

The “New Fallen Woman” in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*

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Inception

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Abstract

In this essay I present the new concept of “The New Fallen Woman,” which merges the Victorian notions of “The New Woman” and “The Fallen Woman”. I analyze Rhoda Nunn and Monica Widdowson, characters in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*, and especially focus on various examples of their supposed “New Woman” and “Fallen Woman” sides. By examining Nunn and Widdowson, my essay questions the validity of these Victorian Era social categories. “The New Fallen Woman,” my interpretation of the way these characters are represented, is a new and productive way of understanding how Gissing represents women in *The Odd Women*. “The New Fallen Woman,” I suggest, helps to promote the idea that there is a positivity found within categories which can otherwise, especially in contemporary Victorian criticism, be deemed negative.

Introduction

George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893) presents a new way of looking at both the categories of the “New Woman” and the “Fallen Woman.” This essay demonstrates how these categories merge into “The New Fallen Woman” by looking at two characters: Rhoda Nunn

and Monica Widdowson. Rhoda's beliefs as a "New Woman" and her relationship with Everard Barfoot lead to her "Fallen Woman" status, while Monica's independence within her marriage and the anxiety which surrounds her husband and their relationship contributes to her characterization as a "Fallen Woman." Both the "New Woman" and "Fallen Woman" status separately show the differences between Rhoda and Monica. In the end, through the interaction between the characters, the two archetypes merge together to create the new category of "The New Fallen Woman" through learning how to release the reins, accept change and grow.

Section I: The Fallen Woman, The New Woman and The Woman Question

The "Fallen Woman" was a concept used in Victorian society to describe a young girl who has "fallen" from her virtue; or, as Gail Cunningham writes in *The New Woman and The Victorian Novel*, "The fallen woman was a stain on society" (21). This depiction of the "fallen" is disdainful ("a stain"), though she is not to be confused with the prostitute, even if they were "fallen" too. John Reed, for example, writes that, "[t]he prostitute, or the fallen woman were not necessarily one and the same, though most popular literature tended to equate the loss of virtue with moral corruption" (59). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the "Fallen Woman," for the Victorians, was, "[a] woman who has lost her chastity, honour, or standing, or who has become morally degenerate; (sometimes) a prostitute" (*OED*). But this definition does not quite fit into the idea that Gissing presents within his novel. Gissing associates the "Fallen Woman" in his novel with adultery and self-denial of love. He also presents another type of woman that, within the Victorian Era, was part of a radical and empowering movement: The "New Woman."

The category of the "New Woman" is defined by many characteristics. Lynn Pykett writes in the foreword to *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*:

The New Woman was by turns...anti-maternal, or a racial supermother; she was male-identified, or manhating and/or man-eating...she was anti-domestic, or she sought to make domestic values prevail; she was radical, socialist or revolutionary, or she was reactionary and conservative, she was the agent of social and/racial regeneration, or a symptom and agent of decline. (xii)

In other words, the category of the “New Woman” covers many things, though as Sally Ledger points out in her book *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (1997), “one of the defining features of the dominant discourse on the New Woman at the *fin de siècle* was the supposition that the New Woman posed a threat to the institution of marriage” (11). In other words, there is no one type of “New Woman”, but she comes in many forms.

The “New Woman” and “Fallen Woman” were contemporary ways of understanding types of women in the 1890s. The Broadview edition of *The Odd Women* provides a series of appendices that offer discussions of the “New Woman” which were published around the same time as Gissing’s novel. For instance, in Mona Caird’s “Character Note: The New Woman” (1894), she describes the “New Woman”: she is “young, of course. She looks older than she really is. And she calls herself a woman” (377). Caird goes on to note how this female figure’s demeanor, the way this woman dresses, and her attitude: “...are strong and independent, indicative of a self-reliant spirit.” (378). Similar to Caird, Nat Arling (1898) in “What is the role of the ‘New Woman?’” writes that:

[‘New Women’] are the best women who take up professions and claim loudest the vote...They form the real basis of the ‘new woman’ ennobling their smallest duties with understanding, calling nothing small, indeed, that can benefit in the slightest degree the individual or race. (381)

For Arling the “New Woman” is strong, independent and capable of doing anything that any man can do. In addition, the “New Woman”

has a passion which allows her to go the extra mile and to fight for what she believes.

