

Mobility and Modern Consciousness in George Egerton's and Charlotte Mew's *Yellow Book* Stories.

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Kate Krueger Henderson

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**Mobility and Modern Consciousness in
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In the second half of the nineteenth century, London grew in population from 2.7 million to 6.6 million people becoming the largest city in the world. As a spatially and socially evolving place it became a key element in a new wave of literature that depicted the freedoms and fears of a burgeoning urban society. The New Woman—a popular label for women seeking professional and social freedom—became an exemplary cosmopolitan protagonist of *fin-de-siècle* short fiction through her assertion of independence in socially fluid public spaces. Because the New Woman heroine took advantage of local conditions to observe and explore a pluralistic London populated by an array of individuals from various classes, she also helped create London as a cosmopolitan arena—a place where set boundaries between classes, genders, and other social categories began to blur.¹ Cosmopolitan movement in *fin-de-siècle* London was no longer the sole purview of a select group (famously represented by the midcentury *flâneur*) flaunting an already-given mastery over the urban arena and its other inhabitants by traversing it as one large playground. Instead, fiction depicted movement within the city as a strategy through which diverse social actors claimed freedom from such easy objectification.

In New Woman short fiction penned by George Egerton and Charlotte Mew, urban mobility becomes a motor for the articulation of a gendered, modern consciousness. Deterritorialization—the breakdown of borders often discussed as a tenet of contemporary definitions of cosmopolitanism—does not only occur on a global scale. In fact, such social and geographic breakdowns can be experienced in tangible ways at a local, material level. Such dissolution of boundaries occurred in late-Victorian London both physically and perceptually in the way various classes and genders were understood in this changing landscape. **[End Page 185]**

Though social segregation did occur in the urban planning of nineteenth-century London, it primarily played out in the development of select suburbs that served middle and upper classes around the

capital city.² A spate of building within the city also focused on serving these populations; railroad and road construction were spurred by the impetus for "metropolitan improvement." The growing geographical separation between home and workplace for bourgeois families also meant that massive numbers of people began to travel into and out of London on a daily basis on railways, steamers, omnibuses, and trams. For example, from the inception of the first omnibus line in 1829, this mode of public transport expanded along with the city population that it served, so much so that by 1890, two omnibus companies transported a combined total of 149 million people.³ Though the poorest populations still congregated in the city center within walking distance of sources of work, as the century progressed omnibuses lowered their fares to compete with railways and the newly built London underground, shifting the passenger population to include working classes as well. Through this change from a purely middle-class clientele to a dynamic and shifting citizenry taking advantage of mounting employment opportunities within the city, public transport became one of these sites of contact that complicated the Victorian ideological segregation of class and gender.

Ironically, the very housing and transportation projects meant to consolidate social segregation served to push those populations into ever-greater contact. One such example was the construction of New Oxford Street. Completed in 1847, it cut through St. Giles rookery, effectively destroying one of the worst slums of the city.⁴ The poor simply moved into the surrounding neighborhoods instead of scattering the inhabitants. As a result, Oxford and New Oxford Streets—major veins for bourgeois consumerism—abutted some of the poorest slums in London throughout the Victorian period.

Because of these juxtapositions, London became a place of contact and interaction, an urban arena defined by its plural citizenry: in short, a cosmopolitan center. Popular concern with understanding these new occupants coalesced during the *fin de siècle* in the debates surrounding the New Woman.⁵ Women took advantage of access to public

t transportation and the expansion of professional opportunities, increasingly...

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KATE KRUEGER HENDERSON
Arkansas State University

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2715 North Charles Street
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[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



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