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DOCTORS, DANDIES AND NEW MEN: ELLA HEPWORTH DIXON AND LATE-CENTURY MASCULINITIES

This article examines Ella Hepworth Dixon's engagement with late-century models of masculinity, namely the doctor, dandy and the New Man, in The Story of a Modern Woman (1894). Specifically, it argues that Dixon isolates the doctor and the dandy as particularly threatening to the New Woman. Though these roles constitute radically different identities, she shows how they similarly confront the New Woman's feminist politics and stand in the way of her desire for intellectual, social and sexual equality. Dixon also gestures to more positive versions of masculinity, even if they are not fully realized in the novel. Many New Women, especially eugenic feminists and social purists, imagined a New Man who could be on equal terms with the New Woman. Such a figure is largely absent from Dixon's novel, though the artist Perry Jackson comes closest to New Manhood. Jackson's status as an artist frees him from conventionality, though his growing commercial interests challenge his non-conformity. Dixon's decision to avoid such an idealized relationship for Mary ultimately demonstrates her commitment to rejecting traditional love plots in favour of a more realistic mode.

When Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* was published in 1894, it was met with almost universal praise. Even when critics lauded the book, however, most could not help but remark on Dixon's harsh treatment of men. *The Times* notes: "There are many men in this novel, but not one who is not selfish, or a society 'dude', or a scandal-monger, or a profligate".¹ A reviewer for the *Critic* echoes this sentiment, noting that in these "books by women about women", man

[...] is considered worthy of serious mention only if he can be made to shoulder some crime, recent or of long standing, against womankind; and when, if he is not portrayed as a downright idiot, he is endowed with just enough intelligence to make him the scapegoat for all that is evil in life. [...] It is a book of this kind that Miss Dixon has produced.²

And the *Lady's Pictorial* insists that the troubles of the two New Women in the novel, Alison Ives and Mary Erle, "arise from the faults and feebleness of men".³ Dixon does indeed play with stereotypes, such as the "society 'dude'" or "profligate", with an aim to criticize men's abuse of power. Rather than simply using male characters as props in a narrative that focuses only on the New Woman's development, however, she also cannily offers critiques of harmful forms of masculinity and depicts the modern woman's complicated relationship to these less-than-ideal figures. The novel details the way in which certain styles of masculinity impede the New Woman's quest for social equality, but it also gestures, if only implicitly, to a hopeful future in which the New Woman and New Man may unite in human solidarity.

Dixon's only novel recounts the story of Mary Erle following the death of her father. Her mother dies when she is a child and her father's death forces her to work to support herself and her idle younger brother. Mary's long-time friend and suitor Vincent Hemming proposes to her early on in the novel. Immediately after she accepts, however, Hemming leaves for a tour of India, Australia and Canada to collect material for his book on "the Woman Question".⁴ After Hemming's departure, Mary attends the Central London School of Art, where she meets successful painter Perry Jackson, and decides to give up painting for writing. When Hemming returns to London, he keeps his distance from Mary and marries a woman whose wealth and family will help him start his political career. After refusing a second proposal from Vincent to run away with him, which would necessitate his abandonment of his wife and child, Mary continues her work alone. The novel also recounts the story of Mary's best friend, Alison Ives, an intelligent, wealthy New Woman with a good sense of humour.⁵ Her story takes a sombre turn when she discovers her doctor-fiancé's dark sexual past, and she dies soon after, though not before she makes Mary pledge to "never, never do anything to hurt another woman" (164).

Though the novel emphasizes the struggles of modern women in its very title, it also engages consistently with debates about late-century masculinity. Dixon addresses changes in late Victorian culture—how, for instance, men responded to the rise of the New Woman—as well as changes in fictional representations of manliness. After reading Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), a young Mary Erle asks her governess to explain a moral ambiguity in the novel: "Dickens says that little Em'ly is a fallen woman, because she goes to Italy with Mr. Steerforth. Was Mr. Steerforth a fallen man, too?" (56). Mary's innocent question exposes the Victorian sexual double standard that insisted on women's purity while allowing men far greater sexual freedom. Her query also encourages readers to compare Dickens's Steerforth with the male characters populating Dixon's novel, and to consider whether they, too, are similarly "fallen". One of Dixon's literary projects was to revise such

representations, transforming rakish male characters like Steerforth into modern anti-heroes. In so doing, Dixon updates the realism of the earlier Victorian novel by rewriting the male hero and the marriage plot. She claims in "Why Women Are Ceasing to Marry" (1899) that "[m]ost of the married ladies in the great mid-Victorian novels looked up to their spouses with admiration tempered by awe. [...] [T]his wifely meekness is no longer possible".⁶ Her fiction thus functions as a "corrective" to earlier representations of awe-inspiring heroes; as she explains: "the old masculine idols are shattered, and the heroes of ladies' novels are no longer Greek gods, or Guardsmen, or even men of blameless life".⁷ Rather than occupying the familiar role of aristocratic rake, the modern villains in *The Story of a Modern Woman* occupy culturally charged professions and roles at the *fin de siècle*. Dixon isolates two masculine positions as particularly threatening to the New Woman: the doctor and the dandy. Though these roles constitute radically different identities, she shows how they similarly confront the New Woman's feminist politics.

