The Shades of Our Grandmothers: New Women, Old Mothers, and Generational Thinking

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<1>George Egerton's 1893 New Woman short story, "Virgin Soil," depicts a painful confrontation between mother and daughter. Five years after her wedding, Florence returns to her mother's home bitterly disillusioned. Disgusted with the "legal prostitution" of her marriage, made when Florence was young, uneducated about sexuality, and unprepared for matrimony, Florence announces to her mother that she is leaving her husband. Her mother is shocked at Florence's account of her husband's infidelity, but Florence asserts that she blames her mother rather than her husband:

> "Philip is as God made him, he is an animal with strong passions, and he avails himself of the latitude permitted him by the laws of society. Whatever of blame, whatever of sin, whatever of misery is in the whole matter rests *solely* and *entirely* with you, mother…and no one else…. It is with you, and you alone, the fault lies." (110)

Florence blames her mother for teaching her nothing of men and sexuality or of the nature of wifehood and of motherhood, and, more importantly, for coercing her into an oppressive institution.

<2>Through Florence's anger at her mother, Egerton identifies the extent to which patriarchy depends upon female complicity. Yet the intensity of Florence's vitriol toward her mother and easy forgiveness of her husband, who only briefly appears in the first page of the story, raises questions. In brushing aside her husband's behavior, Florence suggests that social norms allow him such latitude that he is not truly at fault: "'Man is what we have made him, his very faults are of our making'" (110). These norms, Florence implies, are constructed and enforced by women like Florence's mother, who force their daughters into marriage to strange men and then hold them responsible for masculine morality. When Florence's mother defends herself and insists that Florence married Philip willingly, Florence responds, "'How like a woman! What a thorough woman you are, mother,'" expressing a surprising degree of misogyny (111).

<3>While much of the critical work on motherhood and maternity in New Woman fiction explores the relationship of the New Woman to her own reproductive potential, "Virgin Soil" directs our attention to the conflict between the New Woman and her mother: the New

Woman not as wife or mother but as daughter. Many New Woman works depict unhappy marriages, but in this essay, I focus on works that hold the mother of the New Woman responsible for those marriages, and indeed, depict the mother as the primary obstacle to the freedom and fulfillment of the New Woman: Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* and Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus.* First, I connect this pattern to Adrienne Rich's discussion of matrophobia and consider it in the context of the critical reception of New Woman literature, which often emphasizes failures to think outside the constraints of Victorian patriarchy. Ultimately, however, I argue for a more optimistic reading of these mother-daughter relationships as part of a project to construct a multigenerational vision of feminist progress, anticipating the twentieth-century rhetorical construction of feminism as a series of generational waves. Many scholars since the 1990s have identified the shortcomings of generational thinking, but even its limitations helped New Woman authors of the 1890s imagine a better future for their granddaughters.

Part I: "The essential female tragedy"

<4>In *Of Woman Born,* Adrienne Rich describes "the essential female tragedy" as "the loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter": the all-too-common breakdown of emotional connection, intimacy, and mutual support between mothers and daughters (240). She connects this to "matrophobia," defined as "the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one's mother*" (240). The mother represents that which the daughter wants to escape: "Thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted" (237-238). In "Virgin Soil," the definitive act of Florence's liberation is not confronting and leaving her husband, but confronting and leaving her mother, who has come to symbolize patriarchy far more than her husband does. Rich describes rejection of the mother as "a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free" (238). "Virgin Soil" depicts one such "radical surgery" (238).

<5>The origins of matrophobia, of the desire or need to reject the mother, can be found, according to Rich, in the patriarchal institutionof motherhood rather than to the "*potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children," a "mothering" that has feminist potential (xv). While Florence in "Virgin Soil" holds her mother responsible for patriarchy, Rich's *Of Woman Born* would encourage her to hold patriarchy responsible for her anger at and disappointment in her mother. As Hallstein explains, Rich "views matrophobia as developing as a result of patriarchal understandings of motherhood" (8), in which the mother "remains an object of mistrust, suspicion, misogyny in both overt and insidious forms" even when safely "confined" in the patriarchal family (Rich 116).

<6>These patriarchal understandings of motherhood are prevalent in the literature of the nineteenth century. Jeanette King, for instance, suggests that the forms of the *Bildungsroman* and Romance, dominant in the mid-to-late Victorian period, distinguish the

young heroine, focused on issues of love and marriage, from the peripheral, inadequate, or absent mother (21). Marianne Hirsch argues that plots of nineteenth-century European and American literature depict "the heroine's singularity based on a disidentification from the fate of other women, especially mothers" (10-11). Mothers, by becoming mothers, have succumbed to "conventional constructions of femininity" and thus become "targets of this process of disidentification and the primary negative models for the daughter" (10-11). According to Hirsch, the trend begins to change in women's literature of the 1920s, which directly interrogates motherhood more often. New Woman literature of the 1890s may fall somewhere between these two paradigms. While the literature sometimes boldly depicts complicated relationships between mothers and daughters, its matrophobic tendencies may not be out of keeping with what has frequently been understood as the overall failure of the gender politics of these texts.