In her introduction to *The Odd Women*, Arlene Young notes that the importance of Gissing's novel is its "continuing relevance of the issues of rights and wrongs of women" (9). Jacob Korg, in his essay "The Woman Question," says that "[Gissing] felt the emancipation of women was an important phase of the general struggle for liberty" (185). By creating characters who embody the "New Woman" and "Fallen Woman" types, Gissing's novels, especially *The Odd Women*, questioned the ways that contemporary critics understood women and their evolving place in Victorian society.

Section II: George Gissing and the Status of Women

George Gissing "was born in Wakefield, a small industrial city and agricultural centre...in the North of England, on 22 November 1857" (Young 10). Gissing is one of the lesser known late-Victorian authors. Young observes that "[Gissing] was never part of the mainstream, socially or intellectually, and was never, despite his brilliance and productivity, particularly successful as an author" (10).

In terms of the Woman Question, for Gissing, a "Fallen Woman" was part of his personal life. Young notes that his wife "Helen (Nell) Harrison... [was] a young prostitute," and Gissing was "determined to save her from degradation. In order to keep her off the streets, he gave her money...Gissing's efforts to rehabilitate Nell, however, did not result in her salvation, but led to his own degradation" (10-11). For Gissing, his "fall" was a result of trying to help his late wife financially. He ended up going to jail after being caught (11) and as a result moved to America to begin his career as an author (11); he later returned to England where he wrote most of his novels.

In relation to how this connects with the “Fallen Woman” and “New Woman” types in his novels, Gissing’s personal views on how women should be treated within played a role as well. Needless to say, some of his personal views were formed by his experience with his own wife. As Korg writes: “[Gissing] believed firmly that women were the intellectual and spiritual equals of men” (185). This is significant for the fact that in *The Odd Women*, the characters of Rhoda Nunn and Monica Widdowson portray both these types, but in a new, merged category that defies the contemporary understanding of women: “The New Fallen Woman.”

Section III: Rhoda Nunn, New and Fallen Woman

The Odd Women is about the journey of three sisters, Virginia, Alice and Monica Madden, who, after their father has passed away, face the challenge of maintaining their upper-class status. These sisters meet Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot, who run a school that helps girls to be more independent. The novel deals with the line between public and domestic spheres: within these two settings enters Edmund Widdowson, who courts Monica, and Everard Barfoot, who is the suitor to Rhoda. Throughout their encounters with these two men, both Rhoda and Monica experience their own “Fall” and redemption.

Rhoda and Monica are important because they are the ones who triumph over their circumstances and help to propel the idea of “The New Fallen Woman” forward. Gissing makes it evident that he is for the independence of women through the character of Rhoda Nunn, and the character development of Monica Madden. Thus, *The Odd Women*, and specifically the characters of Rhoda Nunn and Monica Madden, is a crucial text for situating Gissing’s writings in late-Victorian debates about the status of women.

Rhoda Nunn is characterized as a “New Woman” through her figurative martyrdom, her reimagined lifestyle in contrast to other

women and, most importantly, her divergent beliefs. Rhoda Nunn's figurative martyrdom is what most clearly characterizes her as a "New Woman." While martyrdom does not occur literally within the novel, Nunn's self-perception certainly suggests the stories of Christian martyrs and self-sacrifice.

Rhoda believes that women should be educated in all manner of skills. When Monica goes to visit Rhoda, both women engage in brief small talk, before Monica's curiosity gets the better of her, and she asks Rhoda what she does for a living: "'How shall I put it,' replied the other, smiling. 'To make women hard-hearted'" (63). Rhoda's belief in wanting women to be "hard-hearted" shows that she is powerful and an excellent leader for women. To have women be "hard-hearted" means to be unmarried, focusing on themselves and their work. Her excellence stems from not being "hard-hearted" herself but in giving women an education within her school. By improving the minds of women, she believes that society would be bettered.

Rhoda is characterized as a "New Woman" in the novel since, among other characteristics, she shares a different set of beliefs than those of her peers. Rhoda, for example, believes that women should have a proper education and not marry; in fact, she does not believe in marriage. When talking with Monica again, Rhoda says to her:

So many *odd* women—no making a pair with them. The pessimists call them useless, lost, fertile lives. I, naturally—being one of them myself—take another view. I look upon them as a great reserve. When one woman vanishes in matrimony, the reserve offers a substitute for the world's work. True, they are not all trained yet—far from it. I want to help in that—to train the reserve (64).