In Dixon's novel, Dr Dunlop Strange represents the corruptness of doctors and their challenge to the New Woman in the late nineteenth century. New Women frequently levelled attacks against the medical profession's desire to shield women from information about their own bodies.⁸ In the case of venereal disease, such secrets could be deadly. Sarah Grand, another New Woman writer, insists: "Doctors advise these men to marry, and only the most conscientious acknowledge that the disease is incurable. The marriage certificate should be a certificate of health".⁹ Though Grand suggests that if the marriage certificate took men's health into account women might be protected, she, like other late-century feminists, also recognized that the institutions of marriage and medicine both legitimized male power. Indeed, New Woman fiction often demonstrates the struggle between doctors and husbands for control of the wife's sexual health.¹⁰ Even though he does not actually marry Alison, Dr Dunlop Strange combines the two figures, making the doctor-husband an alarming figure who exposes feminist concerns with the institutions of both medicine and marriage. Strange's interest is in women's ailments and his speciality is nervous diseases. Yet his apparent concern for women's health is revealed as a fraud once his sexual past is unearthed. His public objectification of women is paralleled dramatically in the private sphere when Alison encounters a sick woman with whom Strange had an affair and then cruelly discarded.

Like the doctor, the dandy is presented as a figure who stands in the way of the New Woman's desire for intellectual, social and sexual equality. Though the dandy and the New Woman were often linked in the periodical press of the *fin de siècle* as figures who elicited fears over the malleability of gender distinctions,¹¹ Dixon demonstrates the very different cultural concerns of these

two social and literary groups. Most importantly, the notion of female solidarity and community championed by the New Woman is in direct opposition to the dandy's fantasy of the individual detached from the social whole, embodied in Baudelaire's concept of the "cult of the self".¹² Ellen Moers explains that the "decadence of dandyism" emerged during the *fin de siècle*.¹³ The revised "decadent dandy" was connected to the early Victorian dandy's focus on irresponsibility, idleness and material culture, but also to the Decadent and Aesthetic movements of the late nineteenth century. While the dandy's creed of languor mocked the late Victorian masculine ideal, associated with energy and duty, he also challenged the New Woman's socio-political aims.¹⁴ Dixon illustrates this in her novel by having Mary encounter a number of dandified men, including the nameless editor of the *Fan*, Mr Bosanquet-Barry; his young companion, Beaufort Flower; and even her would-be suitor, Vincent Hemming.

Yet Dixon also gestures to more positive versions of masculinity, even if they are not fully realized in the novel. Many New Women, especially eugenic feminists and social purists, imagined a New Man who could be on equal terms with the New Woman. The term "New Man" was, like the New Woman, a discursive response to the feminist movement of the late century, and it was adopted by both serious feminist commentators and anti-feminist satirical writers. For instance, the New Man of the popular press was often depicted as an effeminate character, and he thus drew attention to the masculine nature of the New Woman, compared to whom he appeared small, weak and ineffectual.¹⁵ Yet New Women of the period optimistically imagined a New Man who could be recognized by his pure mind and body; he would support the New Woman's goal of gender equality and would renegotiate traditional gender roles in partnership with the New Woman. Such a figure is largely absent from Dixon's novel, though the artist Perry Jackson comes closest to New Manhood. Jackson's status as an artist frees him from conventionality, though his growing commercial interests challenge his non-conformity. Grant Allen's mock New Woman novel, *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897), which rewrites *The Story of a Modern Woman*, follows the life of a woman writer struggling in London; unlike Mary, however, the heroine, Juliet Appleton, has a brief love affair with her boss, an ideal New Man.¹⁶ Dixon's decision to avoid such an idealized relationship for Mary demonstrates her commitment to rejecting traditional love plots in favour of a more realistic mode.

The doctor: "smooth, smug, successful"

The figure of Dr Dunlop Strange directly challenges the presumed ethics of male doctors in the late nineteenth century. The plot twist in which Alison

discovers that the sick, abandoned shop girl in the hospital is, in fact, Strange's former lover parallels the fraught relationship between the New Woman and the doctor in the last decades of the century. A key cultural event that registered their hostility was the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886, largely due to feminist interventions. The Acts were instituted in 1864, 1866 and 1869 by Parliament in an attempt to control the increase of venereal disease among the armed forces. They were motivated by public anxiety relating to both prostitution and the spread of venereal disease, and the first Act of 1864 was introduced in Parliament without debate.¹⁷ Eventually, the Acts covered 18 military districts throughout England, and they maintained that any woman suspected of being a prostitute could be forced to undergo medical examination. If surgeons found the prostitute to be infected, she could be confined to a lock hospital for three months; the maximum stay was increased to nine months in the 1869 Act.¹⁸

The Acts effectively provided state backing for the sexual double standard, thus legitimizing male promiscuity. The Royal Commission on the Contagious Diseases Acts states this double standard clearly:

[...] there is no comparison to be made between prostitutes and the men who consort with them. With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse.¹⁹

The women who sought to repeal the Acts, dubbed "social purists", argued that it was male, not female, sexuality that needed controlling, and that it was the male body which was responsible for social degeneration. The overturning of the Acts in 1886 therefore challenged long-held perceptions of male sexuality, and the campaign helped to consolidate the feminist activism that was to be associated with the New Woman. At the same time, New Women were also angry at the manner in which most doctors kept wives ignorant of their husbands' contracting of venereal disease from prostitutes. The repeal movement thus registered a widespread antagonism between feminists and the medical establishment, which was also articulated in the anti-vivisection campaign and in New Women's attempts to use birth control and to become doctors themselves. What was most at stake in these medico-moral movements was the New Woman's claim to control and safeguard her own body.