<7>Indeed, the history of the criticism of New Woman literature is a history of disappointment. Scholars have often identified moments of aesthetic innovation and forward-thinking cultural criticism while observing that such moments are not sustained through the ends of the novels, largely because these writers are unable or unwilling to move beyond certain nineteenth-century conventions or ideologies, as Teresa Mangum has discussed (12). To be sure, critics have carefully observed that the complex professional circumstances of New Woman writers may have limited their ability to resist the "conservative force of the novelistic traditions" they built on (Miller 44-45; see also Kucich 195-196). Ann Ardis reads the "middling" politics of New Woman works as "compromise formations" (8), while Rita Kranidis and Ann Heilmann have both offered analyses of how New Woman writers strategically presented their ideas and carefully modified their narratives in order to achieve success in the literary marketplace (Kranidis 67, Heilmann *New Woman Fiction* 41). The consensus has been that these works strive to but ultimately cannot fully escape Victorianism, in its most disappointing aspects. Jane Miller, for instance, notes that New Woman novels' focus on the pain and frustration of their heroines served a critical function, but she also suggests that "the fictional efforts of the New Woman novelists were hampered by the conservative ideologies of gender, love, and sexuality inherent in [late Victorian] conventions and traditional narrative structures" (18-19). The continuing centrality of marriage to these texts, she argues, limited the possibilities for political and formal innovation.

<8>It is often mothers who usher New Women into both marriages and marriage plots; they function as the avatars for those "conservative ideologies of gender, love, and sexuality." B. A. Crackanthorpe's 1894 debate on "the Revolt of the Daughters" revealed one way that mothers came to represent this conservatism. Crackanthorpe describes a national conflict between daughters and mothers due to girls' desires "to be an individual as well as a daughter" rather than "feeble imitations of their mothers' best copies" (264, 263), and mothers' refusal to give their daughters the freedom they offer their sons. Alys W. Pearsall Smith's response, "A Reply from the Daughters," affirms that mothers represent the larger familial institutions that enforce submission and dependence: "The revolt of the daughter is not […] a revolt against any mere

surface conventionalities… but it is a revolt against a bondage that enslaves her whole life. In the past she has belonged to other people, now she demands to belong to herself" (275). Pro-daughter and pro-mother responses from Sarah M. Amos and May Jeune, respectively, make clear that at stake in this debate is two different understandings of patriarchy, one embodied by mothers and one embodied by men. Jeune argues that the traditions of motherhood function to protect young women against the various dangers of masculinity and men, and "with the majority of girls the home is still a haven of safety, the mother is counsellor and friend, and we have to legislate for the community at large" (283). Amos, in "The Evolution of the Daughters," argues that such attitudes are "a slander on men" (288). In Amos's view, both young men and young women are evolving, while mothers represent tradition, passing down through the generations the same worldview and enforcing it upon their daughters. While this debate identifies the significant role of familial and domestic institutions in oppressing women, the insistence on associating those institutions with mothers (there are no fathers in these pieces) suggests a desire to absolve men, who are represented as symbols of freedom and progress: daughters want freedom, in part, to be treated like their brothers, to live more like men, and to associate (socially, intellectually, professionally) with men. It is easy to see how and why such politics come to seem "middling," how the possibilities of incisive commentary and social critique have a tendency to fall back into conservatism and even misogyny.

<9>The ends of New Woman novels have been especially notable to many critics as places of ideological conservatism. Ardis argues that New Woman novels characteristically "retreat" "from their own radical political or artistic agendas in the face of overwhelming opposition to the New Woman's antipatriarchal and utopian energies" (156). Ardis reads many New Woman works as "abandon[ing] their own utopian trajectories" in part because while they "figure the New Woman's most radical desires… they also represent the external conditions that curtail satisfaction of these desires" (156; see also Pykett 148). The unhappy conclusions of many New Woman novels may indeed disappoint; in speaking to an audience of potential New Women, these novels seem to promise that only misery, perhaps punishment, will follow a commitment to the principles of the New Woman.

