

## **A Suitable Wardrobe: The Lone Female Traveller in Late Nineteenth-Century Fiction**

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The development of Britain's transport network during the second half of the nineteenth century radically altered the landscape of major urban centres such as London. The extension of the suburban railways, alongside the growth and improvement of the tram and omnibus systems, suggests that as the century drew to a close, the population was making more short journeys both in and around the metropolis. Destinations previously reached on foot could now be achieved in minimal time and at little expense, providing lower income groups with an opportunity for exploration which had previously been denied to them. Traditionally, urban exploration had been the domain of the wealthy male 'flaneur', a figure famously evoked in the work of Charles Baudelaire. As Judith Walkowitz suggests, however, by the late nineteenth century the city 'was not just the home and fixed reference of the male flaneur; it had become a new commercial landscape, used by men and women of different classes'.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the role of transport in creating and sustaining this new landscape served simultaneously to undermine an elite, masculine identity. As the late nineteenth-century author George Gissing demonstrates in his novels *The Odd Women* (1893) and *The Whirlpool* (1897), developments taking place in London's transport system had particular implications for women, now occupying a significant space on public transport and often travelling alone. As this paper will discuss, the fictional register of both these phenomena illustrates the complexities inherent in our conception of public space during the late nineteenth century.

Emerging from a literary tradition in which respectable women travelled under a very strict set of criteria involving both appropriate

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<sup>1</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 2000), p. 25.

clothing and a suitable chaperone, these works concerned with the late nineteenth-century city reject such parameters in favour of heroines who hold a degree of disdain for such regulated activity. Gissing explores a variety of female characters who constantly defy and challenge acceptable conduct in their use of London's transport system. Alma Rolfe in *The Whirlpool* finds it an annoyance to rush back to the station before midnight after attending a concert and so simply stays the night at a hotel, quietly returning to the suburbs the next morning, a course of action considered to be morally dubious, whilst Monica Madden in *The Odd Women* frequently takes the omnibus and subsequently exposes herself to unwanted male attention. Despite the absence of direct criticism levied at these events, there is a very definite sense that Alma and Monica's presence on public transport contributes to their sense of moral degradation.

In recent scholarship, the debate surrounding the relationship between women and public space has focused on the wider phenomenon of the city street rather than the explicit use of transportation. Exploring a range of contemporary source material, the works of Deborah Epstein Nord and Judith Walkowitz suggest that the street was a particularly problematic space for women due in part, although not exclusively, to the presence of the prostitute. Walkowitz notes, for example, the attempt made by the London police in the late nineteenth century to 'clear public thoroughfares [...] of streetwalkers to make room for respectable women'.<sup>2</sup> As an interchangeable term for the female prostitute, the expression 'streetwalker' instantly invests this location with gendered potency. Whilst men were able to enjoy the freedoms the city streets presented, women were at risk of being mistaken for prostitutes when they chose to occupy such a space. For Nord, the literary construction of the male flaneur is partly responsible for creating this climate of anxiety, as it relied on defining the female as object, something to be looked at and studied: 'to be a woman on the street [...] was to be

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<sup>2</sup> Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 24.

exposed to the illicit gaze of men'.<sup>3</sup> As such, 'in the city of the male spectator woman appears most often as prostitute, always objectified, always "other"'.<sup>4</sup> To attract this gaze was to be sexually available and therefore morally suspect.

To a certain extent, this anxiety is embodied in the response to the introduction of the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1864, 1868 and 1869. Originally designed to combat the spread of venereal disease, primarily, although not exclusively, within the armed forces, the acts were first introduced to port and garrison towns, for example Plymouth on the south coast. It was hoped that eventually they would be in operation across England. However, they were subject to much public criticism and were repealed in 1886. One of the main criticisms levied at this legislation was that identification of a prostitute could be made at the discretion of the (male) enforcer. Thus, the gaze of the privileged male flaneur underwent a significant transformation during this period, becoming (albeit momentarily) a powerful political and social tool for both the middle and upper class. Permitting the authorities to arrest prostitutes 'suspected' of being infected on the basis of behaviour and appearance 'made conscious [...] what had almost always been the case; that, when [women] ventured onto the city streets under the conditions necessary to urban strolling and observation, they took on the persona of the fallen woman'.<sup>5</sup>

The trope of the fallen woman provides a useful framework for a discussion of female identity more generally within the context of the nineteenth century. The relationship between sexual activity and femininity, for example, is examined in the work of Sonya O'Rose. Drawing on the work of Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, O'Rose suggests that people in Western society are 'assigned to the mutually exclusive social categories

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<sup>3</sup> Deborah Epstein Nord, 'The Urban Peripatetic: Spectator, Streetwalker, Woman Writer', *Nineteenth Century Literature* 46, 3 (1991), p. 352.