Dixon has Dr Dunlop Strange represent the medical profession's complicity with the sexual double standard and the objectification of women. Strange takes advantage of the male doctor's intimacy with his female patients:

The half-chaffing, half-caressing tone in which his patients addressed him (for Dunlop Strange was popular with great ladies); the *rôle*, three-parts confessor and one-fourth adorer, which he played with these beautiful victims of the vapours and megrims, appealed directly to his vanity. (158)

Throughout the novel, Strange is informally engaged to Alison Ives, who is intelligent and possesses an “utter absence of snobbery” and a “real desire to be in sympathy with her own sex” (70). Though Alison is an upper-class woman, she is perhaps more of a candidate for New Womanhood than Mary: she commits herself to aiding ignorant, poverty-stricken girls in London’s East End, going so far as “slumming” in Mile End Road and rescuing a young girl from prostitution in Whitechapel. Dr Strange recognizes that to marry this attractive, clever woman would be “the crowning act of a brilliantly successful career” (149). Less enthusiastically, Alison imagines that the life of a doctor’s wife will be a “busy, sensible” one and, she reasons, “in her world, one had to marry some day or other” (149). Though Alison is in no rush to marry, she recognizes that marriage will prove useful to her someday. “[I]t was absurd to suppose that old maids had any influence on people’s lives”, she thought, “and Power, to put it plainly, was what the modern woman craved” (92). Dixon contradicts her character’s views in “Why Women Are Ceasing to Marry” when she claims: “Formerly, girls married in order to gain their social liberty; now they more often remain single to bring about that desirable consummation”.²⁰ Though Mary Erle achieves questionable power as a single woman, Alison’s assumptions that women could only achieve power once married are largely contradicted in the novel. As she discovers the secrets of Strange’s past, she questions the happiness permitted in a union with such a man, and she begins to elevate the value of female solidarity above the marriage union.

Dixon draws explicit connections between Alison, Mary and the nameless lower-class woman abandoned by Strange, who, as Erin Williams writes, haunts the novel as “a spectre of women’s victimization and an insistent reminder of the precariousness of their economic situation”.²¹ Even before Alison meets Strange’s lover, labelled in the hospital as “Number Twenty-seven”, the novel sets up the theme of solidarity and connectedness between women (151). Perry Jackson’s painting, *Two Sisters*, offers a striking visual example of the interconnectedness of women. It depicts two young women in Trafalgar Square, one, a “woman of superhuman beauty wrapped in a threadbare shawl”, huddles in the cold; the other, “painted, bedizened, supercilious”, passes by in a brougham (127). In addition to the connectedness of women, then, the painting gestures to the vulnerability of women’s lives, implying that the supercilious woman in the carriage could one day be left alone and desolate. Though the women in the painting do not meet, Mary actually encounters “Number Twenty-seven” in the park twice before seeing

her in the hospital, and this woman functions as Mary's double, waiting for her lover just as Mary waits for Vincent to return from his travels.

Dixon's method of connecting her female characters through their similar struggles and regardless of their class reaches its climax when Alison meets "Number Twenty-seven". When Strange takes Mary and Alison on a tour of the hospital, they encounter a girl with "rapid consumption" (151). The nurse informs them that the young woman tried to commit suicide by jumping into the canal, only to be fished out by the police. When the girl turns over, Mary recognizes her as the young woman from the park, and Strange recognizes her as a girl who was fond of him, "but who had grown so bad-tempered and suspicious that he had been obliged to break off all relations with her" (152). This "unsightly corpse [...] of his dead pleasure" recognizes him and laughs coarsely (152). Though Strange attempts to deflate the moment by exclaiming, "Poor creature! She mistakes me for someone else", Alison intuitively understands their relationship, and she comes back the next day to learn the girl's story (152). Later, she informs Strange at a dinner party at her home that she has discovered his secret. When she tells him that she has been visiting "Number Twenty-seven", he tells her: "Dear Miss Alison, those are terrible cases. They are cankerous evils, eating away the very life of our social system" (159). In placing blame upon the sickly woman, Strange echoes the language of the Contagious Diseases Acts. When he claims that he finds such a subject "painful to discuss with young ladies", Alison quickly retorts: "I am not a 'young lady'. I am only a woman, taking a great deal of interest in others of my own sex" (160). Though her social sphere encourages her to ignore women like "Number Twenty-seven", Alison refuses to do so. Her allegiance thus shifts quickly from Strange to the young woman. As soon as Alison reveals that she knows the story of his past, Strange recognizes that his relationship with her is over, for she "was not one of those girls who have infinite complaisance for a possible husband" (161).