<10>That said, Ardis importantly distinguishes between works that disappoint because of the writers' ambivalence about radical social change and those that disappoint because they depict the culture's suppression of radical social change: "These writers do not use form to obscure, repress, or mute their controversial feminist content. They flaunt their anger. They proclaim their heresies in loud voices. They document the efforts made to silence them" (170). In a desire to maintain this distinction, I read the matrophobia in New Woman novels not as an abandonment of utopian energies but as part of a hopeful vision of multigenerational progress, one that both depicts and surpasses the limitations of the culture in which the novels are written. While, as Heilmann has suggested, "New Woman fiction often calls into question the possibility of individual liberation" (*New Woman Fiction* 175), collective liberation is often located in the not-too-distant future.

Part II: "Whatever of blame, whatever of sin, whatever of misery… rests solely and entirely with you, mother"

<11>In her discussion of matrophobia, Adrienne Rich suggests that it is "easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her" (237). Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book* and Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* do both. These novels describe the ways in which the institution of motherhood has ensured that women "remain under male control" and has "degraded female potentialities" (Rich xv), depicting mothers as the victims of patriarchal oppression. At the same time, they identify mothers as the major enforcers of patriarchal oppression. These novels depict mothers as obstacles to their daughters while analyzing the cultural conditions that make it impossible for them to be anything else.

<12>*The Beth Book* opens with compassion for Beth's mother, about to give birth to her seventh child, Beth, the narrator informing us that Mrs. Caldwell "lived in the days" when women "had not begun to think for themselves" and accepted suffering as their "lot" (1-2). Grand invokes a historical temporality in order to prepare the reader to extend sympathy to a character who, as the novel proceeds, stands continually in opposition to the heroine. Grand intersperses commentary on the tragedy of Mrs. Caldwell's life with scenes of her systematically crushing the spirit of Beth, a sensitive, eccentric "woman of genius." She refuses to praise Beth and thus "checked her mental growth again and again instead of helping her to develop it" (27). She beats Beth "severely" (58). "'Little bodies must be seen and not heard,'" she chastises her (37). When Beth misbehaves, her mother's response is "brute force"; she slaps, shakes, and berates Beth, at one point until Beth literally throws herself into the ocean to escape "her mother's clutches" (149). She describes Beth as a "trial," accusing her of caring "for no one but herself" (143); she is unwilling or unable to understand the extent to which Beth craves her mother's love.

<13>These scenes of abuse exemplify Adrienne Rich's observation that that "the power-relations between mother and child are often simply a reflection of power-relations in patriarchal society":

> The child dragged by the arm across the room to be washed, the child cajoled, bullied, and bribed into taking 'one more bite' of a detested food, is…a piece of reality, of the world, which can be acted on, even modified, by a woman restricted from acting on anything else except inert materials like dust and food. (20)

Grand's narrator allows us, on the one hand, to experience Beth's pain and anger at her mother's treatment of her, and on the other hand, to see Mrs. Caldwell not as a particular creature of malevolence but as an embodiment of Victorian norms. Grand refers frequently to customs that normalize Mrs. Caldwell's behavior and explicitly asks the reader not to blame her:

It was not Mrs. Caldwell's fault, but the fault of her day, that she was not a noble woman. She belonged to early Victorian times, when every effort was made to mould the characters of women as the homes of the period were built, on lines of ghastly uniformity…. If the mind be tight-laced long enough, it is ruined as a model, just as the body is; and throwing off the stays which restrained it, merely exposes its deformities without remedying them; so that there is nothing for the old generation but to remain in stays. (125)

While encouraging her readers to distance themselves from those "early Victorian times" in order to make visible an ideology that was naturalized for Mrs. Caldwell, Grand's use of a historical temporality exaggerates the contrast between the backward past and the successful present in order to encourage further progress. The various contrivances and misdeeds of Mrs. Caldwell

fill us with pity and surprise us, yet encourage us too by proving how right and wise we were to try our own experiments. If we had listened to advice and done as we were told, the woman's-sphere-is-home would have been as ugly and comfortless a place for us to-day as it used to be when Beth was forced by the needs of her nature to…fight, and pray, and lie, and love, in her brave struggle against the hard and stupid conditions of her life…. (175-176)

Grand uses a somewhat unusual "we" here to ally the reader with the New Woman project, encouraging not self-satisfaction at the progress that has been made but rather encouraging her readers to "try our own experiments" rather than listen to advice and do as we've been told. The novel thus invokes a multigenerational chronology of past, present, and future.

