

Girls of the Period

**Women Critics and Constructions of
the Feminine in the Mid-Victorian
Novel.**

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Abstract

This thesis addresses women's agency in the mediation and reception of mid nineteenth-century fiction from the end of the 1840s until the beginning of the 1870s. It demonstrates how women participated in shaping an ideology of the feminine by utilising the platform of periodical reviewing to monitor constructions of womanhood in the novels of women writers.

The notion of a feminine critical discourse about gender is a familiar one. There has been academic interest in the reactions of reviewers such as Margaret Oliphant and Geraldine Jewsbury to images of the feminine in sensation novels, but no study exists that brings together a body of women's criticism of this period, or examines the critical responses of women to a much wider spectrum of female representation, for example, in the field of domestic or religious fiction. This thesis explores the critical reaction, not simply to the transgressive or improper feminine, but to idealised images of the domestic angel. It points to a reshaping of the idea of the heroic which allowed women to take centre stage in fiction, and goes on to explore several constructions of the feminine that became a locus of concern for women commentators: the martyr to self-sacrifice; the injured wife; the governess; the religious heroine; the transgressor of sensation novels, and the assertive "Girl of the Period" in her various phases.

Interrogating those texts and themes that preoccupied nineteenth-century women critics, the thesis retrieves a lost context to women's writing of the period and argues that the discourses surrounding forgotten novels by writers

such as Harriet Parr and Charlotte Riddell provided a forum which allowed representations of gender to be contested, re-negotiated and re-defined. Bringing to light new critical material by reviewers such as Eleanor Eden and Jane Williams, the thesis examines many articles and reviews that have received no previous academic attention.

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INTRODUCTION

WOMEN WRITERS: WOMEN CRITICS

Let any one read the list of books in a modern library, and judge how large a share of them were written by women. Mrs. Jameson, Mrs. Stowe, Miss Brontë, George Eliot, Mrs. Gaskell, Susan and Katherine Winkworth, Miss Martineau, Miss Bremer, George Sand, Mrs. Browning, Miss Procter, Miss Austen, Miss Strickland, Miss Pardoe, Miss Mulock, Mrs. Grey, Mrs. Gore, Mrs. Trollope, Miss Jewsbury, Mrs. Speir, Mrs. Gatty, Miss Blagdon, Lady Georgiana Fullarton, [sic] Miss Marsh, and a dozen others.

(Frances Power Cobbe, "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" *Fraser's Magazine*, Nov. 1862, 609)¹

Frances Cobbe's roll call of women writers is indicative of the broad spectrum of texts that were in the compass of the nineteenth-century critic. Monica Fryckstedt, writing on Geraldine Jewsbury's prolific reviewing career for the *Athenaeum* notes that "what strikes a modern reader is not only her remarkable familiarity with the various genres of novels co-existing with the main stream of domestic fiction, but, above all, her refusal, shared by many of her contemporaries, to rank novelists, to compartmentalise them into major and minor" (*Geraldine Jewsbury's Athenaeum Reviews* 15). Margaret Oliphant, reviewing for *Blackwood's Magazine*,² reflects this catholic approach. Her article "Modern Novelists – Great and Small" (May 1855, 554-568), for example, spans two generations of women writers from Catherine Gore, Anne Marsh and Frances Trollope, to Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Julia Kavanagh, Geraldine Jewsbury and numerous others. Oliphant's "Modern Light Literature" series is similarly expansive and includes an overview of society novels, from William Thackeray's *Pendennis* (1850) to works by Anna Carter Hall and Julia Stretton (Oct. 1857, 423-427).

Oliphant indicates a willingness to engage with both "high" and popular culture but such eclecticism is partly determined by mid-century attempts to reconcile literary merit and moral value. Critical discourses about fiction, primarily informed by Christian morality, allowed space for a privileging of ethics above aesthetics, as evidenced by such articles as *The London Quarterly Review's* "Recent Novels: Their Moral and Religious Teaching" (Oct. 1866, 100-24) which evaluated the moral messages promulgated by such diverse writers as George Eliot, Charles Kingsley and Ellen Wood. A debate about realism, or perhaps what David Skilton more accurately refers to as "truth-to life" (86),³ allowed similar points of contact to be made. An 1867 *Saturday Review* article entitled "Women's Heroines" employs predominantly realist criteria, making reference to *Jane Eyre* and a range of Eliot's novels as a preface to a discussion of Eliza Lynn Linton's *Sowing the Wind* (1867). Acknowledging women's facility for acute observation, the reviewer nonetheless complains that "the vast majority of women who write novels do not draw upon their observation for their characters so much as upon their imagination" (Mar. 2, 1867, 260). A conflict between the idealisation of womanhood during this period, and what Lyn Pykett refers to as "an irruption of the feminine" (4) in genres such as sensation writing led to accusations that women were not being described either accurately or appropriately in fiction, and as Pykett observes, "we encounter a discourse on realism which prescribes both how women may represent and how women may be represented" (33). It is women's participation in this discourse and how that participation shaped an ideology of the feminine that I am concerned with in this study.

A further series of critical comparisons between a number of disparate writers is facilitated by the classification of women's writing as a distinctive genre, so that even when hierarchical comparisons are made, "great" and "small" female novelists can be located at different points on the same spectrum. Such separatism prefigures later feminist practice, albeit from a rather less sympathetic standpoint. William Greg, in his article, "False Morality of Lady Novelists" (*National Review* VII, 1859, 144-167) categorises women's writing in these terms, and like the *Saturday Review*, finds it guilty of failure, both in its depiction of realism and in its lack of proper moral judgment, although Greg mostly attributes this to the predominance of "young lady novelists" who write without the benefit of necessary life experience. "Indeed," remarks Greg, "the fiction market has mainly fallen into their hands" (148).⁴

The juxtaposition of popular women writers with more canonical figures in some recent academic studies, such as Fryckstedt's literary survey of 1866, *On the Brink* has been facilitated by modern feminist and cultural studies perspectives on Victorian literature. This approach, still relatively unusual, has come full circle in the sense that it mirrors the reviewing practices of many mid-Victorian periodicals, yet there are significant differences. Just as nineteenth-century literary debates reflected their own prevailing concerns about realism, morality and issues such as "the woman question," later studies have, of course, been predicated on the preoccupations of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Feminism has raised an awareness about women's exclusion from the canon that has led to the "rescue" of many forgotten texts and writers and allowed new parameters for the study of Victorian literature, but such interest cannot be

divorced from its own ideological context. Nicola Thompson, noting the paucity of studies on a broader range of women's writing, argues that "the feminist movement, ironically, has itself complicated the entrance into the canon of most Victorian women novelists, uncomfortable as it is with the treatment of the woman question in so many Victorian novels by women" (*Victorian Women Writers* 15). Thompson claims that "along with New Woman novelists, sensation novelists have attracted the bulk of the relatively small amount of critical attention paid to noncanonical Victorian women novelists"(18) and suggests that a continued privileging of texts that can be accommodated into our own feminist discourses presents a distorted picture of women's writing during this period, and places other prolific and once well-known writers of the period outside our frame of reference, out of print and out of favour.⁵

Although many "anti-feminist" women have been the subject of recent research, for example in Valerie Sander's 1996 study *Eve's Renegades*,⁶ these writers often generate interest because of the level of controversy they provoked, as in the case of Linton's polemical journalism; or because of some perceived level of subversion in their work.⁷ Twenty-first century feminist perceptions of nineteenth-century literature do not, of course, replicate those of nineteenth-century women commentators such as Cobbe or Oliphant, although that does not prevent us from engaging with such critics as if there were no perceivable cultural dislocation, not least a basic lack of knowledge of many of the writers and texts that informed their debates.⁸ John Sutherland, alleges that "the academic study of Victorian fiction has signally failed to engage with the mass of works produced in the field" ("The Underread" xii) and argues that the close

reading practices demanded by literary theory has militated against wider reading: "As theory enriches the quality of discourse it has impoverished the frame of reference, as scholars concentrate more on *how* they read than *what* they read " (xiii). This frame of reference appears to be expanding with publication of books such as Thompson's *Victorian Women Writers* and Harman and Mayer's *The New Nineteenth Century*,⁹ yet is narrower perhaps than in the first half of the twentieth century when more comprehensive surveys of Victorian literature were fairly commonplace.¹⁰

Any selection of texts we choose to foreground will always be partial and selective but a closer look at Cobbe's "list" offers a salutary reminder of the difference between contemporary and contemporaneous critical perspectives. Several of the names she cites are likely to be unfamiliar to modern academics who might be inclined to construct an alternate canon of women writers of 1862. The sheer scale of women in the literary marketplace perhaps caused the successful and well-established Charlotte Yonge to be overlooked. The omission of Mary Braddon and Ellen Wood, still in the early stages of their careers,¹¹ may have appeared less glaring to the reader of *Fraser's Magazine* who could feasibly have subsumed them into Cobbe's "dozen others," a group which might have included such names as Mrs. S. C. Hall, Mrs. Hubback, Julia Kavanagh, and Emma Jane Worboise. This kind of list, of course, takes no account of the women who were publishing under male or androgynous pseudonyms, for example Josepha Gulston (Talbot Gwynne), Harriet Parr (Holme Lee) and Charlotte Riddell (F. G. Trafford); or those identifying themselves only as "by the author of" one of their previous works. This group

currently included such writers as Emily Ponsonby, Emma Robinson, Julia Stretton, Henrietta Keddie, and Margaret Oliphant.¹²

With a few notable exceptions,¹³ discussion of the work of these women novelists is missing from modern studies of Victorian women's writing, yet their novels were interwoven into the literary contexture of the mid-Victorian period and informed the critical discourses that were being enacted by reviewers and journalists such as Oliphant, Cobbe, Jewsbury, and other women commentators who were engaging with women's fiction during this period.

Information about the status and reception of many forgotten writers can be gleaned from reading reviews of their work in Victorian periodicals such as the *Athenaeum*, the *Saturday Review* and the *Spectator*. A wealth of information has become more accessible to researchers since the establishment of the online index of the *Athenaeum*, based on its marked file of contributors located at City University library. This is useful in identifying the amount of critical attention that writers received, if only in terms of a numerical count of their reviews.¹⁴ Playwright and novelist Emma Robinson (1814-1890), for example, had at least a dozen notices in the review columns of this journal between the mid 1840s and mid 1860s. In the same year that Cobbe was drawing attention to the predominance of women's writing Robinson saw three of her books published or reprinted,¹⁵ yet today this versatile writer remains relatively unknown.

Charlotte Riddell (1832-1906), the author of at least fifty books published under a variety of pseudonyms,¹⁶ who took over editorship of the *St James's Magazine*

from the prolific Anna Carter Hall, is another "notable woman author"¹⁷ of the period whose reputation has not endured. Most of her work is now inaccessible to the modern reader with the exception of those of her ghost stories that have been reprinted in anthologies.¹⁸ Riddell, whose career peaked slightly later than Robinson's, had nine reviews in the *Athenaeum* between 1855 and 1870 and at least four in the *Saturday Review*.¹⁹ An advertisement in the *Athenaeum* for an 1861 edition of her novel, *Too Much Alone* (Nov. 23, 1861, 673) offers favourable quotes from eleven newspaper and periodical reviews garnered from its initial publication the previous year. Riddell's "F.G. Trafford" novels were the subject of Anne Thackeray's article "Heroines and Their Grandmothers" in *Cornhill Magazine* (May 1865, 630-40) in which she commended "Mrs Trafford's" originality in her portrayal of urban living, "this din of London life, and the way in which city people live and strive"(634). There was evidently an expectation on Thackeray's part that these novels were sufficiently well known to be familiar to readers of *Cornhill*.

Another overlooked novelist, Harriet Parr (1828-1900), accumulated twenty reviews of her work in the *Athenaeum* between 1855 and 1871 and received attention in other journals also, her *The Life and Death of Jeanne D'Arc* (1866) being reviewed by Anthony Trollope in the *Fortnightly Review* (Oct. 15, 1866, 632-6). Parr, who herself wrote a series of articles on women writers for the *British Quarterly Review*, is perhaps the most forgotten writer of her generation. She seems to have elicited little or no academic interest and has not had a novel reprinted since 1883,²⁰ yet her output was impressive. Parr wrote children's books; stories and verse; essays; biographies of French historical figures; at

least one hymn;²¹ and around twenty-three adult novels, several of which were translated into French and Italian. Both she and Riddell were published by the prestigious Smith and Elder and had work illustrated by Walter Crane.²² The juxtaposition of reviews of Parr's own work with other, more familiar texts and writers is a reminder of a lost context to mid-century writing. Her *Thorney Hall* (1855) is featured in the *Athenaeum* (Apr. 7, 1855, 403) alongside Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855); *Gilbert Massenger* (1855) with Charlotte Yonge's *The Lances of Lynwood* (1855), (Nov. 24, 1855, 1366); and *Annis Warleigh's Fortunes* (1863) shares page space with Ellen Wood's *The Shadow of Ashlydyat* (1863) (Jan. 23, 1864, 118-9). *Kathie Brande* (1856) was discussed with Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) by Greg in his *National Review* article "False Morality of Lady Novelists" (144-67) and reviewed in the *Westminster Review* by George Eliot (Jan. 1857, 306-326) in the same "Belles Lettres" section as Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1857).

This proximity does not denote a democratisation in the reception of texts. None of these three writers were accorded the same stature as writers such as Brontë, Eliot or Gaskell, although there was at least a recognition in the review columns that they formed part of the literary context in which more prestigious writers were testing out ideas. Parr was admired by Dickens²³ and received mixed reviews from Jewsbury who rated her as a flawed but promising writer, capable of producing still better work.²⁴ Eliot's assessment was fairly similar, but Parr unfortunately never quite fulfilled this expectation.²⁵ A writer with a comparable reception and reputation is perhaps Dinah Mulock, although Parr has not benefited from a similar revival of interest.

The historical retrieval of these writers and texts, while an important consideration in this present study, is secondary to the retrieval of women's agency in the way women's fiction was received and mediated. It would be disingenuous to suggest that substituting one set of forgotten women writers for another provides a more representative picture of mid-Victorian writing. My intention here is not to profile a particular group of writers but to locate the texts that preoccupied Victorian women reviewers in their concerns about the representation of womanhood in fiction. The *Athenaeum's* marked file and its index provide a unique source of information, not only about the reception of texts but about the identity of reviewers and is useful in determining the extent to which women were reviewing books by other women. The practice of anonymous reviewing and the lack of information available on other journals may render a more complete picture impossible to recover. William Beach Thomas's 1928 study of the *Spectator* refers to a selection of women writers and reviewers including Cobbe, Oliphant, Julia Ewing, Emily Faithfull and Julia Wedgwood (234), but without further details the extent of their contributions cannot be properly assessed. Merle Bevington's book on the *Saturday Review* offers a similarly tantalising picture of women's involvement in reviewing, suggesting that sensation writers Annie Thomas and Florence Marryat may have been called in to review fiction (389-90), but again empirical evidence is unavailable and only a small number of women's reviews have been identifiable by Bevington. The extent to which women writers were engaging with texts by their contemporaries, both as readers, and in the more formalised context of reviewing appears to have been considerable. George Eliot, for example, despite

her stated reluctance to be associated with less prestigious women novelists, and her insistence that she had little time for fiction, read works by Brontë, Gaskell, Mulock, Oliphant, and Anne Thackeray.²⁶ Her reviewing responsibilities for the *Leader* and the *Westminster Review* led her to novels by writers such as Parr, Jewsbury, Ellen Wallace, and Josepha Gulston, yet another writer whose name has been virtually erased from the history of nineteenth-century fiction, despite having the distinction of having her work read by Gaskell, Eliot, Brontë and Jewsbury.²⁷

The study of women as critics is inextricably interwoven with the study of women as writers as many women were working through issues of morality within the twin dialectic of fiction writing and criticism, and a significant portion of the novels they reviewed, simply because of logistics, rather than editorial policy, were also by women writers. It would be tempting to assume that women reviewers were directed exclusively towards women's fiction but the range of subjects they covered was extensive. Nor was women's fiction designated a specifically female preserve, for example of twenty-one novels by Ellen Wood featured in the *Athenaeum* between 1861 and 1870, eight were reviewed by Jewsbury, five by Lena Eden, and the remainder by various male reviewers including four by John Cordy Jeaffreson. My decision therefore to (largely) exclude texts and criticism by men is deliberate, although where particularly pertinent I have made references to novels by male writers who were sometimes working in genres that had been gendered as female.²⁸ Anonymous novels are similarly problematic, although nineteenth-century reviewers were generally willing to make assumptions about female authorship.

²⁹ The early feminist journal, *The Rose, the Shamrock and the Thistle*, perhaps also grappled with this difficulty by defining its critical brief as "A review of books written by or addressed to women" ("Our Ivory Tablets," Nov. 1862, 82).³⁰ To exclude reviews of anonymous novels, would, I suggest, exclude much relevant material and I therefore refer to those unattributed novels that prompted discussions of the feminine amongst reviewers. I do not claim to reproduce any discourses about fiction in totality, merely to point to the range of concerns expressed by women reviewers about the way femininity was represented in women's writing.

Literary women such as Eliot, Jewsbury, Oliphant, and Mulock were participants in discourses which encompassed their own work as well as novels by their contemporaries. In the following chapter I suggest the significance of this process on themes such as female self-sacrifice in Eliot's fiction since her own position was formulated during a period which saw novels by women writers closely dissected by women reviewers for the stance they took on this issue. These discourses about numerous forgotten novels helped shape the literary and ideological context in which more canonical writers were experimenting with various moral positions. The same social and cultural context in which Parr wrote *Thorney Hall* and *Gilbert Messenger* also produced *Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Middlemarch* (1871-2).

Fryckstedt, in her study *On the Brink*, suggests a methodology to restore texts to the place they once occupied in the popular canon. Rather than selecting the novels we assume to be significant and searching for pertinent reviews, "instead

we reverse the procedure and first read all the reviews published in a few leading literary weeklies and then let them guide us in our choice of reading" (16). A gender analysis of those forty novels cited by Fryckstedt (135) as having dominated the reviews of 1866 reveals twenty-eight books by women writers, including two of Riddell's novels,³¹ eleven by men, and one anonymous text, and it is illuminating to discover that Henrietta Keddie's novel, *Citoyenne Jacqueline* (1865) was one of the most widely reviewed books of the year, alongside Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866). The discourse about literature that was being enacted in the review columns was it seems, overwhelmingly about women's fiction and my intention here is to restore women's voices to these debates.

The reception of texts by popular women writers of this period has of course been the subject of previous feminist interest, most notably in Elaine Showalter's seminal study *A Literature of their Own* (73-99). Showalter emphasises the way that critical practices have marginalised women writers, and the paradigm that she established is one of women novelists struggling against the patriarchal constraints of a critical standard primarily informed by the gender of the writer. Showalter cites many examples of the lack of critical parity between the reception of novels by women and their male contemporaries³² and highlights the injustice and innuendo suffered by women whose unconventional personal lives rendered them particularly vulnerable to gender-specific abuse.³³

Patrocinio Schweickart in her 1986 essay, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading" draws attention to the change in emphasis

signalled by critics such as Showalter who were concerned with women's writing or "gynocriticism," from previous studies such as that of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) which was primarily concerned with a critique of patriarchal texts. Schweickart, referring to these two phases, notes that as feminist criticism shifted from the first to the second, it "turned its attention from androcentric texts per se to the androcentric critical strategies that pushed women to the margins of the literary canon" (44). Schweickart's envisaged "third phase" is for the women reader to bring a fresh female perspective to the reading of texts based on a dialogic relationship between the feminist reader and woman writer. Her hope is for a future "community of feminist readers and writers" (56), but this, I argue, is an incomplete model of women's relationship to texts. It does not recognise that historically, women have ever played any role in the mediation of texts by other women. To embrace a "future phase" of feminists as interpreters of female texts without framing this in the context of previous women readers and critics is to negate the efforts of those who have already sought to engage with the way female experience has been represented in women's writing and fails to acknowledge any tradition of woman-on-woman criticism, although as Barbara Onslow notes, "women have been critics almost as long as they have been novelists" (61). Women wrote commentaries and biographies of other women writers throughout the nineteenth century, for example; *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England* (1843) by Anne Ellwood; Jane Williams' *The Literary Women of England* (1861); Julia Kavanagh's *English Women of Letters* (1862) and Anne Thackeray's *A Book of Sibyls* (1883). Towards the end of the century Lucy Walford brought out *Twelve English Authoresses* (1892); Helen Black wrote *Notable Women Novelists of*

The Day (1893), which comprised chapters on 26 women writers, and Oliphant edited a collection of essays by women on their contemporaries in *Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign* (1897). Some of these books seem to have been part of a conscious effort to construct a feminine literary tradition. Jewsbury, reviewing Kavanagh's book, refers to her companion volume *French Women of Letters* and notes that Kavanagh's stated object is to show "how far, during the last two centuries and more, women have contributed to the formation of the modern novel in the two great literatures of modern times" (Oct. 25, 1862, 527-8).

Failure to acknowledge women's voices in literary debates compounds the problem of women's invisibility as addressed by feminist historians such as Sheila Rowbotham in her 1973 study *Hidden from History*. Just as it is important to recover the work of women such as Parr, Riddell, Robinson, and numerous other writers that may have been marginalised either by androcentric interpretative strategies, a preoccupation with theory at the expense of wider reading, or even as Thompson suggests, feminist revisionism, there has been a growing recognition that it is equally necessary to restore the voices of women to the critical discourses about literature and to acknowledge their existence in roles other than that of the beleaguered writer. A reading of women writers as recipients of gendered critical opprobrium in an exclusively masculine forum not only colludes in marginalising women, as Schweickart infers, in that it signals only a movement from "male" texts to male criticism, but it is problematic in its tendency to devalue the wider role that women were carving for themselves in the mediation of fiction during this period and casts them as

victims of an oppressive ideology, constructed and imposed without female participation or consent. As Judith Newton argues, "in so far as our constructions of history suggest a monolithic male hegemony, they rob women of a sense of agency and quite simply give men too much 'credit' " (126).

The critical double standard was certainly a reality for many women writers but they were not without strategies to counter it. Women used prefaces and introductions to defend themselves against their detractors, wrote letters to individual critics or journals, or incorporated textual material in their fiction. Charlotte Brontë, as Juliet Barker describes, utilised all three options.³⁴ Ellen Wood satirised the role of the reviewer in *Roland Yorke* (1869) with her depiction of the vindictive Gerald Yorke who lavished praise on his own defective work and savaged a more worthy rival under cover of anonymity in *The Snarler*. Wood's insinuation that critical disapprobation was often conducted on a level of personal spite was wholeheartedly subscribed to by Rosina Bulwer Lytton whose belief that her husband's influence was responsible for hostile reviews of her novels had prompted her to denounce the critical establishment in a preface to her 1856 *Very Successful* (1856).³⁵ This was clearly not an isolated attack on Rosina Bulwer Lytton's part, as Jewsbury's review of her *Behind the Scenes* (1854) two years earlier makes clear:

Lady Bulwer Lytton has at various times been at the (sic) pains to denounce her enemies in terms far 'above proof,' at being in conspiracy to prevent her books being printed, and by occult influence to mar their reception when they have finally struggled into the light of day. 'The force of language can no further go' in the abuse she has lavished upon all whom it may concern. (Apr. 15, 1854, 460)

Jewsbury, before launching a savage attack both on Bulwer Lytton herself, and on the book, which she judged to be "revolting" (461), adds cynically:

If Lady Bulwer has any friends left in the world they ought to pray that another time her enemies may be more successful; and that she may never again have the chance of giving publicity to a work like the one before us. (460)

Emma Robinson also had a skirmish with Jewsbury following her damning review of Robinson's novel *Madeleine Graham* (Mar.12, 1864, 311), a fictionalised account of the case of Glasgow poisoner Madeleine Smith. Robinson reacted swiftly with an indignant letter to the *Athenaeum* (Mar. 19, 1864, 40) denying that her story was founded "on purely 'sensational' principles" (40) and claiming that the exposure of greed and materialism was her only motivation.

