of universal canonicity (will this artist’s work hold up over time?) and a more specific national canonicity (is this artist “English” enough?). Moore finds Keene to be particularly “English,” like a larger group of artists Moore identifies as isolationist, staying away from such things as “foreign travel” (397). Parsons, on the other hand, Moore faults for his endless experimentation with color, a tendency Moore accuses many late-nineteenth-century painters of possessing and characterizes as “talent in a state of disintegration” (429). Though Moore does not directly accuse Parsons of being too much like the French, and he even looks for the later-day French impressionism in Parsons’s
work as a way for it to redeem itself, Moore’s association of over-experimentation with the French in other articles, and his suggestion that Parsons and other English painters lack the consistency of the Dutch, suggests that Parsons has fallen prey to the French influence.

This sort of commentary from Moore—someone who had been so heavily influenced by the French and seemed to still have a real affection for the French as he was writing these articles (see, for example, “My Impressions of Zola,” published in the English Illustrated Magazine in 1894)—is somewhat surprising. Yet, subsequent articles in The Speaker confirm even more firmly Moore’s belief that English painters needed to separate themselves from other traditions, especially the French tradition. See “The New English Art Club,” “The Royal Academy,” “The New Gallery,” and “The Paris Salon” for examples. Later in life, in “The Dusk of the Gods” (1916), an interview John Lloyd Balderston had with Moore, Moore would go so far as to claim that “ignorance” and “segregation” were the best circumstances for great art, since when artists from different nations mix, the “inner vision” is lost and they end up imitating each other rather than representing Nature (166-67).

98. Interestingly, the article on Drama in Muslin that has survived is “Defensio Pro Scriptus Meis” (1887), in which Moore responds to critics of the novel by stating his intentions and providing his own criticism of the novel. While Frazier cites this particular article as evidence of Moore’s move away from naturalism (153), it is also useful for its discussion of the process Moore underwent in order to develop his central female character, Alice Barton. Moore considers Barton’s character the greatest strength of the novel, and he states that she is as good as any of the heroines found in Howells or James (280), but the process by which Moore builds this character involves deconstructing real women in order to construct an imaginary one. Of the process, Moore states that after deciding on Alice’s profession, the writing of sentimental stories, he “passed in review all the women I know who took part in the world’s work; I remembered some five or six who collectively were a realization of the character which, in vague and fragmentary outline, I had already conceived. I thought of these women long and anxiously[,] I recalled looks, words, and gestures; I raked together every half-forgotten memory; I considered the main structure of each temperament; and I took note of special peculiarities; over and over again I pulled these women to pieces like toys, and strove to build something of my own out of the pile of virtues and vices that lay before me” (279-80).

99. Traditionally, critics recount the story of Moore reading an article about servants in the newspaper, which asked readers to think about the amount of service they require from those in servant positions and which struck Moore in an especially strong manner. “My thoughts had galloped away on something that looked like an inspiration from the Muses,” he writes in A Communication to My Friends. “I was asking myself if servants, who in English literature are never introduced except as comic characters, might not be treated as the principal characters of a novel. After all, they are human beings like ourselves, though reduced by riches to a sort of partial slavery” (65). Critics also highlight passages from Moore’s discussion, in Confessions, of “awful Emma,” the woman who served him when he first returned from Paris and was living in lodgings on the Strand. “Emma, I remember you—you are not forgotten—up at five o’clock every morning, scouring, washing, cooking, dressing those infamous children; seventeen hours at least out of the twenty-four at the beck and call of landlady, lodgers, and quarrelling children. . . . Dickens would sentimentalise or laugh over you; I do neither. I merely recognise you
as one of the facts of civilisation... Yes, you are a mule, there is no sense in you; you are a beast of burden, a drudge too horrible for anything but work. ... Poor Emma! I shall never forget your kind heart and your unfailing good humour; you were born beautifully as a rose is born with perfect perfume; you were as unconscious of your goodness as the rose of its perfume. ... I studied the horrible servant as one might an insect under a microscope. ‘What an admirable book she would make, but what will the end be? if only I knew the end!’” (133-37, 191).

