LATE VICTORIAN AND
EARLY MODERNIST
WOMEN WRITERS

Dreams, Visions and Realities

Edited by
Stephanie Forward

Dreams, Visions and Realities

With love to the Forwards: Nick, Jacqui, Suzanne, Pat and Ken,
and to the Forrests: Muriel, Andrew, Janice, Jamie and Emily.

Titles in this series

Anna Lombard
by Victoria Cross
Edited by Gail Cunningham

Dreams, Visions and Realities
An anthology of short stories by turn-of-the century women writers
Edited by Stephanie Forward, with a foreword by Ann Heilmann

Keynotes and *Discords*
by George Egerton
Edited by Sally Ledger

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by Lucas Malet
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The Creators
by May Sinclair
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Dreams
by Olive Schreiner
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Late Victorian and Early Modernist Women Writers

Series Editors
Marion Thain and Kelsey Thornton

Dreams, Visions and Realities

Edited by Stephanie Forward

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Series Editors' Introduction

This series 'Late Victorian and Early Modernist Women Writers' owes its immediate inspiration to a casual grumble from Gail Cunningham. She was regretting that there are many splendid books by women at the turn of the nineteenth century which she would like to be able to teach, but that she was unable to put on her reading lists because her students would not be able to get hold of a copy. Anyone researching and teaching late Victorian and early modernist women writers will recognize this position: how difficult it can be to buy copies of prose texts which have changed the accepted view of literature of the period, and how frustrating that this revolution in the critical world cannot change the syllabuses we teach until good editions of these works are easily available. We decided to do something about it, and have designed a series which intends to bring back into print significant work by important and interesting women of the time, books which have been difficult to obtain but are nonetheless points of reference for those who study the period.

To establish a series of this sort is to make a clear statement about the changes taking place in our understanding of literary history and the place of women writers within it. It recognizes that a significant shift is being made in the way in which we must view not only the work produced in the late years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century but the critical position from which we understand it. We therefore thought it important to secure as editors critics and scholars whose work has figured significantly in assisting and defining this change.

Since one of the reasons for the neglect of these novels and stories is the nature of critical and social prejudices and opinions, we also thought that it was important to ask the editors to provide substantial contextualization, in introductions which should explain not only the importance of the writers for their own day but also for ours, and with substantial suggestions for further reading.

We trust that this group of books will enrich both courses in women's writing and courses on late Victorian and early modernist texts. The general reader too should find much to interest, amuse and entertain.

Marion Thain
Kelsey Thornton

Preface

"I am fond of life, and devote myself to the study of it in all its phases; and this leads to occasional adventures", Sarah Grand's Josepha nonchalantly remarks in "The Man in the Scented Coat". Whether it is Grand's New Woman writer playing at cards in a hide-out with the Prince of Wales during a fog-ridden London night, Beatrice Harraden's acclaimed pianist backpacking Switzerland in the guise of a piano tuner, Pauline Hopkins' spurned bride and abandoned wife taking male presumption for a ride, Mary Wilkins' home-loving mother putting her foot down about family accommodation, Kate Chopin's Louisiana wife spending a passionate afternoon in the arms of her lover for the immediate benefit of both their families, or Evelyn Sharp's teenage cricketer who joins the game only to change all the rules, the New Girls and rebellious Old Women in this collection appear to have a much better time of it than the prevailing image of the deadly serious and morally high-toned New Woman might lead us to expect: not for them the perils of a feminism which Elaine Showalter has recently condemned as "confining, Victorian and self-punishing" (Showalter 88).

It is certainly to the credit of this collection that the New Woman is presented in all her diversity, thematically as well as generically. As Stephanie Forward points out in her comprehensive introduction, there were many reasons why turn-of-the-century women authors were drawn to shorter forms of writing, and this is an aspect which tends to be neglected in critical appraisals of New Woman fiction. Some of the stories in this collection show an affinity with the realistic or naturalistic modes of much of the fiction of the time, while others capture the impressionistic technique of contemporary painting, or transport us to the world of dreams, the stuff of Gothic nightmares as well as of Freudian visions of the unconscious – an unconscious explored in haunting detail so that it may act on, and politicize, the reader's awareness of the condition of women in society. Thus Charlotte Mew's Poesque scenery and plot in "A White Night" intimate that live burial is the destiny of every good bride (the woman in wedding white) in the house of patriarchy: a recurrent message in *fin-de-siècle* feminist writing which is central also to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper" and Edith Wharton's "Quicksand". The eerie rituals, patterns and textual inscriptions which orchestrate female sacrifice and entombment in Mew, Gilman and Kingsford point to the irrational and arbitrary maze of male-defined structures and ideologies which entrap and paralyse women,

