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Julia Lackermayer

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1. Introduction

The core of this diploma thesis are the changing roles of women in late Victorian and Edwardian Great Britain – from the Fallen to the New Woman – as represented in the dramatic of the period. The main focus will be on the time span 1867 to 1913, which marks the years of the premieres of the earliest and the latest play under discussion respectively. I will, however, try to embed the relevant social and literary concerns of that era in a wider historical context in order to show that these transformations affecting British society and culture did not take place within a closed and easily defined period of time, but were rather part of a temporal continuum. These changes, then, concerned reformations in the domestic and private sphere with women's reconsideration of established patterns of marriage and motherhood, on the one hand, and women's gradual venture into the more public sphere, their involvement in education, employment and politics, on the other hand.

Moreover, a discussion of the socio-cultural facts and the corresponding discourses of these decades with regard to the position of women and the associated Woman Question will prove to be useful in analysing fiction, or rather drama, as the latter was largely motivated by the former. In this context, Martha Vicinus, for example, points out that

[t]he classic works of Victorian literature cannot tell us much specifically about female suffrage, the rising number of single women, or job opportunities, but they can illuminate the emotional conflicts and resolutions of men and women concerned with woman's proper place. (Vicinus, xii)

The first part of this paper will therefore be primarily concerned with the historical background and the changes on the level of education, employment, marriage and politics. The second part will be directed at a clarification of the concepts of the Fallen Woman and the New Woman, their relation to the ideal woman as the Angel in the House and the further implications of these three models with respect to fact and fiction.

The third and most prominent part will aim to discuss plays of the period in question and, as a further step, to relate these dramatic works to the socio-cultural

situation in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain. The focus will be on Watts Phillips' *Lost in London*, Henry Arthur Jones's *The Dancing Girl* and *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance*, Arthur Wing Pinero's *Iris*, Sidney Grundy's *The New Woman*, William Somerset Maugham's *Penelope*, John Galsworthy's *The Eldest Son*, St John Ervine's *Jane Clegg*, Elizabeth Baker's *Edith*, Cicely Hamilton's and Christopher St John's *How the Vote Was Won*, and Stanley Houghton's *Independent Means* and *Hindle Wakes*.

2. Historical Background

The changing roles of British women and their increasing independence throughout the 20th century are linked to various transformations on different societal levels taking place over the second half of the 19th century in England and especially towards the end of it. As Gail Cunningham points out, the age of the *fin-de-siècle* could be seen as a time where social change took place on various areas in British society with decadence, dandyism and seemingly loose moral values, on the one hand, and debates on how to restrain them, on the other hand.¹ As a result, '[i]nstability was the recurrent theme of the cultural politics [...] and gender was arguably the most destabilizing category' (Ledger, *Cultural Politics*, 22), as Sally Ledger points out. Fixed gender roles began to be questioned and a new kind of woman, later simply termed the 'New Woman', began to emerge. In this context, Ledger argues that

[i]t's no coincidence that the New Woman materialized alongside the decadent and the dandy. Whilst the New Woman was perceived as a direct threat to classic Victorian definitions of femininity, the decadent and the dandy undermined Victorians' valorization of a robust, muscular brand of British masculinity deemed to be crucial to the maintenance of the British Empire. (Ledger, *Cultural Politics*, 22)

The New Woman essentially differed from the notion of the Angel in the House by demanding a function in the public sphere. She was a woman that spoke up for her right to education, the vote and the earning of a living, and, thus, to generally become more independent of men. This development, in turn, tended to arouse debates among men, who either belittled this strife for emancipation or considered it as a virtual threat to the social system in general, and marriage and the family in particular. Cunningham further points out that the crucial factor for 'the elevation of the New Woman into a symbol of all that was most challenging and dangerous in advanced thinking [...] was, inevitably, sex' (Cunningham, 2). It became more and more clear that women, who had largely been regarded as 'sexless', had to say something on subjects of sexuality as well:

¹ Cf. Cunningham, 1.

Venereal disease, contraception, divorce and adultery were made the common talking points of the new womanhood. And marriage, traditionally regarded as woman's ultimate goal and highest reward, came in for a tremendous battery of criticism. (Cunningham, 2)

The revolutionary idea behind the importance of sexuality in the discourses about the New Woman was that female sexuality had lost some of its stigma. Previously only prostitutes or 'fallen' women had been associated with being sexually active, as will be discussed in more detailed below. While the two latter types of the female can be interpreted as belonging to the past, the New Woman, as the term already indicates, was an innovation, a phenomenon to which the established definitions could not easily be transferred. Furthermore, the widespread opinion, especially among men, was that the New Woman represented a threat to the social order. Cunningham again argues that

[d]espite the circumlocutions, it is clear that the New Woman is regarded as a highly sexual being, all the more dangerous since she cannot be dismissed as a prostitute or a fallen woman. (Cunningham, 14)

It is equally important to note that the New Woman is essentially a middle-class phenomenon, which also finds its manifestation in the texts to be analysed. Moreover, this observation also accounts for the fact that the following discussion of the social reality concerning women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries will be mainly focused on the middle classes. The issue of working-class women will, however, also be mentioned in a later chapter analysing Stanley Houghton's play *Hindle Wakes*, which is set in a working-class environment.

As already pointed out, the status of women in society, their political and legal rights, generally summarised under the term 'Woman Question', became one of the major concerns of public debate in the second half of the 19th century. Martha Vicinus points out that

[b]y the 1860's the woman question had become one of the most important topics of the day. Job opportunities, marriage laws, female emigration and education were only some of the issues debated at that time. Women themselves – and particularly middle-class women – were increasingly concerned with what their roles were, and what they should be. (Vicinus, ix)

Therefore, in order to obtain a broader picture of the socio-cultural situation surrounding the plays to be discussed, it will prove constructive to examine the various transformations throughout the second half of the 19th century and relate them to the growing emancipation of women at that time.

2.1. Women and Education

2.1.1. Girls' Colleges

A first step towards gaining some independence for women was the establishment of new educational opportunities. It should be noted that girls' schools existed before the changes that began to emerge around the middle of the 19th century. They were usually fee-paying and for girls from a middle-class background, but the emphasis of the curriculum was less on the acquirement of academic skills but rather on the development of the appropriate feminine accomplishments.² Women's access to secondary education was facilitated by the establishment of the first female colleges, Queen's College and Bedford College in London in 1848 and 1849, from which the first generation of well-qualified female teachers emerged, which for years proved to be almost 'the only respectable profession for middle-class women' (Vicinus, xvii). In 1850 and 1854 the foundations of North London Collegiate College and Cheltenham Ladies College followed.

As Philippa Levine points out, women considered education as a way to gradually obtain various other liberties as well. It was conceived

as a means of training for paid employment, as a means of alleviating the vacuity and boredom of everyday idleness and, of course, as the means to improving their ability to fight for the extension of female opportunities in a host of other areas. (Levine, 26)

In the debates on the question of female education, the voices against it came up with a wide range of different arguments. They claimed, for example, that the

² For a further discussion, see: Levine, 26f.

energy absorbed by studying would later be lacking in women's capacity for reproduction, and that their withdrawal from primarily domestic concerns 'would serve to undermine family life' (Levine, 26).

One of the leading personalities involved in the struggle for women's access to higher education was the feminist Emily Davies. She held the opinion that girls should receive the same educational opportunities as boys.³ Others argued that the primary aim of female education should be to prepare women for a future as wives and mothers by focusing on domestic science classes.⁴ Dorothea Beale, the principal of Cheltenham Ladies College, for instance, stated that her goal was to educate 'girls so that they may best perform that subordinate part in the world to which, [she] believe[d], they ha[d] been called' (Beale, quoted in Lewis, *Women in England*, 91).

2.1.2. Universities

In the 1860s, debates largely concerned the question whether women should be granted permission to sit university examinations. In 1863, Cambridge consented to a trial run for girls, a scheme which was permanently established in 1865 after it passed through the Senate of the University by a narrow majority of 55 to 51. Three years later, the University of London introduced a particular women's exam, and in 1870, Oxford allowed women to its Local Examinations.⁵ One of the most important driving forces behind these achievements was Emily Davies again, whose next aim was to enable women to access tertiary education. In 1869, Girton College for women, which adhered to the principle that the curriculum and testing methods should not differ from male colleges, was founded.⁶ Girton, which from the beginning of its establishment had good connections with Cambridge University was incorporated by the latter in 1872, but did not admit women to Honours examinations, granting certificates of proficiency rather than degrees.⁷

³ For a further discussion, see: Levine, 43f.

⁴ Cf. Lewis, *Women in England*, 91.

⁵ Cf. Levine, 35f.

⁶ For a further discussion, see: Levine, 44f and, Cunningham, 4.

⁷ Cf. Levine, 55.

2.2. Women and Politics

In the course of the second half of the 19th century, women became more and more involved in public and political matters. They acquired access to local government offices and direct participation in party politics.⁸ Moreover, women's rights movements, with the primary goal to assert general female enfranchisement, began to flourish.

2.2.1. The Origins of the Women's Suffrage Movement

It could be argued that women's request for their share in politics had already started in the 18th century, as probably most prominently expressed by Mary Wollstonecraft in her treatise *Vindication for the Rights of Women*, first published in 1792. Even though she does not directly state that women should be allowed to vote, she claims that they should have some sort of political representation. In chapter IX, she argues that 'women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government' (Wollstonecraft, 147). From that point onwards, however, the female suffrage movement had still a long way to go and quite a few obstacles to overcome.

By the 1860s, an organised women's suffrage movement began to emerge.⁹ Two events of this decade are said to have triggered off serious political debates about women's right to vote.

On the one hand, the Reform Act that extended male rights to vote was enacted in 1867, which, by the way, was also the year the earliest play under discussion, Phillips' *Lost in London*, was first performed. This act enfranchised all male householders and, consequently, enabled working-class men to vote for the first time in Britain.¹⁰ As David Rubinstein points out, '[t]he rise of the labour movement demonstrated the trend towards increasing self-confidence on the part of underprivileged groups' (Rubinstein, 138). Therefore, according to Jane

⁸ Cf. Gleadle, 154.

⁹ Cf. Rendall, 130.

¹⁰ Cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_Act_1867> [14 January 2007]

Rendall, the debates surrounding this event also significantly marked the beginning of women's struggle to vote.¹¹ Nevertheless, she argues that women's efforts to gain a right to vote were differently motivated than those of working men. Women did not put self-interest in the foreground, but rather stressed the notion of a 'woman's mission'. This mission can be understood as a form of civic humanism directed towards improving the situation of the uneducated and poor. Furthermore, this humanitarian and charitable vocation was by and large restricted to the middle-class. As Jane Lewis emphasises in her introduction to a portrayal of five Victorian/Edwardian women dedicated to social action,

[p]hilanthropic work remained within the bounds of propriety and middle-class women's sphere, whereas most other public activities involved crossing the boundary into unwomanly behaviour. (Lewis, *Women and Social Action*, 11)

It is again important to note that these notions of philanthropy and public involvement were inextricably linked to issues of class and gender.

On the other hand, the question whether women should be granted the right to vote also started to be an issue in Parliament when John Stuart Mill was elected as an independent Member of Parliament.¹² Mill supported equal rights for women and the suffragettes' cause, which is also expressed in his essay *On the Subjection of Women*, which originally appeared in 1869. In the introduction, he states that 'the object of debarring woman from political life and from lucrative occupations seems to be to perpetuate their subordination in domestic life' (Mill, *Subjection*, 12). With respect to female suffrage in particular, he claims that

[p]ersons who could not themselves conduct the government may have the right to choose governors. Voting is a means of self-protection; and whatever securities are needed in the case of men to prevent a misuse of the ballot, would prevent women from misusing it. And where the interests of women differ from those of men, women especially require the suffrage as a guarantee to just consideration. (Mill, *Subjection*, 12)

In 1866, a first petition was presented by a committee of women, whose aim was to put an end to those legal disabilities which made it impossible for women to vote for members of Parliament. This petition called for 'granting the suffrage to

¹¹ Cf. Rendall, 119.

¹² Cf. Blease, 193.

unmarried women and widows on the same conditions on which it is, or may be, granted to men' (Rendall, 133). The committee failed to achieve much. In 1867, Mill aimed to introduce amendments to the above mentioned Reform Act by including women as well. In a speech in front of the House of Commons on May 20 he put forward to substitute 'man' for 'person' on the grounds that

[i]t is not only the general principles of justice that are infringed, or at least set aside, by the exclusion of women, merely as women, from any share in the representation; that exclusion is also repugnant to the particular principles of the British Constitution. It violates one of the oldest and most cherished principles of the constitutional maxims [...] that taxation and representation should be co-extensive. (Mill, *Speeches*, 252)¹³

His proposal, however, did not appeal to the majority of voters.

2.2.2. The Rise of the Suffragists

Even though political changes did not take place on the broader national level, women became increasingly involved in communal politics and public representation. In 1869, all female ratepayers in England and Wales were permitted to vote municipally following the Municipal Franchise Act, a right that was later narrowed to unmarried female ratepayers. One year later, the creation of school boards followed, which allowed female candidates.¹⁴ Lewis argues that women's involvement in school boards and local politics was rather influenced by their wish to do philanthropic work than by feminist motivations.¹⁵ She argues that female school board members took special interest in the girls' curriculum and tended to support the study of domestic subjects. In a similar way, 'local politics were considered to be an extension of philanthropic work, and were seen as an extension of women's domestic sphere' (Lewis, *Women in England*, 94).

Nevertheless, the 'appeal of the women's suffrage movement increased in the aftermath of the Reform Act, and a form of national organisation was soon

¹³ For the complete speech, see: Mill, *Public and Parliamentary Speeches: Vol I*, 151-162.

¹⁴ Cf. Gleadle, 157.

¹⁵ Cf. Lewis, *Women in England*, 94f.

adopted' (Rendall, 139). In the 1870s the first local women's Liberal Associations were formed. By 1887, there were over 40 such associations all over the country, generally referred to as the 'Women's Liberal Federation'. The fight for women's right to vote soon emerged as the unifying policy of these groups.¹⁶ Almost from its beginnings, however, the women's suffrage movement was not always in unison as there existed conflicts between groups in various cities due to different political attitudes and varying strategies as to how the vote could be obtained. The founding of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) under the leadership of Millicent Garrett Fawcett in 1897, then, 'finally provided a central umbrella for campaigns, though it did not heal fundamental political differences' (Rendall, 157). This unity did not last for long either. In 1903, a group of some members split from the NUWSS, as they were increasingly disappointed by its lack of achieving much through their tactics of reasoned argument and persuasion. Under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst, they founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), and adopting the slogan 'Deeds, not words', they soon began to be known for a more active kind of campaigning. Even though from the 1890s onwards, support for female enfranchisement began to grow and was taken more seriously by press and Parliament than before,¹⁷ the suffragists were constantly faced by opposition on various levels and the arguments brought against any female involvement in politics were manifold. As Lewis points out,

[u]nderlying the suffrage struggle was a set of attitudes which dictated that women's natural sphere was the home, that their full development came only with motherhood and that a 'womanly woman' would not be interested in politics. (Lewis, *Women in England*, 97)

The arguments of the anti-suffragists drew largely on the ideology of separate spheres, which did not only imply that women would not be interested in the vote, but also that it would confuse 'the proper boundaries of masculine and feminine, public and private, domestic and political' (Tickner, 154). Consequently, the harmonious social order would be subverted and the effects on family life would be disastrous as women would neglect their highest duty of maternity.¹⁸

¹⁶ Cf. Gleadle, 161.

¹⁷ Cf. Rubinstein, 139.

¹⁸ Cf. Tickner, 154f.

Therefore, it does not seem surprising that '[a]mbitious politicians had no wish to struggle for a cause whose advocacy laid them open to charges of frivolity or crankiness' (Rubinstein, 142).

2.2.3. The Rise of the Suffragettes

As all the suffragists' appeals remained without effect, especially the members of the WUSP began to employ more drastic and militant measures by 1905. It is, important to note that not all women who wanted the right to vote supported these strategies. The more militant fraction became to be known as 'suffragettes' whereas the more law-abiding section remained to be called 'suffragists'.¹⁹ The unusual behaviour of the former naturally raised more public awareness, and as a result 'they drew public attention to the whole question to a degree which had never been known before' (Blease, 250). At first, some of these militant suffragettes only interrupted political meetings by loudly uttering their indignation from the gallery in the House of Commons.²⁰

The campaigns for female enfranchisement increased in the years to follow. In 1907, the first big public demonstration in London was organised. About 3,000 women took part in this procession, and as Strachey points out, they marched with 'hearts in which enthusiasm struggled successfully with propriety' (Strachey, 307), as they also had a sense of public shame and a fear of losing their reputations. Moreover, suffragettes began to chain themselves to the railings in Downing Street or the statue in the lobby of the House of Commons, they attempted to raid Parliament, were arrested for obstruction, and threw stones at shop fronts in Regent Street and at public buildings.²¹ Once in prison, some militants drew public attention to themselves by going on hunger strikes. Again, most of these active acts of militancy were condemned by a large number of those who were normally in favour of women's suffrage. In 1910, a positive sign from the Government's side was perceived. There was talk of women's suffrage and serious parliamentary efforts were made by the Liberal Government. An all-party committee of members, known as the Conciliation Committee, was put together and drafted a

¹⁹ Cf. Strachey, 302.

²⁰ Cf. Strachey, 298f.

²¹ Cf. Strachey, 311ff.

bill that was by and large supported by all sections.²² Six months of intense propaganda on the side of all supporters of female suffrage followed with huge processions and meetings, and the rejection of any form of militancy to ensure that the bill received every chance. Their endeavours remained without success once more. As a result, the suffragettes turned to militant tactics again. Mrs Pankhurst's society received numerous and generous donations, but, as Roy Strachey argues, the militant movement began to lose its importance:

The Press and the public had grown tired of the news of "outrages," and even when these became more serious in character they attracted comparatively little attention. [...] What people wanted to know now was how the matter actually stood, what the Government would do, and what the real prospects were; and the question of methods, which had once been so interesting, faded into insignificance. (Strachey, 327)

As another Reform Bill proposal was rejected in 1912, righteous anger began to grow among the constitutional societies and especially within the militant circles. The general attention of the feminists' course was especially attracted through a tragic incident at the Epsom Derby: Emily Wilding Davison, one of the militant suffragettes, threw herself in front of a racing horse and got killed.²³ More demonstrations followed, but the Government's attitude towards female suffrage remained unaltered, which inspired hope within the feminists for the next election. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 brought all campaigns to a sudden end: any political activities by the suffragists were suspended and any militant actions by the suffragettes were instantaneously stopped.²⁴ During the war, however, the role of women in society gradually began to change. In their ambition to help, women from every layer of society not only worked in the nursing service, but, after receiving some training, also successfully took on 'men's jobs.'²⁵ Consequently,

[t]he Women's Movement, indeed, was gaining support by the results of the new experiences, and women themselves were learning to look upon their value in the world in a new light, but no one had time or thought to spare to translate these things into legislation. (Strachey, 350)

²² Cf. Strachey, 315f.

²³ Cf. Strachey, 332f.

²⁴ Cf. Strachey, 337.

²⁵ Cf. Strachey, 338ff.

As the years that followed are not part of the period this thesis is primarily focused on, the subsequent development with regard to female enfranchisement will only briefly be summarised here. In 1918, the Representation of People Act granted the right to vote to ‘all women over the age of thirty who were householders, the wives of householders, university graduates or occupiers of property worth £5 per year’ (Tickner, 236). The age limit was most likely a result of politicians’ concerns to keep women in a minority. Moreover, women over 30 were considered to be more domestic, whereas younger women’s beliefs and ideas were feared to contribute to a destabilisation of the system.²⁶ Ten years later, women were enfranchised on equal terms as men – that is over the age of 21.

2.3. Women and Employment

From the 1860s onward, a gradual progress concerning middle-class women’s participation in paid employment could be perceived. This was mainly due to the afore-mentioned improvement of female admittance to education. Occupations were to be found in the medical, clerical, retailing and education sectors.²⁷ Kathryn Gleadle further argues that the stability of nineteenth-century society, however, remained by and large intact as gender differences were reiterated when women entered those positions, for example, by expanding certain concepts such as female benevolence and gentility to medical and nursing professions.²⁸ It is also important to note that this kind of female employment was not yet the norm as ‘for the majority of women, this was a period of stasis, not change. Women continued to engage in ‘traditional’ activities – such as domestic management, child care and philanthropy’ (Gleadle, 139). Similarly, Bonnie Smith states that

[d]uring the Victorian period women and men inhabited separate spheres: women practiced virtue at home in their domestic, reproductive, and maternal activities; men worked in public, in the marketplace, and took part in representative politics. Coexisting with this ideology of separate spheres was one concerning women’s unsuitability for work. [...] This

²⁶ Cf. Pugh, 288.

²⁷ Cf. Gleadle, 137.

²⁸ Cf. Gleadle, 153.

ideology first made working-class women into a disadvantaged group in the workforce. As the ideology gained expression in medical, poetical and philosophical terms, it also encompassed the middle-class woman, who was seen as even more unsuited for work than her lower-class counterpart. (Smith, 182-183)

Another factor that contributed to the focus of public debate on middle-class women's employment and the limited range of socially acceptable jobs available to them was the rise of single women. From 1851 to 1871 Great Britain saw an increase of unmarried women between the ages of 15 and 45 from 2,765,000 to 3,228,700.²⁹ In this context, it is again important to note that different standards were applied to working-class women, who had an easier access to paid employment in agriculture, hand manufacture, domestic service, factories, but also to prostitution.³⁰

2.4. Women and Marriage

At the beginning of the Victorian era, common law did not grant women a separate identity from their husbands. It generally stated that anything a wife earned belonged to her husband.³¹

Over the subsequent decades women gained some rights concerning their status in marriage, but men still continued to be the governing figures. In this connection, Gleadle points out that

[t]he perpetuation of male authority within marriage is not surprising, given that most women remained economically dependent upon their husbands; educationally disadvantaged in comparison to them and without political rights. (Gleadle, 174)

A shift in the general understanding of marriage, then, was accompanied by amendments in the property rights of married women together with changes of the

²⁹ Cf. Vicinus, xvi.

³⁰ Cf. Gleadle, 95-110.

³¹ Cf. Vicinus, xiv.

grounds women could cite to sue for divorce, both of which were again primarily beneficial to middle-class women.³²

The Divorce Act passed in 1857 can be considered as a first step towards the recognition of a woman's control over her property in certain specified cases as it granted her all the rights of an unmarried woman with respect to property after a judicial separation or divorce.³³ The reasons for which a divorce could be petitioned for, though, were essentially different for men and women. The new law generally granted men the right to divorce their wives if they had been guilty of adultery. Women, however, had to prove that their husbands had committed an act of adultery plus some 'aggravating circumstance', which meant either bigamy, cruelty, desertion, rape or incest.³⁴ In other words, it was deemed to be natural for a woman to forgive her unfaithful husband, whereas a man was never to pardon an act of infidelity by his wife. Commenting on this prevalent hypocritical concept in Victorian culture, Deborah Anna Logan argues that

[p]erhaps nowhere is the power differential between Victorian males and females more clearly seen than in the sexual double standard, which demanded female chastity (a "moral" standard) while promoting the tradition of male sexual activity prior to marriage as necessary to men's health (a "scientific" standard). (Logan, 18)

Female adultery meant a threat to the family and a danger for society as a whole because the family was also seen as a microcosm of the nation. Therefore, Lord Cranworth, the Lord Chancellor and sponsor of the Divorce Act commented on whether a husband should forgive his adulterous wife that

[n]o one would venture to suggest that a husband could possibly do so, and for this, among other reasons [...] that the adultery of the wife might be the means of palming [a] spurious offspring upon the husband, while the adultery of the husband could have no such effect with regard to the wife. (Cranworth, quoted in Edelstein, 209)

An important stage in the improvement of married women's legal position was the passing of the Married Women's Property Act in 1870 that allowed wives to own and control their 'own property'. This basically included

³² Cf. Lewis, *Women in England*, 78.

³³ Cf. Holcombe, 11-12.

³⁴ Cf. Nead, 52.

the earnings and property they acquired by their own work after passage of the Act; money invested in several specified ways – in annuities, in savings banks, in the public stocks and funds, in incorporated or joint stock companies, in the shares of provident, friendly, building, loan, and other such societies, and in insurance policies on their own or their husbands' lives; and with qualifications, property coming to them from the estates of persons deceased. (Holcombe, 20)

By 1882, a more extensive Married Women's Property Act was passed. It granted a married woman the same status as an unmarried one and the right to a 'separate property', which meant the right to retain any property that she acquired before as well as after marriage, to sue and be sued with regard to her property and to dispose with it in her own discretion throughout her life as well as after her death.³⁵ Furthermore, it also conferred responsibilities to women for the support of their families.³⁶

Moreover, divorces gradually began to lose some of the stigma attached to them. Other factors that played a role in a slow but gradual alteration of the traditional conception of patriarchal marriage in the second half of the 19th century were the accessibility to contraception, and the possibility of spinsterhood as an alternative, which nevertheless continued to be viewed inferior to marriage and motherhood in a majority of cases.³⁷

³⁵ 'Cf. Holcombe, 24f.

³⁶ Cf. Gleadle, 178.

³⁷ Cf. Gleadle, 185.

3. The Construction of Women

In England, the 19th century was marked by the growth of an influential middle class. As Lynda Nead stresses, this middle-class could not be perceived as one single entity, but rather as an amalgamation of diverse occupational groups with a variety of different incomes.³⁸ Therefore, a way to create a particular group identity in order to distance oneself from the other classes was needed. According to Nead,

[t]his class coherence was established through the formation of shared notions of morality and respectability – domestic ideology and the production of clearly demarcated gender roles were central features in this process of class definition. (Nead, 5)

The separation of gender roles led to the creation of the ideal woman as a model of moral virtue, who significantly differed from men in her sexuality. Men's sexual urge was conceived as active and vigorous whereas female sexuality was considered to be weak and passive. This ideology turned out to be one of the primary grounds on which middle-class homes and marriages were based. Consequently, any female behaviour that did not conform to this established norm was considered deviant. Women's sexuality was generally constructed around the opposition between virgin and whore, the respectable and the fallen.³⁹ Logan points out that the Victorian era was confronted with a 'madonna-harlot dichotomy' (Logan, 6f) without leaving room for categories in between, and Mary Poovey argues that

[t]he place women occupied in liberal, bourgeois ideology helps account for the persistence in the domestic ideal of the earlier image of woman as sexualised, susceptible and fallen. [...] The contradiction between a sexless, moralized angel and an aggressive, carnal magdalen was therefore written into the domestic ideal as one of its constitutive characteristics. (Poovey, 11)

Moreover, it can firstly be argued that not only the Fallen but also the New Woman digresses from the constructed norm of women as the Angel in the House.

³⁸ Cf. Gleadle, 5.

³⁹ Cf. Nead, 6.

Secondly, it should be mentioned that the Fallen Woman does not really coexist alongside the model of the New Woman. Neither is the latter merely a new term for the former. It could rather be argued that the New Woman is a new model of womanhood that has emerged from the previously established dichotomy.

The following chapter aims at a detailed discussion of the three major roles ascribed to Victorian and Edwardian women in everyday life as well as in literature.

3.1. The Angel in the House

Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
Man for the sword, and for the needle she;
Man with the head, and woman with the heart;
Man to command, and woman to obey;
All else confusion.
(Tennyson, *The Princess*, V, 437-441, 264)

As Vicinus points out, throughout the 19th century the prevalent attribute expected from women was respectability.⁴⁰ Respectability, then, was generally considered to mean that a woman acted ‘womanly’ by knowing her place in society, which was at home. Along these lines, the Victorian ideal of womanhood was that of the Angel in the House, a term that originated from the title of a poem by Coventry Patmore, first published in 1854 and revised up until 1862.⁴¹ It is an account of Patmore’s wife Emily and describes his concept of the ideal wife. The poem was not instantly popular, but became increasingly famous throughout the second half of the 19th century. In his analysis of the poem, Ian Anstruther notes that ‘[t]he effect on the poem, and thus on Coventry, was slow, but sensational. The poem began to sell in thousands, especially in cheap editions’ (Anstruther, 8). A passage that reflects quite well the general tone of the poem and its evaluation of wives is *The Wife’s Tragedy*, the beginning of Canto IX:

⁴⁰ Cf. Vicinus, xix.

⁴¹ Cf. Christ, 146.

