volupté

INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF DECADENCE STUDIES

Volume 2, Issue 1

Spring 2019

Review: Lena Wånggren, *Gender, Technology, and the New Woman* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018)

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ISSN: 2515-0073

Date of Acceptance: 30 May 2019

Date of Publication: 21 June 2019

Citation: Helena Esser, 'Review: Lena Wånggren, *Gender, Technology, and the New Woman* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018)', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies*, 2.1 (2019), 141-145.

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Lena Wånggren, *Gender, Technology, and the New Woman*
(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 232 pp.
ISBN 9781474441308

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Wånggren's study offers insight into two phenomena of *fin-de-siècle* culture and literature that have not often been considered in conjunction, namely the New Woman and her relationship with emerging technologies. Whereas the archetype of the bicycling New Woman has become iconic in contemporary media and prominent in New Woman scholarship, Wånggren argues that an even wider variety of technologies provided New Women with the skills necessary to participate actively in the public sphere and modern life at large. Focusing on the typewriter and the bicycle, but also less evident technologies such as medical knowledge and forensic skills, Wånggren employs a suitably wide concept of 'technology' and provides productive readings of lesser-known Victorian popular fictions. These readings are embedded into considerations of the larger socio-historical context, while also introducing us to interesting texts lying beyond the scope of a now-established New Woman canon, focused mostly on Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird, George Egerton, or Sarah Grand. *Gender, Technology, and the New Woman* considers not only the New Woman as an active user of *fin-de-siècle* technologies, but also examines the public interest in this figure and her appearance in commercial fiction. Wånggren's study may be valuable for those interested in the New Woman and textuality, *fin-de-siècle* culture, and technology, as well as Victorian popular fiction and publishing practise.

Throughout her introduction and first chapter, Wånggren persuasively lays out the rationale for her approach against the backdrop of historical context. She draws attention to the much-quoted 'semi-fictionality' of the New Woman ideal to highlight how the New Woman has been constituted by textuality and how the multiplicity of (often conflicting) voices of New Woman writers on issues such as motherhood, marriage, and suffrage, share a rejection of conventional gender roles and a demand for opportunities in education and careers. Technology, according to

Wånggren, provides the democratizing and widely accessible means to attain these shared goals. Commercial fiction, she posits, with its consumerist ideologies of individual choice, marketed the New Woman as a novelty figure ripe for mass consumption and soon configured her as a pop culture archetype. The New Woman arose at an intersection between a group of signifiers assigned by and perpetuated through fictional representations, as evidenced by Girton College graduates, typists, medical women, and teachers emerging alongside a media revolution which brought about the telephone, the typewriter, the X-ray, and the safety bicycle. This draws together the two main aspects of her study in a convincing way and illustrates how an analysis of popular New Woman fiction may provide new and valuable insights into the New Woman as a feminist figure.

Wånggren's theory of technology is particularly productive. Challenging a masculinist definition of technology as purely material, she widens her definition to accommodate the cultural dimension of technology as techniques and knowledge as well as the material aspect of technology in the form of tools and devices. In so doing, Wånggren argues that technology cannot be inherently progressive. It is neither neutral nor autonomous (p. 27), but harbours potential for various outcomes and gains potency from a socio-cultural context. It is vital, therefore, to consider gendered user agency within Foucaultian reciprocal power relations. In accordance with this, Chapter 2 explores the identity of the typist in relation to the machine which, on the one hand, provides access to the male-dominated public sphere of the office, but, on the other, may also become synonymous with the woman behind it.

Wånggren contextualizes her close readings against a skilfully sketched socio-historical background in which she considers fiction by Bram Stoker, Arthur Conan Doyle, and George Gissing, and illustrates how both typewriter and the New Woman emerged as symbols of modernity, progress, and a new metropolitan experience. She argues that although typists may become the object of voyeurism or be treated as mechanical themselves, they were also often well-educated and also inscribed their physical presence into the office space (p. 44). Wånggren then provides attentive close readings of Grant Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897) and Tom Gallon's *The*

Girl Behind the Keys (1903), in which a typist cleverly reworks gendered power relations in order to expose her criminal employers.

Chapter 3 focuses on the bicycle as an emblem of the New Woman's personal freedom. Wånggren draws a concise and evocative portrait of the bicycle as a democratic, accessible, and affordable symbol of mobility and emancipation, and considers cycling manuals and journals, poems, illustrations, and medical discourse as well as short fiction by George Egerton, Kate Chopin, Alice Meynell, Mary E. Kennard, and Conan Doyle. She recapitulates the relationship between rational dress and bicycling, as well as illustrating how the bicycle came to characterize the New Woman as single, educated, and rational, so that popular fiction may employ it to signal a character's politics. Wånggren then provides a closer look at H. G. Wells's 'cycling romance', *The Wheels of Chance* (1896) and Grant Allen's *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899). Both, according to Wånggren, portray New Woman cyclists as energetic, audacious, and determined, but also demonstrate that feminist liberation is dependent on user agency, not the bicycle itself.

