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## Feminist Sensibility in Sarah Grand's Novels: *Ideala* and *The Beth Book*

**Dr. Prakrithi H. N.**

Professor & Chairperson  
Postgraduate Department of English  
Jain University  
Bangalore- 560027

### **Abstract:**

The focus on feminist sensibility in Sarah Grand's novels is concerned with how difference is invested with oppression that exists due to hierarchy and gender discrimination. The article examines how feminist sensibility in Grand's novels *Ideala* and *The Beth Book* is seen in her endeavors to give voice and language to her female protagonists. *Ideala* and *Beth* are allowed to talk for themselves and Grand unlocks a largely gynocentric space for feminist contemplation so that submerged knowledge and hidden alternative can be brought to the surface. Feminist sensibility in *Ideala* and *Beth* is seen in their attempt to create new spaces and their urge to explore the new self through confirmation of positive self. She depicts the feminist sensibility which centers on understanding and resisting the hierarchical binary opposition between male and female. A Careful survey of the Victorian era explains the cultural and critical ambivalence about the new woman genre and its gendered implications at the time of its production. The act of looking back helps to understand the revisionist strategy which enabled Grand a new woman novelist to place empower her woman.

**Keywords:** feminist sensibility, new woman genre, subversive spirit, revisionist strategy, Patriarchy, female artist, marital failures.

### **Introduction**

It is not that I happened to stumble upon Late Victorian novels to know their contribution to literature but it was a conscious effort to understand the artistic endeavor of the Victorian novelists. A careful literary survey helps us to comprehend the fact that Victorian novels have been an important critical focus for feminist scholarship and the novels are perceived as the melting points of ideological conflicts and attitudes towards woman's nature and role. But little do we know about the contribution of those silent voices which go unnoticed owing to the attention given to mainstream novelists of the era. The focus on Feminist sensibility in the new woman novels is a topic that has been ignored in literary criticism. One of the radical changes that Victorian era witnessed was the rising consciousness of women about their political rights and potentialities. The awareness created in social and political circles gave rise to sensibilities which saw the emanation of feminism. Well was this realized only by feminists? What was the response of the novelists? Was feminist assertion reflected in their works? The early and mid Victorian mainstream novelists, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell, showed very little signs of change in the political and social order. Feminine in their novels can be perceived as a search for women's voice that advocates to the ethics of care. The increasing emphasis on the feminine virtue activated the call for women's movement.

It would not be an error to see the period between 1860's and 1920's as a period that saw varied shifts in the development and growth of the novel and also introduced new genres (Sensational, New woman) which deviated from the conventional genre. The deviation in the generic mode, theme, plot and subject are helpful in depicting the changes in the very perception of the feminine. By 1860's novelists endeavored to examine the institution of marriage and identity of women. Ibsen's Nora (*A Doll's House* 1879)) created vibrations by slamming the door. The 1880's was a decade of socialist organization for the intellectual woman. *A Doll's House* was not just about woman's revolt about the old order but also about revolutionary call for the redefinition of marriage. Did the banging signal women's downfall? It is not so because Grand makes Ideala respond "They can fail, and if they do we should still have learnt something from them." (*Ideala* 75) this was the hope of the new woman. What then was the agenda of the new woman novels? Why were they called popular novels? Who was this new woman? Why was the genre named after the new woman? It is hard to answer without understanding the purpose.

### **The Agenda of the New Woman Novels**

Modern readers may fail to reckon the new woman this invites one to debate about this phenomenon called the new woman. She was condemned as they felt she disrupted female dignity and female respectability that Victorians respected. Lyn Pykett, observes that the new woman in the New Woman novels functioned as a figure of authorial 'self reflexivity': she terms her, "As an intruder into the masculine sphere art, she was the cultural equivalent of the feminists, and also served as a vehicle for figuring a conflicted feminine interiority ("Portraits of The Artist" 128) It was a popular genre because the new woman genre was seen as the product of reader's response which increased the sales of the fiction and also the popularity of the writers, because "The social function of popular literature was to stimulate and allay social anxieties.(Modleski 28 )

It was believed that new woman was largely a literary creation, featuring in the fiction of the time and that she was full of ideas and aspirations of radical feminists desiring freedom. It is also true that the fictional illustration facilitated the readers to connect with the possibilities and challenge of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century feminist thought. This feature also confirms that the demand for gender equality has been one continuous struggle starting from the Victorian era to the present century. The interest in new woman writers solely rested on the fact that the advent of the new woman genre marks a new history in the Victorian cultural and literary scene. Social structures oppressing women became the theme of the popular novels. Analysis of the new woman in new woman fiction facilitates understanding of the Victorian period's estimation of the genres and current interpretation to rewrite its dynamics. Finally a critical perspective serves to incorporate the cultural imaginings and re-characterize the genre to contextualize the new woman novels.