Like the campaigners who worked to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, Dixon reverses the language of contamination, showing how Strange, and not his former lover, is a "cankorous evil" and even a degenerate body. In their representations of deviant masculinity, New Woman novelists frequently depicted degenerate subjects as texts to be read, as displaying the character of their minds on their bodies. In her short story "The World's Slow Stain" (1895), Dixon describes the character Gilbert Vincent in this manner, explaining that when he smiled, "people had a brief vision of unclean things".²² In *The Story of a Modern Woman*, Strange has a "perpetual pucker just between his eyes; those eyes, [Mary] noticed, spoilt his face; they were small and somewhat shifty" (92). Later in the novel, Mary watches Strange with his new lover: as he looks at Lady Blaythewaite, "with a long gaze which took in every detail of her radiant health and beauty, he slipped his nervous, sinewy

fingers round her wrist" (176). In contrast to his lover's "radiant health", Strange's oddly excited, fibrous hands suggest a future contamination of her healthy body. Indeed, Dixon earlier suggests that Strange metaphorically spreads his contagion to Alison. As Emma Liggins argues, Alison seems to sicken and die "from the very *knowledge* that Dr. Strange had seduced and abandoned 'Number 27'".²³ Immediately after witnessing the encounter between Strange and "Number Twenty-seven", Alison feels "a curious kind of nausea", which she imagines to be "the air of the ward" (152). Liggins claims that her waiting outside is what actually sickens Alison, while Steve Farmer assumes that Alison contracts consumption from the dying girl.²⁴ Yet the very ambiguity behind Alison's death only reinforces Strange's apparent responsibility. Strange's past deviance seems to kill his fiancée, even in the absence of a sexual encounter (152). Dixon here is committed less to detailing accurate medical facts than she is to demonstrating a moral conflict between the doctor and the modern woman. In an 1894 interview, Dixon explained that she wished *The Story of a Modern Woman* to show

[...] how hardly our social laws press on women, how, in fact, it is too often the woman who is made, as it were, the moral scapegoat, and who is sent out into the wilderness to expiate the sins of man.²⁵

The *Critic's* insistence that the men in the novel are "the scapegoat[s] for all that is evil in life" thus emerges not as a result of Dixon's critical stance on all men, but as her attempt to reverse, and thus call attention to, the cultural practice of female scapegoating.

Throughout the novel, Dixon avoids the common mid-century convention in which deviant characters meet a bad end, and the immoral men in the novel remain in society, thus commenting on society's complicity with the sexual double standard and the doctor's powerful social authority. Audaciously, Strange appears at a party at Alison's mother's home five years after her death. Lady Jane greets him kindly, not knowing his culpability in her daughter's death nor Alison's angry rejection of his affections. Rather ominously, Lady Jane introduces him to her niece Victoria, "[p]resented to-day, and so devoted to society" (176). Mary records his entrance with resentment:

And the face of the fashionable doctor, smooth, smug, successful, was seen here and there chatting in the crowd. If the mouth was still hard, the smile was more insinuating than ever. A voluptuous feminine atmosphere surrounded him as he moved about. Pretty women bent forward to whisper, meeting his eyes with an intimate look, or laying detaining, half-caressing fingers on his arm. He bent down, with the familiar air of a man who is accustomed to the intimacies of the consulting room. All of these

charming ladies had been, were now, or would be, his patients. His reputation had grown apace in the last five years; no one could have the megrims in Belgravia or Mayfair without consulting Sir Dunlop Strange. (176)

Strange thus suffers nothing after ruining the lives of two women. He is free to continue as a doctor, and as a “smooth, smug, [and] successful” man in the upper classes of society. By making his social acquaintances and his patients one in the same, Dixon further connects the doctor’s irresponsible treatment of women in both public and private realms; with Strange’s presence, the “intimacies of the consulting room” thus contaminate the drawing room.

The degenerate dandy

The dandy figures constitute the other deviant men in the novel, and though they are not as overtly threatening as the doctors, they similarly challenge the New Woman’s autonomy. The late nineteenth-century dandy combined the earlier dandy’s focus on apathy and material culture with a relationship to the Decadent and Aesthetic movements of the *fin de siècle*. New Women often situated the decadent dandy as a figure opposed to late-century feminists in terms of their respective social and literary values. Sarah Grand, for instance, contrasts the dandy-aesthete’s adoption of “art for art’s sake” with the New Woman’s socially elevating “art for man’s sake” in *The Beth Book* (1897).²⁶ In both *The Beth Book* and *The Story of a Modern Woman*, the dandy also emerges as an unlikely lover for the New Woman.