yet as Olive Schreiner's "Dream Life and Real Life" suggests, feminists sometimes combined their attack on patriarchy with a reclamation of the concept of self-sacrifice in order to sanctify women (in Schreiner's story, black or mixed-race women) as a spiritually redemptive and morally regenerative force in society. Not all of the women presented in these stories are heroines in the conventional or even feminist sense; with its concluding tableau of cynical materialism, the ending of Ella Hepworth Dixon's "'The World's Slow Stain'", so different from the closing scene in Mabel Wotton's "The Hour of Her Life", illustrates the great variety of approaches, and it is this very hybridity and shape-shifting of the New Woman character – and writer – which make them such emblematic figures of the *fin de siècle*, an age of multiple contradictions, endings as much as beginnings, in which high realism vied with symbolist and proto-modernist literary forms and concerns, not infrequently in the work of one and the same writer. Indeed, Matthew Arnold's dictum of the "two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born" (Arnold 321), is repeatedly echoed in these texts, such as when Wotton's rejected New Woman laments that she is "hanging between two worlds without belonging to either", while Caird's Old Man admits to a similar predicament, being "a sort of abortive creature, striding between two centuries".

An informed and well-balanced sense of textual hybridity is the overriding impression achieved by this collection, which brings together an exciting range of British and American writers, including a black New Woman writer, and which offers an absorbing mixture of canonical and neglected texts. The juxtaposition in particular of Gilman's famous "The Yellow Wall-paper" and Caird's little-known "The Yellow Drawing-Room" opens up a space for scrutinizing *fin-de-siècle* colour symbolism and the feminist use of metaphor, which is also of crucial significance to George Egerton's "The Mandrake Venus" and Kingsford's "The City of Blood". The introduction provides extensive contextualisations of the writers, period, and the central issues raised by their texts, teasing out the conceptual links between the stories and their thematic threads, such as the intricate way in which questions of class and racial or sexual oppression overlap and interlock. As Forward points out, many characters express a sense of alienation when they comment on events unfolding like a spectacle on the stage: ultimately, what writers sought to problematize was the performativity of gender and gender relations. That gender is a culturally constructed act (a performance) rather than an innate quality is a very modern idea which ran counter to the biological essentialism so prevalent at the turn of the century (in fact, many feminists of the time invoked biologically determinist, even eugenicist concepts in order to claim citizenship rights for women). Just as some of the writers in this collection challenged the taxonomies of late-Victorian science, so they deconstructed the masculine gaze in literature, either

comically as in Caird's story, where the Old Man himself concedes the defectiveness of his vision, or dramatically as in Mew's "A White Night", which pointedly ends with the collision of female and male points of view:

> "Oh, for you", she says, and with a touch of bitterness, "it was a spectacle. The woman didn't really count."
>
> On looking back I see that, at the moment in my mind, the woman didn't really count. She saw herself she didn't. That's precisely what she made me see.

And this is of course precisely what the New Woman writers sought to get across to their predominantly female readership: the imperative, for women, to assert their rights, so that they would, once and for all, begin to "count": in their own as well as men's stories. As Mew's chilling introductory paragraph implies, only then would their tragedies lose their "merely accidental quality of melodrama"; would the violence they encountered cease to be perceived as "inessential" or even pleasantly "sensational"; would they rise from the shadow world of the mere "recollection ... experience ... picture", unable to "reproduce" (create) in their own right, and walk into the "radiant, bold, unapologetic, unabashed" light of Caird's sun-beamed yellow drawing-room, a vibrant symbol of the female literary imagination. I have no doubt that the reader will find much of interest and inspiration in these stories.

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Introduction

For much of the nineteenth century the novel was the dominant prose medium, but in the 1880s and 1890s the short story became increasingly popular. Women writers were at the heart of its development, and found it a congenial and liberating form. This anthology introduces stories written by women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, enabling modern readers to explore the themes and techniques they developed. The stories date from 1877 to 1910, and include contributions by British and American authors. The aim of the collection is to revisit their work and make it available to a wider audience. Several of the stories have not been printed since their original publication, although readers may be familiar with some of them already. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-paper", for example, has appeared in other anthologies. It merits inclusion here because it can be discussed alongside Mona Caird's little-known tale "The Yellow Drawing-Room".