New woman novels successfully project the evolving feminist awareness of the fin -de-siècle era. They tried to entangle the standards prescribed by the Victorian society which can be detected in the works of new woman novelists. Today we talk of writings that would equal or rise above male mimicry. It is interesting to observe that their novels rose above male imitation and modest approach, their agenda was to undermine cultural ideologies alerting readers to accept female behavior (their assertion) as an alternative to conventional

female roles. But sadly these novels were condemned by conservative critics as trash which eventually damaged the true concerns of the new woman novels. Transformation in the very understanding of man woman relationship, motherhood, womanhood, enhanced the confusion in the fin de siècle era. It is important to explain how these confusions help to understand whether novels, challenge or reinforce the ideological notions.

Therefore, the act of looking back throws fresh insights and helps us perceive the literary wealth of the era. Academic syllabus enlightens us about the literary contribution of main stream novelists of the era to show the transformations they brought in but little do we know about the contribution of the new woman novelists. A willful probing marks the new woman genre as productive in giving voice to the cultural memory of the past. They witness what Martha Vicinus, Michel Foucault state about the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as an era that was crucial in the modern, sexual and gender identities. Their views are favorable to understand the era as crucial because of the shifts and changes in values and attitudes experienced. Facts such as these help to discern the endeavors of New woman fiction which was to correct the long observed conservative beliefs about woman as the virgin or the whore. The novels testify the various relationships between feminists and the mainstream cultural politics; it stands in antithetical relation to dominant and literary ideologies. Such a feature is seen in how; new woman writers developed a new myth of woman depicting her as the assertive and challenging woman who destabilized the traditional notions of woman as the 'angel in the house.' Cicely Hamilton in *Diana of Dobson* (1908) gives a realistic picture of woman's work in a drapery store and its examination of the economic motives for marriage. Agnes Grove's, *Ubiquitous Woman*, (1909) a short story exhibits the oratory skills of a vivacious woman; it is this trait that throws the male chauvinist narrator into a state of confusion. The confusion arises because she is described as intensely feminine looking woman but her actions are unwomanly.

Mona Caird's, *The Morality of Marriage*, (1897) Olive Schreiner's, *The Story of An African Farm* (1883) serve as a theoretical frame work for modern feminism. The novelists not only identified the need to rethink about the stance and identity of woman but also showed variation in their depiction of woman. Schreiner and Grand upheld the notion of self-sacrifice of the motherhood and affirmed motherly instinct as innate in woman which women could not shun. Caird, rejected the image of a woman with the baby as she perceived it as woman's subjugation. Such assortment in the representation of the new woman speaks for the contemporary relevance. The unprecedented candor about female sexuality, marital failures, rejection of heterosexuality, evidenced decadence of male dominance. What then stopped them from gaining the critical acclaim? It was difficult for these writers to establish a position of their own because they had to face the wrath of critics. They were marginalized both by the mainstream stream novelists and conservative critics who labeled them as lesser known writers. Victorian critics like Hugh Stutfield (in "The Psychology of Feminism" 1897) considered women's writing as intuitive and hence lacks intellectual temper. Such male bias termed the new woman fiction as lacking in reason and in no terms could equal the explorations of men. Reverend Barry in *The Strike of Sex* published incognito in the Quarterly review (1894) attacked Grand's novel *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) for its supposedly radical scrutiny, accusing the novel as aboriginal for displaying the uncouth element. He like the other conformist critics dismissed the ways of the new woman as jeopardizing the place of the

English race. These are few instances to evince how such severe criticisms were responsible for the new woman fiction losing importance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