Dixon was friends with a number of famous late-century dandies, such as Oscar Wilde and Max Beerbohm, the well-known caricaturist. Dixon records in her memoirs that “[Wilde] had not an engaging personality, being too much occupied with his own personal appearance and his carefully prepared paradoxes”.²⁷ Dixon’s description of Beerbohm is more complimentary, though again focuses on his personal appearance: “Max had beautiful manners, long, curling eye lashes, the most marvellous clothes, and a habit of offering subtle compliments to women”.²⁸ She humorously describes his influential trendsetting:

Max was a dandy of such importance as to be able to set the fashion among the young bloods. [...] When he first tucked a brightly-coloured silk handkerchief into his coat pocket, so that a tiny corner was visible, Pall Mall was astounded, but followed suit.²⁹

Dixon clearly draws from such acquaintances in her creation of the silly Bosanquet-Barry and his young companion Beaufort Flower, or “Beaufy”, in *The Story of a Modern Woman*. Bosanquet-Barry is a thinly veiled version of Wilde and, as Margaret Stetz notes, Beaufy appears to represent Wilde’s lover Lord Alfred Douglas, nicknamed Bosie.³⁰ A Wilde-like figure also turns up later in the novel as the editor of the *Fan*, a magazine modelled after Wilde’s *The Woman’s World*, to which Dixon contributed.³¹ All three men are defined by fashion, flirtation and constant, often vindictive, gossip. But two of the men also hold powerful positions as editors of periodicals. With these positions they dictate the kind of work women like Mary can do, such as when the editor of the *Fan* tells Mary that all he needs from her is “a really good society article. Only about smart people, don’t you know” (111–12). Thus, Mary reluctantly, though with good humour, engages in the world of gossip along with Bosanquet-Barry and Beaufy. Though these men are cruel gossipers, their characterizations remain rather ridiculous. The dandy takes a more serious cast, however, in Mary’s fiancé, Vincent Hemming.

Despite the homosexual overtones of the dandy, evinced in all three characters mentioned above, he emerges as a threatening seducer of women in the character of Hemming. Lisa Hamilton has argued that a number of New Woman writers imagined a literary trajectory for the decadent male, placing him as “the moral and philosophical heir of the eighteenth-century libertine”, and identifying such men not as “wild” but as “degenerate”.³² Dixon thus maps the dandy’s sexual avant-gardism onto a heterosexual romance narrative in which he, like the doctor figure, becomes a modern version of the eighteenth-century rake. Yet since Dixon expressed her desire to modify “mid-Victorian novels”, her literary revisions apply even more forcefully to mid-century embodiments of the eighteenth-century rake, such as characters like Dickens’s Steerforth.³³ In her novel, the dandy is an example of dangerous manhood, but also one of weakness and failure. Like Strange, Hemming is unable to rid himself of imposture and pretence, both in terms of his sexual behaviour and his professional career.

Hemming is not a decadent dandy in the manner of Bosanquet-Barry,³⁴ but Dixon emphasizes his manicured appearance, his attraction to wealthy society and his falsity, all qualities that link him to other negative portrayals of dandies. Gazing at his picture, Mary notes “his intellectual forehead, his impotent mouth, and the slight frown which he sometimes affected” (98; my emphasis). Later, she recalls that he is “like one of those men whose rather pompous manner surrounds them like a suit of armour” (182). Like Strange, Hemming considers himself an expert on women. Immediately after he surprises Mary with a marriage proposal, he leaves for a research trip for his book on the Woman Question. The narrator belittles Hemming’s interest in “the enfranchisement of women” by suggesting that it is merely a social pose:

"It was a subject on which he was persuasively eloquent. It was quite pretty, ladies always thought, to hear him talk of his dreams, his sacrifices" (77). Despite her love for Hemming, Mary immediately regrets accepting his proposal: "His hands, which held her two wrists as they stood there gazing at each other, felt like links of iron" (82). Her engagement to Hemming, as well as his subsequent voyage, places Mary in a subservient position, as she anticipates here. Their relationship consists of Mary anxiously waiting for Hemming's letters and for his eventual return. Hemming's distant behaviour once back in London foreshadows his abandonment of Mary. He meets a woman whose wealthy manufacturing family will further his political career and so he chooses Violet Higgins over the struggling modern woman. His proposal to Mary, then, like much of his behaviour, lacks sincerity, and his penchant for affectation also affects his relationship with his future wife.

Hemming's abandonment of Mary for Violet signals the dandy's attraction to privilege and social status. The Higginses essentially offer up their daughter, complete with "a considerable fortune", to Vincent (125). And though he is not attracted to her—he describes her as "a young lady with beady eyes, a high colour, and a complete absence of chin" (125)—he courts her nonetheless. Notably, his attraction to politics does not accompany authentic political or reformist aspirations, but a political career offers him a higher rung on the social ladder. Valerie Fehlbbaum suggests that the unknowing Violet, who is "sold" into a loveless marriage, could in fact "be the heroine of another New Woman novel", but Dixon is rather ambivalent in her treatment of Hemming's wife.³⁵ When Mary spots Violet at the opera before the marriage, she takes in her competition's "underbred face, with its beady eyes and fretful mouth, her over-trimmed, provincial clothes, and her uneasy attitude" (140). Mary assumes that such a woman will not meet Hemming's "fastidious tastes" (140). In this description of Violet's physical deficiencies, Mary's (and perhaps Dixon's) class biases are revealed. In fact, other characters in the novel, such as Lady Jane, openly snub Violet, inviting only Hemming to their parties. Dixon's message is that in picking Violet, Hemming has chosen incorrectly and he is punished for his selfish and misplaced ambitions.