<sup>4</sup> Epstein Nord, 'The Urban Peripatetic', p. 353.

<sup>5</sup> Epstein Nord, 'The Urban Peripatetic', p. 365.

of woman and man solely on the basis of anatomical sexual differences'.<sup>6</sup> In Victorian England, this sexual difference was largely associated with the ability to bear and raise children. Thus, the 'equation of women with biology or nature, and men with culture'<sup>7</sup> served to enforce woman's position within the domestic, rather than the public, sphere. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes, there was 'a strong identification of women's roles with the family during this period'.<sup>8</sup> Whilst women were inextricably linked with reproduction and, more explicitly, the act of sexual intercourse, men 'were not perceived to be "sexed"'; their biological roles were not the focus of attention'.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, men's presence within the public sphere was not necessarily defined in these terms. When women appeared in public, however, they immediately transgressed this ideological boundary; no longer contained within the domestic environment, their sexual function was exposed.

George Gissing's fiction displays a remarkable familiarity with the permeability of these boundaries, addressing the ambiguities inherent in this female public presence. Furthermore, Gissing's use of public transport as a means of illustrating such permeability demonstrates an authorial awareness of the renegotiation of public space taking place in late nineteenth-century culture, with *The Whirlpool* registering the growth of the suburban railway network and *The Odd Women* dealing with the rise in the use of public transport by London's workers. Just as the street demanded a constant assessment of women, identifying the virtuous from the vicious, so too did these various methods of transport. The work of Ian Carter, for example, suggests workers in well-established sex trades forged strong connections with the railway at an early stage. For a few years after 1866, services between Charing Cross and Cannon Street in London were renowned for a

<sup>6</sup> Sonya O'Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> O'Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 135.

<sup>9</sup> O'Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, p. 14.

rather subversive clientele. ‘Some ladies of the street had found that the South Eastern Railway’s first-class compartments, combined with the uninterrupted seven minute run, provided ideal conditions for their activities at a rental that represented only a minute proportion of their income.’<sup>10</sup>

To distinguish themselves from this rather transitory whoredom, respectable women occupying similar carriages relied primarily on their appearance. In this sense, the manner in which a woman dressed defined her experience of urban travel. Those who sought to avoid the uncomfortable experience of the male gaze were encouraged to favour sombre outfits that attracted the least attention. Taking a letter from *The Times* in 1862 as her starting point, Lynda Nead considers this debate in relation to the city streets. The letter describes a situation in which two women from the provinces are frequently accosted by men. The ensuing correspondence suggests that their red dresses and pork pie hats with white feathers are responsible for this attention. As Nead concludes, ‘really respectable women, who do not wish to attract attention, should assume a quiet dress and manner when unaccompanied in the city’.<sup>11</sup> Reflecting a familiar literary construct in which dark colours are reserved for the good and pious heroine, whilst bright colours are the domain of the sexually provocative female, Nead’s elucidation of respectable dress clearly aligns Monica Madden’s costume of pale blue in *The Odd Women* with the latter.

As a drapery store assistant Monica is particularly susceptible to accusations of moral impropriety due to both the nature of her employment and her subsequent leisure time. The owners of the drapery establishment, for instance, have ‘no objection whatever to their young friends taking a stroll after closing time each evening’.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, on the Sunday holiday, the employees return late, with one resident arriving home just before one

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<sup>10</sup> Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain: The Epitome of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 172.

