Weathering Challenges to the Separate Sphere Ideology: The Persistence of Convention in Victorian Novels, 1850-1901

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Abstract

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The separate sphere ideology, dominant but never hegemonic in Victorian Britain, dictated that women's natural vocation was to be wives and mothers. Between the years 1850 to 1901, the surplus woman problem and a nascent feminist movement challenged the separate sphere ideology. It was also reinforced by imperialist ideologies that held the British family as a sign of Britain's superiority, and eugenics which placed great importance on heterosexual marriage and reproduction.

How did novelists, especially women novelists, respond to the challenges against the separate sphere ideology? How did they depict unconventional women such as surplus women, women who behaved in transgressive ways, feminist women, lesbians, and women who were in interracial relationships? The conventional narrative stressed the importance of marriage, and unconventional characters either reformed themselves or met tragic fates. This remained consistent throughout the second half of the 19th century. At mid-century, unconventional women were the ones who rejected marriage, had an affair, etc. As women began to gain rights in education, work, and civic rights, the temptations that drew middle class women away from conventional life shifted to wanting to work or becoming feminists. Novels also depicted alien others, such as lesbians and non-white people, as menaces and threats to conventional marriage. Acceptable unconventionalities were limited: it was acceptable for women to be unconventional

if they were exceptional or they broke one convention but upheld another, such as motherhood. At the end of the century, New Women novelists and other novelists that sympathetically depicted unconventional women critiqued the separate sphere ideology, but were overwhelmingly pessimistic about the possibility that women could escape convention.

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Introduction

The separate sphere ideology which prescribed that women's natural vocation was to be a wife and mother was dominant, but never hegemonic, in Victorian Britain.[1] In the second half of the 19th century, demographic factors began to undermine it. The 1851 census found a "surplus" of around 400, 000 women; there were not enough eligible men to marry them.[2] Additionally, a nascent feminist movement began to advocate for greater civic and political rights, leading many women to desire greater independence and some to voice a desire to never marry. By the end of the century, a new female type called the "New Woman" had emerged that critiqued the institution of marriage and argued women should have increased access to the public sphere. The emergence of these New Women was met with resistance, if not open hostility, from the conservative elements of British society.[3] The late 19th century also witnessed more open discussions of sexuality, which included the acknowledgement that women felt sexual desire and that some could be attracted to the same sex. Some anti-feminists accused feminists, and other unconventional women, of being lesbians.[4] This accusation further challenged the separate sphere ideology. At the same time, the separate sphere ideology was incorporated into imperialist thought. The British believed that the separate sphere ideology was the superior and "civilised" way of organising society, and that British women could model domestic and virtuous wifedom and motherhood for women in the colonies.[5] This played a role in how the British justified the

[1] Susie Steinbach, "'Can We Still use Separate Spheres?' British History 25 Years after *Family Fortunes*," *History Compass* 10/11 (2012), 826.
[2] Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth-Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 35.
[3] Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-2.
[4] Lisa Carstens, "Unbecoming Women: Sex Reversal in the Scientific Discourse on Female Deviance in Britain, 1880-1920," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20.1 (2011), 80.
[5] Catherine Hall, "Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century," in *Gender and Empire* ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 51.

expansion of the British Empire and its continued control over the colonies. It also reinforced the importance of the separate sphere ideology at a time when it was being undermined and challenged by the surplus women problem and feminist activism.

The novel became the dominant form of literature in the Victorian period.[6] Novels reflected the worldview of their authors and if they were popular, they reflected the worldviews of their readership, as well as the cultural values of the society that produced them. Many novels followed the increasingly popular marriage plot, in which a young woman and man met and eventually married.[7] Hence, novelists were likely to be interested in the debates surrounding the separate sphere ideology and marriage, and the questions surrounding women's place in society. How did novelists -especially women novelists-respond to this debate in the decades between 1850 and 1901? In particular, how did novelists depict unconventional women who challenged the separate sphere ideology?

This thesis briefly considers the early Victorian period to provide context for developments in the middle and late century. However, the 1830s and 1840s were a period in which the challenges to the separate sphere ideology were much more minimal than they were after 1850, and imperialism was at a low ebb. That is why the time period for this thesis begins at mid-century and continues until the end of the Victorian period in 1901, the year Queen Victoria died.

1. **Methodology/Historiography: novels as historical sources**

Novelists and their readers were largely drawn from the middle class, the same class that promoted the separate sphere ideology.[8] Significant proportions of novel readers were women.[9]

[6] James Eli Adams, *A History of Victorian Literature* (UK: A John Wiley & Sons Ltd Publication, 2009), 25.
[7] *Ibid*, 25
[8] Louis James, *The Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 4. See Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) for an exploration of

This was a cause for concern among moralists because they believed those publications could influence the minds of young women "considered at once the largest and most susceptible segment of the novel-reading public."[10]

Many novelists were also middle-class women, some of whom led conventional lives. While it is true that they earned money publishing, writing was an acceptable activity for respectable women.[11] Some women novelists, however, were not conventional - they had unconventional relationships, acted unconventionally, or were feminists. Analysing how women novelists viewed the separate sphere ideology can shed light on how middle-class women in general viewed it. It also can reflect how they reacted to the factors that either challenged or reinforced the separate sphere ideology such as the surplus women problem, the feminist movement, deviant female sexuality, and imperialist ideologies.

Victorian novelists, especially women novelists, were concerned by the challenges posed to the separate sphere ideology but their responses were not uniform and even often conflicted. Some defended the status quo while others critiqued it. Contemporary novels reflected those tensions that resulted from the challenges against the separate sphere ideology, and society's evolving responses to them. This thesis argues novelists believed the separate sphere ideology weathered the challenges against it and remained pervasive in Victorian British middle-class culture in the middle and late 19th century. This is evidenced by the persistence of convention in the narratives of Victorian novels. Victorian novelists who sought to defend the status quo depicted unconventional women who did not want to marry and reproduce as social threats and claimed they could not achieve happiness outside of domestic life. As the feminist movement

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how novels contributed to the construction of the ideal of the domestic woman and the vital role that women novelists such as Jane Austen and the Brontes played in the emergence of the novel as a genre of literature.

[9] Leah Price, "Victorian Reading," in *The Cambridge History of Victorian Literature* ed, Kate Flint (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 38, 51.

gained traction, these novelists demonised the feminist movement and women who desired paid work; women had to give up their feminist and occupational ambitions or else they would surely meet a tragic fate. Feminists were also increasingly depicted in terms that suggested "unnatural" proclivity e.g. lesbianism. Women that had relationships outside the white race and produced mixed-race children were also condemned because they were perceived as weakening the white race. Other novelists who sympathised with unconventional women or espoused feminist ideals argued that restricting women to the domestic sphere was harmful, but they were pessimistic about women's ability to successfully escape it; in their view beliefs in the naturalness of the separate spheres was too deeply embedded in British society and culture to be ignored.

While historians have used novels as primary sources, novels have not often been used as the main source material. When historians have examined novels, they have often done so briefly and in conjunction with other more traditional archival sources.[12] In recent years, however, historians and other scholars have increasingly argued for greater examination of literary sources in History.[13] This thesis posits that novels reveal much about how middle-class Victorians responded to challenges against the separate sphere ideology and that they warrant in depth study from a historical perspective. The contribution of this thesis is therefore to use novels as a significant historical source to study the British middle-class response to the challenges against

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[10] *Ibid*, 51.
[11] Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, 12.
[12] Examples of historians that briefly examine novels that are useful to this thesis include Lynn Abrams, *The Making of the Modern Women* (London: Routledge, 2002), Martha Vicinus *Intimate Friends: Women who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), and Gillian Sutherland *In Search of the New Woman: Middle-Class Women and Work in Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). This thesis also utilizes the work of literary critics such as Sharon Marcus' *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) which is an interdisciplinary work that includes historical analysis and studies female friendship, desire, and marriage in Victorian novels.
[13] See Eric Slauter, "History, Literature, and the Atlantic World," *Early American Literature* 43, 1 (2008), 153-186, Ruth Perry *Novel Relations: Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Cora Kaplan, "Imagining Empire: History, Fantasy, and Literature," in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* ed. Catherine Hall and Soniya Rose (Cambridge,

the separate sphere ideology. It views novels as avenues for political argumentation and self-representation from British middle-class novelists, primarily from women, and it studies how they worked through cultural problems that arose at a time when long standing perceptions of marriage, domesticity, and the ideal place for women in society were being questioned. Scientific/academic texts often had specialized/limited audiences, and lifewriting (letters, diaries, etc) was usually private. Since novels were fictional, novelists were able to create positive and negative depictions of what they considered to be proper or improper forms of womanhood, and to allude to topics considered taboo such as female same-sex desire which was unlikely to happen in non-fictional popular public texts such as newspaper articles. Feminists and anti-feminists also used novels to disseminate their arguments. Hence, novels both represented and shaped cultural debates about marriage, feminism, surplus women, deviant female sexuality, interracial relationships, and other unconventional women. They illustrate the responses that a segment of middle-class women had to their changing position in society, and the possibilities-or lack thereof-that they imagined for themselves.

Historians who have used novels as primary sources have discussed their strengths and limitations. In *Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (2004), Bernard Porter briefly used novels to investigate the influence of imperialism on Victorian British culture. However, he acknowledged that his endeavour could potentially be flawed because "culture in this 'high' sense may not be a reliable mirror of society in any place or time." He observed that

> it is fundamentally unsound to generalize about British culture in the broader sense, on the basis of these works of culture in its narrower sense…Novelists and other artists, even great, timeless ones, certainly cannot be divorced from their surrounding cultures. But

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Cambridge University Press, 2006), 191-211, Mario T. Garcia, *Literature as History: Autobiography, Testimonio, and the Novel in Chicano and Latino Experience* (USA: The University of Arizona Press, 2016)

> they may not reflect the *majority* culture of a place or time. If they did, they might not be so timeless or so *great*.[14]

Novels were largely a product of the middle class and were consumed largely by the middle class. As scholar Louis James observed, Victorian novels were "largely written by and for a specific, large but restricted middle-class readership and consolidated middle-class cultural values."[15] Working class people who were literate would most often read literature such as penny dreadfuls. Novels tended to be too expensive for them and even for many of the lower middle class, until periodicals and circulating libraries became more common.[16] Hence, novels reflected a very specific segment of Victorian society. They reflected the views of the middle-class authors who wrote them, the houses that published them, and the middle-class Victorians that read them. Porter's assertion that surviving Victorian novels that are still available are so because they were judged timeless is not entirely true; many of the novels examined in this thesis were popular at the time of publication precisely because they resonated with the Victorians and therefore reflected their time.

Despite these limitations, there are many benefits to using novels to investigate British culture. In *Novel Relations: Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (2004) Ruth Perry conducted an interdisciplinary study of how 18th century novels depicted shifts in kinship ties from being based on blood related family to conjugal marriages. Before the 18th century, Perry argued that bonds of blood (parental bonds, sibling bonds, etc) were more important than marriage bonds. In the 18th century, however, that shifted to an emphasis on conjugal ties in which "the obligations of spouses to each other are stressed above and against

[14] Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 134, 135.
[15] James, *The Victorian Novel*, 4.
[16] Adams, *A History of Victorian Literature,* 13, 23.

their ties of filiation." Perry studied these shifting understandings of kinship through literature and was "led to this formulation by the texts themselves, by the obsessive concern with defining family membership in the novels of the period." Perry noted that her argument "moves between literature and history." Perry primarily used novels to trace changes in the depictions of family relations. While Perry was aware that novels were not realistic, she argued that they "represent the foci-the obsessions of the culture, and that in their issues one can see the working out of the particular problems facing this society at that time." In the 19th century, many novelists explored problems related to unconventional women and the challenges that they posed to the separate sphere ideology. Novels provide a window into how novelists' opinions and depictions of unconventional women changed throughout the second half of the 19th century, and what they revealed about cultural anxieties about surplus women, the feminist movement, and women considered sexually deviant.[17]

In her book chapter "Imagining Empire: History, Fantasy, and Literature" Cora Kaplan asked "how did literature make Empire both vivid and legible to readers in Britain?" Kaplan explored how fiction, poetry, and anti-slavery polemics "represent[ed] the everyday relations of metropole and colony, of domestic and imperial subjects." She examined literature from the early 1800s until 1834 and from the 1950s to the early 2000s. Studying novels such as Amelia Anderson Opie's 1805 *Adeline Mowbray* which depicted a free black woman in England whose narrative centered on her loyalty to her white mistress, Kaplan found that chief "in the political

[17] Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-2, 3, *5*.

and literary imagination of Britain in the first half of the empire, were the relations of metropole and colony, and the dangers of female and non-white autonomy."[18]

Kaplan observed that while many cultural and social historians have used novels as primary sources, they typically use literature for the "dramatization for the reader of a case already made through more factually based materials." Instead, Kaplan argued that when literature is "offered a more dynamic role, literature can point towards new historical questions, rather than simply glossing existing ones." She suggested

> that literary texts, are not only, or even primarily, a body of evidence that supplements or supports social and political history…but should be of most interest to historians because of their very generic specificity, the ways in which they give free-and freely acknowledged-reign to the space of imagination and of fantasy.[19]

She continued, "the fantasmatic register in which literature operates an alternative history opens up, with a complicated narrative of its own, but one that is at the same time constitutive of the social real, representing most eloquently and sometimes scarily its affective dimensions."[20] While Kaplan encouraged historians to use novels to study cultural perceptions of imperialism, her argument also applies to cultural perceptions of gender and sexuality. Novels provided authors the free space to express their ideas about women's social roles, their belief of whether women's happiness lay in being a wife and mother or whether marriage was an oppressive institution for women. Many debates about the separate sphere ideology and feminism occurred within novels.

Historian Susan Walton provided an example for how historians could use novels to study cultural perceptions of gender in *Imagining Soldiers and Fathers in the Mid-Victorian Era:*

[18]Cora Kaplan, "Imagining Empire: History, Fantasy, and Literature," in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 191, 195, 208.
[19] *Ibid,* 192.

Charlotte Yonge's Models of Manliness (2010). Walton drew on the work of John Tosh who argued that masculinity underwent critical changes between the years of 1800-1914 a time during which Britain was growing into an industrialist and imperialist nation. Tosh argued that the 19th century "entrench[ed] an entrepreneurial, individualistic masculinity, organized around a punishing work ethic, a compensating validation of the home, and a restraint on physical aggression."[21] Walton examined how British culture navigated the tensions that arose from these shifting definitions of masculinity. For example,she asked how British culture responded to a decreasing emphasis on physical violence whilst there was a need to recruit men to serve the army. For answers, she looked at how popular novelist Charlotte Yonge represented masculinity in novels such as *Heir of Radclyffe Hall* (1853), *Kenneth* (1855), and *The Daisy Chain* (1856). Walton observed that Yonge depicted "ideal knightly men who battled with the forces of evil wherever they found them but who retained sufficient recognizable human frailties to attract fondness and sympathy."[22] To justify using novels as historical sources, Walton argued that since history is a discipline that examined "identity, mentality, and social structures," it provides an opportunity to "interrogate literary texts with the intention of adding to historical understanding." Doing so provided a "wealth of perspectives," and deepened "our understanding of Victorian culture as a whole." Novels are a good source to study masculinity because Victorian men were "influenced…inevitably…by imaginary conceptions and role models." Walton chose to examine the work of Charlotte Yonge because she was a best-selling novelist and so her work could

> provide a useful route into the cultural beliefs embedded in constructions of masculinity in the mid-nineteenth century; by an examination of some of her work in an exact

[20] *Ibid*, 211.
[21] John Tosh, "Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914," *Journal of British Studies* 44.2 (April 2005): 331.
[22] Susan Walton, *Imagining Soldiers and Fathers in the Mid-Victorian Era: Charlotte Yonge's Models of Manliness* (London: Routledge, 2010), 2, 180.

> historical context, it is possible to understand better the standpoints, anxieties, and values of important sections of Victorian society.[23]

Yonge's novels could "provide an arena where we can witness contested versions of masculinities weighed up, debated and rehearsed, offering another perspective on the history and culture of mid-Victorian people." Walton also observed that novels are useful in studying the ways that Victorian culture explored masculinity, claiming that "cultural qualms were debated and contested within the greatly enlarged arena of print, which empowered all silent readers, men and women, to participate in the arguments."[24] Walton demonstrated how novels could shed light on perceptions of gender, and how they could reflect cultural debates. While Walton focused on how novels depicted masculinity, her work was relevant to the study of femininity in Victorian culture as well. Fictional role models also influenced conceptions of femininity, and novels also reflected the ways that women's place in society was contested in the second half of the 19th century, and those depictions and debates helped shape the worldview of the readers.

In *Literature as History: Autobiography, Testimonio, and the Novel in the Chicano and Latino Experience* (2016) historian Mario T. Garcia argued that historians should more extensively use novels (and autobiographies) as historical sources and aimed to provide an example through his examination of Chicano and Latino novels as primary sources. He argued that novels such as Alejandro Morales' *The Brick People* were historical documents because they documented history and made it central to the text, as Morales did in using narrative to explore the experiences of the Chicano working class. Since Garcia intended his work to be a model for how historians can use narrative as historical evidence, he argued for its use in general terms to make it applicable to literature beyond Chicano and Latino history. Garcia argued that "all

[23] *Ibid,* 2.
[24] *Ibid,* 2, 3.

narratives possess a historical context and therefore directly or indirectly speak to their historical period. Novels and autobiographies are historical narratives." Garcia aimed to use novels (alongside autobiographies) as "historical documents and for what they convey about Chicano/Latino history." He also observed that "novelists…also document history, and so their writings can be used by historians to document the past." He hoped to bring history and literature together, and suggested that "a literary writer not only can provide us with historical evidence, but also can provide a personal insight into history that more formal documents cannot." In analysing novels and other forms of narrative, Garcia noted that he was not engaging in literary theory, but instead using his "skills and knowledge as a historian to seek historical understanding through…narratives." He also claimed that "literary narratives are historical texts" and that was how he, as a historian, was interpreting them. Garcia used novels to study Chicano and Latino history, and his work serves as a general guide for how to use novels in historical work. Garcia's arguments about the usefulness of literature to history as a discipline support Kaplan's argument that novels can be of great use to historians-not only as supporting evidence to more traditional archival primary sources, but as evidence on their own. Novels can provide historical insight into the culture that produced them, and they can document the thoughts of their writers on the society in which they lived.[25]

Perry, Kaplan, Walton, and Garcia demonstrated that novels have much to offer as historical sources and can contribute much to historical understanding. This thesis builds on their work and uses novels to gain insight into how women novelists, both conventional and unconventional, responded to the challenges against the separate sphere ideology, and how they portrayed women who transgressed its bounds. It also examines how these debates about the

[25] Mario T. Garcia, *Literature as History: Autobiography, Testimonio, and the Novel in Chicano and Latino Experience* (USA: The University of Arizona Press, 2016), 3, 112, 4, 5, 18.

separate sphere ideology, women's place in society, and marriage extended to depictions of lesbianism and imperialism, which were both more marginal issues in British culture. While it is important to remember that novels are not necessarily reflective of Victorian British society as a whole, they can shed light on how the Victorian middle-class novelists communicated their thoughts about their society to their audience, which was predominantly made of middle-class women.

2. The corpus

Many novels accepted the ideology as part of the "natural order" and did not pay it much attention. Hence, this thesis examines widely read novels that exemplify the debates surrounding the separate sphere ideology in depth. The ones that address issues such as marriage, surplus women, feminism, lesbianism, and imperialism are of particular interest. Some of these subjects, such as lesbianism and imperialism were more marginal concerns in Victorian literature, which means that the selection of novels concerning these is limited. Female authors have been privileged, because, as women, they were most affected by the changes in women's rights and the on-going debates about the separate sphere ideology. Male novelists were included as foils to the women novelists and were selected due to their popularity or the thematic importance of their works. This thesis primarily examines novels that were widely read, since popular novels indicate that the readers agreed with the themes and arguments of the novels. Since many Victorian novels were serialized, and circulating libraries made novels accessible to more middle-class readers, print runs were not always a reliable indicator of readership even when available. Hence, novels were selected from prominent novelists, and the novels were either serialized or re-published which indicated popular demand. Other novels represented more dissonant voices that may not have been as popular but were thematically important, especially

in terms of novels that addressed lesbianism and Empire. New Women novelists were selected due to the prominence of the authors to the genre, and the arguments the novels made. All novels analysed in this thesis are digitally available.[26]

The women novelists that this thesis examines were all British, white, and middle-class and with one or two exceptions were Christian. Despite these similarities, they were in other ways a diverse group. Some were conventionally married, others were unmarried, while others had unconventional relationships, had same-sex desires, or supported themselves financially.

Many women novelists lived conventional lives as wives and mothers, like Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855), Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), Ellen Wood (1814-1887), Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897), Flora Annie Steel (1847-1929) and Florence Marryat (1833-1899). Brontë had been a governess and teacher before marrying.[27] Wood cultivated her image of a traditional domestic wife to deflect public suspicion, as her novels were lurid.[28] Oliphant supported herself and her children with her writing after her husband's death, an acceptable way to make a living for women.[29] Later in the century, Marryat combined marriage and work, but in artistic fields (she was an actress, playwright and editor).[30] Flora Annie Steel was married to an Indian Civil Service officer.[31] Her novel *On the Face of the Waters: A Tale of the Mutiny* (1896) narrated an English woman's efforts to survive the 1857 Indian mutiny and provides insight into how novelists discussed subjects of womanhood and marriage in colonial settings. While these

[26] Selecting novels available online was also practical for research during the COVID19 pandemic.
[27] Patricia Ingham, *The Brontes (Authors in Context)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 13-14, 34-35.
[28] Beth Palmer, *Women's Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture: Sensational Struggles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 83.
[29] Deirdre D'Albertis, "The Domestic Drone: Margaret Oliphant and a Political History of the Novel," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 37.4 (Autumn 1997), 805-806.
[30] Sarah Lennox, "'She was a brave and a busy woman,' Rediscovering Florence Marryat, Victorian novelist, spiritualist, and performer," *Literature Compass* 15.3 (2018), 1-2.
[31] Susmita Roye, "Introduction," in *Flora Annie Steel: A Critical Study of an Unconventional Memsahib* ed. Susmita Roye (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2017), xi.

women novelists were conventional, their perspectives often differed. Wood had a conservative view of marriage, while Oliphant was critical of marriage as the sole option for women.

It was acceptable for unmarried women to support themselves through their writing, like Anne Brontë (1820-1849) who worked as a governess or Emily Lawless (1845-1913), a historian in addition to novelist. [32] This did not necessarily make them sympathetic towards unconventional women. Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901) and Rhoda Broughton (1840-1920) were anti-feminist. On the other hand, New Woman novelist Ella Hepworth Dixon (1857-1932) was also a journalist and her novel *The Story of a Modern Woman* followed a feminist heroine who sought to live independently and aid other women.[33] Victoria Cross (Annie Sophy Cory) (1868-1952) positively depicted a woman who had engaged in an interracial marriage.

Other women novelists were unconventional, both in terms of their lives and their politics. Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) married, but late (she was 38), to poet Robert Browning.[34] She also campaigned for women's rights. George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) (1819-1880) had a romantic relationship with a married man, George Henry Lewess, and called herself Mrs. George Henry Lewess even though they were not married. [35]

Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915) also had a romantic relationship with a married man whose mentally ill wife was confined to an asylum.[36] Sarah Grand (Frances Elizabeth Bellandon Clarke) (1854-1943) was a New Woman novelist who left her husband.[37] She

[32]Ingham, *The Brontes (Authors in Context)*, 15; Marie O'Neill, "Emily Lawless," *Dublin Historical Record* 48.2 (1995), 125.
[33] Beth Palmer, "Ella Hepworth Dixon and Editorship," *Women's Writing* (2012), 96-97.
[34] Daniel Karlin, "Introduction," in *Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett: The Courtship Correspondence 1845-1846: A Selection* ed. Daniel Karlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), ix.
[35] Kathleen McCormack, "George Eliot and George Henry Lewess: Respectable Adultery and Anonymous Celebrity," in *Anglo-American Travelers and the Hotel Experience in Nineteenth-Century Literature: Nation, Hospitality, and Travel Writing* ed. Monica M. Elbert and Susanne Schmid (New York: Routledge, 2017), 203.
[36] Saverio Tomaiuolo, *In Lady Audley's Shadow: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Victorian Literary Genres* (Edinburgh, Great Britain: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 11.
[37] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 95-98.

examined the difficulties of an unhappy marriage in *Ideala* (1888), shedding light on how a feminist novelist tackled the debates surrounding marriage in the 1880s and 1890s. Alice Mona Caird (Alice Mona Alison) (1854-1932) was a feminist who was married, but who spent much of her time living apart from her husband.[38] She condemned marriage and motherhood in *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894). This particular group of authors was critical of contemporary gender norms.

There were also unconventional women novelists who expressed desire towards women. Contrary to the previous group, they were not necessarily sympathetic towards unconventional women, or optimistic about their prospects. Vernon Lee (Violet Page) (1856-1935) and Amy Levy (1861-1889) were feminist and lesbian. The first criticized marriage; the second was optimistic about it. Eliza Lynn Linton (1822-1898) was a journalist and also a lesbian.[39] Yet, in her novel *The Rebel of the Family* (1880) Linton vilified feminist and lesbian women, paradoxically condemning women who engaged in lifestyles and behaviours that resembled her own.

Those women were also quite different in terms of politics. Some, like Grand, Dixon, Levy, Lee, Caird, etc, were feminists. Others such as Yonge, Linton, and Broughton were anti-feminist. Then there were those who had a combination of supportive and critical opinions towards the changes in women's social position such as Eliot and Oliphant. These different politics were reflected in their novels, which makes the novels insightful sources on how middle-class women thought differently about the debates surrounding the separate sphere ideology.

This thesis also examines the work of a small number of male novelists who act as foils for the women novelists. In the case of novels that address lesbianism and imperialism, the work

[38] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century*, 180-181.

of male novelists was included because those subjects were seldom addressed and there was not much choice. Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was chosen due to his popularity, and his novel *Little Dorritt* (1855-1857) featured an unmarried woman who was hinted to be a lesbian. Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) and Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) were similarly chosen for their popularity. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's (1859-1930) short story "The Yellow Face" provided an example of a depiction of an interracial relationship and a mixed-race child. Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's (1814-1873) *Carmilla* (1872) associated lesbianism with vampirism, an association that became highly influential. James Grant's (1822-1887) *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny (*1868) was selected to balance Flora Annie Steele. It also showed how English women's perceived domesticity and virtue, paired with their perceived vulnerability, became justifications for British colonialism. In *The Odd Women* (1893) George Gissing (1857-1903) provided an in-depth exploration of the limited options open to women-both conventional and unconventional- in the 1890s. These male novelists demonstrate that women novelists were not the only ones interested in debates surrounding the separate sphere ideology, marriage, female sexuality, and feminism. They also show that the opinions on these subjects from male novelists were also diverse and conflicting.

The thesis follows a thematic/chronological outline. The first two chapters provide historical context. Chapter one examines the separate sphere ideology and investigates its philosophical and scientific origins, its ties to the middle-class, its limitations, and how the surplus women problem and the feminist movement challenged it. Chapter two turns to lesbianism, studying why it was not explicitly illegal in Victorian Britain, how sexologists understood it, and the experiences of women who had relationships with other women at the

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[39] Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 148-152.

time. This thesis then turns to novels. Chapter three examines the conventional marriage plot in which a young woman and man overcome obstacles to marry each other. It investigates novels in which the "normal" order is restored, and stage unconventional women who both become conventional wives and live happily ever after or remain unconventional and meet a tragic end. Chapter four studies the alien other in Victorian novels, and it discusses novels in which it is hinted that the unconventional women are lesbians, and novels that tackle imperialism or discuss race, largely focusing on miscegenation. Chapter five examines novels in which female characters were in some manner able to be successfully unconventional. It then questions whether New Women novelists believed that women could successfully escape the confines of marriage to become independent.

Chapter 1

The Separate Sphere Ideology: British Perceptions of Sex and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century

The separate sphere ideology emerged in Britain, the rest of Western Europe as well as North America in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as a consequence of the economic and political aspirations of different segments of the middle class. It reflected the evolving understandings of the nature of women and men. The separate sphere ideology claimed that women, who were considered emotional beings, belonged in the private or domestic sphere, whereas men, who were rational, were the ones equipped to operate in the public sphere of economic activities and politics.[1] The ideology of separate spheres confined women to marriage, motherhood, and a domestic life. However, it was a product of its time and even at its zenith, it was never hegemonic. Women could escape the social norms that the ideology prescribed, and they could lead lives that did not involve having husbands or raising children. Some women could, if they were so inclined, engage in discreet romantic relationships with other women despite social disapproval.

Although the separate sphere ideology was never hegemonic, it nonetheless coloured contemporary perceptions of unconventional women and of homosexuality. It also became an argument to justify alleged European/British superiority over non-white people and became a strand in imperialist ideology and practice.

[1]Steinbach, "'Can We Still use Separate Spheres?' British History 25 Years after *Family Fortunes*," 826.

