New Woman Fiction, 1881–1899

Annie E. Holdsworth,
The Years that the Locust Hath Eaten (1895)
'Joanna Traill, Spinster' (1893)

Edited by
SueAnn Schatz

ROUTLEDGE

NEW WOMAN FICTION, 1881–1899

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INTRODUCTION

Little known today, Annie E. Holdsworth was a popular novelist in late nineteenth-century England, though her works would eventually fade into obscurity as the twentieth century progressed. She was born Eliza Ann Holdsworth on 25 April 1860 at Grey's Hill, Jamaica, the third of five children of a missionary and his wife, the Reverend William and Elizabeth (Hall) Holdsworth.[1] In 1869, the family returned to England, with Rev. Holdsworth serving as Wesleyan minister in Snaith, Yorkshire. By 1881, Annie E. Holdsworth was boarding with a minister's widow, Mary Hawson, at Wellington Cottage, Sussex, and teaching in a school. She is listed on the 1881 Census as a widow.[2]

After moving to London, Holdsworth co-edited the *Woman's Signal*, the successor to the *Woman's Herald*, with Lady Henry (Isabel) Somerset from January 1894 to September 1895, during which time the periodical was heavily concerned with temperance.[3] She contributed mostly fiction and reviews; *Joanna Traill, Spinster* appeared as a serial in the *Women's Herald* from 24 August to 26 October 1893 and *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten* appeared as a serial in the *Women's Signal* from 6 June to 10 October 1895. Publishing under the pseudonym Max Beresford from the 1880s, Holdsworth's reputation as a novelist grew during the 1890s; *Bonnie Dundee* appeared in 1884 and *Belhaven* in 1889. The first novel under her own name, *Joanna Traill, Spinster*, was published in 1893. A novel a year followed until 1904, then every few years after that. Her last published book was *The Book of Anna* (1913).

Holdsworth married the poet Eugene Lee-Hamilton – the half-brother of Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) – in 1898, after meeting him in Florence the previous year.[4] Lee-Hamilton and his half-sister had a difficult relationship, and while Holdsworth tried to act as conciliator, Vernon Lee seemed irritated by her sister-in-law's attempts. In a letter to Kit Anstruther-Thomson in October 1898, she described Holdsworth as 'dreadfully anxious for good terms. But oh! oh! They dined here on my birthday. And the dulness [*sic*], the want of manners, the perpetual saying of things (on her part) that made one hot – platitudes'; as well, Paget considered her sister-in-law 'a spendthrift'.[5]

Uncannily, Holdsworth's life would imitate her art in two ways. Like Dunstane Momerie in *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten*, Lee-Hamilton had for years suffered from semi-invalidism. According to Peter Gunn, Lee-Hamilton's mother's 'preoccupation with matters of health, which in her reached a degree that may fairly be called neurotic, was at least part cause in [his] subsequent neurasthenia'.[6] After his mother's death in 1896, Lee-Hamilton more or less miraculously recovered. Holdsworth and her husband had one daughter in 1903, named Persis Margaret, who – like Dollie in *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten* – was born sickly and died the following year.[7]

Lee-Hamilton never recovered from his daughter's death; after suffering a stroke he died in 1907, and Holdsworth considered herself in financial difficulty. While she continued to write, she applied to the Royal Literary Fund in September 1909 for assistance. In her letter to the Fund, she revealed that Lee-Hamilton had refused a pension of £500 from the Diplomatic Service, for which he had worked for five years, believing that family money would be sufficient to support himself and his family. Holdsworth claimed that from an annuity investment she had an income of only £200 per year,[8] with £50 going 'towards the support of two invalid sisters'. Perhaps commenting on the waning interest in New Woman novels, Holdsworth ended her application: 'owing to the condition of the book market, my books no longer bring me in any royalties'. In October of that year, she was granted £100.[9]

Holdsworth continued to live in Italy for the rest of her life, dying on 10 July 1917.[10] She is buried beside her husband and daughter in the Allori Cemetary in Florence.[11] Despite her worries about finances, she left her brother William West Holdsworth a rather tidy sum of £1,541 8*s.* 2*d.* – in 2008 worth £341,867 or US $634,026.[12]

The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, among the myriad social issues facing Britain, the crusade to alleviate poverty became a central matter for some. At the same time, the reading public was being introduced to the 'New Woman', the literary figure who struggled to break the bonds society placed upon her. In Holdsworth's *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten*, a meeting of the two takes place.

