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# Representations of the New Woman in "The Irish Times" and "The Weekly Irish Times". A Preliminary Approach

## ≈ Resumen

Este artículo presenta una primera aproximación al estudio de las representaciones de la figura de la Mujer Nueva en las publicaciones irlandesas *The Irish Times* y *The Weekly Irish Times* en la época Victoriana, a finales de siglo XIX. Para ello se analiza en primer lugar el concepto de Mujer Nueva y su coincidencia en el tiempo con el denominado Nuevo Periodismo, desde el punto de vista de los estudios de mujeres. Se estudia, en segundo lugar, la etiología y características de las publicaciones utilizadas como corpus, los criterios de selección de las mismas, y se comparan con las publicaciones inglesas en este período. También se explora el reflejo de la convulsa situación política finisecular irlandesa en estas publicaciones. Otro de los ejes del trabajo es el estudio de la situación de la mujer en el período y las diferentes percepciones sobre la misma, a veces contrapuestas, y cómo éstas se reflejan en estas publicaciones, tanto en diferentes artículos de opinión como en la Sección de Cartas al Director. Se comparan, asimismo, los roles de las mujeres en estas publicaciones con los de la prensa dirigida exclusivamente a lectoras y sus rasgos distintivos. En tercer lugar, se analizan extractos de diferentes artículos y las sorprendentes y contradictorias opiniones vertidas sobre las vidas de las mujeres del período.

Palabras clave:

Nueva mujer; Irlanda; periodismo; *Fin-de-siècle*; estudios de mujeres

## ≈ Abstract

This article presents a preliminary approach to the study of the images of the New Woman in the publications *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times* at the turn of the twentieth century. From the theoretical framework of women's studies the concept of New Woman is analysed in relation to that of New Journalism, which arose at the same time. Additionally, the aetiology and features of the two publications, plus the criteria for corpus selection, are described, and the corpus texts are compared to similar English publications of the period. The complex political situation in Ireland at the turn of the century is also considered. The role of women and the various perceptions of them are analysed, both in the sections of letters to the Editor and in essays. The roles of women in *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times* are also compared to those depicted in journals and newspapers addressed to a female readership. The study concludes with excerpts of the two publications in question and the analysis of the contradictory opinions on the lives and roles of women in the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle*.

Keywords:

New Woman; Ireland; journalism; *Fin de siècle*; women's studies

Poor women, how we are studied! Whether we walk  
or ride, or read or work – whether we dance or play,  
or write or sing, it is all the same old story!  
Grand, Sarah. 1894. “The New Woman.”  
*The Weekly Irish Times*, 27 Oct.

**T**he above quotation is a good illustration of a common perception during the Victorian period: that the role of women in society had become one of the most important debates of the day. It is undoubtedly the case that over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century the position of women saw rapid and significant changes. This was materialized particularly in the periodical press, and British as well as Irish journals offered their readers several sections on the debate generated by the so-called Woman Question. Not only did the professionals working in these media address the issue, but their readers also participated eagerly and sometimes passionately in such exchanges, with letters written to the editors not infrequently focussing on this topic. Indeed, the introductory quotation is an extract of one such letter, in which a reader, who signed herself as “Maud I.,” responded to the letters of other readers in an important Irish newspaper, *The Weekly Irish Times*, the weekend edition of the daily *The Irish Times*.

In the final decade of the nineteenth century, debates on the status of women acquired a new turn and the phenomenon of the New Woman was born. Most issues about women which had previously been discussed, such as education, marriage, work and franchise, continued to be explored, and thus would come to be associated with the New Woman; however, specific attention was now paid to women’s sexual behaviour and external appearance, which involved their forms of dress, as well as some new “unfeminine” fashions, like cycling, smoking, drinking and gambling. Those engaged in the study of the controversial and complex figure of the New Woman tend to agree that a significant part of the discussion about women took place in the journals and magazines of the period (Ledger 1997, 16; Heilmann 2000, 16, 34; Richardson and Willis 2001, 13; Green 2016, 73–4). Moreover, the advent of the New Woman coincided in time with the emergence of so-called New Journalism, which embraced journalistic elements like tit-bits, human interest or personalising information, and particularly sensationalism (Beetham 1996, 123–5; Brake and Demoor 2009, 443; Harcup 2014, 196). Both these phenomena, the New Woman and New Journalism, would become increasingly intermingled in the social and cultural arena of the last decade of the century.

