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Fanged Desire: the New Woman and the Monster

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<1>While visiting Bahía Blanca, Argentina in the 1830s, Charles Darwin encountered an unusual snake which he described as a “Trigonocephalus”: a cross between a viper and a rattlesnake. His response to the creature was one of disgust. In his journal, he wrote:

The extremity of the tail of this snake is terminated by a point, which is very slightly enlarged; and as the animal glides along, it constantly vibrates the last inch.[...] As often as the animal was irritated or surprised, its tail was shaken; and the vibrations were extremely rapid. Even as long as the body retained its irritability, a tendency to this habitual movement was evident.[...] The expression of this snake’s face was hideous and fierce; the pupil consisted of a vertical slit in a mottled and coppery iris; the jaws were broad at the base, and the nose terminated in a triangular projection. I do not think I ever saw any thing more ugly, excepting, perhaps, some of the vampire bats. I imagine this repulsive aspect originates from the features being placed in positions, with respect to each other, somewhat proportional to those of the human face; and thus we obtain a scale of hideousness. (97)

For Darwin, what gave the serpent its particular hideousness was its “human face.” The effect described here resembles what Freud would later term the “uncanny”; it is the *unheimlich* nature of the creature – its unfamiliar familiarity – that inspires simultaneous interest and repulsion. While Darwin recognizes its “fierce” vitality, he denounces the reptile as “hideous.”

<2>Darwin’s detailed description of the Trigonocephalus evokes more than the familiar features of the human face (arising from the body of a serpent), however. The particular language used by the scientist to describe this snake suggests human genitalia as well. The “vertical slit” of the iris and the “triangular projection” of the nose recall the female body while the vibrating tail with its “slightly enlarged” point suggest the male. Here the sense of the uncanny is evoked not only by the association of man with reptile but by an emblematic merging of male and female shapes. The snake’s opening mouth and triangular head rest upon a body that is cylindrical and decidedly phallic. For Darwin, the effect is “repulsive.”

<3>In addition to the plethora of snakes, birds, and beasts described in Darwin’s writings, ideal, “normal,” and “abnormal” human bodies became subjects of investigation during the nineteenth century. During this period, scientists and medical practitioners staged public and private explorations of the body in an effort to determine both the physical features of hermaphrodites and also to isolate, organize, and typify the various “types” of the living form.(1) Teratological texts like Walter L. Pyle’s *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine* (1897) contained copious descriptions of complex bodies – bodies with a shortage or excess of arms, legs, heads, and genitals.(2) At the same time that science encouraged this type of taxonomy, the general population was engrossed with the unusual bodies presented by entrepreneurs such as PT Barnum.(3) Barnum evoked both scientific and sensational discourse in his displays of women like Daisy and Violet Hilton (the conjoined twins), and Madame Clofullia, née Josephine Boisdechene (the bearded lady).(4) In turn, other individuals who were labeled “nondescripts” or “half men/half women” (the famous Julia Pastrana, for example) made up a significant proportion of the shows in popular London exhibition rooms. The construction of identity within such social and scientific narratives about bodily difference was generally influenced by a hierarchy that ascribed power, status, and privilege to the “normal” body.

<4>Amidst all this discourse and fifty years after the publication of Darwin’s journals, the curious pairing of male/female and human/serpent resurfaces, this time in New Woman fiction. Notably, however, the two New Woman texts examined here respond to such pairings in a way that is

vastly different from Darwin. For George Egerton and Sarah Grand, the figure of the man/woman human/serpent appears to evoke not disgust but “wonder” (“A Cross Line” 19). It is my argument that, like the hermaphrodites investigated by scientists, exhibited in sideshows, and present in both myth and nineteenth-century art, the fictional New Woman can be interpreted as a sort of intersexual phenomenon.⁽⁵⁾ Although her particular brand of Otherness is associated with snakes and thus shown to be highly disruptive, in many cases the disruptive potential of the New Woman may be equaled – or even excelled – by her erotic potential.

<5>As critics like Elaine Showalter have argued, the 1880s and 1890s were decades of social upheaval, a time when assumptions about sexual identity and behavior were questioned and, in some cases, discarded. As Michel Foucault has argued, “the techniques of power exercised over sex [did] not [obey] a principle of rigorous selection, but rather one of dissemination and implantation of polymorphous sexualities” (*History* 12). It was during this period that the fictional character of the New Woman emerged. She was envisioned as a self-directed subject, actively rejecting traditional feminine roles, and authors frequently constructed the fictional New Woman’s Otherness by describing her as the possessor of a dual nature. While she appeared assertive and vigorous in action and thought, authors often displaced or modified her gendered identity. In her study on the nature of femininity at the turn of the century, Lyn Pykett observes how the New Woman genre affected readers:

The New Woman challenged traditional gender boundaries in paradoxical ways. The mannish New Woman threatened such boundaries from one direction by quitting the sphere of the proper feminine, aping masculinity and becoming a new intermediate sex. On the other hand, these boundaries were also eroded by the New Woman’s hyperfemininity. The New Woman as hysteric threatened to invade and infect the whole of society with a degenerative femininity. (141)

Pykett argues that the cultural idea of the New Woman, representative of mannish and hyperfeminine “types” of women, was an emblem of “a culture in crisis.” Nevertheless, such a woman also was emblematic of a culture’s drive to envision female identity in thrilling, groundbreaking ways. Indeed, a number of authors of New Woman fiction were eager to explore this individual’s potential to invoke alternate epistemologies of sexual identity. It is my argument that to do this was to revolutionize the female subject’s potential for achieving complex subjectivity. In the two 1893 texts explored here, George Egerton’s “A Cross Line” and Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*, New Woman characters exhibit both masculine and feminine impulses and, in consequence, are imagined as double-sexed. Imagined this way, Egerton and Grand’s female characters think and feel outside the traditional cultural boundaries proscribed for women.