In *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, Seth Koven discusses the vogue of middle-class Victorians going into the slums of London – some for the thrill of descending into the dangers of a heretofore forbidden area, but others to lend a hand to the working-class poor. Women, particularly, made up this latter group, and while they often went out of a sincere desire to help, their actions also positioned them as renegades and pioneers. As Koven

points out, 'For upper- and middle-class women raised in homes with armies of domestic servants – cooks, parlour maids, charring girls – immersing themselves in the dirtiness of the slums was a literal and symbolic act of independence and adventure'.[13] But beyond the 'independence and adventure', many socialist feminists, such as Beatrice Webb, Sylvia Pankhurst and Helen Bosanquet, were genuinely interested in helping the poor, and they perceived that their fight for women's rights was intricately meshed with bringing attention to oppression of all varieties. These feminists understood the enormity of such a battle because, as *The Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission* would state at the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the largest obstacles in overcoming the problem of unemployment and its resulting poverty was not so much persuading the middle and upper classes that poverty could be eradicated, but convincing them that the problem existed at all.[14] As an upper-class woman, gazing at a painting entitled *A Nineteenth-Century Madonna*, declares in *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten*, 'Really that is too ridiculous! – a woman starving, and a dead child on her lap. Things like that don't happen in the nineteenth century' (below, p. 87).

Like this painting, Holdsworth's novel places the problem of the working poor directly in front of its middle-class readers' eyes. Holdsworth is operating within the long-standing tradition that women have the innate moral and compassionate temperament that obliges them to help the needy. Her novel earnestly pleads for justice for lower-class women, but her solution to the working-class woman's problems is to impose middle-class values on her. Whether Holdsworth firmly believed that the middle-class way of life was the most virtuous, or if she was unaware of just how resolutely such conventions and values shaped her attitude and writing, *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten* conceals a double edge: while struggling to reformulate the way people think about women and the poor, it also dangerously serves to reproduce then-current assumptions. Ultimately, Priscilla Momerie's role in this novel as a New Woman, writer and defender of women – especially lower-class women – is a precarious one precisely because she is middle class. Priscilla may sympathize with, empathize with, defend and demand justice for the working class, but her middle-class standing and her desire – her need – to stay within middle-class boundaries often negates her efforts to help the working poor. Yet, this novel effectively locates the working poor's lot as a social problem within the range of the middle class's help.

Although practically unheard of today, Holdsworth's fourth novel was fairly well received on publication in 1895, earning plaudits from critics who lauded its heroine as 'full of high aspirations, in the prime of youth and health, [and] animated by an enthusiasm for the masses who, in eyes like hers, are held to constitute the "people"'.[15] Holdsworth's novel is unique because it does what Rita S. Kranidis says many New Woman novels *do not do*: 'Characters in feminist novels often turn to the slums of London as sources of experience, wisdom, and

growth toward independence, but those settings are rarely central to the narratives themselves'.[16] Thus, by situating the action of *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten* directly in a working-class neighbourhood, Holdsworth is, in effect, fictionally 'slumming'. Her novel is meant to encourage readers to change stultifying social conventions and conditions, but it also reveals multiple problems when middle-class ideology operates upon the working-class poor.

* * *

While the term 'New Woman' is never mentioned in this novel, there are three incarnations of her in the characters of Gertrude Tennant, Miss Cardrew and the book's protagonist, Priscilla Momerie. The combined characteristics of these three women reveal Holdsworth's apparent discomfort labelling her female creations as 'New Women'. Their situations, experiences and beliefs lead them to live lives that are outside the boundaries of what would have been 'acceptable' middle-class ideology; indeed, all three are 'unconventional' (a term repeatedly used to describe Priscilla), but Holdsworth shrinks from permitting any of these women the freedom to define themselves as 'New', and thus capable of making a difference to society. One is struck with how resolutely Holdsworth first opens the possibilities for her women characters – thus allowing her to critique class strictures – but then limits them by imposing stifling, and in Priscilla's case, fatal conventions.