The year 1894 was of great relevance for this discussion. Indeed, it was “christened” by Lynn Pyckett as the “*annus mirabilis* of the New Woman” (1992, 137), referring to novels on the issue written by women; Sally Ledger makes a similar point regarding New Woman drama in the same year (Ledger 2006, 53). Most importantly, the term New Woman was coined in 1894 by the writer Ouida (Maria Louise Ramé) (1839–1908), in her article “The New Woman”, responding to Sarah Grand’s essay “The New Aspect of the Woman Question”, both of which were published in *The North American Review* (Jordan 1983). From this moment onwards the expression became very popular in the periodicals of the time, including in the Irish press. Moreover, in Ireland, as Talia O’Toole has noted, a considerable number of New Woman writers “aimed to subvert dominant discourses and revolutionize

the cultural and social world” (2013, 1). Among these Irish writers, Sarah Grand (Frances Bellenden Clarke McFall) (1854–1943) was of paramount importance, in that she stood for and vindicated the ideals of the New Woman both in her writings and in her life. Indeed, Grand herself was involved in social and political activities and even served as Mayoress of the city of Bath between 1922 and 1929. O’Toole mentions various other women connected by birth to Ireland or who lived there, and who participated in this movement: George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright) (1859–1945), Hannah Lynch (1859–1904), L.T. (Lillie Thomasina) Meade (1844–1915), among the best known. Hence, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, “a subversive energy [...] was producing new resistance movements across a range of areas” in Ireland (O’Toole 2013, 1), a context which favoured intense debate on any topic.

In order to provide new insights into these issues, the current study will offer a preliminary approach to the controversial debate on the New Woman, concentrating on the Irish periodical press. Due to limitations of space, only two journals have been selected, *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times*. Both of these contributed to the discussion with general and specific sections, and the analysis will look in particular at the initial references to the New Woman in those issues published in 1894. This paper is thus the first step towards a more extensive study, in which we intend to address the concept of the New Woman in the Irish periodical press at the turn of the twentieth century, encompassing more journals and a wider time span.

### *The Irish Times and The Weekly Irish Times*

During the mid-nineteenth century, journalism as a profession was enjoying a growing reputation in Britain and Ireland; however, Irish journals could not rival the great British periodicals. Britain was living through a period of transition with a certain deterioration of the economy, new departures for the Imperial project, and the emergence of new political currents, like socialism. In Ireland, Irish nationalism was gaining momentum, as many Irish felt that they had been abandoned by the Metropolis. Principally among Catholics, the campaign for Irish Home Rule took root, while more radical groups, such as the Fenians and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, played a more violent part here, even murdering some British representatives on the island. For obvious reasons, they were strongly opposed by the Unionists, who were mainly Protestants and from the North. However, in terms of gender roles, there were no important differences between religious faiths, with the ideology of separate spheres constantly addressed from the pulpit by both Catholic and Protestant priests (Earner-Byrne and Urquhart 2017, 313–16).