Women writers used whatever means they had at their disposal to justify or defend themselves, but those with access to more obvious sources of journalistic power had an authoritative platform from which to respond to criticism. Mary Braddon, according to Solveig Robinson, deployed a specific editorial policy of defending sensation fiction in *Belgravia*. Robinson ("Editing *Belgravia*" 109-122), describes how Braddon commissioned an article by George Augustus Sala, "The Cant of Modern Criticism" (Nov. 4, 1867, 45-55) in direct response to the anonymous attack on her in *Blackwood's* by Oliphant which had accused Braddon of plagiarism; suggesting that she and fellow sensation writer Annie Thomas "might not be aware how young women of good blood and good training feel" ("Novels," Sept. 1867, 260); and going on to conclude that "the objectionable writers are all second rate" (280). Sala, as Robinson notes,

"virtually demolished Oliphant's *Blackwood's* essay" (115). Oliphant herself, as one of *Blackwood's* foremost literary critics was in a particularly strong position from which to launch attacks on those who criticised her novels. When the well-reviewed *The Perpetual Curate* (1864), part of Oliphant's *Carlingford* Series, was disparaged in the *Athenaeum* (Nov. 12 1864, 629), Oliphant assumed the review to be the work of its editor, William Hepworth Dixon, and speculated that her publisher, John Blackwood, might have been his target, having no reason to suppose herself to be the subject of any personal vendetta ("The Making of a Novelist" Shattock 121).

In a swift counter-attack just a week later, Blackwood's placed a 3/4 column advertisement in the *Athenaeum* (Nov. 26, 1864, 697) citing "Opinions of the Press," consisting of fulsome reviews of Oliphant's novel, carefully selected to highlight the thoughtful, intellectual and anti-sensational elements of the book.

The final quotation comes from the *Reader*:

Those readers who have any taste for quiet humour and delicate study of character will not need our recommendation to read it. There are some readers and some critics who can appreciate neither of these qualities. To these our advice is: Don't trouble yourself about a book which Providence has not enabled you to understand (697)

Strategically placed between this extract and the *Saturday Review's* commendation that the book benefits from being read "with a great deal of thought and introspection" is a brief eye-catching quotation from the *Athenaeum*: "Unreal, awkward, rambling, and inexpressibly tedious" (697).

It is difficult to establish how much of a personal role Oliphant played in this confident and insouciant piece of advertising which so clearly connoted the

Athenaeum reviewer as lacking in discernment or discrimination, but she remained unaware that the actual perpetrator was John Cordy Jeaffreson whose next review of her work had at least a hint of shamefaced self-justification.³⁶ Oliphant however, was not finished with the hapless Dixon and later made use of the opportunity to savage his book *Free Russia* (1870) in a merciless six page denunciation in *Blackwood's* ("New Books," Aug. 1870, 167-173). As she presciently remarked only three months earlier, perhaps already anticipating the pleasure of retaliation,³⁷ it was gratifying for a critic to be in this position of power "and when we happen to have a real honest enmity, to fall upon our brother for whom we entertain that lively sentiment with corresponding liveliness of assault" ("New Books," May 1870, 629). Oliphant justifies this as at least being a human response on the part of the critic, and not without literary compensation, "for to have a foe, and to be able to strike a good straightforward blow at him, is an enlivening process, and generally calls forth in the most vivacious manner a critic's power" (629).

The adoption of an anonymous critical persona was clearly empowering for women such as Oliphant who were not prepared to be passive victims of male critical disapproval. The mask of anonymity often provided flimsy protection for women writers given that reviewers continually speculated about gender; but journalists and critics were more easily able to subsume their own identity into that of the journal they were writing for, and assume a masculine authoritative or neutrally gendered stance. Jane Osborn voices her pride in this feeling of professional authority in Linton's *Sowing the Wind*:

To sit behind the scenes and pull the strings - to know that what one says as 'We' in the *Comet* is taken among thinking men as a new gospel, when if one had said it as 'I, Jane Osborn,' it would have been sneered at as woman's babble. (223)

The contribution that women like the fictional Jane Osborn, and of course Linton herself, made to the critical discourses of the nineteenth century are gradually being retrieved after being rendered almost invisible for more than a century, although in the case of women critics appears to be a largely female project. Peter Dale's 1977 book *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History* profiles Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater. Harold Orel's *Victorian Literary Critics* (1984) includes work on Richard Holt Hutton, Leslie Stephen, Andrew Lang, George Saintsbury and Edmund Gosse. Such studies of the Victorian critic have typically constructed this figure in the image of the male sage and mediator of high culture, not a position easily appropriated by the female. Onslow, noting how "women's collective contribution to journalism has largely gone unregarded" (1) cites the way that T. H. S. Escott's *Master's of English Journalism* (1911) accorded only five lines to the prolific and influential Harriet Martineau. Leslie Marchand's 1941 study of the *Athenaeum*, while a valuable precursor to the now thriving study of Victorian periodicals, as Marysa Demoor points out, omits the role of women in this journal. Marchand names Dixon and Henry Chorley as the most prolific reviewers between the period 1846 to 1869, but Geraldine Jewsbury, despite having penned approximately 2,300 reviews is given only a cursory mention in a list of over thirty book reviewers (225). Marchand's list does include other women reviewers but the effect of this seems to be to equate contributors such as Elizabeth Gaskell (2 reviews), and Julia Kavanagh, (7 reviews), with the prolific

and influential Jewsbury. Marchand's subtitle is "A mirror of Victorian culture" but the mirror in which Marchand views the *Athenaeum* is a distorting one in that it fails to reflect images of the feminine.

The impetus towards the study of women's criticism is gathering momentum, not only because of feminist concern with retrieval, but in a changing academic climate that has allowed space for the reassessment of the work of one of the most prolific reviewers of the nineteenth century, Geraldine Jewsbury. There had been little interest in Jewsbury since Susanne Howe's 1935 biography, but a spate of studies on Jewsbury, most notably Monica Fryckstedt's 1986 book on her *Athenaeum* reviews, allowed the notion of the critic as male to be contested.³⁸ Fryckstedt's study of Jewsbury was innovative, not simply in its bringing to light such a useful source of critical material but simply in drawing attention to the prominence of Jewsbury in the supposedly masculine world of periodical reviewing,

Work on women as journalists and critics has continued although there remain significant gaps. Onslow's *Women of the Press in the Nineteenth Century* (2000) includes a chapter on women critics and reviewers spanning the whole century, and providing a useful overview. Demoor's *Their Fair Share* (2000) is a comprehensive survey of women reviewers in the *Athenaeum* but does not begin until 1870 where Fryckstedt's study ended. Fryckstedt's book, of course, concentrates exclusively on Jewsbury and thus omits her contemporary women reviewers. The period of this present study precedes Demoor's, commencing at the end of the 1840s, taking in the rise of domestic fiction and some critical

responses to the Brontës, and concluding around 1870, at the end of the era of sensation writing and also the close of the most prolific period of Jewsbury's reviewing career.³⁹

Although Demoor refers to "a significant growth in the number of reviews by women" (1) in the *Athenaeum* in the 1870s, even prior to this date women represented a strong presence on its review pages but their contribution has not been the subject of academic study. Few other reviewers, either male or female, could match Jewsbury's output, and numerous women like Theodosia Trollope who wrote just 4 reviews, had only a brief involvement with the *Athenaeum*, although others wrote for the journal over a prolonged period. In the 1830s and 1840s Lady Sydney Morgan contributed at least 129 reviews with another 23 possibly attributable to her. Hannah Lawrance produced 206 reviews between 1830 and 1858, mostly of historical texts and Dinah Mulock contributed 28 reviews in the late 1840s before she achieved fame as a novelist the following decade. Other early women contributors included Mary Margaret Busk (28 reviews) who specialised in German, French and Italian literature, and Louise Costello (21 reviews) who wrote mainly on French topics. (Maria) Jane Williams contributed 188 reviews between 1839 and 1860, although her focus was largely children's literature.⁴⁰ The only woman reviewer from the mid-Victorian period who concentrated almost exclusively on adult fiction was the Honorable Eleanor (Lena) Eden who contributed the majority of her 140 reviews between 1860 and 1864.⁴¹ Having fallen through the gap between Fryckstedt's specialist study on Jewsbury and the later period of Demoor's interest, Eden has received no academic attention although her frequently

acerbic critical commentaries offer insight not only into mid-century attitudes to fiction, but a range of contemporary issues.⁴²

Other significant work in the field of women's criticism⁴³ includes two special editions of *Victorian Periodicals Review* in summer 1996 and spring 1998, and an issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose* in Spring 1997 which focused on women and periodicals. The 1996 edition of *VPR* included a useful article by Solveig Robinson on the emergence of a feminist critical tradition in magazines published by the Langham place group, *The English Woman's Journal*, *The Englishwoman's Review* and *Victoria Magazine*⁴⁴ but does not extend to other magazines "conducted by women" such as *The Rose*, *the Shamrock and the Thistle*. Women's magazines without a feminist agenda, or women's reviews in more mainstream periodicals, did not come into Robinson's remit.

I have included critical material from some "feminist" magazines in this study, although disappointingly they have not proved such a prolific or revealing source on women's writing as the *Athenaeum*. The first issue of the *English Woman's Journal* appeared promising, including a review of *Year after Year* by Caroline Clive (1858) and *The Morals of May Fair* (1858) by Annie Edwards, but the tone of these reviews, and reviews from other comparable women's journals such as *The Rose*, *the Shamrock and the Thistle* are often descriptive, informative and non-judgmental, lacking the critical cut and thrust that writers like Jewsbury and Oliphant so relished. The notorious *Morals of May Fair*,⁴⁵ for example, is summed up rather blandly by "a favourable specimen of the class of fashionable novels to which it belongs" (Mar. 1858, 68); and *The Rose*, *the*

Shamrock and the Thistle, as I discuss in chapter five, continued to enthuse about Ellen Wood throughout 1863 and 1864, while other journals were amusing themselves with her supposed vulgarity and poor grammar.⁴⁶

Despite their commitment to women's issues, the editorial policy of feminist magazines sometimes appeared to be to eschew popular fiction in favour of more improving literature. *The English Woman's Journal* in its "Notices of Books" for April 1858, for example, opens with *Thorndale; or, the Conflict of Opinions* by William Smith, a book which the reviewer concludes "will find its way into the hands of the reading public and the libraries of all scholars and thinkers" (128). The other items reviewed in this issue are *A Personal Narrative of the Siege of Lucknow* by L. E. Rees. *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* by E. J. Trelawny, and *The National Magazine* for the first quarter of the year. The section then moves on to foreign literature in which it looks at *Studies, Experiences and Travels in America* by Julius Frobel, and *Les Salons de Paris* by Madame Ancelot. This fairly heavyweight agenda, in contrast to the eclecticism of the *Athenaeum* may have been an attempt to establish a serious reputation for a fledgling woman's journal.

More general women's magazines edited by women, although a potential source of reviews, are problematic in terms of attributing female authorship as such magazines tended to include contributions from male journalists. I have excluded book reviews from Ellen Wood's *Argosy*, which were as likely to have been written by her son, Charles, as Ellen herself;⁴⁷ and also from Braddon's *Belgravia*, which, as Solveig Robinson discusses, employed a number of male

critics ("Editing *Belgravia*" 109-122). I have however, included some material from *Eliza Cook's Journal* on the balance of probabilities that they were written by Eliza Cook herself.⁴⁸ The volume of magazines, either edited or published by women is immense, and it has been impossible to systematically cover a complete range in one single study. I have instead focused most heavily on contributions to mainstream magazines that have been definitively attributed to specific women critics and reviewers. There is clearly much work remaining to be done on reviews in a wider spectrum of women's magazines.

Although much anonymous women's writing may never be recoverable, recent studies have combined in expanding our knowledge of the part women played both in the specialist arena of women's publishing, and in the wider literary world, as editors, journalists, reviewers, critics and publishers readers. This work has served to restore women's voices to the critical discourses of the period, although many such "mapping exercises" have, perhaps surprisingly been made without reference to the women's movement. Onslow is primarily concerned with the historical recovery of women's voices who, in the words of Dale Spender were "once acclaimed but now denied" (Onslow 2). This work, instead of being located at the heart of feminist scholarship, is slightly distanced from it by Onslow who describes her approach as "broadly historical and mildly feminist" (preface xi). Like Thompson, Onslow is concerned that nineteenth-century women writers with a less radical agenda have not received the same critical attention as those who, for example, advocated female suffrage. Other studies have had recourse to alternate theoretical frameworks and those with a particular focus on reviewing practice such as Demoor's *Their Fair Share* or

Thompson's *Reviewing Sex*, whilst retaining a focus on gender have instead turned to reception theory and the work of Hans Jauss. Rather than representing an entirely new perspective this methodological framework allows space for traditional feminist historiography. Robert Holub notes that "the question of reception is immediately linked to the writing of history. Why a given work or author becomes famous, how that fame is perpetuated over periods of time, what factors increase or diminish a reputation." (47). These are questions that have particular pertinence for women's writing where the reception of texts by women have come with a specific "horizon of expectations" (Jauss 28) on the part of the critic.

The modern feminist "horizon of expectations" of women's texts, is, as I have argued, not the same as that of the contemporaneous woman critic, hence an inevitable mismatch of interest, but this gulf has been obscured by the privileging not only of those texts of that are most attuned to our own preoccupations but also of critical discourses that fit into our specific frames of reference, typically those that confirm narratives about marginalisation or female transgression. Oliphant's *Blackwood's* reviews might appear to have received much academic attention, yet they have tended to have been plundered for expressions of disapproval about sensation writing rather than being the subject of detailed systematic study, and her remarks are not always contextualised in a way that gives an adequate picture of her overall reviewing.⁴⁹

This is not to argue that studies of sensation and subversion are not valid and important and should not continue to repay interest. This present study is equally partial and follows specific strands of feminist interest in its focus on women critics, women's fiction, and how an ideology of the feminine was negotiated through female discourses about fiction. This topic is rendered unfamiliar only in that I argue for other discourses about fiction and the feminine to be given due weighting. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from Oliphant's observation on *Cometh up as a Flower* that "what is held up to us as the story of the feminine soul as it really exists underneath its conventional coverings, is a very fleshly and unlovely record," ("Novels," Sept. 1867, 209) or from Jewsbury's comment on the same book that "Of good feeling, or ordinary good principle there is not a trace" (Apr. 20, 1867, 514) was that the locus of women's anxieties about constructions of femininity was the sensation novel, or at least novels featuring images of women identifiable to the modern critic as sexualised or transgressive, yet women critics, as I argue in chapter four, showed as much dissatisfaction with portrayals of religious heroines as they did with characters such as Broughton's Nell le Strange, Kate Chester or Esther Craven.⁵⁰ Oliphant was certainly more pre-occupied with Anne Thackeray's portrayal of femininity than Ellen Wood's, although her brief comments on *East Lynne* have been much quoted,⁵¹ while her lengthy analysis of *The Story of Elizabeth* ("Novels," Aug. 1863, 171-183) and subsequent reviews of Thackeray's work have largely been ignored. Jewsbury, similarly, is frequently cited with reference to her apparent disapproval of Rhoda Broughton⁵² but her continuous monitoring of the less contentious Harriet Parr has passed unnoticed,

although Jewsbury reviewed eleven of Parr's novels as opposed to only one of Broughton's.⁵³

Pykett's notion of a "gendered discourse on fiction" forming part of "a broadly based nineteenth-century crisis of gender definition" (23) is supported by the various anxieties, strictures and expressions of indignation that women critics give voice to about the way women were represented in the fiction of the period, but these voices of dissent do not only arise against sensational or radical images of womanhood, but also against women who fall back on feminine weakness or domestic angelhood. Jewsbury, for example, rejects the heroine of the portentously titled *Women as they Are* by Annie Tinsley as a valid representation of modern womanhood: "She does little besides 'burst into tears' upon every emergency, and she cannot go out of one room to another without a page and a half of emotion" (Dec. 23, 1854, 1557). Jewsbury concludes that if women really did resemble the heroine "we are afraid that society would protect itself by drowning half of them like superfluous kittens" (1557). Jewsbury and other women critics, as I discuss, showed themselves to be particularly disturbed by the elision of women's oppression with victimhood, an issue that the twentieth-century women's movement has grappled with anew.

Oliphant, despite her acerbity, frequently responded with warmth towards women writers. She established a firm friendship with Anne Thackeray, initiated as a result of her reviews of Thackeray's novels,⁵⁴ and Thackeray's *A Book of Sibyls* opens with a dedication to Oliphant: "My little record would not seem to me in any way complete without your name, dear Sibyl of our own". Oliphant could be generous about writers such as Brontë and Eliot and wrote

warmly of Dinah Mulock after her death, despite reservations about her writing.⁵⁵ Even her criticism of Broughton was partly provoked by Broughton's portrayal of rivalry amongst women, which she felt was ungenerous and unfair. Oliphant instead offers a positive and affirming picture of female solidarity amongst literary women:

But the fact is, that a great many of the women who write, live very contentedly in the society of other women, see little else, find their audience and highest appreciation among them, and are surrounded and backed up and applauded by their own sex in a way which men would be slow to emulate. ("Novels," Sept. 1867, 266.)

Oliphant's later attack on Linton is prompted by a similar distaste for a devaluation of her own sex. In a review of Linton's essays *Ourselves* (1870), Oliphant ostentatiously adopts a masculine persona to discredit what she sees as Linton's "spiteful preachments" against women, coupled with an unrealistic ennoblement of men. "Men, too, have their sins, let us admit," Oliphant pronounces. "Some of us drink, and smoke, and swear, and make ourselves hugely disagreeable, not only to our wives, but to everybody concerned" ("New Books," Aug. 1870, 175). Oliphant, in this context, appears to be effectively working undercover to defend the interests of women. Her demand for a more equitable rendering of masculine shortcomings, both in fiction and journalistic polemic, is given an insider's credibility and an overlay of male chivalry, where the voice of female dissent might have been seen as merely querulous.

Women critics, although they could be supportive, took their roles as literary arbiters seriously and exhibited intolerance to those of their sisters that they saw as bringing women's writing into disrepute. Eliot condemned the lower order of women writers in her *Westminster Review* article "Silly Novels by Lady

Novelists" and is frequently cited as distancing herself from writers such as Oliphant and Dinah Mulock Craik.⁵⁶ Whilst she might have had reservations about Mulock as a writer she was appreciative of her sincerity, expressing pleasure with the "venerating affection" shown to her by Scottish poet Robert Buchannan "for her earnest religious feeling and strength of character" (Haight vol. IV, 129). Eliot could, on occasion, be encouraging of female talent. She surmises *Erlesmere* by L. S. Lavenue ("Belles Lettres," Oct. 1856, 578-9) to be "possibly the first publication of a young authoress" and commends it as "a book of remarkable promise". Although critical of some of the book's melodramatic effects she concludes, "Her first attempt is not in itself satisfactory, but it creates a belief in her powers" (579). Jewsbury, similarly, took pains to encourage promising female talent such as Harriet Parr but could be scathing about those she felt to be mediocre writers like Alison Read, the author of *The Way of the World* (1859), about whom she speculated "having read a good deal of second-rate literature has apparently said to herself, 'I could almost do as well myself,' " (Dec. 24, 1859, 851).

Many women commentators rather than looking for solutions in social systems or legislation felt that women needed to effect change within themselves. Critics such as Oliphant, Eliot and Jewsbury often had an uneasy relationship with emergent feminists and used their critical authority to lecture women on personal responsibility rather than collective rights. Jewsbury, in a combined review of Jane Roscoe St. John's *Englishwomen and the Age* and *The English Woman's Journal*, expresses this individual ethos of self-help: "we may lament the oppression and injustice in the condition of women in general ... but no

amount of philanthropic feeling can alter the fact that there exists no state of *permanent depression* and misfortune for those who deserve success" (Aug. 25, 1860, 248). Fictional heroines, in this context, took on a functional as well as a symbolic role and needed to be fit to inhabit the drawing room as well as the novel. The responses of fictional characters to the various dilemmas that faced women during the period could serve as test cases for action and be assessed by reviewers on the basis of morality, practicality and general ideological appropriateness. Novelists had the power to order fictional universes and reward or punish feminine behaviour and attributes according to their own criteria, but novel writing, as Frances Cobbe affirmed was considered "morally a serious thing" ("Old Maids" 609) and such judgments could have wide-ranging effects. As Harriet Parr wrote in her critique of Dinah Mulock: "It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of a pure moral tone in the literature of fiction; for the influence of fiction on the manners and morals of a nation is almost incalculable" ("The Author of John Halifax," *British Quarterly Review*, July 1866, 33). It was part of the critic's role to ensure that the novelist's power was exercised judiciously and to point out to the reader any instances where it might be abused. The prescribed version of realism offered by the nineteenth-century novel usually required specific literary outcomes, and experienced reviewers were often more alert to the nuances of various plot developments than writers themselves, taking responsibility for a wider role in disseminating morality. Any attempt at authorial pleading on behalf of an individual heroine could not blind the critic to the possible ramifications of her actions, hence Oliphant's acute sensitivity to Wood's treatment of Isabel Vane.

Mary Poovey, confirming the role played by fiction in ideological processes, notes: "Part of the work that texts perform is the reproduction of ideology; texts give the values and structures of values that constitute ideology body – that is they embody them for and in the subjects who read" (17). While fictional images of women undoubtedly fulfilled an ideological function, it was the acceptance or rejection of these images by reviewers and journalists and the ensuing discourses about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of various aspects of femininity that helped to determine their fixity. Rather than being an external patriarchal imposition, appropriate gender identity was being negotiated by women who were in a position to contribute to the development of ideology.

Previous studies that have interrogated nineteenth-century constructions of womanhood, such as Patricia Thomson's *The Victorian Heroine* and Kimberly Reynolds and Nicola Humble's, *Victorian Heroines*,⁵⁷ have typically chosen their images from a self-selection of novels. The various types of womanhood that make up the following chapters were determined not by their occurrence in the limited number of novels accessible to the modern reader, but by the reference made to them in innumerable critical reviews by nineteenth-century women writers and journalists. The discrete chapters I have separated them into represents my own attempts to categorise, inevitably unsatisfactory given the considerable degree of overlap: the self sacrificing-heroine often doubling as governess or injured wife, and the girl of the period sometimes inhabiting similar territory as the sensation heroine, or encompassing other diverse forms.

Other images of the feminine have not been fully addressed by this study. The old maid, the fallen woman, or the distressed needlewoman, may have been the locus of much wider social debate but they featured less so in critical reviews by women, and sometimes did not feature largely in women's fiction. Shirley Foster, writing about Dinah Mulock Craik's own experience and her writing on singleness, notes that her novels "oddly enough, contain relatively few spinsters." (*Victorian Women's Fiction* 52). Harriet Parr, herself unmarried, did often profile single women. Jewsbury commended her portrait of Miriam Sedley, the governess in *Maude Talbot*, but expressed disappointment "that she so soon faded into a subordinate character" (Mar. 4, 1854, 271). As single women more usually played only a supporting role in relation to the female romantic lead it was rare for them to attract critical comment. Similarly, the debate about fallen women, apart from Gaskell's *Ruth* does not seem to feature significantly in the review columns. Many reviewers, like Oliphant who believed *Ruth* to be "a great blunder in art" ("Modern Novelists," May 1855 560) felt the subject matter ill-chosen for fiction and this may have been one reason why discussion was either muted or primarily centred on whether or not the theme itself was an appropriate one for writers to explore. Jewsbury advances this opinion in her review of Sarah Ellis's verse novel *Janet* (1862) which features an "unfortunate female" (Oct. 4, 1862, 431), arguing that the truth of such women's lives is "so terrible and ghastly" that it is "entirely unfitted for the purposes of art" (431).

