

TRIANGULAR DESIRE AND FEMALE SACRIFICE: EMERGING LOGIC IN ADA
LEVERSON'S *LOVE'S SHADOWS*, *TENTERHOOKS*, AND *LOVE AT SECOND SIGHT*

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2007

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To my grandmother, Elaine.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my partner, Andy, who has been my rock, supporting and encouraging me every step of the way with his unshakeable confidence. I would also like to thank my family, especially my grandparents and parents, for their ongoing support and excitement about my path in life and for instilling in me the belief in education. I thank my Wisconsin and Florida friends who always listen and advise with open hearts and minds. I would also like to thank Dr. Caroline Levine whose guidance at the University of Wisconsin-Madison encouraged me to follow my passion for literature and research in graduate school. I thank Dr. Gilbert for her invaluable comments and questions, and I thank Dr. Chris Snodgrass who made this project possible through his patience and dedication as a scholar and a teacher.

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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August 2007

Chair: Chris Snodgrass
Major: English

Ada Levenson's *The Little Otley* trilogy, which contains her novels *Love's Shadows*, *Tenterhooks*, and *Love At Second Sight*, exemplifies the transitions between Victorian/Edwardian gender ideologies and more modern ideologies. Rather than completely breaking with the past, Levenson engages with aspects of past and current gender ideologies to bridge these ideologies with developing, more modern gender ideologies. In *Love's Shadows* and *Tenterhooks*, Levenson exemplifies female sacrifice, a key element in Victorian gender logic, via three triangles of desire. In each triangle, a female must sacrifice to uphold "happy endings," including heterosexual marriages and male homosocial relationships. Furthermore, heterosexual marriages are maintained at the expense of female homosocial relationships whereas heterosexual marriages encourage male homosocial relationships. In *Love At Second Sight*, Levenson rewards her heroine by allowing her to become a modern, empowered woman, but only after the heroine repeatedly and successfully upholds her role as a proper, sacrificing Victorian/Edwardian woman.

Ada Leverson's contributions to *Black and White*, *Punch*, and the *Yellow Book* and her six novels were popular during the fin de siècle and early twentieth century for their comedy and marriage themes. One prevalent view in scholarly criticism is that Leverson is quite forward thinking for the Edwardian period. This exemplifies a trend in criticism about fin de siècle and Edwardian women writers and their work: Scholarship often focuses on these women's progressive themes to emphasize their breaks with the past. Colin MacInnes claims of Ada Leverson, "Not only was she well 'abreast of' her times, but so often proves herself to have been well ahead of them" (14). Kathleen Graham states that Ada Leverson "rejected out of hand stereotyped Victorian ideals of domesticity and her outlook was advanced" (4). Sally Beauman claims that by Leverson's last novel, "the dragons of conformity, convention and timidity have been well and truly slain" (xvi). This trend in scholarship enables and encourages us to examine the complexities of these women's literary careers and how they came to be viewed as progressive.

Leverson exemplifies the transitional by bridging aspects of her past and current gender ideologies with the developing ideologies rather than completely breaking with the past. For all of her Edwardian sophistication, in many of Leverson's most famous works, such as *The Little Otteley* trilogy, which contains her novels *Love's Shadows*, *Tenterhooks*, and *Love At Second Sight*, she actually reinforces a key component of the traditional Victorian gender system, female sacrifice. In the Victorian gender system, women were expected to sacrifice for their husbands and loved ones, and they were expected to be passive, pure, Angel in the House figures who did not act on their sexual desires. Leverson's female heroine in *The Little Otteley* trilogy ends up as an empowered modern woman, but only after "earning" her reward by repeatedly sacrificing for

her husband and remaining faithful to him in ways that reinforce the familiar Victorian paradigm.

Leverson exemplifies female sacrifice through three central triangles of desire in *Love's Shadows* and *Tenterhooks*. For Leverson, the triangular structure is instrumental because it shows how one's gender relates to both heterosexual and homosocial relationships and how these relationships relate to one another. In Rene Girard's conceptualization of triangular desire, three occupants—the subject (lover), the object (beloved), and the mediator (rival)—exist in a metaphorical triangle. The subject (lover) desires the object (beloved) and feels jealousy towards the mediator (rival).¹ To some extent, Leverson's triangles of desire parallel Girard's paradigm of triangular desire; however, Leverson focuses more explicitly on how gender relates to appropriate desire and proper sacrifice. In Leverson's paradigm of triangular desire, women encounter obstacles, including their own inappropriate desires and desires from men who are not their husbands. These obstacles force women to choose whether or not they will uphold their proper sacrificial Victorian/Edwardian roles. Ultimately, these women do sacrifice their own emotional and physical desires. Proper etiquette and “happy endings,” including male homosocial relationships and heterosexual marriages, inexorably depend on the need for a sacrifice by a female in the triangle. In *Love At Second Sight*, Leverson's last novel, female sacrifice is rewarded, thus reinforcing it as proper, good behavior that women should aspire to.