The way she says, "I look upon them as a great reserve..." (64) suggests that Rhoda is saying that she looks down upon married women, but this phrase also suggests she means the unmarried

women are in “reserve.” That is, they can be recruited and used to train so they have the skills necessary to become “The New Woman.” Rhoda’s statement to Monica shows that she believes that women should be educated and that it would better society. The term “odd” in this case is not just about the absence of partners for these women. Gissing plays on the double-meaning of the term, since Rhoda is also “odd,” as in unusual. Rhoda’s beliefs and even her character are “hard-hearted” and she is set in her ways; this is in contrast to other women and thus she is “odd.” Rhoda is disciplined when it comes to how she believes women should behave in the workplace. Thus, Rhoda wants to use the potential of the women who are “odd,” or, in other words, Rhoda’s way of stating that she wants to “help to train the reserve” (64), showcases her wanting to take the reins of the girls who are seen as “odd” and train them up to be “New Women,” i.e., to be independent and not conform to societal norms.

Mary Barefoot shares Rhoda’s beliefs about the potential of so-called “odd women,” but her methods are less severe. Mary is more sympathetic when they receive the letter about a certain Miss Royston who once worked for both Rhoda and Mary but left. In this scene, the women find out that Miss Royston has died as a result of suicide. Both Rhoda and Mary are clearly upset about the matter, yet their display of emotions differs. Mary expresses a more sympathetic approach to the news of Miss Royston’s demise, whereas Rhoda appears indifferent. When Rhoda talks of Miss Royston she says: “The girl’s nature was corrupted with sentimentality, like that of all but every woman who is intelligent enough to read what is called best fiction but not intelligent enough to understand vice” (82). In this quotation alone, we get a strong sense of Rhoda’s beliefs. Rhoda says to Mary that women should be educated in: “self-respect and self-restraint...” (80). Rhoda believes that women should work hard and do their job perfectly, no matter the cost; they should be like a martyr and sacrifice themselves for their work. The different reactions between the two

women also show just how un-sympathetic Rhoda is when she says to Mary: “I *felt* no compassion” (150 emphasis in original). To this, Mary replies:

No. You have hardened your heart with theory. Guard yourself, Rhoda! To work for women one must keep one’s womanhood. You are becoming – you are wandering as far from the true way—Oh, much further than Bella did! (150)

Mary exposes the enormous pressure that Rhoda has placed upon herself in order to maintain certain standards, some of which, Mary implies, are abstract from real situations and real women. Rhoda’s inflexible character eventually leads to her downfall.

Rhoda’s “New Woman” character also seems to hinder her ability to feel anything, especially romance, towards the potential suitor and Mary’s cousin, Everard Barfoot. In fact, Rhoda’s budding feelings for Everard lead her to view herself instead as a “Fallen Woman.” Their relationship is like a game of cat and mouse: neither one gives into the other.

Their relationship begins with Everard courting Rhoda and her toying with him. For example, in “Chapter VIII: Cousin Everard,” Rhoda and Mary discuss the latter’s cousin. As Mary talks about him, the narrator says that “Rhoda was listening with an amused smile” (108), which suggests that Rhoda is starting to think about Everard in a romantic way. However, it seems that Everard is more interested in Rhoda than she is in him. In their first interaction, he is tempted; the narrator says, “And this example of her sex had excited his curiosity in no common degree. His concern with her was purely intellectual...” (121). It is clear that Everard is drawn to Rhoda. However, it is Rhoda’s feelings towards him that remain uncertain. The narrator stresses: “...she had no sensual attraction for him, but he longed to see further into her mind...” (121). Clearly, Rhoda is not yet interested in the young man, but he is, and his desire for her is strong.