Notwithstanding the pre-occupation of newspapers and periodicals with this issue, the main locus of concern for book reviewers was the representation of

the middle-class girl and her potential as a role model, and transgression of the middle-class heroine was rare, even in sensation fiction. Surprisingly, given women's association with this subject, the greater number of the books that Sally Mitchell profiles in her study *The Fallen Angel*, were by male writers.⁵⁸ I do not suggest that men dominated either the field of sensation writing or those novels that purported to voice concern about fallen women, but it may have been that women were more hesitant about actual rather than apparent transgression, and like Rhoda Broughton frequently brought their characters to the verge of fallen-ness without allowing them to incriminate themselves.⁵⁹ A review of *Walter Goring* (1866) by sensation writer Annie Thomas in the *Queen* perhaps confirms this hypothesis:

There is a want of purity about the tone of the book, which to our minds is more offensive in what emanates from a woman than a man's pen. The characters are placed too near the brink of wrong to be pleasant to contemplate; they do not absolutely topple over, but they are so near it, that we hardly know whether or not to call them stainless. (Apr. 14, 1866, 281-2.)

The first three constructions of the feminine I cite as being identified as a locus of anxiety by women commentators; the self-sacrificing woman; the put-upon governess, and the injured wife, are often targeted by critics because of their penchant for martyrdom, passivity, and sense of injury. The final three prove dissatisfying because of their undue assertiveness or lack of moral seriousness; the frivolous and materialistic religious heroine in pursuit of romance under guise of spirituality; the sensation heroine; and the notorious "girl of the period". Women commentators appeared to despise the weak, passive, or excessively martyred heroine as much as they were troubled by her opposite and constantly looked for some kind of equilibrium between the two. During a period when, in Pykett's words, the gendered discourse about fiction "was

bound up with a desire to fix gender boundaries and categories at a time of profound anxiety about the nature of these categories " (23) fictional constructions of womanhood were being constantly interrogated, contested and re-negotiated through critical processes. Ideological conflict about the nature of gender identity generated cyclical reproductions, revisions, and varying degrees of acceptance or rejection of particular modes of femininity. Images of the badly treated wife or victimised governess would saturate the fiction market eventually generating a critical backlash, and perhaps an uneasy consensus that embracing certain portrayals of womanhood might prove problematic, although this was not always sufficient to deter the aspiring writer not sufficiently attuned to these discourses. As part of the process of the construction and validation of the heroine, the conditions for a female heroic had to be first to be constituted. In the following chapter I explore the dynamic between the development of this concept and the burgeoning field of women's fiction.

Notes

¹ This article is reprinted in *Prose by Victorian Women*, Eds. Andrea Broomfield and Sally Mitchell (235-262). The book also includes Anne Thackeray Ritchie's "Heroines and their Grandmothers" (487-504) and Eliza Lynn Linton's "The Girl of the Period" (355-360).

² All Oliphant's reviews cited in this study are from *Blackwood's Magazine* unless otherwise stated.

³ Skilton, in chapter four of *The Early and Mid-Victorian Novel* distinguishes between "truth-to life" and realism. Realism, as Skilton describes was often equated with 'low' subjects which needed to be elevated with some degree of idealism. I use the term more loosely here in relation to accurate representation of character.

⁴ Greg discusses five books in this article. *Mildred Vernon* (1848) and *Leonie Vermont* (1849) by Baroness Blaze de Bury; *Kathie Brande* (1856) by Harriet Parr; *Ruth* (1853) by Elizabeth Gaskell and *Framleigh Hall* (1858) by Julia Wedgwood. Given his premise of naive and impressionable young womanhood it is interesting to note that De Bury was in her mid to late thirties when these two books were published. Parr was 27 on publication of *Kathie Brande* Gaskell was 42 when she wrote *Ruth*. Wedgwood was the youngest of the group at 24 when *Framleigh Hall* was published in January 1858.

⁵ This privileging of writers associated with sensation continues in Emma Liggins' and Daniel Duffy's *Feminist Readings of Popular Victorian Texts* (2001). Out of four chapters concerned with popular women's writing, two focus on Ellen Wood and one is on Mary Braddon. The fourth chapter is concerned with ghost stories.

⁶ *Eve's Renegades* (1996) by Valerie Sanders is concerned with Oliphant, Linton, Charlotte Yonge and Mrs. Humphrey Ward.

⁷ Linton's "The Girl of the Period" article has been the subject of much attention, for example from Sanders in *Eve's Renegades*, Nancy Fix Anderson in *Woman Against Women*, and Elizabeth Helsinger et al in *The Woman Question*. Anderson looks for possible subversion in Linton's *The Rebel of the Family* (1880) in *The New Nineteenth Century* (117-134). Elisabeth

Jay, in her introduction to the 1998 edition of Margaret Oliphant's *Miss Marjoribanks* (xi-xxxv) refers to several recent critical responses to this novel, which come to varying conclusions on its degree of subversion. Merryn Williams in "Feminist or Antifeminist? Oliphant and the Woman Question " assesses the complexities of Oliphant's stance in a number of her novels. Shirley Foster in *Victorian Women's Fiction* (19-27) While acknowledging Yonge's basic conservatism, problematises her work in a similar way.

⁸ Elaine Showalter for example cites Oliphant's "indignant review" (175) of Rhoda Broughton's *Cometh up as a Flower* (1867) yet offers only a cursory reading of this book which she appears to have confused with the plot of Broughton's *Not Wisely but too Well* (1867). Christina Bouffis, (112) in an otherwise incisive discussion, suggests that Oliphant mistakenly attributes *Cometh up as a Flower* to sensation writer Annie Thomas. Oliphant does no such thing, it is simply that her movement back and forth over a range of unfamiliar texts and writers is confusing for the modern reader (see "Novels," 1867, 272-3).

⁹ *The New Nineteenth Century: Feminist Readings of Underread Victorian Fiction* includes John Sutherland's foreword, referred to earlier. It comprises essays on the work of fifteen novelists including Oliphant, Linton and Geraldine Jewsbury. Thompson's *Victorian Women Writers* includes essays on Martineau, Oliphant, Yonge, and other non-canonical women writers. Shirley Foster's *Victorian Women's Fiction* (1985) examines a range of women writers, primarily Dinah Mulock, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Sewell, Gaskell and Eliot.

¹⁰ I refer here to such studies as *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and others* (1931) by Stewart Marsh Ellis, *The Victorians and their Books* (1935) by Amy Cruse, *Victorian Wallflowers* (1934) by Malcolm Elwin, *Things Past* by Michael Sadleir (1944) and *The Queens of the Circulating Library* (1950) by Felix Alan Wallbank, as well as more thematic based approaches such as Katherine West's *A Chapter of Governesses* (1949) and Margaret Maison's survey of religious novels *Save your Soul, Eustace* (1961).

¹¹ Wood, at this point, was beginning to achieve celebrity as the writer of *East Lynne* (1861), particularly following Samuel Lucas's famous review in the *Times* (25 Jan. 1862, 6). Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* was not published until the autumn of 1862 (*Things Past* 72).

¹² In 1862 Oliphant was generally styling herself "By the Author of 'Margaret Maitland' ". Keddie later wrote under the pseudonym of Sarah Tytler but many of her earlier books were published as "By the Author of 'The Nut-Brown Maids' ".

¹³ The most obvious exceptions are Braddon, Wood, Oliphant, and Yonge who have all been the subject of recent studies, many of which I have already discussed or have cited in the index to this present study. Other writers discussed have only rarely been the subject of research. Julie Melnyk discusses Worboise's *Overdale* (1869) in *Women's Theology in Victorian Britain* (107-122). The only reference I have been able to find to Emma Robinson's work is a discussion of her novel *Mauleverer's Divorce* (1858) in Anne Humpherys' "Breaking Apart: The Early Victorian Divorce Novel" (*Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question* 42-59).

¹⁴ The index can be found online @ <http://www soi.city.ac.uk/project/athenaeum/reviews/home.html>. Although it is invaluable in identifying reviews, the journal itself still needs to be consulted for actual content. As Fryckstedt pointed out in her article "Retrieving a Synchronic Perspective" (87) the *Athenaeum* is widely available in a number of libraries.

¹⁵ *The City Banker* (1856), *Cynthia Thorold* (1862) and *Which Wins, Love or Money?* (1861).

¹⁶ As well as publishing anonymously, Riddell wrote as Mrs. J. H. Riddell, R. V. M. Sparling, and Rainey Hawthorne although her most successful novels were written under the name of F. G. Trafford.

¹⁷ I take this phrase from Helen Black's 1893 *Notable Women Authors of the Day* which includes a chapter on Riddell, who was still publishing at the end of the century, but does not feature Robinson who had since died. Harriet Parr, who had not published a novel for a decade, is also omitted.

¹⁸ Riddell's "The Old House in Vauxhall Walk" is reprinted in *The Virago Book of Ghost Stories*, ed. Richard Dalby (1988), 135-149. *The Open Door* is anthologised in *Victorian Ghost Stories*, eds Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (1991), 256-282. *The Collected Ghost Stories of Mrs. J. H. Riddell*, ed. Everett Franklin Bleiler was published in 1977.

¹⁹ This is by no means an exhaustive search. I have used the *Athenaeum* online index for this and other listings although this has involved tracing individual titles as novels published anonymously are not linked to their authors. In the *Saturday Review*. I have noted *The Moors*

and the Fens (Apr. 1858, 377-8); *City and Suburb* (July 1861, 356-7); *The Race for Wealth* (July 1866, 306); and *The Rich Husband* (July 1866, 768). Riddell's novels, because of her various pseudonyms can be easily overlooked. The most comprehensive survey of Riddell's work can be found in Ellis's *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others* (323-35) although several items have been omitted. Ellis wrote that in later life, Riddell "lost count of all her works, possessed very few copies of them herself, and often forgot where certain stories had appeared or what had happened to her rights in them." (266). Ellis clearly had his own difficulties in negotiating his way through the maze of Riddell's pseudonyms. He does not include her novels written as Rainey Hawthorne and seemed to be unaware that she wrote under this name.

²⁰ The only academic work on Parr that the MLA index reveals is a short article by Elaine Showalter entitled "Dickens' *Little Dorrit* and Holme Lee's *Gilbert Messenger*" (*Dickens Studies Newsletter* 10, 1979, 59-60). Parr's last novel in print was *Loving and Serving*, London: Smith & Elder, 1883, although there was a later edition of one of her children's books, *Legends from Fairy Land*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1908.

²¹ The text and music to Parr's "Hear our Prayer, O Heavenly Father" (1856) can be found on a web site dedicated to Anglican hymns @ <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/index.html> (accessed Jan. 2002).

²² Riddell's 1876 version of *The Moors and the Fens* was illustrated by Crane, as was Parr's *The True, Pathetic History of Poor Match* (1864). Crane (1845-1915), described by John Rowe Townsend in *Written for Children* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) as one of the "the first three great picture-book artists" (150) was illustrating his own series of nursery books from 1865. He had already exhibited his first picture at the Royal Academy in 1862.

²³ *The Life of Charles Dickens* by John Forster includes an extract of a letter by Dickens to Parr (Aug. 4, 1855) on receipt of her manuscript for *Gilbert Messenger*. He wrote, "I read your tale with the strongest emotion and with a very exalted admiration of the great power displayed in it. It moved me more than I can express to you. I wrote to Mr. Wills that it had completely unsettled me for the day, and that by whomsoever it was written, I felt the highest respect for the mind that had produced it" (824). Dickens regretted that the length of the novel rendered it unsuitable for serialisation in *Household Words* but Foster intimates that he may have accepted

later material from Parr for *All the Year Round*. This is given credence by the inclusion of a story by Parr in Dickens' 1862 anthology *Christmas Stories*.

²⁴ Jewsbury felt that Parr's debut novel, *Maude Talbot* (1854) "on the whole, must take rank as a superior novel" (Mar. 4, 1854, 375) although she compared her description of a fire scene at a factory unfavourably with the burning of Carsons' mill in Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848). *Thorney Hall* (1855) Jewsbury considered "to mark a great improvement upon 'Maude Talbot' " (Apr. 7 1855, 403), though she believed Parr to be "capable of something still better" (403). Reviewing *Gilbert Messenger* (1855) later the same year, Jewsbury noted, "In each succeeding work by this author, we mark an improvement in the interest as well as in the workmanship of his stories" (Nov. 24, 1855, 1366).

²⁵ Eliot made similar encouraging comments about *Gilbert Messenger* pointing to "so marked an advance in her successive productions" (*Westminster Review*, Jan. 1856, 300). Although she felt her dialogue to be stilted and unnatural, she particularly commends Parr's "excellent moral taste" (300). Eliot had earlier commented on shortcomings in Parr's style in a brief notice of *Thorney Hall* (*Westminster Review*, July 1855 296). In a later review of *Kathie Brande* (1856) she complains that although Parr attempts to describe vivid scenes she "*writes about* them, does not *paint* them" (*Westminster Review*, Jan. 1857, 321). Nonetheless she allows the book to be "decidedly above the average of feminine novels" (322).

²⁶ Eliot admits to reading *Villette* (1853) and *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Brontë (Haight vol. II 87); *Cranford* (1853) and *Mary Barton* (1848) (Haight vol. III 198); *Ruth* (1853) (Haight vol. I 304-5); and *Sylvia's Lovers* (Haight vol. IV 79) by Gaskell. She declared Thackeray's *The Story of Elizabeth* (1863) to be "charmingly written" (Haight vol. IV 209). While disclaiming her interest in her contemporaries: "In general it is my rule not to read contemporary fiction," she cites Anne Thackeray and Trollope as exceptions (Haight vol. VI 418). For evidence that she is likely to have read Oliphant and Mulock see footnote 57.

²⁷ Gaskell wrote to George Smith, "please to tell me if 'Holme Lee' is a man or woman. I don't want real names but I am also curious to know if my guesses about sex are right" (Chapple & Pollard 413). She wrote a similar letter enquiring whether Talbot Gwynne (Josepha Gulston) was a woman writer: "I am almost certain Miss Brontë told me this" (417). Charlotte Brontë wrote a critique of Gulston's *The School for Fathers* (1852) in a letter to W. S. Williams on 3rd

Apr. 1852 (Wise & Symington vol. 3, 327-8) giving some qualified praise, although she was not overly impressed with the novel. Eliot reviewed Gulston's *Young Singleton* (1856) in the *Westminster Review* (Oct. 1856, 575). Jewsbury reviewed Gulston's *Nannette and her Lovers* (1854) in the *Athenaeum* (Apr. 29 1854, 522).

²⁸ Nicola Thompson in *Reviewing Sex* deals with the issue of the gendering of texts in more detail, writing about associations of the feminine with Trollope later in his career.

²⁹ There are numerous examples of reviewers making assumptions about gender. Eden speculates that *Abbeys and Attics* (1861) by Julian Strickland may have been written by a woman (Feb. 22, 1862, 254-5) and assumes female authorship of the anonymous novel *The White Rose of Chayleigh* (1862) (May. 3, 1862, 592). Emma Robinson's *Madeleine Graham* (1864) was published anonymously but Jewsbury refers to the writer as "she" in her review (Mar. 12, 1864, 371). Charlotte Riddell's *City and Suburb* (1861) was written under the pseudonym of F. G. Trafford but Jewsbury, without any comment about gender, refers to the author as "her" (May 25, 1861, 692). *Footsteps Behind Him* (1862), although listed as written by William F. Stewart, Jewsbury claims "is written by a female hand, in spite of the masculine name on the title page" (Sept. 20, 1862, 365). *May Blossom* (1861) by Austyn Graham is purported to be written by a barrister, although Jewsbury insists "it is evident in every line that it must be written by a very young lady" (July 6, 1861, 17). Eliot assumes Catherine Spence's anonymous *Tender and True* (1856) to be written by a woman (*Westminster Review*, Jan. 1857, 322), and penetrates Harriet Parr's pseudonym - "though the name is epicene, the style of Holme Lee is unmistakably feminine" (*Westminster Review* Jan. 1856, 300).

³⁰ The subtitle of the review pages of *The Rose, the Shamrock and the Thistle* was later amended to "A Review of Books Chiefly Written By Women" (See "The Lady's Literary Circular" Jan. 1863, 269).

³¹ *George Geith of Fen Court* (1864) and *Pemie Keller* (1866).

³² Showalter (94-6) points to the change in the tone of criticism of Eliot's work when her identity was known, and the insistence of Charlotte and Anne Brontë that their novels be treated without regard to their sex.

³³ Again Showalter refers to speculation about Charlotte Brontë's gender: "If Currer Bell was a woman, they could not imagine what sort of a woman she might be" (*Literature* 92). In the case

of Eliot, Showalter (95) points to Dixon's comments in the gossip column of the *Athenaeum*. Dixon dismissed *Adam Bede* as a tale "such as a clever woman with an observant eye and an unschooled moral nature might have written" (July 2, 1859, 20). Showalter describes Braddon's unusual circumstances - her life as an actress and her cohabitation with John Maxwell whose wife was detained in a mental hospital, (163-4), but does not comment on adverse criticism arising from her situation, although Braddon was described by Michael Sadleir as "an innocent victim of contemporary prejudice" and "a pariah, cruelly baited by her kind" (*Things Past* 69).

³⁴ Many writers have chronicled Brontë's various responses to critical attacks but I cite references here from Barker which is perhaps the most comprehensive and accessible source. Various instances include her preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre* in which partly comprised an answer to "timorous or carping critics" (Barker 541) and a second, less successful attempt to answer Elizabeth Rigby's *Quarterly Review* article in a preface to *Shirley* which was vetoed by Smith and Elder, leading Brontë to resort to smuggling in a textual response (605-7). Brontë's correspondence about critical reviews included an angry letter to G. H. Lewes after a review which played heavily on her gender (614) and a letter to the *Christian Remembrancer* which provoked a conciliatory editorial response (734).

³⁵ See Marie Mulvey Roberts's introduction to a recent edition of Rosina Bulwer Lytton, *Shells From the Sands of Time* (1995). Michael Sadleir in *XIX Fiction* vol. 1 (72) discusses the complicated history of this preface which was later printed in pamphlet form due to the threat of legal action against publication of a second edition of *Very Successful* (1856).

³⁶ Jeaffreson's review of Oliphant's *Agnes* (1865) a year later is far more favourable, although his assertion that "Mrs. Oliphant has atoned for her shortcomings of 'The Perpetual Curate' by writing a novel which is not only superior to her previous works, but exhibits powers of which her earlier books contained no promise" (Nov. 4 1865, 611), comes across as something of a pompous justification for his previous criticism.

³⁷ This seems a feasible possibility. Dixon's book had already been reviewed in the *Athenaeum* at this point by William Ralston (Apr. 16 1870, 507-8). Although this long review is fairly critical it does begin and end on a positive note. Ralston acknowledges that "we have preferred to dwell on that part of his book with which we can cordially agree" (508). There is no evidence of interference or censorship by Dixon but there was likely to have been some prudent restraint

on the part of a contributor placed in the position of reviewing a book by the journal's editor. Oliphant may have looked forward to writing a more frank assessment of its shortcomings.

³⁸ Studies on Jewsbury referred to are: Susanne Howe's *Geraldine Jewsbury: Her Life and Errors*. (1935) and Monica Fryckstedt's *Geraldine Jewsbury's Athenaeum Reviews* (1986). Other significant work includes chapter six of Guinevere Griest's, *Mudie's Circulating Library* (1970), Jeanne Rosenmayer Fahnestock's, "Geraldine Jewsbury, the Power of the Publishers' Reader" (1973) and Karen Carney's "The Publisher's Reader as Feminist" (1996).

³⁹. After this period Jewsbury mostly confined herself to reviewing children's books. Although I have largely concluded my study of reviews in 1870, in the case of novelists such as Eliot and Oliphant I have made reference to later novels in order to follow up particular themes in their work.

⁴⁰ The marked file lists this reviewer as "Miss Williams". The *Athenaeum* index online at City University names her as Jane Williams (1806-1885). This would identify her as the Welsh historian and writer who used the pseudonym "Ysgafell," author of *The Literary Women of England* (1861). It is unlikely that this reviewer was the Jane Williams cited on the City University index since she herself reviewed Ysgafell's *The Origin, Rise and Progress of the Paper People* (1856) for the *Athenaeum* (Feb. 1, 1857, 245). The tone of the review rules out any possibility of self-promotion. Williams is mildly amused at the idea of children being encouraged to create vast kingdoms of paper cut-outs: "The idea is good and droll, but then it is carried too far - very much too far...What sane mama would dare to introduce such an order-overthrowing pastime to the knowledge of her little ones?" (245). Marysa Demoor, co-editor of the indexing project, noted that "identifying those reviewers might seem an easy task once one has the surnames, but the reverse proved true in the case of some very common names" (*Their Fair Share* 3). I suggest a more likely candidate is (Maria) Jane Williams (1795-1873). Like her namesake, (Maria) Jane published a collection of fairy tales (in Crofton Croker's *Irish Fairy Legends*, 1828). The DNB entry for (Maria) Jane cites Henry Chorley as describing her as "in her day the most exquisite amateur singer he had ever heard". Chorley, the *Athenaeum's* music critic and author of 2496 book reviews might possibly have provided the link between (Maria) Jane and the *Athenaeum*.

⁴¹ All references to critical reviews by Eden, Jewsbury and Williams in this study are from the *Athenaeum*.

⁴² Entries in the marked file frequently refer to this contributor as "Lena" Eden and I have used this diminutive throughout this study. There is no DNB entry for Eden. She does have an entry in John Sutherland's *Longman Companion*, although this makes reference to her novel writing and not her reviewing. Eden, (1826-1879) daughter of the Bishop of Bath and Wells and niece of novelist Emily Eden, was the author of numerous novels including *Easton and its Inhabitants* (1858) and *False and True* (1859). In 1862 She edited *The Autobiography of a Working Man* (1862) which was praised by Jewsbury for its authenticity in relating the life story of a labourer in his own words. In her review Jewsbury described Eden as being "known to the public, not only as a clever writer of fiction, but as a genuine and successful missionary among the poor" (June 14, 1862, 781).

⁴³ I have confined myself here to work specifically recovering women's criticism. Other related work includes Laurel Brake's *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (1994). Lyn Pykett's influential study, *The Improper Feminine* (1994) played a pivotal role in establishing the notion of a gendered critical discourse that has significant implications for the study of women as critics. Beetham and Boardman's *Victorian Women's Magazines* (2001) includes a short chapter on reviews (180-189) but encompasses non fiction, theatre and art reviews, providing only a taster of popular fiction reviews.

⁴⁴ "Amazed at our Success: The Langham Place Editors and the Emergence of a Feminist Critical Tradition." *V.P.R.* Summer 1996, 159-172)

⁴⁵ Griest (143-7) describes the battle between the *Literary Gazette* and Mudies in 1860 in which *The Morals of May Fair* was cited as one of Mudie's banned books. The *Athenaeum* later became embroiled in this debate and Edwards herself published a letter in the *Athenaeum* (Nov. 3, 1860, 594) dissociating herself from the attack on Mudies and citing the fact that her second novel had been approved for Mudie's list.

⁴⁶ The Broadview edition of *East Lynne* (2000) contains a comprehensive introduction by Andrew Maunder which looks at Wood's critical reception, and the appendix reproduces a number of contemporary reviews.

⁴⁷ Ellen's son, Charles Wood, was involved closely with the *Argosy* from the outset until her death when he succeeded to the editorship. His anonymous debut novel *Buried Alone* (1868) was serialised between July and Dec. 1868 and he contributed numerous articles to the journal.

⁴⁸ This again is a difficult judgement to make and I have used only a limited amount of material from *Eliza Cook's Journal* which the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* describes as edited and "partly written" by Eliza Cook (vol. 4, 603-4).