1. **The separate sphere ideology and the two-sex model: changing understandings of sex and gender in eighteenth and nineteenth century medicine and science**

The separate sphere ideology was rooted in 18th century philosophical, medical, and scientific writing. French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) played a prominent role in the emergence of the ideology when he published *Emile* in 1762. Rousseau was, as Lynn Abrams noted, one of the prominent thinkers who popularized notions of domesticity and motherhood that became important to the separate sphere ideology.[2] Rousseau saw women and men as being destined for different roles: "Nature teaches us that [women and men] should work together, but that each has its own share of the work." Rousseau defined women's natural role in society as wives and mothers.[3] However, as Linda Colley argued, while Rousseau painted women as especially dependent on men, and thought that women's role was to obey them, he also believed that they had the power to morally influence their husbands. Rousseau's *Emile*, which developed those notions, was translated into English by 1770, and influenced British thinkers such as Hannah More. [4]

French philosophers were not the only 18th century thinkers to believe that women and men were meant to play different social roles. Members of the German elite also embraced the separate sphere ideology. According to Marion Gray, the Cameralists believed that the marketplace was the realm of men. German society "came to accept the belief that it was normal

[2] Lynn Abrams, *The Making of Modern Woman* (London: Routledge, 2002), 30.
[3] Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile; Or Education* trans. Barbara Foxley (London & Toronto: J.M Dent and Sons; New York: E.P Dutton, 1921. Originally published in 1762),288, 289. https://oll-resources.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/oll3/store/titles/2256/Rousseau_1499_EBk_v6.0.pdf
[4] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 239, 239-240.

for men to be economic producers and for women to be active only in nonproductive activities, those often labeled 'reproductive.'"[5]

The ideas of philosophers and political scientists such as Rousseau and the Cameralists were legitimized by new medical and scientific theories. Evolving medical understandings of biological sex shaped the separate sphere ideology. Prior to the eighteenth-century, the predominant understanding of sex was rooted in the writings of Classical thinkers like Aristotle and Galen who argued that woman was an inferior form of man.[6] Thomas Laqueur called this understanding of sex "the one-sex model." The Roman physician Galen believed that women's genitals were the same as men's, but that women's genitals were outside in.[7] The vagina was an inverted penis and the ovaries were the female equivalent to the male testes.[8] According to Aristotle and Galen, women were unfinished or misbegotten males-they were colder and their lack of "heat" led to their reproductive organs staying stuck inside, and to their being physically and mentally less developed.[9] They had small bodies and smaller brains.[10]

The difference between women and men in this model was one of status. As Laqueur explained, "To be a man or woman was to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes." Laqueur also compared having a penis, rather than a vagina, to having a "certificate of sorts…which entitled the bearer to certain rights and privileges."[11] Sex was thought of as transmutable. Historian Lynn

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[5] Marion W. Gray, *Productive Men, Reproductive Women: The Agrarian Household and the Emergence of Separate Spheres during the German Enlightenment* (New York and Oxford: Bergahn Books, 2000), 89-90, 1. Cameralism was "the science of statecraft" that came to include economics.
[6] Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), ix.
[7] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1992), 8, 22.
[8] Abrams, *The Making of Modern Woman*, 21.
[9] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 29; Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex*, 18-19, 21-22.
[10] Abrams, *The Making of the Modern Woman*, 22.
[11] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 8, 134-135.

Abrams recounted a medieval story of a woman chasing a pig, who suddenly grew a penis and transformed into a man.[12] Therefore, the one-sex model was clearly hierarchical, though it did not carry with it the notion that women and men were essentially different and hence called to inhabit different spheres due to their anatomy.

This view of women as inferior and a misbegotten man meant that they did not necessarily belong to a separate sphere from men. Indeed, during the pre-industrial period, there was not a strict division between home and the workplace; very often they were one and the same. Women often worked with their husbands and families.[13] Hence, a woman could work with or under the supervision of a man, or on her own. The inequality between women and men was preserved without constraining women to a domestic sphere or associating men exclusively with the public sphere. Men belonged to the private sphere as well, and they were the ones who commanded the household. The gendering of the private and public spheres and the association of the private with the domestic and the public with the marketplace did not fully emerge until the 19th century.[14] The one-sex model, while it may have constructed woman as inferior to man, did not support the concept of separate spheres.

However, conceptions of sex began to shift in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when what Laqueur termed the 'two-sex model' emerged. Physicians and scientists began to perceive males and females as mirror opposites of each other.[15] The two-sex model was based on a perception of female nature as different to the nature of males. In the 18th and 19th centuries, men were associated with reason while women were more inclined to follow their senses and

[12] Abrams, *The Making of Modern Women*, 21. In some cases, a male baby's genitalia resembled female genitalia until puberty, when their testicles dropped. This Medieval story paralleled a real medical condition, which was known since Ancient Greece.
[13] Abrams, *The Making of the Modern Woman*, 128.
[14] Lawrence E. Klein, "Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth-Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure," *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 29.1 (1995), 105.

instincts. Physicians also believed that women's reproductive capabilities required a great deal of energy, which was diverted from brain activities.[16] These perceived differences in biology that made women differently intelligent and subject to their passions (they were intuitive instead of rational) made them unsuited for the public sphere hence they were naturally suited for the domestic one.[17] Their weaker bodies and reproductive functions also made women incapable of physical labour. Many 19th century anthropologists like James McGrigor Allan believed that when women menstruated or were pregnant, they were "unfit for any great mental or physical labour."[18] Abrams noted that "the theory that a woman's mind was innately connected to her reproductive function helped to justify the theory of separate spheres-the translation of sexual difference into social and economic difference comprising the belief that woman was fitted for the private or domestic sphere and the male for the public or civil and political arena."[19] While the idea that women could not perform laborious work was popular among physicians, it did not necessarily reflect the reality of women's lives. Working class women had to have jobs to support themselves, many of them working in the domestic service or in textiles. Many women also performed heavy physical labour as farm women, factory workers, and servants.[20]

The emphasis that physicians placed on women's reproductive systems played a role in the importance of motherhood that was framed as the contribution women made to English society. Allan wrote that

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[15] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 148-149. The one-sex model did not disappear. Instead, the two-sex model became dominant in medical and scientific understandings of sex (150).
[16] Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex*, 82, 46-47; Abrams, *The Making of Modern Woman*, 22.
[17] Beatrice Craig, Robert Beachy, and Alastair Owens, "Introduction," in *Women, Business, and Finance in Nineteenth Century Europe: Rethinking Separate Spheres*, edited by Robert Beachy, Beatrice Craig, and Alastair Owens (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 2; Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex*, xi.
[18] James McGrigor Allan, "On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women," *The Journal of the Anthropological Society of London* 7 (1869): cxcviii.
[19] Abrams, *The Making of Modern Woman*, 23.
[20] Emma Griffin, *Bread Winner: An Intimate History of the Victorian Economy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 36-37.

> It is woman's great function, and it should be her proud privilege that she can bear and rear children to be men. Is it not a glorious mission to be a wife and mother? In solacing their husbands, giving them healthy children, and superintending their education, do not women discharge to the utmost their share of duties? Is there any possible way by which women in general could fulfil their vocation better, or more effectively aid in advancing human happiness, racial, and national progress?[21]

Allan argued that motherhood was essential to society. Bearing and raising well-educated children was the greatest contribution a woman could make, a contribution that Allan considered "glorious." His ideas about the integral role of reproduction on "racial and national progress" show the influence of Social Darwinist beliefs; in maintaining England's population, English women ensured that their country remained strong. Those ideas coloured his perceptions of women who failed to marry and reproduce, especially of women who encouraged others to follow in their footsteps.[22]

The two-sex model also influenced 19th century perceptions of the lack of female sexuality. Historian Nancy Cott defined 'passionlessness' as "the view that women lacked sexual aggressiveness, that their sexual appetites contributed a very minor part (if any at all) to their motivations, that lustfulness was simply uncharacteristic." Cott argued that prior to the 17th century, women were considered hypersexual and more carnal than men. That changed between the 17th and 19th centuries to the perception that women had less sexual desire than men did.[23] This transformation of the perception that female sexuality was excessive to the view that it did not exist was part of the emergence of the two-sex model. For instance, proponents of the two-

[21] Allan, "On the Real Differences in the Minds of Men and Women," ccxii.
[22] Allan was staunchly against the feminist movement. He published an essay deriding the movement in 1890 entitled "Women Suffrage Wrong in Principle, and Practice; an Essay," (London: Remington & Co, Publishers, 1890), in which he argued that women's rights activists wanted to gain all of man's rights without shouldering his duties (4).
[23] Nancy Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs* 4.2 (1978): 220-221. Cott noted that passionlessness was not the universal ideology towards female sexuality, and she argued that the influence of passionlessness on women's behaviour was limited.

sex model believed that the female orgasm was not necessary for generation. Laqueur expounded,

> The assertion that women were passionless; or alternatively the proposition that, as biologically defined beings, they possessed to an extraordinary degree, far more than men, the capacity to control the bestial, irrational, and potentially destructive fury of sexual pleasure and sexual allurement-all were part of a grand effort to discover the anatomical and physiological characteristics that distinguished men from women. Orgasm became a player in the game of new sexual differences.[24]

The belief that women were passionless was predominant in the 19th century. It was an important part of how social perceptions of women were altered. As Cott explained, society began to base their perceptions of women's nature on their perceived moral superiority rather than on their sexual natures.[25] As we shall see, passionlessness also contributed to the invisibility of female homosexuality in the Victorian era because it became difficult to perceive of women feeling sexual desire and acting on it. Since women were thought to either lack sexual desire or had the ability to control it, 19th century thinkers such as Allan worried less about their sexual behaviour and instead encouraged them to be more dedicated wives and mothers.

The separate sphere ideology emphasized marriage and motherhood as the natural role for women, which influenced how women who chose not to marry or not to have children were perceived. In the 19th century, this came to serve the interests of the British industrial middle-class that was attempting to gain political power and influence.

2. The separate Sphere ideology and the Victorian British middle classes

In the 19th century, the political influence of the industrial middle class remained limited since the aristocracy and the gentry, who owned most of the land, controlled Parliament directly or indirectly. This prevented the passing of legislation that would benefit the population of

[24] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 150.
[25] Cott, "Passionlessness," 221, 228.

urbanized districts. They resisted legislation inimical to landed interests such as the abolition of the Corn Laws, which kept the price of bread high and forced manufactures to pay higher wages.[26] According to Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, the British industrial middle-class argued that it deserved greater political power because of its higher moral standard. Davidoff and Hall explained, "Middle-class farmers, manufacturers, merchants and professionals…[were] critical of many aspects of aristocratic privilege and power, sought to translate their increasing economic weight into a moral and cultural authority."[27] The industrial middle class claimed moral superiority over the aristocracy, which they viewed as dissolute, and deemed erroneous the argument that they deserved greater political power.

The industrial middle class claimed moral superiority over the licentious aristocrats through stressing the importance of the roles that middle class men and women performed. Unlike the aristocracy and gentry, the industrial middle-class men worked for a living. The women took care of the home and the children. These public and private roles became critical to the industrialists' political and economic ambitions. That was why Davidoff and Hall concluded that their "principal argument rest[ed] on the assumption that gender and class always operate together, that class always takes a gendered form." Gender and class were mutually constitutive- each contributed to the construction of the other. [28]

The importance of the domestic ideal to the Victorian middle-classes helped shape ideas which relegated women to the domestic sphere in the separate sphere ideology. Those ideas were disseminated to middle class readers through prescriptive conduct books and fiction in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

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[26] Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture, and Society in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 2017), 36-37, 38.
[27] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* 3rd edition (London: Routledge, 2018. Originally published in 1987), 30.

3. **"Domestic virtues:" British eighteenth and nineteenth-century prescriptive writing**

Starting in the late 18th century, middle class prescriptive writers began to encourage women to embrace domestic roles. In *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), schoolteacher and influential writer Hannah More argued that "every kind of knowledge which is rather fitted for home consumption rather than foreign exportation, is peculiarly adapted for women." Those types of knowledge taught women to be good wives without being vain, to be useful instead of famous, to be just and content without having "witnesses" or "panegyrists." More believed that "she who has the best regulated mind will…have the best regulated family." More argued that female education should equip women for domestic life and their roles as wives and mothers.[29]

In the early nineteenth-century, Sarah Stickney Ellis joined More in praising the importance of the domestic sphere for women. *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* published in 1839 and dubbed by Sharon Marcus "the most influential conduct book of the nineteenth century" provided a conduct book for English women to follow regarding morality, their goals in education, the way they conversed with their husbands, and their moral duties. [30] Ellis belonged to the middle-class. Her conduct book laid out the duties and responsibilities of English wives and daughters and identified the means for women to fulfil what she viewed as their crucial role in English society.

Central to Ellis' writing was the importance of women's place in the domestic sphere. She claimed, "there is an appropriate sphere for women to move in, from which those of the middle class in England seldom deviate very widely. This sphere has duties and occupations of

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[28] *Ibid*, 30, 13.
[29] Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (London: T. Cadell Jun. and W. Davies, 1799), 3, 2, 5-6.

its own, from which no woman can shrink without culpability and disgrace." A woman's reputation depended on how well she managed her home, which to Ellis went beyond the practical management of the household but was a "philosophy in this science, by which all their highest and best feelings are called into exercise." Ellis framed the home as a moral refuge for men returning from the marketplace.

> How often has man returned to his home with a mind confused by the many voices, which in the mart, the exchange, or the public assembly, have addressed themselves to his inborn selfishness, or his worldly pride; and while his integrity was shaken, and his resolution gave way beneath the pressure of apparent necessity, or the insidious pretences of expediency, he has stood corrected before the clear eyes of woman.

A domestic woman created a refuge for her husband to return to at the end of a long day facing the temptations of a marketplace. The perception that domestic wives were virtuous, indeed angelic, became a popular ideal in the mid 19th century. Therefore, the role of middle-class English women was to look after their homes and the family that resided in those homes. They were to keep their husbands' company by the fireside and to be their family's moral guides.[31]

Literature also contributed to the spread of the separate sphere ideology, particularly in shaping the ideal of the English wife as the angel at the home. In Coventry Patmore's highly influential narrative poem The *Angel in the House* (1854) the protagonist, Felix Vaughan, praised his wife Honoria. He described his life with her and their children: "Those are our children's songs that come/With bells and the bleatings of the sheep; /And there, in yonder English home, /We thrive on mortal food and sleep!" In addition to this joyful image of domestic life, Vaughan praised Honoria for her gentleness, sweetness, and her dedication to her role as a wife and mother. He praised wives who dedicated their lives to caring for their husbands. He

[30] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian Britain* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 31.

wrote, "The gentle wife, who decks his board/And makes his day to have no night/Whose wishes wait upon her lord/who finds her own in his delight."[32] Jeanne M. Peterson noted that the term 'angel' carried with it significant meaning:

> In the narrowest sense the angel was the one near to God, the pious one to kept the family on the Christian path. In secular terms the angel provided the home environment that promoted her husband's and children's well-being in the world; she also provided a haven from its worst pressures through her sound household management and sweetness of temperament. The latter meaning suggests the angel's domesticity, unwordliness, asexuality, innocence, and even helplessness in matters outside the domestic sphere.

The angel of the home became an influential ideal for upper middle-class women.[33] Patmore's angel was influential in shaping the image of the ideal Victorian wife whom middle-class men wished to marry and middle-class women wished to embody. Patmore's writing was therefore of significant importance in understanding the growth the separate sphere ideology in England.

More, Ellis, and Patmore were among the most influential prescriptive writers who supported the domestic ideal and expounded on the importance of the household and of the gender roles that underpinned the separate sphere ideology. Their writing was also, as Amanda Vickery noted, "prescriptive rather than descriptive in any simple sense."[34] They advocated an ideal that they thought women should achieve; they did not describe how late 18th and early 19th century women lived their lives.

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[31] Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England, Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (London: Fisher, Son &Co, 1839), 72-73, 25, 53.
[32] Coventry Patmore, *Angel in the House* (London: Cassell &Company, 1891. Originally published in 1854), 5, 87, Kindle.
[33] Jeanne M. Peterson, "No Angel in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984), 677, 678.
[34] Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal* 36.2 (1993), 383-384.

Nevertheless, the domestic role and its association with women remained a prevalent ideal. In his 1869 article, *Why Are Women Redundant?* William Rathbone Greg deplored women's increased labour force participation.

> There are hundreds of thousands of women…scattered through all ranks, but proportionally most numerous in the middle and upper classes-who have to earn their own living, instead of spending and husbanding the earnings of men. Who, not having the natural duties and labours of wives and mothers, have to carve out artificial and painfully sought occupations for themselves; who, in place of completing, sweetening, and embellishing the existence of others, are compelled to lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own. In the manufacturing districts thousands of girls are working in the mills and earning ample wages, instead of performing, or preparing and learning to perform, the functions and labours of domestic life.[35]

Instead of questioning the separate sphere ideology in the light of what he saw as a threatening number of women with occupations, he cast the increase in the number of working women as an unnatural aberration; it was "natural" for women to remain in the domestic sphere. When women exited that sphere, they led "artificial" lives. In taking such "artificial" actions, women were violating core aspects of femininity, which included caring for and improving the lives of their husbands and their family. Whereas Ellis had been concerned with middle-class women in 1839, Rathbone Greg saw women of all classes who worked and did not marry as a problem in 1869. The problem of working and "redundant" women were a pressing problem that Rathbone Greg urged Victorian society to solve. The problem of these redundant or surplus women shed light on Victorian attitudes towards marriage and its importance to society.

4. **Surplus women and marriage in Victorian England**

The Victorians believed that marriage was of critical importance to their society. Rathbone Greg claimed that "marriage, and union of one man with one woman, is unmistakably indicated as the despotic law of life. This is *the* rule. We need not waste words justifying the

[35] William Rathbone Greg, *Why Are Women Redundant?* (London: N. Trubner & Co, 1869), 5.

assumption."[36] Victorians had to look no further than Queen Victoria and Prince Albert to find the epitome of bourgeois marriage. Prince Albert had (no known) mistresses and the two of them had nine children. As historian Susan Kinglsey Kent argued, Victoria and Albert "consistently presented the royal family in imagery consonant with the values associated with domesticity." What was not broadcast to the public was that presentation of their marriage was not entirely accurate. Victoria also hated pregnancy and childbirth, and she was distant and even resentful of her children.[37]

If the ideal English marriage had hidden blemishes (such as Victoria disliking babies), many English people failed to marry at all. Some by choice, and others because there was not a spouse to marry them. Rathbone Greg's insistence that monogamous heterosexual marriage was dictated by nature was, in many ways, a reaction to observing the gap between the ideology he embraced and the practical reality that he saw around him.

Rathbone Greg was anxious about the number of unmarried women in England. The 1851 census revealed that there were approximately 400, 000 women who had no husband.[38] These were the women that were known as "redundant" or "surplus."[39] The 1851 census also revealed that the female population outnumbered the male, which contributed to the alarm the census provoked.[40] An 1851 article "Woman in Her Psychological Relations" published in *The Journal of the Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* examined the problem caused by

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[36] *Ibid,* 8.

[37] Susan Kingsley Kent, *Queen Victoria: Gender and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 46, 54-55. Victoria and Albert had a very active and happy sex life.

[38] Judith Worsnop, "A Re-Evaluation of 'the Problem of Surplus Women,' in 19th-century England: The Case of the 1851 Census," *Women's Studies International Forum* 13.1-2 (1990): 22.

[39] These redundant women were all spinsters, but all spinsters were not redundant women (if a significant number of men chose not to marry, for instance, there would be a sizable spinster population that would not be surplus).

[40] Worsnop, "A Re-evaluation of 'The Problem of Surplus Women," 22. 19th century scientists believed that the natural sex ratio should be equally balanced between the two sexes, although Worsnop noted that they had no prior census data on which to base that assumption.

women who had no husband due to social factors. The anonymous author proclaimed that "whatever may be said about the *rights* of woman, it is her allotted *duty* to marry and bear children." However, it was not possible for all women to perform this duty because some men may decide to remain unmarried, or because there were fewer marriageable ones than women in age to marry. The author explained that

> It is obvious, however, that in Christian and highly civilized nations, it is not possible for every woman to fulfill her mission; for although the numbers of each sex living at one time are nearly equal, yet since many *men* do not marry, many women *cannot,* and are, therefore, doomed to celibacy perforce.

The article revealed that the number of unmarried women was a problem that English society had to solve. The author struggled to resolve women's need for a husband with the social reality that deprived many women of the opportunity:

> Herein, indeed, is a great problem to solve. The order of nature is, that the woman shall be devoted to the cares of maternity and the domestic duties of life; the order of society is, that millions shall have no husband, and therefore legitimately, no children. The order of nature seems to be, that as maternal cares occupy the woman exclusively, her sustenance and protection, and sustenance and protection of her children, should devolve upon man; the order of society deprives millions of women of a mate and protector. Under these circumstances, how does she fare?[41]

The problem of surplus women was therefore considered a significant one. Historians Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair observed that single women, especially those who did not live with their family, were

> regarded as a social problem, prey to the twin dangers of poverty and sexual impropriety. At worst, they could be seen as presenting a sexual threat to the married: at best, they were viewed as 'incomplete' and probably embittered if they were unable to fulfil their biological destiny as wives and mothers. The terms used-redundancy, superfluity-serve to

[41] Anonymous, "Woman in Her Psychological Relations," *The Journal of the Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* IV (1851): 42. The author specified that the countries where this was the case were Christian or "highly civilized" because they outlawed polygamy, with the assumption that non-Christian and "non-civilized" countries allowed polygamous marriages.

> underscore the view that the *only* role for woman was as wife and mother: only then could she be needed, be useful.[42]

Surplus women could not fulfill their duty as wives and mothers, and they were believed to be economically vulnerable (though this was not a universal economic reality for women who engaged in market work or were otherwise employed for wages).

Aside from rendering almost half a million women without the protection of a husband, the surplus woman problem was also unnatural. Rathbone Greg claimed that "nature makes no mistakes and creates no redundancies."[43] Social purity activist Ellice Hopkins echoed Rathbone Greg's worry, who observed that "nature has carefully provided for the equality of the sexes by sending more boys than girls into the world, since fewer boys are reared; but we have managed to derange this order."[44] Rathbone Greg and Hopkins blamed the British for creating the problem of surplus women; left to nature, they presumed that the sex ratio would be equal and all women would have an available spouse. As it was, Hopkins decried the redundant women in the metropolis and the surplus men in the colonies, suggesting that the crucial error the British made had been in keeping women at home while sending men overseas.[45] Rathbone Greg suggested that Britain should send 500, 000 women to the colonies to marry the British men stationed throughout the Empire, and to increase the desirability of the women who remained in the metropolis.[46] Hopkins still bewailed the problem in 1899, demonstrating that it remained a concern at the turn of the century.

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[42] Eleanor Gordon, and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 167-168.
[43] Rathbone Greg, *Why Are Women Redundant?* 37.
[44] Ellice Hopkins, *The Power of Womanhood or Mothers and Sons: A Book for Parents and those in Loco Parentis* (New York: E.P Dutton & Co, 1899), chap 9. Kindle.
[45] *Ibid*, chap 9.
[46] Rathbone Greg, *Why Are Women Redundant?* 37-38.

Victorians considered the problem of surplus women a largely middle-class problem, since they presumed that working class unmarried women had employment in the domestic service, manufacturing trades, and other similar occupations.[47] While many middle class women also had occupations, social decorum required that they did not work for wages to support themselves.[48] Rathbone Greg granted that some middle class women could work as nurses, matrons, and other charitable occupations, but he believed that ideally only a moderate number of women would enter into those professions.[49]

Not all opinions about redundant women were negative. Gordon and Nair observed that during the 19th century, opinions about redundant women were "not only ambivalent and shifting, but occasionally contradictory."[50] Scholar Angelique Richardson observed that feminists such as the Langham Place circle argued that the problem of redundant women could be solved through educating and employing middle class women.[51] They saw the problem of redundant women as an opportunity to challenge the idea that women should be relegated to the domestic sphere.

The separate sphere ideology that prescribed that middle class women should not engage in market work was by no means hegemonic or an accurate reflection of reality. It was also not the sole ideology of gender that was present, and it did not always accurately reflect women's relationship to market work and the public sphere.

[47] Worsnop, "A Re-evaluation of 'The Problem of Surplus Women," 23. Of course, many middle-class women also had occupations.
[48] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century,* 37.
[49] Rathbone Greg, *Why are Women Redundant?* 37.
[50] Gordon and Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain*, 167.
[51] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century,* 37. The Langham Place circle was an active women's rights organization from the mid-1850s to 1870. It was led by feminists such journalist and essayist Bessie Parkes.

5. Businesswomen and domestic men: the limitations and decline of the separate sphere ideology and the emergence of the feminist movement

The separate sphere ideology suggested the existence of two opposite worlds that never overlapped. However, this was not true in practice. British women did not always dedicate their lives to being a domestic wife and raising their children. Middle class women also took part in market work. Many women worked in some form, but proponents of the separate sphere ideology such as More and Ellis wanted women's labour to be restricted to the household. That is, they wanted middle-class women to do non-market work that included overseeing domestic servants or doing household tasks such as the laundry. However, women also took part in market-work that included running businesses, working for wages, or being self-employed.

Historians such as Peter Earle, Margaret Hunt, and Hannah Barker have studied women's participation in market work from the 17th century to the 19th century, and found that though women faced challenges, they were often active in business and trade. Peter Earle noted that in the 17th and early 18th centuries, middling class women had a place in business "as a helpmeet to their menfolk, first to their fathers, and then to their husbands, and also as the proprietors of independent business." Widows often took over their late husbands' business and spinsters also ran their own businesses.[52] This continued into the 19th century. Unmarried women also had the benefit of avoiding the restraints of coverture, which prevented women from suing anyone or being sued themselves, signing contracts, or owning their earnings.[53] However,

[52] Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (Great Britain: Methuen, 1989), 158, 158-161.

[53] While coverture was often an obstacle for married women in business, it was not as constraining as it appeared to be and, in some cases could even protect women's interests. Nicola Phillips argued that while coverture was an impediment to women who traded, wives still engaged in business and trade. There were also legal exceptions and relief that legal treatises in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries provided. However, although coverture was not necessarily as limiting to married women's property rights and business endeavours as it might have appeared, many feminists held coverture as a representation of negative social attitudes towards women. Nicola Phillips, *Women and Business, 1700-1850* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), 23-26.

married women also often had occupations. Amy Louise Erickson argued that 18th century married women continued to value their occupations regardless of their income level.[54] In fact, Margaret Hunt noted that many late 17th and 18th century middling women living in urban areas (alongside their working-class counterparts) earned an income.[55]

Hannah Barker argued against the idea that women were "less likely to labour outside the home as time went on." While more women of the upper middle class may have abstained from economic activities, many lower middle-class women remained in business. Indeed, Barker found that in the northern English towns of Manchester, Sheffield, and Leeds, the number of women in business did not noticeably decrease. Women predominantly worked in fields that were considered feminine such as shopkeeping, food and drink, teaching, or nursing, though they also worked in other trades.[56] Gordon and Nair also observed that women living in late Victorian Glasgow continued to run businesses and their presence in retail might even have increased after 1850.[57] Earle, Hunt, Barker, and Gordon and Nair demonstrated that through the 18th and 19th centuries the separate sphere ideology was not hegemonic, and that it did not prevent women from earning an income. Women may have faced greater challenges than men in business, and they did not have the same access to education and career opportunities that men did, but they still were able to run successful businesses. Whether married or unmarried, they had lives outside the home and they took advantage of the opportunities that were available.

Women who did not earn an income were also not the domestic angels that Patmore praised. Peterson argued that the ideal of the angel in the house was simply that-an ideal, and

[54] Amy Louise Erickson, "Married Women's Occupations in Eighteenth-Century London," *Continuity and Change* 23 (2) (2008), 293.
[55] Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 128.
[56] Hannah Barker, *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2, 56-57, 62, 67, 69.

little more. She stated, "Much talked of in some Victorian circles, the angel of the house was nowhere to be found among living women." Upper middle-class women enjoyed much greater freedoms than the separate sphere ideology and the ideal of the angel in the house suggests. Peterson revealed that upper middle-class women could enjoy a quality education, that they were aware of and involved in family businesses, and they could lead active lives.[58]

Though women did not have the franchise, they took part in Britain's politics. Simon Morgan argued that in the 19th century, "women made an important contribution to the emerging ideal of a progressive middle-class based around voluntary association, local government institutions and a burgeoning civic pride." Women could dress in the colours of their political party, wave flags at elections, blockade shops to pressure owners to support their favoured candidates, and support family members who ran for office. Responses to such political engagements were often lukewarm, but Morgan observed that contemporaries perceived "women's public activities in ways that were compatible with the construction of 'woman' as apolitical and above party." Women therefore did have a presence, and a role (even if marginal) in England's political and civic life. Women did not remain within the confines of the domestic sphere; they were present in the marketplace, and many had an interest in politics. They were not, in practice, tied to wifely duties and to motherhood as firmly as prescriptive literature implied.[59]

In the second half of the 19th century the feminist movement campaigned for greater access to the public sphere.[60] Historian Philippa Levine observed that feminists did not always

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[57] Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, "The Economic Role of Middle-Class Women in Victorian Glasgow," *Women's History Review*, 9.4 (2000): 800.
[58] Peterson, "No Angel in the House," 708, 706.
[59] Simon Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Taurus Academic Studies, 2007), 1, 130-132, 158.
[60] The term 'feminist' emerged in the late 19th century, prior to which activist groups for women's education, employment, and suffrage, were known as the "women's movement." (Gillian Sutherland, *In Search of the New*

oppose the separate sphere ideology, arguing that "for many women committed to the fight for women's rights, the most effective weapon was not the total rejection of [the separate sphere ideology] but rather a manipulation of its fundamental values." Women's rights campaigns used the separate sphere ideologies' claims that women were morally superior to argue that greater access to the public sphere would be beneficial for society.[61] Yet the gains in women's rights and feminist campaigning did undermine and challenge the precepts of the separate sphere ideology, especially as they granted women greater access to the public sphere and greater ability to support themselves outside of marriage. In the 1850s, feminist activists Bessie Raynor Parkes and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon began to hold meetings in London and advocate for "gender reform in education, employment, and politics."[62] While individual women's activist groups often had different political aims, with some dedicated to marriage reform, others to education, or to the suffrage movement, they were often linked with each other and had a shared purpose in improving the rights of women.[63]

At the same time, women were gaining greater access to education. Post-elementary educational facilities for girls started to open in the mid 19th century. Bedford's College was founded in 1849, the first English institution of higher education for women. Secondary schools quickly followed- the North London Collegiate School opened in 1850 and the Cheltenham Ladies College in 1853.[64] Feminists also campaigned for marriage reform in the 1850s. The

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Woman: Middle Class Women and Work in Britain, 1870-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1). This thesis applies the term "feminist" to describe the women's movement, women's rights activists, and novels that supported the movement because, as historian Philippa Levine argued, the solidarity between women and desire for political action to achieve their goals in varied issues (suffrage, education, work, etc) suggested that the term 'feminism' accurately describes the movement. Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900* (London: Hutchenson Education, 1987), 14.