Elaborating on Girard's notion of triangular desire, Eve Sedgwick argues that male homosociality is supported by heterosexual marriage: “Male-male love . . . is set firmly within a structure of institutionalized social relations that are carried out via woman: marriage, name,

¹ The lover is an example of a subject, the beloved is an example of an object, and the rival is an example of a mediator. Girard asserts that the jealous subject (lover) “easily convinces himself that his desire is spontaneous . . . it is deeply rooted in the object and in this object alone” (12). The jealous subject (lover) maintains that “his desire preceded the intervention of the mediator” (12). Girard also asserts that jealousy “always contains an element of fascination with the insolent rival” (12) and that the bond that links the subject (lover) to the mediator (rival) is just as strong as the bond that links the subject (lover) to the object (beloved).

family, loyalty to progenitors and to posterity . . .” (35). Women “cement the bonds of men with men” (26) and males are able to “consolidate partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females” (38). Through triangular structures of desire, Levenson shows that male homosocial relationships are appropriate, encouraged, and supported by heterosexual marriage whereas female homosocial relationships are not. Furthermore, Levenson demonstrates that heterosexual marriages are fulfilled and maintained at the expense of female homosocial bonds.

The first triangle of desire in *Love’s Shadows* traces the relationships of two men, the married and idiotic Bruce Ottley, Bruce’s friend, Raggett, and one woman, Bruce’s wife, Edith Ottley, a witty and intelligent woman. It establishes Edith as a proper, sacrificing woman. Raggett desires Edith and sends her flowers (*Love’s Shadows* 98), and Bruce becomes jealous, a key component in triangular desire, which eventually leads to Bruce asking Edith to sacrifice for him:

After dinner Bruce followed Edith into the drawing-room, looked angrily at the flowers and said—

“Now what’s the meaning of all this? Mind I’m not jealous. It isn’t my nature to be. What I dislike is being made a fool of. If I thought that Raggett, after all I’ve done for him—” (103)

It is in fact Bruce’s nature to be jealous throughout the trilogy. In *Love’s Shadows*, Bruce is jealous of Cecil, a young man who is involved in a courtship with a young woman in whom Bruce is interested (63, 90). In *Tenterhooks*, Bruce is jealous of Edith because her illness is taking attention away from him (211). In *Love At Second Sight*, Bruce is jealous of the Mitchells, Bruce and Edith’s married friends, because they might take the attention of Madame Frabelle, the Ottley’s houseguest, away from him (382); he is also jealous of his wife’s trip to revue (413); and he is jealous of Aylmer, Bruce and Edith’s friend, because Edith and Madame Frabelle admire him (430-431). So, the lines “Mind I’m not jealous” and “It isn’t my nature to

be [jealous]” indicate precisely the opposite of what they seem to say—namely that Bruce is jealous. But at this point in the conversation, it is unclear whether Bruce is jealous of Raggett or Edith.

As the conversation progresses, it becomes clear that Bruce is jealous of Edith, which reveals that he does not appreciate her role as an appropriate female medium between himself and Raggett. Edith understands social etiquette and tries to explain her role as a medium between Bruce and Raggett to her husband. When Bruce threatens to rebuke Raggett for sending Edith flowers, she responds: “Don’t be in a hurry. After all, he’s your great friend. You’re always talking to me about him; and what’s he done?—sent a few flowers and called here once. I’m sure he thought you would like it . . . He could hardly send you flowers, Bruce. I’m sure he thought it was the proper thing (*Love’s Shadows* 103-104). Edith suggests to Bruce that the meaning behind Raggett sending her flowers was actually to gain the affections of Bruce in an appropriately decorous way. She identifies herself as a medium through which two males display affection for one another by strengthening their homosocial bonds. In doing so, she appropriately upholds her role as a proper female medium and also deflects potential readings of homosexuality between the two men. But Bruce insists, “The attention should have been paid to me, not to you” (103-104). His comment reveals that he desires Raggett and views Edith as his rival to the extent that Edith occupies Raggett’s attention and receives tokens of his attention.² Bruce’s comment also indicates that he does not appreciate that heterosexual marriage encourages and supports male homosocial relationships and that his wife’s deflecting position is necessary in an appropriate male homosocial relationship.

² Episodes indicating Bruce’s desire for Raggett and rivalry with Edith also occur in paragraph three on page 71 and in the last paragraph on page 151.