As the novel progresses, Rhoda's feelings for Everard become conflicted. In "Chapter XXV: The Fate of the Ideal," Rhoda waits for Everard to arrive on their planned vacation, as both have decided to vacation together as a means of clarifying and establishing their relationship. Rhoda's "New Woman" side emerges as she toys with the idea of rejecting the proposal which had been mentioned earlier in the novel (260). The narrator says: "Yes; she had enough power over him for that. But how would that affect his thought of her?" (260). In one sentence, Rhoda stands firm in her beliefs, yet afterward she is concerned about Everard's thoughts about her. Here she contradicts her beliefs which prompts the question: if Rhoda stands firm in her beliefs, should she be so concerned with what Everard thinks of her? Yet, this situation also illustrates the tension of being a "New Woman" (with respect to marriage and relationships) and questions her agency as a woman. Rhoda tries hard not to let her emotions get the better of her, especially when the narrator says: "In the afternoon she suffered from impatient expectancy" (261). At this point Rhoda's feelings are developing towards him, but this does not last, and in the end they part ways. Their separation leads Rhoda's feelings to go from conflicted to her spiralling out of control as she deals with the aftermath. It is through these conflicting emotions that her "Fallen Woman" status manifests itself most prominently.

Rhoda's characterization as a "Fallen Woman" not only comes from the relationship with Everard but also from their failure of the relationship. Specifically, it is the way that she handles the dissolution of their relationship which causes her to view herself as a "Fallen Woman." According to Nina Auerbach, "Fallen Women" are usually portrayed as "mute, enigmatic icon[s]" (29-30). In other words, the "Fallen Woman" is a silent, puzzling type. With this in mind, Rhoda does not quite fit this description; rather, she is the complete opposite in the way she handles the breakup with Everard and her "Fallen" side is shown. Rather than being "mute" as

Auerbach describes; Rhoda's "Falleness" is shown through the way she handles the end of their relationship.

Rhoda's "Fall" stems from her relationship with Everard, and specifically from the way that she handles the breakup. In "Chapter XXVII: The Reascent," the narrator describes Rhoda: "Her state of mind was that of the ascetic who has arrived at a morbid delight in self torture. She regarded the world with an intense bitterness and persuaded herself not only the thought of Everard Barefoot was hateful to her soul..." (284). In relation to Rhoda's "Falleness," I argue that her "Falleness" is sacrificial as Rhoda has never felt anything romantic towards anyone before. As a result of developing feelings for Everard, she punishes herself which is then tied closely with how she perceives herself as a figurative martyr. Her outlook on life at the moment is dull and she is hurt by the situation at hand; because of this, she makes herself into a "Fallen Woman."

Rhoda's state of mind because of the events at play cause her to act irrationally. She suspects that Everard and Monica have been together and, as the narrator explains, she is determined to throw herself into her work as a coping mechanism: "During the next week she threw herself with her energy upon her work, stifling repugnance with which at first it affected her, and seeming at length to recover old enthusiasm. This was the only way of salvation..." (285). The word "salvation," stresses Rhoda's emerging "Fallen" identity, since she is willing to do anything in order to keep her mind off of the issues with Everard. Indeed, she even goes as far as restricting her diet: "[she] ate only just enough to support life, rejecting wine and everything that was most agreeable to her palate" (285). The idea of food provides a way to see how she is punishing herself: as she rejects the pleasure of food, so too she rejects the potential pleasure of a relationship with Everard. Rhoda marks herself as a "Fallen Woman" because she feels she has sinned by allowing herself to fall for Everard and relinquish her "New Woman" beliefs.

Section IV: Monica Widdowson as New and Fallen Woman

Monica Widdowson is drastically different from Rhoda, and she is “New Woman,” but in a different way. Comtini suggests that there are different “experiments presented” in *The Odd Women*, especially experiments of a “domestic ideology” (532). The “domestic ideology” (532) comes from the notion of a traditional household during the Victorian period. The domestic sphere is thought to be, as Vaid explains, the domain of women: “the doctrine of separate spheres is analogous to the contemporary division of labour...and depends on the premise that women by nature are radically dissimilar to men” (WS-64). In other words, Vaid says that women and men are not alike, or “dissimilar.” I do not disagree with Vaid, as it is through the domestic sphere that we see Monica’s “New Woman” self-emerge, but it also poses conflict for both herself and her husband as a result of her “New Women” values.