<14>*The Beth Book* has two major antagonists: Beth's mother in the first half of the novel, and Beth's husband in the second half. As in "Virgin Soil," the mother bears responsibility for the daughter's miserable marriage, more so than the husband who makes it so miserable. The engagement proceeds without her consent through a mutual understanding between her mother and the man in question; she soon finds that it is "a settled business, already irrevocable. She wanted to explain that she had not actually pledged herself, that she must take time to consider; but her heart failed her in view of her mother's delight" (330). Her mother rejects Beth's attempt to register her objections, both because the marriage seems to be advantageous and because she is unable to believe that a girl might not want to be married (335). Beth ultimately prays for guidance in "an agony of remorse for having tormented her mother" and hears her mother sob:

What should she do? Her unhappy mother—heart-broken, indeed. What a life hers was—a life of hard privation, of suffering most patiently borne, of the utmost self-denial for her children's sake, of loss, of loneliness, of bitter disappointment!... Beth stole downstairs, bent on atoning in her own person by any sacrifice for all the sorrows, no

matter by whom occasioned, which she felt were culminating in this final outburst of grief. (336)

Beth marries to please her mother, shaped by an ethos of self-sacrifice. Indeed, Grand urges us to connect Beth's sacrifice here to her mother's sacrifices, to connect her suffering through self-denial to the suffering of her mother through self-denial, which presumably was connected to her own mother's suffering through self-denial. In this climactic moment, *The Beth Book* seems to demonstrate Jane Miller's argument that the suffering of the New Woman in fiction reinforces the stereotype of female self-sacrifice (20-21), but it also emphasizes a multigenerational causality of the suffering of mother and daughter.

<15>The second half of the novel depicts Beth's unhappy marriage with her husband, in which she learns that atoning in her own person for her mother's sacrifices does not make her own life any better. Beth's husband takes her money, reads her mail, brings his mistress to live with them under false pretenses, secretly runs a Lock Hospital, and vivisects their dog in their home. When her mother dies soon after the marriage, Beth realizes that "her courageous toil had gone for nothing" (384). Beth leaves her husband to fulfill her own ambitions, eventually supported by a group of like-minded women and men who populate the pages of Grand's other novels (*Ideala* and *The Heavenly Twins*). The conclusion, in which Beth is comfortably ensconced in the home of these friends, enjoying professional success, and about to be reunited with an American man whom she met after leaving her husband, has raised many questions among critics, notably for the ways in which it seems to privilege heterosexual romance with a particularly flawed character and to valorize an ethos of self-sacrifice (Heilmann *New Woman Fiction* 82-83; Pykett 185-186; Miller 20; Youngkin 51). Nevertheless, the novel returns in the end to its motif of historical time, implying that Beth's ambivalence about her role might be shed in future iterations of the New Woman: "Beth was one of the first swallows of the woman's summer. She was strange to the race when she arrived, and uncharitably commented upon; but now the type is known, and has ceased to surprise" (527). With this optimistic view of women's progress and Beth's professional and romantic happiness, *The Beth Book* concludes with one of the very rare happy endings in New Woman fiction. This happy ending is enabled by the erasure of motherhood in the second half of the novel: Beth's mother dies soon after her marriage, and Beth herself has no children. While as a young woman, Beth obeys her mother at the expense of her own desires and needs, after her mother's death, Beth eventually learns to place those desires and needs over those of her husband; maternal ideology has been removed from the equation.

<16>In contrast, Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* retains a focus on motherhood throughout; the heroine, Hadria becomes increasingly shrewd about how the ideology of Victorian motherhood uses both mother and daughter to trap one another. Hadria herself is perhaps her mother's greatest victim, but she spends the novel trying to understand the conditions that have led her mother to expect her children—her daughters—to sacrifice their own happiness: "'A mother disappointed in her children must be a desperately unhappy

woman. She has nothing left; for has she not resigned everything for them? But is sacrifice for ever to follow on sacrifice? Is life to go on rolling after life…?'" (38) When Algitha, Hadria's older sister, announces her plan to move to London and conduct charitable work rather than marry, she is confronted with the extent of her mother's sacrifices:

> "She said that her children are all bad and unnatural; that she had spent her whole life in their interests; that if it had not been for her, we should all of us have grown up without education or accomplishments, or looks, or anything else; that she watched over us incessantly when we were little children, denying herself, spending her youth in her devotion to us, when she might have gone into the world, and had some brightness and pleasure…. But she had renounced everything she cared for, from her girlhood—she was scarcely older than I when her sacrifices began—and now her children gave no consideration to her; they were ready to scatter themselves hither and thither without a thought of her, or her wishes. They even talked scoffingly of the kind of life that she had led for *them*—for *them*, she repeated bitterly." (40)

Mrs. Fullerton's life has been spent in an orgy of sacrifice to a set of values about the roles and duties of women; her daughter's rejection of those values is an insult to her personally while also preventing her from achieving the outcomes for which she sacrificed so much (well-married daughters, successful sons). As Heilmann puts it, "Socialized into abjection by their mothers, daughters are offered up to the Minotaur—the patriarchal family and its cult of woman sacrifice—to emerge from their ordeal as the willing executioners of the next generation of women" (*New Woman Strategies* 214). Caird emphasizes sacrifice as a multigenerational exchange: the children must sacrifice because the mother sacrificed.