On the other hand, Edith fully understands her role as a deflecting medium, and as a proper Victorian/Edwardian wife she remains faithful to her husband and tries to make him feel secure in her fidelity. She states, “I hope you know, Bruce, *I* shouldn’t care if I never saw him [Raggett] again” (104). The italicized “*I*” in Edith’s statement emphasizes that her tone is serious and definite. Moreover, her use of the negative words “shouldn’t” and “never” may even indicate that she prefers Raggett’s absence. Throughout, Edith maintains her position as a non-desiring woman who rejects advances from a man who is not her husband.

But, again, Bruce does not fully appreciate his wife’s role. Bruce immediately jumps into a defensive mode and sharply defends Raggett, asking Edith, “Why not? Because he’s my friend, I suppose?” (104). He picks up on and emphasizes the negatives in Edith’s statement when he asks, “Why *not*?” He cannot believe that she would not want to have a relationship with Raggett. Bruce situates Raggett as his possession and Edith as a rival. The connecting word between Bruce’s first two statements indicates that Edith wants nothing to do with Raggett precisely “because” Bruce has a relationship with him.³ Bruce orders, “Try and make up your mind to give up Raggett’s society altogether. You don’t mind making this sacrifice for me, do you?” (104-105). Edith answers her husband, “Not in the least . . . I prefer it” (105). In this situation, Bruce seems blind to the possibility that Edith rejects Raggett out of respect for her husband and that his wife has already made up her mind to reject Raggett’s advances and behave respectably and properly. Bruce views Edith’s act of giving up Raggett’s society as a sacrifice. Edith’s sacrifice is not emotionally difficult since she does not desire Raggett; however, the difficulty of Edith’s sacrifice is not what matters. What matters is that Edith upholds her role as a proper, sacrificing wife who obeys her husband. Two important paradigms thus emerge in

³ An almost identical conversation between Bruce and Edith regarding Raggett occurs in the beginning of Chapter 23 on page 136.

Levenson's conception of triangular desire: Heterosexual marriages actually encourage and perpetuate male homosocial bonds, and the woman is the figure who must sacrifice when there are two men and one woman in a triangle of desire.

To maintain her proper role as the wife in a heterosexual marriage, Edith must also sacrifice her female homosocial bond with her young friend, Hyacinth Verney, who was "the romance of Edith's life" (35). When Edith tells her husband that she saw Hyacinth in a park with Cecil, the object of Hyacinth's desire, Bruce responds, "I scarcely think, after what you have told me, that I can allow you to go out with Hyacinth tomorrow . . . I never wish to hear Hyacinth Verney's name mentioned again. You are never to speak of her to me . . ." (87, 88). Edith obeys her husband's demands: "She then went into the little drawing-room and looked longingly at the telephone. She feared there would be no chance of communicating with her friend that evening" (90). After Hyacinth's marriage to Cecil at the end of *Love's Shadows*, she disappears from the trilogy, which strongly suggests that Edith and Hyacinth's homosocial bond breaks and is not mended. Heterosexual marriages are maintained at the expense of female homosocial bonds.

Another triangle of desire in *Love's Shadows* focuses on Hyacinth Verney and Cecil Reeve's courtship and eventual marriage and includes Hyacinth, Cecil, and Hyacinth's housemate, Anne Yeo. The second triangle, with the opposite gender ratio, parallels the first triangle regarding the characters' gender and their heterosexual and homosocial desires. The first triangle contains male homosocial desire whereas the second triangle contains female homosocial desire. If the same logic from the first triangle of desire held, the opposite minority gender, the man, would do the sacrificing. However, here it is Anne Yeo, a woman, who sacrifices. Furthermore, female homosocial desire is not revered through male sacrifice in the

second triangle like male homosocial desire was reversed through female sacrifice in the first triangle.

Raggett and Hyacinth are parallels because they both desire someone of the opposite gender in their respective triangles. In the Hyacinth-Cecil-Anne triangle, Hyacinth desires Cecil, and another female must eventually make sacrifices in order for Hyacinth's desire to be fulfilled. Towards the beginning of the novel, Anne identifies Hyacinth's desire for men as "attack[s]" or obsessions that are the only things Hyacinth "live[s] for": "It's nearly three months since you— had an attack. Blair was the last. Now you're beginning to take the same sort of interest in Cecil Reeve" (36-37). In Hyacinth's case, her heterosexual female desire is acceptable because she eventually marries Cecil. However, Hyacinth cannot marry Cecil or live "happily ever after" with him without sacrifices by another female.