<6>Interestingly, as they draw figures that are simultaneously masculine and feminine, Egerton and Grand associate these figures with reptiles. In the works explored here, the character of the New Woman becomes intertwined with the image of the serpent. In Egerton’s work, the masculine heroine is imagined with a live snake coiled around her hips. In Grand’s novel, *Angelica*, who impersonates her twin brother and dresses as a man, is compared to the “Lady of Lusignan,” a mythical character who habitually transformed into a serpent. Echoing Darwin (though presumably not purposefully), these two authors associate the snake with the merging of seemingly disparate physical elements. In their works, the hermaphroditic body is shown with (or as) a snake.

<7> In his essay, “Nude Venuses, Medusa’s Body, and Phantom Limbs,” Lennard J. Davis explores the destructive gaze of the Medusa, the mythological serpent-haired woman whose hideousness had the power to turn men to stone. He interprets the Medusa as a symbol of the disabled or fragmented body and explores how the gaze of the disabled individual, like the gaze of the Medusa, might be empowered. He writes:

The Medusa gaze [may be] rerouted so that it comes not from the object of horror, the “monstrous” woman, but from the gaze of the “normal” observer. It is the “normal” gaze that [can be] seen as naked, as dangerous. And unlike Perseus slaying Medusa by holding up a mirror, it is now the “object of horror” who holds the mirror up to the “normal” observer. (63)

It is this action – the exploration not only of “frightening” or “different” individuals but also of the gazes that these individuals receive from others – that occurs in these two texts. As the figure

of the woman-man-serpent throws into question the social hierarchies that empowered traditional behavioral and physical ideals of the female person, Egerton and Grand intimate that such merged beings are not inherently “repulsive.” They are, however, repulsed by the societies that they inhabit.

<8>George Egerton and Sarah Grand both celebrate and subdue the figure of the masculine, serpentine New Woman in their texts. Although the snake serves as a phallic symbol of power, it is an emblem of female insurgence and consequently “poisonous.” Judith R. Walkowitz, in her *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, argues that “London in the 1880s was a historic moment when middle-class women were enabled to speak publicly about sexual passion and sexual danger”; however, she also asserts that women who spoke out about sex were “bound imaginatively by a limited cultural repertoire, forced to reshape cultural meanings within certain parameters” (9). So, in some sense, was it the case for these two authors. In order to contain transgressive narratives of desire, utopian descriptions of the masculine New Woman’s romantic experience eventually are replaced by recuperative textual configurations. At the end of each text examined here, the “monster” must be conquered and the heroine returned to a traditionally feminine posture of feeling and behavior. Nevertheless, in these works, the serpent is associated with temptation *and* forbidden pleasure. Consequently, these narratives provide fascinating discussions of the ways in which the mannish New Woman both titillated and disturbed the individuals around her. Indeed, although the spectacle of the odd, Other New Woman was, in a sense, an emblem of “a culture in crisis,” she also was a spectacle in the sense that she was spectacular – dramatic, attractive, arousing, fascinating, and freakish.

<9>Egerton’s *Keynotes* was an enormous, immediate success in both Britain and America, and the book established Egerton as a key personage among New Woman authors.(6) Here, I focus on what is perhaps the most popular subject for modern writings on Egerton – the first and most frequently reprinted story from *Keynotes*, “A Cross Line.” From the opening of the text, Egerton uses erotically charged descriptive language to introduce the heroine. This woman is not given a name (perhaps in an attempt to underscore her status as representative of the essential nature of all women); however, her husband playfully calls her “Gypsy.”

<10>Gypsy’s desires are not repressed or reshaped by the fact of her marriage. Notably, an early scene that depicts the heroine and her husband “at home” illustrates both her indeterminate gender identity and her awareness that this identity might be labeled as “bad.” The scene reads as follows:

“I wish I could understand you, dear!”

“I wish to God you could. Perhaps if you were badder and I were gooder we’d meet halfway. *You* are an awfully good old chap; it’s just men like you send women like me to the devil!”

“But you are good (kissing her), a real good chum! You understand a fellow’s weak points...Why (enthusiastically), being married to you is like chumming with a chap! ...You are a great little woman!”

“Don’t see it! (she is biting his ear). Perhaps I was a man last time, and some hereditary memories are cropping up in this incarnation!”

He looks so utterly at sea that she has to laugh again, and, kneeling up, shuts his eyes with kisses, and bites his chin and shakes it like a terrier in her strong little teeth. (“A Cross Line,” 16-17)

The “masculine” nature of the New Woman is specifically voiced in this moment of the text; additionally, one might refer to Lyn Pykett’s description of the ways in which the heroine’s decidedly “unwomanly” attributes are described throughout this narrative.(7) This New Woman also indicates that she needs more than “chumming with a chap,” but her husband, unable to read her feelings or to follow her argument, is unable to participate meaningfully in her life. As Showalter points out in her brief discussion of the text, “[a]s the title hints, they speak in crossed lines, at crossed purposes, because female identity transcends male knowing” (65). I would refine Showalter’s statement by proposing that Egerton here is arguing that an *individual’s* subjectivity transcends traditional categorization: in this moment Egerton is illustrating how, despite her sexualized woman’s body, despite her “masculine” competence, intellect, and aggressiveness, the

New Woman wishes to be seen as a complex self, rather than simply as a “chap” or as a wife.