MAN must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She cast her best, she flings herself-
How often flings for nought, and yokes
Her heart to an icicle whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;
While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes;
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
A comfortable word confers,
She leans and weeps against his breast,
And seems to think the sin was hers;
And whilst his love has any life,
Or any eye to see her charms,
At any time, she's still his wife,
Dearly devoted to his arms;
She loves with love that cannot tire;
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
Through passionate duty love springs higher,
As grass grows taller round a stone.
(Patmore, Canto IX, Sahara, Preludes, I, *The Wife's Tragedy*, 111)

Virtue, passivity, innocence, purity, dependence, compassion, love, and beauty – the desirable female traits of the 19th century – are mentioned in this extract. In order to point out the prevalence of this Victorian attitude towards femininity, it will prove informative to mention other important representatives, operating in different cultural domains in nineteenth century England. John Ruskin, one of the most eminent Victorian art- and societal critics, for example, gives the following description of the ideal and 'true' wife in his essay 'Of Queens' Garden', written in 1865 and later published as the second preface to *Sesame in Lilies* in 1871:

[...] home is yet wherever she is; and for a noble woman it stretches far round her, better than ceiled with cedar, or painted with vermilion, shedding its quiet light far, for those who else were homeless. [...]. But do not you see that to fulfil this, she must – as far as one can use such terms of a human creature – be incapable of error? So far as she rules, all must be right, or nothing is. She must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise, – wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side: wise, not with the narrowness of insolent and loveless pride, but with the passionate gentleness of an

infinitely variable, because infinitely applicable, modesty of service – the true changefulness of woman. (Ruskin, 122-123)⁴²

Similarly Dr William Acton, an established authority on venereal disease and prostitution,⁴³ noted:

A perfect ideal of an English wife and mother, kind, considerate, self-sacrificing, and sensible, so pure hearted as to be utterly ignorant of and averse to any sensual indulgence, but so unselfishly attached to the man she loves, as to be willing to give up her own wishes and feelings for his sake. (Acton, quoted in Nead, 19)

The woman, thus, occupied a saint-like status, a notion that to some extent also implies a certain degree of sexlessness, as already set forth at the beginning of this paper. Furthermore, this concept accounts for the fact that any form of ‘deviant’ behaviour was usually heavily stigmatised. Women who became perceptible as sexual beings, tended to be categorized as ‘fallen’, a common perception that was subject to change in the course of the period to be considered. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that, in the words of Lewis, ‘[w]hile Victorian women were supposed to be passive and pure, Victorian men were excused the odd moral lapse on the grounds that it was a natural result of their virility’ (Lewis, *Women in England*, 112). This prevalence of double standards will also be a significant aspect in dealing with the plays in question.

Moreover, it can be claimed that the Angel in the House was confined to the domestic realm whereas her husband inhabited the public domain. According to Nead, this situation and its connection to an evolving cult of domesticity is due to a development that started in the late 18th and early 19th century when the home and the workplace began to be separated.⁴⁴ Women were increasingly defined as being naturally suited for domestic duties whilst men were said to be more fit for dealing with the ‘world outside’. The assumption that men and women occupied separate spheres is closely related to scientific theories of sexual differences. Besides the already mentioned Dr Acton, Charles Darwin, for example, was another prominent figure who supported this idea. In his work *The Descent of*

⁴² For a further discussion on Ruskin’s ideals of womanhood, see: Linda M. Austin. “Ruskin and the Ideal Woman”. *South Central Review*. Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter, 1987): 28-39.

⁴³ Cf. Nead, 19.

⁴⁴ Cf. Nead, 32.

Man, first published in 1871, Darwin ascribed divergent character traits to men and women: 'Man is more courageous, pugnacious and energetic than woman, and has more inventive genius' (Darwin, 557). Woman, on the other hand,

seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness. [...] Woman, owing to her maternal instincts, displays those qualities towards her infants in an eminent degree. (Darwin, 563)

Another eminent character who argued for the differentiation of sex roles was the philosopher Herbert Spencer. He held the opinion that it was the result of humankind's adjustment to social survival. Moreover, according to him, the more a society was developed the greater was the sexual difference between men and women. A further point of his argumentation was that a woman's individual intellectual and physical growth stopped earlier than a man's, who saved his energies for reproduction.⁴⁵

In the field of psychology, George Romanes, starting his argumentation from Darwin's physiological differentiations, argued that differences between the sexes concerned mental faculties such as intellect, emotion, and will. In his 1887 essay *Mental Differences between Men and Women*, Romanes stated that a woman's intellect was less developed than that of a man and that she lacked willpower, concentration and proper judgement. He granted, though, that female senses were more advanced. With regard to relationships, he wrote that

[f]rom the abiding sense of weakness and consequent dependence, there also arises in woman the deeply rooted desire to please the opposite sex [...]. Alike in expanding all the tender emotions, in calling up from the deepest fountains of feeling the flow of purest affection, in imposing the duties of rigid self-denial, in arousing under its strongest form the consciousness of protecting the utterly weak and helpless consigned by nature to her charge, the maternal instincts are to woman perhaps the strongest of all influences in the determination of character. (Romanes, 20)

These ideas of sexual differentiation were then communicated by medical doctors, whose female clientele in the late 19th and early 20th century consisted for the most part of middle-class women.⁴⁶ Consequently, the diagnoses of female ailments

⁴⁵ Cf. Lewis, *Women in England*, 83.

⁴⁶ Cf. Lewis, *Women in England*, 84.

were to a large extent motivated by theories of a distinction between the sexes as well. Lewis argues that

[t]he physician's approach to female illness exemplified the strong influence of theories of sexual difference and the nature of their implications for the position of women in society. By the 1880s nearly all female disorders were ascribed to uterine malfunction, in accordance with medical and scientific preoccupations with the over-riding importance of female biology. Moreover, female well-being was defined in terms congruent with both women's reproductive function and ideal feminine behaviour. (Lewis, *Women in England*, 85)

An ideal feminine behaviour and healthy development was associated with a woman's attachment to her particular realm and her demonstration of moral virtue expressed by 'passivity, a love of home, children and domestic duties and [...] sexual innocence and absence of sexual feelings' (Lewis, *Women in England*, 86). A more detailed discussion of the relationship between female patients and doctors will follow in the chapter dealing with William Somerset Maugham's play *Penelope*, where the eponymous character's husband is a physician.⁴⁷

Women's primary task was to provide a refuge for their husbands and children and to fill it with peace, beauty and emotional security.⁴⁸ Lewis also points out that the emphasis on domestic values was due to a decreasing status of religion in everyday life:

[d]uring the mid-and late nineteenth centuries the wife and mother at home became doubly important as a moral force because evolutionary ideas had shaken the religious faith of so many. The hearth itself became sacred, and the chief prop of a moral order no longer buttressed by belief. (Lewis, *Women in England*, 81)

Furthermore, the home was generally perceived as a kind of safe haven to counterbalance 'the rapid economic, political and social change outside and [...] the competitive values of the market place' (Lewis, *Women in England*, 113). In the second half of the 19th century, England had to defend its international leadership as foreign competition grew fiercer. Consequently, the implication of this concept of the family as a form of microcosm of society, was that a stable

⁴⁷ Cf. *Penelope*, I, 10.

⁴⁸ Cf. Lewis, *Women in England*, 81.

home would also ensure the stability along with the security, prosperity, progress and order of the state.⁴⁹ Likewise, Samuel Smiles, a Victorian author especially known for his books on the virtue of self-help⁵⁰, stated:

The Home is the crystal of society – the very nucleus of national character; and from that source, be it pure or tainted, issue the habits, principles and maxims, which govern public as well as private life. (Smiles, 341)

As a result, it could be argued that two different concepts were inherent in those Victorian notions of the home. On the one hand, it was generally understood as a place that helped to maintain the stability of the state. On the other hand, it played an important role in securing national progress and success. It could be argued that the theories of separate spheres and the intrinsic binary opposition of the sexes are the main reason why these two concepts of home are not contradictory. Women's task was to uphold stability, their realm was the home, which was meant to be the secure haven from which men engaged in their duty to assure progress. Similarly, Mary Poovey argues that

[t]he rhetorical separation of spheres and the image of domesticated, feminized morality were crucial to the consolidation of bourgeois power partly because linking morality to a figure (rhetorically) immune to self-interest and competition integral to economic success preserved virtue without inhibiting productivity. (Poovey, 10)

It is again important to particularly stress the fact that this set of principles and ideals primarily concerned English middle-class society. This aspect is also emphasised by Elizabeth Langland, who points out that the duties of a middle-class wife could to some extent be compared to the staging of a play:

The bourgeois wife must fulfil a range of representational functions. A lower-class wife, a working girl, would not be sufficiently conversant with the semiotics of middle-class life and could not, therefore, guarantee her husband's place in society. The home, often figured as a haven with its attending angel, can be decoded so that we recognize it as a theatre for the staging of a family's social position, a staging that depends on a group of prescribed domestic practices.' (Langland, 9)

⁴⁹ Cf. Nead, p. 33.

⁵⁰ Cf. <www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Smiles> [3 November 2006]

3.2. The Fallen Woman

The Fallen Woman can be commonly understood as a form of deviance, especially sexual deviance, from the feminine ideal of the Angel in the House.

Even though the term 'fallen woman' has clearly sexual connotations it is not simply a synonym for 'prostitute'. The idea of 'fall' implies to some extent that the woman has been respectable at one point and that her deviant behaviour has led to her exclusion from reputable society. This has the further implication that it is a class-specific term as the Fallen Woman comes from a middle-class background whilst the prostitute is usually a member of the working-classes.⁵¹

A Fallen Woman can generally be considered as having committed an act of adultery. Unlike the prostitute, her sexual activities, however, did not contribute to her income and, consequently, an increase of independence. Quite contrarily, as Nead argues,

[a] woman's 'fall' from virtue was frequently attributed to seduction and betrayal which set the scene for her representation as victim. Most importantly, the victimized fallen woman mobilized none of the connotations of power and independence; her deviancy did not involve money and thus, to a certain degree, she retained her femininity, that is she remained powerless and dependent. (Nead, 95-96)

Female adultery did not only mean a disruption of the home as a place of virtue and stability, but also disturbance of society as a whole. The consequence of this attitude was that 'within official forms of public representation female adultery was frequently identified as the most transgressive form of sexual deviancy' (Nead, 48). Moreover, even one single act of infidelity on a woman's side was largely considered as a permanent fall from virtue. An important aspect of the prevalent assumptions about female sexuality was the belief that the effects of sexually deviant behaviour were to a large degree unalterable and irrevocable.⁵² 'The static "once fallen, always fallen" maxim dictated that a woman need make only one sexual mistake to be branded permanently fallen' (Logan, 17). This notion and its consequence, namely the drawing of a clear-cut boundary between

⁵¹ Cf. Nead, 95.

⁵² Cf. Nead, 49.

the permitted and the forbidden, proved to be another factor involved in the dynamics of the stability of society.

3.3. The New Woman

The Eternal Feminine is in process of change, and the woman of political and social activity will be different from the domestic woman, no doubt, just as palaeolithic man differs from its neolithic brother, but she will not be any the less Woman... Let us watch the modern woman; no longer doll-like, she is now energetic and assured; not less beautiful ... This evolution of woman is inevitable. When everything in the modern world is changing, can woman remain unchanged? (Jean Finot, translated in *Votes for Women* (1911), quoted in *Spectacle of Woman*, 182)

The New Woman can be said to have emerged from the ongoing changes that took place in society towards the end of the 19th century when the ideal of the Angel in the House proved to be less and less retainable. The New Woman stands for a development away from the 'womanly woman' as she demands a say in the public sphere as well. According to Rebecca Stott,

[t]he New Woman [...] comes to refer to a new type of woman emerging from the changing social and economic conditions of the late nineteenth century: she is a woman who challenges dominant morality, and who begins to enter new areas of employment and education. (Stott, viii)

Moreover, the New Woman did not only differ from the compliant feminine ideal of domestic womanhood by claiming a right to education, suffrage and employment, she also had a different attitude towards her outward appearance and public conduct. She cut her hair, smoked and began to wear less hampering clothes. She was figuratively and literally able to move more freely than the generations of women before her. She 'sought to travel unchaperoned, visit the theatre and music hall, read what [she] wished and take part in sports and games, notably cycling' (Rubinstein, xi). She did not wear starched petticoats and tightly laced corsets, as the crinoline had disappeared by the 1870s and the bustle by the 1880s, but typically wore a tailored costume or a combination of skirt and

blouse.⁵³ With the rise of the popularity of cycling, she even started to dress in trousers or ‘bloomers’, basically merely for practical reasons because the long skirts had repeatedly been one of the main reasons for accidents and, consequently, injury and embarrassment.⁵⁴

3.3.1. The Birth of the New Woman

‘New Woman’, as an actual term is said to have been coined in 1894, when it was first rather generally used in an essay by the radical novelist and social purist Sarah Grand, published in the *North American Review*.⁵⁵ The term was soon capitalised and taken up in a derogative way by ‘Ouida’, the pen name of the writer Louise Ramé.⁵⁶ In her article, Grand emphasised that women underwent a process of awakening in which they came to realise that they were entitled to the same position in society as men. She scrutinized that

the new woman [...] had been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years, thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the-Woman’s-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy. (Grand, 142)

Moreover, Grand pointed out that men in general would not be pleased with these developments. Patricia Marks argues that Grand’s article was particularly attacking men for their desire to maintain the status quo and to generally uphold two different types of women, ‘the “cow-woman” (the household drudge) and the “scum-woman” (the prostitute) for their convenience’ (Marks, 11).

Ledger maintains that the primary impetus for Grand’s article was the double standard involved in bourgeois Victorian marriages whereby sexual virtue was demanded from the wife but not from the husband.⁵⁷ This form of hypocrisy characteristic of the relationship between husband and wife at that time will later on come up again in a discussion of St. John Ervine’s play *Jane Clegg*.

⁵³ Cf. Rubinstein, 214.

⁵⁴ Cf. Rubinstein, 217.

⁵⁵ Cf. Ledger, *The New Woman*, 2; Nelson, ix.

⁵⁶ Cf. Rubinstein, 15f.

⁵⁷ Cf. Ledger, *The New Woman*, 20.

Ouida, then, described the New Women as ‘unmitigated bores’ (Ouida, 153-154). She criticised them for their supposed lack of humour and their inclination to be more interested in public life, education and sports than in their roles as wives and mothers, which was to be their proper vocation.⁵⁸

From the moment this particular issue of the *North American Review* was published in Great Britain in May 1894, ‘the new woman became a stock phrase at the tip of every journalistic pen’ (Rubinstein, 16). Even though it was a term that predominantly haunted the press at the beginning of its coinage, New Woman characters also found their way into novels and plays of that time rather quickly. One of the first writers to employ them was Sydney Grundy. His play *The New Woman*, first staged highly successfully in September 1894,⁵⁹ will be discussed in more detail at a later point of this thesis.

3.3.2. Defining the New Woman

Since the New Woman can be seen as having emerged from a combination of various transformations in different fields, such as education, politics, philosophy and employment, it is indeed difficult to give a clear-cut of the term. This elusiveness of the term existed from the very moment it emerged. As Olive Schreiner, a South-African born English writer who was herself considered to be one of the first New Women, wrote:

[m]uch is said at the present day on the subject of the ‘New Woman’: [...] It cannot truly be said that her attitude finds a lack of social attention. On every hand she is examined, praised, blamed, mistaken for her counterfeit, ridiculed or deified – but nowhere can it be said, that the phenomenon of her existence is overlooked. (Schreiner, 252-3)

Similarly, Ledger argues that

[t]he New Woman as a category was by no means stable: the relationship between the New Woman as a discursive construct and the New Woman as a representative of the women’s movement of the fin de siècle was complex, and by no means free of contradictions. (Ledger, *Cultural Politics*, 23)

⁵⁸ Cf. Rubinstein, 16.

⁵⁹ Cf. Rubinstein, 16.

3.3.3. Arguments For and Against the New Woman

The expression 'New Woman' had quite different connotations to different people depending on whether they supported a perpetuation of the then present state of affairs or a widening of female rights.

The anti-feminists considered these new, advanced women as a potential threat to the status quo, a threat to the English 'race' by opposing traditional marriage⁶⁰ in general, and 'a threat to the economic supremacy of bourgeois men in Britain' (Ledger, *The New Woman*, 19) in particular. One of the ways to act against this potential danger was to ridicule these emergent 'new' women. As David Rubinstein argues 'anti-feminists disguised their apprehension by professing to find humour in the spectacle of challenging the existing pattern of relations between the sexes' (Rubinstein, 17).

The New Woman became a frequent target in the popular press towards the end of the 19th century. She was often depicted in a satirical and derogatory way in caricatures and parodies published in the issues of humour and satire magazines such as *Punch*.⁶¹ As Ledger points out, 'New Women and feminists in general were often constructed in the periodical press as mannish, over-educated, humourless bores' (Ledger, *Cultural Politics*, 26). A versifier in the periodical *Pick-Me-Up* from 1897, for example, presented her as embodying everything that is unattractive in a woman as she was gaining more and more manly characteristics and therefore distancing herself from the feminine ideal of the almost angelic being:

Last act of all, a woman new but old –
Old in that all the grace of youth has gone,
A thing that wears the outer garb of men,
Yet owneth but man's worst qualities,
That preaches doctrines, needless and unclean,
The which herself but half doth understand,
She apes all manly sport, disgusting men,
Wears cigarette in mouth, eyeglasses in eye,
Prepares herself a sad unloved old age,
Sans womanhood, sans taste, sans everything.
(*Pick-Me-Up*, 17 Apr. 1897: 38, quoted in Marks, 13)

⁶⁰ Cf. Ledger, *Cultural Politics*, 22.

⁶¹ For a further discussion, see: Marks, Patricia. *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*.

Criticism of this new kind of woman did not only take place within the media, it was also part of the medico-scientific discourse. Elaine Showalter states that

[a]s women sought opportunities for self-development outside of marriage, medicine and science warned that such ambitions would lead to sickness, freakishness, sterility and racial degeneration. (Showalter, 39)

Showalter further points out that male anxiety in England centred around the theory maintained by physicians that the New Woman would be unable to reproduce. Paying too much attention to the development of her brain, it was believed, the uterus would be starved and, thus, the stability of society as a whole would be endangered.⁶² Ledger adds to this discussion that it was not only feared that New Women could not reproduce altogether, but that if they did, they would be the breeders of mentally as well as physically weak children.⁶³ In any way, the continuity of the nation, one of the main public concerns in the 1890s, was considered to be imperilled. Ledger identifies the death of General Gordon in Khartoum in 1885 as the starting point for this preoccupation with the maintenance of the British Empire and its people. Britain's interests abroad were perceived to be at risk and a way to counteract this development was believed to be the breeding of a pure and strong English 'race'.⁶⁴ Apart from these ideological and theoretical threats, critics of the New Woman also feared that she would disrupt traditional schemes in actual spheres of daily life, such as the labour market. An argument that was not unjustified as Ledger points out:

[...] her threat to the economic status quo was quite real. Women had worked outside the home throughout much of the nineteenth century – the idea of the domestic angel was from the start to some extent a Victorian myth – but their employment had largely been in low-paid factory work, sweated labour or domestic service. At the turn of the century new employment opportunities were rapidly evolving with the advent of the typewriter, with the expansion of metropolitan department stores and with the professionalisation of nursing and of the teaching profession. (Ledger, *The New Woman*, 19)

⁶² Cf. Showalter, 40.

⁶³ Cf. Ledger, *Cultural Politics* 30f.

⁶⁴ Cf. Ledger, *Cultural Politics*, 31.

For a further discussion about eugenic ideas in late Victorian England, see: Richardson "The Eugenization of Love: Sarah Grand and the Morality of Genealogy".

This aspect of the New Woman will later on prove to be particularly important in a more detailed discussion of *Independent Means*.

Quite contrary to the above notions, the New Woman also represented a form of feminist heroine to her supporters, who largely contributed to the gradual gaining of female independence. She raised questions about conventions relating to marriage, motherhood and employment, and was considered as even superior to men. In her afore-mentioned article, Sarah Grand, for instance, identified men to be in a stage of infancy because of their difficulty to grasp that women started to be less and less content with being restricted to the domestic sphere. Furthermore, she considered it as women's responsibility to help them to come to terms with the new development, to 'hold[] out a strong hand to the child-man, and [to] insist[], but with infinite tenderness and pity, upon helping him up' (Grand, 143).

3.3.4. The New Woman in Fiction

In the same way as the concept of the New Woman in fact is a rather elusive one for which a clear-cut definition does not exist, she cannot easily be pinned down in fiction either. Various new different female characters came into being, all broadly categorised as 'New Woman'. Consequently, Ledger states that

[t]he New Woman had manifested herself in multifarious guises in fiction and in the periodicals through the 1880s and 1990s. The 'wild woman', the 'glorified spinster', the 'advanced woman', the 'odd woman'; the 'modern woman', 'Novissima', the 'Shrieking sisterhood', the 'revolting daughters' – all these discursive constructs variously approximated to the nascent 'New Woman'. (Ledger, *The New Woman*, 2-3)

Moreover, it has been suggested that the New Woman was rather a literary phenomenon altogether. According to Ann Ardis, the New Woman had hardly any basis in reality, but was related to a particular form of literature.⁶⁵ Similarly, Angelique Richardson argues that 'the extent to which the New Woman was a social reality was fiercely debated in the periodical press, but she entered the world of fiction with considerable impact' (Richardson, 227). In the same way, Ledger

⁶⁵ Cf. Ardis, 12f.

points out that ‘the New Woman was largely a discursive phenomenon’ (Ledger, *The New Woman*, 3). The portrayal of this new femaleness became increasingly popular in novels of the 1890s. Ardis, however, suggests that the fictionalised New Woman had already materialised in 1883 in the shape of Lyndall in Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*.⁶⁶ Ledger also places Schreiner’s novel at the beginning of the emergence of the New Woman in fiction, as she argues that Lyndall ‘is unmistakably a prototype New Woman’ (Ledger, *The New Woman*, 2). From 1883 onwards, over a hundred novels populated with New Woman characters were written until circa 1900.⁶⁷ Probably most eminently they materialise in Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the D’Urberville* (1881), George Gissing’s *The Odd Woman* (1893), Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), Mona Caird’s *The Daughter of Danaus* (1894) or Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did It* (1895). What all these novels have in common is that they deal with women, their nature and sexuality, in an innovative and up to that time unread of way. As Carolyn Christensen Nelson, points out,

the New Woman writers began to explore for themselves the lives of women, removing the definition of what was woman’s nature and the true feminine from the hands of male writers and replacing it with a more complete and complex view. They do that in remarkably different ways but all of them force us into reexamination of the representation of women in the fiction of the nineteenth century. (Nelson, 3)

⁶⁶ For a further discussion on *The Story of an African Farm*, see: Ardis, 61-68, and Ledger, *The New Woman*, 77-83.

⁶⁷ Cf. Ardis, 4.

4. Victorian and Edwardian Drama

4.1. Overview

Firstly, it should be mentioned that the theatre did not suddenly change after Queen Victoria's death. Therefore, according to George Rowell, there was no caesura between Victorian and Edwardian drama, and alterations concerning the English stage did only take place with the outbreak of the First World War.⁶⁸ Consequently, he argues that Victorian and Edwardian drama should be regarded as one single entity, and that 'it is perhaps permissible to treat the whole period 1893-1914 as the last chapter in the history of the *Victorian* [my italics] theatre' (Rowell, 104).

The prevalent moral values of the Victorian age also find their reflection in the dramatic works of that time. The plays, predominantly written for a middle-class audience, dealt with issues that mirrored the middle-class frame of mind. As Michael R. Booth points out in this context,

[t]he general response of drama to social change, to the increasing materialisation and urbanisation of Victorian life, and the growing population of *dramatis personae* by middle-class characters living in middle-class urban settings, was to attempt – at least in comedy and the serious drama – to match the increasing verisimilitude of stage setting with an increasing verisimilitude of characterisation and social behaviour on stage. (Booth, 131)

These social transformations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the changing perception of women concerning sexuality, marriage, motherhood, education, employment and political involvement, also found their way into the plays selected for this thesis. In the ensuing analysis of these dramatic works, an attempt to point out the temporal transition from the Fallen to the New Woman will be made. The emphasis will be on the analysis of the relevant female characters and the attitudes towards them. It will be discussed to what extent these heroines test certain values,

⁶⁸ Cf. Rowell, 103f.

for example with regard to relationships, and what the consequences of their respective behaviour are, depending on various factors such as genre, class, audience and author. Furthermore, each analysis will mainly be structured along the following four questions: Firstly, why does a particular character qualify as a Fallen or New Woman? Secondly, what are the consequences of her behaviour? Thirdly, are double standards employed insofar as the male characters involved are treated differently? Finally, what were the audience's and the playwright's attitudes towards the respective play?

4.2. **Fallen Women**

Quite generally, the term 'fallen' could be ascribed to any woman who had been sexually involved with a man outside the moral and legal bonds of marriage.⁶⁹ Throughout the 19th century, the Fallen Woman was a prevalent figure on the stage.⁷⁰

According to Sos Eltis, she had three essential incarnations: 'the seduced maiden, the wicked seductress, the repentant magdalen' (Eltis, *Fallen Woman*, 223). Moreover, it was also possible for a Fallen Woman character to go through all of these manifestations in the course of one play. It can broadly be maintained that her acts were considered to be an aberration of the norm and therefore baneful to society. Consequently, Eltis argues that the primary function of these plays was of a didactic nature:

a warning of the dangers and disgrace that were the inevitable wages of sexual sin. Sex outside the bonds of marriage posed a threat to more wholesome relationships, broke up families, and generated all manners of villainy and vice. (Eltis, *Fallen Woman*, 224)

Throughout the Victorian era, there existed the wide-ranging concept of a 'two-women' dichotomy, the categorisation of women as either virtuous or fallen,⁷¹ which also becomes evident in this excerpt of a dialogue taken from Henry Arthur Jones's *The Case of Rebellious Susan*:

⁶⁹ Cf. Eltis, *Fallen Woman*, 223.

⁷⁰ Cf. Eltis, *Fallen Woman*, 222.

⁷¹ For a further discussion of the 'two-women' dichotomy in literature, see: Watt, 5f.

SIR RICHARD: [...]. Women are divided into two classes.

LADY SUSAN: Good and bad!

SIR RICHARD: Not at all. Those who have lost their reputation, and those who have kept it.

(*Rebellious Susan*, II, 142-143)

The same attitude can also be found in the majority of the other plays to be discussed. It is interesting to note that quite a few works of fiction at that time appear to be more modern and revolutionary in thought as they provided a more profound and reflective examination of the situation of Fallen Women than any of the plays. In the context of literature, George Watt argues that

Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell, Collins, Gissing, Moore and Hardy each have, in at least one major work, questioned the absolute nature of the two groups of women – the pure and the fallen. They proved that there was no one fall, no single disgrace, no automatic placing of categories of purity and prostitution. (Watt, 7)

Similarly, Alfons Klein points out that any woman that transgressed the moral and sexual norms of the Angel in the House model in Victorian literature was usually termed ‘fallen woman’ or ‘Magdalen’.⁷²

In the context of the plays to be analysed, the term ‘fallen woman’ cannot simply be equated with that of ‘prostitute’, even if the former was generally used as a synonym for the latter by Victorian contemporaries.

It seems that the reasons for the submission to immoral behaviour are very thought to be very much alike for female representatives of both categories if one compares the features of some of the plays’ main characters with William Acton’s account of the motivations leading to prostitution, which he considers to be linked to the vice of women. In his treatise on prostitution,⁷³ published at around the same

⁷² ,Es ist [...] symptomatisch für eine thematische Präokkupation der viktorianischen Literatur, daß die Frauenfigur, die gegen die moralischen und sexuellen Normen des religiös stilisierten Leitbildes von der Frau als „The Angel in the House“ verstößt, oft als *fallen woman* (seltener *fallen angel*) oder *Magdalen* gekennzeichnet wird‘ [‘It is symptomatic of the thematic preoccupation of Victorian literature that the female character who violates the moral and sexual norms of the religiously stylised model of the woman as ‘the angel in the house’, is often labelled *fallen woman* (more rarely *fallen angel*) or *Magdalen*’, [my translation]] (Klein, 267).

⁷³ Cf. Acton, William. *Prostitution Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and Other Large Cities and Garrison Towns with Proposals for the Control and Prevention of Its Attendant Evils*. 1857. London: Frank Cass, 1972.

time as Phillips' *Lost in London*, Acton saw the vice of women as occasioned by the following causes:

Natural desire.

Natural sinfulness.

The preferment of indolent ease to labour.

Vicious inclinations strengthened and ingrained by early neglect, or evil training, bad associates, and an indecent mode of life.

Necessity, imbued by

The inability to obtain a living by honest means consequent on a fall from virtue.

Extreme poverty.

To this black list may be added love of drink, love of dress, love of amusement, while the fall from virtue may result either from a woman's love being bestowed on an unworthy object, who fulfils his profession of attachment by deliberately accomplishing her ruin, or from the woman's calling peculiarly exposing her to temptations.

(Acton, 165)

As the analysis of the first two plays in particular will show, some congruence between the respective playwrights' ideas and Acton's enumeration quoted above will manifest itself.

4.2.1. *Lost in London*

– Nelly Armroyd

In accordance with the scheme laid out in the introductory historical outline, Nelly Armroyd, the main character of Phillips' melodrama *Lost in London*, which was first performed at the Adelphi in 1867, can be regarded as a true Fallen Woman. Her status as immoral woman is even emphasised by the genre of melodrama with its stock characters and clear-cut binaries of vice and virtue.⁷⁴ Therefore, psychological nuances are of no importance, which means that a fallen, in this case seduced, woman is sinful and deserves death as the appropriate punishment. According to Elin Diamond, this course of events was specifically a feature of the 1860s. She argues that

⁷⁴ For a detailed discussion of the features of melodrama, see: Booth, 150-162.