The era covered was a very significant one for women, as they questioned their restricted position in society. Throughout this vibrant period of transition there were campaigns for reform in many different areas of their lives. They were seeking enhanced opportunities for education and employment, and hoped for professional recognition. There were demands for political enfranchisement and emancipation. Changes were requested in the laws pertaining to marriage, divorce and custody rights, and anxieties were voiced about the controversial subjects of prostitution and the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases. Women often espoused causes such as animal rights and vegetarianism, and some were attracted to spiritualism.

Critics have been drawn to the fascinating figure of the New Woman of the *fin de siècle*, who was mercilessly lampooned in her own day in the pages of *Punch*. However a recent volume of essays stresses the fact that The New Woman did not exist, and Lyn Pykett has suggested that the phrase is "a shifting and contested term" (Pykett, p. xi). Certainly it would be misleading to suggest that women all wanted the same things, and that they all worked together with specific hopes and dreams in common. Nevertheless, "dreaming" is a repeated idea in their writing and the stories in this volume tend to share some powerful imagery and themes. The anthology has not been arranged chronologically; rather it begins with a startling treatment of a controversial subject, which leads

into another writer's attempt to address a related topic. Each story is linked to the next, as a number of interlocking issues are introduced in the book as a whole.

The term "Short-story" was first used to define a specific literary form by the American critic Brander Matthews, in an article in the *Saturday Review*, July 1884. Peter Keating has pointed out that Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe had called their work "tales" (Keating, p. 39). The short story liberated authors from some of the constraints imposed by novels: they could make a point very quickly, without needing to set scenes in minute detail, and without tracing intricate patterns of cause and effect. The three-decker novel had tended to follow particular plot conventions, and to conclude with either marriage or death; but in short stories authors found flexibility. They could focus on specific episodes, encounters and impressions, analysing psychological responses to those moments, and it was acceptable for the ending to remain open.

During the course of the nineteenth-century, British writers were influenced by a number of major literary trends from other countries and cultures. They encountered the realism of Flaubert, Maupassant, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev; the naturalism of Zola, Ibsen, Hamsun and Strindberg; and the symbolism of French writers, including Huysmans, Rimbaud and Verlaine. The short story form was mastered by American, French and Russian authors before having an impact in Britain. Many British authors were "disciples" of authors from abroad: for example, Ella D'Arcy admired the writings of Guy de Maupassant.

Contemporary periodicals and newspapers often contained fiction, and there was an ever-increasing demand for short stories. Keating has noted some illuminating statistics demonstrating the popularity of periodicals in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. In 1875 the *Newspaper Press Directory* listed 643 weekly, monthly and quarterly magazines; the number cited for 1885 was 1,298, rising to 2,081 in 1895 and 2,531 in 1903. Keating comments that these figures are not complete, but certainly indicate trends (Keating, p. 34). Holbrook Jackson, in his retrospective study of the 1890s, claimed that these publications "represented the unique qualities in the literature and art of the decade; they were bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh" (Holbrook Jackson, p. 41). The titles themselves convey something of the dandyish and playful flavour of the time. They included: the *Butterfly*, the *Chameleon*, the *Dome*, *Eureka*, the *Evergreen*, the *Hobby Horse*, the *Idler*, the *Pageant*, the *Pall Mall*, the *Parade*, *Pick-me-up*, the *Poster*, the *Quarto*, the *Rose Leaf*, the *Savoy*, the *Studio*, the *Temple*, *To-Day*, *To-Morrow*, the *Windsor* and the notorious *Yellow Book*. Some authors built their whole literary careers by producing short stories. The form proved ideal for adventure tales and ghost stories, for fantasies and utopian dream sequences. One of the major attractions of the short story was its versatility.

The short story had a fluidity of form, which was a feature of other branches of the arts. Jackson observed that during the 1890s striking effects were created by transposing terms from one set of artistic ideas to another, in the manner of Baudelaire's theory of correspondences. Thus Whistler gave pictures musical titles, for example "Symphonies" and "Harmonies", and W. E. Henley used musical terms for his poems, such as "Scherzando" and "Largo e Mesto" (Jackson, p. 173). Ella D'Arcy entitled her first anthology of short stories *Monochromes*. George Egerton's short stories of the eighteen nineties were published in volumes with titles suggesting musical pieces: *Keynotes*, *Discords*, *Symphonies* and *Fantasias*.