Raggett and Hyacinth are also parallels because they are both objects of same gender desire: Bruce desires Raggett, and Anne Yeo desires Hyacinth. Throughout the novel, Anne makes comments that reveal her desire for Hyacinth: "'Like so many of us, he's [Bruce is] in love with you,' said Anne. Hyacinth laughed, thinking Anne was in fun" (97). By explicitly using the word "us," Anne groups herself with the people who are in love with Hyacinth, but Hyacinth misreads Anne's comment as being "in fun."⁴ A parallel exists between Bruce and Anne in that they both homosocially desire someone.

Levenson maintains the parallel between Bruce and Anne with respect to who they position as rivals. Just as Bruce's homosocial desire leads him to view the opposite gendered person in the first triangle, Edith, as his rival, so Anne's homosocial desire leads her to view the opposite gendered person in the second triangle, Cecil, as her rival. An evening after Hyacinth fights with

⁴ Anne's desire for Hyacinth is also revealed in the last paragraph on page 43 and throughout most of page 133.

Cecil and tells him not to come to see her anymore, Anne comes into Hyacinth's room, and the following conversation ensues:

“I hate him,” said Hyacinth. “Do you dislike him, Anne?”
“Dislike him?” said Anne, turning out one of the lights. “No, indeed! I loath
him!
“But why?” . . .
“Because you're a fool about him,” she said somewhat cryptically. (76)

Anne is jealous because Cecil is the object of Hyacinth's desire. To some extent, Anne and Hyacinth exist in a “marriage” with Anne taking on the role of wife: “Anne had, in a most superlative degree, enjoyed the house, her little authority, the way she stood between Hyacinth and all tedious little practical matters” (134).

However, Anne and Hyacinth's cohabitation and “marriage” will inevitably end when Hyacinth marries Cecil, thus leaving Anne alone, physically and emotionally. Hyacinth and Cecil's wedding represents Hyacinth's unconscious choice of Cecil over Anne, which results in Anne's necessary sacrifice—her removal from Hyacinth. Hyacinth explains to Edith, “Since the day of my wedding she's [Anne has] never been seen or heard of. She walked straight out into the street, and London seems to have swallowed her up” (150). Anne removes herself by leaving on the day of the wedding. Hyacinth goes on to explain that “She [Anne] took nothing with her but a large paper parcel, and left all her luggage, and even her dress that I made her get for the wedding was laid out on the bed” (150). Anne's absence on the day of Hyacinth's wedding and this seemingly symbolic act of leaving the dress out in the open, on the bed, gestures strongly to Hyacinth's wedding as an important pivot point—Anne is supplanted by Cecil as Hyacinth's partner. Leaving the dress behind perhaps signifies that Anne has no role in Hyacinth and Cecil's life. In having Anne remove herself from Hyacinth on Hyacinth's wedding day,

Leverson breaks the female homosocial bond, showing that such female homosocial desire and bonds must be sacrificed to heterosexual marriage.

Indeed, Anne's sacrificial role in the Hyacinth-Anne-Cecil triangle is made to extend even further. Leverson brings Anne back to Hyacinth to reaffirm female sacrifice as the means to heterosexual happy endings. As mysteriously and as quietly as she disappeared on the wedding day, Anne reappears at a critical moment when Hyacinth "wants" and "needs" Anne because her marriage with Cecil is in jeopardy. Hyacinth claims, "I'll tell you, Anne. You are the very person I want. I need you immensely. You're the only creature in the world that could be the slightest help to me" (159). Hyacinth thinks that Cecil desires another woman, Eugenia, feeling that "he still puts her on a pedestal" (161). Hyacinth sees Cecil and Eugenia driving in a car together, and "turned pale as death and seized Anne's hand" (179). The seizing of Anne's hand seems symbolic of the potential shift in Hyacinth's dependency and desire, from Cecil to Anne. This potential shift becomes closer to being realized when, after seeing Cecil with Eugenia, Hyacinth threatens to supplant Cecil with Anne: "Let us separate! . . . I will go abroad somewhere with Anne, and you can stay here and go on with your intrigue . . . you're perfectly free." (183). In a schematic sense, Cecil would be removed from the triangle, leaving a space that would be filled by Anne—Hyacinth "will go abroad somewhere with Anne." Once again, Anne would become a partner "with" Hyacinth.