[i]nterestingly, in the 1860s, domestic melodrama, which vied for popularity with nautical and romantic varieties, offered a variation on the long-suffering heroine: the heroine who dies of sin. (Diamond, 10-11)

In this connection, she particularly draws attention to the plots of *Lost in London* and *East Lynne*, a popular novel written by Mrs Henry Wood and published in 1861, which was also performed in a dramatic version. The narrative is about an upper-class woman who leaves her husband and children in order to elope with her aristocratic suitor.⁷⁵ Later, she returns to the household unrecognised as a governess and dies of a broken heart in the end.⁷⁶

Lost in London shows many elements that are typical of melodrama.⁷⁷ According to Frank Rahill, the melodrama can be understood as

[a] form of dramatic composition in prose partaking of the nature of tragedy, comedy, pantomime, and spectacle, and intended for a popular audience. Primarily concerned with the situation and plot, it calls upon mimed action extensively and employs a more or less fixed complement of stock characters, the most important of which are a suffering heroine or hero, a persecuting villain and a benevolent comic. It is conventionally moral and humanitarian in point of view and sentimental and optimistic in temper. (Rahill, xiv)

In Phillips' play, the melodrama with its mixing of genres, stock characters, musical elements, tableaux and strong emphasis on the emotional and sensational, is intermingled with the conventions of the domestic tragedy dealing with the middle- or working-classes and evolving around a hero, or in this case heroine, whose fall from morality is presented.

Discontented with her life as wife to the honest, hard-working Job Armroyd, a miner many years her senior, Nelly, a Lancashire beauty, runs counter the idea of

⁷⁵ Cf. Diamond, 11.

⁷⁶ For a further discussion of *East Lynne*, see: Birch.

⁷⁷ For a further discussion of melodrama, see Schmidt or Brooks. Schmidt argues that the 'melodramatic' can be understood as a 'besondere Form eines Inszenierungsmodus, der visuelle, akustische und sprachliche Zeichen in eine emotionssteigernde Organisation raum-zeitlicher Kategorien stellt, innerhalb derer eine Polarisierung und Intensivierung der von ihnen angestrebten Effekte erreicht wird' ['a particular form of staging-mode, where visual, acoustic and verbal signs are organised according to spatial and temporal categories in order to augment emotions. Among these categories a polarization and intensification of the desired effects is achieved' [my translation]] (Schmidt, 28).

the Angel in the House by eloping to London with the young and fashionable mine-owner Gilbert Featherstone. The play centres around the virtual fall of the heroine, who does not find happiness but repents her deed immediately. From the very first page of *Lost in London*, there is a strong sense that Nelly longs to break out from the monotony and tedium of her everyday life. As a consequence, she is readily talked into escaping with Gilbert Featherstone. In a soliloquy, she maintains that

... it's a dreary life to be a miner's wife – to sit o' nights a-listening to the wind wailing out o' doors, or rumbling i' the chimney, or to go a-wandering i' the day ow'r the bleak moorland, which even the birds seem to shun. [...] And yet a word of mine can change all this into a life as gay, as bright, and as full of happiness, as this is dreary and desolate. (*Lost*, I.i, 207)

Throughout the play, the general notion seems to be that Nelly can never fully be held responsible for what happens to her. She is a woman and thus more prone to go astray than men. Weakness is presented as inscribed in the very nature of women. Therefore, Nelly cannot resist temptation even if she knows that it is wrong, and, when left alone, she characterises herself as follows: 'oh! fool! fool! That I have been to listen to the voice of the tempter, and oh! accursed vanity of woman that gave the voice such power!' (*Lost*, I.ii, 217). Her weakness and passivity cannot solely be accounted for by her female character traits, but is, according to Booth, one of the characteristics of heroes and heroines in melodrama in general, where the villains, in this case in the shape of Gilbert Featherstone, tend to play the more active roles. It is 'the villain who acts while the hero and heroine react' (Booth, 160). Moreover, she goes away to the big city, where vices appear to be aggravated as, in the words of Job, '[i]t be a dreadful and a dreary place, this Lunnon, for them as are weak an' wi' no hand to guide 'em' (*Lost*, II.iii, 244-245). Nevertheless, Nelly constantly senses that what she does is fundamentally wrong from a moral point of view.⁷⁸ It could be suggested that her status as an orphan and the lack of the role model of an angel-like mother, who would set a good example of the domestic virtues and duties of a wife, play some part in this context. Nelly is

⁷⁸ Cf. 'Surely, of all bad women I am the worst' (*Lost*, I.ii, 219).

also denied any form of happiness after her arrival in London. She 'does nothing but mope' (*Lost*, II.i, 230) and feels that she is gradually dying of a broken heart.⁷⁹ In the end, Job comes to claim Nelly again simply on the apparently self-explanatory grounds that she is his wife. After her elopement, he has not lost his sense of duty and righteousness and has started to look for her in London. In contrast to Nelly, he '[has] but one road to take, an' that's th' straight one' (*Lost*, I.iii, 225).

The heroine's honour can not be restored because a fall from virtue has permanent consequences. She is not only 'lost in London' in a geographical sense, but also in a moral one. As she herself states towards the end of the play, she is 'lost to [Job] – to [her]self – to everything' (*Lost*, III.i, 262). This loss of morality is regarded as a sin and a state even more grievous than death.⁸⁰ Penitence seems to be of no use and any form of atonement impossible, not even after Job has forgiven her. Consequently, death is what really befalls her just before the curtain drops. In this final scene, she appears to be almost transfigured and Job's last words insinuate that Nelly shall be delivered in heaven, which is the utmost concern: 'Though lost in London (*he indicates by a gesture the city now bright with moonbeams*), I shall foind her theer. (*He points upwards with a bright, hopeful look.*)' (*Lost*, III.i, 269). That this moral message was positively received by the contemporary audience, can be deduced from Alfrida Lee's comment that 'success for the play was expected'.⁸¹ It ran for 48 nights and was also positively received at its performance in Philadelphia in 1866.⁸² The American author and critic William Winter, however, had quite a low opinion of the merits of the play as he found the inherent portrayal of vice insupportable even if it served as a deterrent for the audience.⁸³

⁷⁹ Cf. *Lost*, II.i, 237.

⁸⁰ Cf. TIDDY (*with an outburst of grief*). She's gone, Job! She's gone!

JOB (*staggers back as from a blow and drops the lamp which he has been holding*). Not dead! She's not dead?

TIDDY. Worse nor that! – far worse – she be gone wi' – wi' –
[...]

Wi' Mester Gilbert! She be gone wi' Mester Featherstone!
(*Lost*, I.iii, 224)

⁸¹ Cf. <http://www.emrich.edu/public/english/adelphi_calender/hst1866.htm> [26 November 2006]

⁸² Beasley, 57.

⁸³ 'Winter's review of the play is an essay setting forth his opinion that the representation of vice, even for the purpose of teaching virtue by showing how ugly vice actually is, cannot be tolerated by responsible members of the community. He felt that there is no place on the stage for 'sickening details of weakness and sin,' and he whole-heartedly condemned this particular piece for representing evil by unsuitable means, in wrong perspective, and in violation of the principles of good taste' (McGraw, 116-117).

Considering the reception of the play, *Lost in London* should nowadays be appreciated as a social document of the Victorian era rather than for its quality as a dramatic work.

4.2.2. *The Dancing Girl*

– Drusilla Ives

The Dancing Girl, written by Henry Arthur Jones and first performed at the Haymarket in January 1891, also deals with the endeavours of a young and beautiful woman to break free from her assigned lot. Even though its heroine, Drusilla, can be categorized as a Fallen Woman, she differs from Nelly Armroyd in many points. The main difference between them has to do with the fact that the latter is repentant whereas the former is not. The play is about the daughter of a Quaker, Drusilla, who has been brought up in a village on a Cornish island and begins to lead a double life as a dancer, a dubious profession, calling herself Diana Valrose in London, while her father believes her to be employed as a governess. Like Nelly, she also has an admirer who is at the same time her father's landlord, the Duke of Guisebury. Being rather careless in business matters, though, the Duke loses all his money. He asks Drusilla to marry him and to live moderately and quietly, but she refuses on the grounds that '[t]o live cheaply in a little continental town – [...] it would be purgatory! [She] must have [her] London, [her] Paris, [her] theatre, [her] dancing, [her] public to worship [her]' (*Dancing Girl*, II, 328). Following this assertion, Guisebury forms the plan to commit suicide after one last reception at which Drusilla should dance. Having found out about his daughter's impious doings, her father interrupts the feast and comes to fetch her while showering her with curses and denouncements because of her lack of repentance. Nonetheless, Drusilla remains determined. Contrary to Nelly, her reasons for turning her back on her former restrictive life persist, as she tells her father that '[his] mean, narrow life stifled [her], crushed [her]! [She] couldn't breathe in it! [She] wanted a larger, freer, wider life – [She] was perishing for want of it' (*Dancing Girl*, III, 344). Her wish for self-fulfilment is even strong enough to break with her family and to set out completely on her own without any regrets. It

is also interesting to note that Drusilla – like Nelly – has grown up without a mother who could have set her an example of moral conduct.

In the further course of the play, it is reported that ‘the dancing girl’ went on to earn her living as a public dancer in New Orleans, where she dies unrepentant to the very last. Arguably, this very fact turns Drusilla into a worse kind of Fallen Woman than Nelly as, according to Penny Griffin, the former

is not led astray. She chooses her path in life willingly, without shame or remorse. [...] Drusilla, in her heartless flippant way, is evil – a moral emblem shown to the audience. (Griffin, 32)

Worse still, she not only does harm to her own morality, but also attempts to lure others from the path of virtue and godliness. On the one hand, she is at least partially responsible for Guisebury’s failing to attend to his village’s needs and his spending all his money on pleasure. On the other hand, she tries to find an ally in John Christianson, an upright Puritan and former devotee of hers, and to make him act against his convictions by lying and not telling her father about her whereabouts.⁸⁴ In this respect, she almost appears to equal a biblical figure, an Eve or Salomé.

Besides, her punishment through death in the end, was then generally considered to be justified by the Victorian audiences.⁸⁵ A huge success, *The Dancing Girl* ran for 310 nights and was performed in New York in the same year. It was received approvingly by the audience as well as the reviewers and among those congratulating the playwright on his achievement was, incidentally, also Herbert Spencer. Concerning the reviews, Doris Arthur Jones points out that

[t]he notices, with one or two exceptions, were extremely favourable. The *Sunday Review* said, “A great play comes only about once in a generation; but Mr. H.A. Jones has nearly written one in *The Dancing Girl*,” though the writer added: “A feebler fourth act has rarely tested the patience of the audience.” (Jones, *Life and Letters*, 114)

The question whether Drusilla had been repentant before her death or not is most pressing for her father when he meets the nun who had nursed his daughter in her

⁸⁴ Cf. Jackson, 10.

⁸⁵ Cf. ‘Victorian audiences applauded the awarding of the fine young to the roué, and complacently accepted as poetic justice the death of the dancing girl’ (Cordell, 86).

last hours.⁸⁶ Learning that she did not, he is at first unable to speak but according to the stage directions ‘utters a great cry of pain and sinks onto rock, overcome’ (*Dancing Girl*, IV, 351).

Not only do Drusilla’s and Nelly’s fates correspond, but also those of their suitors. Subliminally, class issues seem to be of some relevance here as well. While the two female characters come from a respectable but nonetheless working-class background, both male protagonists are socially above them. Moreover, both are penitent and are given the opportunity to lead a better life in the future. Guisebury is saved from suicide by the virtuous Sybil Crake and becomes a respected man after all.

Generally, it can be observed that the moral standards applied to men and women at that time were not the same. This does not only hold true for *Lost in London* and *The Dancing Girl*, but will later also be of significance in the other plays to be discussed. With regard to Henry Arthur Jones, it seems that he is, on the one hand, aware of those double standards, but, on the other hand, does not raise any questions concerning their justness. This view is also expressed by Richard Cordell, who states that

Jones was frank in expressing his conviction that a single standard morality is impossible. He was a realist and conservative in as much as he believed man lived most comfortably by observing certain social laws arrived at through cumulative racial experience, and modifiable only with the slow passing of time. ‘His invariable answer to the social innovator was the byword of the modern pragmatist – “It won’t work!”’ (Cordell, 87)

It could be interpreted as a gradual change in the audiences’ perception of the status of women that when the play ran again in London in 1909, eighteen years after its first performance, at His Majesty’s, it was not very successful.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Cf. *Dancing Girl*, IV, 350.

⁸⁷ Cf. Jones, *Life and Letters*, 114.

4.3. The Transition from the Fallen to the New Woman

In a number of plays at issue, the female protagonists cannot easily be classified as either Fallen or New Women, neither do they simply conform to the ideal of the Angel in the House, but are rather hybrids of all three categories. In some cases, these main characters, who generally meet the terms of the traditionalist notion of how a woman should act and be like in the end, stand out against female supporting roles, who present caricatures of New Women.

4.3.1. *The Case of Rebellious Susan*

–Susan Harabin and Elaine Shrimpton

In 1894, another play by Henry Arthur Jones, *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, was first performed at the Criterion Theatre in London. Here, the situation of a woman who departs from the virtuous path does not appear as bleak as in the plays discussed above. Nevertheless, as will become evident, the maintenance of her good reputation and the adherence to the ideal of the Angel in the House still proves to be more important than her strife for self-realisation.

The plot evolves around the young Lady Susan Harabin, who is initially determined to leave her repeatedly adulterous husband James. At first, she just spends a holiday in Egypt, where she falls in love with Lucien Edensor. After they coincidentally meet again in London, they form the plan to elope to the continent. Throughout the play, the possibility of an affair between them is only hinted at, but never openly proclaimed.⁸⁸ Through the persuasion of her uncle Sir Richard Kato, who acts as a *raisonneur*,⁸⁹ though, she is talked into staying with her husband in

⁸⁸ ‘Jones goes on to great lengths to veil Susan’s actions in Cairo to keep her chastity a possibility, and he sets Sir Richard on her with a vengeance to keep her reputation (if not her chastity) intact’ (Fan, 42).

⁸⁹ Jackson on the role of the *raisonneur*: ‘They speak frequently for the modification of ideal standards of conduct in the light of the practical possibilities of life, and they advocate the accommodation of the desire for personal fulfilment to the limitations imposed by society’ (Jackson, 14).

For a more detailed discussion of the role of the *raisonneur* in Jones’s plays, see: Ruscher, 53-74.

the end. James Harabin, on his part, is willing to take her back despite her unwillingness to tell him anything about what happened in Cairo. Both swear to remain faithful in the future, and social conventions are restored. However, by way of the ambiguity with regard to the nature of her relationship with Edensor and the fact that she returns to her husband, 'Rebellious Susan' neither qualifies as a Fallen nor as a New Woman.

A New Woman is nonetheless present in the play in the character of Elaine Shrimpton, who, according to Jackson, 'has features familiar in anti-feminist humour of the period: she is severe, arrogant, mannish, argumentative and graceless' (Jackson, 17). She takes part in the women's movement as the organiser of 'The Clapham Boadicean Society for the Inculcation of the New Morality among the Women of Clapham'. The name of this society itself seems ironical. Moreover, Griffin points out that in the subplot dealing with Elaine 'Jones tilts at a favourite target, a 'New Woman', using her marriage as a counterpoint to Lady Susan's' (Griffin, 36). When Elaine is introduced in the first act of the play, she mainly seems to parrot things she might have picked up in feminist literature in her speech.⁹⁰ Elaine marries despite the warning of Sir Richard, her guardian, and his advice to first learn at least basic house-keeping skills, as he believes Elaine to be 'a rather ignorant, impulsive girl, with a smattering of pseudoscientific knowledge, chiefly picked up from unwholesome feminine novels' (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 122). As the beginning of the second act suggests, her marriage does not turn out particularly well. Ten months have passed, and she and her husband already temporarily live in separate apartments due to a disagreement about a mere trifle that is later solved by Sir Richard.⁹¹ Moreover, in the final act, a dialogue between Elaine and her guardian seems to be representative of the common Victorian perception of the New Woman movement as a phenomenon that is not only to be ridiculed, but also to be rebuked as it runs against nature. Elaine, who holds the opinion that society should be changed and the differences between the sexes redressed so that women get an opportunity to realise themselves, is cut short by

⁹⁰ Cf. 'ELAINE: (very decidedly): At the same time we feel that we have duties and responsibilities that we shall allow no worm-eaten conventionalities of society to interfere with' (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 121).

'ELAINE: Why should we dwarf and stunt ourselves physically, morally, intellectually, for the sake of propping up a society that is decrepit and moribund to its core?' (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 122).

⁹¹ Cf. *Rebellious Susan*, II, 125.

Sir Richard, who apparently represents the voice of reason and tries to redirect her aspirations to become an Angel in the House rather than a social reformer:

ELAINE: [...] There is an immense future for Woman –

SIR RICHARD: (*interrupting*) At her own fireside. There is an immense future for women as wives and mothers, and a very limited future for them in any other capacity. While you ladies without passions – or with distorted and defeated passions – are raving and trumpeting all over the country, that wise, grim, old grandmother of us all, Dame Nature, is simply laughing up her sleeve and snapping her fingers at you and your new epochs and movements. Go home! Be sure that old Dame Nature will choose her own darlings to carry on her schemes! Go home! Go home! Nature's darling woman is a stay-at-home woman, a woman who wants to be a good wife and a good mother, and cares very little for anything else. (*Rebellious Susan*, III, 153-154)

According to Russell Jackson, this sermon-like speech, which focuses on the perpetuation of the race rather than on what is acceptable behaviour in society, is quite similar in tone to the arguments a number of conservatives put forward against the women's movement in the 1890s and can be accounted for by Jones's interest in social and biological evolution.⁹² Sir Richard's speech, however, has no effect on Elaine. She is determined to follow her ideals and even willing to face imprisonment and to defend herself in court.⁹³ Therefore, despite the fact that she is mocked, Elaine also represents a potential menace. She is unwilling to carry out the traditional duties expected of women, insults men, and is actively involved in revolutionising society.⁹⁴ As Ada Mei Fan notes, '[i]t is an attitude that leads not only to the destruction of the home and family but perhaps to the destruction, or at least disruption, of the entire nation' (Fan, 35).

In some passages, not only the New Woman movement and its disadvantageous influences on women's behaviour is ridiculed and criticised, but the idea of female education altogether. An example can be given in Admiral Darby's comments on the downhearted Harabin, who has been on his own for several months as his wife has left for Cairo:

ADMIRAL: (*pointing to HARABIN as to a martyr*) There! There you see the result of all this tomfoolery of women's higher education! There you

⁹² Cf. Jackson, 17.

⁹³ Cf. *Rebellious Susan*, III, 154-155.

⁹⁴ Cf. Fan, 35.

see what happens when a woman takes the bit into her mouth. A man's peace and happiness utterly ruined. (*Rebellious Susan*, II, 136)

Moreover, the Admiral's observations about Lady Susan's behaviour do not only concern the situation of the married couple, but also seem to be a reflection of the general evils of this new development with regard to female independence.⁹⁵ This notion corresponds with the Victorian idea that the family serves as a microcosm of society as a whole and that disruptions in the former have consequences for the stability of the latter, as argued in the introductory pages.

Despite the conventionality that is especially voiced through the character of Sir Richard, Cordell argues that *The Case of Rebellious Susan* is one of the most provocative Victorian dramatic works. He sees enough evidence for Lady Susan's act of infidelity between the lines and in Jones's foreword to the printed edition of the play, written in a form of a letter, in which the playwright states that 'if you must have a moral in my comedy, suppose it to be this – that as women cannot retaliate openly, they may retaliate secretly – and lie' (*Rebellious Susan*, 107).

Cordell, therefore, points out that '[t]o have an adulteress happily reunited with her husband at the curtain-fall is without precedent either in Jones's plays or those of his contemporaries' (Cordell, 216). Correspondingly, Jean Chothia argues that the implication of Jones's play is that sinfulness has rather to do with being found out than with actually doing anything improper.⁹⁶

In order that the play could be staged in times of censorship, certain concessions had to be made not only through the use of ambiguity and Kato's strong voice of reason, but also through Susan's realisation that her prior behaviour was not warrantable.⁹⁷

Moreover, any form of retaliation seems futile as this final conversation shows:

LADY DARBY: Why didn't you forgive him at first, Sue, and save us all this trouble?

LADY SUSAN: (*Sighs.*) I wonder why I didn't.

LADY DARBY: You see, dear, we poor women cannot retaliate.

LADY SUSAN: I see.

LADY DARBY: We must be patient.

⁹⁵ Cf. 'ADMIRAL: [...] A woman has no right to shake the foundations of society in this way' (*Rebellious Susan*, II, 137).

⁹⁶ Cf. Chothia, *New Drama*, 36.

⁹⁷ Cf. Cordell, 216f.

INEZ: And forgive the wretches till they learn constancy.

LADY SUSAN: I see.

LADY DARBY: And dear, yours is a respectable average case after all.

LADY SUSAN: Yes, a respectable case after all.

(*Rebellious Susan*, III, 160-61)

As the above passage indicates, Lady Susan is somewhat changed in the end. At the beginning she is portrayed as a rather self-determined and self-confident woman, who has been convinced not to be ‘an object of pity’ (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 109) and ‘to pay [her husband] back in his own coin’ (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 109). She appears to be quite sharp-witted and unwilling to simply employ a bit of nagging, and it initially seems unlikely that she will let her husband get away with his unfaithfulness.

Her passionate attitude has made way for a kind of passiveness in the final act, and one cannot help but wonder if Jones’s PS to his preface of the printed play – ‘[m]y comedy isn’t a comedy at all. It’s a tragedy dressed as comedy’ (*Rebellious Susan*, 107) – is not meant to point out that the ending of the play does not necessarily illustrate his own attitude towards its subject matter. In some passages, Jones seems to criticise society, where cases like the one of ‘Rebellious Susan’ appear to be the norm and are accepted without questioning.⁹⁸ When Lady Darby suggests that these instances should generally be looked over and hushed up, Inez, replies that ‘[i]t is the advice that everybody always gives in such cases, so I suppose it must be right’ (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 109). Heinz Peter Forsthuber argues that even though Susan makes an attempt to become more emancipated at the beginning, she does not turn into an Ibsenian *Nora*. In the end, traditional ideals and conformity prevails.⁹⁹

If there is a morale to the play, it seems to be that, for a woman, there is simply no way she can revenge her husband’s infidelity if she does not want to lose her

⁹⁸ Cf. ‘LADY DARBY: Oh no, my dear! Some cases are much worse than others; and when you come to my age you’ll be thankful that yours is no worse than a respectable average case’ (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 110).

In this connection, the clearly ironical use of ‘respectable’ in association with the discussion of matrimonial unfaithfulness could be interpreted as a further instance of Jones’s critical attitude towards society’s understanding of morality.

⁹⁹ Cf. Forsthuber, 229

standing in society.¹⁰⁰ Women do not have any option except accepting and forgiving their spouses and, quite ironically, this magnanimousness is construed as their true virtue, giving evidence to the fact that they are all ‘noble creatures’ (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 117), and making Admiral Darby exclaim, ‘[a]h! what angels women are!’ (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 118). The theoretical consequences of an extramarital affair for a woman of Lady Susan’s rank, belonging to the upper class, would be to become ‘déclassé’. An idea of what the various consequences of a loss of reputation and caste were to Jones can be found in another one of his plays, *The Liars*. Here, the character of Sir Christopher Deering, a *raisonneur* as well, comes up with a list of particular instances, when he has to deal with a situation quite similar to that of Susan, involving a married woman who plans to elope with her admirer:

[...], think of the brave pioneers who have gone before you in this enterprise. They’ve all perished, and their bones whiten the anti-matrimonial shore. Think of them! Charley Gray and Lady Rideout – flitting shabbily about the Continent at cheap table d’hôtes and gambling clubs, rubbing shoulders with all the blackguards and demi-mondaines of Europe. Poor old Fitz and his beauty – moping down at Farnhurst, cut by the country, with no single occupation except to nag and rag each other to pieces from morning to night. Billy Dover and Polly Atchison – cut in for fresh partners in three weeks. That old idiot, Sir Bonham Dancer – paid five thousand pounds damages for being saddled with the professional strong man’s wife. George Nuneham and Mrs Sandys – [...] she drank herself to death and died in a hospital. (*Liars*, IV, 215)

In *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, Kato cautions the heroine, ‘[o]ne false step and you’re lost’ (*Rebellious Susan*, II, 144), a word of warning that does not seem exaggerated when recollecting Nelly Armroyd’s and Drusilla Ives’ fates. Moreover, Susan’s uncle does not grant his niece her own free will. He declares himself the guardian of her morality and does not allow her to live independently without a man to watch over her good reputation. She only has the option to either go back to her husband or live with Sir Richard. This, in turn, is only one of the many instances of manifest double standards between men and women in the play.

That different rules of proper conduct apply to men and women is quite evident throughout the play. As Sir Richard once puts it, ‘[...] what is sauce for the goose

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Fan, 33f.

will never be sauce for the gander' (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 112). James Harabin's affairs are freely discussed, whereas only a hint at an indiscretion on Lady Susan's side is met with harsh criticism of her conduct. She herself seems to know that women who do not want to lose their respectability cannot do anything except threaten to match their adulterous husbands.¹⁰¹

From a psychological point of view, it is interesting to note that Susan tends to think that some shortcoming on her part is the explanation for Harabin's behaviour. When Kato wants Susan's husband to give just a single reason for his demeanour, Lady Susan prompts,

[i]s my company unpleasant? Is my temper bad? Has he found me flirting with anybody? Have I given him his dinners badly cooked? He must be surely able to give some shadow of a reason. (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 115)

Cordell considers the application of double standards concerning the morality of men and women a general feature of Jones's plays, where 'the frank immorality or insinuated indiscretions of men are not considered as checks to a happy marriage' (Cordell, 91).

Arguably, due to the vagueness surrounding Lady Susan's relationship with Edensor, the reactions to the play were mixed. The actor-manager Charles Wyndham, for example, who not only produced the play, but also cast himself in the role of Sir Richard, obviously had difficulties with the general moral message *The Case of Rebellious Susan* was likely to convey to its audience. In a letter to Jones he wrote:

I stand as bewildered today as ever at finding an author, a clean-living, clear-minded man, hoping to extract laughter from an audience on the score of a woman's impurity I am equally astounded at a long-experienced dramatic author believing that he will induce married men to bring their wives to the theatre to learn the lesson that their wives can descend to such nastiness, as giving themselves up for one evening of adulterous pleasure and then return safely to their husband's arms, provided they are clever enough, low enough, and dishonest enough to avoid being found out. (Wyndham, quoted in Griffin, 37).

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Rebellious Susan*, II, 132.

After the play's premiere, the critics were also unconvinced. Nevertheless, it turned out to become a huge success with audiences.¹⁰²

4.3.2. *Penelope*

– Penelope O'Farrell and Ada Fergusson

Penelope, the eponymous heroine of William Somerset Maugham's play, written in 1908 and first performed at the Comedy Theatre in London in 1909, is a married woman as well. Her husband is Dickie O'Farrell, a doctor. With regard to this particular profession, it can be said that medical practitioners played an important role in mediating ideals of gender dissimilarity. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, their female clientele consisted predominantly of middle-class women.¹⁰³ Lewis points out that

[i]n a period when a rigid separation of spheres prevailed between men and women, the physician's approach to female illness exemplified the strong influence of theories of sexual difference and the nature of their implications for the position of women in society. (Lewis, *Women in England*, 85)

Moreover, the doctor occupied an interesting position in a female patient's life. He was not only of great significance in a middle-class household, but was also one of the very few men, belonging to the same class, with whom the married woman dealt with directly.¹⁰⁴

Like Susan and James Harabin, the O'Farrells have been married for a couple of years and, as was the case in all the other plays so far, their marriage has remained childless. It is also interesting to note that women with children automatically seem to have been considered as more virtuous. Only if she was not only a loving wife but also a caring mother, a woman could be the perfect embodiment of the prevalent domestic ideal or, as Poovey puts it, women's 'most important work was

¹⁰² Cf. Griffin, 37f.

¹⁰³ For a further discussion, see: Lewis, *Women in England*, 84ff.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Lewis, *Women in England*, 86.

increasingly represented as the emotional labor motivated (and guaranteed) by maternal instinct' (Poovey, 10).

Furthermore, the opening scene of *Penelope* can be compared to that of *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, as the heroine also assembles her friends and relatives in order to tell them about the actions she has considered to take in consequence of her husband's infidelity. From the very beginning, Penelope is perceived as a caring and hospitable woman. Even though she is not physically present, she makes sure that all her guests' particular wishes are well attended to.

The measures Penelope has in mind, though, seem to be further-reaching than those of Susan because the former does not simply want to pay her husband back in his own coin by 'going to find a little romance, and introduce it into [their] married life' (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 124). Quite on the contrary, Penelope '[doesn't] want to get [her husband] back by exciting his jealousy. [She doesn't] want his love if [she] can only have it by making him think other men are in love with [her]' (*Penelope*, II, 42), but initially wishes for a divorce. In this context, it should be borne in mind that fourteen years lie between the first performances of the two plays and that the public opinion concerning marriage at that time was gradually changing. Moreover, a situation like this – a wife being betrayed by her husband – is not generally perceived as 'a respectable average case' (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 110) any longer. A spouse's unfaithfulness is not simply due to the very nature of men. Instead, the husband's conduct is regarded as detestable and offensive. Mrs Golightly, Penelope's mother, for example, states that 'Dickie's behaviour is abominable, and there are no excuses for him. It's a mere matter of common morality' (*Penelope*, I, 20). Even Dr O'Farrell himself grants that one of the possible consequences of O'Farrell's adulterous behaviour ought to be Penelope's wish for a divorce.¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, divorce was still far from being socially acceptable, which is also indicated by Davenport Barlow, Penelope's uncle, when he says that '[f]amily life in England is going to the dogs. That is the long and short of it' (*Penelope*, I, 18).