⁴⁹ Oliphant's disapproval of Wood, Braddon and Broughton has been quoted by numerous sources. Norman Page, in the 1994 edition of *East Lynne* (642-3) quotes from Oliphant's May 1862 article. Lyn Pykett in *The Sensation Novel* makes several references to Oliphant's 1862 and 1867 articles in this context. Showalter (175-7) refers to both Oliphant and Jewsbury's anti-sensationalism Boufis in her essay "Of Home Birth and Breeding" draws heavily on Oliphant's remarks about sensation writing. As far as I am able to ascertain there has been no single study of Oliphant's reviewing except for Barbara Onslow's "Humble Comments for the Ignorant" which focuses on her art criticism. Sanders cites a broad range of Oliphant's reviews in *Eve's Renegades* but this is not, of course, a study dedicated solely to analysis of these reviews.

⁵⁰ The respective heroines of *Cometh up as a Flower* (1867) *Not Wisely but too Well* (1867) and *Red as A Rose is She* (1870).

⁵¹ As well as the studies already cited, Jonathan Loesberg (120), Jeanne B. Elliot (341) and Winifred Hughes (107) refer to Oliphant's remarks on Wood taken from her articles in May 1862 or Aug. 1863. It is in the same August article "Novels" where Oliphant makes brief reference to Wood that she deals extensively with Anne Thackeray, including a critique of *The Story of Elizabeth* (171-178, 183).

⁵² Fryckstedt *Geraldine Jewsbury's Athenaeum Reviews* 85-89, Fahnstock 259-62, Gettmann 195-6, Showalter 177, Griest 123.

⁵³ Although Jewsbury, in her role as publisher's reader, thought the moral tone of Broughton's novels rendered them unsuitable for Bentley's and advised against the acceptance of *Not Wisely but too Well* (Gettmann 195), she reviewed only *Cometh up as a Flower* in the *Athenaeum* (Apr. 20, 1867 514-5). I have listed Jewsbury's reviews of Parr's novels in the bibliography to this study.

⁵⁴ See Winifred Gerin's *Anne Thackeray Ritchie: A Biography* for further details of the friendship between Thackeray and Oliphant.

⁵⁵ After Mulock's death Oliphant paid tribute to her in *Macmillan's Magazine* in an article entitled "Mrs Craik". Oliphant deliberately avoids the issue of literary merit in favour of a eulogy to Mulock's personal qualities. She writes; "This is no time to speak of her work, which will no doubt have a variety of criticism and interpretations; but about herself there is no conflict of testimony" (81). In Oliphant's *Autobiography* she privately complained that Mulock had achieved greater financial success than she had with fewer books: "I don't pretend to think it was because of their superior quality" (102)

⁵⁶ Eliot claimed in a letter to Francois D'Albert-Durade "the most ignorant journalist in England would hardly think of calling me a rival of Miss Mulock - a writer read only by novel readers, pure and simple, never by people of high culture" (Haight vol. III 302). Despite having written to Sara Hennell on 23rd April 1862 that "I have not read the 'Chronicles of Carlingford' but from what Mr. Lewes tells me, they must represent the Dissenters in a very different spirit from anything that has appeared in my books" (Haight vol. IV 25) it was possible she was referring only to the serialisation of *Salem Chapel*. She had in fact admitted in a letter to John Blackwood five months earlier (Oct. 17, 1861) "I have not read the last number of the 'Chronicles of Carlingford', not having much time for extra reading, but I read the previous number and thought the scene between the Rector and his deaf mother delightful" (Haight vol. VIII, 292).

⁵⁷ *Victorian Heroines* is also concerned with depictions of the feminine in art.

⁵⁸ Chapter four of Mitchell's book, "Sensation, Sex, and the 1860s" covers a range of novels too numerous to list, but those she refers to by women writers are primarily Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861); Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862); Annie Thomas's *On Guard* (1865); Florence Marryat's *Love's Conflict* (1865); Rhoda Broughton's *Not Wisely but too Well* (1867), and Ouida's *Under Two Flags* (1867). Novels by men include William Winwood Reade's *Liberty Hall, Oxon.* (1860); Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861) and *Griffith Gaunt* (1866); A. J. Barrowcliffe's *Normanton* (1862); James McGrigor Allan's *Nobly False* (1863); Wilkie Collins' *No Name* (1863); William Starbuck's *A Woman Against the World* (1864); George Meredith's *Rhoda Fleming.* (1865); William Stephens Hayward's *The Soiled Dove* (1865); Edmund Yates' *Land at Last* (1866); Oswald Boyle's [Alfred Austin] *Jessie's*

Expiation (1867), and Bracebridge Hemyng's *Held in Thrall* (1869). As far as I am able to ascertain none of these are women writing under pseudonyms, although Mitchell (99) points to suggestions that Yates' *Land at Last* may have been written by Frances Sarah Hoey.

⁵⁹ Broughton takes her characters to the "brink" in *Cometh up as a Flower* where Nell is saved only by Dick M'Gregor's refusal to rescue her from her loveless marriage, and in *Not Wisely*, where Kate is on the verge of running away with the married Dare Stamer but is prevented by the intervention of clergyman, James Stanley, who follows her on the train and persuades her to return home before the situation becomes irrevocable.

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARD A FEMALE HEROIC: DUTY AND SELF-SACRIFICE

And oh, young readers, if your hearts burn within you as you read of these various forms of the truest and deepest glory, and you long for time and place to act in the like devoted way, bethink yourself that the alloy of such actions is to be constantly worked away in daily life; and that if ever it be your lot to do a Golden Deed, it will probably be in your unconsciousness that you are doing anything extraordinary, and that the whole impulse will consist in the having absolutely forgotten self.

(Charlotte Yonge, *Book of Golden Deeds*, 18-19.)

Self-sacrifice is a virtue, but common sense is a greater.

(Geraldine Jewsbury, "*Dauntless*," Jan. 30, 1858, 144.)

When Geraldine Jewsbury, reviewing Elizabeth Sewell's *Katherine Ashton* (1854) noted, "it is a book upon Gothe's [sic] text – 'Do the duty nearest at hand'" (July 1, 1854, 812), she was acknowledging a doctrine that by the mid 1850s had become a central tenet of Victorian moral consciousness, and one which Sewell was still re-iterating at the end of her life when she complained that "the chief object of many energetic women teachers and workers" was "to do their duty in that state of life to which God does *not* call them".¹ As the influence of Romanticism had inevitably given way to the sensibilities of a new age, a belief in the primacy of the needs of others rather than the centrality of self, and an appreciation of the value of what George Eliot was later to term "unhistoric acts," (*Middlemarch* 795) for the wider common good, marked an paradigm shift which impacted significantly both on women's perception of their role in society and on their depiction of that role in fiction.

"If Self is to be the end of exertions, those exertions are unholy – there is no doubt of *that*" (Chapple and Pollard 107), wrote Elizabeth Gaskell to Tottie Fox in 1850 following correspondence about how women could combine artistic endeavour with domestic duties; but her equation of writing with "work," and more specifically, work that might prove instrumental "in advancing the Kingdom of God" (107) positions the writing of fiction as earnest duty rather than personal fulfilment. If literature might effectively be deployed in the promulgation of social, religious and moral responsibility this offered legitimate justification for women to annexe it as part of their proper sphere. Novelist Alice King, writing in 1872 indicates a compatibility of feminine purpose between the role of the woman writer and that of wife and mother:

Their spheres of action are different, but their womanly mission is the same. One rules over the home circle, the other over many minds far away. The influence of one is immediate but more narrow; the influence of the other is less direct but wider. One strikes the moral and religious key-note of the family, the other that of the public taste. (*Argosy* vol.13, 1872, 52.)

The increase in religious writing during the Victorian period paralleled a rise in the number of women novelists,² and this brought with it a general tendency for more widespread female representation within the pages of fiction. Margaret Oliphant, at the end of the century, recalled Elizabeth Rigby's speculations about the gender of the writer of *Jane Eyre* in the light of her "ignorance of dress" (*Women Novelists* 19), observing shrewdly, "The much larger and more significant fact that no man ... ever made a woman so entirely the subject and interest of his book, the only interest in it, was entirely overlooked..." (19).

In this chapter I argue that women, in their construction of images of womanhood within fiction, and in their participation in wider discussions about

the validity of such fictional images, showed themselves to be active negotiators of ideological changes to perceptions of feminine identity and to the role of women in society. I am concerned here with female agency in the cultural representation of womanhood as it related to the issue of female duty and self-sacrifice, and how women were engaged in testing out the usefulness of various ideological positions in discourses both within and about women's fiction. I do not wish to significantly engage with what Mario Praz refers to "the process by which Romanticism in England gradually turned bourgeois" (39).³ It is, however, perhaps necessary here to foreground the development of the ethos of female self-sacrifice that was emerging in the early Victorian period since I posit that this process of embourgeoisement impacted significantly upon women writers and facilitated their construction of what I refer to as "a female heroic," as a rather more prosaic version of heroism began to supersede the prototype of the alienated, epic, Romantic adventurer.

One of the defining texts to mark a transition between the Romantic and Victorian periods was Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1838),⁴ a book with ostensibly no feminine agenda, yet women were quick to recognise its gendered significance. Carlyle's clarion call: "Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe" (*Sartor Resartus* 146) proclaimed a spiritual manifesto for an industrial era in which hard work, duty and self-renunciation were to be the new orthodoxy. This challenge to what was perceived to be the self-indulgent introspection of Romanticism struck an immediate chord with women writers who had always operated on the periphery of Romantic idealism. Eliot, in an article on Carlyle in the *Leader* in 1855 saw his influence as paramount. Even for those who

contested his opinions, the reading of *Sartor Resartus* was, she believed, "an epoch in the history of their minds" (*Leader*, Oct. 27, 1855, 1035). Eliot had recommended *Sartor Resartus* to Martha Jackson in 1841 (Haight vol. 1, 122-3), but other established woman writers had already expressed their enthusiasm. Jane Carlyle appeared bemused by the level of female responsiveness it was generating:

You cannot fancy what way [Carlyle] is making with the fair intellectuals here! There is Harriet Martineau presents him with her ear-trumpet with a pretty blushing air of coquetry which would almost convince one out of belief in her identity! And Mrs Pierce Butler, bolts in upon his studies, out of the atmosphere as it were, in riding-habit, cap and whip ...- My inexperienced Scotch domestic remaining entirely in a nonplus whether she had let in '*a leddy or a gentleman*'! And there is a young American Beauty – such a Beauty! 'snow-and-rose-bloom' thro' out ... And this charming creature *publicly* declares herself his '*ardent admirer*'; and I heard her with my own ears call out quite passionately at parting with him 'Oh Mr Carlyle I want to see you - to talk a long long time about – *Sartor*'!! Sartor of all things in this world! What *could* such a young lady have got to say about Sartor can you imagine? And Mrs Marsh the moving Authoress of the Old Man's Tales reads Sartor when she is ill in bed; from which one thing at least may be clearly inferred that her illness is not of the head. (McQueen Simpson 98-99)⁵

It is doubtful that Carlyle envisaged a specifically female reaction to his quotation from *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, "The situation that has not its Duty, its Ideal, was never yet occupied by man" (148-9): yet the idea that the heroic had its proper function in the "Actual," the mundane conditions of everyday life, had a particular resonance for women. *Sartor Resartus* introduced a more accessible frame of reference for the heroic ideal. Those that yearned for a sympathetic environment to facilitate acts of valour and heroism were advised that it was the enactment of duty within their existing condition that brought spiritual fulfilment; "the Ideal is in thyself" (149).

Rather than creating a new ethos for the Victorian age, Carlyle was perhaps most effective in giving a more secular voice to the emerging zeitgeist which appeared to be drawing on elements from various sides of the religious spectrum. The call to duty was given credence in Evangelical circles with its emphasis on practical applications of piety, although as Elisabeth Jay points out, Evangelicalism also to some extent offered a "an alternative to the philosophy on which the new industrial society was founded" (*Religion of the Heart* 7), particularly given its assertion of "the unique importance of the individual"(7). This privileging of individualism, as I illustrate in chapter four, became a locus of concern for women critics in relation to evangelical heroines, but it was within the Oxford movement that sublimation of self gave rise to most discussions about where the balance of duty lay. Elizabeth Sewell claimed that her first novel, *Amy Herbert* (1844) was "the outcome of the influence that the Oxford Movement had, not only upon myself but upon all about me" (Cruse 43), and indicated the level of discussion that was taking place about the balance between the small duties of home and wider duties to the community:

Everyone seemed to be waking up to a sense of unfulfilled duties, and the question constantly discussed was which had the primary claim – home, or church services and works of charity. I heard it said that young ladies rushed about to visit the poor, and were constant at daily services, while they were neglectful of their parents. (Cruse 43)

Women like Sewell, Charlotte Yonge, and Christina Rossetti used thematics of renunciation significantly in their work, drawing on a religious tradition of obedience and humility. Norman May, in Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* quotes Thomas a Kempis "seek ye the lowest place and be inferior to everyone," (231) and this philosophy was permeating far beyond writers with a High Church background. Eliot's Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* experiences "a

strange thrill of awe" (289) when she reads *The Imitation of Christ* and for the first time becomes aware of her own insignificance. Eliot takes the opportunity to indulge in an authorial aside in which she acknowledges a tribute to "the voice of a brother who, ages ago, felt and suffered and renounced"(291).

Unlike Evangelical writers such as Hannah More and Sarah Ellis⁶, it was not Carlyle's particular intent to validate the domestic arena, any more than this was likely to have been a consideration of Tractarians such as Newman or Keble, but the elevation of mundane acts of duty, the de-centring of self, and the idea that social and environmental constraints were merely a construct, an irrelevance to an inner reality that must be lived meaningfully "here or nowhere" (*Sartor Resartus* 149), provided a convenient philosophy with which to underpin a version of female heroism and spirituality, and one which women found useful to appropriate. Jane Carlyle was facetious when she speculated on how curious it was that her husband's writing was "only completely understood by women and mad people," (McQueen Simpson 99) but a value system built on work, duty, and negation of self, offered imaginative space for female participation in the ideological reconstruction of the middle classes and served to provide a moral framework to support the ideology of separate spheres. The extent to which many women appeared receptive to the idea of separate spheres, is to some degree illustrative of female adaptivity to the historical moment. The public sphere offered little space for female agency. Seizing the domestic sphere as a site for spiritual growth enabled women to achieve empowerment within this ostensibly constraining environment by

claiming moral status and value for their roles as nurturers and household managers.

The domestic novel, a medium which allowed women's writing to flourish during the early and mid-Victorian periods, had by the eighteen forties largely superseded the previous fashionable society novel (Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen - Forties* 74-5).⁷ While, the reasons for the Victorian cult of domesticity are multi-faceted,⁸ domestic fiction was, I argue, significantly predicated on a reshaping of the heroic by women writers who sought to fill the vacuum left by the demise of the romantic hero by writing this ideologically and spiritually reconstituted figure as feminine, bourgeois and domestic.

Valerie Sanders traces a connection from Sarah Lewis in 1839, who had a feel for "emotional rapture" (*Eve's Renegades* 19) in her promotion of women's domestic mission, through to writers such as Charlotte Yonge and Margaret Oliphant who engaged with "the densest domestic detail"(19). Quoting Lewis's definition of women's mission as "the application of large principles to small duties" Sanders notes a difference in emphasis emerging:

Meanwhile, other writers preferred to concentrate on the 'large principles' and treated the home arena as a severe moral testing ground. The imaginative appeal of this idea extended from Sarah Ellis to George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, so that women were able to find adventures in the middle-class home as demanding of their powers of endurance as those they had experienced in the Gothic castle the century before. (19-20)

A negotiation between Lewis's "large principles" and "small duties" can be determined in the shifting and unstable relationship between the twin themes of duty and self-sacrifice in women's fiction. These qualities co-exist uneasily in

women's novels of the 1850s and 1860s, duty and sacrifice at times appearing as synonymous and interchangeable, and at others, as principles which writers and reviewers sought to disassociate; the latter representing unfeminine acts of dramatic self-aggrandisement, while the former stood for daily unsung renunciation that sought neither recognition nor reward. The discipline of everyday duty, nonetheless, might serve a preparation for more visible acts of heroism, as Yonge infers in the introduction to her *Book of Golden Deeds* (1864), although the heroic deed must remain understated so that "the doer of it is certain to feel it merely a duty" (15). Female heroism, even in a more public arena was generally given validation by the addition of a domestic component. Yonge's short biographies of famous men and women include a range of role models, from Meg Roper, a "chief comfort" (66) to her father, Thomas More, to Grace Darling, who not only rescued survivors of a shipwreck but "lodged, fed and nursed them for two whole days while the storm abated" (240). Cecilia Brightwell's *Above Rubies*, published the same year dealt exclusively in notable women, and again draws comparisons between the more traditionally heroic and the domestic. Brightwell notes that many of these women "performed rare deeds of courage and high service" but reminds her readers that "in the quiet, unobtrusive, and common-place duties of the household, most women may find their proper sphere, and employ themselves both usefully and honourably" since such deeds are "approved by God as well as acceptable to man" (Preface iv).

Whilst women like Lewis and Ellis were successful in investing the execution of daily tasks with spiritual significance through the medium of Evangelical tracts or guides to household management, the portrayal of these principles took

on a different dynamic in a fictional context where mundane domestic duty might lack sufficient element of conflict to drive a strong narrative plot. As duty became established as a popular theme in women's fiction of the 1850s, demands were made upon the inventiveness of writers to generate it with dramatic interest and variety. This could be achieved either by increasing the level of introspection about the most minute decisions of daily life, a device which led much women's writing to be dismissed as "morbid",⁹ or by heightening the emotional effects with the creation of scenarios in which it became ever more difficult and painful for women to carry out the functions of everyday duty. The result tended to be a disproportionate amount of self-preoccupation and suffering in women's novels. As Sally Mitchell observed, suffering had "a positive moral and religious meaning" in so far as "Women novelists could make use of suffering in order to develop traits in their characters which express an alternate feminine value system" ("Sentiment and Suffering" 38). But this alternate value system did not go unchallenged, and commentators such as Jewsbury showed themselves alert to the self-destructive possibilities inherent in such a doctrine.

Even whilst approving the ethos promulgated in Sewell's *Katherine Ashton*, Jewsbury's observation that "we never read a work of this kind without feeling very glad that we are not the heroine to be disciplined at the hands of the author (812)" suggests an ambivalence about the way women characters were being made to serve as exemplars of renunciation. Jewsbury voiced suspicion about the motivation that prompted women to constantly eschew their own self-interest, and as I discuss, articulated her belief that women's relationship to

happiness and their own emotional well-being was becoming become distorted and dysfunctional.

One obstacle faced by writers of domestic fiction was the difficulty in making a virtue out of the normative situation where a woman's own needs were subservient to those of her husband and children, although as I illustrate in the following chapter, marriages that were demonstrably intolerable afforded an opportunity for women to execute a level of duty that for some critics verged uncomfortably on martyrdom. Since a happy marriage and motherhood were the pinnacle of female fulfilment, it is perhaps unsurprising that they became the vehicle for the ultimate female renunciation. A number of popular women writers in the eighteen fifties utilised the domestic novel as a showcase for female heroism by taking as their central focus the theme of young women giving up the possibility of husband and home because of a noble ideal or point of principle, generally brought about by some highly contrived plotting.

Edward Willoughby (1854), by Emily Ponsonby, is a fairly typical "point of principle" renunciation novel of the 1850s. Jewsbury, registering what were to become her characteristic objections to female self-sacrifice, finds fault with both the logic and the morality of Ponsonby's heroine. Clare Willoughby, on her father's insistence, had broken off her relationship with her cousin Edward. She finally obtains parental consent for her marriage only to find that Edward, in a fit of pique and desperation, has rashly engaged himself to Lillia, a spoilt and wilful eighteen year old. Clare nobly insists that he proceed with this inauspicious marriage, although as Jewsbury points out, the result is the

unhappiness of all three. She is unconvinced by the moral value of this kind of sacrifice:

Our objection is to the very false morality inculcated under the notion of "self-sacrifice." A perception of *justice* is far more needed by women than either generosity or self-denial. (June 24, 1854, 775.)

Clare is eventually allowed to marry her lover when he is widowed some years later. The popularity of this type of prolonged renunciation was perhaps responsible for a trend in later fictional marriages which Lena Eden commented on in a number of reviews and leads her to speculate on why "in all the novels of the present day, nobody is ever allowed to marry till they have become old, fat, and uninteresting" ("*Miss Gwynne of Woodford*," Aug. 31, 1861, 281).¹⁰

A more valid premise upon which a woman might renounce her lover was to enable him to find happiness with someone he actually preferred, rather than was bound to out of a misplaced sense of duty. This sacrifice, unlike the capricious behaviour of Claire Willoughby, seemed to win more general approval, and was the theme of Anna Ogle's *A Lost Love* (1855). The young orphaned Georgy Sandon regrets her decision to accept an offer of marriage from Captain Stephen Anstruther as an escape from the oppressive atmosphere of the home of her aunt and uncle. She finds the courage to break off the engagement during Stephen's posting abroad after falling in love with a distant cousin, James Erskine. Georgy enjoys a brief period of joy when her affection appears to be reciprocated, but before the new engagement is revealed to their respective families, she becomes aware of James's former attachment to the widowed Constance Everett. The couple had become estranged after an argument, but Constance, unknown to James, had written a conciliatory letter

which had never reached its destination, a similar plot device used by Anne Manning in *Some Account of Mrs. Clarinda Singlehart* published the same year, which Ogle herself reviewed in the *Saturday Review*.¹¹

As well as providing her heroine with a more acceptable motive, another reason Ogle won critical approval seems to be the understated nature of her heroine's sacrifice which is presented in a way that underplays any element of self-glorification. Georgy clearly loves James with all the passion of her youthful, impulsive nature as she reveals when he asks for reassurance of her affection:

"Do I love you!" she whispered back, and by a sudden movement bent towards him and threw her arms round his neck. "You know I do: Oh, my God! I should die if you forgot me." (183)

Despite the depth of her own feelings, the realisation that James still cares for Constance leads Georgy to release him from his engagement in a way that is both undemonstrative and touching. Georgy strives to make the right choice under difficult circumstances and retains sufficient humility about how her duty must be executed to forestall any suspicions about exaggerated heroism:

She must act though, now – that was something. She would go away calmly, with no parade of self-sacrifice. She was not heroic in any abstract way: the days were long past when she had nursed dreams of devotion and enthusiasm for their own sakes; but for any one whom she loved, she would have died quietly, without expecting that her fate could affect them much, and without asking a word of recognition from any human being. (191-2)

Jewsbury praised *A Lost Love* enthusiastically, including a lengthy extract from the renunciation scene in her review. In spite of the tragic fate of Georgy, which as she remarks "would be too painful were it not for the skill with which the conclusion is so managed as to leave the reader indifferent to what is called a 'happy ending' " (Aug. 25, 1855, 968), the overall effect she felt to be "tender

and delicate" (969). Eliot reviewed the book in the *Westminster Review* and was particularly impressed by Ogle's realistic depiction of her heroine:

You will find a real picture of a woman's life; not a remarkable woman, not one of those heroines who have such amazing moral strength that they despise happiness and like to be disappointed, or who are so wonderfully intellectual as to give even serious views of 'female competition'; yet not a commonplace woman, but one who, while loving and thirsting to be loved, can give up her one hope in life when sympathy and good sense demand it, without having any fine theories about her deed, or any consciousness that she is doing something out of the common. ("Belles Lettres," Oct. 1855, 611.)

Jane Margaret Winnard's *The House of Raby* (1854) involves another popular renunciation plot line, the giving up of marriage in order to avoid perpetuating hereditary madness in subsequent generations. This was a topical variation on the point of principle theme, particularly amongst woman writers. It afforded their heroines the opportunity to practice self-sacrifice on a larger scale, not simply for the sake of their lovers or their families, but for the common good and the future well-being of those yet unborn. Jewsbury, however, was not impressed by Winnard's treatment of this theme. "Up to a point, the interest is well maintained," she observed, "but when the high heroism begins, the story grows – what shall we say? - revolting" (Dec. 16, 1854, 1524). The principle behind the sacrifice is not called into question. Jewsbury affirms that it is the correct choice under these circumstances:

Margaret and Arundel had both agreed to renounce a marriage with each other on the highest grounds that can actuate rational beings – namely that it was *right* to do so; and that the accomplishment of their own personal happiness was quite unimportant compared with the responsibility laid upon them. This was a good and noble idea to work out a book. (1524)

What Jewsbury finds disturbing is the plot development which allows the couple to live on together as brother and sister, so that Margaret can continue to

minister to Arundel throughout his periods of insanity. "Instead of a noble renunciation, it leaves on the reader the idea of a lurid, sulphurous, smouldering passion, stifled down, but neither extinguished, nor yet in healthful exercise" (1524).