Yet just as he discarded Mary, Hemming longs to leave his wife. His position as a dandy is important here, as male aesthetes were criticized by late Victorian feminists for their treatment of women as "mere texts to be interpreted, circulated, consumed, and discarded".³⁶ Dixon was aware of such concerns and elsewhere gestures to the dangers of the dandy's desire to objectify women. Again, in "The World's Slow Stain", for instance, playwright Gilbert Vincent ponders the character of his friend Adela Buller and surmises: "What excellent 'copy' she would make; what a capital *type* she would be on the stage. [...] Really, he must make an exhaustive study of Adela".³⁷ Hemming, too, makes a "study" of women: rather than engaging

empathetically with Mary in London, he leaves England to study the Woman Question. When he makes her a proposal a second time, Mary comes with the knowledge of Hemming's manipulative tendencies, and she, like Alison, chooses female solidarity over a fraught relationship. Dixon's depiction of this scene emphasizes Mary's great effort to reach a decision, and she thus foregrounds the New Woman's struggle between feminist politics and heterosexual passion, or what Mary calls "the mysterious, inexorable bond of the flesh" (182). When Hemming tells her that he is dreadfully unhappy with his wife and child, Mary cannot help but feel triumphant. Yet his proposal warns of future subjection: he tells her "you are capable of being a true woman, of giving up something for the man you love. [...] You would inspire me to noble things" (183). Mary's refusal comes less from her uneasiness with Hemming's arrogance than from the promise she has made to Alison to "never do anything to hurt another woman" (164). She tells Hemming: "I can't, I won't deliberately injure another woman. Think how she would suffer! Oh, the torture of women's lives—the helplessness, the impotence, the emptiness!" (184). In a reversal of their previous situation, Mary then sneaks away from the apartment, leaving Hemming unknowingly waiting for her. Mary rejects the dandy's treatment of women and the helplessness that results from such manipulation. Dixon implies that the dandy is only interested in treating the New Woman as an object or text to be kept at a distance, and the dandy-aesthete thus cannot be the New Man.

The (not so) New Man and the romance ending

New Woman writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries frequently imagined what the New Man could or should be like. For instance, Olive Schreiner, in *Woman and Labour* (1911), suggests that "[s]ide by side with the New Woman [...] stands the New Man, anxious to possess her only on the terms she offers".³⁸ She argues that the ideal of this New Man departs "strongly from that of his forefathers in the direction of finding in woman active companionship and co-operation rather than passive submission".³⁹ Though the "under-sized, drab-faced young man of about thirty" (86) that is Perry Jackson may not be the most obvious candidate for New Manhood in the novel, he in fact comes closest to meeting this ideal of a man seeking out "active companionship and co-operation" in woman. He is also, like many potential New Men, an artist. Like the New Woman, herself typically an artist or writer, the New Man-artist is able to think self-reflectively about Victorian gender codes and social mores, and he often lives at the periphery of society. In Amy Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), a New Woman novel unusual for its conciliatory romance ending, one of the central female characters marries

the artist who works across the street; she continues to work as a photographer, while her New Man husband also continues his artistic practices. In Grand's *The Beth Book*, she offers a less concrete union between Beth and the painter Arthur Brock, as he rides towards her as "the Knight of her long winter vigil" at the end of the novel.⁴⁰ Beth loves him, but since she cannot obtain a divorce, the status of their future relationship remains unclear. Nonetheless, Grand implies that an artist, and particularly one who has also worked hard to earn a living, is an appropriate match for the intelligent, determined New Woman.

In *The Story of a Modern Woman*, Mary meets Perry Jackson at the Central London School of Art, where they are both students. Early in the novel, Jackson is described as "good-nature itself" (86) and he encourages Mary in her painting. Mary likes him, in part, because he does not represent any kind of "type": "To Mary, Mr. Jackson was so frankly, so completely himself, representing such a completely unknown, unguessed-at type, that he ended by amusing her" (86). He seems, at this stage in their friendship, completely opposed to the dandy: he lacks pretence and falsity, and literally works side by side with Mary. Mary can see the good in him, and seems to contrast him positively with Vincent: "Perry with his ridiculous manners, his good heart, his stubborn determination to get on, and his curiously keen knowledge of the public; Vincent with his smooth, charming phrases, his good looks, his vacillating nature" (133). Despite Jackson's positive qualities, he becomes distanced from the ideal of the New Man as the novel progresses and he rises to celebrity status by painting pictures that the public desires.