They have not faded into oblivion because scholarly interest in the new woman has grown since the 1980's. Critics like Lyn Pykett, Ann Heilmann, and Teresa Mangum have drawn attention to the cultural paradigms of the genre. Recent studies perceive the new woman as advanced and the benefit of education sets her apart from her predecessors. These aspects call for a concerted interest to explore the new woman strategies of Sarah Grand who presented a different ethics which confused women and men about their stance in the fin de siècle era. Frances Elizabeth Bellenden Clarke chose a female name Sarah Grand, a pseudonym that did not disguise her gender, and this explains how she went against the norm of many feminist writers selecting masculine names. It's an instance to show how she like her heroines in her novels was a new woman. Grand's novels can be termed as progressive because she pushed the woman to the center; such a strategy helped her to cover the growth and changes in the life of female protagonists. As a new woman novelist she defined political activism as an expression of female creativity. Such a venture helped her to revise and revolutionize the commanding literary artistic discourse that aimed to feminize and transform traditional literary paradigms (narrative cross-dressing, revolutionary spirit, 'speaking of the other') The novels refigure female desire as divergent and innate, displaying Grand's own representational claim and dissecting the cultural milieu which shapes her female characters. These aspects confirm the fact that her fiction championed to present the real concerns of the new woman. Grand used the genre to extend the meaning of the new woman. Her characters,

Cover the spectrum of the turn of the –century, middle class, independent women; adolescent-hoydens, gender switching heroines, free love advocates, women of genius, novelists and orators, suffragists and social reformers, teachers and business women. (Mangum,4)

In a nut shell Mangum characterizes the new woman which also suggests the multiple orientation of the new woman which is diverse from the preset descriptions prescribed by the fathers. Grand, like Mona Caird, Olive Schreiner was committed to the social advancement of women and attempted to explode the binary opposition. "Her fiction established a new ethics which... established a tradition of feminist political literature written for and consumed by a female mass market." ( Modleski 28 )

### **Evocation of Feminist Sensibility in *Ideala* and *The Beth Book***

Feminist sensibilities are concerned with how difference is invested with oppression that exists due to hierarchy and gender discrimination. feminist sensibility was an alien concept in the Victorian period, yet their creation comes closer to the latest feminist theories This calls to mind what Mary Wollstonecraft's novel *Mary* mentions (1788) it shows Mary as an independent woman resisting hierarchy and conventional wisdom. Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra* (1854) challenges the cultural notion that women are passionless, and lack intelligence. Oscar Wilde observes that by the 1890's the development of women's assertion was intense, and the mainstream press had to reckon the sprouting body of women writers expressing such sensibilities. Wollstonecraft in her breathtakingly bold novel, *Maria* (1798)



initiated the celebration of female sexuality a sensibility meant that offers too much political power to women and emasculates British men. It is also affirmed that feminist sensibility to Wollstonecraft depicts women as a rational being when she says, “Whose grandeur is derived from the operation of its own faculties, not subjugated to opinion; but drawn by the individual from the original source...” (qtd in Conger 124)

Grand’s depiction of feminist sensibility in her fiction evinces the change in the very perception women but this facet has been ignored in critical studies. She sought to enhance the status of women’s political writing by establishing the concept of feminine aesthetics by blending art, politics and feminism. It’s interesting to note that such strategies point out the dexterity with which she addressed diverse readership and this made her gain prominence in the fin de siècle literary and periodical market place. This transformed her position from the popular and the conservative to the intellectual and the advanced. Her novels opened up a largely gynocentric space for the discussion of feminist thought which evinces how she successfully projects the evolving feminist awareness of the fin –de-siècle era.

*Ideala* and *The Beth Book* explain how Grand apparently finds writing as the place where subversive thought can germinate. Such a vocation, allows her to permit her heroines to recover their immense physical and intellectual sensibility that have been sealed. Grand’s fiction shows how patriarchy is the best tool to understand women’s secondary position. Patriarchy is used because within the feminist cultural studies, patriarchy is assumed to exist and is used to recognize different instances of oppression and challenge. *Ideala* and *Beth* contradict the sexist ideology by evincing how masculinity and femininity are fluid, such a project emphasizes plurality. Her novels illustrate that no individual can display stable, unitary selves but are only a combination of the masculine and the feminine traits. Such a feature shows her liberal and objective perception and also her concern to erase the distorted view which defined masculine as powerful and feminine as passive. *Ideala*’s articulation shakes the male complacency “Do you think women are less brave? No, when they realize the truth they will fight for it. ...they will use the weapons...love, constancy...intellectual strength and will.” (137, 138) The last decades of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an indomitable force by feminists to overthrow these notions about masculinity and *Ideala* echoes the cultural and social transformations the era witnessed. We see how Grand’s fiction establishes feminist sensibility in the new woman which is seen in their movement from a position of lack to one of power. This approach also reflected the novelist’s own identities and provides an insider’s commentary. Grand marks a clear shift from the works of the mainstream women writers, who could not articulate realistically. The depiction of women and the revolutionary project undertaken explain that Grand was not obliged to preface her works with disclaimers and apologies as her predecessors. The utopian impulses of woman artists were largely responsible to construct stories which re-imagined the roles of the artist and the muse. Olive Schreiner *The Buddhist Priest’s Wife* (1892) Charlotte Perkins Gilman *The Yellow Wall Paper* (1887) Grand’s *Ideala*, Mona Caird’s *Daughters of Danus* (1894) are instances show how women writers had to become muses themselves.