Due to the contentious political panorama which followed the Great Famine in Ireland (1845–47), the Irish press offered attractive avenues for journalistic expression (Brown 2015, n. pag.; Tilley 2019a, 76). Apart from the tense political setting, other significant elements were also instrumental here, such as the growing number of readers and the reduction in taxes on the price of books and newspapers (Morash 2010, 88). It was within this context that *The Irish Times* was established in 1859, and today is the only surviving newspaper of those published in that period. Founded by Major Lawrence Knox, it was bought on his death in 1873 by the Arnott family. Other journals were in existence in Ireland in 1859, yet it seemed that there was a space for a new daily periodical, one with the kind of political views of *The Irish Times*. Thus it

soon became a significant rival to other newspapers, such as *The Freeman's Journal* and *The Daily Express*. Indeed, it quickly became a success, rapidly moving from being published three times a week to every daily. In 1873, when the new owners arrived, more attention was paid to commercial and industrial affairs and its political affiliation changed, from Protestant Nationalism to Unionism. In particular, by the year 1894, *The Irish Times* bluntly declared itself to be Unionist (Brown 2015, n. pag.). Its target audience was the Dublin Protestant upper and middle classes, yet “judiciously balancing its views” in order to attract and retain a large readership and thus maintain its revenues (Morash 2010, 119–20). Throughout their histories, the newspaper and Irish society have undergone significant transformations, and today the *Times* is a respected and progressive journal for the multicultural and secular readership of Ireland (O'Reilly 2015, n. pag.).

The success of the English imports of weeklies in the nineteenth century provoked the publication of Irish counterparts. All the Irish companies which launched dailies embarked on publishing weekly and evening journals (O'Brien 2017, 12). Regarding *The Irish Times*, it started with *The Weekly Irish Times* and a weekly sports newspaper, *The Irish Field*. A weekly was easier to obtain, not only because the buyer had to pay for just one newspaper, which was itself cheaper, but also because those people living in remote areas tended to visit a market only once a week and would purchase a newspaper whilst there (12). Besides, as Harris notes, Sunday and weekly papers of this type became a national passion in Ireland, “a guilty pleasure even” (2018, n. pag.). As for the main topics covered, “nationalism, religion and sex were [...] the basic ingredients of Sunday newspapers and the emphasis given to each dictated the differences between titles” (n. pag.).

### The New Woman and New Journalism

Elaine Showalter took from the novelist George Gissing the phrase “sexual anarchy” for the title of her book *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture of the Fin de Siècle*, to illustrate the opinions of many Victorians on the perception of an increasing degeneration in social, sexual and gender codes (1991, 3). She also argued that *fin-de-siècle* periods are particularly prone to these kinds of insecure attitudes, which are usually counterbalanced by stricter rules (4). Among such rules, the ideology of the separate spheres was crucial in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus it was that the public sphere was accorded to men, while women's preserve was the domestic sphere. Through being confined to the home, women were kept intact and pure. They were thus almost angelical figures, in that they were not in contact with all the possible negative aspects of public and social life, such the vices of drinking and gambling, and particularly sexual depravities, to which many men succumbed. Moreover, women's assigned position at home and their supposed special gifts therein were fundamentally connected in terms of their assumed contribution to society, with women seen to be useful due to their spiritual, moral and educational skills. Hence, their influence was a form of power for women (Showalter 1982, 183–4; Mitchell 2000, 152–3).

However, many Victorian women's lives prove that the boundaries between these two spheres were fluid, as they were able and willing to test, negotiate and remake them (Morgan 2007, 4). As Davidoff and Hall have suggested, the two spheres were separated by an ideological divide, which was a product of the age and was shaped not just by notions of gender, but also of class (2002,

33). The increasing participation of women in new and diverse social contexts, as well as their unrelenting political demands for legislative changes in the areas of formal education, marriage, finance, work and suffrage, among others, constituted a threat to the established order. Accordingly, their conservative opponents exploited every possible means to attack them and to show them to be the cause of many of the social and political problems of the moment. One such problem was the crisis in gender identity, which was materialised in mannish or unwomanly women. The visual image here was habitually a bicycling woman wearing divided skirts or knickerbockers as a symbol of a disturbed identity. Moreover, they were on the streets and thus had literally abandoned their home, their parents, husbands and children. While they were enjoying their freedom, the sacred institution of family was supposedly in danger. Nevertheless, the New Woman also had her supporters, mostly women themselves, many of whom believed that such stereotypical representations were no more than simple exaggerations, and that women's new achievements and the reforms they had won would make them better prepared for the social, political and cultural challenges of the *fin-de-siècle*.