<11>As the text progresses, the nature of the heroine’s sexual and romantic desires are further revealed, as the reader is rendered a participant in the voyeuristic sexual fantasies she has while in the woods. For example, the heroine

fancies herself in Arabia on the back of a swift steed. Flashing eyes set in dark faces surround her, and she can see the clouds of sand swirl, and feel the swing under her of his rushing stride. Her thoughts shape themselves into a wild song, a song to her steed of flowing mane and satin skin; an uncouth rhythmical jingle with a feverish beat; a song to the untamed spirit that dwells in her. (“A Cross Line,” 18-19)

The theme that proves to be particularly interesting within this moment of the text is not just the heroine’s need to be somewhere else, to play a different, more sexual role, but her need to be observed and recognized in this role – by men. In her dream, there is a large audience (“flashing eyes set in dark faces surround her”) for her sexualized act of riding a horse. Further, the fact that the eyes observing her are not those of her white countrymen is a significant indicator of the heroine’s defiance of the cultural restraints placed on women’s sexuality; the intense transgressive potential of the heroine’s desire to be viewed by “dark faces” would have been immediately evident to late-century individuals familiar with the work of scientists and sociologists who vigorously condemned racial mingling. The heroine’s fetishistic awareness of audience (linked with erotic performance) increases as her dream progresses:

Then she fancies she is on the stage of an ancient theater out in the open air, with hundreds of faces upturned towards her. She is gauze-clad in a cobweb garment of wondrous tissue. Her arms are clasped by jeweled snakes, and one with quivering diamond fangs coils round her hips.... She bounds forward and dances, bends her lissome waist, and curves her slender arms, and gives to the soul of each man what he craves, be it good or evil. And she can feel now, lying here ... the grand intoxicating power of swaying all these human souls to wonder and applause. She can see herself with parted lips and panting, rounded breasts, and a dancing devil in each glowing eye, sway voluptuously to the wild music that rises, now slow, now fast, now deliriously wild, seductive, intoxicating, with a human note of passion in its strain. She can feel the answering shiver of feeling that quivers up to her from the dense audience, spellbound by the motion of her glancing feet, and she flies swifter and swifter, and lighter and lighter, till the very serpents seem alive with jeweled scintillations. (“A Cross Line,” 19-20)

There is danger and power in the phallic and historically significant image of the snake that wraps around the woman’s hips. Cleopatra was killed by an asp; Eve’s alliance with the serpent led to the loss of paradise, for man and woman. Here the heroine embraces this symbol of danger and disruption, imagining herself with a fanged phallus, taking on the role of the femme fatale. The woman with heaving breasts and the snake around her hips also recalls the image of the hermaphrodite, the double-sexed being of art and myth. In this textual moment, the unrealized sexual potential of the heroine is illustrated through an intricate weave of images and signs that indicates the merging of the masculine and the feminine within a single individual. Accordingly, Egerton hints that the “keynote,” or key, to the epistemological puzzle of woman is her potential to overcome the boundaries of her gender.

<12>In this passage, power is associated with the transgressive possibilities inherent within female sexuality. Also, the undeniable erotic charge of the heroine’s dream seems to be heightened rather than lessened by the merging of physical sexual characteristics indicated by the heaving breasts and scintillating serpent – thus, the “shiver of feeling” elicited from her crowd of watchers. This merging of genders is fulfilling for the individual at the same time that it titillates others.

<13>Nevertheless, the dream phallus here *is* a snake, complete with fangs. This desire is, then, dangerous. Often in fictional and non-fictional texts of the period, the desiring female was described as a disruptive force. Further, within recent discussions of nineteenth-century literary depictions of desire, the specific nature of such disruption has become a critical issue. For example, Elaine Showalter, in her chapter on Oscar Wilde and “The Veiled Woman” in *Sexual Anarchy*, discusses late-century images of Salome and of the sexual, mysterious woman, “dangerous to look upon,” who signifies “the quest for the mystery of origins, the truths of birth and death” (145). According to Showalter, in *fin de siècle art and culture*, female desire is equated

and death" (145). According to Showalter, in *jin de siècle* art and culture, female desire is equated with a hidden Medusa, associated with the *vagina dentata*, and is therefore marked undoubtedly as hazardous. In her discussion of images of the veiled woman in late-century literature, Showalter cursorily notes that Egerton's heroine, with her hidden fantasies of sexual excess, might be described as a kind of veiled woman. However, in this textual instance, Showalter uses Cixous's analysis of the Medusa to analyze Egerton's heroine: "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous 255). Certainly, as Showalter briefly notes, Egerton's image of the sexually desiring female exhibits both such positive and such disruptive elements. Nevertheless, Showalter fails to note the complex sexual imagery in Egerton's writing. Egerton's text is *not* simply a refiguring of the devouring Medusa, a response to male decadents' fascination with "female corrosive desire and male homosexual love" (Showalter 145), but rather an exploration of the erotic potentials associated with the hermaphrodite, a figure both masculine and feminine, equipped with both a woman's body and a phallus.

<14>The image of the hermaphrodite may be interpreted as representative of the empowered woman, in possession of the authority indicated by the phallus and evident in her control over imagined male audiences and over the men in her life; it might also illustrate a vision of the possibility of a new being, encompassing the best features of both sexes, a symbol of balance, beauty, and intense desire. Interpretation of this image is limited, however, by the fact that Egerton focuses largely on the containment, rather than on the expression, of this figure during the remainder of the narrative. The body of the hermaphroditic dancer will be suppressed as the heroine enters a period of what an historic reader may have termed "confinement," a nineteenth-century expression that alludes both to pregnancy and to entrapment. At the close of the story, Egerton's heroine, thrilled to learn of her new physical condition, abruptly ends her extra-marital affair and begins to talk of sewing gowns for the baby. Despite Egerton's celebration of symbolic costume and dance, this woman ultimately will be placed within a sphere of traditional female behavior and feeling as she accepts a distinctly feminine (pregnant) body at the end of the text. This action allows Egerton to restrain what would otherwise be a radical and disruptive illustration of intersexual possibility.