Evocation of feminist sensibility is seen in woman’s journey from womanhood to selfhood; her dilemmas show the conflict that woman at the turn of the century experienced. *Ideala*’s infelicitous marriage to the envious doctor exacerbates her conjugal relation and her

impassive response to his wretched conduct does not reinforce their relationship. She grapples with the decision, whether to resist her overbearing adulterous husband for another man (Lorrimer) or to accept an ordained singleton and refuse the desire for normative relationship. The novel ends with her decision to live without a male aid and work to save woman from male oppression. The narrator Lord Dawne, Ideala's friend articulates his inability to understand her. The difficulty of Lord Dawne to assess Ideala was the difficulty that men faced to understand women who aspired to find greater meaning during the transition phase.

The choice of the male narrator makes one perceive Ideala as an object who is molded by the gaze of the narrator. Why didn't writers free woman from the male gaze? The choice of the narrator is assumed by the feminist critics as a lacuna, nevertheless Grand makes him a reliable narrator as he envisages a public life for Ideala unlike her husband and Lorrimer who limit her intellectual pursuits. Grand releases Ideala from the male gaze, her acquaintance with women reformers in China instills new political cognizance which makes her work with prostitutes. The book ends with a feminist proposal with Ideala devoting herself to a new cause to make women understand that "They have yet to learn to take wider view of things'...Do not stand in their way...They are running water, if you check them they stagnate." (140) But instances such as these show how Ideala no longer relies on the omniscient predilections of the narrator and is seen as an autonomous figure.

This corroborates Grand's strategy to provide a broader platform to women by presenting them as active agents within the married world. Her women characters protest against men who wish to denigrate women's position. Evadene attempts suicide, Edith dies of Syphilis (*Heavenly Twins*, 1893) which she has contracted from her unfaithful husband. But Ideala and Beth daringly oppose the injustice and prejudice of the patriarchal world. Marriage is presented as a horrible legalized oppression and suppression, and Ideala terms it "a commercial treaty" (50) these thoughts concord with Anglo American II wave feminism we see how for Ideala like Andrea Dworkin, Susan Griffin, Kate Millet and Mary Daly, echo the fact that marriage legitimizes the man's desire for sex.

Victorian novelist's comment on the ongoing debates about marriage confirm that the writers' cast a critical eye on the subject which showed marriage not as a bringer of joy but a contract which is bound to disillusion both man and woman destabilizing the stabilized patriarchal culture. Feminist sensibility in Ideala, is seen in her individuality, her decision to remain out of the marriage circle and to liberate herself from man's control. She builds her feminist identity as the grand heroic and importantly single woman. The subtle sense of womanly sensibility is seen in Grand making Ideala withdraw from heterosexuality this illustrates her desire for liberation without seeking divorce or re-marriage. A cautious scrutiny shows how present notions of marriage are similar to what the late Victorians thought and felt about marriage. It also alerts us to the social transformations and ideological disputes swirling in the Victorian culture. If marriage is considered a trade then women are traded by men and the novels authenticate it. Ideala's comment on marriage, 'marriage without love is an immoral contract' (110) is unprejudiced and advanced contrary to the bishop's adage that "marriages are made in heaven." (110) Complete freedom from the domestic sphere is unfeasible and home becomes an enclosed garden, forceful and unhappy marriage is borne because, "We still live in

a framework of familio-religious relations in which the woman is the body to the man's head.” (Elvy 47)

In making Ideala endure her husband's atrocities is Grand admitting her failure to work through feminist issues? Her refusal to share her trauma and her familial conflicts demonstrate her strength and dignity and also urge her not to publicize the defects in marital relationship. Can this trait make Ideala a feminist? We cannot overlook the fact that her novels are an evidence of feminist and modernist edge. Evadene Frayling, Edith Beale, and Angelica Hamilton in *Heavenly Twins* explore the unjust submission of women to husbands and patriarchal dictates, which mark the insurgent power of the New Woman novels. Patriarchy influences these women to subdue the wild, aggressive and opposing nature of women. Ideala's demand for fidelity from her husband and his failure to live unto her expectation triggers her. She critiques the biased society which expects women to be a passive observer of man's flaws, her refusal to condone her husband's faults; (his illicit affairs) are some of the subversions worked out in the novel. Edith in *Heavenly Twins* blames women for their inertness and self sacrifice, Ideala's interpretation of manhood shows her astute understanding of the man's world.