The context of change and instability also affected the press of the time. The emergence of New Journalism had as profound impact on the periodical press of the late nineteenth century. This term, first coined by the writer and critic Matthew Arnold, was applied to new popular newspapers and magazines, in contrast to traditional, serious journals (Harcup 2014, 196). However, New Journalism also affected and transformed existing periodicals, in that they began to incorporate innovative techniques and strategies inspired by the new model (Brake and Demoor 2009, 443). The expansion of the reading public, particularly that of certain specific groups of readers, and the massive publication of books and journals, were instrumental in the emergence of special texts addressed to special audiences, namely women and children, and even young girls. Regarding women's literacy, during the final decades of the nineteenth century, levels had reached almost 90 per cent (Lyons 1999, 313). Periodicals for women did exist at this time. However, in terms of general journals and magazines, women were seen as an important but distinct group of consumers, and thus most publications included a special section for ladies. According to Beetham (1996, 123–4), in those sections, as well as in the press addressed specifically to women readers, who were considered less educated, the particular features were:

“Tit bits”, that is, very short articles, less than two inches in length. They broke the traditional columns, which were themselves punctuated with more headlines and cross headings.

A greater number of illustrations, due to the use of cheaper printing techniques.

“Human interest” stories, in which the personal angle was emphasised. Consequently, the exchange of personal views and gossip columns became central elements.

The tactics of “sensationalism” were used to shock readers, involving scandals and emotive stories, for example.

It is also remarkable that more and more women were participating in the journalistic world at this time. As a consequence of the growing literate female population, there were not only more women readers but also more women writers, who eagerly entered journalism as a means of expressing publicly

their concerns and indeed of earning a living (Gray 2012, 4). The significant number of periodicals addressed to women also facilitated the presence of women writers among their usual contributors, thus provoking genuine change in the *fin de siècle* journalistic market. This is the case with the Irish press, in that new periodicals aimed at women were published during this period (Tilley 2019b, 21). Nevertheless, as Beetham points out, the representation of the woman journalist was “essentially feminine rather than professional” (1996, 129), with constant allusions to their sex as a distinctive attribute. In any case, their involvement in this world was intimately linked to the emergence of New Journalism (Beetham 1996, 125–6; Gray 2012, 7–9). As for general and serious publications, the “feminisation of the press” (Beetham 1996, 125) was materialised in the creation of new spaces for women, with specialised information for them.

### Discussing the New Woman

Thanks to the digitalisation of journals and magazines, their storage in diverse databases, and the availability of optical character recognition, the search of specific terms and expressions in the periodical press of the past centuries has been made considerably easier. In the current study, the first article which mentions the term “New Woman” appeared in *The Weekly Irish Times* on 16 June, 1894. It was an article taken from the English journal *To-Day* entitled “Jerome K. Jerome on the New Woman” by the English author and humourist (1859–1927), best known for the travelogue *Three Men in a Boat* (1889). The author explains the current state of the debate about women’s circumstances, since it seems that whilst the label New Woman is new, the debate is not. Indeed, subjects such as “sex and human nature, man, woman, marriage” are of course not new. He even provides the names of two of the women who are involved in the debate: the British writer Mona Caird (née Mona Alison 1854–1932) and the Irish Sarah Grand, who produced books and articles in which they engaged with these issues.