Besides, the case of Penelope is different because she affirms to love her husband¹⁰⁶, whereas Susan never mentions anything in that direction. Moreover, as will also be discussed in more detail below, the ideal of the Angel in the House

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Penelope*, II, 72.

¹⁰⁶ 'PENELOPE: [...] I simply dote upon Dickie. I've never loved any one else, and I never shall' (*Penelope*, I, 15).

does not seem to ensure a happy and stable marriage any longer. Penelope describes herself as having ‘been a perfect angel’ who has ‘simply worshipped the ground [her husband] has walked on’ (*Penelope*, I, 20). Nonetheless, Dickie cheats on his wife with her alleged friend Ada Fergusson, while Susan’s husband had affairs with various unspecified women. In this context, it is also interesting to point out that quite a similar plot can be found in another of Maugham’s plays, *The Constant Wife*, written in 1926, almost 20 years after *Penelope*.¹⁰⁷ Here, the husband of Constance, the main character, is a physician who has an affair with a married woman as well, but apart from these similarities the heroine’s situation has rather changed. Even though she regains her husband’s affections, she decides to go on a journey with a former suitor and, consequently, ‘chooses to have her own affair instead of troubling to restore her husband’s spirit of romance’ (Barnes, 76). Ronald Barnes further points out that Maugham’s plays, in general, reflect the public’s changing attitude towards marriage.¹⁰⁸

In contrast to the situation in *The Constant Wife*, gaining her husband’s affections is still the main goal for Penelope after a conversation with Mr Golightly, her father, who opposes a divorce. As already indicated by his surname,¹⁰⁹ he advises his daughter go lightly over the whole business and to trifle with the matter. His role is comparable to that of the *raisonneur* Sir Richard. Similarly, Anthony Curtis argues, ‘Golightly is our mentor, our reasoner, our Maugham mask who knows how to cope with everything under the sun’ (Curtis, *Pattern*, 70). When his wife talks of Dr O’Farrell’s abominable behaviour, he responds with the words: ‘My dear, I have no objection to you talking common morality if you’ll let me talk common sense’ (*Penelope*, I, 20). It seems that common sense and common morality with regard to disturbances within a marriage do not correspond in the same way as in *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, but are by now regarded as different entities.

Penelope, then, is quickly persuaded to try to win Dickie back, but this appears not so much based on the maintenance of social acceptability but on the heroine’s persistent love for her husband. As soon as her father suggests a scheme to make

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Barnes, 175-177.

¹⁰⁸ For a further discussion, see chapter IV ‘Maugham’s Image of Society as Reflected in the Marriage Contract’ in Barnes, 64ff.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Curtis, *Pattern*, 70.

her husband come back, she is more than willing to do anything in her power to ensure a successful outcome.¹¹⁰ This plan requires self-control at any time, never to show or tell her husband of the extent of her love as not to stifle him with her feelings. Mr Golightly advises his daughter that she ‘must never let [her]self out of hand; [she] must keep guard on [her] tongue and [her] eyes and [her] smiles – and [her] temper’ (*Penelope*, I, 23). These seem to be the new virtues,¹¹¹ which, admittedly, are found to be immoral by both Mrs Golightly and Penelope at first.¹¹² In this case, this means that morality as a prior motive in a woman’s life has lost some ground.

Moreover, the consequences of the disturbances in the O’Farrells’ relationship have less to do with keeping up appearances to the outside world and demonstrating a harmonious family life to society, but rather with maintaining a façade within the marriage itself. Initially, Penelope appears to be worried about the outcome of such a strategy. Responding to her father’s proposition, she wants to know, ‘if I acquire so many virtues I shan’t be a woman, but a monster, and how can he love me then?’ (*Penelope*, I, 25). Nonetheless, she follows Mr Golightly’s recommendations and even encourages her husband to meet Ada. Penelope does so in the hope that her rival would by and by adopt her own previous pattern of behaviour by doting too much on Dickie. Furthermore, the heroine keeps up a cheerful face along the way, but as soon as she is out of the lovers’ hearing range, it becomes evident that she is in fact miserable, as a conversation with her father indicates:

You don’t know what I’ve suffered this month with a smiling face. I’ve laughed while my heart ached. [...] I haven’t even dared to cry by myself in case Ada Fergusson should see that my eyes were red and tell Dickie. He’s seen her every day, every single day for the last month, and all the time I’ve been cheerful and pleasant and amusing. (*Penelope*, II, 43)

In order to console herself, on the one hand, and to pay back her husband’s unfaithfulness, on the other hand, she resorts to consumerism,¹¹³ the soothing qualities of which were already hinted at in *The Case of Rebellious Susan*.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Penelope*, I, 23f.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Penelope*, I, 25.

¹¹² Cf. *Penelope*, I, 24.

¹¹³ ‘PENELOPE: [...] whenever he goes out for the day I have to console myself by buying something. I generally choose something rather dear’ (*Penelope*, II, 44);

Nonetheless, her father's scheme succeeds in the end. Her, at times, almost unbearable self-control finally comes off and is rewarded by her husband's return in the same way as her forebear, Homer's Penelope, was.¹¹⁴

Penelope is also more daring and outspoken than *The Case of Rebellious Susan* when it comes to women having an affair. Ada Fergusson, Penelope's antagonist, is a married woman whose husband is in the navy and stationed in Malta. She is aware of her assets and displays them without any perceivable sign of remorse or guilty conscience. She is 'a womanly woman. And that's why men like [her]' (*Penelope*, II, 64). Despite the fact that she starts a liaison with Dickie, which would qualify her as a Fallen Woman, she does not seem to be that different from the virtuous Penelope. Beneath her flirtatiousness, she appears to have a tendency to cling to men as well, which already becomes evident shortly after her first appearance, when she asks Penelope's husband,

D'you mean to say your wife asks you where you've been and where you're going. How like a woman. [*Innocently.*] By the way, what are you doing this evening? (*Penelope*, I, 33)

Generally, there is a tendency in the play to lump all women together. Each woman seems to exhibit the same kind of behaviour, which can only be kept at bay with great efforts of self-control, as exerted by Penelope. In one passage, for instance, Dr O'Farrell summarises female demeanour, of which his wife seems to be the only exception, as follows:

Yes, I suppose all women do that – except Pen. Pen never bothers. She never asks you if you love her. She never keeps you when you want to get away. She never insists on knowing all your movements. And when you leave her she never asks that fatal, fiendish question, at what time you will be back? (*Penelope*, II, 68)

'PENELOPE: I'll do nothing. I'll hold my tongue, I'll smile, I'll make jokes, but...

GOLIGHTLY: Yes?

PENELOPE: I want some hats badly. I'll just go and ring up Françoise and tell her to send me all she's got in the shop' (*Penelope*, II, 45);

'PENELOPE: Yes, you see, I've been consoling my aching heart by replenishing my wardrobe' (*Penelope*, II, 73).

¹¹⁴ Curtis, *Pattern*, 71.

Before these seemingly universal female character traits materialize in Ada, though, Dickie invents a patient, Mrs Mack, who bears some resemblance to Worthing's invented friend, Bunbury in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*,¹¹⁵ in order to be able to see her more often. As soon as Penelope's manoeuvres to win him back start to come off, it is suggested that Ada is best disposed of by inducing uncle Davenport to focus his attention on her. Mrs Fergusson, in turn, appears to be less governed by a feeling of shame or repentance, as was the case with Nelly Armroyd, than by a sense of hurt pride.¹¹⁶ In the end, she even considers travelling to Malta in order to stay with her husband. The peccadillo with the married Dickie does not seem to have any consequences for her and she is ostensibly able to continue her life without being cast off as a Fallen Woman. Her reputation is apparently unharmed, which would have been impracticable half a century before. Nevertheless, she is not a New Woman either as she, in her own description, as 'womanly woman' relies on the attention of men and does not strive to be independent of them.

Double standards appear to reach a climax in this play as Penelope holds only herself and the slightly exaggerated way of showing her affection towards her husband responsible for his infidelity.¹¹⁷ Moreover, as soon as Dickie learns that his wife has known about his affair all along, he first starts to call *her* behaviour 'disgraceful', 'scandalous', 'devoid of any sense of decency', 'monstrous', 'callous', 'cold-blooded', 'cynical' (*Penelope*, II, 72), 'wicked' and 'cruel' (*Penelope*, II, 74). Consequently, it is now *he* who wants a separation and who acts as the upholder of traditional values by claiming:

I've got a moral sense, and I tell you that I'm simply outraged. You're overthrowing the foundations of society. Whatever I've done, I've got more respect for the sanctity of the home and the decencies of family life than all of you put together. (*Penelope*, II, 76)

Therefore, it seems that Maugham to a large extent still adheres to traditional ideas about relationships between men and women. In fact, the author himself initially

¹¹⁵ Cf. Fan, 327.

¹¹⁶ 'MRS. FERGUSSON: Oh, what a humiliation! I've been just a convenience because [Penelope] had other fish to fry. How sordid it makes the whole thing! And I was yearning for romance. I would never have looked at you if I hadn't thought she doted on you' (*Penelope*, III, 99).

¹¹⁷ 'PENELOPE: [...] I find I've been entirely mistaken about Dickie. He's not to blame in any way' (*Penelope*, I, 26).

planned to name the play *Man and Wife*.¹¹⁸ In this connection, Ted Morgan argues that

Maugham was writing in the context of English civil law, which until 1923 accepted a wife's adultery as a ground for divorce, but required additional proof of desertion or cruelty in the case of the husband's adultery. He endorsed the Edwardian assumption that a woman with an unfaithful husband should use her wits rather than retaliate. (Morgan, 155)

Nevertheless, the play undoubtedly shows that things are different for women after the turn of the century, an opinion also shared by Mr Golightly, as he once explains to Dickie, 'My dear fellow, we're in the twentieth century' (*Penelope*, II, 75). Divorce is not absolutely out of the question anymore. In order to keep their husbands, though, women now have to resort to different measures. It is not sufficient to act like Angels in the House any longer, to attend to all the spouses' needs and to love them unreservedly. On the one hand, this is undoubtedly a step forward in female emancipation, as a woman becomes more and more independent from the domestic sphere and, consequently, from her husband, too. She can engage in various societies, as Mrs Golightly does,¹¹⁹ and ceases to centre all her attention on her partner. In the words of Penelope, she 'no longer feel[s] that the world is coming to an end when [he] go[es] out of the room' (*Penelope*, III, 104). Moreover, women are encouraged to put on masks and to almost behave like actresses in their domestic spheres. This notion can be considered to be an advancement from the Victorian concept of womanhood which looked upon women as possessing a steady personality with all the angel-like virtues already described. As Kerry Powell points out in an analysis of actresses in the Victorian age,

[t]he idea of woman's free and flexible selfhood [...] contradicted Victorian thought about the self in general and woman's self in particular. Indeed, performance by its very nature endangered the Victorian belief in a stable identity [...]. (Powell, *Victorian Theatre*, 23)

¹¹⁸ Cf. Morgan, 147.

¹¹⁹ 'GOLIGHTLY: [Mrs Golightly] has had an affair with the Additional Curates' Society, and an intrigue with the English Church Mission. She has flirted with Christian Science, made eyes at Homoeopathy, and her relations with vegetarianism have left a distinct mark on her figure' (*Penelope*, III, 83).

On the other hand, this performing of roles at home is only advocated when it helps to secure the fidelity of the husband. Therefore, the steps taken by Penelope seem to convey that women ought to play roles constantly in order to please and keep their husbands and that the likelihood of a happy marriage increases if men are not sure of their wives' affections at any time.¹²⁰ In the same way as women in general are portrayed as having an innate urge to express their affections, men are depicted as being polygamous by nature. The responsibility to prevent a husband's philandering, however, lies entirely in a wife's hands. She simply has to suppress her real self and to pretend ceaselessly, which is also the advice Penelope gets to hear from her father in the final act:

PENELOPE: Do you mean to say I'm to expect Dickie to have flirtations with half a dozen different women?

GOLIGHTLY: I only see one way to avoid it.

PENELOPE: And what is that?

GOLIGHTLY: Be half a dozen different women yourself.

PENELOPE: It sounds dreadful exhausting.

[...] It was so easy for me to love, honour and obey him, and so delightful. It never struck me that I ought to keep watch over my feelings.

(*Penelope*, III, 81-82)

From the early 21st century's vantage point of view, it certainly remains to be questioned whether this form of female emancipation, as presented by Maugham in his play, is a progress indeed. Fan notes on the ending that

[i]n putting the wife always on her guard, Maugham leaves the audience somewhat suspended, removed from the solid ground of an absolutely happy ending. But dissatisfied as we are with the reduction of the male-female love relationship to a cat-and-mouse game of artificial transactions that are never to yield true happiness, we accept it as the human condition, glad of partial gratification. (Fan, 328)

To the Edwardian audience, Penelope was perceived as being the triumphant party. J.T. Grein's review of the play for the *Sunday Times and Special* in January 1909, for example, does not only show this interpretation of her character, but also illustrates some of the prevailing double standards of that time:

¹²⁰ Cf. 'Penelope herself is all appearance: she is an actress playing a role, first of her own design, then of her father's. Without the role-playing, she is a flat type, simply the loving, dutiful wife. She is entirely too dependent on Dickie – and on her father, since she obediently goes about performing according to his directives. The marriage, too, is not a genuine relationship, but a playing house, an acting relationship' (Fan, 323).

The old axiom, that a normal woman is content with one man, that to her a little flirtation is all the variety she requires, and that the average man is polygamous without necessarily meaning any harm. So curious are the ethics of man, according to Mr. Maugham – and I for one shall not say him nay – that when Penelope, who is sharp as a needle and bent on the reconquest of her straying lord, pretends to look upon his peccadillo rather callously, he breaks out in sainted ire and trounces her soundly for the levity of her principles. How Penelope, in this game of mice and men, proves victorious; how, by subtle devices and exquisite *calinerie*, she brings her sinner to his knees, I must leave to judge for yourselves, since all London, married London especially, will rush to see itself in the mirror. (Grein, quoted in Mandler, 69)

Nonetheless, other reviewers did not appear to take the play as an actual portrayal of marriage, but rather detected traces of satire. In an article for the *Nation* in January 1909 for example, William Archer, the most renowned theatre critic at that time, noted:

There is even a real touch of satiric originality in the idea of the husband who, on learning that his wife has long known of his infidelity, and has (apparently) made light of it, feels his moral sentiments outraged, and finds himself, quite sincerely, playing the part of indignant accuser. (Archer, quoted in Curtis, *Critical Heritage*, 93)

As Archer proceeds, he even remarks that it could be ‘felt more than once that Mr Maugham was skating pretty near the edge of the intolerable cynical’ (Archer, quoted in Curtis, *Critical Heritage*, 94).

Moreover, the audience’s reception of plays involving an adulterous woman and an unfaithful husband also seems to have changed over the years. At the end of the first decade of the 20th century, such subject matters on stage were less regarded as daring and scandalous than entertaining and comical, which also becomes noticeable in the following account of the public’s reaction at the first performance by Arthur Bingham Walkley, a theatre critic for *The Times*:

The audience, which was about manifestly becoming tired – or beginning to be afraid that it was about to become tired – by the elaboration of a too familiar idea, was swept away in the sudden delight of this right-about-face [the husband’s shock at his wife’s complaisance] burst into a great roar of inextinguishable laughter, and the play, you felt, was safe. (Walkley, quoted in Curtis, *Pattern*, 71).

4.3.3. *The New Woman*

– Margery Cazenove and Agnes Sylvester

In Sidney Grundy's play *The New Woman*, which had its opening night in 1894 at the Comedy Theatre in London, the initial passion in a young couple's marriage wears off soon as well. As in *The Case of Rebellious Susan* and *Penelope*, the husband falls in love with another woman. It is never explicitly confirmed that Gerald Cazenove really cheats on Margery, his wife, with Agnes Sylvester, who is married as well. Nevertheless, throughout the first two acts, a number of hints may lead to the interpretation that Gerald and Agnes are not satisfied with their respective marriages, have at least rather strong feelings for each other, and spend a lot of time alone together. Even though everyone returns to their lawful partners in the end, the women presented in the play appear to be more independent and less anxious to conform to social conventions than in the dramatic works discussed so far. Consequently, the boundaries between what is supposed to be typical masculine and feminine patterns of behaviour become blurred to some extent.

In the same way, right at the beginning of the play, the description of Gerald Cazenove's chambers as 'effeminately decorated' (*New Woman*, I, 3) suggests that he has a rather unmanly character. Moreover, his apparent concern for the advancement of women makes him collaborate on a philosophical treatise on the ethics of marriage with Mrs Sylvester. These features of his characters largely resemble those of Fergusson Pybus, Elaine Shrimpton's husband in *The Case Of Rebellious Susan*. Similarly, there are certain correspondences between Mrs Sylvester and Elaine. They can both be considered as New Woman figures and are continually treated in a mocking tone. They are, for example, made fun of by stressing how bad their household- and especially cooking-skills are.¹²¹ A more detailed analysis of the ways in which New Women are depicted in the play will follow in a subsequent paragraph.

¹²¹ 'PYBUS: But so far from giving me any afflatus, she will not even give me a light and easily assimilated course of diet. I cannot nourish my peculiar gifts on tinned mutton of the cheapest brands, and the more stringy portions of an underdone ham' (*Rebellious Susan*, III, 152);

'SYLVESTER I had business at the Horse Guards. I shall be home to dinner, though.

MRS SYLVESTER Oh dear, I wish I had known that. There's only mutton.

SYLVESTER The same mutton?

MRS SYLVESTER What do you mean by the same?

SYLVESTER I mean the mutton I had yesterday.

MRS SYLVESTER Did you have mutton yesterday?' (*New Woman*, I, 9).

At the beginning of the play, the aforementioned couple, Gerald Cazenove and Margery, are not married yet. Margery is the maid of Gerald's aunt, Lady Wargrave. Therefore, she does not belong to the same class as her future husband, whose background seems to be upper-middle class. This aspect could possibly also account for the fact that she acts less restrainedly as the plot evolves than the other female characters analysed in the plays so far. Nevertheless, Margery still conforms to the traditional type of 'womanly' woman and, thus, contrasts with the other female characters of the play, who represent caricatures of the New Woman, as also represented in periodicals such as *Punch* at that time. Before Margery appears on stage, she is presented almost as the epitome of the established ideal of womanhood. Gerald talks of her in terms of '[a] woman! that is what one wants – that's all. Birth, brains, accomplishments – pshaw! vanities! community of interest – sympathy of the soul? mere dialectics!' (*New Woman*, I, 11). Moreover, in the course of the first act, as she accepts his proposal, she also assures him that she will obey.¹²² This makes her almost the antipode to Mrs Sylvester, who stresses the importance of equality between men and women and believes that the union of the souls is the most important feature in a relationship.¹²³ Mrs Sylvester's opinion is shared by the other New Woman characters in the play and it seems that in a decade where '[e]verything's New' (*New Woman*, I, 17), their hopes are less idealistic and unrealistic than they might have appeared a few years before. The fact that Mrs Sylvester and Gerald belong to the same circle of society also proves advantageous to her objective, as it is certainly easier for her to voice her ideas than for Margery. It could even be suggested that, at a time when women become increasingly independent and confrontational, a man like Gerald, who initially aspires to marry someone conforming to the Angel in the House ideal, can only fulfil this wish by resorting to a *mésalliance*. It could be argued that this is the reason why Gerald proposes to Margery in the first place.

He soon has to accept that their marriage is far from being ideal as they do not seem to share any common ground at all. In the second act, after twelve months have elapsed, Margery's constantly attempts to make her husband affirm his love for her. In this respect, her behaviour largely resembles Penelope's at the beginning of Maugham's play. After Gerald's initial attraction to Margery has worn off, he comes to realise the difference of class and upbringing between them.

¹²² Cf. *New Woman*, I, 22.

¹²³ Cf. *New Woman*, I, 12.

As she is not a born lady, his wife is rather uneducated compared to himself and not used to certain conventions and formalities of the upper classes such as answering cards, which results in communicational problems in their relationship.¹²⁴ At times, she even seems childlike, she hides behind curtains to give her husband a start,¹²⁵ ties a handkerchief over the Colonel's eyes,¹²⁶ and continually bursts into laughter. She appears to be rather naïve and ignorant of her status. In an account to Lady Wargrave of her married life so far, Margery states,

[a]t any rate, I make people laugh. Isn't that being witty? Then I laugh as well, although I don't know what I'm laughing at, I'm sure! (*Laughs*) Oh everybody laughs at me – but Gerald. (*New Woman*, II, 35)

In the notes to the play, Jean Chothia also points out that 'the astuteness of Margery's perceptions about the social code here and subsequently in the scene sit uneasily with her pranks, naiveté, and silly laughter' (Chothia, *Emancipated Women Plays*, 269). Gerald realises that Margery can never be an equal companion to him. In a conversation with Mrs Sylvester, overheard by his wife, he sums up the problem,

[b]ut Agnes, Margery is impossible! She's no companion to me! I am alone! Her very laughter grates upon me! There's no meaning in it! It is the laughter of a tomboy, of a clown! And she will never learn! She's hopeless, Agnes, hopeless! (*New Woman*, II, 38)

This very light-heartedness and quasi-ignorance make Agnes seem attractive in the eyes of Mr Sylvester. He expresses his admiration for Mrs Cazenove quite a few times and, on one occasion, even openly proclaims his love for her.¹²⁷ Despite all this naivety, Margery is guided by a strong moral sense from within, which keeps her from becoming a Fallen Woman. When Mr Sylvester asks her to be with him and asserts that he will teach her how to love him, she replies,

[s]o, I'm to learn to be unfaithful, is that it? As one learns music? No Captain Sylvester! Suppose two people are so much in love that they can't help it, Heaven is their judge, not me. But to begin to love when

¹²⁴ Cf. *New Woman*, II, 25.

¹²⁵ Cf. *New Woman*, II, 27.

¹²⁶ Cf. *New Woman*, II, 33.

¹²⁷ Cf. *New Woman*, III, 46.

they can help it – not to resist – to teach themselves to love – that’s where the wrong is, and there’s no gainsaying it. (*New Woman*, III, 46)

Moreover, it is this inner moral guide that leads Margery to the resolution to leave her husband and to return to her father in the country. In this respect, she is different from the married women previously analysed. She does not act out of a sense of revenge or hurt pride, but does what seems to be right for her own well-being and conscience. In her position as a former maid, she is less constrained by the codes of social propriety even though she seems to be aware of them.¹²⁸ Her main motivation to go away lies is the fact that she has ‘had enough of half a home and only half a heart. [She’s] starving, withering, dying [t]here with [Gerald]!’ (*New Woman*, III, 47). Still the model of a traditional woman, she does not blame her husband for anything that has gone wrong but Mrs Sylvester, the ‘other’ woman, by declaring, ‘[i]t’s she who’s robbed me of your love! It isn’t I who’ve lost it; she has stolen it!’ (*New Woman*, III, 48). It could be argued that criticism of a woman by another, almost idealised, woman is targeted to have a stronger influence on the audience or readership than criticism by a *raisonneur* character as it subverts the struggle for the emancipation of women from within. Along these lines, one could interpret Margery’s words to her opponent at the end of the third act:

[y]ou call yourself a New Woman – you’re not New at all. You’re just as old as Eve [, and just as hungry for the fruit she plucked]. You only want one thing – the thing that every woman wants – the only thing that no woman’s life’s worth living without! A true man’s love! (*New Woman*, III, 51)

Mrs Sylvester, in turn, does not seem to understand the attraction that emanates from Margery. As a conversation with her husband reveals, she is ignorant of the fact that Margery apparently holds all the qualities a man is looking for in a woman:

MRS SYLVESTER Margery! Are you all mad, you men? What is it in that woman that enslaves you? What is the charm we others don’t

¹²⁸ ‘MARGERY [to Sylvester] I *am* a wife, and I shall not forget it. If I have lost my husband’s love, at least I’ll save his honour. A public scandal mayn’t mean much to *you*, but it means your wife’s ruin – it means Gerald’s’ (*New Woman*, IV, 54).

possess? Only you men can see it; and you all do! You lose your senses, every one of you! What is it that bewitches you?

SYLVESTER What you've crushed out of yourself – your womanhood. What you're ashamed of is a woman's glory. Philosophy is well enough in books; but in a woman a man wants flesh and blood – frank human nature.

MRS SYLVESTER (*laughing hysterically*) A mere animal!

SYLVESTER A woman.

(*New Woman*, III, 50)

Mrs Sylvester cannot simply be counted among the caricatured New Women in the play, who untiringly talk about the inequality between the sexes, muse over the importance of latchkeys, and smoke out of principle. She is a married woman, who is not particularly happy in her relationship due to a lack of common ground.¹²⁹ She has doubts about the concept of marriage itself, as a conversation with Gerald reveals:

MRS SYLVESTER What is a promise when the heart's gone out of it?

GERALD Surely it is a promise.

MRS SYLVESTER To an empty phrase must one sacrifice one's life? Must one stake everything on the judgement of one's youth? By the decision of a moment must one be bound for ever? Must one go through the world 'with quiet eyes unfaithful to the truth'? Does one not owe a duty to oneself? There can be but one answer!

(*New Woman*, II, 38)

No comparable open criticism of matrimony has been uttered by any of the characters in any of the other the plays.

Like Mrs Fergusson in *Penelope*, Mrs Sylvester falls in love with a married man. This time, though, the husband is close at hand and not stationed in another country.

Throughout the play, *New Woman* characters are ridiculed and their endeavours to promote equality between the sexes is made fun of by the male characters. In her introduction to the play, Chothia points out that '[t]hey might be thought of as modern humours figures: once set before the audience, each will respond in an exaggerated and predictable way' (Chothia, *Emancipated Woman Plays*, xv).

¹²⁹ Cf. *New Woman*, II, 37.

Right at the beginning of the play Colonel Cazenove, Gerald's uncle, expresses the viewpoint that '[a] woman, who *is* a woman doesn't want to be anything else. These people are a sex of their own. [...] They have invented a new gender' (*New Woman*, I, 5). The notes to the play elucidate that, as Grundy does not make any efforts to subvert this attitude, the Colonel can be considered to be a *raisonneur* figure.¹³⁰ Repeatedly, he embodies the voice of common sense asserting that the New Women's endeavours and dissatisfactions all come down to their not having a husband.¹³¹

In general, Grundy's play is more outspoken than the works discussed so far. Miss Enid Bethune, Miss Victoria Vivash and Dr Mary Bevan, the New Women in the play, and notably all unmarried, rather openly discuss gender issues as in Dr Bevan's words,

[a] morbid modesty has too long closed our eyes. But the day of awakening has come. Sylvester, in her *Aspirations after a Higher Morality*, Bethune, in her *Man, the Betrayer*, Vivash, in her *Foolish Virgins*, have postulated the sexual problem from every conceivable point of view. (*New Woman*, I, 17)

Furthermore, Dr Bevan represents the first occurrence of a working middle-class woman in any of the dramatic works. According to the explanatory notes to Grundy's comedy, 'medicine was one of the few professions in which women had, despite much opposition and ridicule, made some advancement at this time' (Chothia, *Emancipated Woman Plays*, 269). In this context, it is interesting to note that 'The London School of Medicine for Women' was established in 1874, and by the year 1891 there were 101 female doctors in London.¹³² Owing to her capacity as a doctor, it seems that through her voice forthright allusions to reproduction are more sanctioned and less provocative than through any other voice in the play.¹³³

Moreover, the New Woman characters' constant verbal attacks on the wrong that is done to their gender always seem to serve comic purposes. Their way of reasoning often appears to be exaggerated and illogical, which is usually pointed

¹³⁰ Cf. Chotia, *Emancipated Woman Plays*, 266.

¹³¹ Cf. *New Woman*, I, 18.

¹³² Cf. Chothia, *Emancipated Woman Plays*, 268.

¹³³ Cf. 'DOCTOR [...] The truth amounts to this: the one mitigating circumstance about the existence of Man is, that he occasionally cooperates in the creation of a Woman' (*New Woman*, III, 42).

out or reduced to absurdity by the male characters. Notably, in a discussion about the state of the theatre at that time, those on the side of female emancipation claim its decline:

PERCY The theatre is dying! Dixi! (*Leans back again*)
DOCTOR The novel will sweep everything before it.
SYLVESTER You mean, the female novel?
DOCTOR Nothing can stop it.
SYLVESTER No, it stops at nothing.
(*New Woman*, III, 40)

It can, therefore, be argued that placing lines such as these in a play, meant to be performed in front of people who are generally likely to be in favour of theatre, elucidate Grundy's attitude towards the whole debate.

If the characters' actions do have any social consequences, they seem to concern Margery first and foremost. Considering the marriage to Gerald inappropriate, his relatives take the temporary measure of shunning her.