Where is our manhood? Where are our men? Is there any wonder that we are losing what is best in life when only women are left to demand it? Believe me, marriage is the tune to which the whole fabric of society is going to pieces (50)

Grand attempted to subvert the dominant ideology, like Luce Irigaray she attacks the logic of one. She made her fictional women resist the marginalization of woman and also examines how women could exercise her agency to change her fate. She depicts the feminist sensibility which centers on understanding and resisting the hierarchical binary opposition between male and female. Women's clothes appeared to be a part of their bodies during the era and Grand makes Ideala comment about the dress culture in England, (dress hinted at woman's sexuality) Ideala's observation about the Chinese woman binding their feet for it's their duty to have small feet is similar to English woman wearing corset which binds and cripples woman's movement. Women bear the torture because their clothes designate their stance. Ideala feels, “My country women bind every organ in their bodies, though they know the harm of it and public opinion is against it.” (136) While Hardy concentrated on the question of gender equality and divorce (*Jude The Obscure*) Grand avoids such extremism. Novelists deliberations on the subjugation of their heroines is based fundamentally on the controlled insanity of the male society which aims to control female sexuality and smothering their impulse to free from such rigid ties. Grand makes her women write and such an act corroborates how Ideala belongs to the progressive phase. Women writers wrote to speak about women, about themselves, this strategy is an echo of what Helen Cixous claims,

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies -Woman must put herself in to text –as into the world and into history by her own movement. (“ The Laugh of the Medusa.” 27)

Ideala's evaluation of her poem ‘The Passion of Delysle’ a proto fin de siècle poem evinces her censure on women writers for their sentimental vein. Her criticism is contrary to the



appreciation of the poem rendered by her friends. She by admitting her poem as a diatribe against the female sex writers substantiates her own state, an instance to show how Grand derides traditionalist bias about morality and feminism. The contrapuntal rhetoric of Ideala indicates that the feminist educationist ought to follow a good object. She shows inclination for feminist and social reforms at the same time rejects aestheticism owing to its political mistakenness. The novel displays episodes of conflict as dramatization of the vast cultural scene which reports oppression of women. For instance, Ideala realizes that her husband's adultery, his seduction of the young girl Marry Morris is not a personal betrayal but the sin of man against woman, she charges 'marriage oath' as 'farcical. Her estrangement from her husband helps her to develop her own literary voice. Ideala remains a mystery to Dawne, her friends and her lover Lorrimer, such ambiguities made Victorian conservatives call her as the 'New Woman' who exhibited sensibilities that were slightly varied and bold. Grand makes Ideala adopt the male tactics of brutal candor and knowledge to appraise oppression. Her journey into self-hood is crucial to reclaim the self that is lost in the labyrinth of social customs and taboos; feminist sensibility is evoked in such acts of Ideala. This confirms that the novels became a space where it opened up a largely gynocentric space for the discussion of feminist thought.

*The Beth Book* traces the journey of Beth from the neglected, misunderstood girl to a bold and vivacious writer and activist. Beth's activities mirrored Grand's journey from the domestic domain to the public domain. Grand's purpose in tracing the development of Beth was bounded by a cause i.e. to show the merger of feminist art and activism. Beth's marriage at the age of 16 to a despicable doctor (Dan Maclure) amounts to silencing of the girl by pushing her into another hell. Grand makes Beth different, the difference is seen in Beth's censure of Dr. Dan for practicing vivisection on animals, she refuses to accept his disregard for woman's body and contempt for women who he treats for suspected venereal disease. Beth frees herself from the ideology of marriage finds space within herself (room of her own) discovers a community of likeminded souls (in the creative world of books) who encourage her to develop ideas and support her to become the writer, orator and activist. The creation of a woman of genius (Beth's fictional alter ego) evinces feminist sensibility in Beth who endeavors to move from the margin to the center aiming to deconstruct the hegemonic structures of gender relations. She acerbates her centrality of what Cixous calls, "Women's acquisition of speech' an act of bodily self- imprimatur which writes 'her story in [to] history.'" (*Sorties* 92) Such renovation can equip Beth to actualize her creative urge as she desires to "write for women" (376) A rhetoric contrary to the masculine cultures and paradigm similar to Cixous's demand for 'écriture feminine' Teresa Mangum perceives Beth's urge as, "Beth's quest for a form appropriate to women's experience thus becomes part of a larger dilemma for the writer." (*Style of Wars* 55) As Mangum outlines, the central dilemma of the novel indicates women writers' role in asserting their right to be tended toward self-reflection in art. Her novel is didactic, meant to change opinions and *Beth Book* states Grand's rebellion against the bias of the Victorian readers to undervalue female artist on the basis of gender. The potent force that was predominant in Beth's childhood was smothered by her mother but is reclaimed as Beth grew old. The personal gratification that Beth attains in both private and public sphere shows Grand's endeavors to credit her heroine for her zealous mission.