<15>Nevertheless, before she works to connect her heroine with traditional female functions and interests, Egerton makes the argument that all women possess unknown wells of desire, associating them with the vibrant sexuality the heroine feels within herself. As she concludes her heroine's fantasy of performance, Egerton writes,

her thoughts go to other women she has known, women good and bad, school friends, casual acquaintances, women workers ... a long array.... Have they, too, this thirst for excitement, for change, this restless craving for sun and love and motion? Stray words, half confidences, glimpses through soul-chinks of suppressed fires, actual outbreaks, domestic catastrophes, how the ghosts dance in the cells of her memory! ("A Cross Line" 21)

In Egerton's text, the nature of woman is linked with the essence of her sexuality. In this passage, Egerton comments on the material and cultural structures that encourage women to deny "this restless craving" in an effort to prevent "domestic catastrophes." Kate McCullough, in her discussion of Egerton's writing as a whole, notes that "The tension between the essentialized, passionate woman and her cultural constraints suggests the outsider's critique of dominant British gender codes and a concurrent desire to reclaim essentialism as a space from which she (and all women) can speak" (207). While this is an accurate observation, in this particular text, Egerton's "essentialized, passionate woman" appears to do more than protest "dominant gender codes." Especially as she associates this passion, this "thirst" for "change," with all the women the heroine has known, Egerton creates a subversive aesthetic of pleasure. The figure of the desiring woman is used to *transgress* rather than merely to invert or to protest against gender boundaries. Egerton's vision of the "essential" nature of woman as a desiring being does more than establish an image of womanhood that is founded in the female body, as virtually all modern critics postulate. Egerton's specific description of her heroine as a sexualized figure incorporates images of the male and the female into it. It is the figure of heterosexual pleasure, man and woman conjoined, that serves as the basis for Egerton's construction of the essential feminine, which she then associates with all women.

<16>In this text, it is argued that all women have dangerous sexual potential that they hide from men. Of course, in designating woman as an essentially sexual creature, Egerton

compartmentalizes women just as forcefully as social constructs that labeled women as “unsexed” did. Egerton’s text is nevertheless significant in that it reveals the ways in which femininity exists as a performance. Additionally, it is important to note the ways in which Egerton here argues that women are not only complicit but also in control of the repression and masking of their “true” selves. By illustrating woman’s complicity in man’s delusion, Egerton indicates that it is woman who actually holds the power of command in relation to intimacy, physical pleasure, and reproduction. In turn, although Egerton also argues that men compel women to disguise themselves, she assigns women agency in this process, as well as the power of “secret-keeper.” This fascinating articulation of the mystery and knowledge that are linked to the suppression of the self reflects the sexual ambiguity of the hermaphroditic figure, who was imagined as the possessor of polymorphous sexual features and who was also interpreted as sterile.

<17>Just as “each woman in God’s wide world” assumes the mask of the feminine, Egerton’s heroine will assume and embrace a decidedly female body when she celebrates her pregnancy, giving up her sexual fantasies in order to focus on her new, changing body and the baby that is to come. In “A Keynote to *Keynotes*,” Egerton makes the casual comment that “Unless one is androgynous, one is bound to look at life through the eyes of one’s sex, to toe the limitations imposed on one by its individual physiological functions” (58). In this text, the possibilities of a dynamic, multi-sexed body are imagined and then put aside as the heroine decides to “toe the limitations” that are imposed by the child growing within her.

<18>The transgressive action of this text extends from its interpretation of one character as the possessor of traits both masculine and feminine to its assumption of the complex nature of its audiences’ desires. Of course, notwithstanding its allure, this polymorphous sexuality bears no fruit. Despite the radical potential of Egerton’s text, it concludes with a sort of containment of the hermaphroditic figure within a specific gendered identity. This action brings about the continuance of traditional social formulations of living and being that, despite their artificiality, encourage male and female readers to embrace productive forms of desire which will provide for the continuance of the species.

<19>As we see from other contemporary texts, the idea of the infinitely desirable and voraciously desiring woman could easily be designated as dangerously disruptive. In Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, for instance, Lucy – like the other female vampires in the text – becomes repulsive to male characters as she takes on the role of a sexual woman. Like other New Woman texts that envision a conflation of masculinity and femininity, *Dracula* addresses the flowing together of the male and the female within the fabric of the novel. In his discussion of the symbolic significance of the all-pervasive image of the vampire mouth, Christopher Craft argues,

As the primary site of erotic experience in *Dracula*, this mouth equivocates, giving the lie to the easy separation of the masculine and the feminine. Luring at first with an inviting orifice, a promise of red softness, but delivering instead a piercing bone, the vampire mouth fuses and confuses what *Dracula*’s civilized nemesis, Van Helsing and his Crew of Light, works so hard to separate – the gender-based categories of the penetrating and the receptive. (109)

Ultimately for Stoker, this duality is what is feared, what must be destroyed. Mina shudders at seeing Lucy in her coffin: “the pointed teeth, the bloodstained, voluptuous mouth...[,] the whole carnal and unspiritual appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy’s sweet purity” (252). To Stoker, “non-normative” female desire (defined as aggressive/“masculine” or seen to be directed toward more than one object) is grotesque and destructive, despite the erotic potential and intriguing character of the woman possessed.⁽⁸⁾ Here the sexual woman is not merely imagined with a toothed serpent coiled around her hips; she is imagined as the possessor of actual fangs.