<sup>11</sup> Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 27

o'clock in the morning. As the narrator notes, 'money came to [this resident] with remarkable readiness whenever she had need of it'; the implication being that she may be supplementing her earnings by prostitution.<sup>13</sup> Whilst Monica is the first to arrive home, it is clear that she also returns at a late hour. Intercepted by one of her fellow employees on the street outside the drapery establishment, Monica stands 'close to the door by which Messrs. Scotcher's resident employees entered at night [and has] taken out her latchkey'.<sup>14</sup> Yet Monica attempts to distance herself from the 'lively conversation' of her fellow workmates once inside the bedroom. 'Afraid of being obliged to talk, Monica feigned sleep.'<sup>15</sup> Monica does not wish to be associated with the behaviour of these girls, yet it is clear that she listens intently to their discussion. One employee, for example, 'talks very loud, at first with innocent vulgarity; [then] exciting a little laughter, she became anecdotic and very scandalous'.<sup>16</sup> Having been spotted by one of the girls during the day, however, Monica is also implicated in this dialogue, 'she's picked up some feller to-day [sic]'.<sup>17</sup> Much to Monica's distress, she discovers that her self-imposed silence and 'early' night does not exclude her from notoriety; indeed it only serves to encourage the conversation. Thinking that Monica is asleep, 'heads [are] put forward eagerly, and inquiries whispered'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Monica is made aware that the boundaries defining her own use of leisure time are just as ambiguous.

Monica spends much of this time in 'free wandering' about London. Inevitably, these wanderings include the use of public transport; indeed such use permits Monica to cover extensive ground in the space of one day. Escaping from the monotony of work, Monica takes a great deal of pleasure in these journeys and dresses with this enjoyment in mind. 'The slim figure was well fitted in a costume of pale blue, cheap but becoming; a modest

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<sup>13</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 52.

<sup>15</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 53.

<sup>18</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 53.

little hat rested in her black hair; her gloves and her sunshade completed the dainty picture.’<sup>19</sup> Monica’s journeys in and around the metropolis are defined by their lack of purpose and intent. On the Sunday of her birthday for example, her indiscriminate use of the omnibus and railways suggest that she has only a very casual notion as to the direction she will travel and, indeed, as to whom she shall meet. She will keep an appointment with her sisters, but she may or may not go to church, and she may or may not keep an appointment with a man she met in Battersea Park on a previous Sunday. ‘And perhaps she would not keep the engagement. Nothing compelled her.’<sup>20</sup>

By way of comparison, Monica’s sister Virginia appears to behave in an entirely different fashion. A trip to the bookshop to purchase a birthday present for Monica, for example, is immediately conceived as a major undertaking, and in many respects it is – Virginia intends to walk the five miles to save the small expense of the omnibus or train. Unlike Monica’s, Virginia’s route is recorded in meticulous detail: ‘past Battersea Park, over Chelsea Bridge, then the weary stretch to Victoria Station, and the upward labour to Charing Cross’.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Virginia gives due attention to the clothing she will wear. ‘With extreme care she had preserved an out-of-doors dress into the third summer; it did not look shabby. Her mantle was in its second year only; the original fawn colour had gone to an indeterminable grey [...] Yet Virginia could not have been judged anything but a lady.’<sup>22</sup> Virginia’s ‘indeterminable’ greys and browns obviously indicate a degree of poverty, but they also serve to disengage Virginia from any form of display. Monica’s dress may not require a great deal of wealth, yet it suggests a concern with desirability – and, more explicitly, public desirability.

As a result, Monica’s rather pleasing appearance ensures that she attracts attention from the opposite sex. As she steps out to meet the

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<sup>19</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 19.

omnibus in Kennington Park road, she is almost immediately accosted by a troublesome acquaintance, Mr Bullivant. Monica attempts to rid herself of his presence by firmly stating her intention of taking the omnibus. 'Now I must say goodbye. There comes the bus.'<sup>23</sup> In a desperate attempt to keep her company, Bullivant follows her into the bus, having established 'that there was yet no inside passenger'.<sup>24</sup> The solitary nature of this environment allows Bullivant to pursue a line of conversation increasingly distasteful to Monica. Simultaneously however, it also allows Monica to respond in a manner by which even she is shocked. When faced with the suggestion of marriage, Monica responds, 'you are really wrong to act in this way. A long engagement, where everything remains doubtful for years, is so wretched that – oh, if I were a man, I would never try to persuade a girl into that! I think it wrong and cruel!'<sup>25</sup> Producing the desired effect, Monica's indelicate retort renders Bullivant speechless and when the bus draws up to pick up more passengers, Bullivant is forced to depart. This vulgar conversation cannot continue in the presence of others. If Bullivant has taken advantage of the privacy the omnibus presents, then Monica is equally guilty of using this space to speak freely, uninhibited by polite decorum.

