My Research

Who was the American New Woman and why was she important to female literary writers from the period 1890 to 1930? My thesis explores this question by focusing specifically on the relationship between literary writings and the popular culture portrayals of the New Woman appearing in American magazines, many of which were in the form of advertisements and visual illustrations. I critically examine selected works of five American female writers who engaged with this figure in notably different ways, exploring among other things the sociocultural contexts of their literary works in order to understand why the ideology of the New Woman was so appealing and so pervasive, why it spawned so many different responses from female writers and why it changed so dramatically over time. Beginning with major works by Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, followed by Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen, the thesis argues that in America the changing nature of the New Woman in popular culture helped lay the framework for female literary writers to imagine and create new forms of American womanhood. It further contests that although she was often stereotyped in popular culture, the New Woman's identity proved to be more flexible in literary works and that this complexity extended to both “white” and “black” writers. An additional contention is that unlike white women writers, African-American women writers were obliged to suppress their sexuality since to do otherwise was to reinforce the stereotype of animality that had been projected upon them since the era of slavery.

How I Publish and Promote my Research

I have presented my research at the “Edith Wharton in Florence: A Sesquicentennial Conference Sponsored by the Edith Wharton Society” (2012). My thesis has been deposited into the University of Melbourne digital repository (Minerva), with metadata access.

In the future, I would like to publish my thesis as a book. I plan on strategically targeting American and possibly UK publishing houses, as they would have the most relevant audience for my research.

My Library Services and Spaces

I have used the following library services and facilities:
- Assistance via library service desk
- Assistance via library chat
- Interlibrary loans
- BONUS
- Library study spaces
- Computing, printing and photocopy facilities
- I did not use any reference management software, which I regret. I would have also liked to have found a way to manage my large collection of images.

My Information Management Tips

I would recommend having a one-on-one research consultation with a University librarian early on in the research process. This could help identify important issues, such as appropriate reference management or image management, which are more difficult to deal with later on. I would also suggest reaching out to the Academic Skills Unit (http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills) early on so you can identify important issues, such as appropriate reference management or image management, which are more difficult to deal with later on. I would also suggest reaching out to the Academic Skills Unit (http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills) early on so you can help resolve issues of productivity, work patterns, and generally help you to be a better researcher.

References or Acknowledgements

All references provided alongside images.

Supporting you through the research process

library.unimelb.edu.au/research