Abstract:

Both Ella Hepworth Dixon's novel, *Story of a Modern Woman*, and the advertisements in women's magazines of the late nineteenth century find female illness, and the female body more generally, somehow unspeakable. Despite purporting to be telegraphically clear, advertisements for medicine and other products aimed at women engage in a kind of apophrasis which occludes the specificity of female complaints. Women's health seems to circulate in plain sight, but this seeming conspicuousness hides a deeper uncertainty about that very circulation. In what follows, I am interested in examining this circulation of both diseases and print culture within and surrounding *Story of a Modern Woman*¹. How is the suffering female body positioned in the novel? How are female complaints, both circulating and non-circulating, categorized and over-determined? How do the characters themselves conceive of their bodies and those bodies' ailments? How are physical ailments transmitted or expressed? How can advertisements shed analytical light on fiction, and vice versa? To begin to address these questions, I examine not only the female body and disease transmission within the novel, but also within the larger circulation of magazines. In particular, I examine advertisements geared towards women, particularly food or patent medicine for female complaints such as anemia or menstrual cramps. Sondra Archimedes asserts that in this period of rapid social changes, “women came under special scrutiny from scientists and doctors wanting to explain human behavior and social occurrences in terms of biology” (2). In particular, she argues that women's bodies were pathologized, with transgressive women equated with sick ones in the eyes of medical doctors. I am especially interested in examining how magazine ads mark sick women, or those undergoing natural but pathologized bodily processes, as potentially dangerous, in a way that relegates them to silence while also showcasing their bodies in a false suggestion of openness.

¹ *Story of a Modern Woman* is available through Broadview Press, and can also be accessed online in full through the *Victorian Women Writers Project*, hosted by Indiana University.