100. Still, while Moore makes a great achievement with *Esther Waters*, the limits of his achievement should be discussed. I have pointed out the contrast between Esther and Tess in my discussion of the novel, and Moore himself encourages this contrast between his work and Hardy’s. In fact, Moore claimed that he chose the title *Esther Waters* because it would indicate that his novel was a direct contrast to *Tess* (Frazier 226), and he referred to *Tess* as just a “bundle of anecdotes” (Frazier 229). But just as Moore’s novel points out the limitations of Tess, it is important that we see the limits of Moore’s response to Hardy’s novel, and we can do so by turning to the work of one of the most popular women writers of the 1890s, Marie Corelli. Corelli’s *The Sorrows of Satan*, the story of Geoffrey Tempest, a late-Victorian male author “tempted” by the tenets of decadent aestheticism and “saved” by the woman writer Mavis Clare (who rejects the decadence of the New Woman ideology and holds a more “wholesome” philosophy), broke records for the best initial sales of a novel when it was released, with more than 25,000 copies sold in the first week (Federico 7), and it is often seen as yet a different response to Hardy’s *Tess*. Not only does it show Corelli’s dislike for Hardy (Keating xxi), but it clarifies the limits of Moore’s critique of *Tess*.

In *Sorrows*, Corelli references *Tess* more than once. Not only does her decision to give Mavis the same last name as Angel Clare suggest a reference to *Tess*, but Geoffrey’s claim that the play he attends with friends is “on the usual them which has lately become popular with stage-managers--the glorification of a ‘fallen’ lady, and the exhibition of her as an example of something superlatively pure and good” (67) is another reference. So too is his later characterization of the play as one in which “The ‘woman with the past’ went on with her hysterical sham-heroics, and the mealy-mouthed fool of a hero declared her to be a ‘pure angel wronged’” (71). Such references suggest that *Tess* is less a remarkable artistic achievement and, instead, a sensational play with decadent values, and this view of male authors, as engaging in sensationalism, is strengthened by Corelli’s characterization of male authors as either corrupted by money, as Geoffrey is, or as part of a massive movement toward decadence.

Next to *Sorrows*, *Esther Waters* is a critique that works well within the nineteenth-century literary tradition, using the same narrative strategies employed by the original source and striving for a similar effect, especially terms of the realistic representation of woman’s agency. *Sorrows*, on the other hand, more thoroughly moves outside this tradition, using satire to critique *Tess*. In fact, not only is the content of *Tess* questioned in *Sorrows*, but so is its form. When Geoffrey comments on the “hysterical sham-heroics” of Tess and the “mealy-mouthed fool of a hero,” Angel, his companion Lord Elton is surprised and says, “But, God bless my soul!--you don’t call this play low or immoral do you? It’s a realistic study of modern social life--that’s what it is. These women you know--these poor souls with a past--are very interesting!” (71).

While Corelli’s references to Hardy reveal that Moore’s critique is well within the system of realism, it should be acknowledged that Corelli’s critique also has its own limitations.
In parodying *Tess*, Corelli does more to comment on issues of authorship than she does on the issue of woman's agency. While her portrayal of Mavis Clare suggests that women can be independent, successful, and happy without adopting the New Woman ideology, Mavis’s view of the role of women in society is basically conservative, since she becomes Geoffrey’s “saviour,” a role that has ties to the separate-spheres doctrine that women provide a “safe space” for men. Further, since most of the direct critique of *Tess* is funneled through Geoffrey and his first-person account, Corelli’s own position on *Tess* can be difficult to discern. Clearly, her use of satire throughout *Sorrows* suggests that she might be critical of *Tess* and other male-authored texts of the time, but her use of a character much like herself in Mavis Clare complicates the issue of her authorial voice, since Mavis is a foil to Geoffrey. With Mavis in the picture, it becomes clear that Geoffrey is wrong about many things, including, perhaps, the problems with *Tess*. Mavis herself is not directly critical of the novel and its contemporaries, and even Mavis’s comments about her own lifestyle, such as her reflection that it is wrong to thing of “love and marriage as the only joys that can make a woman happy” (279), is less a critique of the New Woman ideology than it is an account of a positive alternative that stands on its own. While Corelli’s novel points out the limitations of Moore’s critique of *Tess*, it also iterates the achievement of *Esther Waters*. That Moore critiques Hardy’s novel, including its representation of woman’s agency, through realism rather than through a literary mode from outside the dominant system shows the power that working within the system can have.

101. Among the other books that evoke “echo-augury” for Moore—anything by Shelley and Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean* (Confessions 50, 165-66).

102. Another important factor to consider in assessing Moore’s actual financial success with *Esther Waters* is its American sales. The author earned no money from the early American editions of the novel, due to the lack of international copyright laws at the time. Since Moore had no copyright for an American edition and no authorized American edition appeared at the time of the first English edition, the American market was filled with pirate versions of the novel (Hone 212; Gilcher 44). Had the conditions of the American market been more like those of the British market, Moore clearly would have profitted more than he did from sales of *Esther Waters*.