Gertrude Tennant, the aspiring opera singer, is the obvious New Woman of the novel. Described as having only having the ambition 'to sing a solo in the Albert Hall' (below, p. 18), Gertrude is then revealed as solely wanting marriage. And even though Holdsworth bestows upon Gertrude the chance to sing professionally she undercuts her achievement. We learn that 'hard work had not won the chance for Gertrude'; instead, the beautiful young woman had been made into a celebrity of sorts by a journalist who 'had been diligently sowing paragraphs in the papers about the new soprano' (below, p. 91). Ironically, by the end of the novel, Gertrude in fact will be the true New Woman. It is Gertrude who first courageously stands up to Dunstane and his fraudulent 'New Religion' – the work he professes will change the world, but never writes – and she is the first to resolve to 'remain in the Buildings, and try to carry on Priscilla's work' (below, p. 129). Mindless now of her ambitions for a singing career or even marriage, Gertrude will turn her talents and compassion to aiding the weary and the ill of the Regent's Buildings and beyond.

Miss Cardrew, Priscilla's former governess, is a writer and can be defined as an accidental New Woman. Known as 'a spinster who mingled sentiment and fiction, and was known in literary circles as a purveyor of sensations' (below, p. 13), Miss Cardrew represents the single woman's problematic position in a society that does not want to acknowledge its 'odd women'. 'Cardie', as Priscilla calls

her, is aware of the boundaries she is crossing with her writing and so holds to extreme precepts as if her adherence to such constraints puts her work effectively into the background. Miss Cardrew moves from one socially and economically liminal position as a governess, to another as a writer. Because of her precarious social status, she consistently makes sure that she follows the rules of (middle-class) society: comically, Cardie uses a footstool when Dunstane is home because 'in a gentleman's presence a woman should be a creature without legs' (below, p. 35). At other times she appears shocked at conversations that Priscilla or Gertrude engage in with Dunstane and the artist Stephen Malden. This alarm at such unconventionality is sadly amusing when one remembers that her life's work encompasses writing sensation stories and romances. Yet, she willingly debases herself temporarily as 'a purveyor of sensations' in order to fulfil more socially acceptable goals: 'My book has sold beyond my most pleasurable dreams. Priscilla, my dear, I shall be able to live in the country ... and have a little shop' (below, p. 112). Though not totally comfortable with her success as a sensation writer, Miss Cardrew nonetheless takes pride in her work, but also accepts it as part of her situation as a single, older woman with few economic choices. But if Cardie is the mature single woman with few options, then Priscilla Momerie is the young, married woman who does not have many choices either, allowing the novel to critique the institution of marriage and the British class system. Holdsworth's positioning of Priscilla as a New Woman writer acts as a metaphor for these critiques.

As a young child and before she is married, Priscilla is constantly referred to as 'unconventional' (e.g., below, p. 13), but the longer she is married, the more conventional – the more like the 'Angel in the House' – she becomes, allowing her husband Dunstane to abuse her psychologically. Priscilla begins her writing career as a novelist but soon needs to write sensation stories in order to earn money to sustain herself, her newly invalid husband and eventually their baby daughter. As a single woman under her father's economic care, writing was a way to use her imagination, but as a married woman her unceasing need to write for economic reasons leads her to believe she is prostituting herself; the connection between the degradation of serial writing and the degradation of marriage is palpable.

As a married woman forced to earn money because her husband refuses to lower himself to tutor, writing becomes a necessity; the sensation stories for economic survival, her *Book of the Great City* for psychological survival. Priscilla truly becomes one of the masses, struggling to survive. Yet it is her circumstances living among and becoming one of the working class that impel her to write about the poor's condition. However, her situation is different from the other working-class women in the building because she maintains her conviction that she is still middle class and that Dunstane is failing her because he declines work, vowing instead that he will write 'The New Religion'.