The rapidly expanding market for fiction offered opportunities to enterprising women writers like Egerton, and it is easy to see why the short story was particularly appealing to them. There were financial rewards: generally authors would receive the bulk of their payment for the initial periodical publication of a short story, but anthologies secured an additional sum. Women who could grasp only occasional moments to write, in between their other commitments, found the short story a very convenient medium. Furthermore, they could explore issues which genuinely concerned them, and attempt a range of writing styles.

The first story in this collection, George Egerton's "The Mandrake Venus", deals with prostitution. Egerton experimented with new modes of expression to describe innermost feelings and sexual desires, and her writing deserves our attention because of its provocative content, innovative techniques and perceptive psychological analysis. She derived her method of describing fleeting states of mind from some of the Scandinavian writers she admired, particularly Knut Hamsun. Her first book, *Keynotes* (1893), made a considerable contribution to women's literature of the *fin de siècle* and anticipated modernist writing. Its critics associated the publisher, John Lane, with the "feminisation" of fiction. They condemned the egotistical, introspective nature of the writing, and its "morbid" preoccupation with sexuality (Miller, pp. 25–6).

The theme of prostitution features in a number of Egerton's stories. *Discords* (1894) contains powerful indictments of society's attitudes in "Gone Under" and "Virgin Soil". The 1905 volume *Flies in Amber* includes "Mammy", about a young harlot dying of consumption in a London brothel (Forward, "Attitudes to Marriage and Prostitution", pp. 71–2). Lynda Nead has observed that nineteenth-century definitions of the prostitute were "multiple, fragmented and frequently contradictory". She could be viewed as an independent woman earning a living, or as a once-respectable person who had been reduced to selling herself; she might be seen as diseased and disruptive, or she could be sentimentalised as a victim. Definitions of the prostitute "were not discrete constructions but were constantly competing and working across each other" (Nead, pp. 91, 127).

In the summer of 1885, W. T. Stead, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, published a series of articles about prostitution in London. "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" described the perils facing vulnerable young girls. The title was inspired by an ancient Greek myth, which described how the monstrous Minotaur was given seven boys and seven girls every nine years by the people of Athens. Stead's findings generated an immediate and far-reaching response. The Government raised the age of consent from thirteen to sixteen, under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, and the police were given increased authority to deal with prostitutes. In *City of Dreadful Delight*, Judith R. Walkowitz has explained how the prostitutes Stead was claiming to help actually became victims of police purges and public persecution (Walkowitz, pp. 85, 95).

Egerton's allegory "The Mandrake Venus", from *Fantasias* (1898), is her most harrowing account of prostitution. The very title is weird: the mandrake is a plant with a forked root, thought to resemble the human form. It was fabled to utter a deadly shriek when plucked from the ground, and was used in witchcraft or as a narcotic. In the story a pilgrim observes young men who are being led to a city, where they pay homage to "the World Harlot, the Mandrake Venus, the Arch-wife, the Ever-existing". Her throne is fashioned from men's bones, encrusted with golden coins, but, although she is extremely beautiful, passionate and sensual, she is "loathsome as a leper". Egerton describes an erotic scene in which women advance, "clad in garments of cobweb tissue". The use of sibilance accentuates the serpentine imagery, with its connotations of temptation and evil: "They swept on in sinuous lines, swaying, swinging, interlacing, in maddening intricacies; scattering scarlet blossoms as they danced, until their little white feet seemed to dip into a sea of blood." The men are drawn to the girls, as if by invisible magnets, but the pilgrim hears terrible screams: "the cry of the maid as she is torn from innocence and womanhood to minister to the service of the great Harlot mother, even as the mandrake cries as it is torn from its roots". The chilling message is that: "Nations change, creeds arise and die; the house of the Mandrake Venus is alone invincible."

Egerton's graphic imagery suggests sacrifice, and recalls Stead's articles on "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon"; however, her Venus figure is an extraordinary mass of contradictions. She is delineated with images of power, mystery and voluptuousness; yet along with the magnificence there is cruelty and foulness. This provocative story highlights the sheer variety of discourses about sexuality in Victorian times, and raises interesting questions. Was the prostitute a deprived creature who deserved sympathy, or a depraved creature with animalistic sexual instincts? Was woman at once "angel and demon", "a figure of radical instability" (Shuttleworth, ch. 3, especially p. 55)?