<17>As in *The Beth Book* and "Virgin Soil," the mother is the agent of the New Woman's unhappy marriage. Although Hadria begins the novel with firm principles about the harmful nature of marriage, Caird demonstrates how these beliefs become subject to doubt under the consistent pressure of patriarchal convention as embodied and enforced by Mrs. Fullerton: "How delighted her mother would be if she were to give up this desperate attempt to hold out against her appointed fate. What if her mother and Mrs. Gordon and all the world were perfectly right and far-seeing and wise?" (141-142) A similar fatalism pervades her when she is proposed to by Hubert Temperley and makes it difficult for her to resist in the face of his steady insistence: "All had been pre-arranged. Nothing could avert it" (139). Caird does not depict the scene in which Hadria ultimately accepts Temperley, nor the first five years of her marriage; Hadria's belief that she has no agency tells us all we need to know, and the erasure of this scene from the narrative suggests that Hadria herself, whose perspective dominates the novel, may not have been truly present. Algitha later tells their brothers that she believes Hadria would have ended the engagement if not for their mother, who, like Mrs. Caldwell in *The Beth Book,* "hurried the wedding on" (166). Indeed, Mrs. Fullerton is quite pleased not only because of the socioeconomic advantages of the marriage but also "because she was so thankful to see a strange, unaccountable girl like Hadria settling quietly down, with a couple of children to keep

her out of mischief" (166-167). She is satisfied that marriage and motherhood will transform Hadria into a conventional Victorian woman.

<18>Unlike in *The Beth Book,* where Mrs. Caldwell's role as obstacle is replaced by the husband, the husband in *The Daughters of Danaus* takes a back seat to a discussion of motherhood informed both by Mrs. Fullerton's role in Hadria's life and Hadria's experiences as a mother. Hadria's biological children—"little ambassadors of the established and expected" (187)— scarcely appear in the novel, though she does informally adopt an illegitimate orphaned girl, asserting the value of maternity based on choice rather than maternity based on legal or biological ties (Heilmann "Mona Caird" 82). Some of Caird's most trenchant points revolve around Hadria's rejection of her children and rejection of the ideology of motherhood as it applies to her:

> "Motherhood, in our present social state, is the sign and seal as well as the means and method of a woman's bondage. It forges chains of her own flesh and blood; it weaves cords of her own love and instinct…. A woman with a child in her arms is, to me, the symbol of an abasement, an indignity, more complete, more disfiguring and terrible, than any form of humiliation that the world has ever seen." (341, 343)

Here, Hadria prefigures Adrienne Rich's analysis of the institution of motherhood, which has "withheld over one-half the human species from the decisions affecting their lives" and "alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them" (Rich xv)—perhaps with, in Caird's words, "chains of her own flesh and blood."(1) Hadria refuses to be incarcerated in this way and moves to Paris with her adopted daughter to pursue a career in music, leaving her husband and her biological children (all sons) behind. Boldly, she experiences no regret, guilt, or shame—only anger and frustration at the ways her biological children represent "the insult of society… the tribute exacted of my womanhood [through whom] I am to be subdued and humbled" (190). Caird's critique of the sentimental ideal of motherhood is more radical than most other New Woman writers, who often embraced maternity as a source of power and purity, finding it rhetorically effective to contrast that "natural" instinct with the corruption of patriarchal institutions like marriage.

<19>The novel's resistance to the ideology of motherhood is what *The Daughters of Danaus* has been most noted and appreciated for. Thus, it may surprise us that it is the ideology of daughterhood that proves to be Hadria's undoing. It is not the requests and entreaties of her husband or her children that interrupt her education and burgeoning career as an innovative musician in Paris but her mother's illness. Caird insists that we see the relationship between mothers and daughters as imbricated by patriarchy, as it turns out that Mrs. Fullerton seems to suffer primarily from having noncompliant daughters, overly "headstrong and selfish" (367); on her sickbed, she insists, "'I have always done *my* duty,—I have sacrificed myself for the children. Why do they desert me, why do they desert me?'" (364). When the doctor asks if Mrs. Fullerton has had "any great disappointment or anxiety," Hadria and Algitha know that *they* are her disappointment and her anxiety (359). The treatment prescribed is for them to be good

daughters: "'If her children desire to keep her among them, it will be necessary to treat her with the utmost care, and to oppose her in *nothing*…. Her life, if not her reason, are in her children's hands'" (359). Hadria must become a compliant wife and mother in order to save her own mother's life. This particular plot element places Hadria's happiness and fulfillment in direct opposition to her mother: "if her mother lived, her own dreams were ended for ever" (362).