Monica as a “New Woman” is fundamentally different from Rhoda because she is married to Mr. Widdowson. In “Chapter IV: Monica’s Majority,” Monica is still a single working girl who somewhat enjoys her work. When she meets Mr. Widdowson everything changes. Similar to Rhoda and Everard’s courtship, Mr. Widdowson and Monica begin casually seeing each other, they share a romantic date, and just as they are saying good-bye, he asks her how she is going to get home. Monica tells him, “By train—from York Road to Walworth Road” (72), and the narrator remarks that: “Widdowson cast a curious glance at her. One would have imagined that he found something to disapprove in this ready knowledge about the London transit” (72). Widdowson is uncomfortable with her ease of transportation, and, once they marry, the issue of her mobility becomes more apparent.

The marriage between Monica and Edmund Widdowson is toxic. Widdowson always tries to control what Monica does, whom she

goes out with, where she goes when she is out, and even what she reads. The domesticity of Monica's marriage with Widdowson is an issue because she still wants to remain independent, yet the anxiety that Widdowson feels with her freedom starts to cause problems. Comtini notes that Monica "hopes" to reform the ideologies her husband holds and adds that Monica does not agree with Widdowson's "gothic 'helpmate' of marriage" (532). In other words, Monica wishes for Widdowson to change his outlook on marriage.

In "Chapter XV: The Joys of Home," the "New Woman" inside Monica emerges when she leaves a party. Widdowson announces that they must go home, and Monica tells him that she does not want to. She tells him: "I should like to see Milly, but I'm afraid I can hardly take you there to call with me" (165). As they go back and forth Widdowson becomes increasingly annoyed with his wife. He makes "an angry gesture" (165) in response to Monica's rhetorical question: "Didn't I always used to be alone?" (165). This comment from Monica refers to her previous life before Widdowson. The domestic sphere that he holds her to, and that she resists, causes a great deal of anxiety for him. For Monica to tell her husband what she is doing, and not want him to accompany her creates a great deal of anxiety for Widdowson, who believes that Monica's place is to accompany him.

Widdowson's anxiety is prompted by the way he views marriage. He says: "I have begged you not to speak of that and why do you say what you know is disagreeable to me? You used to do all sorts of things that you never ought to have been obliged to do, and it's very painful to remember" (165). In other words, Widdowson is telling Monica not to talk about being independent and discuss her life before him. Furthermore, in saying this to Monica, Widdowson displays his controlling nature. He wants Monica to conform to his ways about how a marriage should be, yet Monica does not submit as befits her characterization as a "New Woman." His anxieties seem to increase as the narrator explains his thoughts: "...Never

once had it occurred to Widdowson that a wife remains an individual, with rights and obligations independent of her wifely condition..." (168). Even in the way he thinks, Widdowson has no idea of what it means to be a "New Woman." He even tells Monica: "Woman's sphere is the home, Monica" (168). She responds by merely pretending to listen to what he has to say. He thinks that she should remain in the home and not go to see her friends by herself or even have the freedom of doing so. The tension continues while they are away together because of the little things that Widdowson tries to control. For example, Monica pleads with him to go out (178-179). She puts her foot down so to speak when she says "...A woman ought to go about just as freely as a man. I don't think it's just. When I have done my work at home, I think I ought to be every bit as free as you are—every bit as free..." (179). Monica portrays herself as a "New Woman" in an authoritative way by telling her husband what she thinks and by reminding him that she is his equal.

Both Monica and Widdowson are unhappy in their marriage. The unhappiness does not merely occur in their interactions, it also trickles into their reading habits. In the midst of a fight between them, Widdowson writes a letter to Monica explaining his feelings about their relationship (212). This leads to the narrator explaining how the two try to reconcile, yet all is not as it seems. The narrator explains:

Monica found more attraction in books as her life grew more unhappy. Though with reluctance, Widdowson had consented to a subscription at Mudie's, and from the new catalogues she either chose for herself, necessarily at random, or by the advice of better-read people, such as she met at Mrs. Cosgrove's. What modern teaching was to be got from these volumes, her mind readily absorbed. She sought for opinions and arguments which were congenial to her mood of discontent, all but of revolt. (213)