Even once he has achieved a degree of fame, Mary remains enamoured with Jackson's frankness. He admits that it is "all rot about encouraging talent. What fetches the public is a long price" (128). And when Mary presses him to explain the "Message" behind his work, which depicts flowers and beautiful women, he admits truthfully: "All I want to do is make the thing pay" (135). While "there was a fund of frankness and kindliness under Mr. Perry Jackson's somewhat unattractive manner that was impossible to resist" (131), his desire to simply "make the thing pay" shows that he is not a suitable mate for the New Woman artist. That is, his commercial values are opposed to the New Woman's search for an authentic aesthetic mode, one distinct, as Lyn Pykett argues, from stylized decadence and the marketplace.⁴¹ Jackson also becomes more dandyish with his financial success, embodying an elitist artificiality. When Mary sees him after he has become a member of the Royal Academy, she notices "with amused surprise, that he was dressed in the height of fashion, and wore a pink carnation in his buttonhole" (127). Further, Mary does not love Perry Jackson. Like Hemming later in the novel, Jackson proposes to her and she refuses. While Hemming represents the type of man not suited for the modern woman but whom Mary loves, Jackson is, conversely, the type of man

who might work alongside the modern woman but whom Mary does not desire. These contrasts set up the modern woman's struggle between feminist ideals and heterosexual passion. Mary admits to Jackson that she is in love with someone else, and they part awkwardly. He had hoped to marry her and share his newfound wealth: "He would like to have saved her from the struggle of the woman who works, the fret and the fever, the dreary fight for existence" (136). Dixon shows how Mary must instead save herself and continue the struggle, and a union between a New Woman and possible New Man is denied.

Dixon's desire to represent modern life truthfully is what, in part, drives her to avoid the traditional romantic ending for Mary. Earlier in the novel, when Mary talks to her editor about the novel she would like to write, she is met with resistance. He complains: "The British public doesn't expect [novels] to be like life. [...] I should suggest a thoroughly happy ending. The public like happy endings" (147).⁴² In an 1899 article, Dixon wrote:

It seems tolerably certain that whatever the novel of the next century is about, it will not concern itself exclusively with the gentle art of angling for husbands. Marriage as the end of everything does not appeal to our modern novelist, and the love-story pure and simple would seem to have gone clean out of fashion.⁴³

Though *The Story of a Modern Woman* is a love story of sorts, the relationship Dixon anticipates for Mary is that between her and her writing. Ultimately, then, Dixon is more interested in representing an authentic New Woman narrative rather than in imagining the compromises that would accord with a relationship between the New Man and New Woman.

In "The Modern Young Man" (1898), Sarah Grand states that women "are responsible for the subtle change which is already apparent in the views of society on the subject of what a man should be; by creating the demand for a higher type, they are ensuring the production of one".⁴⁴ That is, Grand imagined that by writing the fictional New Man and discussing this figure in her non-fiction writing, she—and other New Woman writers—would eventually see such a man emerge within society. Such correlation between fiction and concrete social change was a keynote of New Woman writing. In *The Story of a Modern Woman*, Dixon is less committed to imagining a man of the future than she is to identifying and critiquing the male figures who challenge the New Woman's ideals and pursuits. For Dixon, male doctors and dandies were figures who posed a very real threat to women's autonomy. Her choice to allow such types to continue functioning—and even flourishing—in her fictional London society shows her desire to avoid pat fictional outcomes.

Instead, Dixon shows the impact of the sexual double standard still present at the end of the nineteenth century.

Notes

- 1 Rev. of *The Story of a Modern Woman*, by Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Times* 30 June 1894: 19; rpt. in Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman*, ed. Steve Farmer (1894; Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2004) 195–96 (196).
- 2 Rev. of *The Story of a Modern Woman*, by Ella Hepworth Dixon, *Critic* 681 (9 Mar. 1895): 178.
- 3 “Emancipated Fiction,” *Lady’s Pictorial* 13 Oct. 1894: 534.
- 4 Dixon, *Modern Woman* 82. Further references will be provided parenthetically in the text.
- 5 For more on Mary and Alison’s status as New Women, and Dixon’s own somewhat conflicted relationship to that term, see Valerie Fehlbau, *Ella Hepworth Dixon: The Story of a Modern Woman* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) esp. ch. 2 and 5.
- 6 Ella Hepworth Dixon, “Why Women Are Ceasing to Marry,” *Humanitarian* 14 (1899): 391–96; rpt. in Dixon, *Modern Woman* 260–66 (261).
- 7 Dixon, “Why Women” 261.
- 8 For more on this, see Tabitha Sparks, *The Doctor in the Victorian Novel: Family Practices* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009) esp. ch. 5 and 6, and Emma Liggins, “Writing against the ‘Husband-Fiend’: Syphilis and Male Sexual Vice in the New Woman Novel,” *Women’s Writing* 7.2 (2000): 175–95.
- 9 Sarah Grand, *Sex, Social Purity and Sarah Grand*, ed. Ann Heilmann and Stephanie Forward, 4 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2000) 2: 41.
- 10 Liggins 175.
- 11 For example, the day after the second Wilde trial, *Punch*’s “Angry Old Buffer” wrote a satirical ballad against “Sexomania” that expressed the concerns of many: “a new fear in my bosom vexes; / Tomorrow there may be no sexes! / Unless, as end to all the pother, / Each one in fact becomes the other”. “Angry Old Buffer,” “Sexomania,” *Punch* 27 Apr. 1895: 203.
- 12 Regenia Gagnier, “Victorian *Fin de Siècle* and Decadence,” *The New Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 30–50 (32).
- 13 Ellen Moers, *The Dandy, Brummell to Beerbohm* (London: Secker, 1960) 287.
- 14 Gagnier 34.
- 15 Barbara Tilley, “New Men?: Exploring Constructions of Masculinity in Late Nineteenth-Century New Woman Novels,” diss., U of Florida, 2002, 3. For example, “The New Man (A Fragment from the Romance of the Near Future)”, which appeared in *Punch* in 1894, is a melodramatic story of a husband waiting at home with dinner while his wife enjoys herself in society.