<20>Using Hadria's mother as the symbol of patriarchy, rather than the more obvious husband, allows Caird to identify patriarchy and the resistance to patriarchy as a historical process. Hadria learns to recognize that regardless of the particulars, she and her mother are living out a common tragedy of womanhood (362-363). As King explains, "mother and daughter come into conflict not as the result of clashing personalities, but because such conflict is structured into patriarchal society" (34). In identifying her mother as the obstacle to her freedom and her mother's children as obstacles to her mother's freedom, Hadria recognizes that the fault lies not with either of them as individuals but with the conditions of women under patriarchy: "'It is my impression that in my life, as in the lives of most women, all roads lead to Rome…. It doesn't answer to rebel against the recognized condition of things, and it doesn't answer to submit'" (376). As Hadria's friend Valeria puts it, "'I suppose we are all inheriting the curse that has been laid upon our mothers through so many ages.'" Hadria responds, "'We are not free from the shades of our grandmothers…only I hope a little…that we may be less of a hindrance and an obsession to our granddaughters than our grandmothers have been to us'" (450). The reference to theoretical grandmothers and granddaughters extends the novel's worldview to multiple generations beyond Hadria and her mother. Thus, Caird reframes the fraught, unhappy relationship between Hadria and her mother as a relationship between generations of women, suffering under a common curse. Hadria has discovered that she is unable to break this curse in her own life. It is stronger than she is as an individual, just as it is stronger than her mother. Yet she offers hope in the vision of her granddaughters—not as individuals but as future generations of women—who may be able to carry on the work that Hadria cannot. Freedom from oppression is not individual, but collective, not a revolutionary reversal but a generational evolution.

<21>Caird offers a vision of feminist progress:

> She recalled a strange and grotesque vision, or waking-dream, that she had dreamt a few nights before: of a vast abyss, black and silent, which had to be filled up to the top with the bodies of women, hurled down to the depths of the pit of darkness, in order that the survivors might, at last, walk over in safety. Human bodies take but little room, and the abyss seemed to swallow them, as some greedy animal its prey. But Hadria knew, in her dream, that some day it would have claimed its last victim, and the surface would be level and solid, so that people could come and go, scarcely remembering that beneath their feet was once a chasm into which throbbing lives had to descend, to darkness and a living death. (341)

Hadria sees herself as part of a collective of women lost to oppression, to gender ideology, to patriarchy, to a vast abyss, black and silent. However, she understands that this defeat, though grisly, is ultimately moving women toward a greater goal. Eventually—perhaps long in the future—her sacrifice, the sacrifice of her mother, her grandmother, and the women before them, will enable their descendants to walk on the surface. "'The hope of the future lies in the rising generation,'" Hadria tells her sister. "'You can't alter those who have matured in the old ideas'" (474). She thus suggests that there is only so much progress that can be made within a lifetime; growing up in a culture saturated by patriarchy limits how far one can change, but the thankless work she and others do will contribute to the growing good from a historical point of view, in the generations to come.

Part III: "The hope of the future lies in the rising generation"

<22>*The Daughters of Danaus* and *The Beth Book* both use destructive mother-daughter relationships to depict women's enlightenment and liberation as a multi-generational progress. This generational thinking prefigures the wave metaphor of feminist progress, as well as the "matrophor" that figures different generations of feminists as mothers and daughters (Quinn 179). According to Astrid Henry, while the metaphor of the wave grew in popularity during the birth pangs of third-wave feminism, the first use of the term occurred in the late 1960s by those involved in the women's liberation movement. The language of the second wave connected this movement to the feminism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, now represented as the first wave (Henry 24).(2) First-wave feminists, then, did not represent themselves as the first wave of an ongoing process, but I have argued here that New Woman fiction provides a model of generational thinking that performs a very similar function. To make this argument is not necessarily to redeem such works from charges of matrophobia or internalized misogyny; the development of feminism in the twentieth and twenty-first century has shown that generational thinking may have outlived its usefulness. There are many valid critiques of generational thinking, emerging mostly clearly in the contestations over feminism and identity beginning in the 1990s; many of these critiques also help to explain its usefulness in the 1890s.

<23>In her study of generational conflict in U.S. feminism since 1990, Henry argues that one of the disadvantages of the generational metaphor is that it "naturalizes" what is and what should be understood as an intentional political identification:

> What gets lost in the use of the matrophor is precisely the will behind this identification, for once feminism becomes a mother, the generation that follows her will consist (merely) of her daughters. When young women's identification with feminism becomes naturalized in this way, we lose sight of what is, in fact, a deliberate political act: choosing to identify with feminism. (7)

Hogeland concurs, emphasizing the importance of understanding differences between feminists and feminisms as political and theoretical. Viewing them as generational prevents us from fully understanding those differences while inviting "psychologized thinking" (n.p.).