The fact that it is Monica who is "more unhappy" in the marriage than Widdowson says quite a bit: Monica is in distress from the toxicity between Widdowson and herself. Although the two try to reconcile

their differences by finding common ground in reading (213), it is their way of sweeping things under the rug, as it were. Monica and Widdowson do not discuss the issue at hand, and instead Monica convinces Widdowson to buy the subscription to the circulating library, “a library of which the books are circulated among subscribers” (*OED*). The fact that Monica is more interested in books than her own husband suggests that the issues between them run deeper. The narrator even describes her searching for likeminded arguments that would further divide her from her husband: “...her mind readily absorbed. She sought for opinions and arguments which were congenial to her mood of discontent...” (213). The narrator describes how she prefers sticking her nose in a book rather than spending time with her husband. The breakdown of her relationship with her husband, and her desire for novelty foreshadows her “Fallenness.”

Monica’s “Fallen” side emerges because of her marital problems with Widdowson. According to Auerbach, the notion of the “Fallen Woman” “functions emblematically” (33); this type of the “Fallen Woman” represents bad marriage, or what Auerbach calls a “*memento mori* of a bad marriage” (33). It ties into the idea that Widdowson’s anxiety and her need for more freedom cause Monica’s “Fall.” In other words, Auerbach’s description of the “Fallen Woman” is significant because it links with Widdowson’s marital views. Widdowson perceives that his wife should wait on him hand and foot; she should not roam the streets by herself or visit friends unaccompanied. By saying that Monica is “difficult to manage,” Widdowson is stating that she is too easily changeable. In other words, Monica is the opposite of what he is trying to mold her into. For example, the narrator says: “It would not do to think like this. He was a man wedded to a woman very difficult to manage” (248), Monica is driven to her “Fall” because her husband perceives her as “difficult.” She is in a sense, a failure as a wife through his eyes.

The control that Widdowson feels he needs pushes Monica into the arms of a young man named Bevis. The relationship that Monica has with Bevis causes a lot of her “Falleness” to unfold, since she no longer loves her husband, and she knows that continuing the alleged affair is wrong. Monica tells Bevis: “...I am deceiving him—I have deceived him for a long time, pretending to be a faithful wife when I have often wished that he might die and release me...It is base and wicked to stay there—pretending—deceiving” (238-239). Monica admits her disloyalty towards her husband which both signals her as “Fallen” and contrasts with her identity as a “New Woman.” In other words, seeking sexual independence does not, for Monica, actually result in the independence that is so desired by a true “New Woman.” She knows she is being unfaithful towards her husband, which makes her “Fallen,” yet contrasts with her “New Woman” status. On one hand she remains married while simultaneously being unfaithful to her husband. This is also shown in the way she handles the repercussions of the accusations made against her by Widdowson.

The consequence of the “almost affair” between Monica and Bevis contributes to her “Falleness” because of her public reputation. Monica goes from being a well-respected woman to a disreputable one because of the affair. Widdowson calls Monica out: “‘Liar!’ Again burst from him. ‘Day after day you have lied to me. —Liar! Adulteress!’” (256). Widdowson tells her that he does not believe her when she tries to explain herself (256). He continues: “The prostitute in the street is sooner to be believed...” (256). This says a lot about how Widdowson views Monica. He does not view her as his wife, or someone he can trust, but he sees Monica as someone who is degraded and beneath him. This is significant for the fact that it leads into the next consequence of her as a “Fallen Woman.”

Although Widdowson rejects her, she continues to deceive not only her husband, but her sisters as well. In the same way Rhoda views herself as a “Fallen Woman” for falling in love, so does Monica for

being pregnant with Widdowson's child when she does not love him. The narrator says: "she saw herself as a wicked woman, in the eye of truth not less wicked than her husband declared her. A sinner stubborn in impenitence, defending herself by a paltry ambiguity that had all the evil of the direct lie..." (306). She knows that she must tell the truth but at the same time she does not think it will do any good (306), and this only adds to the tension in herself and those surrounding her.

In one way, Monica is "Fallen" because she lies to her sisters and husband about the pregnancy. Her sister, Alice, gets her to admit her deceit, stating: "Monica—You are deceiving us all. You are guilty" (308); yet, Monica does not conform to how her sister thinks of her. She stands firm in her belief that she is only guilty for lying towards Widdowson. In another way, however, her lying makes her "Fall" and ultimately results in her death after she gives birth to her child. As Auerbach notes, "the Fallen Woman must die at the end of her story" (35); indeed, this is a common pattern throughout "Fallen Women" narratives. In relation to Monica, the repercussions of her actions, specifically her "almost affair," and her deceit, are what cause her to become a "Fallen Woman."