As for the other characters concerned, the amorous entanglements do not seem to have any negative consequences regarding their status in society. It is rather a reconsideration of their sense of right and wrong that takes place. Gerald, for example, is stricken with a bad conscience when he realises that his wife has been downhearted ever since after she found out that he is likely to be in love with another woman. In a rather long vindication in front of Mrs Sylvester, he blames only himself for Margery's misery, as it was he who took her away from her accustomed station and did not cherish her love for him enough. As he says, he 'mistook a light heart for an empty head' (*New Woman*, III, 44), and Chothia notes that his 'speech signals the turning point in Gerald's attitude to feminism as well as to love and Margery. From here on he thinks and acts as a 'true man'' (Chothia, *Emancipated Women Plays*, 297).

This insight of his, leads him away from the principle that men and women ought to be companions instead of different poles. In an almost anachronistic turn, he begins to favour the model of the separate spheres of the genders, and tells Mrs Sylvester,

W[w]hat we want in a partner is what we lack in ourselves. No sympathy only, but sex. Strength requires gentleness, sweetness asks for light; and

all that is womanly in woman wants all that is manly in man. (*New Woman*, III, 44)

The general tone of this play, therefore, appears to be a rather moralistic one. In the end, Gerald repents having not valued his wife enough and Margery rejects Mr Sylvester's approaches. Mr Sylvester, in turn, who has left Agnes, is expected to go back to his wife after Margery urges him to do so. Moreover, at least one of the New Women marries, as Miss Bethune becomes engaged with the Colonel.

A principled order is restored and the traditional belief that marriage is one of the most important pillars of society or, in the words of the Colonel, that '[t]he institution of marriage is the foundation of society; and whatever tends to cast discredit on that holy 'ordnance' saps the moral fibre of the community' (*New Woman*, IV, 55), is reaffirmed. It is interesting to highlight the Colonel's slip of the tongue here, as he certainly meant 'ordinance' instead of 'ordnance', which is a military term for artillery.¹³⁴ Margery and Gerald become reconciled on the grounds that he has found out what he loves about her and what he looks for in a relationship. Before the curtain descends, he tells her that '[he] want[s] [her] to be nothing less or more – only a woman!' (*New Woman*, IV, 59). Recapitulating, it could be argued that even though issues of female emancipation are touched upon throughout the play, they are never treated in a serious way and, ultimately, traditional ideas about love and marriage are affirmed.

Double standards are now openly pointed out by the New Woman characters and are not simply implied between the lines. A recurrent theme is the opinion that a woman is entitled to know everything about her husband's past concerning the liaisons he might have had before marriage. In Act Two, Miss Bethune and Miss Vivash are surprised at finding out that Margery did not care to ask Gerald about his pre-marital life,¹³⁵ and in the third act the conversation centres around the same topic again:

ENID You would confess that? Then you agree with me, that a woman is entitled to know the whole of a man's past?

LADY WARGRAVE (*who has joined them*) Would it not be more useful if she knew something of his future?

ENID Women have futures; men have only pasts.

¹³⁴ Cf. Chothia, *Emancipated Woman Plays*, 273.

¹³⁵ Cf. *New Woman*, II, 30.

DOCTOR (*still in Sylvester's group*) It stands to reason – pure reason – there ought not to be one law for women and another for men.
(*New Woman*, III, 41)

However, their egalitarian attitude always appears to be flawed to some extent, as it is either underplayed by one of the other characters or unconsciously laid bare by these women themselves. On the one hand, they seem to stand in for the belief that men and women are completely the same. On the other hand, they are of the opinion that women are morally superior.¹³⁶ In their eyes, therefore, a man with a past is considered a rascal whereas a woman with a past is regarded as a '[p]oor tempted creature' (*New Woman*, III, 43).

Generally, as Carolyn Christensen Nelson points out, the play shows that the *New Woman* already had a place in the audience's mind as a comic figure that was an easy target for mockery and caricature.¹³⁷ Moreover, *The New Woman* was one of the great theatrical successes of 1894.¹³⁸

4.3.4. *Iris*

– Iris Bellamy

The initial situation of the plot of Arthur Wing Pinero's *Iris* has not been encountered yet as the eponymous character is a young widow. The play was first performed at the Garrick Theatre in London in 1901. The setting described in the first pages suggests an upper-middle-class household once again. The scenery conveys the impression of wealth. The audience learns that, like Penelope O'Farrell and Susan Harabin, Iris is soon to receive guests. Moreover, it is soon established that she has been a widow for five years and that her husband's will contained the condition that she would only receive money if she stayed unmarried. '[W]ed again, and you cease to be of independent means' (*Iris*, I, 245), it states. She is 'well-off, as far as her heedlessness in money-matters will permit of her being so' (*Iris*, I, 238) and because of this financial security she is the first

¹³⁶ Cf. *New Woman*, II, 41.

¹³⁷ Cf. Nelson, 295.

¹³⁸ Cf. Chothia, *Emancipated Woman Plays*, xiv.

of the female characters in any of the plays who is given the opportunity to lead an autonomous life unfettered by a husband to whom she would have to give account for her doings.¹³⁹ Despite her self-sufficiency, Iris can not be considered a New Woman as she is far from being satisfied with the position she is trapped in. She considers the clause in her late husband's will as 'humiliating, cruel' (*Iris*, I, 246) and seems to ponder upon marrying Laurence Trenwith, a young man without a fortune. Her interest in Laurence even exposes her to the danger of being regarded as a Fallen Woman as her solicitor and counsellor Archibald Kane insinuates.¹⁴⁰ Kane succeeds in convincing her that luxuries are far too dear to her to give up her money. That she does not enter matrimony again does not really seem to be an option in the eyes of her friends and relatives, primarily because she is still exceedingly beautiful and has a number of admirers, an opinion which is also expressed by Aurea, one of her guests: 'Of course she'll marry again; she must' (*Iris*, I, 253). Indeed, Iris accepts the proposal of one of her suitors, the rich Frederick Maldonado, who is about fifteen years her senior. Preventing a scandal concerning herself and Mr Trenwith appears to be her main motivation.¹⁴¹

Despite the first impression of her as a superficial character who is quick to spend money for her pleasure, Iris also seems to have a rational side as well, which sets her apart from the heroines in the other plays. In contrast to Penelope, she does not put on a masquerade but tells Maldonado from the beginning about the true nature of her feelings for him. She informs him that '[she hasn't] the love for [him] a woman should have for the man who is to be her husband' (*Iris*, I, 271). She is not blue-eyed and concedes that she is 'past the romantic age' (*Iris*, I, 272). At first cut to the quick by her candour, Maldonado begins to be contented with what he gets. He seems to hold the opinion that Iris cannot help her attitude because she is 'as God made women' (*Iris*, I, 273), who consent to be owned and looked at just like a painting and in return are well provided for by their husbands.¹⁴² Thus, traditional role models are once again established – but not for long. Notwithstanding her initial anxiety about a scandal and her unwillingness to be a poor man's wife, she

¹³⁹ 'Six-and-twenty and independent!' (*Iris*, I, 238).

¹⁴⁰ 'Allow me to remind you, then, that a lady circumstanced as you are – still youthful, beautiful – [...] [w]ho is seen constantly in the company of a young man whom she could not dream of marrying, subjects herself inevitably to a considerable amount of ill-natured criticism' (*Iris*, I, 246).

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Iris*, I, 260.

¹⁴² Cf. *Iris*, I, 273.

resolves not to marry Maldonado and asks Laurence to accompany her to Switzerland. Furthermore, she is not without self-irony and is able to ridicule her pamperedness to some extent. In a conversation with Laurence, she describes herself as:

Your poor, weak, sordid Iris, who must lie in the sun in summer, before the fire in winter, who must wear the choicest lace, the richest furs; whose eyes must never encounter any but the most beautiful objects – languid, slothful, nerveless, incapable almost of effort. (*Iris*, II, 301)

Moreover, a development of Iris' character can be detected in the course of the play. Once she learns that her assets have been lost due to speculation, she does not despair but becomes more mature. She considers her sudden lack of means as a cross she has to bear in order to atone for her previous indulgence and egocentrism.¹⁴³

Even her friends seem to notice the difference.¹⁴⁴ She is also finally resolved to marry Trenwith and to follow him to British Columbia after he has managed to create a home for her there. All these signs appear to indicate that she is coping well with the new situation.

The changes within her, however, are short-lived. The correspondence between Mr Trenwith and her becomes more and more infrequent, although he resorts to coming back to England to find out whether certain rumours concerning his fiancée being drawn to another man are true. In the fourth act, indeed, the audience gets to know that it did not take long before Iris could not resist the temptations of the cheque book Maldonado has bestowed upon her. He did so quite schemingly in order to bind her to him and to make her grateful for his proposal.¹⁴⁵ Maldonado, too, undergoes a development. At first, he was presented as Iris' helpful friend and loyal admirer, but as the play proceeds, the honesty of his motives grows more and more dubious. As he leaves Iris at the end of the fourth act, the stage directions even mention 'an evil look upon his face' (*Iris*, IV, 402).

¹⁴³ 'Oh, do you imagine a woman can be as self-centred as I have been, pampered herself as I have done, without meriting chastisement?' (*Iris*, III, 341).

¹⁴⁴ 'FANNY. I've loved her, as you know, for years, intensely; but I am *proud* of her now. Her whole nature seems to have expanded, Croker – become greater, nobler' (*Iris*, III, 330).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Iris*, IV, 382f.

The consequences of Iris' behaviour prove to be fatal for her. Even though her conduct has not been entirely socially acceptable, it is difficult to ascribe a Fallen Woman's traits to her. Hamilton Fyfe argues that this aspect also turned the role of Iris into one that was difficult to play as '[i]n drama it is easy to be attractive as one who has to struggle, even though the struggle ends in failure. To drift, to fail weakly that is in itself depressing' (Fyfe, *Pinero's Plays and Players*, 212).

Her only mistake was that she accepted Maldonado's money too readily, which marked, in her words, the moment when she began to descend 'the path leading down to this awful abyss' (*Iris*, V, 411). As the acts unfold, Maldonado lets her know that it has always been his plan to make her depend on him financially. She, then, loses the last remains of a good reputation by conceding to move into his house. In the same way as she hasn't been aware of Maldonado's scheme at the beginning, she does not seem to have been alert to the ramifications of such a move.¹⁴⁶ Although her situation as an outcast of society was to a large part prompted by her liaison with Laurence, the latter is not able to forgive her acceptance of Maldonado's support and leaves her for good in the final act. Having overheard their last conversation, Maldonado is highly enraged. Violently and abusively, he throws her out of his house at once even though he must be aware of the fact that this leaves her without anyone to turn to. Considering that her status as a Fallen Woman is less apparent than the one of Nelly Armroyd in *Lost in London*, , for example, this ending seems particularly cruel. It should be taken into consideration that her behaviour was regarded as much more indecent at the very beginning of the 20th century than it would be nowadays. Hamilton Fyfe, a contemporary of Pinero, seems to criticise Iris' attitude and to put the blame for her failing entirely on her. He disapproves of her lack of understanding that a man does not want to depend on a woman in pecuniary terms. According to his interpretation of the play, Trenwith is an honest and upright character, whereas Iris is looked upon as spoilt and reckless because 'she has no objection to making this young man play an unpleasantly equivocal part, no reluctance to become his mistress' (Fyfe, *Pinero's Plays and Players*, 214). He even goes as far as to speculate that Iris postpones going to Canada with Laurence because she secretly speculates that a more favourable position will turn up in the meantime. All her

¹⁴⁶ 'I didn't realise the dishonour – only that I was well-housed again' (*Iris*, V, 414-415).

good intentions, Fyfe points out, have just been pious make-believe.¹⁴⁷ Consequently, it can be argued that the character of Iris apparently did not elicit much sympathy from a contemporary critics and audiences.

Furthermore, double standards, it seems, are less perceptible in Arthur Wing Pinero's play than in the others. To some extent, they are even criticised in a few passages, for example when Maldonado declares that 'England is a paradise only for the puritan and the hypocrite' (*Iris*, IV, 388).

Initially, Iris could have had the opportunity to be independent of men if she had wished it. Moreover, there appears to be a more critical tone concerning the treatment of women who do not precisely act according to the social conventions. Iris is not automatically portrayed as an immoral woman just because she decides to go to Switzerland with Laurence. An equal ranking of men and women to some degree is also evident through the way each gender refers to the other. On the one hand, a woman can be 'possessed' by a man and be compared to a painting in this context.¹⁴⁸ On the other hand, a man can also be 'owned' by a woman and be compared to one of her birds.¹⁴⁹

Gossip about Iris' behaviour in society certainly exists, but her friends do not abandon her all at once. Croker, one of her admirers, even states that 'it is simply abominable that close companionships can't exist between reputable men and women without suspicion of wickedness' (*Iris*, II, 291).

Still, the play is far from postulating any equality between the sexes, which is why '[t]he friendship of a man is worth that of a dozen women' (*Iris*, II, 293), as Iris' friend Fanny declares. Furthermore, the idea of being kept by a woman is insupportable to Laurence. He is even prepared to leave Iris and the comfortable life she is offering in order to try his luck at ranching in British Columbia. He cannot bear the thought of being financially dependent on a woman as the following conversation between the two exemplifies:

LAURENCE. You don't understand that a man – some men, at least; I among the number – can't accept money from a woman.
IRIS. [*Blankly.*] Why not?

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Fyfe, *Plays and Players*, 216.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Iris*, II, 273.

¹⁴⁹ 'Why aren't you satisfied to be one of my birds – oh, but my best, my most dearly prized? Just for a scruple – !' (*Iris*, II, 208).

LAURENCE. Become dependent upon a woman! [...] Live upon a woman.
IRIS. [...] But – the circumstances – ! We love each other.
LAURENCE [*With clenched hands.*] Does that make the situation easier for me? Iris, the position would be intolerable.
(*Iris*, II, 307)

Moreover, Iris' behaviour appears to have triggered off a scandal. Society avoids her because she has left for Switzerland with her supposed lover Trenwith and because she is not wealthy anymore. Even her most loyal former friends shun her because she could not do with sparse money and consented to receive allowances by Maldonado and to live comfortably in a house to which he has a latchkey.¹⁵⁰ Only marrying a rich man could put her out of that situation and make her former acquaintances forget about the affair.¹⁵¹ In a marriage, a wife should still be close to the ideal of the Angel in the House as the following passage, where Iris' friend Croker describes what he asks of a woman, indicates:

[t]hat she should be beautiful to the eye and gentle to the ear; that her face should brighten when I entered, her hand linger in mine when I departed; that she should never allow me to hear her speak slightingly of any honest man, thereby assuring me she indulged in no contemptuous criticisms of me when I was out of her company; that she should be bountiful to the poor, unafraid of the sick and unsightly, fond of dumb animals and strange children, and tearful in the presence of fine pictures and at the sound of rich music. (*Iris*, IV, 393)

Angel-like characteristics of a woman are not only desired as internal virtues, but also appreciated when they can be detected in external features. At their reunion, Trenwith directly states that Iris 'resemble[s] the pictures of angels one was familiar with in childhood' (*Iris*, V, 406). Other stereotypes about female character traits are mentioned throughout the play. Maldonado, at one point, declares that obstinacy is typical of women,¹⁵² and Iris is compared to a child¹⁵³ – a motif already encountered in other plays.

¹⁵⁰ 'IRIS. I wish you would make it a practice to send your name in, instead of using a latch-key. [...] It would appear a little more respectful to me in the eyes of the servants, would it not?' (*Iris*, IV, 378).

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Iris*, IV, 388.

¹⁵² Cf. *Iris*, III, 335.

¹⁵³ Cf. *Iris*, III, 340.

With regard to the reception of Pinero's play, the opinions were divergent. Fyfe notes that the reception of Pinero's play varied to a great extent among the audience.¹⁵⁴ The general verdict, according to Fyfe, was that it was '[n]ot an edifying story [...] but no doubt a lifelike picture' (Fyfe, *Pinero's Plays and Players*, 219). By and large, the ending and the treatment of Iris was considered to be quite harsh, although there is little uncertainty that Iris was perceived as a misled woman. In *The Globe*, for example, Iris Bellamy was compared to one of the best-known tragic Fallen Women in English literature:

[*Iris*] is strong meat and weak stomachs may turn. Nothing so terrible is often encountered in literature ... "Iris" stands in relation to the stage much as "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" stands to prose fiction. (quoted in Dawick, 256)

It is interesting to note that, according to Archer, Pinero initially intended Iris to share the fate of many Fallen Women, namely death. As was the case with Nelly Armroyd and Drusilla Ives, it was planned to let her die in a melodramatic fashion through the hands of Maldonado.¹⁵⁵

The play was perhaps too hard to stomach for the audience of 1901 as it only ran for 115 performances.¹⁵⁶

To sum up, Iris Bellamy's fate shows all the elements of that of a Fallen Woman. She is cast out of society and ends up with nothing in her hands and no one by her side. However, she never considers her conduct as immoral; she never really does have any qualms about going to Switzerland with her lover or staying in the house of a man she is not married to. This could not only be interpreted as a missing sense of decorum and decency,¹⁵⁷ but also as an incipient change in social norms, as a token that women at that time started to think of themselves as more independent.

¹⁵⁴ For a further discussion, see: Fyfe, *Pinero: Playwright*, 197, and: Fyfe, *Pinero's Plays and Players*, 221.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Dawick, 256.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Dawick. 256.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Fyfe, *Pinero's Plays and Players*, 221f.

4.3.5. *A Woman of No Importance*

– Rachel Arbuthnot

Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* was first performed at the Haymarket Theatre in London in 1893. The setting is again upper- and upper-middle-class and among the characters a seducer and a seduced woman are to be found. This time, the subject-matter is treated far more light-heartedly and a far less tragic or resigned fate awaits the once Fallen Woman. In the play, Victorian ideas of decency and virtue are often ridiculed. They are upheld by the old folks, whereas the young people consider them old-fashioned; supposedly, they have been 'tainted with foreign ideas on the subject' (*Woman of No Importance*, I, 16). Due to this hitherto unencountered attitude towards morality and the more positive ending for Rachel Arbuthnot, the once misled woman, it seems right to place her among the characters in the transition from the Fallen to the New Woman, although she had to suffer greatly from her misconduct. In the context of Wilde's attitude to the New Woman movement and the extent to which he was involved in these reformative developments, it should be mentioned that he edited the magazine *Woman's World* from 1887 to 1889. Not only did it comprise articles on household managing and needlework, but it also concerned itself with the 'Woman Question', higher education for women, as well as writing and working women. Despite Wilde's assertion that he '[was] anxious to make it the recognized organ through which women of culture and position [would] express their views' (Wilde, quoted in Ledger, *The New Woman*, 106), Ledger emphasises that Wilde's editorship of the magazine can not easily be regarded as a contribution to the feminist movement.¹⁵⁸ As the analysis of *A Woman of No Importance* will reveal, his standpoint on female morality is at times quite ambiguous.

Interestingly, Rachel Arbuthnot herself seems to uphold the traditional categorisation of right and wrong, of virtuous women on the one hand, and Fallen Women on the other.¹⁵⁹ She is a 'woman with a past' rather than a 'fallen woman', a differentiation that has, for example, also been made by Alfons Klein. In his

¹⁵⁸ For a further discussion of Oscar Wilde and the New Woman, see: Ledger, *The New Woman*, 106ff.

¹⁵⁹ 'What have women who have not sinned to do with me, or I with them? We do not understand each other' (*Woman of No Importance*, IV, 72).

essay on the character of the woman with a past in late-Victorian drama, he argues that due to social changes, the term 'fallen woman', which was prevalent in the middle of the 19th century, was gradually replaced by the term 'woman with a past', which had a less negative connotation.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, he points out that the way this character is presented in Wilde's play is closely connected to the changes in the social code of morality in the 1890s.¹⁶¹

When Rachel Arbuthnot is first encountered in the second act, the reader or audience does not know that certain incidents, which happened twenty years before, have turned her into a Fallen Woman. When she is introduced for the first time, one only learns that she leads a life secluded from society.¹⁶² By and by, the circumstances surrounding her are disclosed. Her liaison with Lord Illingworth twenty years prior led to the birth of an illegitimate son, Gerald. The whole situation comes to light, when Lord Illingworth meets Mrs Arbuthnot again after he has offered Gerald a position as his private secretary without knowing that he is in fact his child. Twenty years before, Illingworth did not want to marry Rachel despite her beseeching entreaties.¹⁶³ His family offered her money instead, which she refused to take. Gerald does not learn about this secret until the end of the third act. Before she fully reveals it, she relates to her son how Illingworth once debauched a young girl and how he mistreated her thereafter; how she begged the tempter to marry her after she had found out about her pregnancy and how he refused to turn her into an honourable woman again by following her wish. Interestingly, Mrs Arbuthnot narrates these events from a third person perspective as if it was about the fate of another woman or an exemplary case of the misfortune many a woman had to experience. In an almost melodramatic monologue, she explains the fatal consequences a false step in youth – resulting from the innocence of the seduced and the cunning of the seducer – could have on a woman's life, while she is all the while in fact talking about herself:

her life was ruined, and her soul ruined, and all that was sweet, and good, and pure in her ruined also. She suffered terribly – she suffers now. She will always suffer. For her there is no joy, no peace, no atonement. She is a woman who drags a chain like a guilty thing. She is a woman who wears a mask, like a thing that is a leper. The fire cannot purify her. The

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Klein, 268.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Klein, 258.

¹⁶² Cf. *Woman of No Importance*, II, 36.

¹⁶³ Cf. *Woman of No Importance*, II, 43.

waters cannot quench her anguish. Nothing can heal her! No anodyne can give her sleep! No poppies of forgetfulness! She is lost! She is a lost soul!
(*Woman of No Importance*, III, 64)

That, on first examination, *A Woman of No Importance* exhibits elements of conventional melodrama with its emphasis on seduction and judgment, is also pointed out by Sos Eltis.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, Norbert Kohl points out that especially the ending of the third act, the revelation of Mrs Arbuthnot's secret to her son, follows a classic melodramatic pattern.¹⁶⁵ According to Kerry Powell, these melodramatic elements do not cast a favourable light on the play; the partial influence of melodrama has to be regarded as an 'unpromising [...] inspiration for a playwright who advertises himself as a serious and original artist' (Powell, *Oscar Wilde*, 60). Powell further argues that Jones's *The Dancing Girl* must have had some effect on Wilde's play, but at the same time draws attention to the fact that Wilde was eager to distance himself from Jones. Describing the three rules for writing plays, Wilde once stated that '[t]he first rule is not to write like Henry Arthur Jones, the second and third are the same' (Wilde, quoted in Hesketh, 221). Moreover, Powell also concedes that *A Woman of No Importance* in many ways diverges from the emotional overindulgence and the conventional sentiments that are usually encountered in Victorian melodrama. In a traditional melodrama, he claims, Mrs Arbuthnot would have to suffer agonizingly and would have to repent.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that the notion of women wearing masks – as it has already been the case in Maugham's *Penelope* – is addressed again in the above quotation from the play.

After the whole truth has been disclosed to Gerald, he wants to force Lord Illingworth to marry his mother as a means of atoning for the wrong he has done to her.¹⁶⁷ Her vehement refusal to cave in to her son's wishes suggests that she has an independent mind. Unlike the heroines of the other plays, she is not eager to either attract a man's attention or to win back a husband's love. She is the first character that managed to live *and* raise a child on her own. In contrast to Iris, she has been able to make ends meet without a man's financial support.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Eltis, *Wilde*, 95.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Kohl, 404.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Powell, *Oscar Wilde*, 67.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *Woman of No Importance*, IV, 70f.

Her behaviour of twenty years prior has had serious consequences on Rachel's life to come. From the moment of this lapse in her adolescence, Mrs Arbuthnot has had to bear her cross. Over all the years, she has not overcome the shame that a pregnancy out of wedlock has brought about and, consequently, she has nothing but bitter feelings about her former seducer, 'the man who spoiled [her] youth, who ruined [her] life, who has tainted every moment of [her] days' (*Woman of No Importance*, II, 44).

Lord Illingworth rode the affair out more easily. He did not have to deal with any serious social ramifications and can, at first, easily claim that Mrs Arbuthnot is '[a] woman of no importance' (*Woman of No Importance*, I, 24) to him.

Lord Illingworth's reputation as a rogue has never really had any consequences on his life style. He is not avoided by anyone in society and can continue to go on as he pleases without any hindrance. Therefore, when he is asked by Mrs Allonby if he has ever tried achieving a good reputation, he can jauntily answer that '[i]t is one of the many annoyances to which [he has] never been subjected' (*Woman of No Importance*, I, 23). Due to his lightheartedness, he comes across as a sympathetic character, even though his remarks are quite chauvinistic at times. For example, he puts forward that *men* should be worshipped like deities in a temple because '[w]omen kneel so gracefully; men don't' (*Woman of No Importance*, I, 19). Furthermore, he is convinced that there is no woman in the world who would not be flattered if one flirted with her.¹⁶⁸ His attitude does not change in the course of the play. Admittedly, he would be prepared to marry Rachel, not because he has a bad conscience and feels the need to atone for his wrongdoings, but because he would like to have a son and heir. When Mrs Arbuthnot remains unyielding, he resorts to affronting her, but this time his former mistress has the upper hand and, thus, Lord Illingworth becomes '[a] man of no importance' (*Woman of No Importance*, IV, 83) to her in the end.

A fresh perspective on practices of English society comes into play through the character of Hester Worsley. Being American, she is less familiar with what is considered to be proper conduct. Moreover, the double standards seem to be less prevalent in her country. At the beginning of the first act, she declares her

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *Woman of No Importance*, I, 21.

admiration for Rachel's son openly, and is reproved by Lady Caroline, who tells her that

[i]t is not customary in England [...] for a young lady to speak with such enthusiasm of any person of the opposite sex. English women conceal their feelings till after they are married. (*Woman of No Importance*, I, 5)

Hester is quite taken aback by this remark as she does not understand that a friendship between a young man and a young woman seems to be out of question in the host country. In this respect, America is even said to be 'the Paradise of Women' (*Woman of No Importance*, I, 11). Interestingly, though, she holds up firm beliefs concerning morality. She has quite puritan ideas and speaks in favour of severe punishment for extramarital affairs.¹⁶⁹ Quite revolutionary is her thought-provoking impulse that this penalisation should not only apply to women, but to men as well. Miss Worsley lays bare the intrinsic inequality between the sexes that was prevalent in English society at the *fin de siècle*. Moreover, she denounces the injustice that the different treatment of any misconduct concerning this matter entails. She postulates that

[i]f a man and a woman have sinned, [...] [I]et them both be branded. Set a mark, if you wish, on each, but don't punish the one and let the other go free. Don't have one law for men and another for women. You are unjust to women in England. And till you count what is a shame in a woman to be an infamy in a man, you will always be unjust, and Right, that pillar of fire, and Wrong, that pillar of cloud, will be made dim to your eyes, or be not seen at all, or if seen, not regarded. (*Woman of No Importance*, II, 34-35).

It should be born in mind that these ideas come from a woman who is herself the very picture of morality. Moreover, as an American, she does not have the same background as the other female characters. It is easy for her to condemn the situation as she did not grow up in an environment where there existed a set of distinct set of Victorian virtues. Ironically, she immediately feels sympathy for Mrs Arbuthnot, whose secret has not yet been generally revealed, because she senses that they are kindred spirits among all those other fairly hedonistic people. Hester praises her sense for detecting what is pure and good in life.¹⁷⁰ After she

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *Woman of No Importance*, II, 34.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Woman of No Importance*, III, 59.

has found out about Rachel's past, she is shocked at first, but overhearing the latter's side of the story and realising how much she has secretly suffered, the young American woman is soon able to overcome her old prejudices.¹⁷¹ Wilde, however, does not straightforwardly portray Miss Worsley as an exemplary picture of virtue. Her moralising speeches are often undercut by other characters and she herself seems to be full of ambiguities. She looks down upon English society and its people, but chooses to live among them, she criticises the English for valuing money too highly, but is herself a wealthy heiress, and she condemns the lax morals in England, but is quick to accept Gerald as her husband.¹⁷² All these factors lend further support to the assertion that Wilde does not simply take sides, but rather criticises hypocrisy and misunderstood morality.

Double standards are exposed openly and their portrayal serves comical purposes. When Lady Stutfield states that '[t]he world was made for men and not for women,' for example, Mrs Allonby counters, 'Oh don't say that, Lady Stutfield. We have a much better time than they have. There are far more things forbidden to us than are forbidden to them' (*Woman of No Importance*, I, 9).

On the other hand, the female characters in the play perceive themselves as more independent as those in any of the plays previously encountered. Often they turn the tables on male behaviour and traditional notions, for instance when Mrs Allonby states that

[she doesn't] think that [women] should ever be spoken of as other people's property. All men are married women's property. That is the only true definition of what married women's property is. But [women] don't belong to any one. (*Woman of No Importance*, II, 26).

Remarks like these indicate that the ideas of the New Woman movement have to some extent found their way into Wilde's play. As in *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, they predominantly serve comical purposes. Moreover, women are again compared to pictures,¹⁷³ as in Arthur Wing Pinero's *Iris*. Not only is the notion mentioned that a woman should not be a man's property, but also that female education serves as a means to further independence. This new found autonomy,

¹⁷¹ Cf. *Woman of No Importance*, IV, 72ff.