Devoney Looser has similarly suggested that "familial models keep feminist struggles from being viewed in larger contexts," including social and institutional ones, and become "dangerous and reductive" (111).

<24>For authors like Caird and Grand, to say nothing of the many other New Woman writers who depicted their heroines living out their lives in misery and disappointment, this may be precisely the appeal of generational thinking: the belief that the women's movement will become naturalized in future generations. Both *The Daughters of Danaus* and *The Beth Book* point out that patriarchy has been naturalized for the mothers; Hadria observes that "'You can't alter those who have matured in the old ideas'" (Caird 474), while Grand's narrator notes that "If the mind be tight-laced long enough, it is ruined as a model, just as the body is… so that there is nothing for the old generation but to remain in stays" (Grand 125). The hope that Hadria finds in her vision of an abyss sucking generations of women under until some can finally walk the surface is the hope that those doing so will "scarcely remember" the chasm beneath their feet—their freedom, she envisions, should be natural and effortless (Caird 451).

<25>More substantially, Henry and many other scholars have pointed out that the generational/wave metaphor establishes a paradigm of conflict. As Henry explains:

> The wave metaphor signals both continuity and discontinuity; in fact, both are essential to its rhetorical effectiveness. Continuity is suggested in the very notion of a wave, which is inevitably followed by successive waves cresting on the shore…. Discontinuity— and often progress and improvement—is highlighted by the numerical delineation of a new, in this case second, wave. The wave metaphor … allows one both to identify and disidentify with the past. (24-25)

Henry points out that second-wave feminists often produced narratives in which they disidentified with their biological mothers (usually depicted as non-feminists) and sought out identification with first-wave feminists of previous generations (7-8). While this has sometimes been understood as a necessary step toward the attainment of enlightenment and political consciousness, third-wave feminists disidentify as well, often against second-wave feminists, sometimes actually their biological mothers: "it appears that for many younger feminists, it is only by refusing to identify themselves with earlier versions of feminism—and frequently with older feminists—that they are able to create a feminism of their own" (Henry 7). Such tendencies may lead to internal conflict, the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of feminist history, and, as Hogeland argues, the reification of "ageism in the movement… on both sides of a putative generational divide" (n.p.). That said, other scholars have emphasized the value of conflict, generational and otherwise. Looser has suggested that the "desirability of feminist conflict… [perhaps] has been largely devalued," possibly because of "lingering nostalgia for an uncomplicated 'sisterhood'" (114). Susan Fraiman argues that conflict between generations of feminism can be useful, even necessarily, even if conflict between generations of feminists is not (528).

<26>The emphasis on the *New* Woman as opposed to the Old Woman, old-fashioned, indoctrinated, and unable to change, is certainly open to the charge of ageism. Jeanette King has argued that the New Woman movement "fed on and into anxieties about the 'masculine' older woman" (18); New Woman often "presented themselves in opposition to old women in the original sense of the term" (33). This conflict between new and old is part of the larger historical context of the 1890s, perhaps most simply summed up in the term *fin de siècle*. Using the contrast and antagonism between old and young, Max Nordau described *fin de siècle* as "the impotent despair of a sick man, who feels himself dying by inches in the midst of an eternally living nature blooming insolently for ever. It is the end of a rich, hoary voluptuary who sees a pair of young lovers making for a sequestered forest nook" (3). Whether one viewed this period through the lens of evolution and innovation or, like Nordau, in terms of atavism and degeneration, "one epoch of history is unmistakably in its decline, and another is announcing its approach… it is as though the morrow would not link itself with to-day" (5). That refusal or failure to link invites a sense of conflict and discontinuity between one period and another and between different generations.

<27>Ultimately, Egerton, Caird, and Grand suggest that disidentification with the mother is both necessary and comes at a cost; Florence, Beth, Hadria, and Algitha must make painful emotional breaks with their mothers for their own well-being, and Hadria and Algitha in particular mourn the lost possibilities:

> "Ah, if mother had only not sacrificed herself for us, how infinitely grateful I should feel to her now! What sympathy there might have been between us all! If she had but given herself a chance, how she might have helped us, and what a friend she might have been to us, and we to her!" (Caird 326-327)

Though they are saddened by "the loss of daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter" (Rich 240), it is clear to them both that identifying with their mother will continue a vicious cycle, while it is only by disidentifying with her and with the past that they might preserve the possibilities of "mothering" for future generations, here identified as a mother-daughter relationship based on what Heilmann has called a "female-identified motherhood": "a friendship between equals, born out of mutual respect and the sense of being in control of one's life" ("Mona Caird" 82). Hadria dreams not of passing down her wisdom to her granddaughters but of being "less of a hindrance and an obsession" to them than her grandmothers have been to her (Caird 450). She anticipates that her granddaughters will move beyond her own failed resistance to patriarchy, and she imagines that they will be right to do so.