Despite her portrayal of Priscilla as a 'modern' (read 'New') woman capable of earning an income, Holdsworth still relies heavily on the middle-class notion that men should be the main providers for the family. She intimates that Priscilla should be allowed to earn a living as a writer, but that she should only write things she *wants* to, not *has* to. Holdsworth further implies that Dunstane *should* take on any work that brings in money.

The Momeries' marriage also is an examination of the class system, as well as a scrutiny of the difficulty of escaping from those divisions in an effort to redefine gender constructs. Dunstane has married 'up', and unconsciously Priscilla constantly reminds him that he is indeed of a lower class than she. An early image of the couple is of a store counter between the young lad and the girl child (below, p. 13), but that image later symbolizes the difference between them that leads to the disintegration of their marriage (below, p. 117).

More integral to the 'New Woman' aspect of the novel is that Dunstane is unable to deal with powerful, economically self-sufficient women – first his mother, then Priscilla. Dunstane refuses to credit his mother for his university education, even though it was she who ran the family grocery business after his father became paralysed; giving credit instead to an uncle, he censures his mother for dying while he was taking his exams. Likewise, Dunstane blames Priscilla for Dollie's death rather than himself, charging 'but you must get your damned money!' (below, p. 75).

Holdsworth also introduces a somewhat risqué element into the plot with the growing relationship between Priscilla and Malden. He falls in love with her and offers to elope to the Continent to save her from Dunstane's cruelty. While clearly Priscilla is attracted and momentarily considers his proposition, she ultimately decides to stay with her husband, as convention wins over emotion. This decision allows Holdsworth to accentuate Priscilla's 'angelic' qualities, including de-emphasizing the sexual element of marriage. Dunstane's paralysis has effectively ended the couple's conjugal relations, revealing Holdsworth's difficulty in trying to envision new gender models while simultaneously avoiding a subject her readers may have found distasteful. Paralysing Dunstane offers her a way to keep her heroine in the role of the 'Angel in the House', as well as enabling her to develop Priscilla into a virtuous New Woman. A relationship with Malden would compromise that integrity. Priscilla's comment 'Right is not best! ... And it is never happy. I have done right for these two years ... Do I look like a happy woman?' (below, p. 98) implicitly acknowledges that her relationship with Dunstane has been less than satisfying in all aspects.

Malden's departure for Normandy opens the possibility for Priscilla to learn first-hand what must happen if she is truly to help the masses as she puts her sexual tension and energy into writing *The Book of the Great City* (the work which will expose the ills of poor society). She transforms into one of those about whom

she writes: a working-class woman struggling to make ends meet, physically and emotionally suffocating under her burdens. Yet, it is this personal transformation that allows her to develop into an author who can change her community. Priscilla's writing thus extends her role as angel from in the house to out in society.

While Priscilla's relationship with Dunstane and their moving into the Regent's Buildings introduce Holdsworth's critique of class issues, there are several important scenes in the novel that most explicitly detail the complexities of the class system as well as the difficulties inherent in attempting to alter that system; specifically, Holdworth's seemingly 'simple' solution to the working-class's problem by imposing 'middle-class' values of cleanliness solidifies class boundaries and prejudices, revealing a perhaps unavoidable trap for middle-class writers. However, the novel also reveals what I believe is an unconscious rejection of middle-class values through its treatment of 'whiteness'; the ideology of 'whiteness' is revealed to be particularly dangerous not only to the working class but also middle-class women.

Priscilla believes that she is one of the masses and wants to do something for their benefit, but as the conveyor of middle-class values to the Regent's Buildings, her 'whiteness' foreshadows her doom. Her ideas about cleanliness and order do little for the working-class tenants – they certainly do not improve their economic situation – but instead bring death to Priscilla herself. Throughout the novel, the usual associations of whiteness with goodness and health are distorted and undermined; repeatedly whiteness correlates to sickness and death. Whiteness in the Regent's Buildings comes not from leisure, but from stifling air and lack of sun. For the working women and men, as well as for the working writer Priscilla, it is an unwholesome sign of unhealthiness, of too much work that drains the body of life-giving blood.