103. For more information about the importance of a book’s appearance to Moore, see *Parnassus* 384-415, 460-81. The full text of these letters also addresses, more fully than I can here, the publication of other novels by Moore and Moore’s belief that the material quality of one book could influence the reception of other novels. Still, it is worth mentioning here the case of *Héloïse and Abélard*, the next of Moore’s novels to be printed as a fine edition. Like *Esther Waters*, *Héloïse and Abélard* focuses on the “love passages” Moore believed to be so central to respected literature (Moore describes *Héloïse and Abélard* as “the great love story of the middle ages” in one of his letters to Laurie [*Parnassus* 387]), and it would be printed in 1921 as a special limited edition with hand-set type. This edition became the centerpiece of a public debate about the benefits of seeing “the book” as “ornament,” the propriety of living authors encouraging the publication of special editions of their own work, and other authorship issues, many of which seem rooted in the same woman-as-book, book-as-woman concept that Moore raised about the publication of the 1920 fine edition of *Esther Waters*.

A review of the numerous newspaper articles written by Moore and others about this particular edition indicates that Moore had come to see the book as ornament but one
that should be constructed in such a way that it was an organic, living being. In his
articles on the type in *Héloïse and Abélard*, he reminds readers of the “handicraft”
movement, made famous by John Ruskin and William Morris, and he suggests that to
publish a book in hand-set type is to more closely produce the books in their natural
form, rather than in the artificial form that results when the type is machine set. In
addition, in the context of Moore’s attention to the canon in his later years, it seems that
in these articles, Moore is suggesting that a book with inner aesthetics, or “fine” content,
deserves an appearance worthy of that content. Still, the articles also make clear that
Moore was overtly marketing his books to book collectors, who were interested in the
appearance of the book as much as, if not more than, its content. Moore’s adamant
stance on the conditions under which *Héloïse and Abélard* was to be published caused
such an uproar that the publisher, Boni & Liveright, ended up publishing an apology in
the four-page advertisement for the novel sent to subscribers. After three pages of trying
to convince their subscribers of the “exquisite” nature of the edition, the back page of the
advertisement includes the following disclaimer: “It was our desire to publish this book
in a regular, unlimited edition, for there is no reason why it should not so appear. But
our arrangements with Mr. Moore, unfortunately, make this impossible.” For more
details, see *Scrapbooks of Clippings about George Moore and His Contemporaries, Collected by
C. E. Neil*, in Arizona State University’s Hayden Special Collections.

104. In addition to these changes, Moore “completely revised” the text for this edition, a
decision that has not been honored in all subsequent editions. For example, Lionel
Stevenson, editor of the 1963 Riverside edition, chose to use the 1899 version of the
book instead of the 1920 version. In the 1899 version, Stevenson reasoned, the revisions
were “mainly confined to the elimination of errors and awkwardness” so the edition
manages to “retain the freshness which was partly obliterated by the more sophisticated
changes made twenty years later” (46).

The freedom to make major revisions—even when they resulted in a loss of “freshness”—was of such importance to Moore that he once threatened to stop writing altogether if he
could not do significant rewriting on printer’s proofs. In a letter written to Laurie in the
spring of 1921, just when Moore’s disappointment and anger over the appearance of the
better edition of *Esther Waters* seemed to be subsiding, Moore renewed his quarrels with
Laurie over the publishing process. He writes: “I should have thought that after these
many years you would have some into the knowledge that I can write only in one way,
and that is by correcting my proofs or if you like better by altering my proofs
extensively. If you have not come into this knowledge please . . . acquire it. *I can write in
one way and in one way only*” (*Parnassus* 514). Moore goes on to complain about the
outrageous prices the printer, Riverside Press, charges him for corrections, and he asks
Laurie to make some arrangement with them. “There is no use warning me against
correcting my proofs for I can write in one way and in one way only; and if
circumstances do not allow me to write that way I must stop writing,” Moore concludes
his letter, giving such a strong statement that Laurie agreed to pay twenty-five percent of
the cost of corrections in the future (514-15). For more details, especially the style of
Moore’s written correspondence with publishers when intent on getting what he wanted,
see full text of this letter in *Parnassus*. The calculated pacing, the repetition of key
phrases, and the sense of deliberate word choice in this letter capture well Moore’s style
for such interactions.