Beth's domestic pursuits give her the momentum to express her political views while the ethics of her writing is designed to transform society without violating the norms of the male

dominated world. The cultivation of the breathing literary space is crucial for her intellectual growth. Beth's struggle against discrimination may be termed as contributing cultural transformation desiring to transform the ideology that produces it; writing is one of the ways where transformation can happen. The depiction of feminist sensibility is seen in Grand's depiction of female creativity as elemental and spiritual. Her purpose is to discredit the binary opposition between feminine nature and masculine culture. Such revisionist method enabled Grand to place her woman at the center and empower Beth to live in her passion and proceed with her mission. "She believed that life could be lived as to make the joys as inevitable as the sorrows" (316)

The revival of the voice urges her to pursue her quest which is evidenced in the appropriation of a room of her own, a room that gave her privacy and enabled her to 'study' to 'reflect' (173) The attic is programmed as the space of her interiority, her literary journey begins here, drawing on a rich tradition in woman's writing. Beth's narrative situates her as the estimable model for the transcendence of the old degenerative order; her estrangement from her husband to make a life of her own makes her a new woman. It has some of the elements of radical feminism that has been reckoned by some of the scholars today. Grand's heroine believes in her right to learn, to work and to love. She finds success without sacrificing her new woman identity, different from *Heavenly Twins* which centers on female sexuality.

Ideala and Beth emerge as successful women when compared to Evadene in *Heavenly Twins* as they possess H.P. Balvatsky's notion of 'Adepts' (*Isis Unveiled* 1877) who believes, "...adepts are superior beings coming closer to the next stage of racial progress than their fellow beings." (qtd. Heilmann 97) Beth and Ideala can be considered as progressive in the fin de siècle era because they possess three qualities which 'adepts' must possess, astuteness, ethics and will, these traits fulfill the thought of the new woman. Lyn Pykett comments, "Grand turned Beth's secret garret into an emblem of the womb, the locus of individual and artistic rebirth..." (183) the attic aids Beth to attain fulfillment of her artistic urge to be the author, and the orator, which makes her the speaking voice in print and action. The new woman regarded Woman's professionalism as important and Grand, in giving voice to Beth, makes her heroine exhibit feminist sensibilities. Grand appropriated the Bildungsroman to write a story that had close resemblance to her own life. The novel envisages a female utopia where class and gender restrictions do not hinder. She finds in her room her artistic and professional potential urge fulfilled, as it bestows her with intellectual freedom. Beth as a new woman text stresses on the emergence of the woman of genius. 1896 shattered the narrative paradigms of the previous century and laid the foundation for modernism. To Grand feminist receptivity does not suggest a mere frosty man hater, a prig in petticoats but a woman who is driven by vocation and who urges herself into professional task. Her focus lay in marriage and motherhood and had a tendency to embrace the social purity campaign, which encoded angel in the house. Grand differed from Mona Caird who discussed controversial subjects like coercive marital sex, single motherhood, free love, and child care.

Feminist critics accused Grand for placing her heroine in the Victorian context by embracing the conservative sexual ideology which Showalter views as a common feature of the fin de siècle women's writing. Grand might have missed the radical purpose of Mona Caird in her essays but her works demonstrate that feminism is not the rejection of the feminine but a blend of both. Such depiction brings Grand's women closer to post feminist evaluation of women. Her women are completely individualistic, they articulate their desire for femininity

with self fulfillment, subvert phallogocentric beliefs, and give space for feminine specificity and motherhood. Grand's mission is to enlighten the unpredictability of feminine identities, in so doing it is clear that her novels address tensions between identities and essence, which are sometimes imposed, sometimes embraced and sometimes recast.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century shows how the lives of their authors had become intermingled creating a complex myth at a time when literary works were commonly seen as the expression of the authors experience. This explains Grand's purpose in advocating the purity concept. Grand positioned the scientific theories (Darwinism and evolutionary theory) to promote feminine sensibility in woman, for e.g. Mrs. Caldwell (Beth's mother) lays emphasis on the importance of women's beauty and passivity which is inspired by Darwin's discourse. Darwin's disciples concluded that women's body and mental functions are inferior to men hence remain passive. Beliefs such as these were irrationally followed by women like Mrs. Caldwell, who denounces Beth for not pursuing feminine interest, "You are so determined not to be like other people that nobody can stand you" (171) The belief in femininity and feminine ideal made mothers train their daughters to be the girl of the period.