<20>Of course, Stoker’s text is an extreme example of the possible dangers inherent in the blurring of gender boundaries. Other writers imagined the masculine New Woman as possessor of “monstrous” qualities but desired to tame, rather than to overtly destroy, her erotic and compelling character. In Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins*, Grand investigates a number of New Women characters that feel differently about love and desire. Here I will focus specifically on the character of Angelica, a New Woman who is inspired to change in response to the suffering she experiences as a result of participating in an “inappropriate” romantic liaison (in which she poses as a man). Unlike Egerton, who shows her heroine willingly embracing traditional positions of feminine feeling and behavior in response to her pregnancy, Grand focuses on Angelica’s lack of

“natural” feminine feeling or maternal instinct. Angelica’s recognition of this lack and of the “incurable malady of the mind which would make life a burden to her for evermore” first drives her to contemplate suicide and then inspires her to reconcile herself with the domestic sphere (Grand 519). Although this reconciliation takes away from the initial uniqueness and vitality of her character, Angelica finds a version of love (and of a happy ending) when she finds a way to transform her “inappropriate” (and seemingly monstrous) desire into a socially acceptable one.

<21>The novel follows Angelica’s evolution from a mischievous and ill-behaved child to a devoted wife. Angelica is wicked as a child because she is bored and because her intellect and artistic talents are not put to use. She wishes to learn Latin, Greek, and mathematics, and when she first is denied the opportunity to study under a tutor with her twin brother Diavolo, she exclaims, “there must have been some mistake. Diavolo and I find that we were mixed somehow wrong, and I got his mind and he got mine. I can do his lessons quite easily, but I can’t do my own.... I can’t learn from a lady, and he can’t learn from a man” (Grand 124).

<22>As the above quotation suggests, *The Heavenly Twins* is full of examples of the ways in which gender is imagined as a performance. Ann Heilmann points out,

By juxtaposing different-sexed twins whose sex roles clash with their “natural” inclination, Grand explicitly challenges the social construction of gender. Diavolo’s gender and name reflect Angelica’s nature to a much greater extent than they do his....It is she who wants to have a career, he who would be content with a “feminine” lifestyle; in stark opposition to their “natural” leanings, he is trained for an active public life, whereas she is consigned to domesticity. (130)

Further, through the use of the two “twin” characters, Grand explores the ambiguity of sexuality and the potential of single individuals to possess the personality traits and, more radically, to assume the bodies of both genders.

<23>Throughout the first half of the novel the “Heavenly Twins” are described as powerfully devoted to one another. At one point Angelica exclaims, “You don’t understand twins, I expect.

It’s always awkward about them; there’s so often something wrong. With us, you know, the fact of the matter is that *I* am Diavolo and *he* is me” (Grand 124). Although this intense identification is special and cherished, Grand ultimately will argue that it is wrong for Angelica to disregard her womanly identity in favor of her brother’s masculine one. Indeed, it is through her masquerade as Diavolo that she will be dubbed “the monster.”

<24>Her “monstrous” behavior begins with her marriage. Angelica teases her (much older) husband mercilessly. She jokingly calls him “daddy,” deliberately attempts to annoy or disturb him, exhorts large sums of money from him for fun, and drives him to leave her alone in the house. It is during this time while she is alone and her husband is in London, after her marriage and before her acceptance of her prescribed role as wife, that Angelica most noticeably transgresses the behavioral restrictions placed on her sex. In response to her dissatisfaction with domestic life, Angelica takes to roaming the streets at night, disguised as Diavolo. While doing this, she experiences a profound change within her consciousness. She claims, “I was a genuine boy, I moved like boy, I felt like a boy; I was my own brother in very truth” (Grand 456). Dressed as Diavolo, Angelica forms an intimate friendship with the reclusive tenor of Morningquest’s cathedral choir, a man whom she respectfully dubs “Israfil.” Although they initially meet casually in the street, over time she comes to spend long hours at this man’s home late at night, dining on his food, talking with him, and playing the violin for his enjoyment. The Tenor quickly develops an intense fascination with and affection for Angelica, whom he thinks of as “the Boy.”

<25>In this section of the novel, Grand spends a great deal of time exploring the Tenor’s fascination with the character he knows as “the Boy” as well as his interest in Angelica herself, whom he sees in church and knows only from afar. After his initial meeting with Angelica-in-disguise, Grand describes the Tenor’s feelings thus:

the Tenor often thought of the Boy with curiosity and interest. There was something unusual in his manner and appearance which would have attracted attention even if his conversation had not been significant, and that it was significant the Tenor discovered by the continual recurrence to his mind of some one or other of the Boy’s observations.... [H]e looked for him continually both by day and night, his thoughts being pretty equally divided between him and the lady whose brilliant glance had had

such a magical effect upon him the first time he encountered it. (Grand 380)

It is important to note that it is the Boy's "unusual" appearance and manner that first attract the Tenor and that this curious appearance is paralleled with the "magical effect" of the lady's "brilliant glance." It soon becomes apparent that here Grand is working to explore both the Tenor's heterosexual desire for the woman he knows from afar as Angelica and his homosexual desire for the person he thinks of as "the Boy." Outwardly, while talking with "the Boy," he frequently celebrates his desire for Angelica, a remote and beautiful woman whom he believes he has never met, having seen her only in church and from a distance. However, as Ann Heilmann has noted in her extensive discussion of this relationship, the Tenor while voicing his admiration for Angelica is "at the same time feeding his forbidden desire through the physical proximity of her brother, even articulating this desire through the discourse of chivalrous romantic love" (134). Heilmann convincingly argues that Grand's extensive descriptions of the Tenor's intense affection for the odd and unruly young man who visits his chambers at night serve as evidence of his homosexual desires, as does his "secret" past as student and companion to an older man.(9)

<26>This drama of forbidden desire is ultimately ended by a boating accident. As Angelica and the Tenor spend a night floating down the river, Angelica playing her violin in the moonlight, Angelica is suddenly made nervous by an abrupt physical (possibly romantic) movement made by the Tenor. Startled, she falls into the water and almost drowns. The Tenor dives in and rescues her; however, in doing so he removes her wig and sees her in wet clothing. Her real gender becomes immediately obvious, and the Boy's true identity as Angelica is quickly revealed. The Tenor is devastated by the indecent behavior of a woman whom he formerly idealized, overwhelmed by the loss of the person he knew (and desired) as "the Boy," and tortured by his new, unhappily intimate relationship with a married woman. Consequences are fatal; unable to celebrate these developments, he dies, praying for Angelica in the hopes that the Lord "might make her a good woman yet" (Grand 509).