Monica's boldness in dealing with Bullivant's attentions illustrates a degree of confidence mirrored throughout the novel, particularly in her relationships with men. 'She knew herself good-looking. Men had followed her in the street and tried to make her acquaintance.'<sup>26</sup> Whilst sitting on a bench in Battersea Park, for example, she articulates her desire for a man who has 'nothing of the shop about him!'<sup>27</sup> Despite the acknowledgement that Bullivant is 'clad with propriety', she quite clearly associates this man with the 'scandalous' conversation she encounters at Scotcher's, and therefore discounts him as a suitable match. Yet Monica is only a shop girl

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<sup>23</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 34.



herself. She may have been born into a relatively genteel family, but this wealth has long since disappeared. Thus, when Monica enters the omnibus, her persona is no different to Bullivant's. Bullivant is 'reckless of the consequences', whilst Monica forces herself 'to be cruel, because it seemed the only way to put an end to this situation'.<sup>28</sup> By drawing on the similarities between the two, Gissing implies this boldness is a rather vulgar characteristic, adopted and practised by Monica as a direct result of her position within the drapery store, and, concomitantly, the public sphere.

On a future occasion, a rather more amicable acquaintance, Everard Barfoot, adopts a similar freedom of speech when he finds himself alone with Monica, this time in a first-class railway carriage, by which time she has married. Intercepting Monica at the entrance to the station, Barfoot establishes they are travelling in a similar direction and begs to accompany her. Once inside the carriage, Barfoot cannot 'resist the temptation to use rather an intimate tone',<sup>29</sup> to which Monica later expresses some concern. 'I don't know why he took me into his confidence. It happened first of all when we were going by train – the same train, by chance.'<sup>30</sup> Barfoot's attempt at emotional intimacy with Monica is mirrored in their physical proximity, a potentially troublesome feature of public transport more generally. 'Their eyes met. Barfoot bent forward from his place opposite Monica.'<sup>31</sup> This behaviour clearly excites Monica. As Barfoot talks 'softly' on the subject of beautiful women, Monica blushes 'with surprise and pleasure'.<sup>32</sup> Despite this 'new appearance of mutual confidence and interest',<sup>33</sup> the relationship between the two remains purely platonic. However, Monica's insistence on travelling alone allows others to make assumptions about the nature of this encounter. On seeing them together at

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<sup>28</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 30.

<sup>29</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 220.

<sup>30</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 359.

<sup>31</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 221.

<sup>32</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 221.

<sup>33</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 221.

the station, an acquaintance of both draws the inevitable (but false) conclusion.

Barfoot's previous disclosure of his experience with a girl named Amy Drake instantly provides the framework for this encounter with Monica. Like Monica, Amy travels 'alone',<sup>34</sup> this time on her way into London from the provinces. Barfoot claims, having noticed Miss Drake on the platform at Upchurch station, it is only when they changed at Oxford that she put herself in his way so he was obliged to begin talking with her. 'This behaviour rather surprised me [...] At all events, Amy managed to get me into the same carriage with herself, and on the way to London we were alone.'<sup>35</sup> At Paddington Station the two leave the station together and Amy does not reach her intended destination until the evening (Amy later gives birth to a child). Barfoot appears incensed at Amy's behaviour, yet, interestingly, he adopts a similar approach when he encounters Monica at the station. Monica enters the station 'rather wearily, with her eyes on the ground, and does not become aware of [Barfoot] until he addresses her'.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Barfoot instigates this liaison with Monica. Evidence of such conduct suggests a discrepancy in his account of Amy Drake. In this sense, Gissing implicates Barfoot, rather than Amy, as 'the reprobate of experience'.<sup>37</sup>

Like Monica, Amy Drake serves in a shop, implying that Barfoot is able to identify this social type within the public sphere, potentially taking advantage of her inferior rank. Aware that such women travel without a chaperone, and thus risk the accusation of moral impropriety, Barfoot has a certain degree of freedom in his means of approach. 'If he chanced to encounter the pretty little woman it would not be disagreeable.'<sup>38</sup> Gissing therefore demonstrates a degree of sympathy for both Monica and Amy. It is not necessarily the moral character of the shop girl which renders solitary

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<sup>34</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 107.