At this point in the novel, Leverson has set up parallels between the Hyacinth-Anne-Cecil and Bruce-Edith-Raggett triangles, albeit with a different homosocial bond. In the Bruce-Edith-Raggett triangle, the woman encourages the male homosocial relationship while she acts as a necessary medium to deflect potential readings of homosexuality between the two men. In the Hyacinth-Anne-Cecil triangle, the same would be true with the opposite gender ratio, namely

that a man encourages the female homosocial relationship while he deflects potential readings of homosexuality. However, in the Hyacinth-Anne-Cecil triangle, Levenson breaks the parallel, reinforcing even more the female sacrifice theme—Anne declines to replace Cecil in Hyacinth’s affection and instead substitutes herself for him as the sacrificial medium. For Hyacinth’s happiness, Anne sacrifices, making things “right” between Hyacinth and Cecil. To heal the marriage, Anne speaks with Eugenia, Cecil’s love interest, and gets Eugenia to promise that she and her husband will leave the country for an extended time, which she fulfills. In the logic of Levenson’s world, Anne cannot stay; Anne’s removal from Hyacinth is also essential to restoring Cecil and Hyacinth’s “happy marriage,” which also acts as the novel’s “happy ending.” Anne acknowledges to Eugenia that she was “almost selfishly glad” about Hyacinth and Cecil’s marriage trouble: “I could have got her back. We could have gone away together” (186). The phrase “could have” indicates Anne’s influence and signals that Anne will not take advantage of Hyacinth and Cecil’s marriage difficulty by going away with Hyacinth and supplanting Cecil.⁵ Even Cecil begins to realize Anne’s influence over Hyacinth and that Anne is his rival: “At heart he did not believe Anne would give her any but sensible advice, though he now began to feel a little jealous of her influence” (189-190). Anne holds the power to either dissolve or heal the marriage, and chooses the better course, explaining, ““But I can’t see her miserable. She has such a mania for Cecil Reeve! . . . It’s sure to be fixed up soon, and then I’m going away too . . . I feel I’m not in the picture . . . We can’t all be happy” (186-187). If Anne were to stay, Hyacinth would still depend on her, and Anne would wield too much affection for Hyacinth. The only way Hyacinth can fully take part in her marriage with Cecil is if her other life partner,

⁵ James Scannell also notes that Anne will not let Hyacinth leave her husband: “When Hyacinth realizes that her husband is still obsessed by an old, unrequited love, and sees the two together, she immediately wants to leave her husband and the country, but her practical companion, Miss Yeo, will not let her take such a dramatic step” (244).

Anne, is removed. Julie Speedie notes, “Of all the forms of love depicted in the book, Anne’s is the most unselfish: concerned only for Hyacinth’s happiness, it is she who makes the decisive move that brings Hyacinth and Cecil together, knowing that in doing so she will be excluded from Hyacinth’s life for ever” (152-153).

Anne Yeo’s role in the Hyacinth-Anne-Cecil triangle reinforces Levenson’s notion of female sacrifice. The logic in the Hyacinth-Anne-Cecil triangle is that one woman, her homosocial desire and her presence, must be sacrificed so that the other woman can be “happy” and fulfill her desire in a heterosexual marriage. The contrast is defining: the second triangle suggests that heterosexual marriages break homosocial bonds between women, whereas the first triangle demonstrates that heterosexual marriages encourage homosocial bonds between men. The one constant is a familiar Victorian one—female sacrifice.

Triangular desire is also used to underscore the need for female sacrifice in *Tenterhooks*, a novel that focuses on Bruce and Edith’s deteriorating marriage and introduces Aylmer Ross, Bruce and Edith’s friend and Edith’s ideal man. This triangle contains two men and one woman, the same gender ratio as in *Love’s Shadows*, and involves two of the same characters, Bruce and Edith.

In *Love’s Shadows*, Bruce desired the other male in the triangle, Raggett, and in *Tenterhooks*, he also desires the other male, Aylmer. Bruce states to Edith, “I’ve made a friend tonight. There was one really charming man there—he took an immense fancy to me” (*Tenterhooks* 238). Bruce calls Aylmer his “friend,” but the terms “charming man” and “fancy” have romantic connotations, and so he implies that his relationship with Aylmer is likely to extend well beyond a surface friendship, even though Aylmer does not return Bruce’s feelings. Similarly, Aylmer, like Raggett in *Love’s Shadows*, desires Edith. When Aylmer and Edith take

their seats, having been assigned by their hosts to sit next to one another, Aylmer tells Edith that he had hoped he would sit next to her, thus revealing his initial attraction to her (232). In fact, Aylmer becomes completely smitten with her: “Whatever she had been, mentally or morally, he would undoubtedly have fallen in love with her physically, at first sight. But it was very much worse than that. He found her delightful, and clever; he was certain she was an angel” (248). The fact that Aylmer, a man who is not Edith’s husband, desires her creates a parallel situation to the first triangle in *Love’s Shadows*, except that unlike that situation, Edith reciprocates that desire: “Seeing him [Aylmer] was certainly quite the most amusing and exciting experience she had ever had” (262). Merely “seeing” Aylmer trumps all other experiences—including experiences that, presumably, involved more than merely “seeing.”