[61] Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900* (London: Hutchenson Education, 1987), 13.

[62] Harold L. Smith, *The Women's Suffrage Campaign, 1866-1928* revised 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2010), 8.

[63] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 14.

[64] C.V. Burek, "The role of women in geological higher education-Bedford College, London (Catherine Raisin) and Newnham College, Cambridge, UK," *Geological Society, London, Special Publications* 281 (2007), 11; "History of College," About CLC, Cheltenham's Ladies College, para 1, accessed February 17th 2021,

Divorce Reform and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 made it possible for women to keep their property and earnings if they separated from their husbands, as well as to sue for divorce (it granted men the right to divorce on the grounds of adultery while women could only divorce if they proved that their husbands' wrongs were severe such as they were cruel or engaged in incest).[65] Women were also asking for civic rights. The suffrage movement began to gain momentum and an organized committee for women's right to vote formed in 1866.[66] In 1867, John Stuart Mill introduced, an amendment to the 1867 Reform Act, which would have given unmarried propertied women the right to vote (the amendment was defeated).[67] In the late 19th century, women began to enter local politics. Feminist campaigners often argued that excluding women from the franchise and from politics violated the idea of Britain having a representative government, opposing the notion that political participation and representation was the sole realm of men. Still, many women argued that they would be satisfied if the franchise was extended to only "single and widowed women who were property owners or rate-payers in their own right."[68] That is, to women who were not married and who financially contributed to Britain's economy. Certain groups of women such as those who were single, who owned property, or who were educated made a strong case to allow women a political voice and a place in the public sphere. Feminist campaigns such as these were a factor in the decline of the separate sphere ideology in the late 19th century. They also gave women greater justifications to

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https://www.cheltladiescollege.org/about-clc/history-of-college/ ; "History of the School," History of the School, NLCIS, para 1, accessed February 17th 2021,https://www.nlcs.org.uk/about-nlcs/history-of-the-school/history-of-the-school

[65] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019. Originally published 1988), 84-85.

[66] Levine, *Victorian Feminism 1850-1900*, 58.

[67] Evelyn L. Pugh "John Stuart Mill and the Women's Question in Parliament, 1865-1868," *The Historian* 42.3 (1980), 399.

[68] Levine, *Victorian Feminism*, 57, 61, 67.

remain single, since single women were able to claim that they were dedicating themselves to the greater educational and career advantages that were now available to them.

By the 1890s, a new female type called the "New Woman" had emerged. Novelist Sarah Grand coined the term in 1894, claiming that the New Woman "proclaimed for herself what was wrong with Home-is-the Woman's Sphere, and prescribed the remedy."[69] In seeking a remedy to the problems of the separate sphere ideology and critiquing the ideal of marriage, the New Woman drew backlash from traditionalists.[70] The separate sphere ideology did not accurately describe the experiences of Victorian women, and in the mid-to-late 19th century feminist activism undermined it.

The separate sphere ideology also did not accurately describe men's relationship to domesticity. Men also had a closer connection to domesticity than prescriptive literature suggests. Domesticity was most highly celebrated amongst the English middle-classes. Tosh argued that "the pieties of domesticity were a sick joke to slum dwellers, and at the other end of the social spectrum they were scarcely relevant to the great aristocratic families for whom large-scale hospitality was an extension of political and dynastic activity by other means." Farmers in the English countryside also absorbed the domestic ideal at a later date than urban dwellers. Tosh also noted that domesticity was a complicated ideal, writing, "As a code for living, Victorian domesticity was shot through with contradictions."[71]

Domesticity was also not the sole domain of women, as the separate sphere ideology suggested. Victorian men may have had a complicated relationship with domesticity, but their public and domestic lives were not necessarily completely separate. Martin Francis wrote that

[69] Sarah Grand, The New Aspect of the Woman Question," *The North American Review* (1894), 271.
[70] Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, 1-2.
[71] John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 27, 30, 47.

"men constantly travelled back and forward across the frontier of domesticity, if only in the realm of the imagination, attracted by the responsibilities of marriage or fatherhood, but also enchanted by fantasies of the energetic life and homosocial camaraderie of the adventure hero."[72] The binary of public and domestic was not an accurate representation of the roles that Victorian men thought important, or the values that they held.

In sum, women engaged in the marketplace, worked for wages, and owned businesses. They also were involved in political and civic life. Men also shaped the 19th century emphasis on domesticity alongside women. They also often embraced the responsibilities of fatherhood and sought to reconcile those responsibilities with their role in the public sphere. While this does not mean that women's relationship with the public sphere or men's relationship with domesticity was not complicated or fraught, it does suggest that the categories of public and private/domestic were much more complex than the separate sphere ideology would suggest. That is especially true for the second half of the 19th century, when an emerging feminist movement and gains in women's rights challenged the separate sphere ideology. The ideology was never hegemonic, and women were able to escape its constraints to lead lives separate from domesticity, marriage, and motherhood.

6. **The separate sphere ideology and British imperialism**

At the same time as the feminist movement and the surplus women problem were undermining the separate sphere ideology, other forces that were more remote from the lives of ordinary women were reinforcing it. In the second half of the 19th century, the Second British Empire was expanding, primarily into Asia and Africa.[73] This expansion of the Empire meant

[72] Martin Francis, "The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity," *The Historical Journal* 45.3 (2002), 643.
[73] Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture, and Society in Nineteenth Century Britain* 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2017), 66.

that imperialism gained importance in British culture and thought. Scholar Edward Said defined imperialism as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of the dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory." In contrast, colonialism was "almost always a result of imperialism, [and was] the implanting of settlements on distant territory."[74] An important factor of imperialist thought was the justification of the British Empire. As Bell described, these justifications served to "provide reasons, explicit or implicit, for supporting or upholding imperial activity. They seek to legitimate the creation, reproduction, or expansion of empire."[75]

The concept of race became a significant justification for the Empire. It is unclear when categorization and discrimination founded on physical characteristics such as skin colour first began to emerge, but Europeans and North Americans had ideas of race that were apparent by the 1700s.[76] In England, the concept of race became more prevalent in the 1850s and 1860s.[77] During this time, "scientific" racism framed race as biological, and as hierarchical, with the European or "Aryan" races as being superior and the others inferior. The idea that the white race was superior reinforced the notion that the white race would be the one to triumph over the "lower" races and rule over them.[78]

What was the relationship between race and imperialism? While the concept of race did spread to European countries that did not have empires (such as Switzerland), race and

[74] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 8. Kindle.
[75] Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 93-94. Bell also analysed ideologies of governance, which articulated different ways to govern the Empire, and ideologies of resistance that denied imperial rule, ranging from a denial of some aspects of imperialism, or a wholesale denial of it altogether. This chapter, however, is primarily interested in ideologies of justification and how they employed British perceptions of gender, sexuality, and race.
[76] Jane Samson, *Race and Empire*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3.
[77] Edward Beasley, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race: New Racisms and the Problem of Grouping in the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 15.
[78] Gregory Claeys, "'The Survival of the Fittest,' and the Origins of Social Darwinism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61.2 (April 2002): 238, 239.

imperialism did develop an important relationship.[79] Historian Jane Samson argued that "rather than a linear progression from one to another, it is easier to imagine [race and imperialism] as part of a symbiotic relationship. Each needed the other; each supported the other."[80]

In Victorian England, race was often utilised as a justification for the expansion and existence of the Empire. The introduction of the superior English culture and laws in the colonies would "civilize" the colonised; British rule was considered just.[81] Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem "the White Man's Burden" provided a popular example of the image of a benevolent and civilised white race helping to civilise and aid those considered barbarous.[82] It painted Empire and conquest as for the good of the colonised, rather than for the benefit of the conquerors.

Definitions of masculinity and femininity became intertwined with racial thinking over the century. Historian Catherine Hall observed that "in demarcating black masculinity they enunciated white masculinity, in demarcating brown femininity, they enunciated white femininity."[83] Colonised women were often characterised as hypersexual.[84] African women were described as lascivious and promiscuous to an animalistic degree, and not passionless like English women were supposed to be.[84] English women, depicted as virtuous and domestic wives and mothers, were framed as superior and as role models for colonised women.

Presenting virtuous and domesticated British women as civilizing models to emulate reinforced the separate sphere ideology at home, and heightened anxieties about unconventional

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[79] For an exploration of Switzerland's contribution to colonialism and the history of racism in Switzerland see Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tine ed. *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
[80] Jane Samson, *Race and Empire*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5
[81] Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: From Sunrise to Sunset* (Edinburgh Gate, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2013), 113-114.
[82] Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," the poems, Kipling's Society, http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems_burden.htm. Originally published 1899.

[83] Hall, "Of Gender and Empire," 50.
[84] Levine, *The British Empire*, 165.

English women. In the late 19th century, many believed the British middle-class was degenerating, in large part because the divisions between women and men were beginning to blur.[85] The emergence of the New Woman, who often looked masculine and behaved like a man, contributed to those anxieties.[86] The New Women "threatened the stability of the Empire, for how could the metropole transport and transplant British notions of middle-class respectability-those on which the Empire depended-if its own women were unsettling these very values?"[87] The women who challenged those values (surplus women, feminist women, fallen women, lesbians, etc) threatened to disrupt the models/norms that the British used to justify the Empire and to weaken their claims of superiority.

Since these gender norms were intertwined with notions of racial superiority, there were concerns about miscegenation. This was especially alarming when white women entered relationships with non-white men, most commonly in the colonies, but also within the metropolis. As racial attitudes became more pervasive in the late 19th century, condemnations of interracial relationships became more strident.[121] After eugenics became popular in the 1880s and 1890s, white women who engaged in interracial relationships were usually ostracized and lost status.[88] English women were considered the 'guardians' of the English race and they were also believed to guard English morals in the colonies, which they could not do if they engaged in

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[84] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 22.
[85] Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, *Shame and the Anti-Feminist Backlash: Britain, Ireland, and Australia, 1890-1920* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 9.
[86] Sharon Crozier-De Rosa "Marie Corelli's British New Woman: A Threat to Empire?" *History of the Family* 14 (2009), 417.
[87] Crozier-De Rosa, *Shame and the Anti-Feminist Backlash*, 9.
[121] Chamion Caballero and Peter J. Aspinall, *Mixed Race Britain in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 4.
[88] Philippa Levine, "Sexuality, Gender, and Empire," in *Gender and Empire* ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 140.

interracial relationships.[89] At home or in the colonies, English women contributed to Empire building by giving birth to and raising sons to serve the Empire, and by being moral guides for their husbands and children.[90] Concerns over interracial relationships between white women and non-white men in the colonies also influenced negative reactions to interracial relations in the metropolis.[91]

The emergence of eugenics further contributed to these concerns. Eugenics (the term was coined in 1883 by Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton) aimed at preserving the strength of the superior white race, and underlied opposition to interracial relationships.[92] In particular, eugenics sought to preserve the superior genetics of the educated, wealthy, and able bodied. Eugenics targeted many social categories thought not to contribute to racial improvement when they reproduced, including the working class and disabled people.[93] Hence, those of superior white stock (upper or middle class, healthy, able bodied, etc) were encouraged to breed while others of "less desirable" stock were discouraged from doing so.

The British used the idea that the white race was superior to non-white ones to justify their continued colonial expansion, although imperialism did not go unchallenged.[94] They also used the separate sphere ideology for the same purpose, and this gave additional importance to the ideal of the domestic "angel in the house" at a time when British women were calling that

[89] Diane Frost, "The Maligned, the Despised, and the Ostracized: Working-Class White Women, Interracial Relationships, and Colonial Ideologies in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Liverpool," in *The Empire in One City?* Ed. Sheryllynne Haggerty, Anthony Webster, and Nicholas J. White (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2017), 148; Levine, *The British Empire*, 170-171.
[90] Levine, *The British Empire*, 171.
[91] Frost, "The Maligned, the Despised, and the Ostracized," 149. Frost argued that this "alerts us to the fact that developments in the colonies had a powerful influence on developments at home," (149).
[92] Stephen Jay Gould, *The Measure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 107; Samson, *Race and Empire*, 73.
[93] Samson, *Race and Empire*, 73.

[94] For an exploration of Victorian anti-imperialism and Little Englandism, see Mira Matikkala, *Empire and Imperial Ambition: Liberty, Englishness, and Anti-Imperialism in Late Victorian Britain* (London: I.B Tauris & Co Ltd,

ideal into question. Fears that the white race could degenerate or be out-bred by "inferior" races also placed great importance on marriage between middle-and upper-class, white, and able women and men. This suggests that it was plausible for imperialism and race to be an important factor in cultural responses to challenges to the separate sphere ideology.

Conclusion

The separate sphere ideology emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and became the dominant ideology of gender in Britain. Prescriptive writers such as Hannah More and Sarah Ellis wrote conduct books urging women to embrace domesticity and to serve their husbands and raise their children. The ideology was a product of the emergence of the industrial middle-class, who wanted to stress its moral superiority over the aristocracy and gentry and the working classes, to gain political power and influence. It was also influenced by changing ideas of gender and sex, as the view that woman was an inferior version of man was superseded by the view that woman and man were inherently different and therefore called to different social roles and spheres. The ideology mandated that women care for the household, support their husbands, and dedicate themselves to raising their children. Marriage and motherhood became critical tenets of the ideology.

However, while women were expected to marry and breed, not all women met those expectations. For a start, there were more women of a marriageable age than men (the superfluous women problem)-and some men chose not to marry. Some women did not find someone they cared enough to marry, and some women did not want to marry men because they were attracted to women. Sapphic women took advantage of these opportunities to avoid heterosexual monogamous marriage, and they also used popular perceptions of women's nature

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2011) and George Claeys, *Imperial Skeptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

such as women's lack of sexual passion to explain their unmarried status and their close friendships with other women.

Chapter 2

Sapphic Love: Attitudes towards Female Homosexuality in Victorian Britain

The late Victorian era was a significant period in the development of evolving understandings of homosexuality. Male homosexuality was illegal because it was considered a violation of the laws of God and nature. Starting from the 16th century, sodomy received the death penalty. In 1861, England and Wales abolished the death penalty for sodomy, but it remained against the law.[1] The Labouchere Amendment that criminalised 'gross indecency' between men was passed in 1885.[2] The 1895 trials of Oscar Wilde also brought male homosexuality to the attention of the public. In the late 19th century, sexologists also began to develop a medical understanding of homosexuality that posited that there was a psychological basis for same-sex desire. Since much of the legislation and medical studies were centered on sex between men, much of the scholarship about this period has focused on male homosexuality.[3]

Female homosexuality was much less visible in Victorian legal and medical discourses, but not absent. This chapter explores the ways in which these legal and medical developments influenced (or did not influence) British perceptions of female homosexuality, and how perceptions of female homosexuality (such as the belief that women were passionless) influenced understandings of female sexuality. Why did the laws against sodomy and gross indecency not penalize female homosexuality? How did the emergence of sexology influence (or not influence) popular perceptions of lesbians in Victorian Britain? What were the experiences of sapphic

[1] Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 85-86, 96.
[2] Graham Robb, *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W Norton, 2004), 20. It was enforced beginning January 1 1886.
[3] See Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Charles Upchurch, *Before Wilde: Sex Between Men in Britain's Age of Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), Eve Kosofky Sedgwick *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), Graham Robb *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (New

women, and how did they communicate to the public, to their peers, and themselves about their same-sex desire?

Terminology to describe women who loved women prior to the 20th century is complicated, since homosexuality was not yet thought of as an identity and both terms "lesbian" and "sapphic" have modern connotations that they did not in the Victorian era, in the sense that they both are used as identities and refer to communities. While being conscientious of avoiding anachronism, this thesis uses both "lesbian" and "sapphic" alongside "female homosexuality" to describe women who desired other women.

1. From sodomy to gross indecency: criminalization of male homosexuality in Britain and the absence of legislation against sapphic women

Sex between men had long been illegal in Britain. Under the statute of 1533, "sodomy" which included all sexual acts that were not vaginal penetration was illegal under the penalty of death. That included anal sex between men and women, bestiality, and two men having sex with each other. A broad definition of sodomy could also include female homosexuality, which may have been why it was not specifically criminalised. Sodomy was a capital offence in England and Wales until the 1861 Offences against the Person Act that eliminated capital punishment for the crime and instead carried a minimum sentence of ten years with a recommendation for life imprisonment.[4] In Scotland, the sentence of death penalty for sodomy was abolished in 1889. However, the English carried out no executions for sodomy after 1835.[5] In 1885, the Parliament passed the Labouchere Amendment (Section XI of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885) which criminalised any act of male homosexuality wherever it took place, under the penalty of a

York: W.W Norton, 2004), Robert Aldritch *Homosexuality and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2003), Ronald Hyam *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (UK: Manchester University Press, 1990).

[4] Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861-1913*, 85-86, 96.

[5] Robb, *Strangers*, 23.

maximum sentence of two years.[6] The law did not cause an increase in prosecutions, which remained consistent with those in the decade preceding the Labouchere Amendment.[7] Historian Sean Brady observed that the sodomy laws, not Section XI, formed the basis of prosecution of men who had sex with men until 1967.[8]

The lack of reference to female homosexuality is conspicuous in these laws. Neither the 1861 Offences against the Person Act or the 1885 Labouchere Amendment made any mention of female homosexuality.[9] No effort to criminalise sex between women was made until 1921, when it failed in Parliament.[10] Yet in other countries, female homosexuality was specifically penalized, as Robb noted, in "Prussia until 1851; Austria until 1971." However, these laws were not vigorously enforced and prosecution for them also often accompanied prosecution for another crime.[11] Even when sexual acts were made illegal, prosecuting them for their own sake was not a priority. This was not wholly dissimilar to anti-sodomy laws targeting sex between men that was also not always strongly enforced, unless also accompanied by another crime.[12]

Why did Britain make no such attempt to criminalise female homosexuality after it repealed the 1533 statute? One factor may have been the fear of publicizing the crime and introducing the idea to women. This was the case in 1921, when legislators tried to make sex between women illegal and it failed to pass partly because they were afraid that the law would

[6] *Ibid*, 20. Robb observed that it was already illegal to engage in same-sex activities regardless of whether it was in one's home or out in public (20); Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain*, 96.
[7] Robb, *Strangers*, 20-21.
[8] Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain*, 97.
[9] There was a story that the original Labouchere Amendment did intend to criminalise female homosexuality and was scrapped after Queen Victoria proclaimed that women did not have sex together like that. However, the tale was an urban legend that originated from the 1970s (Robb, *Strangers*, 120).
[10] Ornella Moscucci, "Clitoridectomy, Circumcision, and the Politics of Sexual Pleasure in Mid-Victorian Britain," in *Sexualities in Victorian Britain* ed. Andrew H. Miller and James Eli Adams (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 74
[11] Robb, *Strangers*, 18.
[12] For instance, Oscar Wilde's Irish nationalism, though not mentioned during the trial, did not help his case. Robb observed that there were other men convicted for gross indecency who were also Irish nationalists, including Roger

inform women that two women could share romantic and erotic relationships with each other.[13] However, the context of the early 20th century differed from the late Victorian era. In 1921, women were becoming more independent and were beginning to achieve the franchise.[14] There was also the sexual revolution that led many women to become flappers, cut their hair short, and wear short skirts.[15] A great number of women were unable to marry or did not marry until later in life in the first decades of the 20th century. Sex was also much more openly discussed in the 1920s, and it had been uncoupled from reproduction.[16]

Conversely, in the 19th century the belief that women were passionless and morally superior to men made it difficult to conceive of female homosexuality. (Male) lawmakers, lawyers, and judges had difficulty understanding what it could entail, and reconcile it with the notion that women were inherently sexless as the case of Wood and Pirie vs Gordon Cumming revealed. *Miss Marianne Woods and Jane Pirie against Dame Cumming Gordon* was an 1811 civil court case in Scotland. Martha Vicinus noted that "the lawsuit embodies the denial and silence that characterize so much lesbian history." Sixteen-year-old half-Indian schoolgirl Jane Cummings accused two schoolteachers, Jane Pirie and Marianne Woods, of engaging in sexual acts with each other while in the same bedroom as their students. Jane Cummings' grandmother, Dame Helen Cumming Gordon pulled her grandchildren out of the school and encouraged others to do the same. Pirie and Woods then sued Gordon for libel, who in turn accused them of indecency. Pirie and Woods were found guilty, then innocent on appeal. Vicinus observed that the case "turned on two irreconcilable questions: could an innocent child of sixteen have

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Casement and Irish MP Edward Samuel Wesley de Cobain. In these instances, homosexuality became a symbol for other forms of deviance, such as opposition to English imperialism (Robb, *Strangers*, 38).

[13] Moscucci, "Clitoridectomy, Circumcision, and the Politics of Sexual Pleasure in Mid-Victorian Britain," 74.

[14] In 1918, English women thirty and over were permitted to vote. English women gained equal franchise to men in 1928. Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign*, 1, 72.

[15] Linda Simon, *Lost Girls: The Invention of the Flapper* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2017), 7.

imagined or seen 'that very abominable crime,' or could two respectable women have committed the crime in the presence of a child?" In attempting to reconcile these questions, the judges explored whether a sexual relationship between two respectable middle-class teachers was possible.[17]

It was a task that the judges found difficult and disconcerting. Lord Boyle described the case as a "painful duty." One of the judges, Lord Meadowbank, described how Pirie and Woods did not conform to the way he believed women engaged in sexual activities with each other. Lord Meadowbank stated that "There is no sort of doubt, that women of a peculiar conformation, from an elongation of the *clitoris*, are capable both of giving and imitating the functions of a male in copulation; and that in some countries this conformation is so common, that circumcision of the *clitoris* is practiced as a religious rite." Lord Meadowbank also observed that women might perform masculine sexual roles with the use of a tool.[18] The existence of sexual activities between two women was not a problem for Lord Meadowbank. The problem was that neither Woods nor Pirie matched his perception of women who engaged in erotic relationships with each other. Many of the judges also contemplated where the boundary between intimate and affectionate female friendship crossed into the boundary of indecency. Scholar Lisa L. Moore observed that the judges were unsure of how to read female homosexuality in friendships between women, since female friendship was considered to be pure and sexless, making it difficult to know when that friendship became sexual.[19] Pirie and Woods were also two middle-

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[16] Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800-1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 182-183, 192-194.
[17] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, 63.
[18] Jane Pirie, Marianne Woods and Dame Helen Cumming Gordon, "Speeches of the Judges of the Second Division of the Court of Session, Upon Advising the Cause, Misses Woods and Pirie Against Lady Cumming Gordon First on the 25th of June 1811 and next on the 26th of February 1812," in *Miss Marianne Woods and Miss Jane Pirie against Dame Cumming Gordon* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 41, 7.
[19] Lisa Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies: Towards a Sapphic History of the British Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 80.

class Scottish women, which aided the judges' disbelief that they could be guilty of the crimes that Cummings accused them of.

The judges were very uneasy about the implications of two Scottish women engaging in sexual activities with each other. Lord Meadowbank explained that he was incredulous at the charge because he believed that "the imputed vice has been hitherto unknown in Britain."[20] To explain the accusations, the judges therefore turned to Jane Cummings' Indian heritage and upbringing. The petitioners and the judges argued that she had brought knowledge of the vice with her from her childhood in the hot climate of India.[21] In the 19th century, homosexuality was associated with hot climates.[22] As the petition noted, "It is a well known fact, that the natives of those climates come much earlier to maturity than people in colder latitudes…females of the age of eight or nine have ideas quite unknown to the natives of this country at the same age. The tendencies of nature alone instruct them." It continued, "the manners of the lower natives of India are of the most licentious nature."[23] The implication was that Cummings' childhood in India had exposed her to sexual knowledge that was unavailable in Britain. The judges blamed Cummings' Indian origins to exonerate the British, virtuous femininity of Pirie and Woods.

The case of *Miss Marianne Woods and Miss Jane Pirie against Dame Cumming Gordon* reflected many of the reasons why female homosexuality was not illegal. Pirie and Woods were exonerated partly because the judges believed that homosexuality (especially female homosexuality) was something intrinsically non-British: it was hot climates that encouraged

[20] Pirie, "Speeches from the Judges," 8.
[21] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, 68.
[22] Robert Aldrich, *Homosexuality and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2003), 4.
[23]Jane Pirie, Marianne Woods, and Dame Helen Cumming Gordon, "Additional Petition of Miss Mary-Ann Woods, and Miss Jane Pirie, lately residing at Drumsheugh, Near Edinburgh," in *Miss Marianne Woods and Miss Jane Pirie against Dame Cumming Gordon* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), 49.

immoral behaviour and in which girls matured faster.[24] They also had difficulty grappling with the notion that middle class British women could be intimate sexually and thus it was swept under the rug.

The British believed that male homosexuality violated the laws of both God and nature, and they criminalised it as a result. However, in the late Victorian period the emergence of sexology redefined homosexuality as a medical issue instead of a criminal one.[25] This new way of thinking about homosexuality also influenced the ways female homosexuality was understood.

2. Sexology in Victorian Britain: the female invert

In the late 19th century, the emerging field of sexology challenged the view that sexual acts between men were a crime to be punished in court.[26] Sexology did not entirely replace or alter the view that sex between men was criminal; indeed the Labouchere amendment was both passed while sexological works were being written and read. However, it did introduce a new way of thinking about why some individuals were attracted to their own sex.

Sexology had Continental origins.[27] Sexology started in the German world through the interest of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Karl Westphal, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing and spread to Europe and North America. After 1880, sexology became a prominent presence in French

[24] That the judges could not entertain the idea of two Scottish women having sexual relations and instead blamed Jane's Indian heritage suggests an imperialist/racial connection. Lesbianism did not belong in Scotland but could occur in hot climates. For examinations of how imperialism influenced Western perceptions of sexuality see Anne Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucoult's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), and for an investigation of the relationship between homosexuality and race see Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Colour Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

[25] Gert Hekma, "A History of Sexology," in *From Sappho to De Sade: Moments in the History of Sexuality* ed. Jan M. Bremmer (London: Routledge, 2014), 183-184; Robb, *Strangers*, 40-41; Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women, from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981), 248; Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 43.

[26] Heike Bauer defined sexology as "the sustained theorization of sex." Heike Baur, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1; Hekma, "A History of Sexology," 183-184.

[27] Robert Beachy, "The German Invention of Homosexuality," *The Journal of Modern History* 82.4 (2010), 804.

psychiatry and in the 1890s it began to become more prominent in Britain, especially with the work of Havelock Ellis. There were national differences in the motivation and reception of sexology that were largely contingent on whether sex between men was criminalised. In Germany, Austria, and Britain sexology was used as a justification for decriminalization, while in France sexological writings tended to be more conservative since homosexuality was not illegal in France.[28] Austrian lawyer and classicist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs played an important role in its emergence. Ulrich's aim was to argue that sex between men should be decriminalized because homosexuality was not a crime but an inborn trait.[29] Ulrichs' ideas of a masculine outer self and a feminine soul helped to inspire the notion of sexual inversion prominent in sexology. [30]

Prominent German sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing viewed homosexuality as a mental disorder and thus saw it as neither immoral nor criminal but as a sickness in need of medical treatment. Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* became a crucial work in defining inversion. How did Krafft-Ebing write about female sexuality? In reference to female sexuality, Krafft-Ebing believed that women were passive in nature and less likely to pursue the object of their desires. He explained, "If [a woman] is normally developed mentally, and well bred, her sexual desire is small. If this were not so the whole world would be a brothel and marriage and a family impossible."[31] However, Krafft-Ebing believed that women had a greater need of love than men did though he clarified that this love was "rather more spiritual than sensual." He thought that this was strength in comparison to men's active and potent sex drives. He also

[28] Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature*, 57- 58.
[29] Bauer, *English Literary* Sexology, 4.
[30] Anna Clark, *Desire: A History of European Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 2019), 161; Beachy, "The German Invention of Homosexuality," 815.
[31] This demonstrates a class dimension, as it implies that Krafft-Ebing believed that working class women of poor breeding were licentious.

believed that women naturally preferred monogamy, and desired protection for themselves and their children alongside sexual pleasure in marriage.[32]

In the case of acquired homosexuality, Krafft-Ebing argued that especially for women, "fear of the result of coitus (pregnancy), or abhorrence of men, by reason of mental or moral reason, may direct into perverse channels an instinct that makes itself felt with abnormal intensity."[33] Krafft-Ebing associated female inversion with behaviours and sentiments that deviated from social expectations for women. Women could become inverts if they did not want to marry and reproduce, or if they found themselves in a situation without the company of men.

Krafft-Ebing considered rejection of traditional female behavioral patterns, from tomboyishness to an interest in science, to smoking, as symptoms of inversion in the same way as homosexuality. Describing the female invert, Krafft-Ebing wrote that

> The female urning, even when a little girl, presents the reverse. Her favourite place is the play-ground of boys. She seeks to rival them in their games. The girl will have nothing to do with dolls; her passion is for playing horse, soldier, and robber. For female employments there is manifested not merely a lack of taste, but often unskillfulness in them. The *toilette* is neglected, and pleasure found in a coarse, boyish life. Instead of an inclination for the arts, there is manifested an inclination and taste for the sciences. Occasionally there may be attempts to smoke and drink. Perfumes and cosmetics are abhorred. The consciousness of having been born a woman, and therefore, of being compelled to renounce the University, with its gay life, and the army, induces painful reflections. In the inclination of the amazon for manly sports, the masculine soul in the female bosom manifests itself; and not less in the show of courage and manly feeling. The female urning loves to wear her hair and have her clothing in the fashion of men; and it is her greatest pleasure, when opportunity offers, to appear in male attire.[34]

Female inverts had masculine souls and they rejected feminine characteristics, clothing, and habits to adopt stereotypical male ones. To be an invert was not only to desire the same sex, but

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[32] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychipathia Sexualis, Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Legal Study* trans. Charles Gilbert Chaddock (London: F.J. Rebman, 1894), 13, 14, 14-15. Krafft-Ebing believed that because women were more inclined towards monogamy and men more inclined to polygamy, and because society demanded chastity of unmarried women, that infidelity should be punished more harshly for women than men.
[33] *Ibid*, 189.
[34] *Ibid*, 279-280.

it was also to adopt the interests and behaviours thought characteristic of the opposite sex. Historian Rebecca Jennings observed that the masculinity of female inverts helped sexologists navigate female inversion while taking the popular perception of female sexual passivity into account.[35]

Sexologists argued that sapphic women were masculine, and hence had a sexual nature that was like men.[36] Sexologists found it easier to reconcile popular and medical perceptions of womanhood with female homosexuality once they linked sapphic women with masculine natures, behaviours, and physiology.