Jewsbury nonetheless found the theme sufficiently compelling to utilise in her own *Constance Herbert* the following year and its similarities with *The House of Raby* prompted Margaret Oliphant to review the two books alongside each other in *Blackwood's* in May 1855. Oliphant disliked the subject matter of both novels but was particularly dissatisfied by Jewsbury's treatment of it, arguing that Constance's reaction to her situation displayed a lack of acceptance and stoicism which appeared to have been given authorial approval:

Miss Jewsbury's heroine, when she feels herself very miserable, takes refuge in abusing Providence and God for her dreadful privations, and for the cruel injustice of creating her under such circumstances. Indeed, Miss Jewsbury's opinion seems to be, that the only business which God has to do with it at all is to make his creatures happy, and prevent those discourteous ills and misfortunes from laying hands upon them ... This indeed seems a very fashionable doctrine in these days when we have all become so very much kinder than the God who preserves the life in these ungrateful hearts. ("Modern Novelists," May 1855, 561.)

Eliot's review of *Constance Herbert* in the *Westminster Review* two months later contains a detailed and sustained critique of Jewsbury's moral stance on self-sacrifice. She notes that Jewsbury's purpose is primarily to explore this issue:

The characters and incidents are selected with a view to the enforcement of principle. The general principle meant to be enforced is the unhesitating, uncompromising sacrifice of inclination to duty, and the special case to which this principle is applied in the novel, is abstinence from marriage where there is an inheritance of insanity. So far we have no difference of opinion with Miss Jewsbury. ("Belles Lettres," July 1855, 294.)

Although approving the altruism that she felt ennobled this act, "that keen sympathy with human misery which makes a woman prefer to suffer for the term of her own life, rather than run the risk of causing misery to an indefinite number of other human beings" (295), Eliot takes issue with the methods Jewsbury resorts to in order to validate such renunciation. She quotes from Jewsbury's introduction to the book in which both its moral and its didactic intent are overtly stated:

If ... we have succeeded in articulating any principle in this book, it is to entreat our readers to have boldness to act up to the sternest requirements that duty claims as a right. Although it may seem at the time to slay them, it will in the end prove life. *Nothing they renounce for the sake of a higher principle will prove to have been worth the keeping.* (294)

Eliot notes that this truism is illustrated, not only by Constance's sacrifice, but elsewhere in the novel "by the story of three ladies, who, after renouncing their lovers, or being renounced by them, have the satisfaction of feeling in the end that these lovers were extremely 'good for nothing', and that they, (the ladies) have had an excellent riddance" (294-5). Eliot claims, "In all this we can see neither the true doctrine of renunciation, nor a representation of the realities of life" (295). In Eliot's view, "It is this very perception that the thing we renounce is precious, is something never to be compensated to us, which constitutes the beauty and heroism of renunciation" (295).

The moral that Jewsbury appeared to be promulgating in *Constance Herbert* was, according to Eliot, that renunciation, will invariably turn out to be the most expedient choice:

The notion that duty looks stern but all the while has her hand full of sugar plums with which she will reward us by and by is the favourite cant of optimists, who try to make out that this tangled wilderness of life has a plan as easy to trace as that of a Dutch garden. (295)

Eliot's objections indicate an ideological difference between her and Jewsbury which I argue was to be later elided as Eliot's certainties about renunciation showed evidence of being compromised, while Jewsbury, throughout the 1850s and 1860s used the review columns of the *Athenaeum* to vocalise her increasing concerns about female sacrifice. At this stage, Eliot's argument is cogent, whereas Jewsbury, to some extent appears contradictory and confused indicating a slippage between the opinions she espoused as a novelist and reviewer. Well-placed to identify emerging fictional trends, Jewsbury may have been inspired to write *Constance Herbert* because of the topicality of its subject matter. The combination of madness and renunciation was clearly in vogue. In her review of another madness / renunciation of marriage story, Harriet Parr's *Gilbert Messenger* published in the same year, she noted that "hereditary insanity, and the moral duty it entails of self sacrifice" was "a subject that just now seems to possess a peculiar fascination for authors" (Nov. 24, 1855, 1366).¹²

For Jewsbury however, this was an ill-chosen topic because unlike Eliot, she lacked moral conviction about the value of self-sacrifice, and, as Eliot had pointed out, felt it necessary to bolster her case with authorial reassurance and a conclusion that affirmed the heroine's decision. Eliot avoided this option in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) where Maggie Tulliver's renunciation invites judgement on its own terms rather than on its tragic outcome. Jewsbury, in her

review of the novel, did acknowledge that Eliot's was a viable authorial position, commenting on the fact that there was "nothing saved from the wreck of [Maggie's] young life except the consciousness that she broke loose from her temptation, and at the eleventh hour escaped back into the right way" (Apr. 7, 1860, 468). She adds, "this is worked out with a power and pathos that is very beautiful" (468). Anna Ogle's conclusion of *A Lost Love*, which Jewsbury had found so poignant, similarly had offered no affirmation that the heroine's self-sacrifice had been vindicated. Its heroine, Georgy, subsequently undertakes an unsatisfactory compromise marriage to Stephen Anstruther, the fiancé she had once rejected, and later dies in childbirth, while James, during his marriage to Constance, faces the realisation that he has chosen a superficial woman with a limited range of emotions for his lifelong companion. Rather than invalidating the renunciation, the authorial message in both these novels appears to be that the moral imperative was for the heroine to follow her conscience, irrespective of consequences. Although Jewsbury accepts this in the case of Eliot and Ogle, the authorial manoeuvring that Eliot points to in *Constance Herbert*, and the reservations Jewsbury had already expressed about sacrifice being connoted as having value for women do illustrate the extent to which she was alert to the complexities of this issue, even if her response to it does not always appear consistent.

A less dramatic renunciation theme than madness or female rivalry was that of the young woman who gave up her chance of marriage because of the call of existing responsibility to parents or siblings. The sacrifice, not just of financial security, but of romantic love, was, apart from life itself, the ultimate a woman could aspire to if she wished to prove how little she valued her own needs and

desires, but the ideological conflict between the legitimacy of the demands of the existing domestic arena, "the duty close at hand," and that of women's true mission, marriage and motherhood, required particularly careful negotiation.

Harriet Parr, in addition to *Gilbert Messenger*, based a number of her novels around aspects of renunciation, generally for less dramatic reasons than the secret of hereditary insanity that had caused Gertrude Messenger, Gilbert's embittered aunt, and subsequently Gilbert himself, to abandon hope of marriage and children. Grisell Randall, the heroine of *Thorney Hall* (1855) gives up her prospects and money to educate her worthless brothers. After a life of penury she dies unmarried without, apparently ever giving voice to complaint. The story then proceeds to the next generation where Grisell's niece, who does eventually marry, continues the struggle, as Jewsbury notes, to "do her duty day by day as it arises" (Apr. 7, 1855, 403) and shows similar devotion to her own brother until the results of two generations of female goodness finally come to fruition.

The sentiments of *Thorney Hall* are endorsed by Jewsbury who notes that as with Lee's earlier book, *Maude Talbot* (1854), "It is a sister who is the presiding influence in the story" (403). She approved its illustration of the principle of quiet duty within the domestic sphere, "the practical heroism that lies in the most dull and unromantic duties of daily life for all who do them with a noble motive". The following year Jewsbury shows herself less forgiving of Parr's *Kathie Brande* (1856), a more extreme variation on this theme where Parr

allows duty to veer too ostentatiously into sacrifice. The book opens appropriately with an epigram from *Sartor Resartus*:

Say to all manner of happiness, 'I can do without thee'. With self-renunciation life begins. (1)

Kathie, like Anna Ogle's Georgie, overtly refutes the idea of embracing the heroic:

I am, let me premise, no heroine. I never did or conceived a deed trenching on the heroic. My path has lain before me without choice; nothing short of wings could have borne me out of it. (34)

Despite this statement of intent, Parr was far less successful than Ogle in her negotiation of duty and sacrifice. The novel opens with the story of Kathie's father, a poorly paid minor canon in a cathedral town who neglects his six children in favour of intellectual pursuits. Sacrificing his career and leisure to his "great work" which never comes to fruition, he dies, exhausted, ministering to parishioners in the fever-poisoned atmosphere of the town's courts and cellars. As the eldest daughter, Kathie tries not to resent her position as "household drudge" (49), but is sustained by the example of her mother who cites the daily discipline of small duties as a useful preparation for later trials.

"Be assured, Kathie," she would say, "that the upbringing God is giving you is the one of all others to fit you for your future life. Self-denial, patience and industry never come amiss: you may have more need of them some day than you have now". (54)

Kathie does eventually put her self-denial to more dramatic use. After a lengthy engagement she renounces her fiancé to look after her mother, relieving a younger sister to take up an offer of marriage. Jewsbury describes *Kathie Brande* as "intended to set forth the beauty and virtue of self-sacrifice" (1369)

but gives a dismissive account of Parr's execution of this theme: "With a great power of self-sacrifice, the author has not endowed 'Kathie Brande' with any sense of justice" (Nov. 8, 1856, 1369).

The lover remonstrates and pleads that he has enough for her and her mother, and would gladly take both. Kathie replies like a heroine, "My mother would never bear dependence even on her children," - and after having used up the seven best years of a good man's life and worn out the elasticity of his spirits and character, she is utterly unable to see her own injustice and persists in immolating both him and herself. The mother, who is an exasperating model of maternal excellence, accepts this sacrifice also. (1369)

The mother subsequently dies, leaving Kathie with only a good conscience for consolation. Jewsbury sums up her objections by concluding, "moral deformity has its rise, like physical deformity, in the undue exaggeration of some one organ over all the rest" (1369).

Three years later, Jewsbury was more approving of another of Parr's novels, *Against Wind and Tide* (1859) but her comments suggest a conscious monitoring of the issue of sacrifice:

The ethics and morality are free from the morbid tendency to make misery by exaggerating a secondary point of duty and self-sacrifice at the expense of common sense and common justice - indeed to slaughter all other virtues to show greater honour to the selected one, - a mode of proceeding against which we have often protested. (Dec. 10, 1859, 773.)

Although the preference for "small duties" above more dramatic renunciation appears to be widespread amongst women commentators, there appeared to be evidence of a gulf between women's stated relationship to duty and self-sacrifice and their fictional portrayal of it. Henrietta Keddie's *Papers for Thoughtful Girls* (1862) consists of a series of moral essays followed by short tales designed to reinforce their message. Lena Eden, reviewing in the

Athenaeum, points to a discrepancy between the essays and the stories, particularly in the case of Keddie's essay on "The Life of Self-Sacrifice". Keddie advises her readers against exaggerating sacrifice and warns them, as Eden notes, not "to rush rashly out of pique or desire after change or morbid vanity into such a high, clear, rarefied atmosphere" (Mar. 22, 1862, 388). The story she uses to confirm the value of quiet duty is of a woman who devotes herself to visiting the poor and finds herself falling in love with a handsome and intelligent young stonemason, with "coarse, rough, clumsy hands" (388). The romance is, of course, too ill-fated to succeed, and the mason eventually dies as a result of injuries after a fall from scaffolding and the effects of a year's hard labour for defending the heroine's honour in a fight. Eden voices concern about how this and other sensational stories in the book are intended to convey Keddie's maxim of quiet duty: "So far as the bits of good advice at the commencement of each chapter are concerned, nothing can be better; but any ideas that may be thereby formed in the minds of the 'thoughtful girl' must be entirely dissipated by the foolish and unmeaning stories which follow" (388). The simple expedient of finding fictional interest in the doctrine of everyday duty appears to have defeated the ingenuity of many writers.

The close of the 1850s and the commencement of a new decade seemed to herald a fictional peak for the cult of self-sacrifice, at least if Jewsbury's comments are indicative of its prevalence. In a review of Anne Keary's *Through the Shadows* (1859) she complained that "in novels, the rule of conduct seems to be, that the more worthless the object, the greater the heroism in self-sacrifice for him or her" (July 9, 1859, 48), while Julia Pardoe's *A Life - Struggle* (1859)

prompted her to re-iterate her now familiar objections about the undue prominence given to this issue:

We have protested again and again against that false morality which prevails in second-rate novels, where common sense and common justice are sacrificed to some imaginary point of honour or self-elected duty, - where one claim is exaggerated to the exclusion of all relative duties. The evil sought to be avoided is generally of small importance compared with the mischief and misery caused by the self-sacrificing efforts to stave it off. (Jan. 14, 1860, 50.)

The following July Jewsbury made similar observations about Mary Eyre's novel, *The Queen's Pardon* (1860), illustrating her increasing exasperation with the treatment of this subject:

In the novels of the present day, as we have often had occasion to remark, the moral hinges on some point of exaggerated and often quite fanciful duty to the utter exclusion of all legitimate considerations and claims ... Self-sacrifice is at present the favourite shape that these hors d'oeuvres of heroism take in works of fiction; and no virtue can well cause more painful inconvenience to the parties concerned, because the commonest rules of justice and equity are lost sight of, - and justice is the primeval root of all virtue. (July 28, 1860, 123.)

1860 saw the publication of Eliot's own renunciation novel, *The Mill on the Floss*. Although Jewsbury was tolerant of Eliot's authorial treatment of Maggie Tulliver, Dinah Mulock, in an article in *Macmillan's Magazine*, offers a sustained critique of the morality of the novel. She condemns Maggie's renunciation as unnecessary, and as with Jewsbury and Parr's *Kathie Brande*, her concern is partly for the unwitting male victim of such gestures:

The wrong done to him in Maggie's forsaking him was almost as great as the wrong done to Phillip and Lucy: - whom no self-sacrifice on her part or Stephen's could ever have made happy again. ("To Novelists - and a Novelist," Apr. 1861, 447.)

In a prolonged discussion, Mulock complained that Maggie should not have died at the end of the book but Eliot should instead have allowed her to mature into responsible middle age as an inspiration to young readers struggling in similar uncongenial circumstances. She positions Eliot on what was increasingly being seen by reviewers as the wrong end of the spectrum on the issue of quiet duty versus the dramatic gesture: "If we are to judge character by results - not by grand imperfect essays, but by humbler fulfilments - of how much more use in the world were even fond shallow Lucy and narrow minded *Tom* than this poor *Maggie*" (445).

How far the ideology of sacrifice had been gathering momentum over the previous decade is reflected by Elaine Showalter's comment that in what could be seen as an interesting reversal of the personal lives of their creators "Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is the heroine of fulfilment. Eliot's *Maggie Tulliver* is the heroine of renunciation" (*A Literature of Their Own*, 112). The explanation for this seeming paradox is perhaps less related to personal circumstance than chronology. Although Jane does renounce Rochester for the sake of her soul, the incident is not overly prolonged. The issue of glorified female sacrifice was not sufficiently prominent for Brontë to have to engage with, but a decade later it was perhaps the most topical and significant theme in women's fiction. In the context of the numerous forgotten novels by writers of the 1850s such as Emily Ponsonby and Harriet Parr, Maggie's initial renunciation of Philip Wakem in favour of her family's interests, her later rejection of Stephen Guest because of the distress it will cause Philip and Lucy, and the final sacrifice of her own life are comprehensible and familiar plot developments.

A review of *An Old Debt* (1859) by Julia Wedgwood in *The English Woman's Journal* highlights the ideological shift towards duty and denial which had occurred over the preceding decade. While commenting on the "terse and concise phrases and energetic turns of thought which here and there remind us that *Jane Eyre* has been written", the reviewer goes on to observe, "there is the constant call to daily, repeated, unknown, unrepaid sacrifice which places the book in a still more modern and totally different class" (Jan. 1859, 351-2). Jewsbury, illustrating her ever-developing cynicism on this issue, finds Wedgwood's novel "an extremely disagreeable and painful book to read":

The Old Debt may have a specific value for the author; clearing away the morbid, overstrained ideas on which she apparently takes pleasure in brooding, and so enabling her to look on things and people as they really are - to view them in the wholesome "light of common day" instead of the dim twilight of self-consciousness. This 'Old Debt' reads as though written by a prisoner condemned to solitary confinement, and of emotions churned up out of self-conceived imaginations, and has no connexion with the world without, wherein living men and women move and have their being. (Feb. 5, 1859, 185.)

An Old Debt, as Jewsbury reveals, centres on the story of Edward Young, an "unhappy victim" (185) who sacrifices himself for the family honour. Self-sacrifice was not the exclusive preserve of heroines and many male fictional characters were also renouncing marriage for a noble purpose. In Parr's *Gilbert Messenger* Gilbert follows his aunt's example in refusing to perpetuate his family's hereditary madness. In Janet Wilkinson's *Dauntless*, (1858) Mordaunt, gives up the woman he loves to his best friend and refuses to compromise his loyalty and honour, even after his friend's death, a gesture Jewsbury dismisses as "false morality and fictitious heroism" (Jan. 30, 1858, 144). The existence of male sacrifice does, however, appear to be secondary to its female equivalent,

serving to provide women novelists like Parr with a useful variation on their favoured theme.

Jewsbury's review of *An Old Debt* raises a further issue that was perceived to be a serious drawback to women's fiction. Whether they focused on everyday duty or veered into more dramatic territory of renunciation, novels of this type tended to make depressing reading. Carlyle's proclamation "What Act of Legislature was there that *thou* should's't be happy? A little while ago thou had no right to *be* at all" (*Sartor Resartus* 146) and his insistence that man "can do without happiness, and instead thereof find blessedness" (146) seems to have been embraced a little too readily by women writers, and Jewsbury frequently expressed concern that their preoccupation with suffering was morbid and unhealthy. Although she had scolded the heroine of Mary Anne Lupton's *Catherine Irving* (1855) for elevating personal pleasure above the discharge of duty, - "heroes and heroines are not expected to go through the three volumes passionately demanding to be made happy" (June 30, 1955, 760), she may still have been smarting from Oliphant's attack on the lack of stoicism of her own Constance Herbert a month earlier. Over a period of time she showed increasing impatience with novels that depended on tragedy or unhappiness for their effects. Although she approved of Ellen, the heroine of Margaret Colvile's *Maiden Sisters* (1858) and "the patient gentleness with which she resigns herself to suffer without complaint" (Jan. 1, 1859, 16) she disliked the premise of the novel: "We are not fond of melancholy stories. We do not like to have our hearts made to ache over suffering for which there is no help; especially when that suffering might have all been saved by a grain of common sense, or half-a-

dozen frank-spoken words". Georgiana Fullerton's *Too Strange Not to be True* (1864) she found similarly dispiriting:

Mark the tendency of Lady Georgiana to point to self-renunciation and self-sacrifice as the true end of existence; whilst happiness, when it comes, must be snatched as a fearful joy, ready to vanish away – to be held loosely and renounced willingly. This teaching is certainly pure; but it is too austere. In real life we meet with our own sorrows, and expect to meet with them; but in novels we look for a little poetical cheering up. (June 18, 1864, 834.)

Although Jewsbury concedes that "we like to see an example set by the hero and heroine in the way of doing and suffering," (834) she believed that far too many women writers appeared to be dwelling on the latter. Commenting on Emily Ponsonby's *Mary Lindsay* (1863), she claimed that "the author is sternly resolute that it is a dereliction of duty to be happy" (Aug. 15, 1863, 207). Other commentators shared the view that women's writing was becoming too depressing. Amy Cruse in *The Victorians and Their Books* quotes a private letter, written by *Athenaeum* reviewer, Sarah. Austin in 1853,¹³ complaining that Dinah Mulock's *The Head of the Family* contained "too much affliction and misery and frenzy" (317). She goes on:

The heroine is one of those creatures now so common (in novels) who remind me of a poor bird tied to a stake (as was once the cruel sport of boys) to be shied at till it died. Only our gentle lady writers at the end of all untie the poor battered bird, and assure us that it is never the worse for all the blows it has had - nay, the better ... (317)

Eden, whose own novels tended to offer more light-hearted reading,¹⁴ echoed these objections to the depressing sequence of events prevalent in women's fiction. Reviewing Parr's *Warp and Woof* (1861) she noted, "we do not want to read for our amusement and relaxation a catalogue of calamities which happen to people every day, and may happen to ourselves before we die, for aught we know" (Feb. 8, 1862, 186). Anne Thackeray, on a similar theme, opened her

1865 *Cornhill* article "Heroines and Their Grandmothers" with the question "Why do women now-a-days write such melancholy novels" (489). Thackeray admits herself to be charmed by Charlotte Riddell's creation of Beryl Molozone in *George Geith of Fen Court* (1864). Beryl is an unselfish and dutiful daughter "who works for her father, who protects her younger sister, who schemes and plans, and thinks, and loves for all" (497):

She should indeed be capable of converting the most rabid of reviewers to the modern ideal of what a heroine should be, with her April moods and her tenderness and laughter, her frankness, her cleverness, her gay innocent chatter, her outspoken youth and brightness. (497)

Unfortunately Beryl's fate is to be separation from her lover and untimely death, leading Thackeray to conclude that it is "difficult to forgive the author for putting her through so much unnecessary pain and misery" (501). Thackeray concedes the "pathos and power" of the parting between George and Beryl which she reprints in a substantial extract. Its tone is not far removed from that of Ogle's *A Lost Love*, but a decade further on, women were becoming satiated with such novels and more cynical in their reception of them. Her argument exemplifies the point that Jewsbury had been making over a prolonged period, that by renouncing happiness women were in fact wallowing in unhealthy self-indulgence:

And perhaps, after all, the real secret of our complaint against modern heroines is not so much that they are natural and speak out what is in them, and tell us of deeper and more passionate feelings than ever stirred even the tenor of their grandmothers' narratives, but that they are morbid, constantly occupied with themselves, one-sided, and ungrateful to the wonders and blessings of a world which is not less beautiful now that it was a hundred years ago. (502)

Thackeray concludes her article by imaginatively blurring fiction and reality in an appeal, not to writers, but directly to the present wave of heroines whom she

considers "dear and tried old friends" (503) to take responsibility for their example to future fictional generations and their readers:

... but for the sake of their children who are growing up round them, and will be heroes and heroines of the next generation or two, we would appeal to their sense of what is right and judicious, and ask them if they would not desire to see their daughters brought up in a simpler, less spasmodic, less introspective and morbid way than they themselves have been? Are they not sometimes haunted by the consciousness that their own experiences may have suggested a strained and affected view of life to some of their younger readers, instead of encouraging them to cheerfulness, to content, to a moderate estimate of their own infallibility, a charity for others, and a not too absorbing contemplation of themselves, their own virtues and shortcomings? (503)

The belief that women were overly concerned with the minutiae of morality was echoed by many reviewers. Those domestic writers who strove hardest to ensure that duty took centre-stage were, paradoxically, particularly vulnerable to charges of insularity and self-preoccupation, those same values that duty had been intended to replace. Dinah Mulock's *A Life for a Life* (1859) Jewsbury complained "never gets out of the introspective process" (Aug. 6, 1859, 173), while Harriet Parr, despite approving the "noble self-renunciation" of Jean Dowglas, described the book as "not so much sentimental as morbid" ("The Author of John Halifax," *British Quarterly Review*, July 1866, 49). Mulock's *Two Marriages* (1867), Jewsbury found "pleasanter reading on the whole than the author's last work 'A Noble Life,' " but remarked on her tendency towards "noble sentimentalism" (Mar. 9, 1867, 317). Eden criticised Charlotte Yonge's novel *The Young Stepmother* (1861) for its level of introspection:

Each little failing, merit, tendency or habit is here examined under a powerful microscopic lens, and analyzed and commented on till one becomes fairly confused as to the relative degrees of right and wrong; and if the plan be acted upon and carried out in real life, the process can scarcely be a wholesome one to a young mind. (Dec. 21, 1861, 838-9.)