Section V: The New Fallen Woman

The idea that both Rhoda and Monica are a new type of woman stems from their individual characterizations as "New Women" and "Fallen Women." Both archetypes of the "New Woman" and the "Fallen Woman" do not fit within what the late nineteenth-century deems normal, and therefore I propose the idea of a completely new category: "The New Fallen Woman." The "New" and "Fallen" women merge to portray a new idea, but this does not come without tension. For Monica, her "New Fallen Woman" status is a result of her independence and her deceit. She stands firm in her independence and does not let accusations stop her, yet she does admit to being guilty with her actions towards Widdowson and her lying about being

pregnant. Rhoda on the other hand is the more ideal “New Woman” with an aspect of the “Fallen Woman” because she self-identifies as a “Fallen Woman.” Rhoda creates her “New Fallen Woman” status in the way she represents herself through the course of her break-up with Everard, and in how she deals with the tensions in her relationship with Monica.

Their relationship with one another and how it changes them establishes the “New Fallen Woman” category. In “Chapter XXIX: Confession and Counsel,” tension runs back and forth between the categories because of how both Rhoda and Monica communicate. Rhoda is very reserved in the beginning, as the narrator recounts: “Rhoda waited, offering no help whatever, not even that of a look expressing interest” (310). As Rhoda’s apprehension mounts, Monica’s determination in explaining herself leads to Rhoda to remind her: “I haven’t asked for your confidence, remember” (311). But, Monica tells her, “No ... I am not shameless. I have suffered a great deal before I could bring myself to come here and tell you. —If you were more human —if you tried to believe” (311). This causes Rhoda to become annoyed, which then increases the tension as Monica becomes more and more panicked. When Monica says to Rhoda: “I will tell you everything, ’ ... ‘If no one else believes me, you at all events shall...” (313). Through this dialogue, the category of the “New Fallen Woman” is emphasized. This is shown in the way Monica goes to Rhoda (despite her annoyance) and seeks forgiveness. This further demonstrates that she is no longer “Fallen” yet no longer a “New Woman” either. The same may be said for Rhoda as well, who is both “fallen” and “New Woman” by the end of their interaction. Thus the “New Fallen Woman,” I suggest, more appropriately explains these characters.

The category of the “New Fallen Woman” changes the characterizations of both of the women, especially as they help each other. We may identify Monica as a “Fallen Woman,” in her way of dealing with her pregnancy, and a “New Woman” because of her

independence. Indeed, Rhoda explains to Monica that she is not alone in this, and, that there are plenty of women who have been in her situation. Monica therefore is a “New Fallen Woman” since she asks for help (a salvation aspect), but she also becomes stronger and knows she can be a mother (i.e., she is more independent and confident like a “New Woman”). In her interaction with Monica, Rhoda not only forgives her, but her forgiveness also helps herself with her “Fallen” side. She goes from being very reserved with Monica to gentle and more understanding. As Monica asks for Rhoda’s help (314), the change in Rhoda is seen as the narrator describes: “The voice was so gentle, though firm; so unlike what [Monica] had expected...” (314). Rhoda is both an independent advocate for women, but also aware, now, of the possibilities of “Fallen” women and the necessity to lessen her previous “hard-heartedness,” a lesson learned through her own self-identification as a “Fallen” woman.

Conclusion

The “New Fallen Woman” is a category that merges the concept of the “New Woman” and the “Fallen Woman” to display how the two identities become one. Both Rhoda Nunn and Monica Widdowson are characterized as “New Woman” and “Fallen Woman” archetypes through their relationships, and the beliefs they hold. However, this creates a new category that changes the way these roles are defined. I present the concept of “The New Fallen Woman” which moves beyond the Victorian dichotomy of “The New Woman” and “The Fallen Woman,” and prompts us to reconsider how Gissing represents women and their relationships in *The Odd Women*. “The New Fallen Woman” helps to promote the idea that there is a positivity found within categories, which can otherwise, especially in contemporary Victorian criticism, be deemed negative.

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