The fact that Edith desires Aylmer seems to result in her occupying a different position in *Tenterhooks* than she did in *Love’s Shadows*. Whereas in the first triangle, Edith was in the deflecting position between Bruce and Raggett, in this triangle, Bruce seems to have been shifted into the deflecting position between Edith and Aylmer, as the latter suggests: “You mean there’s no reason why we shouldn’t keep on going to plays with Bruce, dining with Bruce, being always with Bruce?” (269). Aylmer views his relationship with Edith as the primary relationship in the triangle by distinguishing the “we,” Aylmer and Edith, apart from Bruce. The use of “we” suggests that Edith and Aylmer act as a cohesive unit and make their decisions together. If Edith, Aylmer, and Bruce are together, for example “going to plays,” or “dining,” it is Aylmer and Edith, as a unit, who are “with” Bruce. Moreover, Bruce acts as a sort of medium through which Edith and Aylmer can share their desire for one another. If Bruce is present when Edith and Aylmer meet, then the meeting is appropriate, whereas if Edith and Aylmer meet alone, it would likely be construed as inappropriate or improper, especially since Edith is a married

woman. Interestingly, in this respect, Bruce has been shifted into a deflecting position, similar to the one that Edith occupied in the Bruce-Edith-Raggett triangle.

However, even though Bruce seems to exist in a similar deflecting position as Edith occupied in *Love's Shadows*, there is a key difference: In the Edith-Bruce-Aylmer triangle, the spouse who serves as the medium is not required to sacrifice. Bruce tries to claim that he sacrifices in *Tenterhooks*, arguing with highly ironic inaccuracy, "You never appreciated him [Aylmer]; he was not the sort of man a woman would appreciate . . . But he's a great loss to me Edith. I need a man who can understand—intellectual sympathy—" (367-368). Yet once again, Bruce emphasizes and prioritizes his homosocial relationship with the other male as the most important and most intimate relationship in the triangle. In asserting that he requires a man who "can understand—intellectual sympathy," Bruce implies two things: First, that Bruce himself, as a man, can understand intellectual sympathy. And second, only men, not women, can understand intellectual sympathy. As it happens, in this instance, Bruce could not be further from the truth. It is hardly Bruce who sacrifices in this particular triangle; in fact, once again, Levenson has the sacrifice fall on the woman.

Edith has the ostensibly perfect chance to fulfill her desire to be with Aylmer when Bruce runs off with Mavis Argles, a young artist with whom Edith's friend Vincy has a secret romance. But Edith does not take advantage of this chance. Aylmer explains, "Edith, don't you see he wants you to make him free? You will be my wife—that's settled—that's fixed up" (352). However, it is not "fixed up." Edith replies, "Bruce is not a criminal. He is not bad. He is a fool. He has behaved idiotically . . . but I mean to give him a chance. I'm not going to jump at his first real folly to get rid of him . . . Poor Bruce!" (352). But, contrary to Edith's characterization, this is not Bruce's "first real folly." In *Love's Shadows*, Bruce attempts to have

an affair with Miss Flummerfelt, an actress in a play that Bruce was dismissed from (195), and earlier in *Tenterhooks*, Edith observes Bruce having a rendezvous with their children's governess, Miss Townsend (311-312). She refuses to take advantage of Bruce's "folly" to escape her marriage. James Scannell argues in "Welcoming the Outcast Back into Society: Oscar Wilde and Ada Levenson's Ur Moment" that Edith does not leave Bruce because she recognizes that his dalliances are not serious: "In *Tenterhooks*, Edith, realizing that Bruce's eloping with Mavis Argles is an infatuation that will end quickly and badly, decides to take him back" (239). While valid, this argument seems to underestimate Edith's sacrifices and the seriousness of her concerns. She tells Aylmer, "I couldn't make my happiness of someone else's misery. He would have been miserable and, not only that, it would have been his ruin. Bruce could never be safe, happy, or all right, except here" (*Tenterhooks* 362). Edith does not divorce Bruce because she knows it would bring him misery no matter what form it took, financial, emotional, or physical. She feels such an immense responsibility and loyalty to her husband that she would prevent any sort of "misery" and "ruin" that could result from a divorce.⁶

As a proper Victorian/Edwardian wife and mother should, Edith sacrifices her own happiness and fulfillment of desire in order to protect her husband. She states, "What I have got to think of is what is best . . . There are some things that one *can't* do . . . It goes against the grain. I can't take advantage of his folly to make the path smoother—for myself . . . Bruce is only weak" (353). Edith fully understands her role and the limitations and expectations of that role. Edith cannot be selfish, and she must "think of what is best" for her family. In Edith's