A strange procession and images of sacrifice also feature in the second story, Charlotte Mew's macabre "A White Night", set in Spain in 1876.

A man named Cameron has been working there, and is joined by his sister, Ella, and brother-in-law, King. After getting locked into a church, they prepare to spend the night there. Fifty to sixty monks arrive with an enigmatic woman. She seems to acquiesce in a lengthy ritual, which culminates in her being buried alive. Cameron is adamant that they should not reveal themselves or intervene in the ceremony, and no white (k)night emerges to rescue the woman.

The notion of live burial imbues the story with a distinctly Gothic atmosphere. Enclosure, imprisonment, literal and figurative confinement: these images are pervasive in nineteenth-century women's writing (Gilbert and Gubar, p. 83). Much of Mew's work reflects the constraints placed upon women, and their habitual renunciation. In "A White Night" the victim is dressed from head to foot in white linen, connoting purity and innocence. She seems to be a representative figure of indeterminate age, acting out a role mechanically. Mew repeatedly uses vocabulary suggesting a theatrical spectacle. Cameron points out the incident's "merely accidental quality of melodrama". He observes that the woman plays her part "with superb effect", and he relates the story as though watching the staging of a drama. She detaches herself from "the living actors in the solemn farce". When Cameron realises that his sister is profoundly disturbed by what they are witnessing, he notes that the performance is "not a woman's comedy". The monks proceed with their ceremony, and Cameron feels he has been manipulated: "They managed the illusion for themselves and me magnificently." Afterwards Ella is haunted: "She refuses to admit that, after all, what one is pleased to call reality is merely the intensity of one's illusion."

"The Mandrake Venus" and "A White Night" both suggest that men and women are carried along by an incomprehensible force greater than themselves. In her opening paragraph Egerton speaks of "a cinématographe of the universe from time primeval". A tinker tells the pilgrim: "we have all been some one else; we are only going on over and over again". The train of men and boys on the pilgrimage dance "as if obsessed", and the women "as if bitten by a tarantula". Each night brings a victim to the great Harlot mother, because the mandrake poison "is carried from generation to generation". In Mew's story the faces of the monks "seemed to merge into one face – the face of nothing human – of a system, of a rule. It framed the woman's and one felt the force of it: she wasn't in the hands of men."

Women writers frequently used images of sacrifice, and suggested comparisons between the suffering endured by women and the treatment of animals. During the second half of the nineteenth century, campaigners in North America and Europe condemned vivisection. Surgical techniques were improving and major advances were being made in the understanding of human physiology, but animal sympathisers felt that these gains were often the result of experiments conducted upon helpless, conscious

creatures without the use of anaesthetics. A number of late-Victorian authors criticised such experiments: for example, the heroine of Sarah Grand's novel *The Beth Book* (1897) is devastated to discover that her husband is a practising vivisectionist, and she debates the subject with him (Grand, *The Beth Book*, ch. 46). It is significant that their discussion leads into a heated altercation about the treatment of prostitutes, because reformers often drew links between the abuse of defenceless creatures and the repression of women by the medical profession and by men generally. Another leading feminist writer, Mona Caird, became President of the Independent Anti-Vivisection League, and published on animal rights.

Anna Kingsford was a high-profile campaigner against vivisection, and this concern is reflected in her graphic story "The City of Blood". She and Frances Power Cobbe became the most active British vivisectionists internationally. Kingsford wrote many articles about animal experimentation, and lectured widely in Europe. Her efforts were strengthened by the fact that she was one of the few female crusaders to be a qualified doctor. Indeed, as a medical student in Paris in the 1870s she offered herself as a subject for vivisection. She cursed opponents, claiming responsibility for the deaths of the French physiologist Claude Bernard in 1878 and Paul Bert in 1886. Her friends thought of her as a reincarnation of the goddess Isis (Meade, p. 277).