Whether agonising over the relative morality of women's everyday choices or depicting renunciation of epic tragedy proportions, there was a feeling that women's perspective had become distorted. By the 1860s novelists were encouraged to adopt a brisker tone. As Jewsbury concluded in her assessment of Ponsonby's *Mary Lindsay*, "a book that depresses the spirits instead of bracing the energies and inspiring the reader with a brave cheerfulness cannot be said to have a successful moral" (207). Despite the success of *George Geith*,¹⁵ there did appear to be some indications of a movement away from the more depressing novels of the previous decade when heroines who sacrificed their lovers succumbed to either unhappy spinsterhood or premature death from what Jewsbury refers to as "a novelist's consumption" ("*Adrienne Hope*, "Dec. 30, 1865). Eden notes approvingly in her review of Emily Cuyler's *Change* (1861) that it was "a consoling sign that even young lady writers are beginning to contemplate the fact that both men and women may outlive an unfortunate attachment and be very happy either with or without someone else" (Mar. 2, 1861, 61).

Oliphant, unlike Jewsbury, did not appear significantly preoccupied with these issues in her role as a critic for *Blackwood's*, but reviewing Anne Thackeray's *The Story of Elizabeth* in 1863, she indicated that the golden age of self-sacrifice in fiction appeared to be at an end. Oliphant found the rivalry of Elizabeth Gilmour and her mother for the love of Sir John Dampier somewhat distasteful, and speculates how it might have been subject to an alternate fictional interpretation a few years earlier:

In a certain species of novel, now happily not so rife as it was a few years ago, belonging to what might be called the literature of self-sacrifice, one can imagine such a contest under different treatment - how that supreme renunciation of self which it is so easy to do in a book and so sadly difficult in life, might be made out of it; and how the daughter for the mother, or the mother for the daughter, would magnanimously make a holocaust of her heart and give up the sublime lover. ("Novels," Aug. 1863, 174.)

Oliphant did, however, utilise the medium of fiction to explore women's relationship to duty and sacrifice. Her Carlingford novel, *The Doctor's Family* (1861), like many of the novels of Harriet Parr, takes renunciation of marriage because of responsibility to other family members as its theme. The indomitable Nettie gives up her income and prospects to support her sister and inadequate brother-in-law and their numerous children. Like many fictional women before her she overtly distances herself from any suggestion of heroism: "Self devotion! stuff. I am only doing what must be done" (30). But when she refuses the offer of marriage that would relieve her from her burden, Edward, her suitor has doubts about her motivation:

To fancy this imperious wilful creature a meek self-sacrificing heroine, was equally absurd and impossible. Was there any virtue at all in that dauntless enterprise of hers? or was it simple determination to have her own way. (72)

Unlike Parr, whose tendency was to vindicate such sacrifice, Oliphant uses this novel to test out its validity, as Nettie becomes aware of the conflict between existing duties and her potential fulfilment as wife and mother:

The effect upon her mind was different from the effect to be expected according to modern sentimental ethics. Nettie had never doubted of the true duty, the true necessity of her position, till she became conscious of her vast sacrifice. Then a hundred doubts appalled her. Was she so entirely *right* as she had supposed? Was it best to relieve the helpless hands of Fred and Susan of their natural duties, and bear these burdens for them, and disable herself, when her time came, from the nobler natural yoke in which her full womanly influence might have told to an extent impossible to it now? (146)

Oliphant's own experiences up to this period may have put her in a better position than many to recognise that self sacrifice was a complicated affair, and perhaps not all that women were being led to believe it to be.¹⁶ Her growing assurance in handling this theme is evident in her 1866 novel *Miss Marjoribanks*. "I will give up anything in the world to be a comfort to you" (9) Lucilla earnestly assures her widowed father, but Dr Marjoribanks has little time for such sentiments: "I am not fond of sacrifices, either one way or another; and I've a great objection to any one making a sacrifice for me" (10). Oliphant maintains a humorous tone on the subject throughout *Miss Marjoribanks* and in her final Carlingford novel *Phoebe Junior* (1876) where the stylish Phoebe ministers gracefully to her provincial shop keeping-grandparents. "No fear of being too fine for my duty, grandpapa," (84) she assures the bewildered buttermilk. Oliphant's progress from questioning the value of sacrifice to outright parody indicates the extent to which women's love affair with duty and sacrifice was moving towards disenchantment and scepticism.

Renunciation remained a popular strand, for example in the "marrying for money" novels I discuss in the following chapter, but women's predilection for self-martyrdom was becoming less and less viable, either as a morally justifiable option, or an indicator of serious literary credibility. *Middlemarch*, (1872) which Eliot commenced in 1869 (Ashton 295) is in many ways a timely conclusion to the treatment of the themes of duty and sacrifice at the end of the decade. Eliot is explicit about the nature of Dorothea's heroic aspirations, particularly in the closing passages of the book. Dismissing any current

opportunities for "a new Antigone" or "a new Theresa," Eliot concludes, "the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone" (795). It is "we insignificant people with out daily words and acts" (795) that are to shape the course of history; a reassertion on Eliot's part of the value of small duties above more dramatic instances of heroism, and an indication of her own development on this issue since she complained seventeen years earlier of Jewsbury's unwillingness to embrace "the beauty and heroism of renunciation" ("Belles Lettres," July 1855, 295). Dorothea's ardent desires, although treated with warmth and empathy, are closely allied to the misplaced fervour of fictional women of the previous two decades and their authorial treatment here can be seen as Eliot's response to a topic that engaged many women writers and critics. The sublimation of Dorothea's idealism into the prosaic reality of everyday, hidden life, when viewed as a reaction to the exaggerated treatment of female domestic heroism, and as a reflection of where the debate on women's relationship to duty had culminated by the end of the 1860s, can be contextualised as being as predictable an authorial choice as the fate of Maggie Tulliver ten years earlier.

Eliot may have famously resisted reading reviews of her own work, but she did not write in a literary vacuum. Like, Jewsbury, Eden, and other writers and commentators, she was a participant in discourses which sought to evaluate the kinds of ideological and moral messages that women's heroines were promulgating; and the influence of those discourses on the construction of a range of fictional women is demonstrative of female agency as a determining factor in the representation of womanhood in fiction.

Duty, as a social and moral principle, continued as a focus of women's aspiration, both real and fictional, but there was a growing consensus that it needed to be balanced with practicality, justice, and a reasonable degree of self-regard. The capacity for female renunciation to degenerate into self-destruction was, by the 1860s, becoming perceived as both fictionally unsatisfying and socially undesirable, as evidenced by Jewsbury's review of Matilda M. Hay's *Adrienne Hope* (1865), a novel of improbable and unnecessary sacrifice. Adrienne, who as Jewsbury records, "labours under a radical want of common sense," (Dec. 30, 1865, 920) sends her legitimate child to be brought up in secret and surrenders her marriage certificate to her unprincipled husband, nobly keeping her promise of silence while he goes on to marry an heiress. Jewsbury notes disapprovingly that she "makes a martyr of herself" (920) in particularly inappropriate circumstances, and concludes wryly:

Heroines like *Adrienne Hope* will, we trust, never quit the boards of the novels in which they are confined, or lunatic asylums must be increased in the land. (920)

Notes

¹ Shirley Foster, in *Victorian Women's Fiction* (115) cites this quotation from *The Biography of Elizabeth M. Sewell* 103, ed. Eleanor M. Sewell.

² Elisabeth Jay (*The Religion of the Heart* 7) cites Patrick Scott's assertion that "between 1801 and 1835 [religious books] formed 22.2 per cent of all books published and between 1836 and 1863, 33.5 per cent were religious" ("The Business of Belief" 224). Pinpointing actual numbers of women writers is always problematic. John Sutherland, in the introduction to his *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, suggests a figure of around 7,000 Victorian novelists. The selection of writers he catalogues includes 566 men and 312 women, although it is difficult, given the large number of anonymous novels, to assess how representative a ratio this is.

³ The parallel Praz points to between this process and the concept of Biedermeier in nineteenth century is useful in our understanding of interest by writers such as Eliot in German cultural productions which were showing evidence of accommodation to broadly comparable social change. Praz's definition of Biedermeier is too extensive to reproduce in full, but he dates it approximately from 1815 to 1870 and refers to it as "a small world of good sense and good manners, domestic pleasures and the cult of a gentle, well-groomed nature ... a world of bourgeois morality and bourgeois art" (118).

⁴ *Sartor Resartus* was serialised in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1833-4 and published in book form in Boston in 1836. It was published in hardcover in Britain in 1838.

⁵ Jane Welsh Carlyle to John Sterling. 1st Feb. 1837.

⁶ Works by these writers include Hannah More's *Essays on Various Subjects*. (1777) and Sarah Ellis's *The Women of England* (1839).

⁷ Tillotson cites Carlyle's attack on Bulwer's *Pelham* (1828) in *Sartor Resartus* (*Novels of the Eighteen - Forties* 75) as a factor in the decline of the society novel and attributes one of the dominant reasons for the general change in emphasis of novels of the forties to "the influence of Carlyle" (150).

⁸ Chase and Levinson emphasise "the influence of missionary-ethnography and the resource of aesthetic experience" (65-66) but point to a comprehensive list of useful studies which offer a range of explanations from "the example of the married queen" to "a retreat in the face of urbanism" (65).

⁹ For example, W.R. Greg in his "False Morality of Lady Novelists " (*National Review*, 1859, vol. 15, 144-66) writes: "In the youth of women more especially, there is a degree of exhaltation of mind and temper which - beautiful as it is, and deeply as we should grieve over its absence - partakes of, or at least has a strong tendency to degenerate into the morbid and unsound. It may add to the interest of a tale but it renders it unfaithful as a picture of life, unsafe as a guide to the judgement, and often noxious in its influence on the feelings." (149). Greg in this article gives a very similar critique of Harriet Parr's *Kathie Brande* to that of Jewsbury's three years earlier, claiming that Parr ought to have represented Kathie's sacrifice of her fiancé "as a deplorable error and not a sublime virtue" (160).

¹⁰ In her review of Matilda Betham-Edwards novel, *Dr. Jacob* (1864), Eden asserts that "the heroes and heroines of fiction are becoming every day further advanced in life, and it is now no uncommon thing to marry off a lady with faded cheeks and streaks of silver in her golden tresses to a gentleman who has lost the youthful symmetry of his manly form, and whose ebon locks are becoming scanty" (Apr. 16, 1864, 543).

¹¹ "A Couple of Novels," Feb. 9, 1856, 28. *The Saturday Review* incorrectly titles this novel "*Some Account of Miss Clarinda Singleheart*". Ogle wrote somewhat defensively in her review : "The device of a lost letter is a poor one, certainly; but it matters not so much by what means a catastrophe is produced, as by what measure of skill the catastrophe is brought to bear on the general interest of the tale" (281).

¹² Eliot cited *Constance Herbert* and *The House of Raby* as charting similar territory as *Gilbert Messenger* in her brief review of the latter ("Belles Lettres," Jan. 1856, 300), but has little to say about the message of the novel other than citing Parr's "excellent moral taste".

¹³ Cruse refers to "Mrs Austin" here but earlier cites her as "daughter of the Unitarian Mrs. John Taylor" (52). This identifies her as Sarah Austin (nee Taylor) who contributed 16 reviews to the *Athenaeum* between 1834 and 1850.

¹⁴ Jewsbury described Eden's *Easton and its Inhabitants* (1858) as "lively and entertaining" (May 29, 1858, 687); *False and True* (1859) as "light and bright and of the stuff that *farces* are made of" (Apr. 30, 1859, 580); and *Dumbleton Common* (1867) "a charming pleasant book" (Mar. 9, 1867, 317).

¹⁵ Stewart Marsh Ellis describes *George Geith* as "the most famous and successful novel ever written by Mrs. Riddell" (278).

¹⁶ Oliphant was widowed in 1859. In 1861 she was supporting three young children from her writing. Elisabeth Jay in *Mrs Oliphant, 'A Fiction to Herself'* describes the struggles of Oliphant's early married life.

CHAPTER TWO

AM I NOT HIS PROPERTY? : INJURED WIVES

If every woman in real life who finds after marriage that her husband is not "all her fancy painted him" should allow her heart to wither and her life to become colourless, and her home cheerless, we should expect that the husbands would either hang themselves or murder their wives, according to the preponderance of their tendencies.

(Geraldine Jewsbury, "*Jane Hardy*," *Athenaeum*, Aug. 1, 1857, 972.)

Margaret Oliphant, in an interesting aside to the reader, at the end of her short novel *Curate in Charge* (1875), admits it to be "a contemptible expedient" (193) to marry off her heroine rather than allow her to continue the struggle to bring up her small half-brothers alone. The rushed and unsatisfactory despatching of Cecily St. John was uncharacteristic of Oliphant, whose fictional relationships, far from being idealised, were usually tempered by a degree of authorial cynicism. Described by Valerie Sanders as "a key figure in the de-romanticizing of marriage in preparation for Ibsen and the new woman of the 1880s and 1890s," (*Victorian Women Writers* 35) Oliphant was less inclined than most writers to assume that women's dissatisfactions ended at the altar rails. Her explanation that marriage "is much preferred by most people to the more legitimate conclusion" (193) comes across as a rather shamefaced justification for denying her heroine the opportunity to resolve her difficulties in a more proactive manner.

While the promise of a wedding in the closing pages remained a staple of women's fiction, several writers and critics were giving voice to the view that romance was over-represented in women's writing. Oliphant, in her

Autobiography, contrasted her work to that of Charlotte Brontë, suggesting that her own fuller life and experience had led her more towards "a man's view of mortal affairs" and the view that "the love between men and women, the marrying and giving in marriage, occupy in fact so small a portion of either existence or thought" (10). Harriet Martineau professed a similar outlook. In her review of *Villette* (1853), she criticised Brontë for putting too much emphasis on love, insisting that "there are substantial, heartfelt interests for women of all ages and under ordinary circumstances quite apart from love" (*Daily News*, Feb.3, 1853, 2). Julia Kavanagh, although cited by Oliphant as a writer who imitated the Brontë model of romance; - "from Nathalie to Grace Lee she has done little else than repeat the attractive story of this conflict and combat of love or war" ("Modern Novelists," May 1855, 559) - concurred with this view in her *English Women of Letters* (1862) when she wrote disapprovingly of "the predominance given to love as the great problem of human life"(96).

Writing about the more mundane aspects of married life in what Margaret Morganroth Gullette refers to as "over-the-threshold novels" (143), offered a possibility for women writers to explore relationships in a more measured and mature way than simply depicting the excitement and conflict of courtship. Romance, of course, did not necessarily conclude with marriage. Idealised depictions of the married state, bolstered by images of perfect femininity, were promoted through a variety of texts, from advice books like Sarah Ellis's *Wives of England* (1843), to Coventry Patmore's poem *The Angel in the House* (1854-62); Ruskin's 1864 lecture *Of Queen's Gardens*; and novels such as Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), and James Guthrie's *Wedded Love*

(1859),¹ but these paradigms did not go uncontested within the period, and some women novelists sought to offer more challenging accounts of the everyday lives of married women, or even to suggest, as Gullette expressively puts it "that a bad marriage was a doom"(143). Writers like Oliphant, Dinah Mulock and even Yonge herself were not afraid to recognize that many unions were oppressive and stultifying and to examine ways in which women might accommodate their lives to marital disappointment. Despite Yonge's obligatory eulogies to wifedom in *The Trial* (1864) for example, it is clear that the role of wife is not appropriate for truly superior women like Ethel May, and none of the May family's marriages run smoothly enough to inspire its younger members:

Even Gertrude, not yet fourteen, had been surfeited with weddings, and replied to Harry's old wit of 'three times a bridesmaid never a bride' that she hoped so, her experience of married life was extremely flat; and a glance at Blanche's monotonous dignity and Flora's worn face, showed what that experience was. (252)

Advice manuals for married women, both practical and more theoretical, proliferated throughout the period and have provided a useful source on the ideology of marriage, but a look at the critical response to such books can provide an alternate perspective. Geraldine Jewsbury, for example, took a fairly conservative stance on the issue of marriage, eschewing any extreme expression of women's rights, yet she articulated distaste for the cult of feminine domesticity as espoused in the many handbooks of the period. She found Elizabeth Strutt's *The Feminine Soul* (1857) "a compilation of impertinence" and warned that "men in general, and bachelors in particular, ought to be told that a woman requires a higher motive to lead her life than even the desire to love, obey, and *cook* for her lord, - all which Mrs Strutt proposes as the chief end of woman" (Mar. 14, 1857, 341). Sarah Ellis's famous advice manuals

received a similar response. In a review of *The Education of Character with Hints on Moral Training* (1856) Jewsbury sneered at "the high position she has assumed as Matron to the Women of England" (Jan. 31, 1857, 149) adding, "We confess that we do not consider Mrs. Ellis a sensible woman, nor her present book a wise book" (149). By 1858 Jewsbury was indicating that Ellis had already been superseded by more modern trends, finding Dinah Mulock's reflections in *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (1858) "much more to the purpose than the treatises upon the Women of England and the Daughters of England which were fashionable some years ago" (Feb. 6, 1858, 177). In 1860 Ellis turned to fiction as a means of propagating her message of wifely perfection, with a series of stories entitled *Chapters on Wives*, leading Jewsbury to observe "we do not know which would be the lot most to be deprecated, to be one of Mrs. Ellis's model wives, or one of these wives' husbands!" (July 14, 1860, 53).

Marriage without any element of conflict could prove a rather unproductive subject for novelists, even in the domestic fifties. Many writers preferred the more exciting option of marital disharmony, attempting to neutralise the controversy of the subject matter by demonstrating women's capacity for duty, sacrifice and endurance, even when trapped in the most unpropitious or brutal liaisons. In Emily Ponsonby's *Mary Lindsay* (1863), the heroine, believing her fiancé to have been killed in battle, allows herself to be persuaded into marriage with a rich banker, Mr Merivale, whom as Jewsbury notes "makes a detestable husband" and as she astutely observes: "The author has now and henceforth a

fine field for her ingenuity in showing how a model heroine ought to behave under torture" (Aug. 15, 1863, 207).

The subject of marriage could be given a topical flavour with reference to concerns which were currently in the public domain. Campaigns for a variety of legislative changes brought the issue to the fore. The Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, first introduced in 1842, became what Nancy Fix Anderson calls "a hardy annual" ("The Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister Bill" 68) in parliamentary sessions in the latter half of the nineteenth century, stimulating unease about the potential for sexuality in the extended family circle and debate about the kinds of relationships that might be sanctioned by law. Some novels were inspired by this issue such as Felicia Skene's *The Inheritance of Evil; or, the Consequences of Marrying a Deceased Wife's Sister* (1849). Skene's "consequences" involve the unleashing of a catalogue of disasters on those connected with the marriage of Richard Clayton to Agnes Maynard, beginning with the death of Elizabeth Maynard, who becomes fatally hysterical after contemplating the possibility that her sister might one day become her successor, her premonition turning to self-fulfilling prophecy. Although the justification for the second marriage had been the care of the children of the first, the second generation, predictably, become casualties of this apparently misguided and self-deluding casuistry. Other books included Catherine Hubback's *The Wife's Sister; or, the Forbidden Marriage* (1851); *Love versus Law* (1855) by Joseph Middleton, and *The Deceased Wife's Sister* by William Clark Russell (1870), but the topic did not lend itself to the same level of fictional treatment as other contentious marital subjects such as bigamy and

divorce.² Although a significant amount of prose material was generated by this subject it appears to have been a largely masculine discourse, of more concern to clergymen and politicians than to female campaigners.³

The nature of the marriage contract came under increasing fictional scrutiny during the 1850s and 1860s with abortive attempts to pass a Married Women's Property Act, and the passing of the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, prompting opportunist productions such as *A Handy-Book on the Law of Husband and Wife* (1859) which offered readers advice on how to make the most of the new divorce laws.⁴ *East Lynne* (1861) is the most famous novel to make literary capital from the Matrimonial Causes Act, while the anonymous *Family Interests* (1856) and Dinah Mulock's *A Brave Lady* (1870) were among those dealing with issues around the Married Women's Property Act. As Anne Humpherys states, "the debates about divorce reform, which actually extended over several decades, and the expectations raised by the passing of the 1857 Act established a context in which women's concerns about their disadvantaged position in marriage could be narrated" (43). High profile bigamy cases, most notably the Yelverton trial,⁵ yielded numerous periodical articles and "thousands of little shilling books about it" (*Athenaeum*, Dec. 7, 1861, 763), including *Martyrs to Circumstance* (1861), a novel by the celebrated victim of bigamy herself. The fate of Theresa Longworth, or "Sybilla Longsword" as she became in one fictional version,⁶ was replicated by novelists eager to demonstrate that a wedding ring did not offer the security and respectability their female readers might suppose. Augusta Huntingdon's *Married or not Married; that is the Question* (1860), concerns itself with the uncertainty of legality that many

fictional brides were becoming exposed to. As Jewsbury observes wryly, "the heroine is remarkably unfortunate for such a very virtuous young woman; it would perplex the oracle of Doctor's Commons to decide whether her marriage would need Sir C. Cresswell to break it "(Sept. 1, 1860, 288).

The publicity given to divorce during this period not only provided the newspaper reading public many salacious instances of infidelity but also laid bare the violence and abuse that had been concealed behind the façade of Victorian domesticity. Frances Cobbe describes this realisation in graphic terms:

Who imagined that the wives of English *gentlemen* might be called to endure from their husbands the violence and cruelty we are accustomed to picture exercised only in the lowest lanes and courts of our cities, where drunken ruffians stumbling home from the gin palace assail the miserable partners of their vices with curses, kicks and blows? Who could have imagined it possible that well-born and well educated men in honourable professions should be guilty of the same brutality? Imagine a handsomely furnished drawing room with its books, and flowers, and lights, and all the refinements of civilized life, for the scene of similar outrages. Imagine the offender a well-dressed gentleman, tall and powerful as English gentlemen are wont to be; the victim shrinking from his blows - a gentle high bred English *Lady!* Good God! Does not the picture make every true man set his teeth and clench his hand? ("Celibacy v. Marriage," *Fraser's Magazine*, Feb. 1862, 234.)

Many women writers struggled to explore contradictions and injustices within marriage, yet still affirm its validity as an institution. Alert to the sensitivity of their subject matter they often sought to justify their authorial moral stance with reference to other ideological imperatives. Deference to male authority, for example, could be pitted against the sacred trust of motherhood as in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) in which it becomes necessary to remove the vulnerable young Arthur from his father's corrupting influence. As Helen Huntingdon states: "In duty to my son, I must submit no longer" (297).

Gaskell had used a similar argument in *Ruth*, when her heroine rejected marriage with her seducer because of the power and influence he would be granted over her illegitimate child. *Eliza Cook's Journal* had approved Ruth's rejection of Arthur Bellingham: "The mother rather than the woman spoke ... He should have no control over *her* boy" (Feb. 26, 1853, 280), but sometimes no ideological manoeuvring was enough to justify trespassing into such sensitive terrain. Charlotte Brontë famously dismissed her sister's book as "an entire mistake" (Barker 530) and stressed what a painful and distasteful duty it had been for Anne to write it, although as Juliet Barker points out "the tone of much of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* belies this" (532). The more vicarious enjoyment that could be gleaned from stories of marital conflict was acknowledged by Jewsbury in her review of Marabel May's novel of divorce, *Wedded and Winnowed* (1860) when she observed that "those who love to read of the troubled possibilities of married life will find them here" (Sept. 1, 1860, 288).