¹⁷² Cf. Eltis, *Wilde*, 119.

¹⁷³ Cf. *Woman of No Importance*, III, 50.

however, is said to have negative results on marriage and family life,¹⁷⁴ which was also a common point of criticism about the movement in the social and political debates at that time. Political matters are even directly addressed, for example when Mr Kelvil states that '[t]he growing influence of women is the one reassuring thing in our political life [...]. Women are always on the side of morality, public and private' (*Woman of No Importance*, I, 10). This conception of morality, though, still largely reminds one of the ideal of the Angel in the House. Moreover, there are a number of instances where traditional gender roles are still upheld. The female characters of the play appear to be uncertain about their changing status in society. At times, they seem to have difficulties to adapt to the prevalent new ideas and to be unsure whether the recent demands of some women are in fact justified, as the following speech of Mrs Allonby to some of the other female guests at the Hunstanton estate reveals:

How can a woman be expected to be happy with a man who insists on treating her as if she were a perfectly rational being?

[...]

Man, poor, awkward, reliable, necessary man belongs to a sex that has been rational for millions of years. He can't help himself. It is in his race. The History of Woman is very different. We have always been picturesque protests against the mere existence of common sense.

(*Woman of No Importance*, II, 29-41)

Not only Mrs Allonby seems to uphold traditional beliefs about femininity, but other characters in the play do so as well. Lady Hunstanton, for example, claims at one point that she does not approve of women thinking too much and that thinking – just like anything else they do – should be done in moderation.¹⁷⁵

The question about the ideal man, then, comes up in their conversation together with other concepts that have also previously been encountered – the comparison of women to children, their capriciousness and lack of rationality:

MRS. CAROLINE. The Ideal Man! Oh, the Ideal Man should talk to us as if we were goddesses, and treat us as if we were children. He should refuse all our serious requests, and gratify every one of our whims. He should encourage us to have caprices, and forbid us to have missions.
(*Woman of No Importance*, II, 30)

¹⁷⁴ 'LADY CAROLINE. Oh, women have become so highly educated [...] that nothing should surprise us nowadays, except happy marriages. They apparently get remarkably rare' (*Woman of No Importance*, II, 29).

¹⁷⁵ Cf. *Woman of No Importance*, III, 57.

In their eyes, rationality and reason is still on the side of men. Moreover, these female characters also seem to agree with the portrayal of women as capricious and unreasonable beings.¹⁷⁶

Elopement is treated far more light-heartedly than in any of the other plays. It is mentioned repeatedly as a passing remark, a topic to be ridiculed and not be judged from a moral point of view at all.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, irony is often employed to turn common beliefs and ideas about morality upside-down. Mrs Arbuthnot, for instance, of whom we know that she could actually be considered a Fallen Woman, is portrayed as the very prime example of the Victorian ideal of womanhood. She is in many ways akin to the Angel in the House, which can for instance be recognized by the way she keeps her household, or the fact that she is dedicated to charitable work.¹⁷⁸ This concept is carried to extremes when the other characters claim that Rachel, an example of virtue, stands above the wickedness of society, and that she adds respectability to any party.¹⁷⁹ Mrs Arbuthnot's withdrawal appears to be self-imposed, which is also pointed out by Sos Eltis. She argues that none of Rachel's acquaintances is conscious of her actual status. Furthermore, Eltis points out that the inhabitants of Hunstanton do not rigidly adhere to concepts of female purity.¹⁸⁰ Even though the play ends with a triumph of those characters that are on the side of morality, many reviewers noted that the better lines and tunes belonged to the more wicked characters.¹⁸¹ Moreover, Eltis maintains that while Wilde was well aware of the fact that the audience would enjoy a plot that 'offered the theatrical cliché[] of the vulnerable woman who becomes a victim of male depravity' (Eltis, *Wilde*, 96), and that the playwright used these conventional elements in order to raise questions about the underlying social and sexual mores.

¹⁷⁶ 'LORD ILLINGWORTH. [...] to the philosopher [...] women represent the triumph of matter over mind – just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals. [...] Women are a fascinating wilful sex. Every woman is a rebel, and usually in wild revolt against herself' (*Woman of No Importance*, III, 51).

¹⁷⁷ Cf. 'it was from Melthorpe, which is only two miles away from here, that Lady Belton eloped with Lord Fethersdale, I remember the occurrence perfectly. Poor Lord Beldon died three days afterwards of joy, or gout, I forget which' (*Woman of No Importance*, I, 8).

¹⁷⁸ Cf. 'But here we have the room of a sweet saint. Fresh natural flowers, books that don't shock one, pictures that one can look at without blushing' (*Woman of No Importance*, IV, 67), and *Woman of No Importance*, IV, 74.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. *Woman of No Importance*, IV, 68.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Eltis, *Wilde*, 109.

¹⁸¹ 'The puritans triumph, but the audience, as contemporary reviews demonstrated, found the 'bad' characters' amoral wit more attractive than the 'good' characters' histrionic moralizing' (Eltis, *Wilde*, 118).

With respect to the reception of the play, the opinions are quite contradictory. Robert Tanitch and Eltis argue that the reviews were by and large favourable.¹⁸² Especially, Wilde's witty dialogues are said to have been praised, and Tanitch cites William Archer, who wrote that 'in intellectual caliber, artistic competence – ay, and in dramatic instinct to boot Mr Wilde has no rival among his fellow-workers on stage' (Tanitch, 198). Eltis maintains that *A Woman of No Importance* was a considerable success as it ran for 113 performances.

Kerry Powell, on the other hand, points out that a run of 113 performances is not impressive compared to Jones's *The Dancing Girl*, which was performed 223 times.¹⁸³ Moreover, he argues that *A Woman of No Importance* was also the least successful of Wilde's plays with regard to criticism.¹⁸⁴ His argument can be supported by a couple of reviews that are far from complimentary.¹⁸⁵ In a scathing review of the play, the critic for the *Observer*, for example, stated that

[i]f a *Woman of No Importance*, with its inconsistent characterization and its inconclusive motives, with its inverted conundrums doing duty for epigrams and strung together on a thin thread of perfunctory plot, with its choice of a painfully hackneyed theme and its abortive straining after originality of treatment – if this be indeed a satisfactory work of dramatic art, then must we revise the standards by which we have been wont to test such achievements. (quoted in Tydeman, 52)

In any case, the premiere audience seemed to have enjoyed the play as it 'won their vociferous applause' (Tydeman, 52). Through other dramatic works, such as Jones's *The Dancing Girl*, the plot was already familiar to the audience and, interestingly, the character of Lord Illingworth was first played by the actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who had previously successfully impersonated the Duke of Guisebury, Drusilla Ives' seducer.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² For a collection of some favourable reviews of *A Woman of No Importance*, see: Tanitch, 198f.

¹⁸³ Cf. Powell, *Oscar Wilde*, 60.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Powell, *Oscar Wilde*, 55.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Tydeman, 51ff.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Eltis, *Wilde*, 114.

4.3.6. *The Eldest Son*

– Freda Studdenham

The opening night of John Galsworthy's play *The Eldest Son*, written in 1909, took place in 1912. As in Grundy's *The New Woman*, the heroine, Freda Studdenham, is a lady's maid. This time, the complex of problems is treated in a more serious and comprehensive way. Issues of class differences and double standards stand at its centre. The plot focuses on the Cheshires, a family belonging to the landed gentry, and the social changes of that time also seem to find their way into the play.¹⁸⁷ In the context of the central female character's situation, it is worth mentioning that Galsworthy seemed to have been interested in the status of women and was also ready to read specialised works on the subject.¹⁸⁸

From the beginning of the first act, hints are dropped that Freda and Bill Cheshire, Sir William's eldest son, have a secret liaison. Towards the end of the act, the audience or reader knows for certain that Freda is expecting a child – the result of a short love affair a couple of weeks before – and that Bill apparently has proposed marriage to her. Their belonging to different classes separates them, of which Freda is highly aware. In contrast to Mrs Arbuthnot, she even suggests to the young Cheshire they break their engagement and promises that she will keep any blame away from him by saying that '[he] needn't be afraid [she]'ll say anything when – it comes' (*The Eldest Son*, I, 28). Bill, though, is determined to stand by Freda's side although his parents have other plans in mind for his future. They would appreciate if he married Mabel Lanfarne, an Irish girl with a respectable family background, some money and, to top that, good riding skills.¹⁸⁹ Mabel's status as an outsider to English conventions due to her Irish background allows her – similarly to Hester Wolsey in *A Woman of No Importance* – to form judgments about English society and the position of women in it. Addressing the Cheshires, she is able to state utterances such as, 'I don't understand you English – lords of the soil. The way you have of disposing of your females' (*The Eldest Son*, II, 37).

¹⁸⁷ 'SIR WILLIAM. [...] Unless we're true to our caste, and prepared to work for it, the landed classes are going to go under to this infernal democratic spirit in the air. The outlook's very serious. We're threatened in a hundred ways' (*The Eldest Son*, I, 25).

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Fréchet, 186.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *The Eldest Son*, I, 26.

Mabel, however, is far less puritan in her views than the American girl in Wilde's play.

It has to be conceded that Sir William would be contented if his son married another girl, but marry he must in order to make an end to his gallivanting days. The father also exerts pressure on Bill by reminding him of his considerable debts that he would be willing to settle.¹⁹⁰ The young Mr Cheshire, though, turns out to have high moral standards. Even though his feelings for Freda have worn off since their romance, he is determined to stand by her side because he 'mean[s] to see that nobody runs her down' (*The Eldest Son*, II, 43). As Iris and Trenwith in Pinero's play, they have planned to start afresh in Canada. By the third act, it becomes nonetheless evident that Bill starts to regret the misalliance. He is torn between feelings of shame and morality, which is made clear when he tells his brother that

[t]his is about as low-down as one could have done, I suppose – one's own mother's maid; we've known her since she was so high. I see it now that – I've got over the attack.

[...]

If you think I care two straws about the morality of the thing –
(*The Eldest Son*, III, 54)

Still, he would stick to his resolution, if Freda did not have similarly distinctive concepts of morality. Knowing that Sir William would cease to give his son any money if he married her, she refuses his proposal. In contrast to the heroines of other plays, her fate as a Fallen Woman is far less tragic. Even her father is quick to take her side and offers his support.¹⁹¹ Moreover, it is the first instance a female character is able to decide over her fate. In the course of the play, she seems to become more and more self-confident. Has she made a passive and obedient impression at the beginning, she starts to assert herself and to talk back to her employers, for example by telling Lady Cheshire that if she – Freda – '[was] a lady [she – Lady Cheshire –] wouldn't talk like that' (*The Eldest Son*, II, 46).¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Cf. *The Eldest Son*, I, 24f.

¹⁹¹ 'She'll not force herself where she's not welcome. She may ha' slipped her good name, but she'll keep her proper pride. I'll have no *charity marriage* in my family. [...] If the young gentleman has tired of her in three months, as a blind man can see by the looks of him – she is not for him! [...] She is not the first this has happened to since the world began, an' she won't be the last' (*The Eldest Son*, III, 73-74).

¹⁹² Cf. Weiss, 200.

Until the end of the play, Bill would have been willing to marry her and Freda could have followed the way of putative societal decency. She decides on the grounds of her inner moral values and considers Bill's and her own happiness above anything else. She does not want to impede Bill's future career and position, and refuses to end up tied to a husband whose feelings for her have already cooled down. Consequentially, as Sheo Bhushan Shukla argues, '[t]he Studdenhams score a moral victory; The Cheshires "remain discomfited", though they breathe in relief' (Shukla, 115). Similarly, Chothia argues that '[t]he 'proper pride' of the working man's rejection of 'a charity marriage' for his daughter shows where real honour lies' (Chothia, *New Drama*, 65). A societal scandal brought about by a misalliance can be averted, but the price the Cheshires have to pay is the recognition of their own cowardice and double moral standards.¹⁹³

Right at the beginning, the people associated with the Cheshire household discuss whether one of the employees, the under-keeper Dunning, has to marry a young girl he has made pregnant. The opinions are divergent and in a discussion between Ronald Keith, married to one of the Cheshire daughters, and the clergyman John Latter, the former takes the side of prevalent moral perceptions whereas the latter holds the view of personal self-fulfillment:

LATTER. How do you imagine vice takes rise? From precisely this sort of thing of young Dunning's.

KEITH. From human nature, I should have thought, John. I admit that I don't like a fellow's leavin' a girl in the lurch; but I don't see the use in drawin' hard and fast rules. You only have to break 'em. Sir William and you would just tie Dunning and the girl up together, willy-nilly, to save appearances, and ten to one but there'll be the deuce to pay in a year's time. You can't take a horse to the water, you can't make him drink.

LATTER. I entirely and absolutely disagree with you.

KEITH. Good old John!

(*The Eldest Son*, I, 13)

Their argument, to some degree, reminds one of the last dialogue between Mrs Arbuthnot and Lord Illingworth in *A Woman of No Importance*, and as in Wilde's play, the traditional views on morality seem to become more and more out-dated. Keith's addressing Latter as 'Good old John' could, in this way, even be interpreted as a somewhat patronising remark. Good appearances, however, have

¹⁹³ Cf. Weiss, 148.

to be kept up. For Sir William it is unthinkable to have someone working for him who does not give an impression of respectability.¹⁹⁴ Propriety is important and personal happiness only plays a subordinate role. The seduced country girl is aware of the fact that Dunning is not in love with her, and she herself is not very fond of him either, but she has set her mind on accomplishing a wedding because it is the only thing that is considered proper in her circumstances.¹⁹⁵

The Cheshires' attitude changes completely when they happen to learn that their eldest son is entangled in exactly the same situation and convinced to do what his sense of morality commands him to do. To Lady Cheshire, it is not comprehensible at first that her son could really have fallen in love with a lady's maid. For her, deep sentiments between members of different classes are inconceivable. She would understand if it had only been a short and meaningless affair, but not that the result of it should be marriage.¹⁹⁶ Even though Freda has been part of the Cheshire household since her birth, the differences in upbringing that would divide Bill and her are insurmountable in the eyes of Lady Cheshire. She warns her eldest son by pointing out, '[i]t's no use being sentimental – for people brought up as we are to have different manners is worse than to have different souls. [...] Your father will never forgive you' (*The Eldest Son*, II, 44). The other family members, with perhaps the exception of the youngest daughter Dot, are shocked as well, when they first hear about the engagement.¹⁹⁷ They repress the notion that they are in fact upholding double standards by their reaction, even though they seem to be quite aware of them. When Keith alludes to the whole hypocrisy that would be involved if Sir William forbade the marriage, he is immediately vehemently interrupted.¹⁹⁸ Shukla argues that Bill's father is not ashamed when it comes to abandoning his so-called morality in order to uphold the caste system in which he stubbornly and unshakably believes.¹⁹⁹ Issues of female emancipation are closely interrelated with questions of class, and in a general discussion of Galsworthy, Fan points out that he

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *The Eldest Son*, I, 16.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. *The Eldest Son*, II, 32f.

¹⁹⁶ 'LADY CHESHIRE. [Baffled, *but unconvinced*] Do you mean that your love for her has just been what it might have been for a lady?' (*The Eldest Son*, II, 43).

¹⁹⁷ Cf. *The Eldest Son*, II, 51f.

¹⁹⁸ 'KEITH. H'm! Hard case! Man who reads family prayers and lessons on Sunday forbids son to –
CHRISTINE. Ronny!' (*The Eldest Son*, III, 58).

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Shukla, 19.

now dare[s] to defy the old mores, to assert the individual's will against societal authority. [...] Galsworthy break[s] with convention and propriety to expose the social game as a sham construct of appearances and chicanery that gilds the status quo, perpetuating the inequities of the existing economic hierarchy. (Fan, 185)

Furthermore, it seems that issues of caste are more at the centre of the play than those of female independence. To Sanford Sternlicht, Galsworthy's target in *The Eldest Son* is 'the blatant control and manipulation of the powerful over the weak' (Sternlicht, 107). It is also interesting to point out that, throughout the plot, the characters of the Cheshire estate are continually alluding to T.W. Robertson's *Caste*, a play they are rehearsing. Similarly to the performance of *Lovers' Vows* in Austen's *Mansfield Park*, it appears to function as a comment on the events of the household. First performed in 1867, *Caste* is about George D'Alroy, an aristocrat, who falls in love with the ballet dancer Esther Eccles and has set his mind on marrying her. Especially in the first act, there are repeated references to the impossibility of their affection as the gap between their respective classes is believed to be insurmountable. Finally, however, a happy ending ensues and even George's class-conscious mother is reconciled with the situation. The class-system is not put into question in the same way as in Galsworthy's play.²⁰⁰ Double standards are further evident by the characters' general assumption that bearing an illegitimate child has less serious consequences for a servant than for a lady.²⁰¹

Moreover, women are not on an equal footing with men in Galsworthy's play either. Being a woman is viewed to entail quite a few disadvantages by the female characters, or else Dot Cheshire would not claim that '[she]'d sooner be a private in a German regiment than a woman' (*The Eldest Son*, II, 50). As in other plays where women have been referred to as paintings or children, they are compared to puppies with respect to their faithfulness by old Studdenham in *The Eldest Son*.²⁰²

By the time *The Eldest Son* was first performed, neither the situation nor the philosophy of the drama was new to the audience. James Gindin argues that, in

²⁰⁰ Cf. Weiss, 228f.

²⁰¹ 'And, after all, what's coming won't affect her as if she'd been a lady' (*The Eldest Son*, III, 61).

²⁰² 'STUDDENHAM. Wonderful faithful creatures [i.e. the puppies]; follow you like a woman. You can't shake 'em off anyhow' (*The Eldest Son*, II, 52).

fact, it resembled other plays to a large extent and stresses particularly its relation to Stanley Houghton's *Hindle Wakes* in this connection.²⁰³

4.4. New Women

4.4.1. *Jane Clegg*

– Jane Clegg

First performed at the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester in 1913, St John Ervine's play stands out as it focuses on characters with a lower middle-class background. The plot centres on one nuclear family – mother, father, two children and grandmother. The eponymous heroine does not have any touch of fallenness about her. On the contrary, she almost seems too irreproachable to be modelled on reality. Jane Clegg's innate conceptions of morality set her apart from all the other characters in the play. As the analysis of Ervine's play will reveal, Jane's general goodness has less to do with the common ideal of the Angel in the House or with Christian notions, as it might prima facie appear, but rather with her inner moral standards and her clear-sighted understanding of her situation. Moreover, her thoughts are at times closely linked to those of the New Woman movement.

From the beginning of the play, Jane Clegg, wife of a travelling salesman and mother of a son and a daughter, is established as the epitome of righteousness and virtue. Soon, the audience, or reader, gets to understand that the relationship between husband and wife is far from harmonious. Henry Clegg seems to be out a lot and his mother also alludes to a previous extramarital affair of his.²⁰⁴ Nonetheless, Jane Clegg, in a true angel-of-the-house-like manner, does not fail to defend her husband against the other family members' reproaches. Unlike other characters, she reacts calmly and cautiously, and has a realistic, if not resigned

²⁰³ '[By November 1912] *The Eldest Son* seemed very much like other plays, particularly Stanley Houghton's *Hindle Wakes*, enough so that Galsworthy wrote to Houghton saying that the play had been written and delivered in 1909, the idea "conceived in 1906", and that the similarities of "situation" and "philosophy" were coincidental' (Gindin, 201).

²⁰⁴ 'Look at the way you took it when 'e went after that woman!' (*Jane Clegg*, I, 148).

attitude to her situation. She does not make a scene or plans revenge, but vindicates her subjectedness by her assertion that she has to make allowances and cannot prevent her husband from doing what he wants to do anyway.²⁰⁵ Jane has a clear understanding of women's status in society. In contrast to characters such as Phillips' Nelly Armroyd or Jones's Susan Harabin, she does not think of leaving Henry because she is aware of the fate that would await her. She would be treated as an outcast of society because, as she puts it, '[a]woman who leaves her husband on moral grounds is treated as badly as a woman who runs away with another man' (*Jane Clegg*, I, 163). It would, however, not do her justice to interpret her as utterly passive, unquestioningly accepting traditional concepts of marriage, and piously sticking to the maxim of 'till death do you part'. Quite on the contrary, she does ask herself why it would not be considered right to leave her husband.²⁰⁶

The situation in the Clegg household is mirrored by their children's game, the rules of which the elder brother Johnnie explains to his grandmother: 'I'm pretending to be mother, and Jenny's pretending to be father. We're building a house with these bricks, but it's no good... Jenny keeps knocking it all down' (*Jane Clegg*, I, 158). Even after Jenny has ended the game by declaring it too boring, they continue to act according to their symbolic roles as 'father' and 'mother' that they have adopted before. Jenny is stubbornly unwilling to apologise to her brother, strikes him, and refuses to help to put away the bricks she has scattered about the room. To further clarify the situation in the household, her grandmother compares Jenny's behaviour to her son's when he was the girl's age.²⁰⁷

Old Mrs Clegg, in general, seems to embody the voice of traditional beliefs and presumed Christian values that would, for example, forbid a woman to leave her husband. Even though it is not always clear if she really thinks that her notions are justified, she constantly reminds her daughter-in-law of them. Jane does not simply accept them as rightful, but begins to question them more and more, while her mother-in-law perpetuates them.²⁰⁸ In this respect, their attitudes almost seem

²⁰⁵ Cf. *Jane Clegg*, I, 162.

²⁰⁶ Cf. *Jane Clegg*, I, 163.

²⁰⁷ 'That child gets more 'eadstrong every day. Jus' like 'er father was, bless 'er. And yet I can't help likin' 'er for it. It reminds me of 'im w'en 'e was 'er age!' (*Jane Clegg*, I, 161).

'JANE CLEGG. [...] Oh, isn't it awful to think that I shall sit here always, mending things and waiting for Henry to come home!

MRS. CLEGG. No, it isn't awful at all. It's nacherl. It's always bin like that, and it always will, It's no good flyin' in the face of Providence' (*Jane Clegg*, I, 165).

diametrically opposed, representing the 'old' and the New Woman. Jane also appears to be more educated than Henry's mother as she, at least in the written version of the play, does not have any recognisable dialect whereas the older woman, for example, often drops the initial h in words, a characteristic element of Cockney English, but also of quite a few other English dialect varieties and typically associated with the working classes.²⁰⁹

Henry's mother does not produce real arguments, but maintains that she is correct basically on the grounds that the role ascribed to woman has always been the same. Moreover, she maintains that it would be Jane's duty to hand all the money she owns to Henry.

In general, financial autonomy is a vital factor for Jane to gain some independence in her marriage. Due to her uncle's financial support, she gets the opportunity to assert herself to some degree. She categorically refuses to hand any of that money to her husband despite his and her mother-in-law's repeated entreaties. This situation appears to be quite revolutionary, as Henry is eager not to let anyone know that his wife would not hand any of her money over to him. In his eyes, this circumstance becoming publicly known would 'make[] a man look such a damned fool' (*Jane Clegg*, I, 170). To him and the bookie Munce, a man to whom he is indebted, it is unconceivable that the husband, as the head of the family, should not be able to dispose of his wife's savings.²¹⁰ Nonetheless, Mr Clegg is rather capable of stealing money from the company he works for than of telling his wife about the reasons for his need of money, namely that the woman he is having an affair with is pregnant with his child and that he plans to leave the country with her. When part of the truth – that her husband unlawfully cashed in a company's check – is disclosed to Jane, she first and foremost thinks about her family's wellbeing and reputation. She does not hesitate to volunteer refunding all the money out of her own purse and to offer a move to Canada as long as the case is not made public.²¹¹ Her acting like a martyr is also somewhat sarcastically recognised by Henry.²¹² Jane does have an independent side to her character, which becomes noticeable, when she does not let her husband have her savings or when she urges him to tell her what has become of the check. However, towards the end of the second act,

²⁰⁹ Cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language_in_England> [5 September 2008]

²¹⁰ Cf. *Jane Clegg*, I, 178.

²¹¹ Cf. *Jane Clegg*, II, 198.

²¹² 'HENRY CLEGG. [*sullenly*.] No good making a martyr of yourself' (*Jane Clegg*, II, 199).

she is still closer to an Angel in the House than to a truly independent woman as the following conversation indicates:

MRS. CLEGG. What better use could you make of [the money] than to save your 'husband's good name?

JANE CLEGG. [*beginning to clear away the remnants of the meal.*] Yes, I suppose it's a great privilege.

HENRY CLEGG. [...] You're a jolly good sort, Jane. You are, straight. (*Jane Clegg*, II, 201)

One cannot help but wonder, though, if Jane's remark is completely free of any cynicism. By degrees, it becomes evident that Jane Clegg is far less obedient and passive than the beginning of the first act might have indicated. She has money and, consequently, is the one in charge within the family, which is sooner or later also acknowledged by Henry.²¹³ In the final act, having the upper hand financially allows her to have the upper hand within the family. Her husband's future depends on her mercy and, for the first time, it is not a woman who is desperate in terms of her position in society, but a man. Has it taken a male character like Maldonado to help Iris out in pecuniary difficulties, it is now a female character who saves a man.²¹⁴ The money also aids her in finally finding out the whole truth about her husband's affair. Similarly, Elaine Aston argues that

[t]he usual imbalance of power between the patriarch (as head of the family) and the mother (as powerless comforter and supporter) is reversed by virtue of Jane having money of her own. It is money, the play teaches, which may give a wife and mother the power to leave her marriage and survive without a husband's support. Jane's position at the end of the play is sad but resolute, in contrast to her husband's unchanging weakness and incompetence. (Aston, 217)

Jane Clegg is financially and morally superior to Henry, who cannot easily cope with this situation. She is saint-like and infallibly virtuous, which is too much to bear for her husband. It seems that this aspect of the ideal of the Angel in the House, which she represents, has become less and less desirable by 1913. When it comes to money matters, women still appear to be preferred as dependents. Female

²¹³ 'Jane has all the money, and she's the boss here. We've got to do what she tells us' (*Jane Clegg*, III, 204).

²¹⁴ 'HENRY CLEGG. [...] Good God, man, I might be arrested this evening. Jane, you'll get me out of it, won't you? I couldn't stand it. Look here, I swear I'll be a good husband to you, I will. I'll swear it on the Bible, if you like' (*Jane Clegg*, III, 212).

preeminence is intimidating for Henry Clegg. He wishes for a companion who neither outdoes him morally nor financially, as his monologue in the final act indicates:

I'm not a bad chap, really. I'm just weak. I'll be all right if I had a lot of money and a wife that wasn't better than I am .. Oh, I know Jane! You are better than I am. Any fool can see that! It doesn't do a chap much good to be living with a woman who's his superior, at least not that sort of chap I am. I ought to have married a woman like myself or a bit worse. (*Jane Clegg*, III, 225)

To Henry, Jane is too composed and cold. She is not a womanly woman in the sense that she makes a man feel that he is needed for support. Kitty, his lover, seems to be quite the contrary. She is described as being scared by the situation and unable to deal with it on her own, which drives Henry to take care of her.²¹⁵

Jane Clegg's attitude to her marriage is that of a modern woman. She comes to realise that she and her husband are ill-suited for each other and lets him go quite easily. In doing so, she places their personal happiness above religious commands, which even makes her husband wonder,

[b]ut still I believe in religion. I mean to say, I know I'm not doing the right thing. I'm going away with Kitty, but I know I'm doing wrong. It's religion tells me that. You don't seem to understand that. You talk as if it was just the case of you and me not suiting.. and that was all. It's not right. You ask mother! She wouldn't talk as you're talking. That's because she's religious. If she were you, she wouldn't let me go quietly. (*Jane Clegg*, III, 228)

Like Freda in Galsworthy's *The Eldest Son*, Jane seems to follow her own moral standards that are not necessarily dictated by the church or society. It has to be conceded, though, that the character of Jane's position is potentially more difficult. She is older, does not really have the support of a parent, and has two children to take care of. Henry's mother, moreover, certainly has a concept of right and wrong as well, but hers is dictated by religion. In this respect she belongs to the league of the 'old' women, abiding by Victorian ideals of morality and conduct, whereas Jane can be considered as a New Woman.

²¹⁵ Cf. *Jane Clegg*, III, 226f.

Contemporary developments concerning the role of women in society find their way into the play. The New Woman movement's demand for an improvement of female education, for instance, is reflected in Jane's wish to be educated. She says that she 'want[s] to know things. [She] hate[s] being told to do things without knowing why [she] should do them. [To her], [i]t doesn't seem right somehow to have a mind and not use it' (*Jane Clegg*, I, 165).

Working women are mentioned, but are scorned by Henry. He believes that they do not take work seriously as a means to support themselves because behind each woman there still stands a responsible father who pulls the strings. Furthermore, Mr Clegg thinks that women take jobs away from men by stating, '[t]hese girls comin' into offices, what responsibility have they got, eh? Live on their fathers they do, and then go and take low salaries and do their fathers out of jobs' (*Jane Clegg*, I, 168).