105. The stage version of *Esther Waters* has its own complex history. The first version of
the play, produced by the Stage Society at the Apollo Theatre in 1911 and published in
1913, received mostly poor reviews from British, German, and American writers, but its production pleased Moore very much, since he was finally able to see his characters brought to life literally (Hone 301). A second version of the play, the result of an unsuccessful collaboration between Moore and H. Barrett Clark, was written by Moore in 1922 but not published until 1984. Clark also wrote a second version of the play in 1922, but it was never produced for stage. For more details, especially about the failed collaboration between Moore and Clark, see W. Eugene Davis’s *The Celebrated Case of Esther Waters: The Collaboration of George Moore and Barrett H. Clark on “Esther Waters: A Play”* (1984), which contains the full text of Moore’s and Clark’s versions. On the one hand, Moore’s choice to use dramatic forms such as the play to promote the novel indicates an attempt to appeal to a broader audience, a sign of achieving commodity-status. On the other hand, the fact that Moore decided to adapt *Esther Waters*, instead of one of his less successful works, suggests that the author was concentrating on building his classic-status. Davis lends support to this argument, for he believes that Moore chose *Esther Waters* for play adaptation because the novel was the most “English” of his novels and because Moore had just returned to England after abandoning his brief interest in the Irish Renaissance theatre movement (4).

106. There are two George Moore calendars, one authorized (*The George Moore Calendar; a Quotation from the Works of George Moore for Every Day in the Year, Selected by Margaret Gough*) and the other an unauthorized reprint (*Epigrams of George Moore*). Both contain the same text, which includes quotations from *Esther Waters* as well as other novels by Moore, but the authorized version takes special pains to present Moore as an established literary figure. The front pages of the booklet include a page listing other calendars “uniform” with this one (writers include Dickens, Wilde, Montaigne, and Thoreau), a page with Moore’s portrait and signature, and a page with a lengthy biographical note. The unauthorized reprint, on the other hand, is printed in a much smaller, shabbier format and without the dates or any front material about Moore.

107. In the midst of the opening story, about one of the many women Moore supposedly loved, Moore rewrites two lines from “Jenny” and, in doing so, presents himself as a victim of love. “October turns to November and I am but a faded flower in her nosegay,” Moore writes and then, rewriting Rossetti’s “Like a rose shut in a book / In which pure woman may not look,” he states: “A rose shut in a book / In which a pure man may not look” (21).

108. Anderson argues that while the speaker’s anxiety about his own agency, representative of the wider culture’s anxiety about its class structure, always overrides Jenny’s individual agency, there are moments when the abstraction of Jenny results in expressions of agency. For example, when the speaker wonders whether Jenny’s look—characterized as like a “book / Half read by lightning in a dream”—is meant to “fit” the speaker with “a lure” (lines 46-63, p. 158 in Anderson), “a lure” might be read as “allure,” signifying empowerment for Jenny through her beauty (159-60). Nevertheless, Jenny is also characterized more than once as a “closed book,” suggesting that the moments of Jenny’s empowerment, signified by opening the book, are at least perceived by the speaker as being under his control rather than controlled by Jenny herself (161-65).

Psomiades confirms the power of beauty and its limits when she argues that central to nineteenth-century British aestheticism is the representation of the beautiful woman, and she shows how it is that these representations create the institution of aestheticism as
much as, if not more than, the institution of aestheticism creates the representations. Like Anderson, Psomiades emphasizes the tendency for cultural factors—in this case, the system of exchange in industrial England—to override individual agency (Jenny is an art object), but she also focuses on the ways in which Jenny’s “value” makes her a powerful representation, and makes British aestheticism what it is (38-44).

109. Jaffe argues that David “avoid[s] becoming a character . . . by making others into characters into his . . . own story” (115); Jordan asserts that David’s characterizations of other characters, in particular his lack of attention to signs of class differences between himself and others, allow David to avoid blame for his complicity in upholding a middle-class ideology (63-64); and Poovey believes that David’s retrospective narration is an attempt by David to recreate a idealized version of his mother, an act that will keep intact David’s own identity (92).

110. In addition to carrying the charge of overprivileging discourse instead of “story” concerns, narratology also has been accused of falling short of expectations in the area of “real” readers’ responses to specific narrative strategies, and this dissertation addresses that issue. At the “Readers and Readerly Responses” panel at the 2002 Narrative Conference, Will van Peer discussed his and his colleagues’ study of the effects of focalization on teenage readers. To their disappointment, they found that readers are not affected by focalization in the ways one might expect.

In the study, van Peer and his colleagues took a short story about an unhappy marriage, written in third-person and with little character focalization, and rewrote the story twice, first with additional character focalization for the male character and then with additional character focalization for the female character. Expecting that reader would find the female character more “sympathetic,” “just,” and “considerate” when reading the version with added character focalization for the female character that they would favor the male character in the other version, van Peer and his colleagues were surprised to find this not to be the case, proving that, in fact, the effect of focalization on this group of real readers was minimal.