Moving into the Regent's Buildings, Priscilla brings her indoctrinated ideas about dirt and cleanliness, even though she herself has never before done housework. She finds cleaning to be a new experience, something fun – not the drudgery that it is to the working-class women who spend twelve-hour days at a factory, only to come home to more work. If things are not cleaned (for example, the flagstones of the common areas which Priscilla washes), it is only because there are too many other responsibilities to which to attend. Additionally, Priscilla sees her work as a spectacle, something to be commended: she 'had been disappointed that no one had gone by to admire her bare arms, and her hands in the dirty suds' (below, p. 8). Convinced by her bourgeois background that her work, as mere exhibition, is doing something for the working-class tenants that they do not do for themselves, Priscilla fails to realize that the 'bare arms' and 'hands in the dirty suds' are symbols of work that is an additional burden on women who already have too much to do.

The two major working-class characters in the novel are Mrs Markham and Mrs Gibson; both work full time at a factory while raising numerous children with apparently no help from their husbands. (Interestingly, working-class men are conspicuously absent in the novel.) Mrs Markham's and Mrs Gibson's plight as wives, mothers and workers is highlighted by Priscilla's well-meaning but ultimately ineffectual attempts to make their lives better. Initially, the women do 'not accept Mrs. Momerie as one of themselves' because they think her 'a lady masquerading as a working woman' (below, p. 22). While Priscilla, as the middle-class woman, is ironically the outsider here, Mrs Markham and Mrs Gibson hold a type of power precisely due to their class. In the scene in which Priscilla comically and ineptly attempts to wash clothes for the first time in her life, Mrs Markham and Mrs Gibson finally yield and show Priscilla how it is done. They have, despite the working-class accents that supposedly mark their 'lower' class status, a certain kind of knowledge well beyond Priscilla's sheltered experience that enables them to survive in a gritty, unrelenting world. Initially suspicious of Priscilla, they share their knowledge with her, not only of washing but of the degrading class system, giving Priscilla her first lesson in becoming a New Woman who can possibly change social wrongs.

They tell her the story of Jennie Pyke, a child who drowned in one of the washing tubs, kept full because the County Council 'was afraid of a water-famine; and they cuts off the water, all but two hours a day. So we was obliged to fill up tubs and jars to keep enough over the night' (below, p. 23). Stunned, Priscilla flees the rooftop, Mrs Gibson and Mrs Markham finish their and her washing, and Priscilla later returns with a tea tray. Here Holdsworth powerfully offers critiques of several middle-class values in this scene: one, the very thing that is used to promote the middle-class value of cleanliness, the washing tub, is an instrument of death for a working-class child; two, it is the local government – unmindful of the needs of the buildings' inhabitants – that ultimately is the cause of the little girl's death, and the working women have no doubts as to who is to blame; and three, when Priscilla's sensibilities are shaken by this story and she departs, she effectively leaves the *actual* working women to do exactly what working-class women have always done: middle-class women's dirty work. Her return with the tea tray is an attempt to restore order from the chaos caused, not by the lower class's dirtiness, but by decisions made by a government that did not consider possible consequences to the people living in the buildings.

Another integral scene in the examination of class issues in this novel is when Mrs Markham gives birth to twins, after Priscilla's daughter Dollie dies. Priscilla's asking Mrs Markham for one of her babies uncomfortably suggests that it is permissible for a middle-class woman to take a working-class woman's child. With Mrs Gibson's initial support, Priscilla convinces Mrs Markham to give her one of the twins, one 'dollie' replacing another. Their argument is that twins will produce

twice the work for Mrs Markham, for which she does not have the time. Priscilla is convinced that she can take care of the child better than Mrs Markham, who has six other children, but she is just as desperate for money as the working-class tenants. She conforms to the belief that she is still middle class, and it never occurs to her that she cannot financially provide for a child any better than the Markhams.