As Henry's mother maintains traditional beliefs, she also adheres to a clear separation of the typically male and female character traits and of the two genders' respective spheres.²¹⁶

Jane Clegg is highly aware of the double standards that are applied when it comes to men's sexual pasts. 'He knew that woman before he married me. If he told a lie about his samples, he'd be put in jail, but no one thinks anything of his lying to me' (*Jane Clegg*, I, 164). This intrinsic iniquity, though, is not acknowledged by men. They do not intend to change anything about the status quo, where different codes of behaviour apply to men and women. As Sir Richard in *The Case of Rebellious Susan* puts it, 'what is sauce for the goose will never be sauce for the gander' (*Rebellious Susan*, I, 112). In the context of Ervine's play, perpetuating the status quo means that men are not morally condemned if they ask for their wife's money without telling them for what they need it while spending it on horse races and lovers.²¹⁷

Nevertheless, women like Jane become more and more aware of this inequality between men and women and begin to successfully revolt against it.

²¹⁶ 'They are not made like us, men aren't' (*Jane Clegg*, I, 166).

²¹⁷ Cf. *Jane Clegg*, I, 174ff.

The play proved to be a major success in the 1912-13 season at the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester.²¹⁸

4.4.2. *Independent Means*

–Sydney Forsyth

Stanley Houghton's play was first performed in 1909 at the Gaiety Theatre – three years before the premiere of *Jane Clegg* took place there. In this context, it is significant to bear in mind that Manchester was progressive in cultural, social and political terms. At the turn of the century, it 'was reputed to be Britain's most progressive and open-minded city' (Stilz, 135). Moreover, the Gaiety Theatre had been founded in 1908 as a repertory theatre, where plays by local and contemporary dramatists were favoured.²¹⁹

Among the characters of Houghton's play, a model of the New Woman can be found in Sidney. She is a 'suffragette heroine' (Chothia, *New Drama*, 77) married to Edgar Forsyth, whose family belongs to the gentry of northern England. A yet unencountered concept is that circumstances make this woman with an upper-class background look for work as a typist, a job which she is to hold down competently.

Again, a gap between 'old' and 'new' woman, separating two generations, seems apparent. The former is represented by Sidney's mother-in-law, a class-conscious, angel-like woman, who supervises the household gracefully and efficiently.²²⁰ Soon it is established that both traditional attitudes towards womanhood and the status of the gentry, embodied by Mr John Craven and Mrs Mary Forsyth, are in demise. Interestingly, the core of their marriage is pointedly described in the stage directions:

[n]either is accustomed to show a trace of feeling in the presence of the other. The fact is, both care very much for their only son, but any

²¹⁸ Cf. Aston, 217.

²¹⁹ Cf. Stilz, 136.

²²⁰ 'MRS. FORSYTH is a charming, well-preserved woman of forty-five. Her sweet temper and her sense of class enable her to face all sorts of persons and events kindly and equably' (*Independent Means*, I, 9-10).

affection for one another that may have existed has long since given place to scrupulous politeness. (*Independent Means*, I, 12)

This short observation on the inner structure of their relationship seems to suggest that Houghton sees matrimony from a critical angle. Mrs Forsyth seems to be aware that she '[is] a little bit old-fashioned' (*Independent Means*, I, 26), but she does never really question traditionally attributed gender roles, whereas Sidney does. This opposition is already evident when the two women meet for the first time in the play. Triggered off by Mrs Forsyth's assertion that her son's nurse has doted on him ever since he was an infant, the two female characters voice their difference of opinion:

MRS. F. [...] She was Edgar's nurse, you know, Sidney. She has adored him for twenty-five years.

SIDNEY. That's a long time for a woman to worship a man.

MRS. F. When they are not husband and wife, perhaps.

(*Independent Means*, I, 15)

By and by, Mary Forsyth begins to be more aware of the shortcomings in her marriage. Her daughter-in-law's unconventionality makes her realise that, similarly to Pinero's Iris, she does not want to be owned and treated by a man like a valuable object. Addressing Mr Forsyth, she argues that they 'are both ornamental and valuable things to have about the house' (*Independent Means*, II, 48). It is interesting to note that, in this case, being compared to an item of property does not only apply to the wife, but to the husband as well. Edgar's mother wishes to experience passion within her marriage and, surprisingly, the lower classes appear to be a role model for her in this respect. To her, '[t]hose people are not merely pretending to be husband and wife, with a chasm between them' (*Independent Means*, II, 48).

Issues of class and gender develop side by side. In the same way that Mrs Forsyth stands for the traditional female role model, she and her husband also represent a class which is gradually losing its significance at the beginning of the 20th century. Like Sir William Cheshire in *The Eldest Son*, Mr Forsyth is proud of his position

in society, but also aware of the ongoing reformatory processes.²²¹ It soon becomes evident that the gentry's attitudes are somewhat remote from reality. Edgar, for example, does not have any idea of the worth of money and insists on his father buying him a car simply because 'he must have a car to mess about with' (*Independent Means*, I, 19). The fact that neither Edgar nor his father can afford a new automobile is not really taken into consideration. This heedless handling of money matters, makes the upper-class appear unfit for survival, and leads to the Forsyths' bankruptcy. The stage directions indicate that a year has passed between the first and the second act, and the audience is confronted with Mr Forsyth's acknowledgement of his critical pecuniary situation and his complete financial ruin. Tellingly, it is Mr Ritchie, a tradesman and friend of the family, who helps out. He buys the Forsyth estate and procures Sidney a job as a typist for his company. That the upper-class gradually loses its status is also exemplified by Jane, the Forsyths' servant, who obtains a large inheritance precisely at the same time the Forsyths lose all their money. Both Jane and Mr Ritchie are upright characters who offer the insolvent family to aid them financially if needs be.

All too romantic ideas about marriage are not only discarded in the portrayal of Mr and Mrs Forsyth's relationship, but also in that of Edgar and Sidney. Before the wedding, Edgar's conception of matrimony seems to have been shaped by fiction rather than by fact as a conversation with his mother reveals:

EDGAR. [...], it's no good pretending that marriage is the end of everything. I used to think it was always a case of wedding-bells and live happy ever afterwards.

MRS. F. Ah, you always *were* too fond of the theatre.

EDGAR. Well, in my experience –

MRS. F. Your experience! Oh come, Edgar!

EDGAR. It's only five weeks, but it *is* experience. In my experience marriage is the beginning of everything. It's only after you are married that you begin to find things out.

(*Independent Means*, I, 23)

Indeed, the troubles in Sidney and Edgar's relationship begin soon after the wedding because they did not get to know each other thoroughly beforehand. They

²²¹ 'FORSYTH. [...] Nowadays one is hardly a gentleman unless one sells something. What Ritchie lacks is finish, the delicate, intangible quality which is inherited and cannot be acquired' (*Independent Means*, I, 18-19)

have different attitudes to almost anything. Dissensions already arise during their honeymoon, when Edgar does not want to stay in the rainy and uneventful Russmullion whereas Sidney does not accept her husband's offer to go to the French Riviera instead. These complications make the couple return home earlier. There, Edgar confides in his mother the insights he has gained about his newly wedded wife, namely that she shows signs of being interested in politics, and that her political views diverge from his conservative ones. Moreover, Sidney is not eager to go to church, which, according to Edgar, makes a woman look bad.²²² All these are indications that he has in fact married a New Woman.

The character of Sidney comes close to that of an ideal New Woman. She does not only look 'capable and companionable' (*Independent Means*, I, 13), but also has clear ideas of her own. She pronouncedly differs from the obedient and angel-like wife by asserting that her core principle is not to remain loyal to her husband but to 'be loyal to [her]self, first of all' (*Independent Means*, II, 49).

Have women previously used their charms to receive gifts and their spouses' attention, Sidney now tries to employ them in order to convince Edgar of moral and political concepts. Unlike Elaine Shrimpton in *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, Sidney is not portrayed as an unreasonable creature and caricature of the New Woman, but as a level-headed character who even appears to be intellectually superior to her husband. She blames his up-bringing and argues that '[i]t never struck [her] when [they] were engaged, but he really is terribly behind the times', and is determined to overcome this and to 'simply convince[ing] him by unanswerable arguments' (*Independent Means*, I, 26). Sidney herself seems to have been influenced by her late father, a literary man with advanced liberal opinions.²²³ Furthermore, she is in contact with Mrs Pangbourne, a 'sort of suffragette' (*Independent Means*, II, 36), a connection that is eyed distrustfully by Edgar because he is afraid that 'Sid will get hold of some of her ideas' (*Independent Means*, II, 36). Neither he nor his mother or Jane, their former servant, realise at first that Sidney could be in any way involved in the suffragist movement. Letters from the Women's Social and Political Union announcing a demonstration are treated scornfully and their members' measures are ridiculed.²²⁴

²²² Cf. *Independent Means*, I, 24.

²²³ Cf. *Independent Means*, I, 29.

²²⁴ 'JANE. Goodness, Master Edgar, what will they do next?'

As the Forsyth family has been portrayed as antediluvian from the beginning, belonging to a class that is slowly losing importance, Sidney does not come off as an ‘unnatural’ or unwomanly woman, but as modern and likeable. When Edgar finds out that his wife is in fact on the committee of the Women’s Social and Political Union, a dispute between the two unfolds. In contrast to the arguments between Elaine and Sir Kato in *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, however, the woman’s line of reasoning is the more reasonable one this time. Edgar is predominantly concerned with the effects that his wife’s activities will have on his reputation, whereas Sidney appears to have the upper hand by making a rational case for societal changes. She questions her husband’s law-given authority to forbid her to get politically involved because it is based on laws that were made by men.²²⁵ Have other male characters found ways to reassure their sovereignty, Edgar is left quite helpless. Later on in the play, when he wants to prevent Sidney from earning money outside the home by calling on his authority as a husband, she tells him that she ‘[doesn’t] admit [he has] any’ and that she ‘will *not* be bound by [him] or [his ideas]’ because ‘[she] must think for [her]self’ (*Independent Means*, III, 72).

Moreover, Sidney breaks once and for all with the cliché of the Angel in the House and basically denounces it as male fantasy. When Edgar tells her that ‘[a] man can do things that a woman can’t’ (*Independent Means*, II, 40), she retorts,

[t]hen he oughtn’t to, that’s all. You hold the oriental view of women; you’d like to have us all shut up in harems. You think that we’re soft, clinging creatures who only exist for your own delight. I can tell you that it is not my idea, nor the idea of any woman of spirit. (*Independent Means*, II, 40)

Edgar replies to this pronouncement that he still believes a woman’s proper place to be the home, whereupon Sidney counters that his ideal would be a wife ‘scrubbing the floor, while the man sits drinking in the public house’ and that ‘[his] ideas are a hundred years old’ (*Independent Means*, II, 40).

It has to be conceded, though, that occasionally she does conform to the parodies of the New Women as ‘the shrieking sisterhood’. Her first reaction upon learning

EDGAR. Heaven knows! Wear trousers, I expect.

JANE (*grinning broadly*). Oh, Master Edgar! What things you do say!’ (*Independent Means*, II, 37).

²²⁵ Cf. *Independent Means*, II, 39.

about the Forsyths' bankruptcy is 'to burst into a hard, almost hysterical peal of laughter' (*Independent Means*, II, 42) and to undermine Mr Forsyth's status as head of and provider for the family.²²⁶ This strong reaction is, however, mainly triggered off by her husband's previous claim that men and women will never be equal, as the former are the more intelligent and powerful sex, whose duty is to go out into the world and bring home the bacon.²²⁷

Sidney is practical and direct, and she does not gloss over facts. When she and Edgar learn about the Forsyths' insolvency, she reproaches Mr Forsyth with not telling them earlier because she would have been able to give him advice. She even begins to criticise his standard of living harshly and almost insultingly. Sidney goes on to compare the privileges of the upper-class with those of men. To her, class inequality and gender imbalance become interchangeable:

You criticise my ideas and call them impossible. Well, I tell you what, if you had more of my impossible ideas and less of those of your class and your sex, you might be less of a gentleman, but you'd be a good deal more of a man. (*Independent Means*, II, 45)

By the third act, the traditional distribution of gender roles in Sidney and Edgar's marriage is reversed and double standards are thus revealed. With the help of Mr Ritchie, Sidney has found a livelihood and supports the family, whereas her husband is not able to find work. At first, he has difficulties in reassessing his fixed concepts of the different spheres ascribed to men and women. He concedes that he is not really fit for work as his education has not prepared him for it. At the same time, he believes that not being able to provide for his family makes him look like a fool.²²⁸ Initially, it seems that he would rather be willing to starve than to let his wife support the family financially. Ironically, he pleads with his wife to be reasonable in this situation. By the fourth act, he learns to cope with the new circumstances. His father, on the contrary, still belongs to a generation that is even less adaptable to social changes. The loss of the status as the family's provider leads him to alcoholism. The role of the family's guardian is taken over by Sidney. She does not only earn money, but also protects her mother-in-law from Mr Forsyth's verbal attacks. Unlike Mrs Forsyth, the younger woman has no

²²⁶ 'SIDNEY. Behold the strong intelligent man who has gone out into the world to provide for his wife and children' (*Independent Means*, II, 42-43).

²²⁷ *Independent Means*, II, 41

²²⁸ Cf. *Independent Means*, III, 65.

inhibitions to talk back to a man. Therefore, she tells Mr Forsyth that she ‘will not leave this house while mother is in it, unless Edgar intends to protect her from insult’ and even adds that ‘[i]f [she] had been in [Edgar’s] place [she]’d have knocked him down’ (*Independent Means*, III, 70). Protecting Mrs Forsyth, then, becomes obsolete as Mr Forsyth dies from a stroke at the end of the third act. It almost appears that now male characters who are not capable of adapting to new social changes have to succumb to a premature death in the same way Fallen Women did in earlier plays.

Sidney is a determined, competent and self-confident woman who knows of her qualities²²⁹ and often leaves the other character at a loss of words. When Edgar is opposed to her working at first, she threatens with leaving him and, in contrast to characters like Penelope O’Farrell or Susan Harabin, she really seems to mean it.²³⁰ Having already found a job, it would not be too difficult for her to make ends meet without male assistance. In the course of the last act, the audience gets to know that she really put her warnings into practice. Her most important maxim is to stay loyal to herself and consenting to a compromise, as the previously mentioned characters do, is out of the question for her.²³¹

Nonetheless, she is still in love with Edgar,²³² and aided by Mr Ritchie’s manoeuvres,²³³ she is willing to take him back on the condition that he does not call into doubt her freedom of thought ever again. This time, it is the male character who has to make allowances.

In contrast to the previous developments in the play, Sidney is to a great extent reconciled with the picture of the Angel in the House. In her thoughts she might be absolutely free, but her acts seem to speak a different language. She tells Edgar that she is expecting a child and that the duty of motherhood shall stand above the duty of earning a living in her future life. Therefore, Elaine Aston argues that in *Independent Means*, ‘[r]e-alignment with the conservative defence of the family unit is affirmed [...] by the ultimate reconciliation between husband and wife, and

²²⁹ Cf. *Independent Means*, III, 71.

²³⁰ EDGAR. You are assuming a great deal if you think that I shall forget this when you come back and beg me to forgive you.

SIDNEY. *You* will have to ask me to come back to *you*; and you will have to admit my right to have to think freely for myself before I do so’ (*Independent Means*, III, 73).

²³¹ SIDNEY. A compromise is always wrong. It is a crime against one’s self’ (*Independent Means*, IV, 88)

²³² Cf. *Independent Means*, IV, 86.

²³³ According to Gaberthuel, Mr Ritchie’s character exhibits signs of a *raisonneur* (Cf. Gaberthuel, 45).

the disclosure of Sydney's pregnancy' (Aston, 212). Moreover, Sydney expresses her gratefulness to Edgar about his wanting her to come back, as she would not have been able to cope with raising a child on her own.²³⁴ Speaking of children and inverted gender roles, it is furthermore interesting to note that, unlike most of the other plays, it seems that men are more prone to childlike behaviour than women. Talking about her husband, Sidney says that he is 'a dear boy' and thinks that 'he's tremendously young for his age' (*Independent Means*, I, 25).

After the first performance of *Independent Means* in Manchester in 1909, it became part of the repertoire there again in 1910, 1911, and 1914, but never reached London stages.²³⁵

Later, Houghton criticised his own play and regarded it as 'the weakest play [he has] ever written' (Houghton, quoted in Gaberthuel, 39). Marcel Gaberthuel stresses the playwright's endeavours to make a case for too many social problems in *Independent Means*. Instead of focusing on one issue, Houghton deals with three: capitalism, the English gentleman and his education, and the position of women in society.²³⁶ Thus, the local *Daily Dispatch*, for example, criticised the play's composition by describing it as a 'small bundle of sociological pamphlets done up as a comedy' (*Daily Dispatch* quoted in Aston, 112). As a consequence, the composition of characters appears constructed and less organic than in plays like *Hindle Wakes*, which will be analysed subsequently. Moreover, some melodramatic elements, the sudden announcement of Mr Forsyth's death and Mrs Forsyth's ensuing swoon, for example, can still be found.²³⁷

4.4.3. *Hindle Wakes*

–Fanny Hawthorn

Hindle Wakes, another play by Stanley Houghton, was first performed in London in 1912. Set in the North of England, in Lancashire, it is a play that deals with

²³⁴ 'SIDNEY. I'm so glad you asked me to come back to you to-day; if you hadn't, I believe I should have asked you to take me back' (*Independent Means*, IV, 92).

²³⁵ Cf. Gaberthuel, 38.

²³⁶ Cf. Gaberthuel, 39.

²³⁷ Cf. Gaberthuel, 43.

social differences again. Christopher Hawthorn and his daughter Fanny both work at Daisy Bank Mill. They are contrasted with the Jeffcote family, who owns the mill. In contrast to the well-to-do families in other plays, Mr Jeffcote started from humble beginnings and created his wealth through hard labour and clever investments.

Fanny resembles Sidney in *Independent Means* insofar as she is a working woman as well. It has to be conceded, though, that it is far less revolutionary for a female character like Fanny with a working-class background to contribute to the family's living. Generally, female labour is seen in a more favourable light in *Hindle Wakes*.²³⁸ Moreover, economic independence is again the foundation on which the main female character's self-determination is based.²³⁹

The ground-breaking element about Fanny's character is that she is a sexually liberated woman; she is able to choose her independence from men deliberately and to lead her life according to her own principles.²⁴⁰

Even though Fanny still lives under the same roof as her parents, she does not seem to feel obliged to give account of each of her movements as the initial passages of the play indicate. She has gone away for a couple of days without telling her parents about her precise whereabouts. The only clue is a postcard with a picture of Blackpool, and, thus, her parents are left in a state of helpless insecurity as the following dialogue between the Mr and Mrs Hawthorn reveals:

MRS. HAWTHORN. [...] What are you going to say to Fanny when she comes?

CHRISTOPHER. Ask her where she's been.

MRS. HAWTHORN. Ask her where she's been! Of course we'll do that. But suppose she won't tell us?

CHRISTOPHER. She's always been a good girl.

MRS. HAWTHORN. She's always gone her own road.

(*Hindle Wakes*, I, 92)

²³⁸ '[Fanny] had to work at the loom for her living, and that does no woman any harm' (*Hindle Wakes*, III, 165).

²³⁹ Cf. Gaberthuel, 124.

²⁴⁰ 'Fanny ist die typische Vertreterin der emanzipierten *new woman*, dargestellt an einem Extremfall der freien Sexualität' ['Fanny is the typical representative of the emancipated New Woman, exemplified through an extreme case of free sexuality', [my translation]] (Gaberthuel, 120).

It is also interesting to note that Mrs Hawthorn still seems to represent the traditional woman who accepts her husband's sovereignty and power of decision. Naturally, he is to settle their future steps with regard to their daughter. Moreover, Christopher Hawthorn does not appear to be utterly convinced of Fanny's being 'a good girl' as he is quick to presume that she is involved in something worse than just a mystery.²⁴¹ His apprehension turns out to be justified. On her return, Fanny tells her parents that she has spent the days with a friend, Mary Hollins, which soon turns out to be a lie. Stubbornly, Fanny persists in her alibi and turns out to be quite a rebellious girl, who questions any form of authority – in one instance, even God is called into doubt. When her parents point out that the impossibility of her stay in Blackpool together with Mary is '[a]s certain as there's a God in Heaven', Fanny replies that 'that's not certain after all' (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 96). She goes on refusing to disclose where and with whom she has spent the last couple of days, but nevertheless the truth comes out gradually. First, it is established that she went away with a man. The subsequent opinions about the consequences of such behaviour are split and show a gap between the generations, between 'old' and 'new', once again. Correspondingly, Gaberthuel argues that the plot of *Hindle Wakes* is taking place in an epoch of transition, where the established norms of society are no longer unquestioningly regarded as binding.²⁴² For Fanny's parents it is evident that she is disgraced and that the only solution is to "marry the lad". They rebuke her and say that she should have gotten wed if she had been that curious about men. Fanny, though, clearly has a mind of her own as she considers marriage not to be a necessity at all.²⁴³ Then, Mr and Mrs Hawthorn also find out that their daughter went to Llandudno in the company of Alan Jeffcote, the mill-owner's son. Their first reaction is that the two youths ought to marry. Alan, however, has already been engaged to Beatrice Farrar, a respectable young woman and the daughter of the local mayor and owner of the second biggest mill in Hindle, for almost a year. Out of this situation a moral conflict arises. As soon as Mr Jeffcote learns about his son's entanglement, he sets his mind on seeing Fanny treated right by making Alan marry her. The father's attitude stands in opposition

²⁴¹ 'MRS. HAWTHORN. Well, it's a mystery.

CHRISTOPHER (*shaking his head*). Or summat worse' (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 93).

²⁴² Cf. Gaberthuel, 99.

²⁴³ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, I, 99f.

to the one of Sir William in *The Eldest Son*.²⁴⁴ In Galsworthy's play, the father wanted to offer the unwanted fiancée money whereas the son has set his mind on wedding her. In Houghton's play, it is precisely the other way around.²⁴⁵ In the course of the plot, it becomes evident that Fanny does not wish to marry the mill owner's son at all. She is an independent woman with particular personal opinions that are not changed by any form of threat. Even though her mother throws her out of the house in the end, Fanny's fate does not seem to be bleak at all. She chooses her future deliberately, and as opposed to other characters such as Pinero's Iris, there is little doubt that she will indeed manage to live on her own when she says,

I'm a Lancashire lass, and so long as there's weaving sheds in Lancashire I shall earn enough brass to keep me going. I wouldn't live at home again after this, not anyhow! I'm going to be on my own in the future. [...] [S]o long as I've to live my own life I don't see why I shouldn't choose what it's to be. (*Hindle Wakes*, III, 179)

To some extent, Fanny bears similarities to Drusilla Ives, the dancing girl in Henry Arthur Jones play of the same name.²⁴⁶ Both are strong-minded and get their way without heeding parental advice or social conventions. In the same way as Drusilla's father does not know that his daughter is leading a double life, Mr Hawthorn says that '[Fanny]'s always been a bit of a mystery to her mother and [him]. There's that in her veins as keeps her restless and uneasy' (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 116). All the other characters in the play presume that Fanny is eager to become Alan Jeffcote's wife, and they are all the more surprised to find out that '[she hasn't] the least intention of marrying him' (*Hindle Wakes*, III, 167). Fanny places self-realisation before the prevention of a social scandal and the opportunity to marry a rich man. Initially, Alan takes for granted that she does not agree on a marriage because she, as a selfless woman, does not want to spoil his future prospects. It does not occur to him that her primary reason for rejecting him is that

²⁴⁴ A partial similarity between *The Eldest Son* and *Hindle Wakes* is also noted in: Gaberthuel, 132ff.

²⁴⁵ 'ALAN. What's going to be done?
JEFFCOTE. I said I'd see him treated right.
ALAN (*brightening*). What'll they take?
JEFFCOTE (*dangerously*). I said I'd see them treated right. If thou expects I'm going to square it with a cheque, and that thou's going to slip away scot free, thou's sadly mistaken' (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 125).

²⁴⁶ A similarity of motif between *The Dancing Girl* and *Hindle Wakes* is also noted in: Gaberthuel, 127.

she is afraid of spoiling *her* life.²⁴⁷ Fanny is quite insightful as she is aware of the fact that a possible matrimony with Alan has no chance of turning into a happy one. In the long run, she is looking for companionship instead of wealth.²⁴⁸

She is a self-confident woman, who believes that her worth is independent of any man. Her attitude is revolutionary insofar as she proclaims to have the same feelings and rights as men. Alan has assumed that Hawthorn's daughter went away with him because she, as a woman, cared for him and naturally longed to become his wife. These prejudices about femininity are overthrown by Fanny when she tells the mill owner's son,

[y]ou are a man, and I was your little fancy. Well, I'm a woman, and *you* were *my* little fancy. You wouldn't prevent a woman enjoying herself as well as a man, if she takes it into her head? (*Hindle Wakes*, III, 175)

By and large, her way of reasoning seems sound and prudential and bears up against any form of criticism. In this light, her parents and Mr and Mrs Jeffcotes' stubborn persistence to enforce what they consider proper appears quite anachronistic. As a consequence, the assertion voiced by Alan's father that women are incomprehensible, which makes them unfit for receiving the right to vote, has precisely the converse effect as Fanny's arguments generally seem to be the more perspicuous ones.²⁴⁹

Moreover, she is not afraid to speak her mind and to speak up to authorities, which can be noticed in the passage where she asks Jeffcote to talk to her in a more polite way by stopping to swear at her.²⁵⁰ In her lines, critique about class and gender policies often mix. In the final act, she tells Alan that she does not wish to be wed to a rich man's son who does not dare to speak his mind because he is too afraid of losing his father's financial support,

[*m*]y husband, if I ever have one, will be a man, not a fellow who'll throw over his girl at his father's bidding! Strikes me the sons of these rich manufacturers are all much alike. They seem a bit weak in the upper storey. It's their father's brass that's too much for them, happen! (*Hindle Wakes*, III, 176)

²⁴⁷ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, III, 172.

²⁴⁸ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, III, 173.

²⁴⁹ 'There is no fathoming a woman. And these are the creatures that want us to give votes!' (*Hindle Wakes*, III, 177).

²⁵⁰ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, III, 168.

With this remark, she does not only invert social prejudices but also concedes that marriage is not her ultimate goal in life and that she would rather end up as a single woman than in an unfulfilling relationship. She rejects empty social conventions, honour and money as false motivations for marriage and is ready to take her future into her own hands and to shape it according to her convictions.²⁵¹ Fanny declares her independence and refuses Alan on the grounds that, as previously mentioned, she is not willing to spoil *her* life not *his*. The astounding element of this announcement is 'that it does not contain any trace of bitterness, victimization or sacrifice. Her dramatically unprecedented triumph rises from her vital, emancipatory self-reliance' (Stilz, 135).

Quite the contrary holds true for Mrs Hawthorn. As already hinted at, Fanny and her mother do not only represent a generational gap, but also seem to stand for the differences between the 'old' and the New Woman. Mrs Hawthorn takes for granted that – at least outwardly – decisions are made by men. Hence, she claims that the ultimate assessment of their daughter's situation lies with Mr Hawthorn. Nonetheless, Mrs Hawthorn seems to have clear conceptions of what should be done. She expects her daughter to be treated in the same way that she was in her adolescence.²⁵² Furthermore, Mrs Hawthorn attempts to influence her husband's resolution. She urges him to go to the Jeffcotes immediately and emphasises what a fine chance it is that he and Mr Jeffcote have been good friends since their childhood. When Mr Hawthorn does not understand his wife's intentions right away, she gets to the point in a quite blatant way: '[t]o get her wed, thou great stupid. We're not going to be content with less' (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 103). For her, a good marriage appears to be a goal of utmost importance. She even ponders on the possibility that Fanny tried to achieve an advantageous match, which would be the only acceptable excuse for her doings in the mother's eyes. The thought of this option almost makes her seem proud of her daughter.²⁵³ She perceives marriage to be a practical institution first and foremost, in which the husband provides for financial security. Unlike Fanny, she does not yet belong to the generation of women who manage to earn their own living.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Cf. Stilz, 144.

²⁵² 'My father would have got a stick to me (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 101), 'You *are* soft. You're never going to let her off so easy' (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 102).

²⁵³ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, I, 103.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Gaberthuel, 101.

Mrs Jeffcote, on the other hand, resembles the character of Mrs Forsyth in Houghton's earlier play. Mrs Jeffcote is described as a woman who has 'adapted herself to the responsibilities and duties imposed by the possession of wealth' (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 105). Besides, she is said to have a mild and good-natured temper, which is put to test in the second act, when she gets to know about her son's doings. Moreover, she belongs to the same generation as Mrs Hawthorn, where the husband, in the words of Mr Jeffcote, still 'wear[s] the breeches in [the] house' (*Hindle Wakes*, II, 136). Mrs Jeffcote is also contrasted with Beatrice. The former is portrayed as a practical-minded, hard-working companion whereas the latter is at first described as a somewhat spoilt young lady.²⁵⁵

Beatrice, though, turns out to be a determined and upright character. Her remarks are witty and she seems to stand above the events. Furthermore, she points out certain double standards and even though she appears not to count herself among 'these advanced women' (*Hindle Wakes*, II, 155), her opinions are quite progressive. By asserting that she is in fact an old-fashioned woman,²⁵⁶ she can voice criticism without being immediately labelled an unreasonable member of the 'shrieking sisterhood'. Her arguments, like Sidney's in *Independent Means*, are logically structured; she takes up prejudices and uses them for her purposes. When Alan urges her to accept the differences between men and women in the context of sexual curiosity, for example, she replies that she can see them as '[m]en haven't so much self control' (*Hindle Wakes*, II, 155). Like other female characters before, she has her own beliefs of right and wrong, an inner moral compass that guides her.²⁵⁷ Initially, her – at times excessive – sense of morality tells her to sacrifice her future with Alan for her idea of integrity and righteousness.²⁵⁸

The younger generation is independent and does not obey blindly. Neither Fanny, nor Alan or Beatrice, take their parents' orders without questioning them. It has become impossible for their fathers and mothers to make arrangements for their

²⁵⁵ 'JEFFCOTE. I didn't marry a girl who'd been brought up like Beatrice Farrar. I married a girl who could help me make money. Beatrice won't do that. She'll help me spend it, likely' (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 106).