<sup>35</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 107.

<sup>36</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 220.

<sup>37</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 107.

<sup>38</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 221.

travel dangerous, but the ‘respectable’ men they encounter whilst doing so. Monica may demonstrate a vigorous display of confidence in her encounter with Bullivant, but she appears vulnerable and naïve in the presence of Barfoot. Indeed, Barfoot offers a persuasive critique of the station platform as a location in which girls such as Amy are able to capture his attention. For Barfoot, the platform provides Amy with the means for introduction outside the context of the shop, an opportunity momentarily to transcend the boundaries of class. ‘In the ordinary course of things I shouldn’t have met her.’<sup>39</sup> Echoing a wider middle-class cultural anxiety articulated in the contemporary periodical press, Gissing is able to evoke sympathy for Barfoot, whilst simultaneously challenging his moral character.

As the work of Erika Rappaport suggests, social diversity was a common cause of complaint in magazines such as the *Queen*. Designed with large sections of society in mind, the railway network catered for a variety of different purposes. Railway companies such as the Great Eastern, whilst actively encouraging ‘ladies’ to use their services, also deliberately attracted custom from a lower-class clientele. The early morning work trains, for example, were intended to carry employees to their place of work cheaply and efficiently. Despite the timetabling distinction, ‘ladies’ inevitably encountered the working-masses.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Gissing’s fiction registers this perception of the ‘working-masses’ as a rather dangerous entity, extending this concern to male members of the middle class. As much of the urban population moved away from town and city centres, however, these ‘shared’ journeys into central London gradually became a necessary feature of everyday life. The increase in London’s day population is evidence of this transition, standing at 170,000 people in 1866 and rising to 360,000 at the beginning of the twentieth century. People, including women, had to be making more journeys, and, as Theodore Barker and Michael Robbins

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<sup>39</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 107.

<sup>40</sup> Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 122-4.

estimate, the number of journeys made in the London area between 1875 and 1895 may have increased by as much as 300%.<sup>41</sup> Having previously been faced with a good, but simultaneously fairly limited, railway network, Britain's main towns and cities benefited from substantial construction during the late nineteenth century. In London, railway building in the last few decades was almost entirely confined to extensions into the suburbs and beyond, and the improvement of the facilities for handling suburban traffic in and out of the central termini. As Barker and Robbins suggest, the railways were best suited to carrying people medium and long distances across London, and, in particular, to and from the suburbs.<sup>42</sup>

This allowed many wealthier families to move away from central areas, inevitably increasing the number of well-bred women using public transport. Indeed, as Rappaport points out, although magazines discussed the disadvantages of railway travel, after the mid-1880s they simultaneously 'spent quite a bit of effort convincing women that they should ride London's trains, omnibuses and Underground...persuading readers that riding such conveyances was safe and respectable, that it was comfortable and easy, and that it would be a pleasurable and even poetic experience'.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the growth of suburbia had rendered this persuasion tactic indispensable. Gissing's novel *The Whirlpool*, reflects this transition to the suburbs, with Alma Rolfe's friends, Dora and Gerda Leach, moving 'from their old house in Elgin Road to a new one out at Kingsbury-Neasden'.<sup>44</sup> Yet 'ladies' do not occupy Gissing's suburbs. In fact, the population that inhabits the fringes of the bustling metropolis are described in rather derogatory terms, suggesting that, for Gissing, this urban expansion is intricately tied up with the concept of class and, more specifically, the visibility of London's lower middle-class. Dora and Gerda, for example, are not considered suitable

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<sup>41</sup> Theodore Barker and Michael Robbins, *A History of London Transport: Passenger Travel and the Development of the Metropolis* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974), p. 208.

<sup>42</sup> Barker and Robbins, *History of London Transport*, p. 208.