In Britain, sexologists blamed the rising feminist movement at least in part for the spread of inversion. Scholar Heike Bauer claimed that the New Woman was "conceptualized as an 'invert' because she deliberately turned on their head traditional gender norms by laying claim to 'mannish' pursuits such as literary endeavour, trouser-wearing, and smoking."[37] Inversion did not only apply to homosexuality, but to behaviour that did not conform to one's gender role.

In addition, feminism caused anxieties not only because it brought with it a rethinking of gender roles, but also because it could contribute to a decline and especially to a drop in the birth rate. The English birth rate declined after 1881.[38] That not only meant fewer white babies, but if one believed evolutionary theory, it would impede natural selection and halt progression, leading the British "race" to regress. Against this backdrop, women who did not marry and breed, or were otherwise unconventional, were cast as undermining Britain's racial superiority.[39] Scholar Lisa Carstens noted that suffragettes and female inverts were often discussed in association with

[35] Rebecca Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Women Since 1500* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007), 77.
[36] *Ibid*, 77.
[37] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 2.
[38] Carstens, "Unbecoming Women," 66.
[39] McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 42.

each other in medical discourses and many thinkers believed that the suffragette movement was rife with inverts.[40]

There was scant British writing about sexology until Havelock Ellis' *Sexual Inversion* was published in 1897.[41] British psychiatrists did not ignore homosexuality, but they pursued the subject with interest while being careful to avoid condoning it and being respectful of the anti-sodomy and gross indecency legislation.[42] Psychiatrists were not the only medical professionals to take an interest in homosexuality. According to Chiara Beccalossi gynecologists might have had more to say about female homosexuality than psychiatrists. Gynecologists linked female same-sex desire to abnormal genitalia such as an enlarged clitoris.[43] These British psychiatrists, gynecologists, and other medical professionals may have been unsophisticated, but they helped form a foundation for the first in depth exploration of sexology in Britain that was published at the end of the century.

Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds published *Sexual Inversion*, the first extensive British work on sexology, in 1897. However, the road to publication was fraught with obstacles. The text ran into trouble when a bookseller called George Bedborough sold it to a policeman, but any customer could have reported it as a violation of Britain's 1857 Obscene Publications Act that outlawed obscene literary publications and empowered police to search locations where obscene material was sold. After Bedborough was arrested and convicted of selling obscene material, *Sexual Inversion* was banned from England and it was published in

[40] Carstens, "Unbecoming Women," 80.
[41] Robb, *Strangers*, 52.
[42] Ivan Crozier, "Nineteenth-Century British Psychiatric Writings about Homosexuality before Havelock Ellis: The Missing Story," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 63.1 (2008), 93.
[43] Chiara Beccalossi, "Female Same-Sex Desires: Conceptualizing a Disease in Competing Medical Fields in Nineteenth-century Europe," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 67.1 (2012), 20-21.

America instead.[44] The tensions surrounding the text may have been exacerbated by *Sexual Inversion's* publication a mere two years after the publicized trials of Oscar Wilde.[45] The book's many misadventures show how difficult it was to disseminate scientific material about sexuality, as such material easily ran against obscenity laws.

Though Ellis largely focused on male sexual inversion, he devoted a chapter to the female invert. He believed that inversion was as common in women as it was in men. This was a clear disagreement with Krafft-Ebing's belief that inversion was less common in women than in men. Rather, Ellis argued that one lacked knowledge about female sexual inversion. Ellis attributed this to male indifference to female sexual inversion, the difficulty in detecting it and differentiating it from the common intimacy between female friends, and women's difficulty in recognizing sexual desire. Turning to the female invert herself, Ellis wrote, "the chief characteristic of the sexually inverted woman is a certain degree of masculinity." That masculinity may be present in her desire to pursue other women and in her lack of interest in men. He believed that female inverts preferred to wear masculine clothing. Or they might act in masculine ways. Female inverts tended to smoke, be athletic, and dislike traditional feminine work such as sewing or housework. Like Krafft-Ebing, Ellis lumped together tomboys, cross dressers, transgender people, and those attracted to their own sex.[46]

To what extent did sexology influence popular culture in Britain? Most sexologists wrote for an expert audience of other psychiatrists and other officials. Jennings noted that sexology's influence on popular culture was limited. Sexology was a marginal field within psychiatry, and many sexological works were published privately or with limited editions, making them

[44] Bauer, *English Literary Sexology*, 57-58. This was the law under which Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* was prosecuted in 1928 for containing content about female homosexuality.
[45] Charles Upchurch, *Before Wilde: Sex Between Men in Britain's Age of Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 201.

unavailable to the public. Furthermore, there was concern that sexological works might tempt individuals to act immorally and therefore they were often censored.[47]

In short, sexology was not widely available nor was it given enough recognition to have a significant influence on 19th century British culture and thought. Hence, sexology could not have influenced the way sapphic women thought about themselves. Nor can sexology shed light on the way sapphic women conducted relationships and how they wrote about them in diaries or autobiographies. Instead, sapphic women explored their relationships with women through code and metaphors that documented the significance of their lovers while keeping it discreet from prying eyes of family or the public.

3. **Sapphic relationships: sapphic lifewriting and female marriage**

Historian Lillian Faderman categorized intimate female relationships in the 18th- and 19th centuries as "romantic friendships." Faderman believed that these relationships were idealized and could be publicly acknowledged, and the women who engaged in romantic friendships never considered them sexual.[48] Historians have since begun to contest Faderman's argument. Martha Vicinus asserted that same-sex relationships between women could be categorized as "sensual romantic friendship" or "sexual Sapphism." While Vicinus did not refute the concept of romantic friendships, she did argue that sexual relationships between women did exist.[49] Sharon Marcus agreed with Vicinus that many romantic friendships that Faderman discussed could in fact have been sexual. However, unlike Vicinus, she believed that marriage was not simply a metaphor for sapphic women. Rather, she argued that lesbian couples such as Frances Power Cobbe and Mary Lloyd shared a form of marriage. Marcus also disputed Vicinus' framing of sapphic women as a

[46] Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1901), 118, 121, 140, 134, 140-141, 143.
[47] Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain*, 85.
[48] Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 16.

repressed minority, arguing that this view led historians to miss the way that these women were able to engage in relationships without raising public ire. Branching off from both Faderman and Vicinus, Marcus argued that Victorian women had relationships with each other that, while not legal, were a form of marriage and did not threaten heterosexual unions.[50]

The diaries of Anne Lister illustrated how sexual encounters between women had to be kept secret. Lister's diaries revealed that relationships between women could indeed be sexual and that the women who partook in those relationships could articulate a sense of identity. Lister belonged to an upper-class family in Yorkshire and was an heiress. Lister recorded her romantic and erotic relationships with other women in coded language based on the Greek alphabet.[51] Lister was not representative of the majority of sapphic women in 19th century England. She was upper class and had an education that enabled her to create a code based on a Classical language. Nevertheless, Lister's diary provided an insight on how a sapphic woman could view herself, her desires, and her relationships. While working class women must have formed romantic relationships with each other, they did not produce written records of those relationships. Therefore, the bulk of the contemporary evidence for sapphic relationships comes from upper- and middle-class women like Lister.

In 1816, Lister described amorous encounters with her peer Anne Belcombe. She wrote that she was "teasing & behaving rather amorously to her. She would gladly have got into bed or done anything of the loving kind I asked her." Lister knew that such behaviour was "amorous," and her language to describe the encounter is suggestive of erotic behaviour. The next night, Lister described the conflict over the feelings Belcombe aroused in her. She recorded,

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[49] Vicinus, *Intimate Friend,* xvii, xvii-xix.
[50] Marcus, *Between Women*, 19-20, 11, 13, 157-158.
[51] Anna Clark, "Anne Lister's Construction of Lesbian Identity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7.1 (1996), 23, 27.

> Anne sat by my bedside till 2. I talked about the feelings towards which she gave rise. Lamented my fate. Said I should never marry. Could not like men. Ought not to like women. At the same time apologizing for my inclination that way. By diverse arguments made out a pitiable story altogether & roused poor Anne's sympathy to tears.[52]

Lister was aware that she had "inclinations" towards women and that she "could not like men." She was conflicted over these feelings and felt that her attraction to women was not acceptable, and she communicated those feelings to Belcombe who was moved by her emotional turmoil. Lister elsewhere noted that she had a "penchant for ladies." [53] Lister recorded these suggestive encounters and her frank discussion of her attraction to women in code. She hid this aspect of her life from anyone that may have found and read her diary, but she was well aware of her own inclinations.

Lister was not necessarily representative of all sapphic women, but her diaries demonstrated that British women could form romantic and erotic relationships with each other that they knew were deeper than friendship. They could also form intimate partnerships that they thought of as marriages and were often socially recognized by their friends. Sharon Marcus wrote, "Women in female marriages created relationships that, like legal marriages, did the work assigned to sexuality in the nineteenth century: the management of shared households, the transmission of property, the expression of emotional and religious affect, and the development and care of the self."[54] If a relationship between women had aspects of these categories, then they could be understood to resemble a marriage even without explicit evidence of a sexual relationship. A community of sapphic women who took part in such relationships began to form

[52] Anne Lister, *The Secret Diaries of Miss Anne Lister* ed. Helena Whitbread (London: Virago Press, 2010), 1, 2.
[53] *Ibid*, 2, 3.

[54] Marcus, *Between Women*, 157.

in Italy in the mid-Victorian period that shed light on how these relationships formed and how they were hidden or kept covert.

In her autobiography *The Life of Frances Power Cobbe,* journalist and feminist Francis Power Cobbe provided a description of this artistic community that included sapphic women that formed in the mid 19th century. Cobbe was a critic of marriage, and she advocated for women to have greater property rights, access to education and work, the right to vote, and be able to separate from abusive husbands.[55] This community that she belonged to consisted of prominent and respectable British and American women who were artists, actresses, sculptors, and writers. These British and American women formed a community based on their shared professional interests, shared desires, and shared politics (many, like Cobbe, supported the feminist movement). [56]

There was a reason that these British and American women sought to form a community in Rome. Vicinus observed that "On foreign soil these women could safely do many things that would have shocked the sensibilities of a narrow New England village or a small British town." Rome allowed them to escape from the judgement that they might have faced at home. There was still a need to be discreet, which they did by emphasizing their dedication to their careers and their commitment to celibacy. That hinged on a "carefully constructed asexuality…discretion was essential for maintaining respectability." Claiming celibacy or emphasizing a dedication to their art appears to have allowed those women to challenge gender

[55] Susan Hamilton, *Francis Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1. Hamilton observed that Cobbe played a critical role "in the passage of the 1878 Matrimonial Causes Act, which made domestic violence grounds for legal separation." Cobbe also advocated against the exploitation of animals (1).
[56] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends,* 33, 34.

norms, remain unmarried, and carry out relationships and affairs with other women without attracting too much negative attention.[57]

It was among this community in Rome that Cobbe first met her life partner Mary Lloyd. She described how American actress Charlotte Cushman introduced her to her Welsh friend Mary Lloyd:

> We happily found Miss Lloyd busy in her sculptor's studio over a model of her Arab horse and on hearing that I was anxious to ride, she kindly offered to mount me if I would join her in her rides on the campagna. Then began an acquaintance, which was further improved two years later when Miss Lloyd came to meet and help me when I was a cripple at Aix-les Bains; and from that time, now more than thirty years ago, she and I have lived together. Of a friendship like this, which has been to my later life what my mother's affection was to my youth, I shall not be expected to say more.[58]

This passage reveals the depth of Cobbe's relationship with Lloyd without detailing the nature of their relationship. Cobbe carefully worded her description of her relationship with Lloyd to confine it to the realm of 'friendship' and to an intimacy akin to that of a mother and daughter. To the unaware reader, Cobbe relegated her lifelong relationship with Lloyd to that of close friendship. Given that close friendships between women were then common, many contemporary readers may not have thought Cobbe and Lloyd's relationship to be suspicious. They may have had qualms about Cobbe's work as a journalist, her criticisms of the lack of women's property rights, and her support for women's franchise and found them more alarming than her personal friendships. Social disapproval may not have been the sole factor in Cobbe's attempts to hide the romantic nature of her and Lloyd's relationship. She may have desired to protect her own privacy from curious readers. Cobbe desired her autobiography to be a commentary on the lives of women in the 19th century. She wrote that through writing her autobiography

[57] *Ibid*, 31.
[58] Francis Power Cobbe, *The Life of Francis Power Cobbe* vol 2 (Boston: Houghton, 1894), 359.

> I have tried to make it the true and complete history of a woman's existence *as seen from within*; a real LIFE, which he who reads may take as representing fairly the joys, sorrows, and interests, the powers and limitations, of one of my sex and class in the era which is now drawing to a close.[59]

Cobbe's aim was to provide an insight into the life of a middle-class British woman in the 19th century. She often used her autobiography to promote her political aims, whether those were criticizing the lack of women's property rights in Britain or calling for marriage reform. Keeping her relationship with Lloyd discreet aided her to maintain the political objectives behind her autobiography. However, she did not wholly deny or hide the romance between her and Lloyd. Cobbe used metaphor familiar to sapphic women to selectively reveal the nature of her and Lloyd's relationship to them while hiding it from a wider unaware audience.

Cobbe's reticence to provide more details about her life with Lloyd was not a wholesale denial. Cobbe's discretion also served as a confession. In refusing to "say more" about her relationship with Lloyd, Cobbe showed her readers how important Lloyd was to her. Marcus noted that while the Victorians understood the word "friend" to mean a companion with whom one enjoyed a non-sexual relationship, the word could also take on a euphemistic meaning that hinted at something more.[60] The context of Cobbe's use of 'friendship' regarding Lloyd suggests that she meant it to be a euphemism, especially considering the other metaphorical language she used. In comparing Lloyd to her mother, Cobbe invoked a metaphor that Victorian sapphic women often used to describe their relationships with other women. For example, Victorian journalist Edith Simcox often called novelist George Eliot (Mary Anne Evans), for whom she had unrequited feelings, her mother. Eliot in turn often called Simcox a child. Composer Ethel

[59] Frances Power Cobbe *The Life of Francis Power Cobbe* vol 1 (Boston: Houghton, 1894), iv.
[60] Marcus, *Between Women*, 32.

Smyth dated older women whom she described as mother figures.[61] The figure of the mother, therefore, provided a metaphor for sapphic women to express their feelings towards their partners.

Metaphor was a useful tool for sapphic women. As Vicinus observed, "Neither a pornographic, nor a scientific vocabulary provided women with the language of love, so nineteenth-century educated women fashioned their sexual selves through metaphor."[62] Sapphic women often used the metaphor of marriage to describe their relationships. Marcus observed that Cobbe often called Lloyd her husband or wife in private correspondence.[63] The metaphor of marriage, however, could be too revealing for a public audience. As Vicinus wrote, "a respectable female couple could be 'married' in the eyes of the public only if no one looked too closely at either one or both. When people did so, they saw one woman aping the role of the man and the other sadly denied children."[64] Using the marriage metaphor was risky in a text written for publication. Sapphic women therefore resorted to another metaphor: that of mother and daughter as Cobbe did in her autobiography.

Vicinus wrote that the mother-daughter metaphor was more commonly used than that of a marriage since "it seemed safer than the obvious eroticism of a figurative marriage." It was also a metaphor that implied that the relationship was temporary, and pedagogical.[65] Cobbe did not use the mother-daughter metaphor directly. Instead, she likened Lloyd's significance to her life to that of her mother's significance when she was younger. Cobbe and Lloyd's relationship lasted for thirty years and there was no significant age gap between them. Nevertheless, Cobbe used metaphorical language that the sapphic reader could have understood. While Cobbe may

[61] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, xxvii, 121, 122, 126.
[62] *Ibid*, xxv.
[63] Marcus, *Between Women*, 11.
[64] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, xxvii.

have used the metaphor of marriage to describe her relationship with Lloyd to her friends in private correspondence, she was careful to use metaphorical language in her published work, language that only those who knew the code could understand.

The writings of Anne Lister and Francis Power Cobbe illustrate that there was a possibility for sapphic women to explore their same-sex desires. In her private diary, Lister was able to articulate her attraction for women, and she recorded anecdotes of her expressing them to the women that she shared relationships with. Cobbe's published autobiography demonstrated that women could have long lasting relationships with each other and communicate with others through metaphor and code. However, they also needed to be discreet and guard their relationships from the public or even accidental discoveries. When Lister employed a code based on ancient Greek, she protected herself from any prying eyes of her family during her life and after her death. Cobbe related her relationship with Lloyd in passing using metaphoric language to prevent an unknowing and possibly disapproving public from guessing the truth of their romance. Sapphic women were also aided by the belief that women were passive and had little if any sexual desire. Since many Victorians were unsure of how women could have sex with each other, it was possible to present an intimate relationship between women as purely platonic or familial. While women may not have been able to live publicly as women who desired other women, they were able to craft metaphorical explanations of their relationships and use common perceptions of femininity to hide their relationships.

Conclusion

Female homosexuality is difficult to locate in Victorian British society for numerous reasons. It was ignored by anti-sodomy legislation and most sexological works focused on the

[65] *Ibid*, xxvii, xxvii-xxviii.

male invert. Written records from sapphic women were scarce and mostly confined to the upper- and middle-class women like Anne Lister and Frances Power Cobbe, and they either recorded their feelings privately in code based on a dead language or only briefly mentioned their partner. The confusion over how two women could engage in sexual activities with each other and whether British women could desire each other was also a contributing factor in preventing legislation against female homosexuality. Sexologists gave the female invert a masculine soul, character, and role to explain her pursuit and sexual feelings towards other women. Sapphic women were careful to keep their sexual feelings discrete and they often used celibacy to explain their refusal to marry. The notion that women did not have active sexual desires also helped long-term romantic relationships escape detection, even when those women cohabited and did not enter into heterosexual monogamous marriages. The hesitation that many of the British had in discussing homosexuality also aided in keeping sapphic relationships under the radar.

Despite this, in the second half of the 19th century anxieties about unmarried, surplus, feminist and other unconventional women began to rise as the separate sphere ideology increasingly came under challenge. Sapphic women were unconventional; they were associated with masculinity, and with the feminist movement. Same-sex relationships could be a reason that women did not marry. These anxieties about unconventional women were reflected in novels, as novelists explored the struggles of and dangers of women who could not marry, did not want to marry, became feminist, or were sexually deviant.

Chapter 3

The Conventional Woman: The Importance of Marriage and the Consequences of being Unconventional in Victorian British Literature, 1850-1901.

Novelists often depicted conventional marriage and motherhood as the best, and often only, source of happiness for women. They also followed consistent narratives regarding unconventional women. In the first, a woman was tempted to stray from conventionality but overcame it and in the end typically became a wife and mother. In the second, the unconventional woman met a tragic end. These two types of narratives remained constant during the second half of the 19th century, but the temptations female characters faced shifted over time. Before the mid 1860s, female characters were tempted to stray from marriage or betray their husbands; they had pre-marital sex, committed bigamy, or left their husbands. After the mid-1860s, as women were gaining access to education, occupations, and control over their income and property, female characters were also tempted away from the conventional path by the desire for an occupation or because they became feminists. Novelists were aware that an increasing number of women might be unable to marry or convinced to embrace feminist activism and choose not to get married, and sought to reinforce that marriage was the best, and often only, source of happiness for women. These narratives were not the only way 19th century fiction treated unmarried and deviant women, as we shall see in future chapters, but they were the one typically found in the most widely read novels.

1. Conventional marriage and motherhood

The marriage plot, in which a young woman and man met and eventually married, was one of the most common narratives in Victorian fiction.[1] Many of these narratives revolved around a

[1]Popular Victorian novels that used the marriage plot include Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley: A Tale* (1849), Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859), Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), *Great Expectations* (1860-

young woman's quest for a suitable husband and her overcoming the obstacles that threatened to prevent her from doing so. The Victorian period inherited these plots from the 18th century.[2] Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) was a typical example of the plot; Elizabeth Bennet needed to find a husband to escape poverty. In the process she rejected a proposal from one she could not even respect and became briefly infatuated with a deceptive officer. Finally, she realised that she was in love with the man she once detested after he rescued her family from scandal. This type of narrative remained popular throughout the Victorian period, and it consistently presented marriage as the only source of happiness for women.

One of the most well known and influential examples of this narrative in the early Victorian era was Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* (1847). Charlotte Bronte was at the time a popular novelist. She married, after having worked as a teacher and a governess.[3] In short, her life was fairly conventional for a middle-class woman of slender means. Her heroine, Jane Eyre, resisted temptation before she was allowed a happy ending. At the beginning of the novel, Jane was an orphan sent away to school. After graduating, she became a governess for Mr Rochester's ward. Jane and Mr. Rochester fell in love, but their wedding was interrupted when a lawyer announced it could not proceed because Mr. Rochester was already married. The latter revealed that he had locked his "mad" wife, Bertha Mason, in the attic and kept her existence secret. Bertha hailed from the West Indies, the daughter of an Englishman and a Creole mother from whom she inherited her madness. Jane refused to stay with Mr. Rochester, having decided to follow her principles and not live in sin with a married man. She insisted that she would "keep the

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1861), Thomas Hardy's *Desperate Remedies* (1871), *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), Anthony Trollope's *Lady Anna* (1873-1874), George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), and many more. The marriage plot was a very common narrative that was used by most Victorian novelists, including the most popular such as Eliot, Dickens, and Hardy.

[2] Lisa O'Connell, *The Origins of the English Marriage Plot: Literature, Politics, and Religion in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3. O'Connell argued that the marriage plot became popular in English fiction sometime between 1740 and 1770 (3).

law given by God, sanctioned by man."[4] Jane accepted the situation with grace. She taught in a rural school till her uncle died and left her a significant legacy. When she decided to see Mr. Rochester once again, she learned that Bertha had burned down his home. Mr. Rochester had been blinded while unsuccessfully trying to rescue her. Despite his infirmity, Jane was happy to return to him and marry him now that his wife was dead and their union no longer bigamous. The novel ended with Jane as a wife and mother, happily taking care of her husband and children.

Jane embodied many of the virtues for which Victorians praised conventional English women. Her cousin, a minister, described her as "docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constant, and courageous; very gentle and very heroic."[5] She was faithful to her principles, choosing to leave Mr. Rochester rather than live in sin even if that meant abandoning the man she loved and risking poverty. Bronte compared Jane to Bertha, who served as her foil. Mr. Rochester compared the two of them, "Look at the difference! Compare these clear eyes with the red balls yonder-this face with that mask-this form with that bulk; then judge me."[6] The comparison between the demonic Bertha and the plain, English Jane emphasized Jane's virtues and beauty. As for Bertha, she was the mad wife from the colonies who burned down Mr. Rochester's home, making the brief presence of Empire in the novel a menacing and destructive one. Jane however was not entirely conventional. She was depicted as independent, and she rejected her cousin's offer to marry him and go and do missionary work in India with him. Had Bertha not died, Jane would have remained unmarried and continued to teach lower-class children, instead of becoming a conventional wife and mother.

This type of narrative remained popular throughout the Victorian period, but it faced increasing challenges as the surplus women problem and the feminist movement brought

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[3] Ingham, *The Brontes (Authors in Context)*, 13-14, 34-35.
[4]Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* 2nd edition ed. Beth Newman (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2015. Originally published in 1847 by Smith, Elder & Co of London), 311.

increasing awareness of women who could not or did not want to marry. This led novelists to increasingly depict unconventional women. This included unmarried women and women who, unlike Jane, were tempted to stray from their principles. Since novelists often depicted marriage and motherhood as the only source of happiness for women, unconventionality tended to end one of two ways: the women renounced their unconventionality and married, or they came to tragic ends.

2. Temptations to resist conventionality

The separate sphere ideology was beginning to be challenged in the second half of the 19th century. Reflecting those changes, novelists begun in the mid 1860s to include feminist activism as a temptation that led women away from conventionality. This became more pervasive in novels published after 1870.

Novelist George Eliot (Mary Anne Evans) was one of the most prolific and popular writers in the middle Victorian period. Eliot's personal life was unconventional; she had a romantic relationship with philosopher George Henry Lewess who was a married man. In 1854, she began to call herself Mrs. George Henry Lewess despite not being married to him.[7] Nonetheless, Eliot was not an active feminist because she disliked being involved in controversial or legislative issues. Eliot often refused to speak about women's rights, even when she was directly asked about it.[8] Yet, as one of the most prominent authors in Victorian Britain, her representation of women's lives and her thoughts about marriage were far reaching.

In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Eliot told the story of an unconventional heroine who was intelligent, masculine, and sympathetic. As a child, Maggie Tulliver showed signs of cleverness.

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[5] *Ibid*, 391.
[6] *Ibid*, 289.
[7] McCormack, "George Eliot and George Henry Lewess: Respectable Adultery and Anonymous Celebrity," 203.

She had an aptitude for reading, math, and Classics. Despite this, it was her brother Tom who received an education in these subjects even though he often struggled academically. As a child, Maggie expressed a desire to be a "clever woman."[9] She wanted to be independent and to be able to support herself and expressed envy for Tom who was a man who "had power" and could "do something in the world."[10] While Tom struggled to understand mathematics, Maggie showed an aptitude for both math and reading. However, instead of being able to "do something in the world," Maggie became trapped in a conflict between two suitors.[11] Philip, who was one of these suitors, had a hunched back and was the son of an enemy family. Philip was enthralled with Maggie, but the enmity between their families and his disability made him unacceptable in Tom's eyes. Maggie's feelings for him were more sisterly than romantic.

She was more attracted to her other suitor Stephen. Stephen was falling in love with her, but he was courting her friend Lucy at the time. Towards the end of the novel, Lucy, Philip, Maggie, and Stephen went rowing. Maggie and Stephen shared a rowing boat and missed their landing. They took a passenger boat to the nearest town, which meant that they ended up spending the night on it together. Knowing that the townspeople would gossip about an unmarried man and unmarried woman being on a boat after nightfall, away from their friends, Stephen proposed marriage. Maggie refused because she knew Philip still had feelings for her and Lucy also had feelings for Stephen and did not want to hurt either of them. Word quickly spread about what the two of them had done. Tom believed that she had disgraced the Tulliver family and cast her out as a consequence. The rest of the town was quick to judge and accused Maggie of having displayed

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[8]June Skye Szirotny, "Why George Eliot was not a political activist," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13.3 (2012), 184-185.
[9] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* ed. Carol T. Christ (London: W. W. Norton Company, 1994. Originally published in 1860), 122.
[10] *Ibid,* 282.
[11] *Ibid,* 282.

"unwomanly boldness and unbridled passion."[12] At the end of the novel, the river flooded during a storm and Maggie set out in a rowboat to rescue Tom from their mill. The two of them then attempted to rescue Lucy and her family but their boat sunk, and they both drowned.

Eliot's narrative was deeply pessimistic. Maggie was clever, but she did not have access to education. Her opportunities were therefore limited, and she was dependent on the good will of her family, particularly on Tom. When he cast her out, she depended on a sympathetic minister to provide her with employment and lodging. However, Maggie could not escape the judgement of her brother and the townsfolk. Though it was Stephen's fault that they spent the night on the boat together, and though nothing unsavory occurred and Maggie rejected Stephen out of consideration for Philip and Lucy, she was condemned. The novel ends with her death. Though Maggie was an appealing character, she could not escape a tragic end. *The Mill of the Floss* ultimately painted a dismal picture of the possibilities open for unconventional women.

In the 1860s, sensation novels became popular.[13] Unconventional women's punishment was an important aspect of sensation novels. A character straying from convention would result in dreadful consequences for her and those near her and a restoration of order for everyone else. The implication was that conventions were to be adhered to; doing otherwise would result in tragedy. Two popular sensation novels published in the first two years of the 1860s, Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) were such cautionary tales, but in different ways.

Ellen Wood (who published under her husband's name as Mrs. Henry Wood) was a prolific writer. While her writing was sensationalist and included subjects such as bigamy, scholar Beth Palmer observed that Wood presented herself as a traditional domestic wife in an attempt to

[12] *Ibid*, 397.
[13] Lynn Pykett, *The Nineteenth Century Sensation Novel* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2011), 1.

distance herself from critique. As Palmer noted, she "cultivated a staid and domestic reputation." Furthermore, Wood positioned her work between the discourses of "sensationalism and pious Christianity."[14] This was evident in *East Lynne* which explored bigamy, violence, and murder while it often sermonized about the virtues of the ideal wife and the consequences of transgressing God's commandments. The main female character, Lady Isabel, was introduced as an "angel of the house." When the main male character, Mr. Carlyle saw her, he was "not quite sure whether it was a human being: he almost thought it more like an angel."[15] After Lady Isabel's father died, Mr. Carlyle proposed marriage. Wood described Mr. Carlyle as the ideal husband: he was honourable, loving, and respected. However, Lady Isabel succumbed to jealousy, convinced that he was having an affair with his friend Barbara Hare. When her jealousy became uncontrollable, Lady Isabel left with another man, Captain Frank Levison, to whom she was attracted; unaware that he was a murderer. Lady Isabel eventually realised that the character of the man with whom she had run away was unsavoury and he refused to marry her when she became pregnant with his child. She bore his illegitimate child, but it was killed in a train accident that also burned and disabled her.