²⁵⁶ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, II, 155.

²⁵⁷ 'I was born to look at things just as I do, and I can't help believing what I do' (*Hindle Wakes*, II, 156).

²⁵⁸ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, II, 157.

children's futures without consulting them.²⁵⁹ To all of the younger characters personal self-fulfillment appears to be more important than treasuring social conventions.

The fate of a woman who has obviously been involved in a liaison without being married is far less fatal in Houghton's play than it was in *The Dancing Girl*. Furthermore, it does not stand out as singular and deviant as Jeffcote tells Christopher – before he knows that his son is involved – not to take the matter 'too much to heart. It's not the first time a job like this has happened in Hindle, and it won't be the last!' (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 114). It could be argued that immorality is punished to some extent, although the characters who are most immediately affected get away unharmed. Fanny's friend Mary, who helped to conceal the affair, is later found out to have drowned.²⁶⁰

Generally, male and female desires turn out not to be that different from each other after all. This is patently indicated by the fact that, in the third act, Fanny repeats Alan's prior motive for their short liaison almost verbatim, namely that he was 'just someone to have a bit of fun with. [He] was an amusement – a lark.' (*Hindle Wakes*, III, 175).²⁶¹ This appropriation of words previously uttered by a male character reminds of Rachel Arbuthnot's closing words in *A Woman of No Importance*.²⁶²

The ground-breaking element here is that her frankness and sexual emancipation do not cause her any harm. Fanny, a character that would have previously been deemed a Fallen Woman, is now even praised for her exemplary behaviour.²⁶³

Moreover, the idea of getting a divorce appears to be less utopian and separation not to be uncommon at all.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, III, 167.

²⁶⁰ 'FANNY. If Mary hadn't been drowned you'd never have found out about it. I'd never have opened my mouth, and Alan knows that.

MRS HAWTHORN. Well, Mary's got her reward, poor lass!

CHRISTOPHER. There's more in this than chance, it seems to me.

MRS. HAWTHORN. The ways of the Lord are mysterious and wonderful. We can't pretend to understand them. He used Mary as an instrument for His purpose' (*Hindle Wakes*, III, 163).

²⁶¹ 'Fanny was just an amusement – a lark. I thought of her as a girl to have a bit of fun with' (*Hindle Wakes*, II, 152).

²⁶² Mrs Arbuthnot refers to Lord Illingworth, her former lover, as 'no one. No one in particular. A man of no importance' (*Woman of No Importance*, IV, 83).

²⁶³ 'ALAN. I can't make you out rightly, Fanny, but you're a damn good sort, and I wish there were more like you!' (*Hindle Wakes*, III, 176).

²⁶⁴ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, II, 136.

Double standards certainly still exist, but they are predominantly upheld by the older generation. For Jeffcote and Hawthorn it is immediately clear that Fanny ought to marry the first man she has been together with. Alan, however, would have been allowed to do as he pleases as long as his doings do not mingle with his father's business.²⁶⁵ After Mrs Jeffcote has learned that her son has compromised a girl, and before she knows who that girl is, she blames the young woman and not her son for the unfortunate situation.²⁶⁶ At first, Alan's honour seems inviolable whereas the girl, despite Mr Jeffcote's assurance that she is a 'straight' one, is considered to be a person of easy virtue. Therefore, Mrs Jeffcote maintains that '[w]hoever she is, if she's not going above going away for the week-end with a man, she can't be fit to marry our son' (*Hindle Wakes*, II, 131). To her, Fanny's motives for going away with Alan can only be explained either by her wickedness or by her deceitfulness.²⁶⁷ Mrs Jeffcote's double standards do not stop at gender differences, but also concern class issues. She thinks that Hawthorn's daughter is socially beneath her son, even though her own husband started his fortune from the same humble beginnings.²⁶⁸ Quite ironically, therefore, she once states that she is 'not cut out for a hypocrite' (*Hindle Wakes*, II, 137). More irony comes into play when Beatrice's father is told the story. Unintentionally, he gives away that he spent the weekend with a woman at the seaside as well, but is quite appalled when he hears that Alan acted in precisely the same way.²⁶⁹ His attitude towards the whole business is that Beatrice is not to hear any of it, as he believes that a fiancée or wife does not need to know everything about her (future) husband's past. Moreover, Sir Timothy Farrar is quite surprised to find out that Mr Jeffcote did not have any female acquaintances before getting married. Such a fact seems dubious and exceptional to him, hence, he tells the mill owner that he 'always thought there was summat queer about [him]' (*Hindle Wakes*, II, 141). Then, Sir Timothy also suggests that Fanny should be given money to settle the incident.

²⁶⁵ 'JEFFCOTE. [...] And if thou must have a straight girl, thou might have kept off one from the mill' (*Hindle Wakes*, I, 124).

'MRS. JEFFCOTE. The creature! [...] (*indignantly*). Why are such women allowed to exist?' (*Hindle Wakes*, II, 131).

²⁶⁷ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, II, 134.

²⁶⁸ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, II, 135.

²⁶⁹ Cf. *Hindle Wakes*, II, 140.

Beatrice is quick to point out prevalent double standards. When Alan asks for her forgiveness, she does not only remark on the different treatment of male and female frailties, but also hints at an equality of male and female desires:

BEATRICE (*at length*). Could you have forgiven me if I had done the same as you?

ALAN (*surprised*). But – you – you couldn't do it!

BEATRICE. Fanny Hawthorn did.

ALAN. She's not your class.

BEATRICE. She is a woman.

(*Hindle Wakes*, II, 154)

Beatrice's utterances show that not only social but also sexual differences begin to blur. Moreover, Chothia argues that the way the plot is structured makes the audience realise that it is not immune to double standards either. By way of the repeated emphasis on personal responsibility and propriety, the audience expects Fanny to marry the mill-owner's son until the scene when Fanny voices her opinion.²⁷⁰

The first performance of *Hindle Wakes* caused some stir among the London audience and reviewers. Houghton all of a sudden became a widely discussed playwright in England²⁷¹ and, overall, the play was received enthusiastically.²⁷² The quite revolutionary feminist tone of the play hit the nerves of the time. J.T. Grein, the *Sunday Times* critic, for example, pointed out that '[*Hindle Wakes*] is of value in these days of the battle of the sexes. It heralds the movement of the future' (Grein, quoted in Gaberthuel, 121). Furthermore, *The Vote*, a magazine of the women's movement recommended a visit of the performance to its readership.²⁷³ In 1912, the play was not only staged in London, but also in Manchester, New York and Chicago, and had a run of more than 2000 performances on the whole.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ 'The audience, taken off guard by the emphasis on marriage and personal responsibility, by the skill with which the various subterfuges are unmasked, and by the realism of the nicely differentiated responses and interactions of the other characters, discovers that it too has fallen into the trap of the double standard' (Chothia, *New Drama*, 78).

²⁷¹ Cf. Gaberthuel, 93.

²⁷² Cf. Aston, 216.

²⁷³ Cf. Gaberthuel, 121.

²⁷⁴ Cf. Stilz, 143.

4.4.4. *How the Vote Was Won*

How the Vote Was Won, written by Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St John – a nom de plume for Christabel Marshal – was first performed at the Royalty Theatre in London in 1909, at a time when the vote for women was in fact far from being won. As a suffrage propaganda play, the main issue treated is the logical imperative of the female vote.

It is not surprising to note, therefore, that Cicely Hamilton was involved in the suffragist movement as a member of the Women Writers' Suffrage League, which also published a previous version of the play as a pamphlet.²⁷⁵ Hamilton also wrote a feminist book called *Marriage as a Trade*, in which her argumentation for women's suffrage, in the same way as in *How the Vote Was Won*, is based on economic reflections. Generally, a tendency can be detected that female playwrights of the Edwardian era often responded to contemporary political and cultural forces in their plays. Moreover, events were hosted by the Actress' Franchise League that brought together theatre and politics. The works of actresses and female writers were performed – among them plays by Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St John - and political pro-suffrage speeches were held.²⁷⁶

The anti-suffrage line of reasoning that women do not need the vote because they are taken care of by men is picked up and made use of by the suffragist in this one-act-play. Their rationale, in one of the character's words, is that

[e]ither [a woman's] proper place is the home – the home provided for [her] by some dear father, brother, husband, cousin, or uncle – or [she is] a self-supporting member of the State, who ought not to be shut out from the rights of citizenship. (*Vote*, 27)

Their reasoning appears to be incontestably logical with the conclusion that anyone has to become aware of the inevitability of their cause sooner or later. In this context, Lis Whitelaw points out that '[t]he farcical plot is typical of Cicely's talent for highlighting the absurdity of arguments by taking them to their logical, for men, extremely discomfiting conclusion' (Whitelaw, 83). Consequently, Horace Cole, a clerk with a moderate income and the only male character of the

²⁷⁵ Cf. Spender, 19.

²⁷⁶ For a further discussion of suffrage theatre, see: Carlson and Powell, 246ff.

play, suddenly sees himself confronted with a bunch of female relatives, who have given up their jobs and seek to be supported financially. In this connection, it should be mentioned that working women belonging to different strata of society appear to have become a matter of course in Hamilton's and St John's plays.

From the very beginning of the play, it is established that, in a quite utopian fashion, almost every working woman regardless of her social background seems to have allied with the women's leagues. They have all begun to invade their male relatives' houses in order to be looked after with the goal in mind that these men will soon be made to join the suffragists' cause.²⁷⁷ And indeed, at the end of the play Horace Cole has turned into an ardent proponent of women's right to vote. In a lengthy speech, which is only occasionally interrupted by the female characters' acclamations, he summarises the suffragists' arguments once again. His character is necessary to exemplify that even a rigid traditionalist must finally accept that it would be irrational to oppose the female vote any longer.

Naturally, *How the Vote Was Won* is filled with likeable New Woman characters. Winifred, Horace's sister-in-law, for example, is described as a 'distinguished looking young woman with a cheerful, capable manner' (*Vote*, 23). It is evident from the beginning that she is an actively involved member of the women's movement. She does not only wear the colours of the NWSPU (the National Women's Social and Political Union), but also has 'an emphatic diction which betrays the public speaker' (*Vote*, 23).

Molly, Horace's niece, seems to be a quite independent woman as well. She has written a – in the eyes of her uncle – 'scandalous book' (*Vote*, 28), earns her own living, does not have any desire to marry yet, and has lived all by herself before she decides to move in with Horace.²⁷⁸

Later, Horace's second cousin, Madame Christine, appears, and it turns out that her career in the world of work has not been inferior to any man's. Before she has decided to turn to Horace, her nearest male relative, for sustenance, she ran a successful business as a dressmaker, where she did not only earn more than her second cousin, but also supported her late husband financially. Furthermore, she

²⁷⁷ 'At this very minute working women of every grade in every part of England are ceasing work, and going to demand support and the necessities of life from their nearest relative may be' (*Vote*, 24).

²⁷⁸ Cf. *Vote*, 28.

resolved to donate all her money and property to the National Union and the Women's Freedom League.²⁷⁹

A further type of New Woman character is represented by the actress Maudie Spark, a cheerful and raucous woman, whose profession enabled her to support herself. In general, actresses have always played a somewhat ironic part in the historical development. On the one hand, they have often acted the part of the repentantly returning wife or the caricature of a progressive woman on stage, on the other hand, they were themselves New Women in many ways, as they could make an income without being dependent on a husband, father or brother.²⁸⁰

At any rate, the New Woman characters appear to be more capable and fit for life than the traditional woman characters of the play. Ethel, Horace's wife, for instance, is left quite helpless after all of her servants have gone on strike. She is anxious to have tea prepared when her husband returns from work, but unable to do so as all her servants have given notice to join the Union.²⁸¹ Ethel's supposed deficiency does not only show in her acts, but also in her looks, as Horace's sister Agatha remarks on her entrance that '[Ethel's] not looking so well as usual' (*Vote*, 27). Besides men, women who do not work and do rely on their husband's support are those characters who are perceived as outdated, feeble and even absurd. In this way, there is, for example, talk of duchesses who 'are out in the streets begging people to come in and wash their kids' (*Vote*, 30). In the end, however, Ethel is convinced of the other female characters' cause as soon as she perceives that her husband has changed his opinion about it.

The play turned out to be a great success with the audience and, despite the fact that it is a blend of comedy and propaganda, critics wrote approving reviews. This is to some extent unusual as reviewers were usually not in favour of suffrage plays.²⁸² *The Stage*, for example, noted that '[b]eneath its fun there is a deal of propaganda which, however, rather engenders the wish that political questions be made as lively and as pleasant in another place' (*The Stage* quoted in: Spender, 20).²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Cf. *Vote*, 29.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Gardner, 3. For a further discussion on the New Woman and the theatre, see: Gardner, 7-14.

²⁸¹ Cf. *Vote*, 25.

²⁸² Cf. Whitelaw, 84.

²⁸³ For further reviews of the play, see: Spender, 19f.

4.4.5. *Edith*

– Edith Stott

Elizabeth Baker wrote *Edith* for the Women's Writers Suffrage League in 1912.²⁸⁴ All of Baker's plays are about female autonomy in one way or the other, and deal with the importance the early woman's movement attached to work as a means for establishing women's self-determination and independence.²⁸⁵

Edith Stott, the heroine of Baker's one-act play, seems to have left traditional notions of womanhood far behind her. She is self-confident, capable and enterprising. She is by no means tied to a home or family, but goes out into the world to conduct business. Therefore, she has achieved what only a few women have accomplished in reality at this time. Moreover, it has to be conceded that even though Edith runs a flourishing business, she does so within the defined area of her dress shops.²⁸⁶ The shop, in general, was one of the few places where a woman could work without fearing to lose respectability. The shopgirl as such began to emerge in England as a new female entity that connected emancipatory and traditional notions. She usually came from a middle-class background, and Lise Shapiro Sanders states that 'the shopgirl symbolizes the intersection between the conservative ideologies of gender and class and new models of female identity, behavior, and experience' (Shapiro Sanders, 2).

Tellingly, it is a female playwright who tackles the subject of female occupation in a practical manner and, correspondingly, Viv Gardner argues that

[i]t remained for the women writers who emerged in the period up to the First World War to combine the new ideas and ideology of the Woman Question with a grasp of the reality of the lives of contemporary women. (Gardner, 9)

Edith has made a fortune in the fashion industry. It is interesting to note that the only other effective business woman encountered in the plays under discussion, Madame Christine in *How the Vote Was Won*, was involved in dressmaking as well. According to Joel H. Kaplan and Sheila Stowell, these 'female fashion

²⁸⁴ Cf. Fitzsimmons, 190.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Fitzsimmons, 191.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Fitzsimmons, 191.

entrepreneurs were presented as emblems of a politically correct and financially secure womanhood' (Kaplan and Stowell, 176) because they preserved their respectability by working in a sector that belonged to their conceded sphere of competence.²⁸⁷ Out of this fact arise two different points of discussion: firstly, it can be argued that at the beginning of the 20th century, a woman's business success can still only take place in a feminine environment. Secondly, fashion in general seems to have played an important role in the process of creating a new female identity at that time. As Hilary Fawcett points out in her essay on femininity and fashion in Britain in the 1900s, '[t]he role of female fashion in this period was crucially tied to changes in social and cultural attitudes to gender and sexuality' (Fawcett, 146). Fashion did not only represent a career opportunity, but also opened up new ways of self-expression to women.²⁸⁸

At the beginning of the play, before Edith actually appears on stage, she is described by her relatives in quite unflattering terms. According to her sister Gladys, she 'has always been a great trial' (*Edith*, 17) and 'a great trouble' (*Edith*, 10). Her brother, Gerald, even claims that 'she has little right feeling' (*Edith*, 20). He believes her to be untrustworthy and likely to walk off with the family's money.²⁸⁹ Moreover, Edith's relatives expect her to have no understanding of financial matters and plan to persuade her to sell the shop as soon as she arrives. They deem it better to vend the small enterprise to Flyte, '[t]hat horrid man with those nasty cheap-looking shops' (*Edith*, 19) than to trust a woman with running it. Their opinion quickly changes when Edith enters. Already her outward appearance suggests self-assuredness, as the stage directions note that she is '*quite at her ease*' (*Edith*, 21). It is also soon established that she is used to giving orders and to having them complied with. Right after she has greeted the other characters, she tells Gladys to prepare some fresh tea and Gerald to pay the taxi. Furthermore, she seems to issue those commands with enough assertiveness to make them both obey immediately.²⁹⁰ All the other characters' arguments against the idea of Edith taking over the family business are swiftly set at nought by the self-confident heroine. She convinces her relatives with the story of her success and declares that

²⁸⁷ Cf. Würz, 75.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Fawcett, 155.

²⁸⁹ Cf. Fawcett, 16.

²⁹⁰ Cf. Fawcett, 21.

the only reasonable thing to do is to leave the shop to the most capable person. Acting differently would not only be anachronistic, but also stupid.²⁹¹ By and by, she convinces the other characters of her line of reasoning and even manages to gain their full approval. Gladys' fiancé, Arthur, for example, tells Edith that '[he is] sure [she]'ll do whatever is best' (*Edith*, 28) and adds that she really must be clever in order to own all these shops.

In general, Edith appears to stand above the other characters. She is more capable and adroit. She sees through other people, which is why she quickly spots the shop manager Mr Bloom's intention of profiting by the deal with Flyte and selling the business for less than it is actually worth.²⁹² She knows of her abilities and is not shy to declare them openly by saying, 'I don't happen to be my father's son, but I am what is quite good – better, in fact, in this case – I am his daughter' (*Edith*, 30). Consequently, traditional gender roles appear to become more and more redundant if not altogether reversed. It seems possible for a woman to choose her own path and to live completely independently of men without having to render anyone account of her actions. Edith can be understood as an ideal embodiment of the New Woman. She is also in accordance with Showalter's analysis of the phenomenon stating that '[w]ith their opportunities for education, work, and mobility, New Women saw that they had alternatives to marriage' (Showalter, 39).

Double standards are still upheld by the characters of the play, but as the plot evolves they are shown to be irrational and dated. When it is found out that Edith is the sole heir of the father's shop, everyone else is filled with indignation about the fact that it has not been passed on to Gerald, the son. At first, no one questions whether he would have been the right person to manage the business even if Gerald himself confesses that he is not really eager to do so.²⁹³ They hold the opinion that by right the authority over property should be passed on to the son and any other procedure would be improper. They initially reproach Edith with inconsideration and selfishness, when she discloses that she would only been willing to accept the inheritance on the condition that she was solely responsible

²⁹¹ 'EDITH. [...] What I was rather afraid of was whether after all he'd be silly enough to leave it to Jerry just because he was the son. You never know with old men. And that's such a stupid idea, isn't it?' (*Edith*, 27).

²⁹² Cf. *Edith*, 29.

²⁹³ Cf. *Edith*, 14.

for it.²⁹⁴ It is obvious to the Stott family that there is no way that Edith, a girl, could be cleverer than Gerald.²⁹⁵ Furthermore, Edith is characterised as extravagant because she has repeatedly travelled to Europe, which is too profligate an undertaking for a woman. For a man, however, a trip to the Continent seems to be less unusual and more justified as the following exchange of words between Gladys and her fiancé exemplifies:

GLADYS. And [Edith] is so frightfully extravagant.

ARTHUR. It costs a jolly lot to go about on the Continent, by Jove! I know something about that.

(*Edith*, 18)

In the end, though, traditional notions of proper male and female accomplishments and aspirations are overturned. The play's heroine is established as the model of efficiency and success whereas the male characters give the impression of incompetence and ordinariness.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ 'EDITH. I can either sell out or share up the spoil, or keep it on and pay the others and income. [...] [T]hose were the only conditions on which I'd take it on. I told Dad he must give me a free hand.

MRS. S. (plaintively). And you planned all this without a thought of the wrong you were doing your brother, your father's only son' (*Edith*, 23).

²⁹⁵ Cf. *Edith*, 14.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Würz, 80.

5. Conclusion

The terms ‘fallen’ and ‘new’ woman were both used for concepts of femininity that digressed from the conventional norm – the Angel in the House – and were, thus, perceived as threats to the established status quo. Whereas Fallen Women were predominantly associated with improper sexual behaviour, notions of education, work and politics were added in the discourse about the New Women. At first, the emergent type of the emancipated woman was ridiculed and looked upon in a condescending way, but it gradually began to be taken more seriously.²⁹⁷ These socio-cultural developments in England in the second half of the 19th and the early 20th century also found their ways into the dramatic works of that time.

Not only in the ‘real’ world, but also in the world of drama, the perception of women steadily changed especially with regards to their sexual and financial independence. Being a good wife/mother and creating a comfortable home ceased to be a woman’s prior goal in life. It became more and more acceptable to opt for a different path. Women could, for example, decide not to marry or to have affairs even if their good reputation was at stake. Moreover, it became possible for women to earn their own living. It is important to bear in mind that the transformations mentioned in this connection primarily concerned the middle-class.

Until the 1880s, choosing any of these options still seemed to have had serious consequences. Nelly Armroyd and Drusilla Ives leave their homes and get involved with men who are not their husbands. Their actions are considered so shameful that, as the result, they both find their deaths in the end. By and by, the idea of a woman walking out on a husband and having an extramarital liaison becomes more and more conceivable, but still not really practicable. Susan

²⁹⁷ Cf. ‚Die anfänglich vorhandenen Assoziationen [der *new woman*] mit anderen Typusmotiven wie der *woman with a past* oder der *femme fatale* sind einer insgesamt positiveren Wertigkeit gewichen, die sich an der männlichen Rationalität, vor allem aber an der gesamtgesellschaftlichen Rolle der Frau orientiert‘ [‘The initially existent associations [of the *new woman*] with other types such as the *woman with a past* or the *femme fatale* have made way to a altogether more positive valuation, which is geared to male rationality and, above all, to the general role of woman in society’, [my translation]] (Ahrens, 319).

Harabin, Penelope and Margery Cazenove all reflect on a divorce – not because they strive for self-realisation, but because of their spouses' unfaithfulness. In Jones's play, an affair on Susan's side is even hinted at. Ultimately, each of these three female characters is persuaded to stay with her husband as the alternatives would be quite bleak. Not the male characters but their wives are the ones who would suffer from the consequences. They would not only end up as outcasts of society, but would also be unable to support themselves. Even though getting a divorce had lost some of its stigma towards the end of the 19th century in 'real' life, as pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, it was still far from being socially acceptable. Moreover, alone the thought of respectable woman having a lover is outrageous, whereas a man's peccadillos appear to be accepted.

In the further process, however, matrimony seems to lose some of its status as the sole means for a woman to lead an honourable and satisfactory life. Rachel Arbuthnot and Freda Studdenham both decide against marriage because it would not agree with their principles. By degrees, personal fulfillment, it could be argued, becomes more important than traditional conventions. Furthermore, society itself appears to be less quick to judge women on the grounds of their deviation from the Victorian ideal of womanhood. Consequently, the concept of the Fallen Woman ceases to exist.

Instead, a new model of femininity begins to emerge. At the beginning of the 20th century, the New Woman is gradually not ridiculed anymore, but perceived as a paradigm. Like Sydney Forsyth, Fanny Hawthorn, or Edith Stott, she is a capable and self-determined woman, who even outshines men. She can choose to have a career or to have an affair without being married. It has to be admitted, though, that certain limitations still apply. Fanny, for example, does have a sexual relationship, but is later cast out by her parents, and Sydney and Edith both do have jobs, but they work in domains that can be considered typically female.

Nonetheless, socio-cultural changes in the perception of women undoubtedly took place over the period of roughly fifty years covered in this thesis, and the dramatic works taken into consideration certainly reflect upon them. Due to the endeavours of the women's movement and its supporters, a woman was definitely freer to

decide about her fate with regards to relationships, occupation and sexuality at the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century.

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8. Appendix

Summary (in German)

Das Thema dieser Arbeit ist die Darstellung der Frau in englischen Dramen in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts. Der Ausgangspunkt ist die Annahme, dass sich im Laufe dieser Zeitspanne ein Wandel der Wahrnehmung von weiblichen Charakteren, die nicht der Norm entsprachen, vollzog – von der ‚gefallenen‘ zur sogenannten ‚New Woman‘, einem neuen Frauenbild, das sich gegen Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts in England entwickelte. Dabei liegt das Hauptaugenmerk vor allem auf der gesellschaftlichen Mittelschicht, wobei die Oberschicht und die Arbeiterschicht durchaus auch ihren Eingang in die Arbeit finden. Der angesprochene Wandel befasst sich nun mit der Tatsache, dass Frauen, die einen Fehler begingen indem sie etwa eine außereheliche Affäre hatten, bis etwa zur Jahrhundertwende als unmoralisch angesehen, und in weiterer Folge von ihren Angehörigen und der Öffentlichkeit verstoßen wurden, im Laufe der geschichtlichen Entwicklung immer mehr akzeptiert wurden.

Da die gesellschaftliche Situation dieser Epoche ihren Eingang in die Theaterstücke fand, und es daher sinnvoll ist, die soziokulturellen Entwicklungen dieser Zeit zu analysieren, befasst sich der erste Teil dieser Arbeit überblickshaft mit den relevanten historischen Ereignissen. Im Zuge dessen wird vor allem auf die zunehmende Teilnahme von Frauen in Bildung, Politik und Arbeit eingegangen.

Im darauffolgenden Teil werden die drei, im England Königin Victorias und Eduards VII vorherrschenden, Konzepte von Weiblichkeit näher erläutert. Zum einen, das Ideal der Frau als ‚Angel in the House‘, die auf einem Gedicht Coventry Patmores beruhende Vorstellung der Frau als engelsgleiches und reines Wesen, dessen primäre Aufgabe darin besteht, eine gute Hausfrau und Mutter zu sein. Zum anderen, die ‚Fallen Woman‘ oder ‚gefallene Frau‘, die von dem Idealbild abweicht indem sie Interesse an Männern, die nicht ihr Ehemann sind, zeigt, und dadurch die Familie zerrüttet. Schließlich, die ‚New Woman‘ oder ‚Neue Frau‘, für die Unabhängigkeit in vielen Bereichen immer mehr realisierbar scheint, und

der Selbstverwirklichung wichtiger ist als gängigen Wertvorstellungen zu entsprechen.

Jedes dieser drei Frauenbilder findet auch Eingang in die ausgewählten, und im Detail behandelten, Werke. Diese sind Watts Phillips *Lost in London* (1867), *The Dancing Girl* (1891) und *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894) von Henry Arthur Jones, Oscar Wildes *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), Arthur Wing Pineros *Iris* (1901), Sidney Grundys *The New Woman* (1894), William Somerset Maughams *Penelope* (1908), John Galsworthys *The Eldest Son* (1912), St John Ervines *Jane Clegg* (1913), *Independent Means* (1909) und *Hindle Wakes* (1912) von Stanley Houghton, Elizabeth Bakers *Edith* (1912), sowie *How the Vote Was Won* (1909) von Cicely Hamiton und Christopher St John.

Im Laufe der Analyse dieser Theaterstücke wird deutlich, dass sich die Rolle der Frau in der Tat graduell verändert hat. Stirbt im ersten Werk, *Lost in London*, die mit ihrem Verehrer weggelaufene Heldin noch aufgrund dieser sündigen Tat, ist es anderen weiblichen Hauptcharakteren, etwa in *The Case of Rebellious Susan* oder *Penelope*, schon erlaubt über eine Scheidung nachzudenken, und letzten Endes, im Falle von *Edith*, sogar möglich ganz unabhängig von Männer ihren Lebensunterhalt zu bestreiten und ohne Ehemann ein erfülltes Leben zu führen.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Julia Lackermayer

Persönliche Daten

Geboren am 24.01.1983
Österreichische Staatsbürgerin
Studentin der Anglistik/Amerikanistik, Kunstgeschichte

Ausbildungsweg

1993 – 2001	Gymnasium Keimgasse in Mödling
seit 2001	Anglistik - & Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Wien
09/2006 – 06/2007	Erasmus-Auslandsjahr an der Royal Holloway University of London

Auszug aus den Berufserfahrungen und Praktika

07/ – 09/2003	Volontariat im Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Wien
09/2005	Teilnahme an einem CSI-Workcamp in Niigata-ken, Japan
Seit 10/2005	Englischnachhilfe-Lehrkraft im Lernquadrat, Mödling
09/ – 12/2007	Praktikum in der Engholm Engelhorn Galerie, Schleifmühlgasse Wien
01/ – 02/2008	Praktikum im Fotomuseum Westlicht, Westbahnstraße Wien
seit 05/2008	Mitarbeit am Projekt Naylor Collection des Fotomuseums Westlicht