Jerome considers the New Woman to be a figure emerging from fashionable London, and he describes how women behave there. Evidently, it is a meaningful starting point:

In the West End of London there are plenty of vapid, brainless, heartless, overdressed-in-the-afternoon and undressed-in-the-evening little animals, that, there being no other name at present for, we have to call women. They are vicious, selfish, and idle. They sell themselves for money, and then do not carry out the terms of the bargain. They marry, but they are never wives. They are blood-suckers on the unfortunate men who have been asses enough to undertake the responsibility of feeding and clothing them. They will ruin them in their business and worry them into early graves rather than go without an extra new dress. They have children, but they are not mothers; they have not even the instincts of the better-class brutes. Self-indulgent and stupid, they drift through life, everlastingly whining and posturing, a bore to themselves and a curse to everyone who knows them ... They are types of nothing but a social disease. (*WIT*, 16 June, 1894, 5)

This is a portrait of the New Woman in Jerome’s opinion; however, he considers that there is no comparable new man, but rather that a man is simply a “commonplace person” and “a decent fellow”, who has to avoid this type of women. *The Weekly Irish Times*, then, is featuring an article to alert readers to new women, who are portrayed as tainting and indeed perverting society. The Irish editorial team is thus giving information to their readers about something that is scandalising London society. Whereas at this moment it is quite a distant danger, it is a fashion which, as habitually occurs, will sooner or later arrive in Ireland.

Nevertheless, just a month later, on 14 July, in *The Weekly Irish Times*, Irish journalist and art critic Ellen Duncan (1850–1939), who years later would found the United Arts Club in Dublin and frequented the poet W.B. Yeats and other Irish artists (Foster 1998, 468), authored the article “A New View of the New Woman”. In this piece she vindicated a totally different New Woman, one which she sought to describe simply as a human being, this perhaps in response to the previous article, in which the New Woman had been defined by Jerome as an animal, indeed a brute animal. Thus Duncan argues:

She is rather the woman who, while recognising to the full the services rendered in the cause of progress by those of her sex who have had the courage of their convictions, and have protested against the conventional limitations that were set to woman’s development, yet frankly admits that men have been found open-minded enough and unprejudiced enough to stand by their sisters in their struggle towards the light. She is also the woman who not desiring to accentuate sex distinctions, but rather to minimise them as much as possible, recognises the fact that “a house divided against itself cannot stand;” and also the greater part of the Brotherhood of Humanity, in which men and women alike work for the common good of all. (*WIT*, 14 July, 1894, 4)

Duncan observed that society was changing, and that women and men should also progress, both sexes together, forgetting petty differences between them. It is especially interesting to find such a progressive view of the role of women in the Irish press of this period, given that Irish periodicals, both religious or secular, when addressing women’s issues, usually assumed the notion of “encapsulating traditionalist gender roles and reinforcing the idea of appropriate gender behaviour as proof of respectability” (Earner-Byrne and Urquhart 2017, 324).

From this moment on, the “Editor’s Letter-Box” section of *The Irish Weekly Times* would focus attention, to greater or lesser extent, on the topic of the New Woman. Indeed, “it is the expansion and institutionalization of letters to the editor in the mainstream press that is perhaps the most noble development, with its inevitable connotation of opening up the pages of the papers to the public to create a putatively free forum for debate” and they became particularly popular in the weekly press (Brake and Demoor 2009, 359). Such is the case with *The Irish Weekly Times*, which offered an ample section for readers’ letters, displaying thus the two-way direction of communication between the newspaper and its readers. However, as Brake and Demoor observe, the editors could discard those letters which did not fit within the

editorial and philosophical lines of the newspaper, and on occasions the editors themselves wrote letters in support of or to oppose a particular viewpoint (359). In any case, until recently these letters were the only channel that the readers had as a means of providing feed-back about the information found in publications; however, it was also a forum in which citizens could communicate and converse with each other on matters of public interest (Torres da Silva 2012, 251), in this case the New Woman. Concerning authorship, in a study by Allison Cavanagh on letters to the editor from *The Times* in the first decade of the twentieth century, women were not very active, providing only around 6 per cent of the total published (2018, 270). In our case, however, the percentage is significantly higher, probably due to the topic in question. As usually occurs with letters of this type, identifying the correspondents can sometimes be problematic, particularly when they use pseudonyms and initials. Nevertheless, since they were discussing the topic of the New Woman, the authors of letters here tended to acknowledge their sex, in order to clarify their position.