* * *

Eventually, worn out by the extremes in her life – writing sensation stories by day for money and her *Book of the Great City* by night – Priscilla dies, almost totally unrecognizable. Perhaps a commentary by Holdsworth, the inability of Priscilla's friends to identify her seems to suggest that Holdsworth, like Priscilla, feels that at times the woman writer is rejected and goes unheard and unseen. Yet she remains steadfast in her belief to fight the good fight. At the end of the novel, Dunstane, Malden, Gertrude and Miss Cardrew decide to stay in the buildings, carrying out Priscilla's plan, as outlined in her book, for alleviating the poor's burdens. However, what Holdsworth leaves out is that the working-class tenants, such as the Gibsons and Markhams, have no choice. They must live in the Regent's Buildings because it is all they can afford. Their lives are little different from what they were when Priscilla entered them. *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten* reveals the complex difficulties inherent in trying to improve the lives of the poor. But, for Holdsworth, one must try.

We never see what it is that Priscilla actually writes in *The Book of the Great City*, but as Holdsworth gives her novel a similar title as Priscilla's effort,[17] the text we read thus can be seen as a mirror of her creation: both are about the unacceptable state of the working poor. More so, since *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten* deals intimately with the ease with which the middle class can descend into the lower class, Holdsworth's rhetorical strategy is brilliantly revealed. She disguises the working poor's situation by placing her middle-class heroine in their position (the ultimate form of 'slumming'); her middle-class audience could then more fully identify with the working class. At the end of the novel, the class system that Priscilla wanted to deconstruct is still in place, but this New Woman's legacy leaves the decision for change up to readers. Holdsworth has given her readers a vivid picture about the working-class poor's abominable situation, giving them the responsibility to do something about it.

Joanna Traill, Spinster

In a review of *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten*, the *Manchester Guardian* referred to its appraisal of Holdsworth's previous novel, *Joanna Traill, Spinster*: '[*The Years*] is not likely to achieve so large a success as [*Joanna Traill*] – a suc-

cess which, as we said at the time of its publication, was principally a success de scandale',[18] due to the plot device in which an unmarried woman takes a former prostitute into her home. It is not a stretch of the imagination that this assessment of *Joanna Traill* stung Holdsworth, as she would use the phrase *succès de scandale* in *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten* to describe the naive Priscilla Momerie's first attempt at novel-writing. Perhaps she was as shocked as Priscilla to discover that what she had written was received as sensation, and not as it was intended – to question conventions. What also seems clear is that in *Joanna Traill* we see Holdsworth engaging with two of the main issues with which she would wrestle in *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten*: the woman who wants to break free of confining societal stereotypes and the devastating effects of poverty.

Joanna Traill can be termed a New Woman, though she does not necessarily see herself as one. Forced by her two younger sisters to refuse a marriage offer because they fear the man's proposal was prompted by her newly acquired wealth (and that they will not inherit any of that wealth when she dies), Joanna determines to do something with her life. While philanthropy is an acceptable role for a single woman, Joanna pushes the boundary of that tolerance by bringing the young Christine Dow into her home, first as a maid, then as her ward. (Interestingly, Joanna's family does not learn of Christine's former life; it is known only to Joanna, Mr Boas and eventually Mr Bevan. The people who are shocked – at least according to reviewers such as the one for the *Manchester Guardian* – are the novel's readers.)

What results from Joanna's decision to go beyond the pale of British societal conventions is another idea that intrigued Holdsworth: the formation of a family outside traditional norms. As the eldest of three sisters left orphaned by their parents' deaths, Joanna feels 'tyrannised over' by her sisters Sarah Crane and Rachel Prothero, after 'twenty years [of being] their slave' (below, p. 136). She rebels in a quiet way – assuming the function of parent to Christine – and thus sets into motion the formation of a more supportive, satisfying and gratifying family that includes a 'daughter' and eventual 'son-in-law', and a 'husband'. An outburst from Christine vocalizes what Joanna internalizes:

> I think sometimes my heart will burst with the life that I have to hold down and keep under. Are all girls like that? Do they all feel the hungry gnawing that I feel? And I sit quietly and strum scales or make stupid drawings – I, with my heart bursting! And they call it life. I feel like a fly with its wings torn off. (below, p. 178)

Christine's plight showcases how easily and quickly a woman can fall from the middle class into poverty (a theme echoed in *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten*). The daughter of a schoolmaster 'starved out by the board school' (below, p. 151), Christine finds herself homeless until taken in by the prostitute Nella: '"I got plenty to eat there, and they promised me pretty clothes when I got better. And one night –" She stopped, turned pale, and dropped her head' (below,

p. 151). Her narrative remains a secret, known only to herself, Joanna, and Mr Boas until she reveals it to the man she loves, Amos Bevan. His cutting reaction is deplorable, though not wholly unexpected: 'But though I loved you to a thousand deaths I could never make you clean ... Marry you ... nor any good man could' (below, p. 198). Only after a self-imposed exile and its resulting reflection does Bevan realize that Christine had no choice in her early life.