- The vignette ends with the emotional husband "bursting into tears". *Punch* 6 Oct. 1894: 167.
- 16 I label *The Type-Writer Girl* a "mock" New Woman novel for its satirical narrative style. Labelling Allen a New Woman author is problematic as his insistence that women could only find true fulfilment through motherhood distanced him from most New Women. The novel playfully utilizes New Woman conventions and Allen even adopts the female pseudonym Olive Pratt Rayner, but, for the most part, it lacks the serious socio-political aims of conventional New Woman novels. For more on this, see Vanessa Warne and Colette Colligan, "The Man Who Wrote a New Woman Novel: Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* and the Gendering of New Woman Authorship," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33.1 (2005): 21–46.
 - 17 Paul McHugh, *Prostitution and Victorian Social Reform* (London: Croom, 1980) 37. As McHugh relates, they were passed with a degree of secrecy: "Introduced in a thin house, late at night, a government measure with a title deceptively similar to an act dealing with veterinary rather than venereal disease, the Bill passed silently through both houses, receiving the royal assent on 29 July without a word being said about it" (37).
 - 18 Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 76, 86.
 - 19 Qtd. in Teresa Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998) 166.
 - 20 Dixon, "Why Women" 263.
 - 21 Erin Williams, "Female Celibacy in the Fiction of Gissing and Dixon: The Silent Strike of the Suburbanites," *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 45.3 (2002): 259–79 (276).
 - 22 Ella Hepworth Dixon, "The World's Slow Stain," *World* 21 Nov. 1895: 59–61 (59).
 - 23 Liggins 185.
 - 24 Steve Farmer, introduction, Dixon, *Modern Woman* 9–35 (32).
 - 25 W.T. Stead, "The Novel of the Modern Woman," *Review of Reviews* 10 (1894): 64–74 (71).
 - 26 Sarah Grand, *The Beth Book* (1897; New York: Dial, 1980) 358.
 - 27 Ella Hepworth Dixon, "As I Knew Them": *Sketches of People I Have Met on the Way* (London: Hutchinson, 1930) 34.
 - 28 Dixon, "As I Knew Them" 250.
 - 29 Dixon, "As I Knew Them" 250.
 - 30 Margaret D. Stetz, "The Bi-Social Oscar Wilde and 'Modern' Women," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 55.4 (2001): 515–37 (517).
 - 31 The *Fan* editor tells Mary: "I want it to be quite the smartest thing out, and a real authority on dress and fashion. As to the dress part, I'm not afraid of that. I do it all myself" (Dixon, *Modern Woman* 111). Wilde also appears in Dixon's novella *My Flirtations* (1893; Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2004) in the character of Val Redmond.

- 32 Lisa Hamilton, "New Women and 'Old' Men: Gendering Degeneration," *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999) 62–80 (70, 72).
- 33 Dixon, "Why Women" 261.
- 34 Hemming is not involved in the Aesthetic or Decadent movements. In fact, he preaches "the necessity of maintaining a high ethical standard, and he always waxed exceedingly wroth over the literary excesses of MM. Zola and de Goncourt, and thanked heaven, so to speak, that those eminent pioneers of Realism did not belong to the Anglo-Saxon family" (77–78). As with his support of the Woman Question, however, Hemming's resistance to such literature seems merely a social pretence.
- 35 Fehlbaum 135.
- 36 Margaret D. Stetz, "Debating Aestheticism from a Feminist Perspective," Schaffer and Psomiades 25–43 (31).
- 37 Dixon, "Slow Stain" 59.
- 38 Olive Schreiner, *Woman and Labour* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911) 272.
- 39 Schreiner 256.
- 40 Grand, *Beth Book* 527.
- 41 Lyn Pykett, "Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Representations of the Female Artist in the New Woman Fiction of the 1890s," *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. Nicola Diane Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 135–50 (145).
- 42 Ironically, what the editor rejects, in addition to the ending, is an indecent proposal of the kind Mary will receive from Hemming a few pages later: "Why, there's a young man making love to his friend's wife. I can't put that sort of thing in my paper. The public won't stand it, dear girl" (Dixon, *Modern Woman* 146).
- 43 Qtd. in Fehlbaum 35.
- 44 Sarah Grand, "The Modern Young Man," *Temple Magazine* 2 (Sept. 1898): 883–86; rpt. in Heilmann and Forward 1: 58–63 (60).

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