In a letter by a correspondent signing as “Senry” [sic] and published on 21 July, 1894, the author mentioned not only the article about the New Woman by Ellen Duncan, but also another one that Duncan had published previously, on 26 May of the same year, also in *The Irish Weekly Times*, entitled tellingly “Female Slavery in Dublin”, which demonstrates the author’s engagement in social causes. Comparisons between women and slaves were not new; Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), written in Ireland, had connected the two types of situations of bondage (Ferguson 1992). Yet Duncan denounced other circumstances derived from industrialization and capitalism, which mainly affected women, as the most vulnerable group of workers, giving examples of the sad lives of factory workers and shop assistants. In the letter, the correspondent did not observe any improvement in the lot of women in recent times which might have led to the term New Woman, and noted that there had been instances of illustrious women previously, such as Agnes Strickland, Jane Austen and George Eliot, among others. The author of this letter was thus of the opinion that Duncan, as with many other women, “are misled by the greater fussiness and the louder self-assertion of the modern woman”. In this letter there is also an allusion to the special circumstances of Ireland, since anything in vogue in England would subsequently be imitated in Ireland, and given that writers “across the Channel” were passionately discussing this issue, the same would happen in Ireland. If we look at the “Editor’s Letter-Box” section in *The Weekly Irish Times* over the following months, this is seen to be very true indeed, as the section would be entitled “The New Woman” and the number of letters would increase, to the extent that the writers established a kind of dialogue on the topic, mediated by the newspaper. The pivotal moment was during the months of October and November of 1894, in which the letters-to-the-Editor section in *The Weekly Irish Times*, with as many as nine letters in October, was wholly devoted to this matter. Yet in December, writers and readers seemed to be tired of the matter and expressed this through their correspondence, which focussed on other issues. On the first of December, a correspondent signing as “Humanity” and who had participated previously in the debate of the New Woman, said: “Seeing that the New Woman correspondence has had a good run in your very interesting paper, I thought another matter, which is of more importance, might be a good subject for discussion” (*WIT*, 1 December, 1894, 6).

One of the issues most often discussed in those letters was the image of New Woman as seen on the streets: “What a disgraceful, immodest spectacle to see a woman tearing along on a bicycle dressed in knickers, &c., and, to complete the picture, perhaps, a cigarette between her lips. Is there any pretension to womanliness in that?” (*WIT*, 13 October, 1894, 1), as asked “Carolla”. In a more severe way, the correspondent signing as “Humanity” claimed:

how a female who dyes her hair golden, charcoals her eyebrows, colours her cheeks, wears a coat, vest, collar and tie, and even goes so far as to show her calves off in a knickerbocker suit on a bicycle, can be called a New Woman [...] It is an insult to her sex. Call them automatic machines, dressed dolls, apes, or the title, when I was a boy, “Tom boys” if you like, but not women. (*IT*, 20 October, 1894, 4)

However, “A Kilkenny Cat” considered that “there are worse traits in the New Woman’s character”, since “Is not this woman seeking for a complete change in the laws and customs by which her sex have been governed for centuries?” In his opinion, women wanted to speak in public, vote in Parliament, frame laws, and to be able to train as doctors. As with most correspondents who criticised the New Woman, this one adduced tradition and religious causes to endorse his position: “The very law of nature has rendered women physically unfit to copy men. Then, Divine law recognises man as the master, and woman as his assistant or helpmate. At marriage ceremonies observe the distinction made between the sexes: the bride *must* promise to love, honour, and obey her husband” (*WIT*, 10 November, 1894, 4).