Beth's eagerness to learn advanced musical composition is subdued by her mother. Feminist sensibility in Beth is seen in her struggle for a space of her own which is unsupported by her mother and husband. Mrs. Caldwell as defender of the patriarchal ideology accepts her husband's debauchery as the will of God but the energetic Beth defies her husband to make a career of her own. Mother's attempt to mold feminine traits in her daughter meets its defeat, which signifies the transformation from the feminine to the feminist. Many instances in the novel show how man, woman and children nurture the bias that tradition, religion, and science have transferred. Jim, Beth's brother is the self-appointed orator of patriarchy. Jim's presence gives Grand an occasion to illustrate the irrationality of the patriarchal dogma. Jim's baseless argument, '...Girls have no brains. They scream at a mouse' and Beth's counter attack 'we never scream at mice...how you can say we have no brains if you never teach us?' (122) Jim as a representative of the dominant silences her telling her not to be "long tongued shrew" (122) Jim's response shows universal contempt poured on women. Beth "had too much self respect" (263) which Jim fails to reckon. George Romanes in his article "Mental Differences between Men and Women" (1887) believes that women have inferior intellectual power, and Grand to prove Romanes's assertion wrong makes Beth resent gender hierarchy. Grand appropriates the scientific practice of physiological determination in depicting Jim as tactless to confront Beth's argument. Grand echoes Wollstonecraft's refutation of the traditional model of female education and draws attention to the fact that Craft's demand had not been fulfilled. Women were still under restraint as patriarchal beliefs could not be shunned overnight to embrace liberated thoughts but that women desired and worked towards their freedom. Beth brings passion and purpose, art and feminism together; Grand interprets it as the joint prerogative of femininity. Beth's eloquence, her creativity and logical outbursts, silences torch bearers of patriarchy. Were the patriarchs successful in subduing women by pushing them to the margins? Are the patriarchs themselves responsible for the birth of feminism? The displeasure and deprivation makes woman endeavor to attain coherent social and sexual identity to become independent, body and soul. The Feminist sensibility her protagonists display may be similar to what Cixous, writes "Women should break out of the snare of silence. They should not be coined into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem." ("Laugh of the Medusa" 25)

Beth's abnegation is a quality of the New Woman which does not indicate the conformist ideas of a good acquiescent woman. Her urge for writing and her skill for oration give a sense of pseudo jouissance. This illustrates what today's poststructuralists conceptualise as jouissances; the narrator describes that writing to Beth was like experiencing love without a lover. Beth's dual function 'writing' and 'oration' grant her a sense of pseudo jouissance, "Writing and voice are entwined and interwoven and writings continuity/ voice's rhythm take each other's breath away through interchanging." (*Sorties* 92) Towards the end Beth is engaged in the task of transforming her male colleague (Arthur Brock) Grand presents the reader with the need for romance and companionship. Beth's true love presents her as conventional but her independence to be herself, her artistic verve makes her modern. The novel ends with a spontaneous overflow of emotions which can be interpreted as Grand's attempt to credit her heroine for her work by bestowing her with personal contentment in public and private spheres