⁶ To some extent, Ada Levenson seems here to transfer some of her own experiences of marriage and being a proper Victorian/Edwardian wife to Edith. In *The Sphinx and Her Circle: A Biographical Sketch of Ada Levenson 1862-1933*, Violet Wyndham writes of Ada Levenson, "Although she was no longer in love with her husband, she dreaded causing him unhappiness" (Wyndham 21). Edith and Ada Levenson both want to avoid causing their respective husbands misery. Also, they both choose to stay with their husbands rather than divorce them despite their diminishing relationships with their husbands.

choice to reject Aylmer, “family and marriage win” (Burkhart 129). Julie Speedie notes that Edith staying with Bruce has been interpreted as a result of “conformism unwilling to overturn accepted social conventions . . . There was little controversy over the ethics of Edith’s decision to stay with Bruce . . . The *Referee* praised Ada’s characterization of Edith, observing that ‘as the world knows nothing of its greatest men, so also it doubtless knows too little of what society owes to its self-effacing, self-sacrificing women’” (196, 198). Even though Edith continually admits that she “cares” for Aylmer, she makes her choice to stand by her husband.

The degree of Edith’s self-sacrifice is signaled by the fact that she vacillates when she tries to explain her reasoning to Aylmer, acknowledging how difficult the choice is for her. Edith states, “It’s chiefly on account of the children. If it weren’t for them I would take advantage of this to be happy with you. At least—no—I’m not sure that I would; not if I thought it would be Bruce’s ruin” (*Tenterhooks* 354). She acknowledges that her feelings for Bruce have changed, stating, “I can never care for him in the way I used to . . . I don’t adore him, that is why I’m not so very angry. I was terribly hurt about Miss Townsend. My pride, my trust were hurt but after that I can’t ever feel that personal jealousy any more . . . I feel just like a sister to him now” (352-353). Even though Bruce’s affair has permanently breached his relationship with Edith, she still sacrifices her happiness with Aylmer in order to continue her marriage with her husband. Being a proper Victorian/Edwardian woman required that the woman put her husband and family first. Moreover, in order to confirm, maintain, and thoroughly validate her status as a proper woman, the sacrifice needed to be made repeatedly, as Edith is shown to do over the course of the first two novels in *The Little Otley* trilogy.

Having thus established Edith as a proper wife, Levenson sees her female sacrificial logic through but in a rather more modern fashion—Edith, having proven herself, is rewarded for her

sacrifices, being released from and permitted to transcend her demeaning marriage for a more just one in the last novel in the trilogy, *Love At Second Sight*, which takes place about three years after *Tenterhooks* and concludes with the end of Bruce and Edith's marriage. Bruce ends his marriage, claiming that he must desert Edith and his children. In fact, he plans to run away with the Ottley's houseguest, Madame Frabelle (541). He explains to Edith,

If I'm to keep sane, if I'm not to commit suicide, I must give up this domestic life . . . Yes, I'm sorry I've tried to endure it . . . I can't stand the responsibility, the anxiety of the children and everything. I'm—I'm going away . . . Three years ago I offered you your freedom and you refused to take it; I offer it you again now. You are older, you are perfectly fit to manage your life and the children's without me . . . I'm miserable. I implore you not to make a scene. Don't oppose me; forgive me. (540-541)

Bruce's affairs demonstrate that he has been an unfaithful and unworthy husband throughout the trilogy. But whereas in *Tenterhooks*, Edith knew that Bruce's relationship with Mavis Argles was temporary and doomed and that he would return home, in *Love At Second Sight* Edith appears certain that Madame Frabelle "will take care of him" and "this time he won't come back" (543). By this, Edith is in effect certainly released from her demeaning marriage, knowing that Bruce no longer depends on her.

Bruce vindicates Edith as a proper wife and mother even as he demonstrates how unworthy a husband he has been. Bruce willingly acknowledges, "Edith, you are a perfect mother . . . I've no fault with you either as a wife" (541). She is absolved of guilt and blame that may result from the end of her marriage. She is freed, and since it is Bruce who chooses to leave, implicitly, he is to blame. With a clear conscious and an untainted reputation, Edith is able to transcend her marriage to Bruce, leaving her ready and able to enter a more just and fulfilling marriage. Edith, remaining positive and supportive, states to Bruce, "I hope you will be happy and well, and I shall try to be" (541). Even in her farewell wishes, she puts her husband before herself, establishing her as a proper, caring wife even to the very end.