<sup>43</sup> Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure*, p. 122.

<sup>44</sup> George Gissing, *The Whirlpool* (London: Everyman, 1997), p. 171.

acquaintances for Alma as they encourage her ambition to become a professional musician. When Alma confesses to Dora that her marriage has ‘put an end’ to her ambitions, Dora instantly dismisses this explanation. ‘I don’t see why marriage should put an end to it’, urged Dora. ‘I’m quite sure your husband would be very proud if you came out and had a great success.’<sup>45</sup>

Thus for Gissing, merely to be a resident in the suburbs holds a rather subversive connotation. Alma’s association with the Leaches and her desire to occupy the suburbs with her husband Harvey, is clearly situated within this dialogue. ‘[Alma] came frequently to Kingsbury-Neasden, and ran up to town at least as often as they (Dora and Gerda) did.’<sup>46</sup> As a woman who insists on pursuing a musical career despite the protestations of Harvey, Alma’s position as a respectable middle-class lady is constantly under threat. Persuading her husband to take a house at Pinner is primarily for her own benefit as it is ‘not many minutes from the Leaches [...] and only about half an hour from Baker Street – “so convenient for the concerts”’.<sup>47</sup> Alma’s presence in the suburbs makes this activity all the more apparent with her movements across the transport network defining the lifestyle she has chosen. Despite Alma’s confidence in traversing this city landscape, however, she finds it increasingly difficult to avoid the advances of Felix Dymes, her musical manager. Aware that she makes these journeys alone, Dymes follows her to the platform in order to proclaim his love. The freedoms which were so attractive in the first instance gradually become a source of distress for Alma.

In this sense, Gissing presents the lone female traveller as exposed to constant temptation. The journeys Alma makes in and around the metropolis inevitably encourage contact with men such as Dymes. It is only when Alma decides to give up her career and relocate to the countryside that she

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<sup>45</sup> *The Whirlpool*, p. 176.

<sup>46</sup> *The Whirlpool*, p. 174.

<sup>47</sup> *The Whirlpool*, p. 174.

becomes a respectable middle-class wife. Similarly, for Monica Madden, the accusations of sexual misconduct with Everard Barfoot and others encourage a re-evaluation of her position as a solitary traveller within the urban environment and subsequently she goes out accompanied by her sister. Even the pious Virginia cannot escape the temptations offered by the urban environment. Her simple dress and intention allow her to avoid attracting the attentions of men but they do not provide protection from another vice, namely alcohol. The railways serve not as geographical markers in her journey, but as an opportunity for her to indulge in this vice with a degree of anonymity. ‘In front of Charing Cross Station she stopped, looked vaguely about her [...] With hurried, nervous movement, she pushed the door [of the refreshment room] open and went up to a part of the counter as far as possible from the two customers. Bending forward, she said to the barmaid in a voice just above a whisper, - “Kindly give me a little brandy”’.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, the freedoms experienced by these fictional women reveal rather subtle nuances concerning the nature of travel facilitated by developments such as the railway. Whilst on the one hand, Gissing presents London’s transport system as a means for women to live lives distinct from their families and husbands, he also attends to the anxieties such activities inevitably present. In drawing attention to the use of this system by women who are either in the process of becoming independent of men, or women who have already become independent, he suggests that these developments embodied wider cultural concerns about the nature of women’s position within urban society, particularly those of the lower-middle class. The increasing number of women taking up employment in urban trades such as retailing progressively rendered the simple assessment of these women as ‘fallen’ inadequate. Whilst both Monica and Alma are exposed to the lascivious attentions of men, their experience of travel serves simultaneously

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<sup>48</sup> *The Odd Women*, p. 20.

to mark their ability to manage such encounters. Alma may fear the advances of Felix Dymes, but she does not allow him to succeed in his attempt at lovemaking. Ultimately, both women are compromised by their use of public transport. Sustaining their married lives for a relatively short period of time, by the end of each novel both women appear to decide to die, wasting away from traditional feminine maladies in recognition of this disrepute. In this sense, Gissing remains highly ambivalent about the freedom transport presents women during this period, placing this debate within a wider discourse concerned with the nature of class more generally.

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