<27>The aspect of this textual drama that I wish to explore here involves the nature of Angelica's performance of gender. Within this drama of chivalrous and forbidden desire, Angelica successfully executes the various roles ascribed to her. Although she plays at being "Boy" and "Lady," the two roles are similar in that Angelica is consistently positioned as the object of another's desire. As Egerton, who depicts the fascinating and potentially masculine New Woman as a celebrated figure, moving audiences "to wonder and applause," Grand illustrates the intense desirability of the woman-as-man. Grand, however, also emphasizes how Angelica's casual and careless performances of masculinity and femininity corrupt her chances for experiencing any kind of meaningful intimacy, sexual or otherwise. In addition, the revelation of her deceit literally destroys the man who desires her. The Tenor analyzes the situation by reasoning thus:

He had been enchanted, like Reymond of Lusignan in olden times, by a creature that was half a monster. The Boy had been a reality to him, but the lady had never been more than a lovely dream, and the monster – well, the monster had not yet appeared, for that dark haired girl in the unwomanly clothes, with pride on her lips and pain in her eyes, was no monster after all, but an erring mortal like himself, a poor weak creature to be pitied and prayed for. (Grand 504)

The Tenor's instinctual response to the "dark haired girl in the unwomanly clothes" is to imagine her as a monster. It is important here to note Grand's choice of a monster: the Lady of Lusignan was a woman with a serpent's tale, a figure that was seen to symbolize flawed or crippled genius. (10) Surprisingly, no current critical work has explored this historical reference and its significance. Jean d'Arras tells the story of the Lady of Lusignan in his 1387 work *Chronique de Melusine in Le Noble Hystoire de Lusignan*. The Lady is a changeling daughter of the fairy Pressina and an ancient Scottish King, cursed to transform into a creature with a monster's body (often illustrated as winged) and a serpent's tail on every Saturday of her life. Interestingly, this curse has been set upon her as a punishment for having once attacked her father. In the myth, to rebel against patriarchal authority is to be designated a monster.

<28>D'Arras describes how Count Raymond de Lusignan falls in love with the Lady when he discovers her in the forest. She agrees to marry him, but stipulates that she be left alone every Saturday, warning him that he must never try to see her on that day or to ask why she must be left alone. However, driven to a suspicion of infidelity by the members of his Court, Raymond spies on his wife. Consequently, he sees her not with a lover but with a silvery tail. The Lady runs away from him. never to return.

<29>A highly appropriate symbol for Angelica and her thwarted musical talent, this reference puts Angelica's husband, Mr. Kilroy, whom she always calls "Daddy," in the position of the wronged father. After she "attacks" him, she transforms into a symbolic serpent. The Tenor appears to take up the symbolic position of the mythical Lady of Lusignan's husband, as Reymond was the man who married the Lady of the woods, discovering her changeling nature and her silvery serpent's tail years later. His placement of himself in the position of the betrayed husband intensifies the homoerotic nature of the Tenor's friendship with the Boy; additionally, the reference to the woman who was compelled to hide her "changeling" body for fear of being hated or condemned reemphasizes the performative nature of Angelica's life. Like the Lady of Lusignan, Angelica is obligated to hide her physical, her intellectual, and her artistic potential.

<30>Imagining the "real" Angelica as a serpentine monster gives the image of the mannish New Woman an enormous disruptive power, a power certainly substantiated in Angelica's stunning effect on the Tenor. She brings about his death in the tradition of the mythological dragons that threatened the chivalrous knights of Great Britain. However, ultimately the Tenor *prefers* to see Angelica as "a poor weak creature to be pitied," an "erring mortal like himself." It is easier to imagine the creature that is the New Woman as corrupted or diseased, as erring, poor, or weak rather than as the wielder of an ability to inspire new, frightening desires.

<31>In consequence of the Tenor's untimely demise, Angelica is consumed with guilt and self-hatred. Grand's heroine cannot escape the feeling that her deception was, in some sense, responsible for this man's death. Finally, after observing a child grieving at his grave, she experiences an epiphany of sorts: "All that was womanly in Angelica went out to the poor little fellow. She would liked to have comforted him, but what could she say or do? Alas! alas! a woman who cannot comfort a child, what sort of a woman is she?" (Grand 519). This is a significant moment; it is here that Angelica realizes that she has become "unnatural" by emphasizing the masculine side of her nature and by neglecting her feminine impulses and responsibilities. She determines in an instant to throw herself off the bridge on which she is standing and to drown; however, before she can take this extreme measure, Angelica is halted by her aunt, Lady Fulda, who knows of Angelica's deception with the Tenor and who wishes to help Angelica recognize her calling to "the Higher Life" (Grand 537). Grand shows Angelica brushing off her aunt's influence at first, but, in a later meeting, Angelica will be moved by Lady Fulda's ominous tone and serious warnings. In this subsequent moment, Lady Fulda announces her belief that Angelica is facing the greatest moment in her life – "an hour when we are called upon to choose between good and evil" (Grand 537). Evil (symbolized by Angelica's temptation to take up masculine identity, to become again the serpent-woman) must be denied. Angelica at first rebels against the extreme language of her aunt, announcing "what have I done after all that you should take me to task so seriously? Wrong, certainly; but still I have not broken a single commandment" (Grand 536). Nevertheless, within Grand's novel, Angelica's crime is serious. By enjoying the freedoms granted to men (living as "Diavolo") and by denying the functions assigned to women (hiding her identity as "Angelica"), she has "sinned against the whole spirit of uprightness" (Grand 537) and, in turn, made herself profoundly unhappy.