Audience members at the panel did point out some of the problems with van Peer’s study, especially the fact that the study’s use of gender stereotypes may have contributed to the results of the survey. Still, it is also true that cultural factors will often intersect with narrative issues. In other words, eliminating the gender stereotypes from the story would not necessarily give more accurate results, since the cultural factors encountered by real readers would be absent from the study.

By focusing on a group of readers from the 1890s, this dissertation also aims to show how narrative issues and cultural factors intersect in the perceptions of real readers. In the reactions of liberal-feminist readers of the 1890s, we see how reader expectations and wishes about how a story is shape the impact of fictional representations in their readings. While my study does not have the scientific accuracy of van Peer’s contemporary survey, this dissertation shows another way in which narratologists can address the issue of real readers’ responses without shifting their focus to data collecting and results analysis.

111. For more information on these real-life examples, see Barbara Miller Solomon’s *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (1985) on the effect of higher education on women’s political, economic, and social
power; The Politics of Women’s Health: Exploring Agency and Autonomy (1998) on the influence of second-wave feminism on women’s health care; and Barbara Crossette’s “Population Estimates Fall as Poor Women Assert Control” (2002) on the decline in birth rates in non-Western countries and the role of formal and informal education in this decline.

In In the Company of Educated Women, Solomon traces the history of women in higher education, with emphasis on the ways in which education has empowered women. Arguing that, “[a]t every stage of their progress, individual women persisted in exploiting opportunities” made possible through education (xviii), she claims that women’s participation in higher education can be tied to better employment opportunities and more choices about family life, since education gives women the choice to work instead of marrying and having children. While Solomon readily acknowledges that education does not necessarily lead to equal pay for work (in 1984, women were still making only 62 cents for every dollar earned by men) or decreased marital and birth rates (the patterns fluctuate over the course of the twentieth century), Solomon believes that the “essence” of the liberal arts experience—“learning to think for oneself” (xx)—changes the way that women think about themselves. The influence of Solomon’s study can be seen in a number of more recent books on women and education, including Susan Levine’s Degrees of Equality: The American Association of University Women and the Challenge of Twentieth-Century Feminism (1995), Amy Thompson McCandless’s The Past in the Present: Women’s Higher Education in the Twentieth-Century American South (1999), and Jane Roland Martin’s Coming of Age in Academe: Rekindling Women’s Hopes and Reforming the Academy (2000).

In The Politics of Women’s Health, members of the interdisciplinary group the Feminist Health Care Ethics Research Network present essays on various concerns about women’s health care, but with emphasis on issues of agency and autonomy for women in their treatment. In addition to contextualizing their project through a discussion of feminist ideals in the introduction to the book, some of the essays specifically refer to the role of second-wave feminist consciousness-raising as part of the history of feminist health care. For example, Abby Lippman, in her article on the differences between geneticization and health promotion models of care, refers to the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective, known for its publication of Our Bodies, Ourselves, and its role in producing materials for women that showed them how to assert agency in making decisions about their own health care (77). As Lippman points out, feminist organizations developed a a health promotion model for health care long before national governments (for example, Canada) promoted such an approach (77).

In “Population Estimates Fall,” Crossette details new findings on population trends in non-Western countries. Though Crossette claims that the changes in birth rates are not necessarily linked to increased formal education, many of the examples in the article show that at least informal education is having an impact on women’s thinking about family size, contraception, and other birth-related issues. In India, for example, the spread of information from women in one village to another is lowering birth rates dramatically. The shift from 2.1 children per woman to 1.85 children per woman will mean 85 million fewer people than expected by the year 2050, and 686 million less by the year 2150. “[W]ith increasing awareness on the part of women,” says Gita Sen, a professor of economics in Bangalore, India, “they are being able to control their own fertility much better. It seems to start in one village and then spread to other places around that area. . . . [P]eople are watching what their neighbors are doing” (15). Still,
Sen also says that formal education is having an impact on the choices women make. She says, “For a very long time we’ve had a huge problem in terms of 50 to 60 percent of the female population being illiterate. The most recent census, the 2001 census, shows the biggest increases in literacy happening in some of the northern states—big jumps in literacy—and that means girls going to school. Those same girls are going to be making the fertility decisions in another 10 years or so, and I don’t think they are going to make them in the same way that their illiterate mothers may have” (15).
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