Chapters 4 and 5 consider medicine as a less evident domain for the New Woman, with Chapter 4 focusing on the 'New Style' nurse (p. 102) and Chapter 5 on the woman doctor. Wånggren outlines how, throughout the late nineteenth century, the technological revolution increasingly configured medicine as scientific, to be measured, monitored, and analysed. This shift enabled nursing to become more well-regarded as a legitimate set of skills and knowledge, embodied in the New Style, by a sober, elegant, vigilant and dedicated nurse. However, Wanggren still finds medical knowledge to be caught in a gendered network of power relations with male doctors remaining the source of authority. She illustrates this by considering fictions by Margaret Harkness, Ella Hepworth Dixon, L. T. Meade, and Florence Marryat, followed by a close reading of Grant Allen's nurse-detective *Hilda Wade* (1900), who exposes a ruthless doctor through her own extensive medical knowledge, which is repeatedly dismissed as 'feminine intuition'. Chapter 5 outlines the history of women becoming doctors, arguing that the latter's struggle for education and careers is inextricably bound up with the larger feminist project of claiming citizenship and

participation in the socio-political sphere. Wånggren considers fictions by Olive Schreiner, Charles Reade, L. T. Meade, and lesser-known writers such as Charlotte Yonge, Henry Curwen, George Gardiner Alexander, Annie S. Swan, and Hilda Gregg, before presenting close readings of Arabella Kenealy's *Dr Janet of Harley Street* (1893), Margaret Todd's *Mona Maclean, Medical Student* (1892), and Conan Doyle's short story *The Doctors of Hoyland* (1894). These fictions, as Wånggren shows, become elaborate arguments in an ongoing debate on gender and femininity in a rational, male-dominated profession, as well as coming to symbolize the struggle of the New Woman to enter higher education and challenge traditional gender roles.

The last chapter considers the lady detective as the ultimate conjunction of the New Woman and forensic technology. She arises at the intersection of technological knowledge (law and medicine), emancipation, education, and personal freedom. As well as being a commercially successful *fin-de-siècle* detective figure, she is an emblem of the liberated woman. Wånggren again provides a comprehensive overview of female detectives in *fin-de-siècle* fiction, highlighting fiction by Conan Doyle, Catherine Louisa Pirkis, George R. Sims, Fergus Hume, and Baroness Orczy, against the backdrop of *fin-de-siècle* criminology. An extensive and intriguing close reading of Matthias McDonnell Bodkin's *Dora Myrl, the Lady Detective* (1900) then presents the eponymous detective as a hyperbolic New Woman figure: a Girton graduate, bicyclist, former telegraph girl, journalist, and doctor who enjoys tennis, croquet, and golf, and challenges gender roles with her vast knowledge of modern technologies. Her surprising knowledge of the telegraph, railway, chemistry, electrical engineering, photography, and aviation is adeptly contextualized in cultural history by Wånggren. Dora Myrl's cleverness and astute deployment of Holmesian rational deduction, which often surpasses the skill of male colleagues, exemplifies the New Woman's ability to question gendered networks of power through the use of deductive reason and modern technology.

Wånggren's study skilfully draws together a variety of socio-historical and cultural discourses to examine intriguing connections and intersections between feminist and technological

progress. Criticisms remain few and faint, but some small amendments would certainly have enhanced this illuminating study. For example, citing Max Nordau and Cesare Lombroso as evidence for certain cultural developments, as Wånggren does on a few occasions, is a precarious venture given both authors' notoriety and controversial political projects in relation to Decadence and *fin-de-siècle* culture. These citations would have benefitted from a short, contextualized reflection, even a footnote. While Chapter 4 is well-written and interesting, it is less evident here than in other chapters how the figure of the nurse intersects with that of the New Woman outside of Allen's *Hilda Wade*. Most notably, a study which opens up and draws together such a variety of discourses across history, culture, literature, and technology, would have benefited from a longer conclusion in which these strands are brought together in a final reflection. Here, the author might have reflected on the fact that while, in the beginning of the study, she deconstructs earlier dismissals of male authors as New Woman authors, the works which Wånggren chooses to close-read are predominantly written by men. This raises the question of what might be said about this emphasis on popular fiction, especially in relation to the mostly female New Woman writers. Lastly, Wånggren comments briefly on twentieth- and twenty-first century techno-feminist re-imaginings through the figure of the cyborg (p. 197) but given the impact of Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), especially in feminist discourse, even a short evaluation of this cyborg myth against the backdrop of her study would have been a fascinating afterthought.

However, Wånggren's engaging study remains full of interesting connections between, as yet, seldom explored discourses embedded in larger readings of the socio-cultural historical context. It makes a convincing argument for the New Woman archetype as an active user of new technologies, and introduces us to lesser-known New Woman fictions and their potential to enrich our understanding of *fin-de-siècle* culture.