<32>Throughout the course of the text, Grand (who acknowledges the narrative voice as her own) appears to sympathize with Angelica's frustration, often elaborating on the internal motivations that drive this young heroine to rebel against the individuals and social structures that would place her in a sphere for which she is not suited. Here however, through the voice of Lady Fulda, the tendency in Angelica to deny her sex and to neglect her responsibilities as a woman (and as a wife) is designated as "evil." Within this scene, Grand's novel takes on the texture of a spiritual conversion narrative. Angelica is compelled either to embrace her serpent-self, falling into a life of "perdition," or else to embrace God and her husband by giving up her independent (and insolent) ways.

<33>In this chapter and the next, Angelica suffers a great deal. She looks for an alternative way of living and feeling, but apparently there is none. Lady Fulda's simplistic and extreme argument, that Angelica either must accept her responsibilities and live the "right" way or else fall into sin and despair, seems accurate. Grand describes Angelica's thoughts thus:

Was there any way of escape from herself? Her conscience whispered one. But was there only one? ...Oh, for the courage to choose!... But why should she arrive at any decision? Why should she feel compelled to adopt a settled plan of action? Why could she not go on as she had done hitherto? Was there really no standing still?

Were people really rising or sinking always, doing good or evil? Why, no, for what harm had she done? Quick, answering to the question with a pang, the rush of recollection caught her, and again the vow, made, and forgotten for the moment, as soon as made, burned in her heart: "Israfil! Israfil! only forgive me, and I will be true!" (Grand 539)

It may be assumed that, in the above passage, Angelica is, on the one hand, choosing between a spiritual "rising or sinking." However, additionally, and more specifically, Angelica here is choosing whether to embrace a "feminine" or a "masculine" lifestyle. At first she is frustrated that the opportunity to "go on as she had done" is denied to her by her Aunt Fulda's binary rhetoric; nevertheless, Angelica soon remembers the physical and emotional wounds that she inflicted on the Tenor, a gentle man for whom she deeply cared. Such harm appears a direct consequence of Angelica's living the sort of "in-between" gendered lifestyle that she has assumed throughout her life. This lifestyle, a reflection of her desire to discard her own identity and to usurp her brother's, has caused chaos and destruction.

<34>Angelica goes home from her visit with Lady Fulda only to experience nightmares; in her dreams, her desire to express herself and to employ her musical talents suddenly appears wicked – not the natural expression of her impulse to do something significant with her life. Consequently Angelica goes to Mr. Kilroy in London. She tells him of all that has transpired, receives his forgiveness, and experiences a seemingly genuine change of heart, rather than merely a change in her way of thinking about her behavior and her life. The scene, and this segment of the novel, ends as Angelica sobs and clings to her husband, pleading with him to "keep [her] close" (Grand 551). Grand here seems to be illustrating Angelica's new sensibilities; she is moved to kiss her husband passionately and to cry out "I am – I am grateful for the blessing of a good man's love" (Grand 551). Angelica, dangerously close to serious transgression, rejecting her duties as wife, participating in a homoerotic relationship with a man while dressed as a boy, has been rescued from disgrace and despair and, in addition, forgiven for her dangerous and immodest behavior.

<35>After this complex and divergent segment of the text, Grand gives up her use of an omniscient narrator. Accordingly, the novel finishes without any scrutiny of the feelings of the women in the novel. Grand's rather disturbing concluding chapter is penned as though from the point of view of Dr. Galbraith, a male physician, and Angelica appears rarely. A brief reference to her, made in a letter to Lady Adeline, her mother, sums up her new position in the world: "[h]er devotion to her husband continues to be exemplary, and he has been good-natured enough to oblige her by delivering some of her speeches in parliament lately, with excellent effect" (Grand 567). After her disastrous experience with the Tenor, Angelica will struggle to achieve influence through a man rather than as one. Despite its vivid imaginative depiction of the intersexual possibilities latent within a woman who has been raised with (and as) a man, Grand's novel refrains from discarding essentialist notions of feminine impulse and domestic responsibility.

<36>Authors responded to the woman – like Angelica – who acted on her desires for experience in varied and complex ways. It may be argued that because Egerton and Grand recognized the New Woman as different (even as grotesque or monstrous) both authors worked to reposition heroines in traditional positions of "feminine" feeling or action at the conclusions of their texts. This attempt may very well be attributed to the pervasiveness of essentialist notions of femininity during this time period. Although new modes of living and feeling might be conceived, the lifestyle associated with such an individual was difficult to imagine, particularly for an extended period of time. Furthermore, such a lifestyle might easily be found frightening or destructive. In particular, Grand and Stoker seem unwilling to embrace the potential promiscuity, homosexuality, or transsexuality that appear within some New Woman narratives. The symbol of the snake-woman is one of power, but it also represents a poisonous force that must be sent from the proverbial garden. All of the texts discussed here associate their heroine's fulfillment with her acceptance of a traditionally feminine position in a home. The temptation of the extraordinary and chaotic lifestyles (described as the heroines venture into in the woods and the town) is to be denied.

<37>Nevertheless, the recuperation of the New Woman into traditional spheres of habit and feeling may easily be interpreted as an additional transgressive move on the part of these authors rather than as a capitulation to an imagined authority or to a larger conservative force. Rather than merely creating female characters who promote "non-womanly" attributes, these authors explore female characters who are simultaneously acting out personalities that encode the feminine and

the non-feminine. Heroines, through rejecting and accepting both a masculine and a feminine subjectivity at different points in the narrative, embody what is best from stereotypes of man and of woman. This is a new vision of woman's potential for achieving a complex subjectivity, of female characters who live and feel both outside and inside of the boundaries prescribed for women by traditional Victorian society.