Presumed dead after the accident, Lady Isabel took a new name and worked as a governess. She eventually became the governess of her own children (Wood somewhat dubiously explained that her former husband not recognising her due to her coloured spectacles and use of shawls to cover her face). Living in her old household as a governess, Lady Isabel was forced to watch Mr. Carlyle's wedded bliss with his new wife Barbara. Eventually, the grief became too much and she died of illness after confessing her identity.

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[14] Palmer, *Women's Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture*, 83. Wood cultivating a domestic reputation differed markedly from other sensational novelists, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins, who both had extramarital affairs.

[15] Ellen Wood, *East Lynne* ed. Andrew Maunder (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000. Originally published in 1861), 49.

Wood punished Lady Isabel severely for abandoning her husband and children. She lost her identity and was forced to watch her former husband happily married and could not be the mother of her children. Instead, she witnessed the domestic happiness that she had abandoned. While Wood was sympathetic towards Lady Isabel's suffering, she depicted it as something she rightfully deserved when she left her marriage. It was also a warning to female readers not to follow Lady Isabel's footsteps. The morning after Lady Isabel ran away, she awoke feeling the consequences of her actions. She did not yet know that her suspicion of her husband's infidelity was false, but she felt the gravity of her decision to leave her marriage and her children. Describing her anguish, Wood addressed the reader:

> Oh, reader, believe me! Lady-wife-mother! Should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you awake. Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, though they may magnify themselves to your crushed spirit as beyond the nature, the endurance of woman to bear, *resolve* to bear them; fall down upon your knees, and pray to be enabled to bear them-pray for patience-pray for strength to resist the demon that would tempt you to escape; bear unto death, rather than forfeit your fair name and your good conscience; for be assured that the alternative, if you do rush into it, will be found worse than death.[16]

Lady Isabel could not be forgiven for abandoning her family, and the consequences of her decision subjected her to a life of misery. In contrast, Mr. Carlyle's new wife Barbara was faithful and dedicated to him. The novel ends with Barbara and Mr. Carlyle vowing to live happily together. Wood was however sympathetic to an unmarried woman. Mr. Carlyle's unmarried sister, Cornelia, lived with Lady Isabel and Mr. Carlyle during their marriage. Cornelia excelled at managing households and therefore took charge of the domestic tasks that should have been Lady Isabel's. While it was not atypical for unmarried women to manage their brother's households, her presence prevented Lady Isabel from adjusting to her domestic duties. Cornelia was also overly concerned with saving money and denied Lady Isabel's reasonable requests to buy dresses and other items

[16]*Ibid*, 334.

that she deemed too expensive or frivolous. Mr. Carlyle feared that this was a factor that led Lady Isabel to leave, and he asked Cornelia to move out before he married Barbara. She later apologised to Lady Isabel for not making her more welcome and letting her have more influence over domestic matters. Cornelia was a sympathetic character, but one who was a hindrance for most of the novel. Wood argued that the happiest outcome for a woman was to get married, and once married to remain loyal to their husbands. To do otherwise would lead to a life of regret and misery.

Similarly, in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), Mary Elizabeth Braddon presented what appeared to be an ideal beautiful wife, who in fact hid sinister secrets: madness, bigamy, and attempted murder. Braddon was familiar with bigamy and madness, as her personal life was highly unconventional. In 1861, the year before *Lady Audley's Secret* was published, Braddon moved in with Irish periodical publisher John Maxwell, who was married to Mary Ann Crowley. Maxwell and Crowley had seven children, but Crowley had begun to show signs of "puerperal insanity" and Maxwell sent her to live in a lunatic asylum in Dublin. Braddon and Maxwell claimed to be married which caused scandal when Crowley's brother-in-law Richard Brinsley Knowles revealed to the public that Crowley was still alive. Braddon and Maxwell married after Crowley's death in 1874.[17] There was a remarkable similarity between Braddon's life and the plot of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, except Jane refused to live with the already married Mr. Rochester and Braddon took the opposite decision and chose to live with her married partner. Similarly, Bertha's brother revealed that Mr. Rochester's wife was still alive, just like Crowley's brother-in-law did.

Lady Audley's Secret was however more than a cautionary tale against bigamy; it was also a critique of the marriage market. The novel began when George Talboys returned to England after

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[17]Tomaiuolo, *In Lady Audley's Shadow,* 11.

years spent abroad prospecting for gold. He then learned that his wife, Helen, had died. When he accompanied his friend, Barrister Robert Audley, to visit his relative Sir Michael Audley, however, he discovered that Helen had changed her name to Lucy and married Sir Michael under false pretenses. Soon after, George disappeared. Robert did not believe that George would willingly vanish without a trace, and he began to investigate. He became suspicious of Lucy, and these suspicions were confirmed when he found a notebook belonging to Helen, with handwriting that matched Lucy's. He finished his investigation and exposed Lucy to Sir Michael as a bigamist and George's presumed murderer. In the aftermath, Lucy was sent to a Nursing home in Belgium where she fell ill and died. The rest of the characters had happy endings: George resurfaced, having survived Lucy's murder attempt, and Robert married Goerge's sister Clara.

Braddon explained Helen/Lucy's actions as those of a "mad woman."[18] Lucy inherited her madness from her mother who had been institutionalized. Many of Lucy's actions were attributed to this madness; her attempt to murder George, her attempt to murder Robert by burning down the building in which he slept (reminiscent of Bertha Mason burning down Mr. Rochester's house), and her duplicity. However, Lucy's actions were also in many ways pragmatic ones in a society in which marriage determined a woman's prospects. Lucy came from a very modest family, and marriage was the only way for her to gain financial security. She explained that

> I had learnt that which in some indefinite manner or other every school-girl learns sooner of later-I learned that my ultimate fate in life depended upon my marriage, and I concluded that if I was indeed prettier than my schoolfellows, I ought to marry better than any of them.[19]

Helen/Lucy's livelihood depended on her ability to secure a husband who was a good provider. Her desire for a wealthy husband was not innate but the result of what she learned while growing

[18] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Originally published in 1862), 294.

up in Victorian society. At first, George Talboys provided her with and the security she desired, but George had a difficult relationship with his father and wanted to live without depending on his father's income though this meant having much less wealth. Therefore, he left to find other means of support and became a gold prospector. Lucy decided that this was too uncertain, took a new name and worked as a governess while he was away. She met Sir Michael, married him, and acquired a higher status and more wealth than George provided. Lucy's desire to marry for money was pragmatic, and marriage was an economic decision for Victorian women. Yet Lucy's desire to be wealthy led her to deceive others, commit bigamy, and attempt murder. She was able to succeed for a short time, until Robert revealed her deception, and she met a tragic end.

While Maggie, Lady Isabel, and Lucy met tragic fates, civil servant and novelist Anthony Trollope presented an unconventional heroine who redeemed herself and found happiness once she married. Trollope was the son of English novelist Frances Milton Trollope. After their family's fortunes plummeted, Frances Milton Trollope supported the family with her writing. Trollope acquired much of his work ethic from her and he modelled his writing schedule after hers as well.[20] From his mother's example, Trollope knew that women could be gifted and financially support a family and that in practice, marriage did not always resemble the ideal of the separate sphere ideology. However, there was a difference between having a literary talent and having other unconventional desires-such as political ambitions.

In *Can You Forgive Her?* (1864-1865) Trollope depicted a heroine caught between two suitors. At the beginning of the novel the heroine, Alice Vavasor, was engaged to John Grey, a morally upright man of whom her family approved. Alice loved John and knew that he was "a man of high character, of good though moderate means; he was, too, well educated, of good birth, a

[19] *Ibid,* 298.

gentleman, and a man of talent."[21] Alice wanted their marriage to resemble a partnership rather than a traditional marriage where she was submissive to John as the male head of the house. John thought otherwise. Alice disliked that John "always spoke and acted as though there could be no question that his manner of life was to be adopted without a word or thought of doubt by his wife. When two came together, why should not each yield something, and each claim something?"[22] Alice had also had a brief romantic, but chaste, relationship with her cousin George Vavasor, with whom she had once almost been engaged. She decided against an engagement because he often treated her rudely and disrespectfully. Whereas John was a gentleman, George was described as "wild."[23] He was heir to his grandfather's small estate. At various times, he had worked as a business partner to a Parliamentary land agent, a wine merchant, and a stockbroker, but also went through periods of unemployment when he lived off his means. He was prone to fits of violence and considered untrustworthy with money because of his reckless spending habits. He was also interested in politics, having unsuccessfully run for Parliament "on the extremely Radical interest."[24] Alice was also interested in politics. Alice "was not so far advanced as to think that women should be lawyers and doctors, or to wish that she might have the franchise for herself, but she had undoubtedly a hankering after some second-hand political manoeuvring."[25] She did not love George, but he offered what John did not: a way to be involved in politics by supporting his career. George was also primarily interested in Alice because she could provide him the money to fund his political campaigns. The relationship, as literary critic Sharon Marcus observed, was of a

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[20] Helen K. Heineman, "Mother and Son: The Writing Trollopes," *The Midwest Quarterly* 57.4 (Summer 2016), 331.
[21] Anthony Trollope, *Can You Forgive Her*? (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982. Originally published 1864-1865), 14.
[22] *Ibid,* 34.
[23] *Ibid,* 20.
[24] *Ibid,* 37.
[25] *Ibid,* 111.

more contractual nature.[26] Alice broke her engagement with John to renew her relationship with George and promised to financially support his political ambitions. George's political ventures ultimately failed, and he broke his sister's arm after he discovered that his grandfather left him out of his will. He travelled to America. John renewed his courtship of Alice and convinced her to marry him again despite her guilt at jilting him.

At the root of Alice's hesitation was the fact she had to choose between two different futures. A marriage to John would be one based on love, but as Marcus noted, it would also be a traditional one in which she would have to play the "angel of the house" and submit to her husband's authority.[27] A marriage to George, on the other hand, would have allowed her to pursue her own political ambitions vicariously. It was acceptable for women to support their husbands, or other close male relatives, in their political careers through networking or stumping for them.[28] Yet Trollope recognised that for some women, marriage might serve as a vehicle for their own ambitions that transcended mere wifely/familial support. In the end, Alice realised that the conventional marriage was the correct choice and Trollope urged his readers to forgive her for her decision to break her engagement. Accordingly, Alice ended the novel with the promise of a happy marriage. Alice gave up the possibility of participating indirectly in political life for a conventional married one.

By the mid 1860s, some women were beginning to want more than a traditional marriage, and some authors began to present feminist demands as threats. Charlotte Yonge was one of the earliest to denounce this new danger. She was a conservative and antifeminist writer who, in *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) explored the lives of "surplus women" living in a seaside town and the ways they responded to their situations. The novel argued that women could not

[26] Marcus, *Between Woman*, 192-193.
[27] *Ibid*,192.

govern themselves without following male advice. The heroine, Rachel Curtis, lived in a seaside town where there were far more women than men. She believed that the best way for those women to solve their predicament was to gain an education and enter the workforce, including occupations that were not traditionally feminine. Rachel was also an activist, who tried to convert other women to her beliefs. Her ambition was what Yonge portrayed as dangerous. Rachel had grown up in a house without a father or any brothers, therefore free of male authority. Her mother was timid, her sister was conventional, and they praised her as the "clever woman of the family."[29]

This gave her an unrealistic opinion of her abilities and eventually led her to embrace feminist ideals. While the town trained young girls in lace making, she wanted to teach them skills that would allow them to enter into better paid occupations and allow them to be able to support themselves from their work and not have to depend on a husband for financial security. However, in seeking to achieve that goal, she fell under the sway of a con man, Mr. Mauleverer.[30] Mr. Mauleverer showed interest in her school, which would raise "the whole tone of female employment."[31] Rachel vowed to help plan and fund the institution, sought donations from the townspeople and convinced them to enrol their daughters with the promise that it would give them the skills to support themselves in a society in which marriage was uncertain due to the lack of men. The two planned to teach the girls skills such as printing, and Mr. Mauleverer proposed that the boarding school could publish a periodical in which Rachel could publish her feminist essays. However, Mr. Mauleverer was a fraud. He did not want to publish a periodical supporting women's rights; he was only interested in the money he could get from the scheme. As a result, the children were neglected and physically abused by their teachers and carers, and one young girl fell

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[28] Morgan, *A Victorian Women's Place,* 131-132.
[29] Charlotte Yonge, *The Clever Woman of the Family* ed. Clare A. Simmons (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 1958. Originally published in 1865), 168.
[30] *Ibid,* 222.

ill and died. Faced with the failure of the school, Rachel gave up her feminist ambitions and ideals. She believed that the death of the child and the mistreatment of the other students were the consequences of her former beliefs. Earlier in the novel, Rachel had met Captain Alick Keith, a soldier recently returned from India. Alick proposed in the aftermath of the school's failure, and Rachel accepted him despite her earlier disinterest in marriage.

The core argument of the novel was that women could not govern themselves without male guidance. Rachel had grown up without any male in her life, and the shortage of men in her town helped fuel her ideas that women should have greater access to educational and work opportunities. It also led her to reject conventional marriage, not only due to her feminist beliefs, but also because she knew that there were not enough marriageable men for all the women. When other characters asked Alick why he would marry an unconventional woman, he argued that marriage would help temper her. It did; in the aftermath of the failure of the school Rachel found happiness as a wife and mother. Her happy ending depended on her embrace of conventional marriage. There was, however, another unconventional woman called Bessie in the novel who did not abandon her unconventionality, and therefore met a tragic end. Yonge depicted another woman, Ermine Williams, as the true "clever woman" of the book.[32] Ermine was selfless and forgiving. She anonymously published essays in periodicals, but her writing promoted conventional values rather than opposing them. Yonge rewarded Ermine when she rekindled her romance with her former beau and eventually married him.

In this novel, Yonge argued that despite the growing problems of surplus women and the growing feminist movement, conventional marriage remained the best source of happiness for women. *The Clever Woman* also signalled a shift in novels. Most novels in the 1850s and 1860s

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[31] *Ibid*, 224.

warned women away from improper behaviour such as pre-marital sex, bigamy, or rejecting a fiancé. Rachel's unconventionality, however, laid in her desire for social reform and the belief that she could inspire other women to enter the workforce. Yonge was attempting to defend a status quo challenged by the existence of surplus women and a growing feminist movement, and her novel was a forerunner of the novels published after 1870 which increasingly painted feminism and paid work as temptations leading women away from conventional lives.

3. New opportunities, new temptations

After 1870, there were new gains in women's rights and consolidations of those that had been achieved in the previous decades. More secondary education institutions opened for women (including women's colleges at Cambridge and Oxford), and the Married Women's Property Act 1870 allowed women to control the income and property that they had earned or inherited.[33] In 1882, the Act was extended to "include all married women's property."[34] As these gains increased, fiction more frequently depicted women tempted away from conventionality through the desire to work or engage in feminist activism.

Scottish novelist Margaret Oliphant was a conventionally married woman and mother. When her husband died, she became the family's sole breadwinner, and supported it though her writing. Scholar Deirdre D'Albertis observed that Oliphant rejected political feminism and feminist theory, arguing that women did not have to be feminist to work, and support their

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[32] *Ibid*, 547.
[33] Burek, "The role of women in geological higher education-Bedford College, London (Catherine Raisin) and Newnham College, Cambridge, UK," 11; Mary Beth Combs, "'A Measure of Legal Independence,' The Married Women's Property Act and Portfolio Allocations of British Wives," *The Journal of Economic History* 65.4 (Dec 2005), 1028.
[34] Ben Griffin, "Class, Gender, and Liberalism in Parliament, 1868-1882: The Case of the Married Women's Property Acts," *The Historical Journal* 46.1 (Mar 2003), 81.

families.[35] Her 1883 novel *Hester* told the story of single women who, like Oliphant, had to financially support their families.

At the beginning of the novel, Catherine Vernon used her personal fortune and clever thinking to save the Vernon family bank from ruin. The bank's main partner, and a cousin to Catherine, John Vernon, had brought the bank to the brink of collapse and then had fled. John had courted her before marrying another woman. His conventional wife, however, did not understand the situation and was unable to come up with solutions. It was Catherine who stepped in and saved the bank by buying it. In the 19th century, some women were partners in running banks and took over family banks when their husbands died.[36] Catherine's role first as partner and then owner of the Vernon bank was not atypical, and it gained her the respect of the town of Redborough where she lived. One townsperson said she was "the same as a man."[37] Over the years, she begun to house her relatives near the bank, including Mrs. John and her young daughter Hester, despite disliking them. At first, Hester wanted to become a teacher to support her mother and regain their economic independence. However, both Mrs. John and Catherine viewed teaching as "paltry work."[38] Teaching was an acceptable occupation for women lower in the social scale, but Mrs. John and Catherine believed that it was not appropriate for women of Hester's social standing.[39] Mrs. John believed it would dishonour her husband, who believed that women should not engage in any paid work at all.

[35]D'Albertis, "The Domestic Drone: Margaret Oliphant and a Political History of the Novel," 805-806. *Ibid*, 805.
[36] Margaret Dawes and Nesta Selwyn, *Women Who Made Money: Women Partners in British Private Banks, 1725-1906* (North America: Trafford Publishing, 2010), xi-xii. Dawes and Selwyn explored the lives of women partners of British private banks, including those who inherited banks after their husbands died.
[37]Margaret Oliphant, *Hester: A Study of Contemporary Life* (London: Virago Press, 1984. Originally published in 1883), 404.

[38] *Ibid*, 76.
[39] Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, 18.

Hester soon entered a romantic relationship with her cousin Edward, whom Catherine loved as a son. Edward helped run the bank, but he was irresponsible. He took a business risk that was profitable to him, but that drove the Vernon bank to the brink of collapse. Edward tried to convince Hester to marry him and leave Redborough with him, but she refused to leave while the bank faced destruction. Edward chose to escape responsibility and fled. His desertion drew the once hostile Catherine and Hester together. Catherine realised that she had misjudged her young cousin and recognized that she would have been a good bank partner had Edward not crippled the bank. She told Hester that if she had the opportunity, she would "soon learn [how to work for the bank]. A few years' work, and you would be an excellent man of business; but it can't be."[40] Instead, Catherine argued that Hester's best chances lay in marriage. Hester disliked that idea, but the bank was in dire trouble and Catherine, increasingly ill, was unable to cope with the situation. She died shortly afterwards. Hester was left to choose between two suitors, and Oliphant concluded, "what can a young woman desire more than to have such a possibility of choice?"[41]

Oliphant explored the ways in which unmarried woman supported themselves and the opportunities that were open to them. Because of her family connections and personal fortune, Catherine was able to own a profitable bank, but this was foiled by her blind love for Edward, whom she considered the son she never had. Hester had the abilities to become a teacher or a bank partner but was denied the opportunity to do either. Throughout the novel, Catherine appeared to be a successful unconventional woman. She was unmarried, without children, and ran a successful business. However, her failings were due to her motherly instincts for Edward. She trusted him with matters which were beyond his abilities. Despite her initial success, Catherine had a tragic end. While Hester did not end the novel as a wife, Oliphant suggested that the only option

[40] Oliphant, *Hester*, 492.
[41] *Ibid*, 495.

available to her was a conventional marriage. Meanwhile, the conventional Mrs. John could not support her family after her husband deserted her and depended on Catherine's financial support. Therefore, Oliphant depicted a society in which the options for women without husbands were limited and conventional marriage remained a necessity unless they had a personal fortune.

Conclusion

In mid-19th century novels, unconventional women typically fell into one of two main categories: those who resisted temptation to stray from the accepted path, ending conventionally married, and those who fell into temptation and were punished, often meeting a tragic end. In the 1850s and 1860s novelists explored and critiqued women's position in society, but most novels served as cautionary tales to warn women not to behave improperly. As the feminist movement gained prominence and women gained access to education, employment, property and income, novelists began to address women's desire for social reform and for vocations. Towards the mid-1860s and especially after 1870 novelists started to acknowledge that the desire to work or to campaign to improve the lot of women was also a factor that could tempt women away from conventional lives. However, the feminist movement did not disrupt the conventional narratives; female characters continued to be rewarded for marrying and punished for being deviant. Female authors who lived unconventional lives also preached what they did not practice. For instance, Mary Elizabeth Braddon punished her heroine for engaging in bigamy while she lived with a married man. George Eliot gave Maggie Tulliver a tragic end despite engaging in an unconventional relationship herself, and Charlotte Yonge was a journalist, novelist, and historian but punished her heroine for desiring to work. Hence, there was continuity throughout the second half of the 19th century that stressed marriage as the only source of happiness for women and punished women that rejected it. The next chapter examines how this narrative that left

unconventional women the choice of either accepting conventionality or having a tragic end influenced depictions of more unconventional threats to marriage, such as lesbianism and interracial relationships.

Chapter 4

Alien Others: Depictions of Sexual and Racial Others in Victorian Literature, 1850-1901.

The alien other in 19th century literature, whether a sexually deviant other or a racial other, was often framed as a source of fear and a threat to conventionality. Typically, alien others either died or were banished at the end of a novel allowing the status quo to return, with the heroine having escaped the menace and having returned to the conventional path, unless the main female character was herself a sexually deviant and/or racial other, in which case the narrative ended in her death. This chapter has two parts. The first covers women depicted as vampyric lesbians, or dangerous New Women who were lesbians or suspected to be. The vampyric lesbian and the lesbian feminist were often the most explicit representations of lesbianism. The second part analyses novels addressing the issue of miscegenation, including fears of interracial relationships at mid-century and the influence of eugenics after the 1880s. Since novels about alien others existed at the margins of 19th century fiction, this chapter examines novels that were either popular or were very representative of lesbianism and/or race. It includes male and female authors, conventional as well as unconventional.

1. Predatory unmarried women and the rise of the vampyric lesbian

Representations of same-sex desire existed on the fringes of 19th century literature. Some novels presented predatory but seductive female characters that were implied to have same-sex desire. These women were often unmarried and were often depicted as a danger to other women. Given the cultural anxieties surrounding surplus women in the 1850s and 1860s, the implied lesbianism of these characters might have reflected fears that surplus and otherwise unconventional women were an increasing danger to conventional women and to marriage. Some novels implied that these unconventional women had unnatural desires for women and

sought to lead women away from marriage and motherhood. The Victorians perceived lesbianism as unnatural, and it became associated with other forms of unnaturalness; these depictions of implied same-sex desire in unmarried and predatory women reflected larger cultural anxieties about unmarried and surplus women.

Novelists did not always represent female same-sex desire as predatory or threatening. Writers could depict a romantic relationship between a feminine man and a woman, with the feminine man standing in for a woman.[1] Close female friendships and a female character being enthusiastic about and encouraging a male character's attraction to another woman, and representations of masculine women were also ways that lesbianism was hinted at in fiction.[2] However, these were more implicit and purposefully did not threaten conventionality. When an unconventional woman was accused of sapphic desire, however, Victorian novelists did depict it as a threat. The vampyric lesbian and the lesbian feminist were the most explicit representations of lesbianism and shed light on fictional representations of the alien other in a way that these other methods of representation do not.

An early and well-known example of a predatory lesbian was Miss Wade in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorritt* (1855-1857). Dickens was a widely popular author, and he often sought to use his writings to encourage social reform. Since he also published his work serially in literary magazines, his work also illustrates how "taboo" subjects could be alluded to in works that were widely read. In the novel, Arthur Clennam, the main protagonist, travelled to Marseilles and met the Meagles and an old spinster Miss Wade, who had been previously jilted by her suitor and showed an unhealthy interest in the Meagles' maid, Tattycoram. She took in

[1]Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, 111. Eliza Lynn Linton expressed her sapphic desire in this way in her novel *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland* (1885) (150-151).

Tattycoram, which caused tensions with the Meagles since they wanted to keep Tattycoram in their service, and also believed that Miss Wade exerted an immoral influence on the younger girl. They managed to successfully convince Tattycoram to come back to them.

Dickens implied that the dangers Miss Wade posed to Tattycoram were due to unnatural desires. During a confrontation with Miss Wade, Mr. Meagles warned Tattycoram "My child, whatever you may think, that lady's influence over you-astonishing to us, and I should hardly go too far in saying terrible for us to see-is founded in passion fiercer than yours."[3] Mr. Meagles elaborated on the dangerous nature of Miss Wade's fierce passion, telling Miss Wade:

> I don't know what you are, but you don't hide, can't hide, what a dark spirit you have within you. If it should happen that you are a woman, who, from whatever cause, has a perverted delight in making a sister-woman as wretched as she is (I am old enough to have heard of such), I warn her against you, and I warn you against yourself.[4]

Miss Wade's affections for Tattycoram were deviant and could awaken similar perversions in the young girl. This made Miss Wade a dangerous figure.

In 1871, Thomas Hardy published his second novel, *Desperate Remedies*, which contained a suggestively intimate relationship between an old spinster Miss Cytherea Aldclyffe and her current maid Cytherea Graye. The elderly Cytherea had once been in love with her namesake's father, but had rejected him, and heartbroken, he had named his daughter after her. Young inexperienced Cytherea struggled to find employment as a maid. While searching for work, she fell in love with Edward Springlove. Shortly afterwards, Miss Aldclyffe hired her as a lady's maid and fired her at the end of the day because of her poor performance. Miss Aldclyffe, however, realised the young Cytherea was the daughter of her one-time suitor, and subsequently,

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[2] Scholar Sharon Marcus argued that the dynamic between Pip, Estella, and Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860-1861) fits this description of female same-sex desire: Miss Havisham expresses her desire for Estella by encouraging Pip to desire her. Marcus, *Between Women*, 136-137.
[3] Charles Dickens, *Little Dorritt* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1857. Originally published 1855-1857), 243.

Cytherea went from an inadequate maid to a reminder of her past. Miss Aldclyffe decided to spend the night in Cytherea's room. She offered to act as a mother to her and was upset that Edward was courting her. She revealed to Cytherea that Edward was engaged to another woman which led to the dissolution of their relationship and pressed her to marry her illegitimate son Aeneas Manston. Manston was later discovered to be a murderer and committed suicide in his jail cell. Miss Aldclyffe died the morning after she confessed to Cytherea that Manston was her illegitimate son, while Cytherea and Edward entered into a happy and conventional marriage.

Like Miss Wade, Miss Aldclyffe was a spinster whose unnatural attraction to a younger woman threatened to pull her away from conventionality. Miss Aldclyffe's dangerous influence was more tangible than Miss Wade's since she was a prominent character in the novel. Hardy ostensibly framed the scene between Miss Aldclyffe and Cytherea as one between an affectionate mother and daughter with Miss Aldclyffe playing the role of the mother. However, the affection she displayed suggested a deeper level of emotion, which was not reciprocated. Hardy stated that Cytherea's "passions were not so impetuous as Miss Aldclyffe's. She could not bring her soul to her lips for a moment, try how she would."[5] When Miss Aldclyffe learned that Cytherea had a suitor, she became as "jealous as any man could have been."[6] She vowed to Cytherea that "I shall never forget you for anybody else, as men do-never. I will be as exactly as a mother to you. Now will you promise me to live with me always, and always be taken care of, and never deserted?"[7] Miss Aldclyffe framed Edward and any man who might draw Cytherea's attention as a rival. Her affection "was not the kind Cytherea's instincts desired."[8] This unrequited, passionate, as well as Miss Aldclyffe's unwillingness to marry marked her as

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[4] *Ibid*, 243.
[5] Thomas Hardy, *Desperate Remedies* ed. Patricia Ingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Originally published in 1871), 79.
[6] *Ibid*, 84.

unconventional, and her power to seduce Cytherea and pull her away from conventional marriage as dangerous.

Miss Wade and Miss Aldclyffe were predatory unmarried women who tried to seduce other women. In 1872, novelist Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu associated lesbianism with vampirism in his Irish gothic horror novel *Carmilla*. Le Fanu was an Anglo-Irish Anglican newspaper owner/editor and an aspiring Tory politician.[9] According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the Gothic genre was, at its core, "an exploration of 'the perverse.'"[10] The popularity of the supernatural in Gothic literature allowed writers to explore subjects more openly than writers in other genres could. The Gothic genre was, as Sedgwick wrote, "the first novelistic form in England to have close, relatively visible links to male homosexuality."[11] Since Le Fanu was writing a gothic horror novel, he could depict same-sex desire more visibly than novelists in other genres. Although depictions of lesbianism were comparatively rarer than those of male homosexuality, *Carmilla* became one of the best-known novels that explored desires between women at length, even if implicitly. *Carmilla* centered on nineteen-year-old Laura, her father, and their guest, a charming young woman called Carmilla who was secretly a vampire. At first, Carmilla appeared to be a gracious and charming guest who developed an intimate relationship with Laura. Carmilla both entranced and repelled Laura, who begun to grow ill and weak. Unbeknownst to Laura, Carmilla was trying to turn her into a vampire. At the end of the novel, Carmilla's secret was revealed, and Laura was saved.

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[7] *Ibid*, 85.
[8] *Ibid*, 83.
[9] Sharon M. Gallagher, *The Irish Vampire: From Folklore to the Imaginations of Charles Robert Maturin, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, and Bram Stoker* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc, Publishers, 2015), 87, 91, 92.
[10] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 91.
[11] *Ibid*, 91.

Carmilla expressed strong desires and affection for Laura, telling her that she had "been in love with no one, and never shall…unless it should be with you."[12] In attempting to seduce Laura, Carmilla not only tried to make her a vampire but pull her away from her father and a conventional life. This was especially threatening because in trying to seduce Laura into an intimate relationship, she also endangered Laura's Englishness.