Kingsford lived with Edward Maitland. They were both theosophists and believed that truths were relayed through them during special dreams. The allegories in Kingsford's volume *Dreams and Dream Stories* are steeped in theosophical imagery. In "The City of Blood" the narrator dreams of a desolate street filled with buildings resembling a prison. She becomes aware of strange sounds of suffering, then blood oozes from a house which is actually the laboratory of a vivisectionist. However the dream extends in scope, because the various houses are the settings for a range of abuses on both animals and humans. Maitland said that he was profoundly impressed by the relation of the dream, as well as being apprehensive about its effects upon Anna Kingsford, "by reason of its tendency to confirm and aggravate her already strong tendency to pessimism". Soon afterwards, when he was "between waking and sleeping", he was "given" a sequel, in which he learned that there was *one* way of escaping from the dreadful City – by ascending to heaven. He and Kingsford came to recognise the dream as:

> an exquisite and prophetic allegory of the state to which the world has become reduced under a priest-constructed religion and a civilisation wholly materialistic, and of the way in which our own and all other redemptive work must be done, in that only they who have first ascended in themselves can – returning – enable others also to ascend and accomplish their needed salvation (Maitland, vol. 1, pp. 160–62).

Olive Schreiner also wrote many allegorical dream sequences, which were very popular in her own day and were a source of inspiration to the suffragettes (Forward, "The Dreams of Olive Schreiner"). It is not surprising that this form appealed to her: she was raised in South Africa, where her parents were missionaries; throughout her childhood she was immersed in biblical teachings, and would appreciate the power of parables. Although she lost her faith and became a freethinker at an extraordinarily young age, the influence of biblical phrasing, rhythms and imagery is apparent in her writing.

When Schreiner published her volume *Dreams* (1890) the reviewer in the *Athenaeum* compared the dream sequences to the painted allegories of Watts, and the *Daily Chronicle* described the author as a "poet-painter". Contemporary critics also praised the volume's lyrical qualities. The short story has an affinity with poetry, and in the 1890s critics enthused about the virtually seamless blending of the two genres. The *Athenaeum* review said of Schreiner's dreams: "Written in exquisite prose they have the essential qualities of poetry, and are, indeed, poems in English." In the *Northern Daily News* they were referred to as "veritable prose poems" (Schreiner, pp. 5, 6).

The creation of dream sequences was therapeutic, enabling Schreiner to withdraw from her anxieties and to sublimate her desires by envisaging a utopian world and the melioration of the human race. For many contemporary women, dreams were a means of escape. Schreiner's vision extended beyond escapism, however, for she hoped to motivate her readers through idealism and optimism to regenerate society: "to carry the dreams and ideals we have formed out into the world, and incarnate them quietly and simply day by day in action" (Letter to Karl Pearson, 23 October 1886. Rive, pp. 108–11).

Dreams feature prominently in one of Schreiner's early tales, "Dream Life and Real Life: a Little African Story", which first appeared in *The New College Magazine* in 1881. Her brother Fred was headmaster of New College School, in Eastbourne, and she stayed with him when she first came to England. The story concerns Jannita, an indentured orphan employed as a goatherd by a cruel Boer family. In her "dream life" the farm is transformed into a pretty, welcoming place; her abusive employers are kind; and, best of all, her father arrives to carry her back to Denmark. Dreaming helps Jannita to cope with her wretched existence; unfortunately there is a sharp contrast between "dream life" and "real life". When Jannita overhears three men plotting to set fire to the farm and to rob the owner, she calls out a warning to her employer. The men murder her and bury her beside her stone "home".

Ann Heilmann has suggested that "with her central Christian metaphor of self-sacrifice Schreiner tapped into the feminist unconscious of the time" (Heilmann, "Dreams in Black and White", pp. 181–2). Jannita is a Christ-like figure. Her racial identity is unclear, because we

cannot tell whether she is white, black or of mixed race. Her self-sacrifice may imply that, together, and irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, women can bring about the regeneration of the human race.

Ella D'Arcy's story, "An Engagement", introduces a different kind of oppression. The heroine dies in less gruesome circumstances; nevertheless, she is clearly a victim. Having invested in a medical practice at Jacques-le-Port, Dr. Jack Owen courts Agnes Allez, believing her to be worth ten thousand pounds. The unscrupulous Owen easily wins the poor girl. She is only seventeen: an inexperienced child who is living a cloistered existence with her grandmother and her mentally retarded brother. Following their engagement, Owen learns that her cash is likely to be tied up, and he is mortified to discover that her family's money has been accumulated from a drapery business. Agnes is devastated by his decision to cancel the engagement.