Leverson gives Edith modern female empowerment, a guiltless “ideal life” with Aylmer. After three years, Aylmer and Edith still intensely love each other, and Edith states that being with Aylmer “would be an ideal life.” Aylmer “put his arm round her. Ah! this, she felt, was real love—it wrapped her round, it lifted her off her feet” (543). Julie Speedie states, “Edith and Aylmer are unique amongst Ada’s heroines and heroes in their capacity to experience a mutually satisfying and totally unclouded sense of love for one another” (229). Similarly, Burkhart asserts, “It is easy to see that Edith and Aylmer will be a happily married couple since they both have the quality of absoluteness which hero and heroine inherit as a birthright. We may not be stirred by their marriage, but we know that it is proper and fitting” (144). While I agree with Speedie and Burkhart, Leverson seems to be doing something more here—she explicitly rewards Edith for repeatedly and properly sacrificing for her husband and family, marking Edith’s behavior as something that is noble, right, and deserving of reward. Leverson even “lifts her off her feet” and puts her on a pedestal, as testimony to Edith’s status as an ideal Victorian/Edwardian woman.

Even though Edith is given a “happy ending” in the form of a heterosexual marriage with Aylmer, this marriage prevents Edith from having a female homosocial friendship with Dulcie Clay, the nurse who falls in love with Aylmer while he heals from war injuries. When Edith meets Dulcie, she is immediately struck by her as someone who is “sweet” and “sensitive” (*Love At Second Sight* 423). Dulcie seems in awe of Edith: “She [Dulcie] admired Edith more than any woman she knew; she thought her lovely, elegant, clever, fascinating and kindness itself . . . Yet . . . Edith was her rival. Of course it was not her fault. She had not take Aylmer away from her, she was his old friend, but the fact remained that her idol was in love with Edith” (529). Dulcie and Edith could have a mutually fulfilling, loving homosocial friendship. But this

potential female homosocial bond cannot be fulfilled because Edith and Dulcie are rivals. Again, Levenson shows heterosexual marriages are fulfilled and maintained at the expense of female homosocial relationships.

Several critics point to progressive themes in Ada Levenson's last novel, which enables and encourages us to examine how Levenson got to that point. Rather than completely breaking with the gender ideology of her time, she bridged elements of it with the developing ideologies, thus helping to create and exemplifying the transitional. Her use and affirmation of female sacrifice within her paradigm of triangular desire should not be underestimated. Even though Levenson lived for 17 years after *Love At Second Sight* was published, she did not write any more novels. *Love At Second Sight* serves as appropriate closure for her heroine, Edith, and perhaps, to some extent, for herself.⁷ By the time Ada Levenson writes this last novel, she has already provided her readers with model Victorian/Edwardian sacrificial women in *Love's Shadows* and *Tenterhooks* by affirming female sacrifice within triangles of desire as a means to "happy endings," male homosocial relationships and heterosexual marriages. However, whereas male homosocial bonds are encouraged by heterosexual marriages, female homosocial bonds are sacrificed to those heterosexual marriages. Within Levenson's triangles of desire, one thing remains constant: the sacrifices must fall on females, whether they are sacrifices by individual women or the sacrifice of female homosocial bonds. In her last novel, Levenson affirms this Victorian logic. She gives Edith an appropriate and deserving "happy ending," a heterosexual marriage to Aylmer, but only as a reward for being an ideal, sacrificing Victorian/Edwardian woman and only at the expense of a female homosocial bond.

⁷ To some extent, Ada Levenson's marriage to her husband, Ernest, parallels Edith's marriage to Bruce. Levenson "had made the discovery that she was never to know the happiness of living with someone with whom she was in love," and she understood "that the rest of her life would have to be a compromise" (Wyndham 20). Perhaps, by rewarding Edith, Levenson can live vicariously through her, thus, to some extent, Levenson is able to reward herself for her past sacrifices and compromises. For Levenson, this "happy ending" in *Love At Second Sight* justifies Edith's, and perhaps her own, role as a proper Victorian/Edwardian wife and mother.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rachel Slivon grew up in Kenosha, Wisconsin with loving, supportive family members and friends and some of the most amazing, influential English high school teachers she was ever to know. These people always encouraged her to follow her dreams and passion. She attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison where her heart was torn between the sciences and the humanities for most of her undergraduate career. During her junior year, she finally decided to pursue the path that would allow her to feed one of her greatest loves—close reading of literature. With the invaluable guidance of her senior thesis director, she graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2005 with a BA in English and came to the University of Florida to pursue a graduate degree in English where she happily continues to feed and nurture one of her greatest passions.