Though the novella was set in Austria, Le Fanu clearly laid out Laura's English origins. At the start of the novella, Laura stated "My father is English, and I bear an English name, although I never saw England."[13] Laura's father ensured that she was instructed in the English language "partly from patriotic motives."[14] Besides addressing her in English daily, Laura's father used to read Shakespeare aloud. Her father also insisted that they often had tea: "with his usual patriotic leanings he insisted that the national beverage should make its appearance regularly."[15] The foreign setting allowed Le Fanu to include depictions of the supernatural and of taboo subjects such as lesbianism because it located the novella far away from Britain. However, the foreignness also contributed to the horror because it suggested that Laura could lose her sense of Englishness. Le Fanu also ascribed monstrosity to foreignness-particularly with blackness. In one scene, a character described seeing a black woman from the window of Carmilla's carriage.

> a hideous black woman, with a sort of coloured turban on her head, and who was gazing all the time from the carriage window, nodding and grinning derisively towards the ladies, with gleaming eyes and large white eyeballs, and her teeth set as if in fury.[16]

[12]Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla* in *Carmilla: A Critical Edition* ed. Kathleen Costello-Sullivan (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2013. Originally published in 1872), 40.
[13] *Ibid,* 4.
[14] *Ibid,* 6.
[15] *Ibid,* 20.
[16] *Ibid,* 21.

While Le Fanu described Carmilla as beautiful, he described a black woman as "hideous" and visibly monstrous, openly hostile towards other women. This was in contrast to Carmilla, whose beauty and good manners provided her a disguise. However, Carmilla was Austrian, and this added another layer to her relationship with Laura. Carmilla was distantly related to Laura through her Austrian mother's family. This suggested that Laura's sense of Englishness was precarious, and her intimacy with Carmilla threatened to destroy it. In a sense, the threat of Carmilla's vampirism also carried with it the threat of miscegenation. While previous novelists implied female same-sex desire to paint unmarried women as predatory, Le Fanu took that trope and combined it with vampirism-with a supernatural being who desired to prey on another woman. [17]

In the 1850s and 1870s, novelists often depicted sapphic desire in connection to women presented as unconventional, such as Miss Wade and Miss Aldclyffe. The implication of same-sex desire painted these characters as dangerous and unnatural. This became solidified in Le Fanu's depiction of a vampire that seductively preyed on a young English woman and threatened to sway her away not only from conventional sexual activities, but from her very humanity.

2. Lesbianism in late 19th century anti-feminist novels

During this period, women had gained greater access to property, education, and career opportunities. This resulted in a backlash from anti-feminist novelists who sought to defend the status quo. The Victorians were also anxious about surplus women who did not have the opportunity to marry. While same-sex desire was only depicted implicitly and rarely, it was often tied to the more visibly threatening spinster. In the 1880s and 1890s, lesbianism became

[17] The trope of the vampyric lesbian was developed further in 20th century film, and so the birth of this trope in Victorian literature influenced cultural perceptions of lesbianism into the 20th century. See Andrea Weiss' *Vampires and Violets: Lesbianism in Film* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993) and David Baker's "Seduced and Abandoned: Lesbian Vampires on Screen, 1968-74," *Continuum* 26.4 (2012), 553-563.

associated with another form of unnaturalness: feminism. Anti-feminist novelists reacted to the emergence of New Women and the gains in women's rights in property, marriage, and education by depicting caricatures of feminists who preyed on other women and led them away from conventionality through their ideology, and through their unnatural affections. Associating feminism with lesbianism became a way for some anti-feminist novelists to demonize and discredit New Women.

In *The Rebel of the Family* (1880) novelist Eliza Lynn Linton depicted feminists as masculine, man hating, and desiring the women they sought to seduce to their cause. Linton was a journalist, an ardent anti-feminist, and a social Darwinist. She believed that feminists, who were dangerous and masculine, were contributing to the decline of British civilization.[18] Linton also had relationships with younger women. Historian Martha Vicinus observed that "Linton could not admit that her love of women was natural. It was instinctive and ineradicable, but unnatural."[19] Paradoxically, Linton worked as a journalist, but in her writing demonised women who did the same.

The novel followed the journey of its heroine, Perdita, from an unconventional woman who fell under the thrall of a dangerous feminist to her eventual embrace of conventional marriage and values. Perdita was the family rebel and held many beliefs that scandalised her mother. She believed that middle class women should be able to marry outside their class, she was critical of the monarchy, and she wanted to work for a living. The tension between her desire for an occupation and her critique of her family's beliefs led her to meet Bella Blount, a mannish feminist. Bella was a divorcee, having left her good-natured husband and her children to

[18]Deborah Meem, "Eliza Lynn Linton and the Rise of Lesbian Consciousness," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 7.4 (1997), 537-540, 542.

advocate for women's rights. Bella sought to convince Perdita to join the feminist movement; she tried to convince Perdita that marriage was an oppressive institution and that men ought to be hated. She also tried to convince Perdita that love between women was superior to the one between women and men. Bella lived with a woman called Connie whom she called "my little wife."[20] She described love between women as "the best and truest that the world can give-the love between women without the degrading and disturbing interference of man."[21] Bella also displayed her affections towards Perdita, who was disturbed by them. Eventually, Perdita realised that Bella and her movement were dangerous, turned away from the movement by Bella's hatred of men and the ardour of her affections. Perdita did not give up her political beliefs about inter-class marriage, and she ended the novel married to a chemist called Leslie Crawford.

Linton depicted Bella as a manifestation of the dangers she believed that the feminist movement posed. Though Bella was deeply critical of the separate sphere ideology and denounced it as oppressive towards women, she and Connie resembled a traditional married couple. Bella earned the money, while Connie took care of the household. Bella also turned her affections towards Perdita, who was "half attracted and a half repelled-fascinated by the woman's mental power and revolted by something too vague to name and too real to ignore."[22] In addition, Bella hated men and she hated motherhood, arguing that "only the lowest type of women cared for either men or children, while the choicest spirits repudiated marriage and

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[19] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, *Ibid*, 151-152, 150. Vicinus recounted how Linton once lent one younger woman money and gave her gifts, only to have the younger woman blackmail her for her pursuit. She also had an affair with eighteen-year-old Beatrice Sichel, who eventually married and left Linton behind.
[20] Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Rebel of the Family*, ed. Deborah T. Meem (Peterborough Ont: Broadview Literary Press, 2002. Originally published in 1880), 54
[21] *Ibid*, 57.
[22] *Ibid*, 174.

maternity alike and made their happiness out of friendship with their own sex."[23] Linton tied Bella's same-sex desire to her rejection of marriage and motherhood.

In 1897, novelist Rhoda Broughton depicted a similar feminist who sought to seduce conventional women. Broughton was known for her controversial depictions of female sexuality.[24] In the late 19th century, however, Broughton's writing became more conservative.[25] Her novel *Dear Faustina* (1897) criticized the New Women and depicted them as dangerous to other women. The novel began with the funeral of the father of its heroine, Althea Vane. After the funeral, Althea's mother announced that she was going to leave the family to join a feminist organization (she had long supported the feminist cause but had been unable to act on it due to her duties as wife and mother). In the aftermath, Althea accepted the invitation of her mother's friend, Faustina Bateson, to move in with her and help Faustina to advocate for women's rights. At first, the ardently feminist and masculine Faustina and Althea shared an intimate relationship in which they spoke to each other affectionately, constantly embraced and shared physical affection. Althea also met Faustina's male friend, John Trebeck Drake, and grew close to him. However, her friendship with Faustina began to sour. Faustina was upset with Althea and Drake's growing friendship, and she realized that Althea had very little to offer which could promote her political cause. Althea did not have the skills to complete any work that Faustina gave her, and she failed at convincing her father's old prominent friends into divulging information about upcoming legislation that Faustina was interested in. The two women grew apart, and Faustina begun to court a young woman called Cressida to replace Althea as her close companion. Cressida was young and beautiful, and Faustina planned to employ her in rescue

[23] *Ibid*, 151.
[24] Tamar Heller, "Rhoda Broughton," in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* ed. Pamela K. Gilbert (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2011), 281.

work, which involved saving prostitutes. That Faustina would send a young woman to do such dangerous work disillusioned Althea, and she gave Faustina an ultimatum: she had to choose between her and Cressida. Faustina chose Cressida, and Althea begged Drake to save Cressida from Faustina's clutches. In the end, a male hero, Drake, very conventionally rescued the women from the villain. Althea decided to volunteer at a Woman's Settlement to teach women needlework, where she would also be close to Drake.

Faustina often used a lover's language to describe her relationship with Althea and addressed her in affectionate terms. Broughton described her love for Althea as one that "used to belong to Love, but which female friendship has lately stolen from his quiver."[26] Broughton was referring to the perception that the affection that many women in feminist circles showed each other exceeded the boundaries of affection expressed in normal female friendships, but increasingly resembled affection between romantic lovers. The relationship between the two women blurred the boundary between friendship and romantic love. Broughton constantly drew attention to their intimacy. Althea credited Faustina with "lift[ing] the veil" and turning her away from love and marriage, which she had previously desired.[27] Like Bella Blount, Faustina also taught Althea to revile men. It was only when Drake began to have a greater influence on her that Althea became disillusioned with Faustina. Broughton did not condemn Althea's desire to work and to help other women. Instead of forcing her heroine to abandon those aims as other novelists such as Charlotte Yonge did, she channelled them instead into territory more conventional and acceptable for women as a volunteer sewing instructor. While Althea did not end the novel as a wife, her relationship with Drake had the potential to evolve into romance.

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[25]Patricia Murphy, "Disdained and Disempowered: The 'Inverted' New Woman in Rhoda Broughton's *Dear Faustina*," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 19.1 (2000), 57.

[26] Rhoda Broughton, *Dear Faustina* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1897), 2.

The association between feminism and lesbianism that Linton and Broughton emphasized was one that also appeared in late 19th century sexology publications /studies. In 1896, poet and sociologist Edward Carpenter framed feminists as women without a strong maternal instinct, and he noted that some are "mannish" while others desire their own sex rather than men.[28] Sexologist Havelock Ellis argued that the emergence of feminism was a factor in a perceived increase of sexual inversion in women at the turn of the century. Ellis argued that while the feminist movement on the whole was "wholesome and inevitable," it did have disadvantages such as

> having been taught independence of men and disdain for the old theory which placed women in the moated grange of the home to sigh for a man who never comes, a tendency develops for women to carry this independence still further and to find love where they can find work. I do not say that these unquestionable influences of modern movements can directly cause sexual inversion…but they develop the germ of it.[29]

Ellis theorized that a congenital anomaly in women of high intelligence allowed them to influence others that were not inverts to act in ways reminiscent of sexual inversion. [30] For example, sapphic women in feminist circles might influence heterosexual women to engage in lesbian behaviour. However, these worries that a movement involving women who challenged the separate sphere ideology and looked mannish could influence women to become sexual deviant appeared in fiction before they did in the work of English sexologists. Novels such as *The Rebel of the Family* and *Dear Faustina* propagated the idea that feminists were not only alien others due to their ideas, or because they were unconventional women, but because some of them could also be sexually deviant.

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[27] *Ibid*, 75-76.
[28] Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming of Age: A Series of Paper's on the Relations of the Sexes* (Manchester: Labour Press, 1896), 66.
[29] Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion*, 147-148.
[30] *Ibid*, 147-148.

At the end of the 19th century, sapphic desire in Victorian novels had become associated with feminism. This connection reflected the anxiety that novelists such as Linton and Broughton felt about the changing position of women, and the dangers they believed the feminist movement posed to women who joined it. Both Bella and Faustina were vampyric-they preyed on other women to turn them against the status quo. Linton and Broughton implied that Bella and Faustina were attracted to their own sex to paint their activism as unnatural and to encourage their readers to condemn them and the movement that they represented. They were a continuation of the predatory unmarried women whose desires were implied to be unnatural in *Little Dorritt* and *Desperate Remedies*. While depictions of lesbianism were rare in novels, novelists that did imply female same-sex desire represented it as a threat against conventionality. Further, the threat was tied to anxieties about other more visible types of unconventional women-the woman unable or unwilling to marry and later the feminist. At the end of these novels, the challenged status quo was reasserted, the predatory woman vanquished, and the victim saved. These depictions of unconventional women as unnatural and vampyric (whether metaphorically or literally) suggest that conservative novelists viewed the changing social position of women and the feminist movement with trepidation. The suggestion of sapphic desire often served as a warning against predatory women who threatened to convince women to reject marriage and motherhood.

3. Empire and race in Victorian novels: the menacing racial other, fears of miscegenation, and the influence of eugenics

In *Carmilla,* Le Fanu depicted an English family in a foreign European country who feared losing their sense of Englishness. That threat was almost realised when an Austrian vampire tried to seduce the young English woman. In a sense, *Carmilla* and other vampire

stories were miscegenation stories. The fear of miscegenation also appeared in other types of novels, particularly in the late 19th century when imperialist thought became more pervasive in British society. The advent of Social Darwinism and eugenics increased these fears. In novels that addressed race and empire, it was no longer enough to emphasize that women must marry, but to stress that they must marry an English/white and middle-class man. To do otherwise was depicted as dangerous to the women and resulted in unsuitable/unnatural mixed race children that were often depicted as threatening.[31]

However, imperialism and the way race relations influenced marriage was a minor theme in novels. Empire and race tended to lurk in the background in most Victorian novels, limited to brief allusions. When novelists did directly refer to it, it was often used as a convenient plot device. Historians differ on what this lack of visibility suggested about the influence of imperialist thought on British culture. Historian Bernard Porter argued that the incidental nature of the references in literature to Empire signified that British culture was not imperialist.[32] Historian John Mackenzie, however, argued that if there were only traces of imperialism in 19th century British novels, that "an assemblage of such shards in their deposits implies the existence of a culture, not its absence."[33] While Porter was right that awareness of the Empire was dim, Mackenzie's argument that the traces of Empire that did exist within novels did indicate that imperialism was influencing British culture. This thesis primarily examines novels where the Empire was not incidental, but where it was visible and indeed integral to narrative.

Yet novels aimed at women were especially lacking in significant reference to the Empire. The Victorians perceived the Empire as a masculine concern and accordingly, most

[31] See analysis of Florence Marryat's 1897 *The Blood of the Vampire* and Victoria Cross' 1901 *Anna Lombard.*
[32] Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists,* 134
[33]John M. Mackenzie, "'Comfort' and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter," *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 36.4 (2008), 665.

novels geared towards a female audience were set in Britain. Many of the novels that did address the issues of Empire and race on the other hand were set in India. The 1857 Indian Mutiny shifted public perception regarding the stability of the Empire and the perceived violence of the mutineers against English women was used to justify continued British rule in India.[34] In addition, Anglo-Indian novelists also tended to set their novels in India. In the 1850s, Darwinism emerged as another common theme in novels dealing with Empire and race, and in the 1880s, eugenics. Overall, novels were dimly aware of the Empire as the average Victorian had very little contact with people outside Britain.

In 1868, novelist James Grant explored the difficulties that English women faced during the 1857 Indian mutiny in his novel *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny (*1868). The 1857 Indian mutiny was an event that shaped public opinion about the dangers to the Empire and the menacing nature of the colonised and thus inspired novelists to recount it through fiction, which would shape their readers' perceptions of the mutiny and the mutineers. The novel followed Lena, Kate, and Polly Weston and British officer Jack Harrower during the event. Lena and Harrower had been engaged, but Lena had broken the engagement in favour of another man who had then left her for another woman. Harrower aimed to win her back. Kate married her fiancée who was a British officer called Rowley Thompson Mellon. However, they received news at the end of the ceremony that the Indian troops had mutinied and that they were heading for Delhi. Lena and Harrower then fled from the city and, after escaping many attempts on their

[34] Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A History of British Imperialism 1850 to the Present* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021, 34-35), Jane Rendall, "The Condition of Women, Women's Writing, and Empire in Nineteenth Century Britain," in *At Home With Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* edited by Catherine Hall and Sonya O Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 118; Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose "Introduction: At Home with Empire," in *At Home With Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* edited by Catherine Hall and Sonya O Rose (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23; Clare Anderson, *The Indian Uprising of 1857-8: Prisons, Prisoners, and Rebellion* (London; New York; Delhi: Anthem Press, 2007), 13.

lives from the mutineers, found shelter with British troops. An Indian man called Preshad Singh captured Kate. She had to fend off his rape attempts before Mellon rescued her. The Indian Prince Abubeker held Polly and her father captive and tried to convince Polly to become another of his wives. The father died in captivity and the Prince had Polly killed after her repeated rejections. Lena and Kate were reunited on the other hand, and the British defeated the mutiny. Lena and Harrower married, and they alongside Kate and Mellon traveled back to England at the end of the novel.

Grant framed the mutiny as primarily a threat to English women, who were subjected to sexual and physical violence at the hands of the Indians. The British believed that English women were raped on a mass scale or killed themselves to avoid it, but historians have largely discredited these claims.[35] Nevertheless, the belief that this violence had occurred was reinforced in Grant's novel. He depicted the Indians calling for the blood of anyone with European blood and for English women to be raped.[36] The British officers used "remember the women and children" as a rallying cry for their soldiers during battle.[37] Grant depicted the Weston sisters as virtuous, delicate, and helpless. Lena was dependent on Harrower to protect her. Both Kate and Polly had to fend off the advances of predatory Indian men who sought to harm them. Grant stressed their whiteness, describing Kate as a "fair blonde of the purest Saxon type."[38] Polly was a "lovely English girl" whose skin was of an "ivory whiteness" that "contrasted most favourably with the dark and dimunitive Hindoo maids."[39] The British, in contrast, protected English women. The vengeance the British meted against the Indians was painted as ways of avenging

[35] Porter, *The Lion's Share: A History of British Imperialism 1850 to the Present*, 36.
[36] James Grant, *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny* vol II (London: George Routledge and Sons, Broadway, Ludgate, 1868), 69.
[37] *Ibid*, 125.
[38] James Grant, *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny* vol I (London: George Routledge and Sons, Broadway, Ludgate, 1868), 51.
[39] Grant, *First Love and Last Love* vol. II, 143.

the English women who had been killed or violated. Grant framed the racial other as untrustworthy and violent or else meek and submissive to the English. The possibility of a marriage between an English woman and an Indian man was presented as a source of fear. Interracial relationships between English men and non-white women could also be accepted as long as they were temporary, and the novel ended with a conventional English marriage.

In her novel *On the Face of the Waters: A Tale of the Mutiny (*1896) novelist Flora Annie Steel depicted a very brief interracial relationship between a British officer and an Indian woman. Steel was the wife of an Indian Civil Service officer and lived with him in India for twenty-two years. Atypically, she spent her time in India making friends with Indians, learning Indian languages, establishing schools for girls, serving as a school inspectress and more.[40] The novel was set during the 1857 Indian Mutiny and followed the events in the lives of a British officer, Jim, and an English woman, Kate Erlton. Jim had a brief relationship with an Indian woman, Zora, who fell ill and died, before giving birth to a stillborn child. Kate lived in India with her husband who was also a British officer, though their relationship was strained and he had decided to leave her for another woman. They had a son attending school in England. The eruption of the mutiny forced Kate and Jim together, since Kate had to rely on Jim for protection. Both of them painted their faces brown and pretended to be Afghanis and lived on a rooftop. One day Jim left to bring to safety a British child they had found called Sonny, and the Indians discovered their true identities. Kate escaped, and the two were later reunited at a British camp where the British were preparing to re-take Delhi. Kate's husband died in battle, and Kate and Jim travelled back to England with Sonny in their care.

On the Face of the Water was in many ways similar to Grant's *First Love and Last Love*. Like Grant, Steel depicted the Indians as either loyal but inferior subjects to the British, or as a

violent people who betrayed the British and wanted to rape and kill white women. Steel depicted the presence of women in India as both a motivator for British soldiers and an obstacle. In the novel, the soldiers retreated in order to protect the women in their charge. Jim could not act against the mutineers for much of the novel because he had to protect Kate. Yet the desire to revenge the perceived wrongs committed against British women helped motivate the soldiers to defeat the mutiny. The British were portrayed as valiant defenders of women, while the Indians sought to harm them. Steel also asserted the superiority of the English family. While Jim loved Zora, his relationship with Kate proved to be the superior one. He had felt "vague repulsion" when he thought of his child with Zora.[41] When he and Kate cared for Sonny, however, he began to feel fatherly affection. He attributed these positive feelings to the fact Sonny was white, and "would inherit familiar virtues and vices instead of strange ones."[42] The triumph of the makeshift family that consisted of Kate, Jim, and Sonny at the end of the novel was a sign of the triumph of the British at the end of the mutiny.

While Steel depicted a father who was relieved that his mixed-race child did not survive, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle explored a situation where a mixed-race child from a previous interracial marriage caused problems to a married couple.[43] In 1893, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published a Sherlock Holmes story about an English woman who went to great lengths to conceal her mixed-race child. In "The Yellow Face" a man named Grant Munro visited Sherlock Holmes and Doctor John Watson to ask Holmes' advice about the mysterious conduct of his wife Effie. Though Grant and Effie were happily married, Effie had begun sneaking out of their house to visit a nearby cottage into which people had recently moved. Grant had seen a figure in the

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[40] Roye, "Introduction," xi.
[41] Flora Annie Steel, *On the Face of the Waters: A Tale of the Mutiny* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897. Originally published in 1896), 38.
[42] *Ibid*, 357.

window with a face that looked "unnatural and inhuman," and was "a livid chalky white."[44] Effie lied about it when caught, and begged Grant not to go to the cottage because "nothing but misery can come of it if you enter that cottage."[45] Holmes suspected that Effie's first husband was still alive and that he resided in the cottage. However, it turned out that the mysterious figure with the face that Doyle alternatively described as white or yellow was a little black girl wearing a mask. Effie confessed that while in America she had fallen in love with a black man and had "cut myself off from my race in order to wed him, but never once while he lived did I for an instant regret it."[46] Effie loved their daughter Lucy who was darker than her father but kept her secret after marrying Grant for fear of losing him should he find out. However, she was missing the child and asked her nurse to bring her to the nearby cottage and disguised her with a yellow mask to prevent discovery. Grant developed a liking for the child and accepted his wife despite her past.

While Doyle depicted Lucy as a precocious child, he still described her as a "creature" and as "coal black."[47] Effie referred to her as her "pet" and that is how Grant accepted her. Doyle did not condemn Effie's previous interracial marriage and her mixed-race child but depicted her positively largely because she subsequently married an English man. If she had "left her race" to marry a noble Black man in America, she had eventually returned to it when she married Grant in England.

Offspring of interracial relationships were depicted more often in negative terms under the influence of eugenics. In *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), Florence Marryat told a tragic

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[43] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Yellow Face" is not a novel but a short story. An exception for this short story was made because of the popularity of Sherlock Holmes, and its unique representation of an interracial marriage.
[44] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Yellow Face," in *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin Books, 2009. Originally published in 1893), 354-355.
[45] *Ibid,* 356.
[46] *Ibid,* 361.
[47] *Ibid,* 361.

story about a mixed-race vampire. Marryat was a novelist, a playwright, an editor and an actress.[48] Her family came from the British West Indies, where her paternal grandfather had been a colonial agent and owned property.[49] In the novel, Marryat argued that heredity was inescapable, and that it was impossible for a mixed-race woman to escape the inferiority of her non-white ancestry. The novel began with the heroine, Harriet Brandt, meeting a group of English travellers at a hotel. Every individual who came into close contact with Harriet, however, fell ill. Margaret Pullen felt ill when Harriet was affectionate with her. Her baby, whom Harriet had doted on, died after spending a significant amount of time in Harriet's arms. Doctor Phillips examined the baby and concluded that the cause of death was supernatural. He suspected it was related to Harriet since he knew her parents, an English slave-owner who practised vivisection on his slaves and a mixed-race mother. Harriet's maternal grandmother had been a slave who had been bitten by a vampire bat. Doctor Phillips argued that Harriet could not escape her heredity. After the child's death, Harriet travelled to England where she lived with a Baroness that she had also met at the hotel. While there, she met Anthony Pennell, and the two fell in love. They decided to marry, but Doctor Phillips warned them both of Harriet's ancestry and the dangers of prolonged contact with her. Anthony dismissed his concerns, but Harriet (who had been unaware of her Jamaican heritage and the vampire bat) pondered ending the relationship to ensure his safety. Anthony convinced her to marry him despite her fears, and the two shared a brief but happy marriage. Soon after though, Anthony fell ill and died. A grieving Harriet killed herself, leaving a note:

[48] Lennox, "'She was a brave and a busy woman,' Rediscovering Florence Marryat, Victorian novelist, spiritualist, and performer," 1-2.
[49] Terra Walston Joseph, "Imperial Anxiety and the Failure of Emancipation in Florence Marryat's *Fin-de-Siecle* Fictions," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 61.2 (2018), 191.

> Do not think more unkindly of me than you can help. My parents have made me unfit to live. Let me go to a world where the curse of heredity which they laid upon me may be mercifully wiped out.[50]

In the end, Harriet herself was a victim of heredity. Her parents' "unnatural" relationship had condemned her to destroy those she loved and rendered her unsuitable to be a wife.

The Blood of the Vampire reflected fears about miscegenation, and deviant sexuality. The first hint of deviancy that Harriet showed was same-sex attraction. She had been devoted to her friend Olga and had cared for her while she was ill (not knowing that she was the cause of her illness). She became very attached to Margaret, and on one instance she put her arm around Margaret's waist and leaned her head on one of her shoulders which "was not a position that Margaret liked, nor one she would have expected from a woman so short an acquaintance."[51] Margaret suspected that Harriet desired women, reflecting that "she had heard of cases in which young unsophisticated girls had taken unaccountable affections for members of their own sex."[52] While Harriet eventually entered a heterosexual marriage, Marryat's brief suggestion of same-sex desire hinted that there was something unnatural about her. That was compounded when Harriet's supernatural and black heritage was revealed. Marryat not only associated lesbianism with vampirism, but blackness with vampirism as well. As Marryat explained, Harriet's parents "left their curse upon this girl-the curse of black blood, and of the vampire's blood."[53] Harriet being a vampire, and her "unnatural" traits such as sapphic attraction and black heritage, made her unsuitable as a wife. While Victorian novels often punished white women for not marrying, it was impossible for Harriet to enter into a conventional marriage because her father and

[50] Florence Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire* (UK: Victorian Secrets Limited, 2011. Originally published in 1897), chap 18.
[51] *Ibid*, chap 2.
[52] *Ibid*, chap 3.
[53] *Ibid*, chap 15.

mother's marriage was interracial. Therefore, even though Harriet married, she was still consigned to a tragic end.

The tragic fallout of an interracial marriage was also the main theme of Victoria Cross' *Anna Lombard* (1901). Cross (Anne Sophy Cory) had been born in India. She was a New Woman writer. [54] *Anna Lombard* took place in the last years of the 19th century and told the story of British civil servant Gerald Ethridge and his attempts to court Anna Lombard, the daughter of a British general. Gerald and Anna met at a ball and fell in love. Their romance was interrupted when Gerald was posted to Burma and decided not to ask Anna to accompany him because Burma had an insalubrious climate and lacked English communities. He also did not ask her to wait because he would be gone for a long period of time and felt that it was an unfair request to make of her. Yet Gerald returned from Burma much sooner than expected and discovered that in his absence Anna had married an Indian servant called Gaida Khan, whose beauty had enthralled her. Gaida eventually died of cholera. However, shortly after his death Anna discovered that she was pregnant with Gaida's child. She and Gerald married earlier than planned to prevent scandal and Anna gave birth to a child that was pale enough to pass as their own. Anna became enchanted with the baby, but Gerald described him as "hideous with that curious hideousness of aspect that belongs usually to the fruit of Eurasian marriages."[55] Gerald realised that Anna's maternal instincts led her to love the baby and that her love for him would always come before her love for her husband. Eventually, Anna realised this and decided to murder her child. Anna asked Gerald to leave for a year to allow her to reflect and seek forgiveness from God. When he

[54] Petra Dierkes-Thrun, "Victoria Cross' *Six Chapters of a Man's Life:* Queering Middle Class Feminism," in *Middlebrow and Gender, 1890-1945* ed. Christoph Ehland and Cornelia Wachter vol 62 (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2016), 203.
[55] Victoria Cross, *Anna Lombard* (New York: Kensington Press, 1901), 201.

returned, she believed that she had gained that forgiveness, allowing the two of them to resume their relationship free of Gaida and the mixed-race child, who was treated as disposable.

Anna Lombard examined the consequences of a marriage between an English woman and an Indian servant, and the impact this had on her relationship with an English man. Anna claimed that she loved both Gaida and Gerald at once, though Gerald was her true love while Anna described Gaida as "a beautiful toy to me. He is like some pet…He is a possession that I value. I like to know he belongs to me."[56] At other times, she described Gaida as a prisoner whom she wants to part with but cannot. Gerald began to think of the contest between him and Gaida as a "conquest" to win Anna. He primarily saw Gaida as a danger to Anna's safety.

> Aside from the moral degradations of life shared with one who, according to the British standpoint, has no moral sense, of being allied with a race whose vices and lies are beyond description; there is the daily, hourly physical danger from a native's insensate jealousy, unreasoning rage, and childish, yet fiendish, revenge.[57]

Cross, like Steel and Grant, depicted Indian men as dangerous towards white women. She also highlighted the danger of the offspring of interracial relationships. Motherhood was often celebrated in Victorian fiction, but Cross painted those motherly instincts as dangerous when directed at a mixed-race child. Since the child was not white, Anna's love for it drew her away from her white husband. In order to give all her love to Gerald, Anna had to smother her own baby. It was Anna's love for Gerald that redeemed her, allowing her a happy ending as Gerald's wife despite her previous interracial relationship and her infantcide. *Anna Lombard* dehumanised its Indian characters. Gaida was likened to a pet and his death was considered beneficial for Anna. Anna killed her own mixed-race baby and faced no consequences and in fact was rewarded with a husband.

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[56] *Ibid,* 95.
[57] *Ibid,* 104.