As Davidoff and Hall discuss, “[Marriage] was the economic and social building block for the middle class; it was the basis of a new family unit” (2002, 324); however, in Ireland, after the tragedy of the Great Famine, marriage models suffered notable changes and the proportion of men and women older than 45 who had never married increased significantly (Luddy 2017, 345). Thus, some correspondents expressed their concern about the reluctant attitude shown by New Women towards marriage. If they were working and earning a wage, then they did not need a man to provide for them; moreover, it was argued that many married women forgot to take care of their family while they were riding around on their bicycles, or amusing themselves in clubs. This might be the reason why some women correspondents claimed that not all women were prepared to marry; in this case, as M. O’Shaughnessy noted, “there are two alternatives open to women [...] either to become parasites on their friends or the State, or to earn their own living. New Women choose the latter” (*WIT*, 17 November, 1894, 4). In any case, for a more conservative reader, who signed as “Madge”, “[many] women must of necessity earn their own livelihood, but there are many ways of doing so in a sphere essentially womanly, and not intruding on that of the sterner sex” (*WIT*, 27 October, 1894, 4).

Obviously, the role of men vis-à-vis the New Woman was also discussed, as the aforementioned “A Kilkenny Cat” did when he observed that with more and more New Women, many men were “[leading] lives of single-blessedness” (*WIT*, 10 November, 1894, 4). Most importantly, representations of the New Woman were commonly associated with the decadent and the dandy, ~

as both figures were perceived as a threat to traditional Victorian definitions of gender (Ledger 1997, 94), with women acting and behaving like men, while men were no longer virile. For instance, a correspondent who signed as “Fair Play” observed: “I have seen men who in their extreme exactness and lavishness of dress have imitated the gentler sex. These we know as ‘fops.’ But why should men these ‘fardels’ wear, as his [sic] physical structure is of the greatest outlines of the wisdom and greatness of God?” (WIT, 24 November, 1894, 6). Similarly, in terms of moral influence, the most greatly appreciated quality of the traditional woman figure, roles were even reversed:

Man will have to fill the woman’s place. He is fast becoming the “gentler sex.” He must exercise his gentle influence over the sterner (female) sex, and endeavour to calm his wife’s troubled mind, induce her to take a holiday from business [...], as if her very life depended on the distance she could traverse on her bicycle, or the speech that she was to deliver at the next meeting on “women’s rights,…” (WIT, 3 November, 1894, 4)

The majority of correspondents had disapproving opinions of the New Woman, although some were more critical than others. As an instance of some progressive individuals who were in favour of what the New Woman represented, the opinion of a writer who signed as “Anti-humbug” is illustrative. She opposed the Old to the New Woman saying that many people criticised those girls who cycled, but they had nothing to say about women who rode horses, played tennis, golf or hockey. Similarly, it was considered immodest to wear knickerbockers or divided skirts, while it was perfectly acceptable to “go half-naked to a ball”. Likewise, the Old Woman “is resolved to sell herself at all hazards to the highest bidder, and [...] to attract any man, regardless of what his character may be” while the New Woman desires “clean-lived, upright man to mate with her own stainless life” (WIT, 17 November, 1894, 4).

Negative opinions about the New Woman are also found in the women’s columns included in *The Weekly Irish Times*: “The Talk of Town, by a Lady” and “The World of Women”. Both sections are composed of various very short news items which occupy a paragraph each, a characteristic of New Journalism, as noted above. Among the news included in them, fashion was of great relevance, but also offered were curiosities about illustrious women or the “recently discovered divinity”, that is, the New Woman. Curiously enough, “The World of Women” was penned by a man; thus, the adverse view of the New Woman is in this sense logical: “The ‘New’ woman may storm our platforms, monopolise our occupations, smoke our cigars, and even don our clothes, if she is so minded, but we will pin our faith to the ‘old’ – the womanly woman every time” (WIT, 15 September, 1894, 5). A month later, in the same section, the position against New Women, or “the advanced and revolting wives” who did not want to admit men’s superiority, was supported by a well-known anecdote about the Queen herself. It concerned her being asked if she wanted to omit the word obey in her marriage ceremony, to she responded “I wish to be married as a woman, not as a queen” (WIT, 6 October, 1894, 5). This is precisely one of the strategies used by Queen Victoria to reconcile femininity and power, seeking to domesticate the monarchy by playing the role of a devoted wife and mother (Maitzen 1998, 156).