Perhaps Holdsworth's most damning condemnation of the constraints that societal conventions place upon women is her depiction of Joanna's death. Despite her significant contributions to the settlement house movement, Joanna continues to be treated by her sisters as their servant, ready to attend them as needed. When she receives a telegram that Sarah is ill, Joanna immediately travels to take care of her; but while the demanding younger Mrs Crane endures a mild case of diphtheria, her elder sister suffers more gravely: 'for ten days she sacrificed herself to the whims of a selfish woman. On the tenth day her strength failed' (below, p. 219). Ironically, it is not the supposed depraved area of the East End and her tireless work for the poor that kills Joanna, but her own self-interested sister.

After her death, Joanna is publicly and forever marked by the label that appears on her coffin-plate: 'JOANNA TRAILL, SPINSTER' (below, p. 220). Despite where her life had taken her in the four years the novel covers, Joanna is not accorded the mark of philanthropist nor even of 'mother'; society sees her only as an unmarried (read: unimportant) woman. But Holdsworth is not content to let Joanna die inconsequentially. Shortly before being summoned to her sister's side, Joanna had realized her profound love for Boas and that despite not being formally married to him, she 'knew that he had made her life complete, that she owed all that gave it worth and beauty to him. He was the inspiration of the best and highest in her, the power that vitalised every germ of good' (below, p. 217). Our final vision of her is what Boas belatedly comes to comprehend: '"Spinster?" No! Joanna Traill was his wife' (below, p. 222). Holdsworth leaves us with the suggestion that the institution of marriage is too restrictive for such a constant, faithful and boundless love.

Notes

1. Holdsworth's siblings were Elizabeth (b. 1857), William W. (b. 1859), John N. B. (b. 1862) and Alice (b. 1869).
2. I have not been able to ascertain if Holdsworth was indeed married and widowed at this young age, or if this is an error on the part of the census-taker or the transcriber.
3. R. T. Van Arsdel, 'Mrs. Florence Fenwick-Miller and *The Woman's Signal*, 1895–1899', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 15:3 (Fall 1982), pp. 107–18, on p. 109; I. Somerset, 'To the Readers of *The Woman's Signal*', *Woman's Signal*, 4:91 (26 September 1895), p. 200.
4. A. E. Holdsworth, Introduction to E. Lee-Hamilton, *Mimma Bella* (London: William Heinemann, 1909), pp. v–xiii, on p. xi.
5. Quoted in V. Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003), pp. 148, 149.