When 19th century novelists explicitly referred to the Empire and race, they depicted it as a menace and a threat to English women and conventional marriage. The colonies were especially dangerous; threat of violence from the colonised was tangible, as the Indian mutiny had demonstrated. Doyle portrayed a mixed-race child from America as a pet, while Marryat and Cross depicted mixed-race offspring from the colonies as threatening. Interracial relationships also threatened conventional marriage; they could pull an English woman away from a white husband. Eugenics increased this concern and in the 1880s and 1890s novels often described mixed race children as inspiring feelings of "repulsion." Even Doyle, who wrote sympathetically about his female character's relationship with a Black man and her mixed-race child, redeemed her through her love for an English man who she put above her child which she treated more as a pet. Non-white people were often characterised as dishonest, violent, and inferior to white people. Even when represented sympathetically, the racial other was inferior to the English. The way that novelists dealt with the threat of the racial other was similar to the way they dealt with vampyric lesbians and other threats to conventionality. Most commonly, the racial other would either die or be banished from the novel.

Conclusion

Victorian novelists depicted the alien other as a threat to English conventionality. They used allusions of lesbianism to vilify unmarried women and feminists-their affection for other women threatened to corrupt younger women and lead them away from conventional lives. At the end of the novel, the vampyric lesbian was banished or killed and the natural heterosexual order reasserted. The racial other was treated similarly. Non-white people could also be depicted as vampyric and as sexually deviant, as they were in Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire*. Outside of gothic horror, the racial other was also a threat that diverted English women

from their English values and from conventional marriage. In sum, the alien other in 19th century fiction, whether a sexually deviant other or a racial other, was a source of fear and framed as a threat to the separate sphere ideology and the virtues of English women.

In the last decades of the 19th century, the New Women emerged, and New Women writers were often critical of conventional marriage and believed that it either should be reformed or abolished. The independent heroines in New Women novels were a source of anxiety and provoked Rhoda Broughton and Eliza Lynn Linton to associate them with lesbianism to condemn them in their anti-feminist novels. Given that novelists often re-asserted conventionality at the end of their novels, and demonised unconventional women and alien others, did New Women novelists actually believe that New Women could successfully escape conventionality?

Chapter 5

The Limits of Acceptable Unconventionalities

The majority of Victorian novels followed the conventional plot narrative that presented marriage as the only happy ending for women or killed the unconventional woman at the end of the novel as punishment. Despite gains in women's access to education, work opportunities, and political rights, these narratives remained consistent throughout the Victorian era. However, there were situations in which it was acceptable for female heroines to stray from conventionality. Some were exceptional women; others escaped marriage for the sake of their children or devoted themselves to them to redeem their past sins. These novels do not reject conventionality-the heroines typically still end up married or dead-but they illustrate the ways that authors could acceptably depict unconventional women.

In the 1880s and 1890s, a new, acceptable to some, unconventional female character emerged yet still could not avoid conventionality. In the 1890s, author Sarah Grand coined the term "New Women", which was soon widely used to describe these types of novels, and the real life women who lived unconventionally and espoused feminist ideals.[1] These novelists had many differing, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives. Some believed that marriage was an inherently oppressive institution, others argued that marriage was important but that it should be made more equal, and there were some, such as Amy Levy, who believed that women could have careers and marry. However, very few of them depicted successful New Women; their heroines failed to reconcile their feminism and desire for love and either ended up traditionally married or lonely. When they ended married, the marriage was an unhappy ending. In this way, New Women novelists critiqued conventional marriage but overwhelmingly did not believe that

[1] Sutherland, *In Search of the New Woman*, 1.

women could escape it or that they could be happy without it. Late 19th century novelists who did not write New Women novels were also pessimistic about women's prospects of women at the turn of the century. While there were exceptions, the dominant arguments expressed in novels that were critical of marriage and the status of women in British society was that women had to resign to their fate and that conventionality could be challenged, but not avoided. These novels suggest that while the women's rights movement may have made it possible for women to have more control over their property, greater access to divorce, more opportunities for secondary education and greater political rights, these gains failed to fully emancipate them from their prescribed roles as wives and mothers.

Hence, in the late 19th century, fiction was an important means for some Victorians to convey feminist arguments and philosophy to the public and often to argue with each other. However, the dominant understanding among novelists was pessimistic. While women may have gained many rights, they were not yet independent. The conventional narrative remained potent. These pessimistic attitudes illustrated that novelists believed that the separate sphere ideology was too deeply embedded in British culture to be ignored.

This chapter is divided into two sections: the first discusses novels in which women breach conventionality but are not condemned for it, and the second analyses New Women and other novels critical of convention published in the 1880s and 1890s. As in the previous chapters, the work of female authors-both conventional and unconventional-are privileged as they were the ones most affected by the developments in women's rights and were the most prominent writers in the New Women genre. Male authors, such as George Gissing and Thomas Hardy, are included as foils, to demonstrate that both female and male authors were similarly pessimistic about the prospects of women.

1. **Acceptable unconventionality: novels positively presenting unconventional women**

Novels in which female characters lived unconventional lives without punishment were few and far between. This suggests that publishers and readers were not widely accepting of novels that completely strayed from the formulaic approach of presenting marriage as a happy ending and punishing those who rejected those options or behaved improperly. There were, however, a few ways in which novelists could successfully elicit sympathy for unconventional women. These novels did not reject the status quo; they often still had conventional ending. These unconventional heroines also typically conformed to other normative expectations- dutiful mothers, wives, or still meeting a tragic fate despite eliciting sympathy. Typically, they also did not fundamentally challenge the separate sphere ideology.

In 1848, Anne Bronte published *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall;* its heroine had walked away from her husband because her duties as a mother outweighed the ones as a wife. Anne Bronte, the youngest of the Bronte sisters, was a governess, a novelist and a poet.[2] She never married (she died at 29).[3] Hers was a fairly conventional life for unmarried women.

In the novel, Helen Graham was a mysterious tenant living by herself with her son. Many of her new townsfolk assumed that she was a widow, though salacious rumours eventually began to spread that her child was illegitimate. Helen also appeared eccentric, having taught her son to hate alcohol and arguing that if young girls had to be safeguarded from temptations, boys must also be taught to resist (which she believed few men were able to do).[4] It was later revealed that

[2] Ingham, *The Brontes*, 1, 15, 24-25.
[3] Marion Shaw, "Anne Bronte: A Quiet Feminist," *Bronte Studies* 38.4 (November 2013), 330-332.
[4] Anne Bronte, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* ed. Lee A. Talley (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 2009. Originally published in 1848), 57-58.

Helen had left her abusive and alcoholic husband.[5] She did her best to stay with and care for her him, even as he sank into the depths of addiction and began an affair with another woman. But he was a corrupting force on her son, exposing him to alcohol and foul language. Helen still felt bound to her husband and returned to nurse him after he fell ill. If Helen had stayed with her husband, her son would have fallen into sin. After her husband's death, she was able to marry her suitor Gilbert and end up a conventionally happy wife and mother.

Helen's desertion was acceptable because her husband's coarse behaviour put her in the position where her duty to care for her son trumped her duty to her husband. Thus, she never really broke the dictates of the separate sphere ideology. As Helen explained, "I am fully alive to the evils that may and must result upon the step I am about to take, but I never waver in my resolution, because I never forget my son."[6] While her actions were consistent with that of a dedicated mother, her husband had to die for the novel to have a happy ending. Her experience was at odds with the realities that mothers who left their husbands for similar justifiable reasons faced. Helen could not have petitioned for a divorce. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* was written before the Divorce Reform and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. As historian Mary Poovey noted, prior to 1857 most women could only petition for divorce on grounds of aggravated adultery, which typically included incest. Poovey observed that "the social ostracism a divorced or separated woman inevitably faced made legal recourse an unattractive alternative for the vast majority of women; only four women had successfully petitioned Parliament for divorce before 1857."[7] Thus her happy ending was at odds with the reality many women who escaped abusive

[5] Marian Shaw notes that the depiction of alcoholism in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is reminiscent of the alcoholism of Anne's brother, Branwell. Shaw, "Anne Bronte: A Quiet Feminist," 331.
[6] Anne Bronte, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, 308.
[7] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 56

husbands or unhappy marriages faced in the early Victorian period. They more likely would have been ostracized/shunned.

Motherly devotion also redeemed a fallen woman in Elizabeth Gaskell's 1853 novel *Ruth*. Elizabeth Gaskell's life was conventional for a Victorian female author. She was married to a Unitarian minister and the mother of four daughters.[8] Her novels often expressed sympathy for England's working classes. In *Ruth,* Gaskell expressed sympathy for a fallen woman and gave her a chance at redemption. The book was controversial, copies were burned in her husband's parish, and it was banned elsewhere.[9] The novel's heroine, Ruth Hilton, was the lover of an aristocrat. After he got ill and his mother intervened, the relationship ended, and Ruth gave birth to an illegitimate child. The main conflict of the novel centred on opposite views of the prospects of fallen women. Minister Thurston Benson believed that Ruth could be led to live a virtuous life despite her mistakes. He was convinced that motherhood, in particular, would be "the very instrument to make her forget herself, and be thoughtful for another."[10] He argued that "every woman who, like Ruth, has sinned should be given a chance of self-redemption."[11] He and his sister took Ruth and her child in, presenting her as a widow. In contrast, their neighbour Mr. Bradshaw believed that the world has determined how fallen women should be treated-as outcasts who should be excluded from respectable society. In the end, Mr. Benson was vindicated. Ruth dedicated herself to being a good mother, governess, and later a nurse. When a fever began to spread among the poor, Ruth went "voluntarily, and, with no thought of greed or gain, right into the very jaws of the fierce disease."[12] This earned her the respect and gratitude of her impoverished patients. In the end, Ruth met a tragic end as she died from an illness she

[8] Alan Shelston, *Brief Lives: Elizabeth Gaskell* (London: Hesperus Press Limited, 2010), 20-21, 29.
[9] Marina Cano Lopez, "This is a Feminist Novel: The Paradox of Female Passivity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*," *The Gaskell Journal* 25 (2011), 30.
[10] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1853), chap 11, Kindle.

caught nursing her former lover. Mr. Bradshaw joined the mourners at her funeral, reflecting that "if all had entertained his opinions, [Ruth] would have been driven into hopeless sin."[13] This ending suggested that the possibilities for redemption for fallen women were limited; Ruth became a devoted mother and worked to benefit society but nonetheless her story ended in death. Gaskell reaffirmed that Mr. Benson's argument for giving fallen women a chance to redeem them was the correct one. *Ruth* argued that despite having sinned, fallen women could subsequently lead pious and virtuous lives. Scholar Carla Fusco agreed, arguing that *Ruth* supported "the idea that one can become a fallen woman as a consequence of a series of misfortunes and not deliberately."[14] Ruth may have fallen into sin, but compassion allowed her to live a virtuous life. Still, the conventional narrative prevailed, and Ruth perished at the end.

In *Aurora Leigh* (1856) the heroine's artistic skills freed her from the norms that governed ordinary women, yet she still ended the novel a married woman. Poet Elizabeth Barrett-Browning was, like her heroine, a woman whose poetic skills similarly offered her greater possibilities than were available to typical woman. She began writing poetry as a child, and continued into adulthood.[15] She married fellow poet Robert Browning when she was thirty-eight and he was thirty-two.[16] After the marriage, the two went to live in Italy.[17] Her novel in verses, *Aurora Leigh* (1856) was published the year before the Divorce Reform and Matrimonial Act of 1857; Barret-Browning, a supporter of the Married Women's Property Committee, had

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[11] *Ibid,* chap 27.
[12] *Ibid,* chap 33.
[13] *Ibid,* chap 36.
[14] Carla Fusco, "Ruth: An Unusual Prostitute. Elizabeth Gaskell's Speculative Gaze vs Victorian Masculine Vision of Woman," *British and American Studies* 21 (2105), 56.
[15] Rebecca Stott and Simon Avery, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Routledge, 2003), 43.
[16] Karlin, "Introduction," in *Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett,* ix.
[17] Stott and Avery, *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, 156.

collected signatures for a Parliamentary petition in its favour.[18] *Aurora Leigh* was, in part, Barrett Browning's own attempt to articulate the difficulties for a woman to be married and an author in the Victorian era.[19] At the beginning of the novel, the male protagonist, Romney, looked down on female writers: "Women as you are, / mere women, personal and passionate, /You give us doting mothers and chaste wives,/Sublime Madonnas and enduring saints!/We get no Christ from you,-and verily/We shall not get a poet, in my mind."[20] Consequently, Aurora refused his proposal of marriage, angrily claiming that he loved not "a woman…but a cause: You want a helpmate, not a mistress, sir-A wife to help your ends-in her no end."[21] Aurora feared that if she married him, her artistic calling/vocation would be stifled by her wifely duty. However, she was unfulfilled on her own and longed for love. By the end of the novel, Romney changed his mind and supported Aurora's writing. It became an essential part of their union. Aurora told Romney, "Beloved, let us love so/well/Our work shall be better for/our love/And still our love be sweeter for/our work/And both, commended, for the/sake of each/By all true workers and true lovers born."[22] Romney accepted this premise, and told Aurora that she must "work for two," while he "for two, shall love!"[23] Romney's acceptance and support of Aurora as an artist meant that the two reached a sense of parity in their relationship. Aurora realized that she would not, as she had once feared, be reduced to be a helpmeet after marriage and that she could still write

[18] Marisa Palacios Knox, "Masculine Identification and Marital Dissolution in *Aurora Leigh*," *Victorian Poetry* 62,2 (2014), 287-288. Barbara Leigh Smith, Bessie Raynor Parks and Mary Howitt founded the Married Women's Property Committee in 1855 to support marriage reform (288).
[19] *Aurora Leigh* was very popular in the Victorian era but faded into obscurity in the twentieth century when it was rarely discussed in relation to Victorian fiction. It resurfaced in academic discourse in the 1970s when interest in women's history drew attention to the poetic novel that had a female poet as a heroine, written by a female poet. In the 1970s, it had a divided reception with some critics deriding Barrett Browning as a traditionalist who reinforced patriarchal values, while others celebrated her as a feminist. Clinton Machann, *Masculinity in Four Victorian Epics: A Darwinist Reading* (London: Routledge, 2010), 57-58.
[20] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1978. Originally published in 1856), 81.
[21] *Ibid,* 87.
[22] *Ibid,* 389.
[23] *Ibid,* 389.

poetry while being married to the man she loved. Her desire to be an artist and her desire for love could be reconciled.

There were circumstances in which fiction could positively depict unconventional women. A female character could leave a marriage if the dangers it posed to her children made it untenable to stay. Some novelists argued that fallen women could be redeemed despite their sins. Exceptional women who had artistic skills could enjoy opportunities not available to other women. Yet this did not occur often in 19th century fiction, and those novels still broadly conformed to conventional narratives (Helen and Aurora got married, and Ruth died).

2. Marriage is not necessarily a happy ending

The conventional marriage plot framed marriage as a happy ending for women. Often, it was depicted as the only happy ending. As discussed in chapter four, many unconventional heroines either reformed themselves and married or else met a tragic end. Towards the end of the 19th century, New Women novelists began to subvert the framing of the marriage plot. It was still adhered to, but they depicted marriage as an unhappy ending instead. Instead of granting the heroine happiness, it trapped her in the domestic sphere. The triumph of conventionality in these novels became a pessimistic commentary on women's prospects: even if they did not want to not marry, they were still unable to escape the bounds of their roles as wives and mothers.

In 1884, author Vernon Lee (Violet Page) was pessimistic about the prospects of women in her early novel *Miss Brown*. Lee was an unconventional woman-she had romantic relationships with other women. She often dressed in a masculine manner. One of her prominent relationships was with poet Mary Robinson.[24] Her fiction often contained homoerotic subtext.

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[24] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, 153. For an exploration of Lee's correspondence with Robinson, see Sally Newman, "The Archival Traces of Desire: Vernon Lee's Failed Sexuality and the Interpretation of Letters in Lesbian History,"

In *Miss Brown,* she depicted her heroine's attempts to live an independent life as fruitless. That heroine, Anne Brown, worked as a maid. She did not want to marry, nor did she wish to have children. Then the novel's main male character, the painter Walter Hamlin (who Lee describes as 'womanly') became enraptured with her while visiting her employers and began to paint her. Eventually, he offered to pay for her education in the hopes that she would one day agree to marry him. However, he later became infatuated with a mannish Russian woman called Sacha Elaguine, who was besotted with both him and Anne. Anne concluded that she had to sacrifice the freedom she had gained with her education and marry Hamlin to save him from Sacha's malicious influence. She lied to Hamlin, telling him that she loved him, and they became engaged. Lee portrayed this as an act of self-sacrifice, since Anne was a woman who valued independence, the freedom to work, and who did not want children.

Despite wanting to avoid a conventional life, Anne was condemned/ forced to live one at the end of the novel. She felt obliged to put Hamlin's well being over her own. While earlier novelists had depicted an unconventional woman becoming a conventional wife as a happy ending, Lee asked whether the conventional ending was a "happy" one or a tragic one that women could not avoid. Lee also used the vampyric lesbian trope, but instead of pulling the heroine away from marriage, Sacha pushed Anne towards it. Sacha Elaguine was a predatory Russian woman who sought to seduce both Anne and Hamlin, and her foreignness was used to explain her unnatural behaviour. Lee took inspiration from her friend Anne Meyer, who complained that her husband made her spend time with Russian women she described as "beastly."[25] When Sacha embraced Anne, the latter felt "a vague, undefinable revulsion."[26] Lee

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Journal of the History of Sexuality 14.1/2 (2005): 51-75. Amy Levy also wrote poetry to Lee that expressed unrequited desire with "To Vernon Lee" and "New Life, New Love."

[25] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, 153-154.

[26] Vernon Lee, *Miss Brown* vol II (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1884), 292-293.

explicitly associated Sacha with the vampyric lesbian: at one point, a male character compared Sacha to a vampire, asking her "Has it never occurred to you…that you may be a dead creature yourself-a vampire come to suck out someone's life blood!"[27] Hamlin's intimacy with Sacha also tainted him, and Anne saw her marriage with Hamlin as bringing her into closer proximity with her:

> To become…the wife of Hamlin was an intolerable self-degradation-nay, a pollution; for it seemed to her, and the idea sickened her whole soul, that the moral pollution of Sacha Elaguine would be communicated to her. To become the wife of Sacha's lover![28]

For Anne, intimacy with Hamlin represented intimacy with Sacha. Yet she felt she had to marry Hamlin to prevent him from marrying Sacha. Ultimately, Lee's message was pessimistic. Anne tried to be independent but ended up married to a man she did not love, who reminded her of a woman she despised, and in a marriage which required her to give up her ambitions and would likely pressure her to become a mother.

Irish novelist Emily Lawless was similarly pessimistic in *Grania: The Story of an Island* (1892). Emily Lawless, daughter of a landlord and a Unionist, was also a poet, novelist, entomologist, and historian.[29] Scholar James H. Murphy notes that Lawless "was ambivalent about some feminist issues and was said to have opposed women's suffrage."[30] The novel was set on Inishmann (part of the Aran Islands) and followed the life of its heroine Grania from her childhood to her tragic death. Grania was the daughter of a Spanish mother and Irish father, both of whom died while she was young. She lived with her half-sister Honor, who was religious, ill, and pessimistic about their prospects, believing that happiness could only come in the afterlife. In contrast, Grania believed that happiness could be found in marriage. Nevertheless, Grania and

[27] Vernon Lee, *Miss Brown*, vol III, (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1884), 7.
[28] *Ibid*, 281.
[29] O'Neill, "Emily Lawless," 125-129.

Honor were fairly wealthy in comparison to their fellow islanders, who were very poor. Grania was also engaged to her childhood friend Murdough, an alcoholic who saw in her a wife who would care for him and financially support him. Throughout the novel, Grania was torn between her love for Murdough and her gradually growing knowledge that he did not return her affections and instead saw her as a means to improve his life. One day, Murdough abandoned her at a fair in Galway and left her to make her way home on her own. On the way, she met a poor family and seeing the harsh conditions in which they lived, she pondered whether Honor's pessimistic outlook was right, and whether there was a point in marrying and bringing children in a world that contained such miseries. [31] When Honor began to succumb to her illness, Grania left to find a priest to attend her. There was a storm, and Murdough refused to accompany her on account of it. Grania attempted the journey without him, but her boat could not handle the treacherous waters and she drowned.

In the end, Lawless vindicated Honor's pessimism. Honor believed that women must "bear and bear, that's all she's got to do, so she has, till God sends her rest-nothing else."[32] That was ultimately Grania's fate; she had to bear Murdough's ill treatment until her death. Lawless' novel had much in common with the English novels that were being published at the time. Like Lee, Lawless was pessimistic about women's prospects. No matter how much she wanted to, Grania could not find happiness in a marriage with a selfish alcoholic and there was no other path to happiness except to perhaps reunite with her sister in the afterlife.

Mona Caird published a similarly pessimistic novel about women's ability to escape what she viewed as the oppressive confines of marriage and to pursue work in *The Daughters of*

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[30] James H. Murphy, *Irish Novelists and the Victorian Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 211-212.
[31]Emily Lawless, *Grania: The Story of an Island* (New York: Macmillan & Co, 1895. Originally published in 1892), 242.
[32] *Ibid,* 179-180.

Danaus (1894). Caird (Alice Mona Alison) was married to James Alexander Henryson-Caird, a Scottish landowner eight years her senior, but they spent much of their married time apart. Her many articles made her a leading figure in late 19th century debates on women's rights. In 1888, she called the current state of marriage a failure in the *Westminster Review* and sparked what scholar Angelique Richardson calls "the most famous newspaper controversy of the nineteenth century."[33] *The Daughters of Danaus* was an indictment of marriage and the restrictions it placed on women's freedom. The heroine, Hadria Fullerton, was a New Woman, but she believed that women could not escape the limitations that society placed on their lives, regardless of their will to do so. Her feminism inspired her sister, Algitha, to reject marriage and work to aid the poor. Their parents could tolerate one daughter choosing not to marry, but not both. Hadria reluctantly agreed to marry, though only on the condition that she would retain her freedom. However, her husband did not respect their agreement after the marriage, as he believed that Hadria would reform herself once she became his wife. Despite marrying, Hadria remained committed to her feminist values and remained critical of marriage as an institution that oppressed women. She had children, but motherhood also failed to change her views. She believed children irrevocably trapped women inside the domestic sphere, and she resented their existence. Eventually, Hadria fled her marriage and travelled to France to study music under a renowned composer. Not long after, her mother fell ill, partly due to the distress Hadria's behaviour had caused her. Hadria was forced to give up her budding career and return. She and her husband still remained distant, but she gave up her dream of becoming a composer and escaping marriage to avoid further distressing her mother. Her friend Professor Fortesque nonetheless urged her to "hold fast to

[33] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century*, 181, 179-180.

your own colours. Don't take sides, above all, with the powers that have oppressed you…you can do more than you dream, even as things stand."[34]

Caird was pessimistic about women's prospects in the late 19th century. Some women might have escaped marriage, like Algitha, but most women were compelled to marry, surrendering their interests and dreams and becoming subservient wives and mothers. Hadria was relentlessly critical of marriage and the domestic sphere, which she saw as nothing more than a prison for women. Even less conventionally, she was critical of motherhood and did not feel motherly towards her own children. She argued, "Motherhood, in our present social state, is the sign and seal as well as the means and method of a woman's bondage."[35] In Anne Bronte's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) motherly devotion legitimised or redeemed women's unconventionality, but Caird saw motherhood as another instrument of women's oppression. Hadria hated the inequality between women and men so much that she frequently expressed a wish to exact revenge on men. She took in the illegitimate daughter of a fallen woman, claiming that she wished to raise her to despise men like her father and to avoid the constraints placed on women (she failed in this mission, as the child's biological father demanded custody of her). Hadria was also critical of the literary narratives about unconventional and New Women. She claimed that novels attacked and sneered at women like her:

> I am always exhorted to cure myself of being myself. Nothing less would suffice. Now this is wounding. All my particular feelings, my strongest beliefs, are condemned, directly or by inference. I could almost believe that there is a literary conspiracy to reform me.[36]

[34] Mona Caird, *The Daughters of Danaus* (New York: The Feminist Press: 1989. Originally published in 1894), 489-490.
[35] *Ibid*, 341.
[36] *Ibid*, 112-113.

Caird observed that conservative and anti-feminist novelists such as Charlotte Yonge, Eliza Lynn Linton, and Rhoda Broughton, often goaded unconventional women such as Hadria to reform themselves if they wanted a happy ending. Yet Caird was pessimistic about women's prospects to escape their bondage. Despite the developments in women's rights in the late 19th century, women could not yet overcome conventionality, which retained its iron grip on the fates of women both real and fictional. Nonetheless, Professor Fortesque's encouragement for Hadria to not reform herself-to keep her feminist ideals and continue to try bettering the conditions of women and herself-suggested that Caird believed that there was a glimmer of hope for women in the future.

Lee, Lawless, and Caird depicted marriage as an unhappy ending. Anne did not want to be a wife and mother, yet still found herself engaged to a man that she did not love. While Grania did love her fiancée and wished to marry him, he did not treat her well and desired her because of her wealth and her ability to care for him. Grania drowned at the end of the novel, but Lawless hinted that if she had married her life would not have been a happy one. Caird argued that marriage and motherhood trapped women in subservient roles, and her heroine Hadria had to surrender her dreams of a vocation and independence out of duty to her family. These novels conformed to convention, but they critiqued it: instead of being a source of happiness, marriage limited women's prospects and consigned them to unhappy, unfruitful lives.

3. **Women's inability to break conventions**

While some New Women novelists argued that marriage did not necessarily lead to happiness for women, others examined the difficulties women faced when they tried to escape convention altogether. Since women had gained access to greater secondary education and more career opportunities, in addition to more control over their property and finances, it became more

feasible to imagine a society in which women did not have to be confined to the domestic sphere. Yet New Women novelists were often pessimistic about the prospects of women who attempted to break the rules that the separate sphere ideology prescribed.

Some novelists, such as Sarah Grand, argued that the rules existed to preserve the social order and were therefore necessary. Sarah Grand (Frances Elizabeth Bellandon Clarke) was an Irish New Woman novelist. She was an unconventional woman, not only because she supported the Women's Rights movements and criticized marriage, but because she left her husband. She was also a eugenicist and sought to use her fiction to spread eugenicist ideas.[37]

In *Ideala* (1888), the heroine Ideala was married to an emotionally and physically abusive man. When she could no longer bear his ill treatment, she decided to leave him. Despite this, the two remained married to safeguard his reputation. She sought advice on how to handle her difficult situation from a lawyer called Lorrimer, to whom she was soon attracted. The two of them considered running away together despite the fact that Ideala was still legally married. Ideala argued that she was prepared for the consequences of "break[ing] through a social convention."[38] However, her friends argued that society needed moral and legal laws to function, and that people must obey them even when it was difficult.[39] This argument convinced Ideala, and she agreed to stop seeing Lorrimer. She eventually found purpose in feminist engagement, helping prostitutes, and campaigning for rational dress. The novel concluded by noting that Ideala "gathers the useless units of society about her and make them worthy women."[40]

[37]Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century*, 98, 95.
[38] Sarah Grand, *Ideala: A Study from Life* ed. Molly Youngkin (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2008. Originally published in 1888), 133.
[39] *Ibid,* 149-151.
[40] *Ibid,* 207.

Ideala did not find happiness within marriage. Her purpose was to help other women. She was critical of marriage and believed that marriage without love was an "immoral contract."[41] She argued that it was a waste to confine wives solely to their domestic duties, that they should be able to seek paid work, and that they should be given greater educational opportunities. Yet Ideala believed that marriage was necessary for British society. She argued that the Roman Empire had fallen because divorce had become easier, suggesting that the increasing ease of divorce in Britain could lead to similar results for the British Empire.[42] Ideala also supported eugenism, believing that the future of the white race depended on the British enjoying good health. Ideala argued that "we want grander minds, and we must have grander bodies to contain them."[43] Providing strong genetic material through reproduction between suitable people was a necessary component. Ideala viewed this as a patriotic duty and believed that English women would rise to arms, using their "love, constancy, self-sacrifice, their intellectual strength and will," to "save the nation" just as men defend the country in battle.[44] *Ideala* displayed conflicted opinions about marriage. The heroine escaped an abusive husband and argued that women deserved greater liberty in society, but she continued to believe that women could best serve society through getting married, morally influencing their husbands, and producing children.

Breaking the rules could also harm other women, and that would not be in line with the feminist goal of aiding women and encouraging a sense of sisterhood. Furthermore, a life without marriage might not lead to happiness either. Ella Hepworth Dixon was a novelist, edited Oscar Wilde's periodical *The Woman's World* and in 1895 became editor of *The*

[41] *Ibid,* 137.
[42] *Ibid,* 178-179.
[43] *Ibid,* 179.
[44] *Ibid,* 181.

Englishwoman.[45] Her novel *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894) centered on a heroine, Mary, who, like Dixon, was a journalist. She lost her father at the beginning of the novel and had to seek paid employment to support herself and her younger brother. However, Mary also wanted to work out of personal interests and became a journalist. Dixon noted that Mary "wished to make her way in the world and compete with men."[46] Her desire to live independently made her ambivalent about marriage-she did not wish to be dependent on a husband, or give up her work, but she was in love with Conservative politician Vincent Hemming. Vincent was often absent, at one point going on a tour of the British Empire to research his book on 'the Woman Question.' Mary always acquiesced to Vincent's wishes but eventually grew tired of waiting. Mid-way through the novel, her best friend Alison Ives fell ill. On her deathbed, she asked Mary to promise to "never, never do anything to hurt another woman."[47] Alison believed that if women were united, they could be the ones to lead the world. Mary promised that "All we modern women are going to help each other, not hinder."[48] Soon after, Mary learned that Vincent had married another woman. Yet he soon found his marriage unbearable and returned to Mary proposing that the two could run away together. Mary refused, upholding her promise to Alison, citing the harm it would do to his wife and daughter. She proclaimed,

> I can't, I won't, deliberately injure another woman…Oh, the torture of women's lives-the helplessness, the impotence, the emptiness!… All we modern women mean to help each other now.[49]

She reminded him of the good work that Alison had done and sent him away. The novel ended with Mary having a successful career as a journalist and helping other women, but alone.