Arthur Brock's nonchalance to Beth's trauma abandoning her to dire poverty and semi starvation, casting feminists as the unsexed crew that mad woman who shriek on the platform clearly show shades of men's atrocity. Beth yields to the seductive influence of romance and many theorists term this as subjugation and objectification of women. This slight adherence to feminine ideal does not exclude the subversive trait in Beth. Grand portrays Beth's defiance and presents her as lacking in provocative individualism. Beth says she agrees to marry because she is weak, "I am firm about some things, but I vacillate when I am alone I know I make a mistake, but when I am with other people who think differently, my objection vanishes." (258) Ambivalence in Beth (servility and independence) hints at the condition of feminists in the fin de siècle society and authors obligation to show the new woman as womanly. The novel complies with traditional modes of writing but ironically implodes tradition. The novel mentions Beth's sexuality but also makes her she embrace the social purity campaign which echoed angel in the house concept. But her heroines show slight variance from the mid Victorian feminists like George Eliot, the Bronte's who expressed their rage but failed to offer feminist questions, allowing marriage to answer all discontents. Ideala, Beth, find their voice moving out of marriage circle, such instances according to critics (Ann Heilmann, Lyn Pykett) evince Grand's feminist views that embraced social renovation and wholesale political transformation. A careful scrutiny of novels evinces the fact that the ethics of her writing is designed to transform society without violating the male dominated world. Such depiction of feminist sensibility was commonly seen in new woman novels. Beth depicts woman's striving to be herself while being constrained by the male gaze. Grand demonstrates Beth and Ideala as women who were naturally noble and morally superior to men, and their mission was to raise men to their own high level, and Ideala remarks 'men are not fit to guide us' (85) Beth tells Dr. Dan "I will submit no ordering and no sort of exaction. Man must be taught to have a better opinion of himself." (314,316) Feminism to Grand meant such elevation and she attempts to illustrate cultural disapproval as political dissent.

The merger of feminist, art and activism are the modusoperandi of Grand to evince her belief in the preemptory of direct public action which makes woman free herself from the male domain. In feminist discourse the vulnerable female body suggests woman as fertile, as a productive body who has the power to produce. Grand makes Ideala comment about English woman's stance "her own sphere is a very indefinite phrase" (138 ) Hence the urge to conquer

when a woman realizes how the nation has denied her an identity. “Fate itself is no match for one woman with will... they will fight to arms.”(138) it suggests that it is better to provoke and live in agony than to submit. Cultural concerns about gender and empire converge in new woman fiction; it proclaims male superiority and the right to dominate. It revolves around the ‘other’ which works under the spell of ideological constellations. We see how her fiction shares the experience of imperialism and feminism. Her fiction centers on the ideal of a white English upper middle class woman, (*Heavenly Twins*) her new woman is cautious enough to retain the traditional role of Victorian woman but one cannot admit her writing as wholly conservative even if one finds streaks of it.

Grand’s attempt at eroding stereo types and myths and showing writing as the place where writing and subversion germinate hint at her strategy to display a new kind of sensibility which can be termed as feminist. The revisionist strategy is seen in how her novels state a calmly reasoned call to help woman by liberating them from the demands of marriage, motherhood and domestic careers and this proves they were ahead of the curve. Grand as a New Woman writer knew that she was a focus of literary controversy with regard to what she wrote. The new woman in fiction had to be shown as the thinking woman and one can decisively state that the picture of the female genius helped to counter the existing status reserved for the male writers. Presenting signs of creative genius she summoned herself as an innovator and leader in the society.

Her women characters resist the dominant order but they show positive signs of power because they operate through normalization. The chosen novels serve a common purpose in showing how the feminist sensibility in their women springs from the fountain head of desire to be treated fairly and judged equally. Ideala and Beth’s mission are perceived as a new feminine-cum feminist poetics that transforms traditional literary and cultural paradigms. Such transformations are seen in how the power of word helped to change what these novelists aspired to alter. Their astute observation of their surroundings and their sense of reasoning presented a different ethics which confused women and men about their stance. The novelist endeavors to give voice to the voiceless if they are unable to attain complete success it is because they are still interacting in the male world. They also show how women cannot be devoid of the feminine self; such depiction may come closer to post feminist stance that feminism is pro-woman without being anti-man. Grand focused on the distasteful outcomes of traditional masculinity (domestic violence, subjugation of women) and presents it as damaging to man and woman. The feminist sensibility rests in woman’s urge to explore the new self through an affirmation of positive values. The writer communicates the need for creating new spaces and the need to establish the dignity of the female self, (she desires to see herself as both object and subject.) Feminist sensibility in Ideala and Beth is seen in their attempt to create new spaces which rests on women’s urge to explore the new self through confirmation of positive self. Her novels if viewed through the lens of feminism celebrate women as empowered by positioning women as central to the narrative. Grand uses the genre to extend the meaning of the new woman; she like modern feminists allows her woman characters to talk for themselves so that submerged knowledge and hidden alternative can be brought to the surface. Their views signal the shifts and changes in values and attitudes that the era saw. All these aspects go to confirm the fact that today new woman novels are not perceived as stuffy sensually repressive, and intellectually regressive, but they are studied for the feminist strategy



which invokes high morality. Her portrayal of women is an innovation and perhaps the most real and important one. It represents not only an exploration of the turn of the century womanhood but a gusty movement at the crossroads.

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