6. P. Gunn, *Vernon Lee: Violet Paget, 1856–1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 19.
7. Vernon Lee did not believe the couple should have children, due to Lee-Hamilton's debilitation: 'E. has *no* right to have children. It isn't the individual child, it's the *taint* communicated to the race' (Colby, *Vernon Lee*, p. 148).
8. While it is difficult to assign an exact value to money from different eras, the website 'Measuring Worth' (http://www.measuringworth.org), by L. H. Office, is very helpful in estimating the worth of a sum of money. I have chosen to use the Average Earnings index. Thus, Holdsworth's annual income of £200 from her husband's annuity would, in 2008 (the last year the website uses for comparison), be worth approximately £40,805, or US $75,677; her sisters' upkeep would have cost her £10,201 annually, or a little under US $19,000. The £100 allowance from the Royal Literary Fund in 1907 would have given her an extra £40,805, or US $58,352, that year.
9. Royal Literary Fund, 'Applicants to the Royal Literary Fund', *Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, 1790–1918* (London: World Microfilms Publications, 1982–3), Reel 115: Case File 2805.
10. P. Harper, 'New General Catalogue of Old Books and Authors', at www.authorandbookinfo.com [accessed 13 August 2009]; P. Harper, email to the author, 14 August 2009.
11. J. B. Holloway, email to the author, 30 August 2009.
12. P. Harper, email to the author, 8 September 2009; information obtained from the List of Grants of Probate for England and Wales.
13. S. Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 187.
14. S. Webb and B. Webb (eds), *The Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, Parts I & II: The Break-Up of the Poor Law; The Public Organization of the Labour Market* (1909; Clifton, NJ: Augustus M. Kelley, 1974), Part II, p. 323.
15. Anon., Review of *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten*, *Athenaeum*, 3556 (21 December 1895), p. 867.
16. R. S. Kranidis, *Subversive Discourse: The Cultural Production of Late Victorian Feminist Novels* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 69–70.
17. Thinking her book has been rejected by the publishers, Priscilla crosses out the original title, replacing it with *The Years That the Locust Have Eaten*; ironically, a letter received after Priscilla goes out for a ride that will culminate in her death explains that the publishers want only a title change and a slight alteration to the end of the work.
18. Anon., 'Books of the Week', *Manchester Guardian* (10 November 1896), p. 7.

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CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN ANNIE E. HOLDSWORTH'S LIFE

Year	Events
1860	25 April: Born Eliza Ann Holdsworth at Grey's Hill, Jamaica, third of five children of the Rev. William H. and Elizabeth (Hall) Holdsworth; sister Elizabeth born 1857, brother William W. born 1859.
1862	Brother John N. B. born.
1869	Sister Alice born.
	Family returns to England; Rev. Holdsworth becomes Wesleyan minister of Snaith, Hampsthwaite, York.
(by) 1881	Teaching at a school; boarding at the home of Mary Hawson, widow of a Wesleyan minister, Wellington Cottage, Oving, Sussex, England.
1884	Publishes her first novel *Bonnie Dundee* (under the pseudonym Max Beresford).
1889	*Belhaven* published (under pseudonym Max Beresford).
1892	Father dies.
	Moves to London; works for *Review of Reviews*.
1893	24 August–26 October: Serialization of *Joanna Traill, Spinster* in *Women's Herald*.
	Joanna Traill, Spinster, the first novel under her name, published.
1894–5	January 1894–September 1895: Co-editor (with Lady Henry [Isobel] Somerset) of *Woman's Signal*, a weekly periodical.
1895	6 June–10 October: Serialization of *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten* in *Woman's Signal*.
	November [?]: *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten* published.
1896	*Spindles and Oars* published.
1897	Meets poet Eugene Lee-Hamilton, half-brother of author Vernon Lee (Violet Paget) in Florence, Italy.
1898	September: Marries Lee-Hamilton in Lymington, Hampshire, England.
	The Gods Arrive published.
1899	*Forest Notes* (written with Lee-Hamilton) published.
1900	Moves with Lee-Hamilton to Villa Benedettini, San Gervasio, Florence.
1901	*Great Lowlands* and *Michael Ross, Minister* published.
1902	*A Garden of Spinsters* published.
1903	Birth of daughter Persis Margaret.
	A New Paolo and Francesca published.
1904	2 October: Persis dies.

1906	*The Iron Gates* published.
1907	7 September: Lee-Hamilton dies at Villa Pierotti, Bagni di Lucca, Italy.
1908	November: Writes introduction to *Mimma Bella*, a posthumous collection of Lee-Hamilton's poetry (published 1909).
1909	*Lady Letty Brandon* published. 14 September: Applies for a grant of relief from the Royal Literary Fund. 19 October: Receives £100 from the Royal Literary Fund.
1910	*The Little Companion of Ruth* published.
1912	*Dame Verona of the Angels* published.
1913	*The Book of Anna* published.
1917	10 July: Dies in Florence aged 57 and is buried in the Allori Cemetery beside her husband and daughter.

THE YEARS THAT THE LOCUST HATH EATEN

By
Annie E. Holdsworth
Author of 'Joanna Traill, Spinster'

New York and London:
Macmillan and Co.
1895