Very significantly, in September 1894 a play entitled *The New Woman* was premiered in London. Given the recent interest aroused by the New Woman, *The Irish Times* published a lengthy review. The play had an important role in further stereotyping the figure of the New Woman, presenting for the audience three different versions of her, ridiculing the behaviour of all three by means of exaggeration and commonplaces (Chothia 1998, xiii–xv). The author, Sydney Grundy, was a successful Victorian dramatist, who sought to offer what theatre-goers wanted, that is, entertaining melodrama. The review agreed wholeheartedly with the author’s satirical view of the New Woman, and apparently so did members of the Royal family, with the performance attended by the Duke and Duchess of York and their entourage. The London correspondent of *The Irish Times* wrote:

Mr Grundy brought his batteries into action at the very commencement of his play, and soon from a delighted house came shout after shout of laughter as the absurdities, and oftentimes the indecencies, of the new cant were passed in review and ruthlessly unmasked, with, moreover, so subtle an exposition of the ridiculous side of the aspirations of the “shrieking sisterhood”, that every hit went straight home. (IT, 3 September, 1894, 6)

## Conclusions

After having explored the debates on the New Woman and the innovative and provocative strategies of New Journalism from the point of view of women’s studies, this paper has highlighted the role of the daily and weekly Unionist press in the dissemination of the controversies around the representation of the evolving roles of women in Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century. Particularly, both periodicals here studied, *The Irish Times* and *The Weekly Irish Times*, reflect in their pages several considerations on the concept of the New Woman and the various instances of criticism received by these ladies at the time. This retrospective view sheds new light on the issue, in that it shows how these New Women were ridiculed by their contemporaries in the Irish press, as exemplified in the review of Grundy’s play. When fighting to change their circumstances, such women were criticized for being “unfeminine” both in behaviour and external appearance. In 1894 the notion of the separate spheres for men and women was being preached and practised by men of different religious persuasions, the public sphere being accorded to males and the domestic sphere being the preserve of women. The presence of women in the public sphere, both as writers and readers of articles with new notions on gender and ideological issues, was a catalyst for a change in personal and social roles as well as a threat for the *status quo*. For this reason they were heavily criticised in the Irish press, to the point of equating them with animals or brutes (as described by Jerome K. Jerome), and alerting Irish society to what was happening in the London metropolis. This fuelled the discussion, and women such as Ellen Duncan subsequently wrote articles defending their position as members of society and denouncing social wrongs. We should note the debates that arose in the section “Editor’s Letter-Box”, in which unknown women presented their case, discussing the topic of the New Woman against the disapproving view of many correspondents, acknowledging their sex in order to clarify their position. In the women’s

columns of journals, other contributors centred their opinions only on the manly external appearance of women, and how they behaved in the streets, e.g. wearing knickerbockers or divided skirts and smoking cigarettes. Some male voices realized that the New Woman would bring about “a change in the laws and customs by which her sex have been governed for centuries” (*WIT*, 10 November, 1894, 4), which in turn would imply changes in men’s lives. Interestingly, the figure of the New Woman was ironically undermined by exploiting Queen Victoria’s attitude, as she is described not as a powerful royal woman, but playing the role of a devoted wife and mother. The authors who led the New Women movement were, among others, Mona Caird, George Egerton, Hannah Lynch and Sarah Grand, but to these we must add those anonymous women who dared to study at universities and to enter a profession, or simply to ride bicycles or to wear trousers. All of them were accused of trying to assume new roles in society. In the Irish context in particular, these New Women paved the way for gender and social changes at a moment in which other resistance movements such as Irish nationalism were also gaining momentum.

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Representaciones de la Nueva Mujer en "The Irish Times" y "The Weekly Irish Times". Una primera aproximación

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