Despite repeated rebuffs she persists in making excuses for him: this is "the eternal rehabilitative process, in which every woman shows herself such an adept in relation to the man she loves". As the months pass her love remains constant, until one day Owen cuts her dead in public. Her interminable journey home under the blazing, inexorable sun is too much for her and she dies. Agnes is a victim in so many ways. Her upbringing restricts her, leaving her vulnerable; Owen exploits her with cynical ruthlessness; he, in turn, is influenced by the rigid class structure on the Islands. Agnes is reminiscent of some of the doomed heroines of French fiction. D'Arcy traces her decline graphically: a decline that is both emotional and physical.

Mabel E. Wotton's story, "The Hour of her Life", is also about class differences. Annette Browning's father was an officer and gentleman, but married beneath him. She has established a successful business, running an exclusive flower-shop "in the heart of Clubland", and is adored by eligible bachelor Freddy Calvin – the heir to a Lord. Although Annette is an independent, professional woman, it is not possible for her to cross the class divide. She elects to make a dignified exit and, in so doing, she shows herself to be a better person than those who are, ostensibly, her superiors. Wotton highlights the difficulties facing women who were placed awkwardly in the social hierarchy.

In 1894 Ella Hepworth Dixon published her novel *The Story of a Modern Woman*, a *Bildungsroman* describing Mary Erle's efforts to survive after the death of her father. Dixon's text can be read alongside the 1888 novel *Out of Work* by "John Law" (Margaret Harkness) and Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage* (1899), as all three authors produced realist fiction. *The Story of a Modern Woman* is a plea for sisterhood; for what Dixon called "a kind of moral and social trades-unionism among women" (Dixon, "The Book of the Month", p. 71). Interestingly there is an Oscar Wilde figure, called Mr Beaufort Flower, and Wilde is parodied again in Dixon's short story "'The World's Slow Stain'". In a sense, Wilde was

fair game. Male writers like Henry James and Wilde satirised other authors, so perhaps Dixon did not need to feel any qualms about returning the gesture. Having said that, Wilde had helped to further her literary aspirations by publishing some of her work in *The Woman's World* during his editorship from November 1887 to October 1889.

Cynicism and weariness pervade "'The World's Slow Stain'". The title of the story is a quotation from Shelley's *Adonais*: "From the contagion of the world's slow stain / He is secure" (XL). Adela Buller has made up her mind to contract a marriage of convenience with Anthony Mellingham, despite the fact that he jilted her ten years earlier. Throughout the tale she is shown to be conscious of her image and her role in society, and assumes poses as and when necessary. Adela views life as a card game, in which the male players are inveterate gamblers and the women have never had the rules explained to them properly.

The odious Gilbert Vincent is heavily based on Wilde. Dixon repeatedly emphasises his fat face and feminine hands; his "uncanny" pallor; his languid demeanour; his "curious", "dubious" and "singularly unpleasant" smile. Both of the male characters in the plot are unscrupulous. Adela visibly ages at the end of the story, but she is determined to see the "game" through. She is a participant, coping as best she can when the odds seem stacked against her. "'The World's Slow Stain'" is an example of naturalist writing, in that we see Adela struggling to adapt to her environment.

Dixon was regarded as part of the *Yellow Book* circle; however she was critical of *fin-de-siècle* society, and was displeased when a friend spoke of her as a "new woman" (Dixon, *As I Knew Them*, p. 41). Her story engages with the contemporary debate about the characteristics of the "modern" woman. Gilbert Vincent regards Adela as "curious" and "one of a new species": "She calls it 'dull' of a woman not to have had emotional experiences, and wouldn't thank you if you altered your conversation to spare her blushes....Yet she can be very sweet, very attractive; and she is curiously feminine – for a modern type."

"'The World's Slow Stain'" was published in 1904. Edith Wharton's story of the same year, "The Quicksand", also explores the individual's relationship to the environment. Hope Fenno falls in love with Alan Quentin, yet feels she cannot marry him because of her moral objections to the newspaper he owns. His mother advises her: "Life is made up of compromises: that is what youth refuses to understand. I've lived long enough to doubt whether any real good ever came of sacrificing beautiful facts to even more beautiful theories."

Hope decides to remain faithful to her beliefs, but six months later the girl has visibly wilted. Her sacrifice of love has proved to be painful, and she tells Mrs. Quentin that she has come round to her way of thinking. At this point, however, the older woman interrupts her and insists that Hope was in the right after all. Now they face each other, woman to woman, soul to soul. It transpires that Hope's position mirrored that of