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[45] Palmer, "Ella Hepworth Dixon and Editorship," 96-97.
[46] Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman* (UK: The Cassell Publishing Co, 1894), 112.
[47] *Ibid*, 259.
[48] *Ibid*, 259.
[49] *Ibid*, 304.

Dixon argued that women should first and foremost support each other, and critiqued the ways that women were perceived as subservient to men in Victorian society. Dixon highlighted the ways in which Mary had to continually let Vincent treat her poorly and acquiesce to his wishes when they contradicted hers. She observed that "A woman-especially in her own home-should always smile. It was on that smile that the whole fabric of civilization rested."[50] Eventually, Mary's vow to never hurt other women led her to reject Vincent's desire to run away with her. Like Ideala, she found purpose in aiding other women and in her journalism career. But she was unable to marry the man she loved. While Mary's decision to reject Vincent's offer was in line with convention, her justification was different. In earlier novels, women were condemned if they had relationships with married men. While Mary intended to avoid those transgressions, her primary concern was to avoid harming his wife and daughter and breaking her vow to Alison. Dixon also stressed that the "modern women" of the 1880s and 1890s were different-primarily because of their perceived solidarity with other women-than women who had lived in the 1850s: Alison's mother, Lady Jane, is described as having "the prejudices of ladies who were young in the fifties."[51] Mary and Alison believed that she would judge suffering fallen women harshly. Instead, they believed that their generation of "modern women" would act in solidarity with other women and seek to better their conditions. This perception was not entirely accurate (Elizabeth Gaskell had argued that fallen women could be redeemed in 1853 – but generated a backlash) but it illustrated Dixon's beliefs that the New Woman was more progressive and compassionate than women of previous generations. Dixon celebrated her heroine's desire to work and supported her feminist aspirations. Yet unlike Levy, she could not see a way for Mary to combine her ambitions with her desire for love.

[50] *Ibid,* 166.
[51] *Ibid,* 263.

There was also a double standard between women and men that judged women harshly for behaviour that men were permitted to engage in. Despite the feminist movement and the gains made in women's rights, this double standard remained prevalent in the late 19th century. Thomas Hardy depicted a hopeless situation in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman* (1891). In the novel, the Durbeyfields discovered that they were the descendents of a powerful family called the D'Urbervilles who had lost their status and wealth. Seeking to regain their lost wealth, they sent their daughter Tess to another family who uses the D'Urberville name thinking that they were relations (they were not). Alec D'Urberville, Tess' supposed cousin, employed her in his household but took advantage of her inferior position and raped her. After a short stint as his mistress, she left him because she was unable to bear his ill treatment and the harm their relationship did to her reputation. She then gave birth to a short-lived illegitimate child. After burying her child, Tess sought employment on a farm and met co-worker Angel Clare and fell in love with him. The two married, and consequently decided to confess their secrets to each other. Angel confessed that he had a brief affair with an unmarried woman. When Tess confessed her history with Alec, however, Angel reacted with revulsion and could not forgive her. Though Angel recognized that Tess had been "more sinned against than sinning," he was unable to see her as the woman he thought she was.[52] The two separated, and in the interim Alec returned and used the destitution of Tess' family to manipulate her into re-entering into a relationship with him. When Angel returned and expressed regret for having rejected Tess, Tess responded by murdering Alec to be with Angel again. The two spent a short time in hiding before the police caught and arrested Tess. She was tried and sentenced to death. Hardy declared that "'Justice' was done and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with

Tess."[53] The quotation marks around 'justice' indicated that Hardy did not believe that Tess' execution was just, but it was the only possible conclusion to her life.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles shared many similarities with George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. In both cases, the heroines were judged for events beyond their control and their loss of reputation was the beginning of their ruin. Hardy criticized the double standards between men and women; Alec had raped Tess and Angel had deserted her despite having had an illicit affair himself, but she was the one who paid for the crime while the men could continue womanizing without facing disgrace. Despite the emergence of the New Woman, women were still judged for their sexual behaviours. In fact, Hardy had been more optimistic about the prospects of women before the rise of the New Woman. In 1874, he had published *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which featured a heroine who was vain and strong willed, who ran a farm, collected suitors, and ultimately ended her story as a happily married wife. Other novelists also highlighted the double standards between women and men. In *Ruth*, Gaskell highlighted the way Ruth's actions were judged harshly while the harmful actions of the man who persuaded Ruth to transgress were pardoned.

While marriage was often depicted as confining for women, breaking the rules also did not lead to happiness either. Novelists such as Sarah Grand believed that conventions served to preserve the social order that strengthened British society. Hence, while Grand was critical of how 19th century society treated women, she still maintained that many conventions must be upheld. Being unmarried was also not a guarantee of happiness, and breaking conventions could also harm other women (running away with a married man would be hurtful to the wife, for

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[52] Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1920. Originally published in 1891), 297.
[53] *Ibid*, 524.

example). Further, women still faced social judgement and double standards for their sexual behaviours. Breaking the rules could still lead to ostracization and obstacles for women who transgressed.

4. Financial independence as a possible solution

Despite these difficulties, could women escape convention and be independent if they had the economic means to do so? Financial stability from employment could provide women a way to support themselves and avoid marriage. Women might be able to take advantage of the new opportunities offered to them in education and work to be able to live independently and happily without husbands or be able to continue working after marriage.

New Women novelist Amy Levy believed that economic independence could be a solution. Levy was a Jewish novelist and essayist. She studied at Cambridge's Newnham College; having benefited from the new secondary schools for women which began to open mid-century. Levy released love poetry for other women (including Vernon Lee) or dedicated to a female subject. She committed suicide in 1889, having suffered from depression.[54] In *The Romance of a Shop* (1888) Levy examined the experiences of female storeowners and their difficulties. While the separate sphere ideology framed market-work as outside the women's sphere, in practice it was not unusual for women to work in or own businesses in the late 19th century.[55]

[54] Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman, "Introduction," in *Amy Levy: Critical Essays* edited by Naomi Hetherington and Nadia Valman (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 1-2, 11, 4.
[55] See Beatrice Craig, *Women and Business since 1500: Invisible Presence's in Europe and North America?*(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), Jennifer Aston *Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth Century England: Engagement in the Urban Economy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), Hannah Barker, *The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Allison C. Kay *The Foundation of Female Entrepreneurship: Enterprise, Home and Household in London, 1800-1870* (London: Routledge, 2009), Nicola Phillips *Women in Business, 1700-1850* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2006).

In the novel, the Lorimer sisters Gertrude, Lucy, and Phyllis opened a photography shop despite their Aunt Caroline's protestations. Much of the conflict in the plot rested on Gertrude, Lucy, and Phyllis' desire to run a business while their other sister Fanny and Aunt Caroline advocated domesticity. That all four sisters were unmarried was a significant source of contention between them and their aunt. Of the sisters, Gertrude was the most conflicted about marriage, pondering whether it would be better to devote herself to her business or to marry. Early in the novel, Gertrude rejected a proposal from her suitor Lord Watergate. When Fanny and Lucy married, however, Gertrude faced the prospect of spending her life alone, which prompted her to reconsider her decision. Lucy wrote a note to Gertrude that encouraged her to do so, writing, "The fact is, Gerty, I am going the way of all flesh, and am about to be married. Believe me, it is the most sensible course for a woman to take. I hope you will follow my example."[56] Accepting Lucy's counsel, Gertrude married. At the end of the book, all three surviving sisters were happily married. Lucy became a mother while continuing her photographic trade. Contrary to Lee, Levy depicted women who were able to marry, become mothers, continue their businesses and retain the ambitions they held prior to marriage. It was a departure from the usual blueprint, and emblematic of Levy's support for women's education and feminist activism.

However, novelist George Gissing believed that the obstacles facing women, especially surplus and feminist women, in the last decades of the 19th century were too severe to be overcome with economic independence. Gissing explored the dire circumstances that surplus women and New Women faced in his 1893 novel *The Odd Women*. The novel depicted the lives of multiple women, some of them conventional women and others "New Women." Gissing

[56]Amy Levy, *The Romance of a Shop* (Boston: Cupples and Hurd, 1889. Originally published 1888), 290.

painted a bleak picture of their prospects. The female protagonists, feminists Mary Barfoot and Rhoda Nunn owned an institution to educate and train to enter the workforce women who could not find husbands. Rhoda hoped to discourage the women from marrying, while Mary hoped to train women to break job market gender barriers. The two of them led productive, but increasingly lonely lives. Rhoda briefly considered entering an unconventional relationship in which she and her suitor Everard would live together but not marry each other. However, she realizes that a union that did not have the sanction of society would never work. Another protagonist, Monica, was desperate for marriage. She and her two sisters had lost their father while they were children and had to support themselves teaching and working in a shop. Her sisters also drank and spent their spare time reading cheap novels. For a short time, Monica studied at Rhoda and Mary's institution. While there, Monica met a man called Edmund who began to insistently court her. Monica realized that if she married him, he would be able to support both her and her sisters. Yet Edmund turned out to be an abusive husband. He was a strident believer of the separate sphere ideology and demanded that Monica stay home. Gissing observed that the idea of viewing Monica as "simply a human being was beyond the reach of his intelligence."[57] He was also jealous of any man Monica talked to. Monica, feeling stifled, had a brief emotional affair with another man that she ended when she realized her fantasies of running away with him were unrealistic. Edmund discovered the affair, physically abused her, and the two separated. However, Monica soon learned that she was pregnant with Edmund's child. She also believed that she would die in childbirth. Rhoda tried to persuade her that she could live a fulfilling life and find happiness. However, Monica's premonitions were true and she died giving birth to her daughter. The novel ended with Rhoda Nunn in tears cradling Monica's infant

[57] George Gissing, *The Odd Women* ed. Arlene Young (Peterborough, Ont: Broadview Press, 1998. Originally published in 1893), 245.

daughter, repeatedly calling her "poor child."[58] Rhoda had often expressed optimism for the prospects of surplus and New Women, but she could not foresee a happy future for Monica's young daughter.

Gissing depicted the opportunities open to women at the end of the 19th century as bleak. The novel suggested that Victorian women were caught in a bind. If they did not marry, because they did not want to or because no man was interested in them, they ended up lonely, desperate, and vulnerable to addiction and other vices. If they tried to marry to gain financial stability, they may fall prey to harmful and controlling men. If they tried to become "New Women," even if they were educated and had a profession, they still ended up lonely and unfulfilled, and witnessed the bleak circumstances of their fellow women that they were unable to change.

Hence, there were divided opinions amongst novelists about the possibilities for women to lead happy, successful lives, and be self-supporting. Levy believed that women could earn their own living. She was also an example of a novelist who was more optimistic about women's prospects, demonstrating that not all New Women novelists were pessimistic and that some of their novels had happy endings. In contrast, Gissing believed that economic stability was not enough to enable women to be independent or happy.

Conclusion

In the 1880s and 1890s, novels tended to be bolder in challenging the status quo than those written earlier. The emergence of the New Woman novel provided feminist authors an avenue to critique the separate sphere ideology, marriage, and to advocate for more work and educational opportunities for women. The emergence of this new genre, and their attracting a wide readership indicates that the Victorian public was interested in feminist discourses and

[58] *Ibid*, 336.

depictions of unconventional women. Yet many New Women novelists were pessimistic about women's prospects and there were few examples of successful, happy New Women to be found in the genre. The heroines of New Women novels critiqued conventions, but they could not overcome them. Lee, Hardy, Lawless, Gissing, and Caird believed that women could not escape the pressure to marry or escape judgement on their sexual behaviour. Though they challenged their readers to sympathise with unconventional women and be critical of the social forces that punished them, they did not let their heroines escape convention. Other novelists, such as Grand, Levy, and Dixon were more optimistic about the changes in women's rights that were occurring. Levy depicted a world in which marriage and motherhood could be reconciled with women's desire to work and have careers. In Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* Mary had a career and was committed to aiding other women but she had to do it without love; men such as Vincent were too cruel to enable New Women like Mary to reconcile love and independence. Another notion that emerged in these late 19th century novels was the idea that women should support other women and aid in their cause. Ideala, Mary, and Hadria were determined to help other women and to better their conditions. New Women novels also placed a greater focus on female friendships than had previously been common. The friendships between Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot, Grania and Honor, and Mary Erie and Alison Ives, were among the most central relationships in those novels, and men tended to recede into the background or proved to be less important to the heroines than their female friends. The depiction of independent, unconventional women combined with this focus on strong female friendship led anti-feminist novelists such as Eliza Lynn Linton and Rhoda Broughton to associate feminism with lesbianism as we saw in chapter five. Overall, these novels often portrayed the late 19th century as a period of transition for women. They were aware that things were beginning to change-women had more

opportunities to work, and feminists were openly challenging the separate sphere ideology. They acknowledged that things were different than they had been in the 1850s. Yet they also knew that the separate sphere ideology remained a potent ideology and that the conventions of marriage and motherhood, as well as remaining faithful and not engaging in pre-marital sex or running away with someone else while married were strong. Hence, they created sympathetic depictions of unconventional and New Women, but they often did not believe that their heroines could successfully escape convention.

Throughout the Victorian era, fiction tended to adhere to conventionality even when they challenged it. In earlier novels, unconventional women could be accepted if they were exceptional (for example, if they possessed artistic talent). Or they redeemed themselves by becoming virtuous mothers (that is, transgressing one norm but strongly adhering to another, such as having pre-marital sex or leaving a marriage but fulfilling their motherly duties). With the emergence of the New Women genre, some novelists became more explicitly feminist and more outspoken in their criticism of the separate sphere ideology, marriage, and motherhood. Yet the majority of these late 19th century novelists did not overthrow conventions; female characters still tended to end their stories as wives and mothers (even if this was depicted as an unhappy ending), or unfulfilled without love. This made the overall mood in the late 19th century literature pessimistic - women wanted to break from the prescriptions of the separate sphere ideology, but ultimately could not do so.

Conclusion

Between the years 1850-1901, the once dominant separate sphere ideology faced significant challenges, which fostered anxieties about unconventional women who were unmarried by choice, feminists, lesbians etc. At the same time, the Second British Empire peaked, "scientific" racism and eugenics became more widespread in Britain, and they might have reinforced the separate sphere ideology -especially since eugenics, which became a significant component of imperialist thought, stressed the importance of racial purity and reproduction.

The study of novels reveals much about how a segment of middle class Victorian British culture responded to the threats against the separate sphere ideology. This class read a lot of novels, especially the women.[1] Literature both shaped and reflected cultural attitudes towards unconventional women, whether they were surplus, fallen, feminist, lesbian, or in an interracial relationship. Many novelists were interested in domesticity, marriage, and the role of women in society. After 1850, they became increasingly aware that the ideal of marriage and domestic womanhood often promoted in novels did not reflect the reality of many women's lives. They began to address these concerns in their work, either defending the status quo, critiquing it, or a combination of both. As women gained civic and political rights and the feminist movement gained visibility, novelists began to reflect and react to these changes. Many depicted feminisms as a dangerous temptation that could lead women astray. Anti-feminist novelists sometimes associated feminism with lesbianism to denounce it as unnatural and dangerous. Other novelists were feminist themselves and used their novels to promote their ideas. As such, novels were among the factors that shaped middle-class Victorian responses to the changes in women's rights in the second half of the 19th century.

As women continued to gain new rights and society became aware of the existence of "surplus women," novelists began to identify feminism and the desire for a profession as new temptations for women, and reasserted traditional norms. For instance, Charlotte Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) argued that women could not govern themselves and needed male advice.[2] Novelists continued to depict marriage as the only way for women to have happy lives; the alternatives led to misery, if not tragedy. The existence of women who could not or would not marry due to feminist ideals led to many attempting to reinforce this norm and defend the status quo.

Some novels even suggested that unmarried and later feminist women were guilty of another, even more dangerous form of unconventionality: lesbianism The average Victorian would be unfamiliar with lesbianism and even those in the know would not openly discuss it in public. Novelists instead used oblique implicit references to lesbianism to blacken their unconventional female characters. This suggested that they believed that women who engaged in one form of unconventionality could also engage in others. Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy both depicted elderly spinsters who took an unnatural interest in younger women, whom they threatened to corrupt. Foreign European women and non-white women were also implied to be lesbians. Some went further and associated lesbianism with vampirism, creating the vampyric lesbian trope: lesbian characters were portrayed as either literal vampires or as predatory women.[3]

In the 1880s and 1890s, lesbianism became associated with feminism, and anti-feminist novelists used accusations of lesbianism to condemn activists. Novelists could only imply same-

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[1] Price, "Victorian Reading," 38, 51.
[2] Yonge, *The Clever Woman of the Family*, 168.
[3] Gina Wisker, "Devouring Desires: Lesbian Gothic Horror," in *Queering the Gothic* ed. William Hughes and Andrew Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 125-126. The trope of the vampyric lesbian

sex attraction in women, to escape legal problems, but their work provide insight into how same-sex attraction in women was communicated to the public. They also show it was often attributed to otherwise unconventional women like unmarried or feminist ones. In much of the literature, the lesbian was framed as an alien other that threatened conventionality, largely through the danger she posed to other women.

The average Victorian living in Britain would have had little direct knowledge of the British Empire and of people of other races. In most novels, the Empire lurked in the background, merely referred to through allusions to race or the colonies. While historians have differed on whether these allusions and references suggest that Victorian British culture was imperialist or not, those allusions demonstrate that the Victorians tended to have only a dim awareness of the Empire.[4] This was especially true for novels targeting a female audience; the Victorians conceived the Empire as a masculine venture.[5]

When it was mentioned, it was often as a place to send a character away for the convenience of the plot. The Empire tended to be more visible in novels that were set in the colonies or featured non-white characters. The 1857 Indian Mutiny drew the public's attention to of India, and novelists followed the gaze. Two novels about the mutiny, James Grant's 1868 *The First Love and Last Love,* and Flora Annie Steel, *On the Face of the Water*, depict British women as more virtuous than Indian women; and depict British men protecting British women while Indian men attempted to rape them, proving British superiority. English women were

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continued into the 20th century, with other novelists following the tradition and it became a trope in horror film as well (125).

[4] See Edward Said *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), and John M. Mackenzie, " 'Comfort' and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter," *Journal of Imperial & Commonwealth History* 36.4 (2008), 659-668.

[5] Cannon Schmitt, " 'The Sun and the Moon were Made to give them light:' Empire in the Victorian novel," in *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 15.

supposed to model the superior forms of wifedom and motherhood that non-white women supposedly lacked to assert ideas of British superiority.[6]

In the 1880s and 1890s, eugenic thought made it a duty for women to marry suitable white men and produce healthy babies to improve and safeguard the white race.[7] Women who failed to live up to the standards of the separate sphere ideology could be accused of weakening the race. However, Empire and race were usually relegated to the background in novels. When they did appear, they were sources of menaces that threatened English convention and had to be vanquished. The alien other, whether a sexual other or racial other, was a source of fear and a threat to conventional marriage.

Unconventional women were not always depicted in negative terms; some novelists were sympathetic towards them. However, in these cases the unconventionality had to be the result of some acceptable cause such as artistic talent or devotion to a higher duty (such as maternal love), and conventions still prevailed in the end. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), *Aurora Leigh* (1856) or *Ruth* (1853) adhered to the conventional narrative: Barrett Browning and Bronte's novels ended with the heroine's marriage and Gaskell's tragic heroine died after valiantly caring for her sick former lover.

In the 1880s and 1890s, novelists became bolder in challenging the separate sphere ideology, conventional marriage, and the social position of women in British society. Explicitly feminist novels featuring independent heroines who advocated greater rights for women and often critiqued marriage or wanted to reform or even abolish it, emerged in that time period and came to be known as New Women novels. These novels caused a backlash from supporters of the status quo, as Eliza Lynn Linton and Rhoda Broughton's anti-feminist novels demonstrated.

[6] Hall, "Of Gender and Empire: Reflections on the Nineteenth Century," 51.
[7] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century*, 8-9.

Yet the conventional narrative persisted to a point even in New Woman novels. Celibacy was presented as the road to loneliness (*Odd Women,* 1893).

Similarly, in *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) Mona Caird argued that it was impossible for late 19th century women to escape their circumstances; regardless of how talented they were or how much they were determined to defy the separate sphere ideology, they still had few prospects outside marriage and domesticity. Remaining single was not a road to happiness either; Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Modern Woman* (1894) offered a pessimistic view about men's treatment of women that made marriage untenable, but the loneliness that women faced without romantic fulfilment left them unhappy and unsatisfied.[8] Similarly, Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) lamented that women were still condemned for their sexual behaviours despite the gains in women's rights, whereas men were able to engage in similar behaviour and to sexually assault women without repercussions.

At the end of the century, male novelists sympathetic to unconventional women were as pessimistic as their female equivalents. George Gissing mourned that women could rarely lead happy lives whether they were unmarried, married, or New Women. Thomas Hardy critiqued the way British society treated fallen women, even if they had fallen as a result of the harmful actions of men. Like female novelists, male novelists often used the conventional marriage plot, and they examined the repercussions of a society in which more and more women either could not or would not marry. Some of them defended the separate sphere ideology while others, such as Gissing and Hardy, critiqued it. In the late 19th century, female and male novelists both shared similar worries about unconventional women.

Not all New Women and other novels sympathetic to unconventional women were pessimistic. At the end of Amy Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), for instance, the heroine

was happily married and continuing to run her photography shop, suggesting that women could have both marriage and a career.[9] Although some New Women novels had a happy outcome, the prevailing mood trended towards pessimism. Despite the rights that women had gained, feminist novelists still believed that there were too many social and political obstacles for women to overcome in order to be successfully independent, or happy. Novelists such as Lee and Caird depicted the marriage plot as an unhappy one, but they still adhered to that narrative. Becoming a successful New Woman appeared to be out of reach.

These novels also illuminated the worldview of the women and men who wrote them. The female novelists whose work has been examined here led different lives and had different perspectives. They mostly belonged to the British middle class. Some of these women were conventionally married, but others were not. Some even entered romantic relationships with married men.

These novelists also had diverse political opinions that were reflected in their work. Feminist novelists such as Mona Caird, Ella Hepworth Dixon, Amy Levy, and Vernon Lee sought to use their novels to argue for greater freedoms and independence for women. In contrast, conservative novelists such as Charlotte Yonge, Ellen Wood, and Eliza Lynn Linton defended the separate sphere ideology and critiqued the feminist movement. Then there were novelists like Margaret Oliphant who was critical of political feminism though she supported women gaining more work opportunities and George Eliot who critiqued the way society treated women and the lack of opportunities available to them but did not like to support feminist ideas. There were also divergent opinions amongst feminist novelists and anti-feminist or conservative ones. Caird was deeply critical of marriage while New Woman novelist Sarah Grand thought it

[8] Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman*, 304.
[9] Levy, *The Romance of a Shop*, 290.

ought to be reformed but was an important aspect of British society. Eliza Lynn Linton was sympathetic to her rebellious heroine's political ideas, such as the acceptability of inter-class marriage that might have offended other conservative writers and indeed, some feminist ones such as Grand. Anti-feminist novelists such as Yonge and Linton opposed the feminist movement while also voicing their own critiques of the status quo.

For these novelists, novels served as an avenue for self-representation and political argumentation. They were a way for these middle-class English women to express their ideas about women's place in society, and either reaffirm or challenge convention.

However, there were sometimes a tension between a female novelist's life and her politics. Some of these novelists, such as Charlotte Yonge, Sarah Grand, and Eliza Lynn Linton, pursued careers but encouraged other women to follow more conventional paths. Though Yonge was unmarried, her novels asserted that women should confine themselves to being wives and not assert themselves in the public sphere. In *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865), the most virtuous and conventional character, Ermine, published essays under a pseudonym. Her articles reaffirmed conventional ideas, contrary to the heroin who wanted to publish articles advocating increased women's rights. Yonge viewed writing as an acceptable profession for women, as long as it defended convention.

Linton was perhaps the most paradoxical. She was unconventional in many ways; she was a journalist and engaged in romantic relationships with women.[10] Yet her 1880 novel *The Rebel of the Family* was anti-feminist and condemned a woman who desired other woman. In short, Linton wanted women to lead the conventional life that she was eschewing herself. She was not entirely against unconventional ideas; she was sympathetic to her heroine's ideas about

[10] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, 148, 151-152.

inter-class marriages. However, she did not believe that it was acceptable to question the separate sphere ideology and marriage.

Conversely, novelist Sarah Grand was a New Woman novelist and a proponent of greater rights for women. She was also an eugenicist. She believed that lower-class poverty was caused by their uncontrolled reproduction and argued that the middle class had the best genetic stock. As a feminist, Grand was deeply critical of marriage and often wrote about unhappy marriages. This was perhaps a reflection on her own experiences, as she had separated from her husband (something, which her heroine also does in *Ideala*). She also advocated better education for women. Despite her advocacy for women, however, she believed that when women entered the public sphere, they should limit themselves to moral issues and stay away from the traditionally male ones. She did not want women to act like men, and by 1900 she had begun to regret being associated with the New Women even though she had coined the term because she did not approve of the direction that it had taken. Richardson observed that for Grand "the purpose of women's self-improvement was primarily to serve the marriage relation, and through or in lieu of this - if no suitable partner was to be had - the world." Therefore, even though Grand left an unhappy marriage and though she voiced criticisms of marriage and how it disempowered women, she still argued that it was critical for women to marry a suitable man (meaning a middle-class man in good health). [11]

Novels became a way for many female authors to express and disseminate their social and political ideas/opinions. They used novels to argue for and against feminism, and voiced support for and criticisms of marriage. More conservative women often defended the status quo while they themselves led unconventional lives (perhaps seeing themselves as exceptions to the rule).

Male novelists also tended to follow the conventional narrative when they examined the place of women in society. In the 1850s to the 1870s, male authors like Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy published popular novels that depicted predatory/vampyric unmarried women with lesbian desire. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) took advantage of his supernatural setting to associate lesbianism with vampirism in one of the most visibly homoerotic novels published in the 19th century.[12] Literature most likely to take the Empire into account was written by men and targeted a male audience (such as adventure novels), consequently male authors were the ones who contributed novels that explored the position of white women in the colonies, and interracial relationships. They depicted both as dangers for British womanhood.

Despite the challenges to the separate sphere ideology, conventions persisted in Victorian fiction. The conventional marriage plot remained the most common narrative in 19th century novels as it had been in the 18th.[13] Women tempted to stray from convention, had to resist the temptation or else meet a tragic fate. Many novels served as cautionary tales, warning their female readers against pre-marital sex, leaving their husbands, or committing bigamy. In the 1850s and 1860s, most novels that included unconventional women, followed this blueprint.

The persistence of convention in these Victorian novels could be owed to multiple factors. Firstly, the Victorians worried that novels might corrupt the minds of the readers.[14] That meant that novels that depicted women engaging in improper behaviour-such as pre-marital sex, leaving a marriage, or becoming a feminist were causes of concern. The 1857 Obscenity

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[11] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century*, 95, 96, 100-101, 98, 100, 104, 106.
[12] It was not that female authors did not contribute implicit depictions of lesbianism in the mid-19th century, but the most prevalent depictions of dangerous/vampyric lesbians came from men at this time.
[13] Adams, *A History of Victorian Literature*, 25.
[14] Price, "Victorian Reading," 51.

Publications Act penalised publishers that disseminated material deemed to be "obscene."[15] Circulating libraries and periodicals were careful to ensure that the fiction that they hosted was respectable.[16] Novelists were limited in what they could publish, and how they could address topics that could arouse suspicion. Providing an ending in which previously unconventional women were either married or punished for their unconventionality allowed novels to be published with lesser likelihood of backlash.

However, this did not mean that novelists did not push the boundaries. A conventional ending did not erase the narrative that preceded it. Gaskell ultimately did conform to the conventional narrative in *Ruth* when the heroine died of illness, but she was keen to reiterate that her argument that fallen women could be redeemed was correct. Braddon condemned Lady Audley to a tragic end, but she used her story to critique the marriage market. Hardy gave Tess Durbeyfield a tragic ending, but the novel argued that this was unjust, and it critiqued social attitudes that led to women like Tess to suffer. A novel that had a conventional marriage plot could also depict unconventional women. Many novels, for example, featured minor female characters who were unmarried and did not meet a tragic fate. In Ellen Wood's 1861 *East Lynne* there was a spinster who did not want to marry and that was acceptable. It was deemed a pity that she was unmarried since she was excellent at running a household, and she was a financial burden on her family, but it was acceptable that she did not want to marry.

Convention did not remain dominant in novels solely due to pressures from publishers and critics. As we have seen, novelists were aware that the ideal of the separate sphere ideology was under challenge from the surplus women problem and the rise of feminism. Those who

[15] Katherine Mullin, "'Poison More Deadly than Prussic Acid:' Defining Obscenity after the 1857 Obscenity Publications Act (1850-1885)," in *Prudes on the Prowl: Fiction and Obscenity in England, 1850 to the Present Day* ed. David Bradshaw and Rachel Potter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.
[16] James, *The Victorian Novel*, 19.

wanted to defend the status quo from these challenges used conventional endings-either marriage or else tragedy-to caution women against leading unconventional lives. They reasserted that marriage was the best, and in fact only, source of happiness for women. Novelists who wanted to challenge the status quo, such as Lee, Caird, Gissing, and Hardy, used the conventional narrative to question whether it was actually the only source of happiness for women and indeed, to demonstrate that it could be a source of unhappiness. That New Women and other novelists grew bolder in their feminist arguments indicates that the gains women had made were robust and that the movement was gaining strength. Yet convention could not be overthrown, and many novelists could not imagine happy lives for their feminist heroines. The separate sphere ideology and the Victorian ideal of marriage could be challenged and critiqued, but still retained power in late Victorian culture.

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