<28>This positivist model of generational change—"the hope of the future lies in the rising generation"—remains worthy of critique, even putting aside the issue of conflict.(3) Henry, for instance, suggests that a positivist model of generations may encourage the "use of the past to mark the superiority of the present" in a way that includes willfully misguided readings of history (59-60). Citing Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time," Patricia Murphy argues that the

Victorian conception of linear time, progress, superiority over the past, and "a belief in human perfection" was "shaped and reinforced by a masculinist perspective" (4; see also Hill 15). Typically in Victorian fiction, Murphy suggests,

> A male character's association with linear time becomes a marker of progress, civilization, and modernity, whereas a female character's connection to cyclical time represents stasis, chaos, and anachronism. Male characters are identified with an acute historical consciousness, and female characters are positioned as virtually oblivious to and removed from history—in effect, the fiction suggests, ahistorical. (24)

Murphy locates the New Woman before the Modernist experimentation with non-linear and potentially feminine or feminist time, but she also argues that New Woman writers "were the true literary pioneers in probing time's ideological allegiances specifically through a gendered lens" (2). Where detractors claimed that the New Woman's threat to marriage and family harmed the natural progression of civilization (6), proponents of the New Woman argued that social change was required to correct inequities and continue progress, often using evolutionary language to make this case (8).

<29>While feminist Modernist writers may have attempted to reverse the gendered binary of time by identifying the restrictions of masculine linear time and the power and liberation of feminine cyclical time, New Woman writers maintain an allegiance to the idea of the progress. But rather than accepting the association of masculinity with progress and femininity with stasis, these writers work to feminize the concept of progress, using generational difference to re-inscribe women into a specifically matrilineal past and future. Beth's mother is not removed from history but a product of her time; Beth herself is "one of the first swallows of the woman's summer" and thus part of an ongoing temporal progression (Grand 527). Hadria imagines a transformation between the time of her grandmothers and the time of her granddaughters; she imagines that her descendants will be able to wrench themselves back *into* history by escaping the curse that Hadria has inherited from her mother and grandmother. This version of progress allows Caird and Grand to depict realistically the limitations of the contemporary while offering hope and strength to sympathetic readers. This positivism leaves behind the complacency about the superiority of the present that characterized much Victorian thought to imagine the superiority of a feminist future.

<30>In actuality, of course, the feminist movement has not evolved and progressed through generational phases of perpetually forward movement. Caird may not anticipate that the daughter of a feminist mother might disidentify with that mother and with feminism in a number of ways, including the rejection of feminism, or the rejection of *her* feminism; neither Caird nor Grand suggest that what "forward" means, or what progress means for women, could become a matter of debate or disagreement. This is certainly naïve and historically incorrect, but ultimately utopian in its vision of what the future holds for women.

<31>Since the 1990s, many feminist scholars have incisively demonstrated the limitations and disadvantages of the generational model and of the familial metaphors used to describe feminist development that assume rather than challenge the matrophobia of Anglo-American culture. It is probably time to move beyond narratives of tyrannical mothers, more oppressive in their embodiment of patriarchy or misogyny than the fathers and husbands and brothers and sons around them. A character (a grandmother) like Hadria would be delighted to think that we no longer have need of her and her travails, that we have outgrown the story of her relationship with her mother, that we seek to move beyond her struggle and confront another—to walk safely on the solid surface and recall the bodies swallowed by the abyss below as only a memory. This, at least, is the hope of generational thinking.

Endnotes

(1)Indeed, Heilmann has suggested that this novel "reads like a fictional exposition of Rich's theory from the perspective of a daughter" ("Mona Caird" 81).(^)

(2)"The term 'second wave' is attributed to Marsha Weinman Lear, who uses the term in a *New York Times Magazine* article from March 1968 to describe the then-burgeoning movement: 'In short, feminism, which one might have supposed as a dead as the Polish Question, is again an issue. Proponents call it the Second Feminist Wave, the first having ebbed after the glorious victory of suffrage and disappeared, finally, into the great sandbar of Togetherness'" (Henry 58).(^)

(3)Henry discusses two models of generational relationships described by Karl Mannheim: the "positivist" model, in which new generations improve upon those that came before, and the "romantic-historical" model, in which the past is romanticized and the passage of time is a sign of decline (5).(^)

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