Both Anne Brontë and Gaskell cited women's right to individual integrity and conscience in upholding choices about leaving bad marriages or refusing to enter into them. In the case of Brontë, Elizabeth Langland traces a connection between the appeal to women's higher responsibility and an Enlightenment feminism espoused by Mary Wollstonecraft in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), quoting Wollstonecraft on her interrogation of the spiritual legitimacy of female deference to masculine dominance, "can she believe that she was only made to submit to man, her equal, a being, who like her, was sent into the world to acquire virtue? - Can she consent to be occupied merely to

please him; merely to adorn the earth, when her soul is capable of rising to thee?" (Langland 139). There was certainly a revival of interest in the once pilloried Wollstonecraft. Her exposition of women's rights was still considered relevant more than half a century later when George Eliot devoted a review in the *Leader* to comparing her work to that of contemporary American writer, Margaret Fuller (Oct. 13, 1855, 988-9). Despite Eliot's assertion that "no edition has been published since 1796" and that the book was "now rather scarce" (988), *Vindication* had actually gone into a third edition in 1846. Jewsbury summarised Wollstonecraft's reclaimed status with characteristic irony in her review of Caroline Norton's *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Bill* (1855), stating, "she has of late years been somewhat rehabilitated with other misunderstood personages, - today her name may be pronounced without the necessity of making a cross or uttering an exorcism" (July 14, 1855, 811).

The appeal to women's spiritual autonomy and the duty they owed to their own salvation was a theme still current two decades after the publication of Brontë's novel and was central to Eliza Lynn Linton's *Sowing the Wind* (1867). Linton's injured wife, Isola St John agonises over this issue: "did the righteousness of wifely submission include unrighteousness to the light within her own soul?" (73). The *Englishwoman's Review* gave the book an enthusiastic notice, suggesting that many married women would identify with Isola's situation and specifically highlights her moral dilemma: "there is a higher law of nature warring with the old law of social prejudice as to what is her duty when conscience says one thing and her husband another" (July 1867, 240). Women's

bodies might frequently be sacrificed on the marital altar but ownership of their souls could at least be legitimately be contested. As Isola's more forthright cousin, Jane, argues: "Do you think it will be any excuse for you when you are weighed in the balance and found wanting to whine out, 'Please, Oh Lord, my husband wouldn't let me?' " (44).

Many novels featuring unsatisfactory marriage took their starting point before the wedding ceremony. A significant number were predicated on the idea of one of the partners marrying for money and then went on to describe the attendant difficulties of contracting a union on this basis. These novels appear indicative of the way that the Victorians were struggling to reconcile an idealised vision of a disinterested love match with the practical and financial considerations that were likely to attend a marriage involving any degree of wealth and property. Fictional marriages of this kind might involve calculating the weighting between old blood and new money, and whether they might combine to mutual advantage. This was by no means an easy equation, and if the authorial message did not indicate that there was a price to be paid for compromising the integrity of the matrimonial bond then the lack might be supplied by the vigilant critic who had the difficult role of making sense of the myriad of fictional portrayals of women in unsatisfactory relationships and formulating a moral response to novels of marital conflict.

The notion of marriage undertaken primarily as a financial transaction offered many avenues of discussion and the novel had long been a site for negotiating the degree of monetary self-interest that was acceptable in choosing a partner.

Love matches were consistently promoted as the ideal in the novels of the nineteenth century.⁷ Considerations of mammon should not be seen to sully what was essentially a sacrament, but there were the demands of caste and family to be taken into account and it might appear prudent for women to have some discreet regard for practicalities. Extreme portrayals of women as adventuresses did not pose too many problems for readers and critics, such women were patently deserving of scorn and condemnation, but it is in the middle ground of marriage for security that appeared to be causing most concern. Some aspiring feminists seemed intent on depicting such women as victims, sold into slavery by oppressive patriarchal systems,⁸ but even writers of a less radical inclination were intimating in their fiction that marriages of interest were inevitably a Faustian pact and could not be expected to end well under any circumstances.

While Nell Le Strange's impassioned and much quoted outburst, "for am I not his property...for has he not bought me" (221-2) in Rhoda Broughton's *Cometh up as a Flower* (1867), is cited by Elaine Showalter as an instance of marriage as oppression, suggesting "a genuinely radical analysis of women's position in the family" (*A Literature of their Own* 174), Nell's death at the end of the book sends out a rather more equivocal message. Authorial sympathy accentuated by punishment for women who transacted marriages of convenience had by 1867 become a staple feature of many popular novels, and titles such as *Matrimonial Speculation* (1854), *Love versus Money* (1855), *The Rich Husband* (1858), *Marrying for Money* (1862), and *The Matrimonial Vanity Fair* (1868),⁹

reflected what was becoming a familiar theme, albeit with numerous permutations.

One variation involved a reversal of gender roles, inferring that both sexes could become pawns in the marriage market. Rochester's marriage to Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (1847) was transacted on this basis, but as the situation was dealt with retrospectively the issue is less prominent than in novels such as the anonymous *Eva Desmond* (1858) where the heroine faces rejection because her suitor looks for more affluent prospect. Jewsbury describes how Eva has her affections engaged by her eligible clergyman cousin, who, instead of honouring his commitment, "at the request of his friends, proceeds to marry a peculiarly hideous heiress, who is nearly an idiot, and has besides a hereditary taint of madness" (Sept. 18, 1858, 360). The resilient Eva does not succumb to victimhood but goes on to achieve social and financial glory, writing a successful novel, grooming her second-choice husband to become a bishop, and eventually settling down in triumph to dinner with the Queen at Windsor Castle.

In the cash nexus of the marriage market the financially independent women might exercise her own prerogative. The infatuated Blanche, in Caroline Grey's *The Young Husband* (1854), is assisted in attaining Claude, the object of her desire, by an eccentric but helpful old gentleman whom Jewsbury notes "hits upon the bright expedient of enabling her to *buy* him" (Nov. 11, 1854, 1363). Mr Fordyce not only leaves Blanche his fortune, but bequeaths the prospective groom three thousand a year on condition he marries her before she is of age. The marriage, undertaken with reluctance on the part of Claude, is predictably

unhappy, and Jewsbury is far from sympathetic, complaining that the sanctity of marriage has been turned into a financial barter:

When young heiresses will insist on being married for their money, by men who "hate and detest them," they richly deserve all the consequences; and such entire absence of all generosity or delicacy deprives them of all claim to sympathy or even toleration. ... The morality of Modern English novels requires to be sharply looked into; - it has become false, morbid, and nonsensical. (1364)

Writers, perhaps anticipating this type of criticism when utilising marriage-for-money plot lines, often used the scenario to employ their authorial voice in roundly condemning the behaviour of the protagonists. As Jane Williams noted in her *Athenaeum* review of another opportunist marriage story, *Quicksands* (1858) by Anna Lisle, "this issue of mammon worship affords scope for a respectable amount of sermonizing" (Nov. 20, 1858, 618). This strategy was patently neglected by Grey who, in Jewsbury's words, "parades Blanche, with her selfish, indelicate passion for a handsome young man, as a touching and gentle victim". Jewsbury objects to the fact that "not one word is said in censure of the weakness and want of womanly self-control she displays throughout" (1364).

Elizabeth Jennings' *My Good for Nothing Brother* (1862) features the ambitious, Hermione blatantly marrying for money, but Lena Eden, reviewing, has little cause to object since Jennings herself is so explicit in expounding her moral. Eden quotes approvingly Jennings' description of modern marriage; "that bond, once of Gordian tightness, now so easily severed, that surely the important words 'until death do us part' might be expunged, and such words substituted as 'until we disagree, or see some one we like better.' " (Dec. 13, 1862, 767).

Jennings is particularly concerned about the tainting of marriage by materialism:

There is a lament for "the good old days," when loving couples married and lived happily on their hundred a year - when great people only had settlements, and it cost a fortune to obtain a divorce! Marriage loses its prestige; it is to buy and sell and get gain. Vulcan is the modern Hymen! Till luxury diminishes its demands, portionless young ladies must submit to spinsterhood as a necessity, and Sir C. Cresswell's Court will remain as a stigma on domestic virtue. (767)

Eden was clearly supportive of Jennings' sentiments. Only a month earlier she had commented censoriously on Katherine Macquoid's *A Bad Beginning* (1862), suspecting its European setting to be a ploy facilitating the portrayal of lax morals and easy separation. She observed that "French marriages seem to be favourite subjects for writers who wish to exhibit the matrimonial bond as an ordinary contract, which like mercantile contracts may be broken with impunity" (Nov. 22, 1862, 658).

Writers who wished to promote a sympathetic response for heroines who married for financial reasons generally deployed the twin bolsters of mitigating circumstances and authorial punishment. These criteria might typically be fulfilled by the heroine reluctantly succumbing to family pressure to marry well, and the subsequent union resulting in tragedy and unhappiness, despite her exemplary efforts as a dutiful wife. Divorce or separation might be a factor but the inevitable conclusion was the death of one or other partner. Jewsbury, reviewing Catherine Hubback's *May and December* (1854) about a young girl steered towards marriage with an older and wealthy husband by her rascally cousin, notes perceptively; "May, who as a heroine, must not forfeit the reader's sympathy, feels every disposition to be a grateful and good wife" (Dec. 2, 1854,

1458). May endures her fair share of suffering and misunderstanding and is almost rewarded with a happy ending but her husband predictably dies just as her marital difficulties have become resolved.

Although alternate versions of the marriage-for-money plot remained popular there seemed to be a growing awareness by the end of the 1850s that this was largely an issue of gender. The plight of young women who have no other economic choice but marriage is not explicitly stated in political terms, but the poor, friendless marriageable girl was a familiar fictional figure. The hundred pound note that Archibald Carlyle gave to the penniless Isabel Vane in the early part of Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (153) becomes a significant enough symbol for Isabel to recall on her deathbed (681), and provides an interesting example of the conflicting ideologies of marriage in the fiction of the period. Ostensibly Isabel is punished for her infidelity. An alternate interpretation might be that Isabel is at fault for her inability to invest emotionally in a marriage underpinned by the philosophies of capitalism, suggesting that Wood's moral is that compromise and pragmatism are the key to matrimonial success. Wood was certainly pragmatic about the ephemeral nature of romantic love. Stevie Davies noted in her introduction to the 1984 edition of *East Lynne* that her message to married women was to "aim for security and respectability rather than excitement" (xii). This might appear to indicate that Wood advocated a tacit acceptance by women of marriage as a financial barter rather than an idealised love-match; yet the failure of the Vane/ Carlyle union with its mutual advantages of social position for Archibald and security for Isabel, a failure that

is replicated in so many novels of the period seems to render such an interpretation rather less plausible.

The consequences of Isabel's marriage of convenience are a reversal of those of Anne Marsh's popular and well-known *Emilia Wyndham* (1846), a novel which shares many narrative similarities with *East Lynne*. Emilia, like Isabel, has her inheritance squandered by a spendthrift father. Like Isabel she was infatuated with a young soldier when she undertook a loveless marriage to her (much) older family lawyer, Mr Danby, but in Emilia's case she gradually grows to esteem her husband without any undue trauma. When she meets her first admirer again several years later her eyes are opened to her husband's superiority and all ends happily. By the time *East Lynne* was published however, Marsh, born in 1791, although still actively writing, appears to have been perceived as belonging to a previous era, still re-working her tired and familiar plot-lines and out of tune with modern trends.¹⁰ The message of *Emilia Wyndham* was that women could find happiness in such a marriage if they did their duty, but women writers were finding this position increasingly untenable. Wood, despite her conservatism, appears to be acknowledging the new consensus. Fictional marriages contracted on this basis invariably ended badly, and critics were confirming that love and affection were the only acceptable motives for a bride. "There is nothing right or heroic in marrying a man for his money, however expedient it may seem" proclaimed Jewsbury in her review of Emily Ponsonby's *Mary Lindsay* (Aug. 15, 1863, 207). Frances Cobbe, writing in *Fraser's Magazine* is uncompromising about any kind of marriage of interest, condemning those that are contracted "for wealth, for position, for rank, for

support". Her inference seems to be that they are virtually tantamount to prostitution: "Such marriages as these are the source of misery and sin, not of happiness and virtue, nay, their moral character, to be fitly designated, would require stronger words than we care to use" ("What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" Nov. 1862, 595).

Polemical novels addressing women's inequality in marriage often utilised the idea of financially dependent young women accepting wealthy suitors who, unlike Archibald Carlyle, quickly transmogrified into cruel and brutal masters. Charlotte Riddell's *The Rich Husband* (1858) illustrates the trend to explore the marriage contract as an instrument of women's oppression, but Jewsbury, who shows little sympathy for this type of politicking or for the unhappy heroines who served to illustrate the injustice of the legal system, insists that "Judith Mazingford's worst enemy was herself":

If beautiful young women conclude to marry rich men whom they do not love, and rich men buy for themselves beautiful wives to be the crowning ornament and charm to their fine houses, without love, or reverence, or any sense of household sacredness, - they both do wrong and the evil consequences will fall on both. (May 22, 1858, 656.)

Another significant feature of the marriage-for-money story is the prevalence of insanity. Like Ernest Clifton in *Eva Desmond*, and more famously, Edward Rochester, those who married for financial reasons, whether culpable or not, were apt to find the partner "tainted" by hereditary madness. The influence of *Jane Eyre*, and the general preoccupation with insanity during the period might account for this to some degree, but although academic studies of fictional madness have tended to designate this "a female malady",¹¹ it was not simply the madwoman in the attic that women needed to beware. In this situation the

husband himself was often the incubus in the marital home, representing an underlying message that women swayed by material consideration will invariably discover they have contracted a bad bargain. The rich husbands they sold themselves to, if not downright brutal or dissolute could frequently be relied on to turn raving mad before the end of the third volume.¹²

Anna Lisle's *Quicksands* appears to be a virtual template for this type of novel. It features a malleable young heroine, Helen Grey, described by Jane Williams in her review as "a girl of good intentions but false training" whose main faults are "love of display and a desire of rivalry" (Nov. 20, 1858, 648). She is persuaded to break off an engagement to her childhood sweetheart to marry Arthur Huntingdon,¹³ the heir to substantial properties, little realising that Arthur's mother has been scheming to effect a marriage before his madness becomes apparent. Helen strives to become a model wife and fulfil her marital duties, but is mystified by the presence of a Mr Brooks who intrudes into their domestic life and at times "fairly monopolises Arthur by taking him for such long walks, that when he comes home he is too tired to speak". Eventually they manage to give his tiresome minder the slip, but Arthur, "removed from the influence of his keeper, becomes outrageous, goes raving mad, and finally dies in close confinement" (648).

The convoluted plot of *Quicksands* incorporates many familiar themes of marriage-for-money novels but there appears to be sufficient suffering and fortitude on behalf of the bride to forestall any serious criticism of her behaviour. Helen ends the book suitably chastened and the writer avoids the

temptation of bringing back the first suitor to effect a happy ending. Many writers, in an attempt to conclude on a more optimistic note, did bring the novel full circle by effectively portraying the unhappy marriage as merely an interruption to an earlier, more romantically satisfying liaison. This was an altogether more dangerous strategy, and one Mrs. Mackenzie Daniel makes use of in *Marrying for Money* (1862).

Jewsbury deals more severely with *Marrying for Money* than Williams did with *Quicksands* although it contains many similar elements. Violet allows her mother to manipulate her into an advantageous marriage despite the fact that she already has a prior attachment. Her new husband meanwhile, has his own admirer, his cousin, Ann Graham, who conspires against their happiness, blackmailing Horace with her knowledge of his secret of latent insanity. When Horace survives an attempted suicide by shooting himself, Violet nurses him and they enjoy a brief period of companionship until he dies. She is then permitted to renew her relationship with her first love, who has by then accumulated a fortune of his own. As Jewsbury remarks acerbically, "this time Violet marries for love as well as money" (June 28, 1862, 851). She remains unconvinced by its moral:

On the whole, this novel is rather an encouragement to marry for money than not. It shows how good and perfect it is possible to be, and yet to marry one man whilst the affections are another's. For ourselves, we have not the faith which the author has in the magic influence of the marriage ceremony; and we would not recommend young ladies to trust to it for keeping a preferred lover out of their thoughts when they are marrying somebody they do not care for because of his money. (851)

Jewsbury again shows herself alert to the authorial position on this issue and is sceptical about the level of sympathy directed towards Violet, the heroine, rather than the unwitting husband who has to suffer her indifference:

When once married, she behaves with a cold, gentle sadness to her husband, which must have been very exasperating; but her husband believes it to be only a sign that she is a great deal too good for him. (851)

This is echoed by her later response to Rhoda Broughton's *Cometh up as a Flower*. While modern commentators like Showalter (*Literature* 174) have tended to focus on the heroine's own consciousness of oppression, Jewsbury indicates that it was the middle-aged Hugh Lancaster who got the worst of the transaction, insisting "he was a good man, and deserved a better fate" (Apr. 20, 1867, 515).

How women were to conduct themselves once trapped in a bad marriage was a dilemma that novelists struggled to resolve and the unhappy wife was required to negotiate a delicate balance between victimhood and rebellion to win approval from readers and critics. The aristocratic heroine of Georgiana Fullerton's *Lady-Bird* (1853) is tricked into marriage by an infatuated and unscrupulous music teacher, Maurice Redmond. Anne Mozley, reviewing the novel in the *Christian Remembrancer* appears unimpressed by the heroine's subsequent behaviour:

She stolidly determines to do her duty by her husband; she economizes, adapts herself to her altered fortunes, and falls into the habits of his class, walks with him and visits with him, and never disobeys him; and by this conduct, naturally enough, drives him to exasperation and despair; for she makes it clear through all that she does not love him. (Apr. 1853, 418.)

Mozley however, does not make any easy moral judgements about how the heroine might adapt herself to marriage to a man who is clearly unworthy of her affections.

We believe Gertrude's situation an impossible one, and we are never bound to bring our judgment and moral acumen to bear on impossibilities. People cannot love treachery, meanness, selfishness, faithlessness, especially when practised to the utter ruin of themselves; and to say at this stage of the business, 'Gertrude ought to have loved her husband,' is a simple unreality which the authoress has taken no pains to make otherwise. (419)

It seems surprising that Mozley, writing in the *Christian Remembrancer*, does not take a more forthright stance on the necessity for wives to simulate affection for their husbands, but her reference to the fact that the marriage is unequally balanced in terms of class may indicate this to be a contributory factor to her pragmatism. Just as writers sought to undermine the legitimacy of the husband's authority with the evocation of hereditary madness, as I later discuss, other signifiers of diminished status might be brought into play. Even Jewsbury was prepared to sanction the idea that relationships that significantly reduced caste for the heroine might be too distasteful to sustain. The heroine of Anthony Smith's *Martha* (1855), the daughter of a clergyman, marries a labourer-cum-burglar but Jewsbury finds herself unable to countenance the union under any circumstance:

We wish we could impress upon novelists and moralists, that the mere fact of marriage neither enobles nor sanctifies this kind of attachment; - no alchemy can extract a grain of heroism out of it; - such love is nothing better than a "sweet degradation" and debases whoever holds to it. (Sept. 1, 1855, 1002.)

Eden dismisses the relationship of a groom with the daughter of his master as an "ill assorted marriage" (Sept. 13, 1862, 337) in Emma Robinson's historical novel *Cynthia Thorold* (1862). Braddon's eponymous *Aurora Floyd* (1862) also

contracts a marriage to her father's groom but Eden does not evoke the spectre of wifely duty to a husband who "persuades her that he is a gentleman in disguise" and then "treats her shamefully, is false to her, neglects her, and spends all her money" (Jan. 31, 1863, 145). James Conyers, by his status if not his actions, has forfeited the right to legitimate concern. Women's sacred mission did not extend to degrading themselves in liaisons with the lower classes, whatever the legality of the situation.

Despite Mozley's refusal to insist upon any affection from Gertrude Redmond towards her husband in Fullerton's *Lady-Bird*, she clearly finds Gertrude's submissive attitude irritating. It seemed wives who took forbearance too literally did not always win critical approval, particularly where Jewsbury was concerned. Although Shirley Foster comments on her "strong sympathy for wronged wives" (*Victorian Women's Fiction* 28) this, as Foster notes, is in the context of Jewsbury's close friendship with Jane Carlyle. Jewsbury witnessed Jane's unfulfilled marriage to Thomas Carlyle at close quarters, commenting on the relationship after Jane's death in 1866 in moving terms, a sharp contrast to the habitually brisk tone of her reviews:

In marrying she undertook what she felt to be a grand and noble life task: a task which, as set forth by himself, touched all that was noble and heroic, and inspired her imagination from its difficulty. She believed in him, and her faith was unique. No one else did. Well, but she was to be the companion, friend, helpmeet - her own gifts were to be cultivated and recognised by him. She was bright and beautiful, with a certain star-like radiance and grace. She had devoted to him her life, which so many other men had desired to share. She had gone off into the desert with him. She had taken up poverty, obscurity, hardship even, cheerfully, willingly, and with an enthusiasm of self sacrifice, on asking to be allowed to minister to him. (McQueen Simpson 238)

Jewsbury goes on to describe how Carlyle, unappreciative of Jane's sacrifice, and wrapped up in his own self-interest metaphorically flung her offerings into the fire. She adds bitterly, "he gave her no human help nor tenderness" (238).

Jewsbury took a clear stand on how women should behave in bad marriages, and her appraisal of fictional situations often extended to include an aside to her readers on appropriate coping mechanisms. Her approach was a pragmatic, "common sense" view that solutions lay with individual women rather than legal or social systems. She despised what she perceived as two opposing responses; the "passive obedience" (Aug. 1, 1857, 972) that characterised the victimised wife in Timothy Shay Arthur's *Jane Hardy* (1857) quoted at the opening of this chapter, a response which she found both perverse and exasperating; or the alternate option of active resistance fuelled by vehement diatribes against injustice. These two extremes exemplified the qualities she most disliked in the behaviour of fictional heroines, a propensity for martyrdom and misery, or aggressive assertiveness. The ideal wife in an intolerable situation, according to Jewsbury, needed to behave with cheerful fortitude and develop strategies to manage the bad behaviour of her spouse, or better still, not contract such a marriage in the first place.

Mary Eyre's *A Queen's Pardon* (1860) is criticised by Jewsbury for several instances of "false sentiment, false heroism, and false morality" (July 28, 1860, 123-4), but she is particularly frustrated by the behaviour of the wife of the hero, William Grey. Although her love for him has "died out", she "persists in 'doing her duty,' the most ingenious form of tormenting in the hands of some

people, and the most exasperating" (July 28, 1860, 123). The heroine of the anonymous *The Wife's Trials* (1855)¹⁴ behaves more accordingly to Jewsbury's tastes:

Mrs. Templeton is a charming woman, and her character is drawn with spirit and delicacy: she is far the most interesting victim wife of our acquaintance, and really deserved a better fate, which is more than we can say of most of that class, - generally speaking, victim wives are very aggravating, and deserve all they meet with. (Apr. 28, 1855, 487.)

The redoubtable Lotty of Julia Stretton's *Margaret and her Bridesmaids* (1856),¹⁵ is also commended by Jewsbury. Lotty is a loyal and tenacious young heroine, impulsive and warm-hearted and in some ways reminiscent of Broughton's later female characters. When eighteen-year-old Margaret announces that she is to marry Sir Harold Leigh, Lotty is initially furious since she had always taken first place in her friend's affections as her "little school husband" (11). The marriage is an unsatisfactory one, as is Lotty's own later marriage to Sir Harold's cousin, Philip Leigh. Jewsbury approves Lotty because although "married to a man who torments her" (Apr. 12, 1856, 458), she manages to tread the preferred middle path: "She does not become a victim-wife, perverse in her virtues and aggravating in her excellence; but she behaves like the good little honest creature she is, and shows where the natural obedience required by her position ends and where common sense begins" (458).