<38>The literary figure of the New Woman is often designated an epistemological puzzle. Certainly Egerton and Grand illustrate her multifaceted and contradictory nature, describing both her independence and her need for affection, her limited position as a woman in society and her desire to participate in it as freely as a man might, her body's potential to become pregnant and its ability to be misinterpreted as masculine. Additionally, these writers explore the complex responses the New Woman might evoke in others, acknowledging her disruptive as well as her erotic potential within their narratives. Ultimately, through the creation of these intense, complicated depictions of unusual romantic relationships, these authors worked to construct a vision of woman and of women's narratives that broke away from the traditional plots that celebrated chivalrous love and the institution of Christian marriage. Indeed, Egerton and Grand radically experimented with traditional modes of characterization and storytelling.

<39>Both the celebration and the containment of the "New Woman as man" also serve as elements within a larger social discourse on the nature of human sexuality. Authors who presented readers with heroines who displayed a tendency to resemble physically, to dress as, or to imagine themselves as men argued that individuals must negotiate identity and desire. These authors indicate that to be in possession of a body is not necessarily to be inscribed within the cultural formulations of subjectivity associated with that body. As Marjorie Garber argues in *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*, the "nature of sexuality...is fluid not fixed, a narrative that changes over time rather than a fixed identity, however complex. The erotic discovery of bisexuality is the fact that it reveals sexuality to be a process of growth, transformation, and surprise, not a stable and knowable state of being"(66). New Women writers, in their attempt to imagine the woman of the future in possession of an identity more intricate than that traditionally associated with the woman of the past, consequently worked to deconstruct nineteenth-century heteronormative discourses. By reconfiguring their literary presentations of woman's capabilities for erudition and feeling, authors created an image of woman, and an image of female sexuality, that was multifaceted and complicated; and, through their exploration of "bisexual" behavior and bodies, authors constructed new, discursive systems for the organization of the sexes and their pleasures.

Endnotes

(1)Michel Foucault argues that the nineteenth century was "powerfully haunted by the theme of the hermaphrodite" and points out that the years of the mid- and late century were "precisely one of those periods when investigations of sexual identity were carried out with the most intensity, in an attempt not only to establish the true sex of hermaphrodites but also to identify, classify, and characterize the different types of perversions" (*Barbin* xvii, xi-xii). Additionally, it was known that Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859) was inspired by his eight-year study of hermaphroditic barnacles (see William Irvine's *Apes, Angels, and Victorians: The Story of Darwin, Huxley, and Evolution*).^(△)

(2)Texts like Pyle's were part of a medical tradition, ranging as far back as Ambroise Paré's 1573 work *On Monsters and Marvels*.^(△)

(3)Throughout the 1850s and in the following decades P.T. Barnum exhibited bearded ladies and hermaphrodites, as well as a myriad of individuals described by Barnum as racial or sexual "nondescripts," for public viewing (see Rosemarie Garland Thompson's "Introduction: From Wonder to Error – A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity" in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*).^(△)

(4)See Allison Pingree "The 'Exceptions That Prove the Rule': Daisy and Violet Hilton, the 'New Woman,' and the Bonds of Marriage" in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, and Richard Collins "Marion's Moustache: Bearded Ladies, Hermaphrodites, and Intersexual Collage in *The Woman in White*" in *Reality's Dark Light: the Sensational Wilkie Collins*.^(△)

(5)The figure of the hermaphrodite also appears within the works of Pre-Raphaelite poets and painters.^(△)

(6)The work was such a hit that John Lane encouraged Egerton to write an entire series of books; *Discords* was published in 1894, *Symphonies* in 1897, and *Fantasias* in 1898.(△)

(7)Pykett writes, “Her unwomanliness is signaled by her brown hands, her skill in the ‘masculine’ pursuit of fishing, and the fact that she roams the countryside freely, has a frank mode of address[,]... is sexually tolerant, and tends to take the sexual initiative. Most unwomanly of all is her apparent lack of maternal feeling, which is signaled by her disgust at small things (in sharp contrast to her husband’s ‘maternal’ delight in the ducklings on their smallholding)” (169).(△)

(8)A number of sources can be cited to illustrate the ways in which “normal” nineteenth-century women were described as passive and passionless. For example, in his 1857 work *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*, the popular and widely respected physician William Acton argued as follows:

I should say that the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind. What men are habitually, women are only exceptionally. It is too true, I admit, as the divorce courts show, that there are some few women who have sexual desires so strong that they surpass those of men.... I admit, of course, the existence of sexual excitement terminating even in nymphomania, a form of insanity which those accustomed to visit lunatic asylums must be fully conversant with; but, with these sad exceptions, there can be no doubt that sexual feeling in the female is in the majority of cases in abeyance. (133)

Of course, ideas about women’s sexuality were complex and varied; Lynda Nead writes that

[b]eliefs concerning the nature of female sexual desire were extremely fractured, but these differences could be displaced and consensus could be reached by invoking a generalized notion of female respectability and opposing it to the imagined excess passion and sexual deviancy of the women of the undeserving poor. (7)(△)

(9)Heilmann describes the ways in which Grand uses “homosexual encoding” to describe the Tenor’s past, as well as the Tenor’s “(to late-twentieth century readers, obvious) sexual attraction” to the Boy Angelica pretends to be (133, 132).(△)

(10)See Aria Nadii’s “The Lady of Lusignan” for a brief analysis and full recounting of the tale. (△)

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