The "victim wife" required a persecutor of sufficient brutality upon which to exercise her powers of endurance. Jewsbury's reference to "the monster husband" in *The Wife's Trials* (487) indicates that she regarded this character as a stock figure. In order to justify narratives of marital conflict it was necessary

for novelists to convincingly undermine the credibility of bad husbands without overtly attacking the ideology of marriage. John Stuart Mill's observation in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) that "it is a political law of nature that those who are under any power of ancient origin never begin by complaining of the power itself but only of its oppressive exercise" (485) seem apposite in this context. Mildred, the heroine of *The White Rose of Chayleigh* (1862), is unusual in her extreme political stand against marriage, and her trenchant attitude leaves Lena Eden somewhat bemused:

She is determined never to marry, for, "never would she place herself in the power of any man - give herself up to his tender mercies by taking the title of his wife - forfeit so her faith to the cause of womanhood and freedom - add thus another link to the chain of tyranny - while England's laws remained what they were". (May, 3, 1862, 592.)

Mildred, unfortunately, according to Eden, "never lives to become the wife of 'a slaveholder' as she considers all husbands to be under the present *regime*" (592) but her early demise leaves behind many grieving admirers. Eden surmises the anonymous book to be "probably the first attempt of a clever, but very young lady," and admires its originality, despite finding the message of the book, "*young*, foolish and mistaken". Eden's tolerance seems to depend in great measure on the perceived immaturity of the writer, most novelists appeared reluctant to criticise marriage as an institution and employed a number of strategies to enable them to interrogate the authority of even the most brutalised of husbands.

In *Sowing the Wind* Linton builds an unassailable case around her injured wife by "tainting" her husband with a surfeit of signifiers designed to invalidate his "natural" male sovereignty and endowing him with attributes of race, class,

illegitimacy and madness antithetical to idealised English masculinity. The tyrannical but effete St John, boasts of his aristocratic lineage but is revealed to be the offspring of a half-Spanish, working-class, artist's model. Sinking into poverty, he rejects bourgeois values of self-help and refuses to engage with the world of commerce, connoted by Linton as healthy male endeavour. Despite his violence and attempted infanticide, Isola continues to minister to him while he raves in the asylum. After his death she is rewarded by the promise of a match with Gilbert, a long-standing admirer, who, like the "true man" described by Cobbe in *Fraser's Magazine*, had instinctively moved to her protection when illegitimate male violence threatened. Gilbert embraces the work ethic with enthusiasm. His background is unexceptionable, his racial heritage, and even his physical resemblance to Isola, - "it was easy for an ethnologist to see that they both belonged to the fair-haired, strong-limbed Scandinavian race" (102), - make him a far more suitable mentor for a young English heroine. Linton, like many ostensibly radical novelists of the period, questions the validity of marital obedience only to subsequently re-affirm it. The authority of the "proper" male is not called into question, it is only pretenders to his status that are exposed and vilified.

Linton, by the time this novel was published, had effectively ended her own six-year marriage, apparently without any undue unpleasantness, and having shown foresight in having William Linton sign a contract allowing her to maintain control of her inheritance and earnings. (Groover Lape 352). Many novelists were suspected of using the medium of fiction to pursue vendettas against estranged husbands. Rosina Bulwer Lytton's models of brutalised masculinity

were largely understood to be based on her ex-husband. Jewsbury obliquely acknowledges an awareness of this situation in her review of *Behind the Scenes* (1854). She accuses Rosina Bulwer-Lytton of reproducing the evil husband too frequently: "it is always the same individual in different attitudes and costumes" (Apr. 15, 1854. 460), and indicates that she believes her to be motivated by malice: "Lady Bulwer evidently hates her model villain far worse than do any of his victims in the story, - whatever that story may chance to be" (460). Rosina Bulwer Lytton's next novel, *Very Successful* (1856), in which Bulwer becomes the evil "Sir Gregory Kempenfelt" even featured portraits of Bulwer and his home, Knebworth House.¹⁶ The reviewer in the *Rose the Shamrock and the Thistle* is suspicious about the motives of Mrs. Edwin James in her depiction of Sir Percy Montgomery in her novel *The Wanderings of a Beauty* (1863), commenting, "Sir Percy and Mr. Edwin James are supposed to be the same individual, and certainly the character in the book is hateful and brutal enough to have been drawn by a divorced wife" (June 1863, 218).

The much-publicised plight of Caroline Norton drew sympathy from Eliot (*Leader*, Aug. 4, 1855, 156-7).¹⁷ Jewsbury expressed limited support tempered by the belief that Norton's elision of the personal and political in her 1855 pamphlet *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Bill* was damaging to her credibility:

Mrs. Norton has suffered great hardship - her married experience has been bitter; and we would not say one word that could wound her sensitive and passionate heart; but we do not feel that in her present outpouring she has done any very good service to the cause she has undertaken to champion. (July 14, 1855, 811-812.)

Jewsbury tried to occupy what she saw as a middle ground. She signed a petition in support of the Married Women's Property Act (Foster *Marriage* 29), as did Eliot, Martineau and Elizabeth Gaskell (Ashton 153), and was prepared to state in print that "the power given by the laws of the land to a husband over his wife's fortune calls for redress and adjustment;" yet her telling caveat that "the thing chiefly needed is that young women should cease from entering upon marriage from false motives - that they should be true to themselves" ("*Family Interests*," Jan. 26, 1856, 104), highlights her belief that the solution to oppressive marriages lay in the hands of individual women rather than changes in the law or social systems. She reiterated this view in her review of Frederika Bremer's *Hertha* (1856):

We believe that is women alone who can influence and help women; no change in laws or external things will do them any good, unless they first of all to their own selves be true. (June 14, 1856, 739.)

Jewsbury repeatedly condemned novels that appeared to have been written with a polemical purpose. "If there can be a greater bore in life than a man with a grievance, it is a woman with wrongs" (Nov. 28, 1857, 1485), she announced in a damning review of Emma Robinson's portrayal of marital disharmony, *Mauleverer's Divorce* (1857), a book which antagonised her because of its "coarse, declamatory, vehement style" (1485). The tone of Charlotte Riddell's *The Rich Husband* (1858) is also too strident to win Jewsbury's approval, and again the injured wife does not behave according to Jewsbury's standards:

Any of us would be all the better for being "wisely and understandingly governed;" but we must take the best we can get, and not make domestic life a scene of indignant protest, scorn, and "railing for railing." Husbands have need to exercise as much forbearance as wives; and if the law give power, which a bad husband may exercise, to his own shame and the misery of all his family, bad wives contrive, with the help of the devil, to work just as much misery and disgrace, and wrong, as if they had all the armoury of the

Court of Chancery on their side. Partizan books, like 'The Rich Husband,' are false alike to nature and to the truth of things; they overcolour and exaggerate, and introduce evil passions - making bad worse. (May 22, 1858, 655-6.)

Jewsbury reiterates her philosophy of making the best of a bad situation:

In any case; where a woman - as in the novel before us - makes a vital error; it is not to be expiated or rectified by passionate protest - not by running away - nor by writing indignant novels, - but by the "fortitude and patience" which accept the consequences of an error or a grievous fault, as the case may be. (656)

Jewsbury had expressed dissatisfaction about the tone of two earlier stories of marital disharmony contained in Hubback's *Life and its Lessons* (1851). The heroine of Hubback's first story, Kate Penrose, is an innocent young girl who has her heart broken by the adventurer whom she marries:

Kate comes back before the year is out, a complete wreck, - gets a separation from her husband, - and dies, to be a warning to all other wilful young women to mind what their friends say to them. The reckless ease with which a separation is obtained is startling; and no indication is given of the circumstances which might excuse the rupture of such solemn responsibilities. (Sept. 20, 1851, 993)

Jewsbury may have been realistic at least on this point. According to Anne Humpherys only 3 women successfully petitioned parliament for divorce between 1827 and 1857, as opposed to 140 men (43). The heroine of Hubback's second story "Holbeck Court" escapes from her unsatisfactory relationship through death rather than divorce, but this option gets a similarly unsympathetic response, largely because Jewsbury does not see it as a good template for the situation of unhappy wives outside the pages of fiction:

The heroine makes a mistaken marriage, - and dies of disgust and unhappiness after the death of her child. In real common life, people who do not set up to be heroines do not throw away their lives in this ignominious fashion, but live under unhappy marriages and sorrows and vexations infinitely more crushing than those represented as so intolerable here. (993)

Despite Jewsbury objections to "running away" as a viable solution it would be misleading to characterise all stories of separation as radically feminist or deserving of critical opprobrium. *John and I* (1862) by Matilda Betham-Edwards is given a fairly positive review by Eden (Oct. 11, 1862, 457, albeit with some caveats since it touches on several contentious issues. John marries a rich widow, Marie, five years his senior, but when her elder daughter Hermine returns home after a broken engagement she becomes entangled in a relationship with her stepfather which breaks up her mother's marriage. Marie herself is clearly not deserving of censure, and Eden appears sufficiently impressed with the originality of the book to not condemn it out of hand, despite its controversial subject matter.

Many novelists of a less purposeful intent than Anne Brontë used temporary separation as a legitimate vehicle of fictional conflict without it bringing connotations of fallenness on the part of the estranged wife. The use of dramatic irony about the real motives of the main characters enabled a tacit understanding between reader and writer that the separation would be eventually resolved, and that marital harmony would be imperilled only to be ultimately affirmed.

Just as the separation featured in Hubback's *May and December* (1854) is commented on by Jewsbury without any virulent condemnation of the heroine; her reviews of E. Daniell's *The Lost Treasures* (July 29, 1854, 940); Emily Owen's *The Spirit of the Holly* (Jan. 19, 1856, 73); and the anonymous *Yesterday* (Feb. 12, 1859, 220-1), contain no expression of outrage, despite the

fact that they deal in marital separation. Although Jewsbury dismisses the latter two novels as foolish, the restoration of marital harmony in all these novels appears to render them relatively uncontroversial and Jewsbury's attitude to such books appears one of disgruntled weariness about their general tone rather than any suggestion of moral panic. Jane Williams, reviewing *Coming Home* (1858), a separation story by Matilda M. Planché, adopts a neutral tone on its subject matter. Williams describes how the simple marital home of Ralph Maynard and his wife Alice is disrupted by the visit of a supercilious cousin "who, by her contempt of the honest young Doctor and her sneers at his unassuming partner, succeeds in clouding the domestic horizon, and producing a temporary separation" (June 5, 1858, 720) but the couple are eventually reconciled without any indication that there might be cause for concern.

Panegyrics to marriage, whilst having some degree of ideological appeal, were generally rejected by women critics as anathema to the doctrine of realism, or in David Skilton's terms "truth to life" (86), so crucial to mid-century writing. *The English Woman's Journal*, despite its feminist agenda dealt very generously with Patmore's *Angel in the House*, finding it "very delicate, truthful and beautiful" (Mar. 1858, 61), but is nonetheless compelled to point out that by "Exalting his Honoria to the position of an angel, [Patmore] gives her but little reality as a human being" (62). Other women reviewers were more brutal in their dissection of unrealistic perfection as evidenced by Jewsbury's reaction to Sarah Ellis and Anne Mozley's assessment of Gertrude's attempts to be a model wife in Fullerton's *Lady-Bird*. Many novels of marital conflict, although they appeared radical in their subject matter, sought to justify, both morally and

ideologically, the figure of the wronged wife by utilising the same conventions of idealised femininity as more conservative works such as Patmore's *Angel in the House*. Jewsbury's shorthand in using such terms as "victim wives" and "monster husbands" suggests an assumption that her readers would be familiar with such conventions and the purpose that they served in signposting where authorial sympathy was directed.

Unlike Eden who had disapproved of the idea of "French marriages," Margaret Oliphant looks to the continent for model of pragmatic compromise for women in situations of marital conflict or incompatibility. In a review of *Memoirs of the Marquise de Montagu* (1870) by the Baroness de Noailles, she compares the privileging of the bond between mothers and children which is "held most sacred" in France, as opposed to "the comparative laxity of the marriage-tie, upon which it is our theory to believe all the domestic affections are built" ("New Books," May 1870, 636). She commends the idea of the separate lives led by Madame de Montagu and her husband:

The theory is worth consideration, and, after all, is perhaps not so bad as it seems; for to be sure, a great many married people find it impossible to have but one life between them; and the sensible understanding of the French household that such a thing can be dispensed with, without heartburnings or that deplorable sense of failure which makes home miserable, might be worth cultivating when the other was not to be had. (637)

Rather than depicting this type of relationship as a controversial option, Oliphant suggests that amicable separation is a more civilised alternative to marital strife:

Madame d'Ayen bringing up her children in content and dignified tranquillity, with a charming friendly regard for the husband who comes to see her now and then, but yet quite able to do without him when need is is, [sic] surely a more dignified figure than the deserted wife raving after the object of her passion, or than the superior wife who is galled by her husband's imperfections at every step she takes. (637)

Oliphant concedes that the English wife may frequently have recourse to this type of arrangement although "she does it against her theory; while her Continental sister has all the support which can be given by the belief that such is the natural course of affairs" (637).

Oliphant, while sharing the pragmatism reflected in many of Jewsbury's reviews about appropriate coping mechanisms in intolerable situations, goes further than other commentators in proposing that such arrangements might be given public sanction and even encouragement, although Oliphant's position on marriage, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, can be described as in many ways ideologically out of step with her contemporaries. In her 1875 novel *Phoebe Junior* the eponymous Phoebe makes a calculated decision about what marriage to millionaire's son Clarence Copperhead can offer her:

He meant wealth (which she dismissed in its superficial aspect as something meaningless and vulgar, but accepted in its higher aspect as an almost necessary condition of influence), and he meant all the possibilities of future power. (234)

Oliphant's ironic sanctioning of marriage for money, although tempered by Phoebe's tolerance of Clarence's inadequacies and a few judicious tears about the emotional sacrifices such a compromise entails, is an extremely unusual if not unique authorial stance. It is interesting to speculate what Jewsbury might

have made of this novel and Phoebe's decision to make a "Career" (234) out of Clarence had she ever had occasion to review it.¹⁸

While much of the debate by women critics on this issue would appear to represent a reluctance to engage with political questions surrounding marriage, there was at least a recognition of unsatisfactory relationships as a reality, and as an appropriate subject for fiction, although few heroines seem to have steered their way through the minefield of a broken marriage in a manner that won critical approval. Like the sisters who sacrificed themselves for parents and siblings in the previous chapter, and the impoverished governesses I discuss in the following chapter, the moral imperative for women in these situations involved fulfilling the demands of duty with neither a sense of grievance nor a desire for self-immolation, and writers who failed to successfully negotiate this balance or failed to give an adequate authorial condemnation of their heroines' shortcomings were subject to censure. Women critics saw novelists as disseminators of moral and ideological standards of feminine behaviour both within literature and among their readership. Their own role in monitoring those standards as arbiters and regulators of female orthodoxy placed them in a position where they themselves were enabled to contribute to the negotiation of women's role in marriage through the discursive medium of the review columns and thus play a role in the continuing development and re-shaping of an ideology of the feminine.

Notes

¹ *Wedded Love* (1859) by James Cargill Guthrie is compared to Patmore's poem in an *Athenaeum* review by Henry Chorley (Dec. 17, 1859, 812).

² Anderson cites numerous prose articles, but the only novel she refers to is Braddon's *The Fatal Three* (1888). A (not entirely exhaustive) search of *Athenaeum* reviews in the 1850s and 1860s reveals only one passing reference to the topic in a review of "*Cyril Blount; or, Trust-Money*. By the author of 'Recommended to Mercy' [Matilda Houstoun] ". According to reviewer Almaric Rumsey, this features "a certain degenerate captain, who marries his deceased wife's sister, then deserts her and marries somebody else" (May 20, 1865, 683). Plot summaries involving bigamy and divorce are too plentiful to enumerate.

³ A search of The British Library catalogue suggests approximately 96 titles on the subject between 1840 and 1870, only 3 of which point to any female authorship. These are; *Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister, Proved to be Forbidden in Scripture* (1855) by Sarah Search; *Remarks on the law on Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister. By a Lady* (1861); and *Remarks on Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister. By a Lady [Jane Tucker]* (1868). Many books and pamphlets are written by clerics or consist of accounts of parliamentary debates.

⁴ Reviewed in the *Athenaeum*, Aug. 20 1859, 241.

⁵ Jeanne Fahnestock describes the background to the Yelverton trial in "Bigamy, the Rise and Fall of a Convention" (50-53). She suggests, among other sources, Duncan Crow's *Theresa: The Story of the Yelverton Case*, London: Hart -Davis, 1966.

⁶ *Gentle Blood; or the Secret Marriage*. By J. R. O'Flanagan. Dublin: M'Glashan & Gill, 1861.

⁷ For example in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Charlotte Lucas justifies her marriage Mr Collins on the grounds that she asks only "a comfortable home" (101). Elizabeth Bennet characterises the match as "a most humiliating picture" (101). Charlotte is clear about the compromise she makes but it is women such as Elizabeth and Jane Bennet who marry from disinterested motives who reap the real financial rewards.

⁸ I use the term "feminist" of course anachronistically. Novels that appear to fall into the more radical category include Charlotte Riddell's *The Rich Husband* (1858) and the anonymous *The White Rose of Chayleigh* (1862).

⁹ *Matrimonial Speculation* (1854); *Love versus Money* by Elish (1855); *The Rich Husband* by Charlotte Riddell (1858); *Marrying for Money* by Mrs Mackenzie Daniel (1862); *The Matrimonial Vanity Fair* by Emma Robinson (1868).

¹⁰ Oliphant, writing in 1855, for example, noted that Marsh was "always exemplary" but "has lost some ground during these last few years" ("Modern Novelists," May 1855, 556), and as I note in chapter six of this study, described Marsh and her contemporaries in this same article as "orthodox and proper beyond criticism". Jewsbury opens her review of *Evelyn Marston* (1856) noting somewhat sarcastically that the author of *Emilia Wyndham* "presents us with her annual novel" (June 28, 1856, 808). She complains that her characters and plots are stale and outworn and concludes: "We are sorry to be thus severe; but the author of 'Emilia Wyndham' must confess that we have had long patience with her" (808). An article on Marsh in the *Lady's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1878 ("Our Female Novelists," vol. 4, 385-396) dates her decline from 1854 (395).

¹¹ For example, Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (1987), Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (1974) and Helen Small *Love's Madness* (1996).

¹² Novels featuring male insanity include Anna Ogle's *A Lost Love* (1855), Harriet Parr's *Gilbert Messenger* (1855), Frederick William Robinson's *The House of Elmore* (1855), Jane Winnard's *The House of Raby* (1855), Anna Lisle's *Quicksands* (1858), Mrs. Mackenzie Daniel's *Marrying for Money* (1862) and Eliza Lynn Linton's *Sowing the Wind* (1867). Not all these novels utilise insanity as an authorial punishment for advantageous marriages.

¹³ It is difficult to assess whether or not Lisle is deliberately invoking Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) in using the names Arthur and Helen Huntingdon.

¹⁴ Monica Fryckstedt attributes this book to Emma Worboise in *Geraldine Jewsbury's Athenaeum Reviews* (95). Emma Worboise's novel *The Wife's Trials* was not published until 1858 and despite its title is not the same book as the one that features in this *Athenaeum* review. In Worboise's book, the heroine, Lilian Hope, is punished for her pre-occupation with fashionable society by the death of her child and the estrangement of her dissipated husband, but

her grief leads to an Evangelical fervour which eventually allows her the means to retrieve her marriage.

¹⁵ Fryckstedt discusses Jewsbury's reception of *Margaret and her Bridesmaids* (1856) in *Geraldine Jewsbury's Athenaeum Reviews*, but erroneously attributes this and other works by Julia Stretton to Anne Marsh (98, 104, 124). The British Library Catalogue does identify *Margaret and her Bridesmaids* as written by Stretton but is misleading in citing Marsh in parenthesis in its listing of this book. The twice-married Stretton (née Collinson then De Winton) appears to have no connection with the name Marsh, nor does the book include any foreword or introduction that could be attributed to Marsh.

¹⁶ Michael Sadleir in *XIX Century Fiction*, vol. 1, notes that *Very Successful* contains "2 satirical portraits and 2 views, all lithographed. Of the former, one is of Bulwer, and the views are of Knebworth House and Knebworth School House" (72).

¹⁷ Cited by Ashton 401.

¹⁸ Jewsbury, unfortunately, did not review any of Oliphant's Carlingford books so it is not possible to gauge how she might have reacted to Oliphant's detached ironic tone.

CHAPTER THREE

OUT INTO THE COLD WORLD: THE GOVERNESS

As Literature has grown to be a woman's occupation, we are afraid that the glorified governess in fiction will, like the poor, be always with us.

("Women's Heroines," *Saturday Review*, Mar. 2, 1867, 137.)

When Ellen Wood lay dying in 1887, she confided to her son, Charles, that for a number of years she had considered writing a series of stories, similar to her regular *Johnny Ludlow* features in the *Argosy*, but pivoting on the experiences of a governess. "I am certain they would have been very popular," she is reported to have said regretfully, "but I shall never write them now" (C. Wood 440). Wood, a writer who always maintained a speculative eye on the market, was probably correct in her surmise that this kind of series would have found favour with the public. The governess was by then well established as a familiar fictional figure, apparently striking a universal chord of recognition amongst the reading public. Bessie Rayner Parkes suggested the ubiquity of the governess in 1858:

While all our lady readers have received instruction from some class of governess, there is probably not one who has not also some relative or cherished friend actually engaged in teaching, or having formerly been so engaged. (*English Woman's Journal*, Mar. 1858, 1)

The 1861 census records almost 25,000 women employed as governesses.¹ The number of women involved in domestic service, around 750, 000, was thirty times greater, but problems encountered by the cook or housemaid did not have the same resonance for the middle class reader. The necessary interaction between women presiding over modest households and their servants might

have fostered some degree of enforced intimacy but did not have the same compelling dynamic as the governess – mistress relationship.

The female servant did, of course, feature regularly in the fiction of the period, sometimes playing a fairly significant role such as that of Phoebe Marks in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), but appearing more often as a peripheral figure. Other employment undertaken by women, such as needlework, was represented in novels such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848). The figure of the seamstress was, like the governess, a significant subject of debate, often appearing in cheaper periodical fiction as the object of pathos or a candidate for prostitution,² but less visible in mainstream novels. When Julia Kavanagh adopted a seamstress as her heroine in *Rachel Grey* (1855) without recourse to this kind of lurid treatment it was a move that seemed to be welcomed by women reviewers. George Eliot strongly approved Kavanagh's prosaic subject matter, "the trials of a dressmaker who *could* get work" (*Leader*, Jan. 5, 1856, 19), but was critical about its failure in execution, concluding that a lack of corroborative detail about many aspects of working class life rendered it ultimately ineffective. Mrs. Bennett, writing in the *Saturday Review*³ shared Eliot's concern about Kavanagh's ability to offer a convincing portrait of her chosen subject, being concerned "more with the inner than with the outward life of her heroine" (Dec. 22, 1855, 142-3). Geraldine Jewsbury was rather more enthusiastic about Kavanagh's characterisation, and like Eliot, she affirms the focus on the unsensational aspect of such women's lives and gives credit to the book for having as its central female character "a young seamstress, neither beautiful nor clever" (Jan. 12, 1856, 40-41).

Other female occupations emerge intermittently in the fiction of the period. Mary Barton's seamstress friend, Margaret Jennings, supports herself by singing when her eyesight fails. Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and Dinah Mulock's *Olive* (1850) were innovative in portraying women who painted for money rather than amusement. Charlotte Yonge's Ermine Williams in *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) writes a regular freelance column for a periodical. Slightly later in the period, Margaret Oliphant's Mabel St John in *Curate in Charge* (1875) hopes to make a living by illustrating books, perhaps reflecting the growing success of female illustrators like M. Ellen Edwards who were increasingly having their work acknowledged.⁴ School teaching, as opposed to private governessing is featured in several manifestations, and there are numerous examples in Charlotte Brontë's novels alone. A few actresses appear, such as Bianca Pazzi in Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters*, (1848) and Rachel Armstrong in Mulock's *The Head of the Family* (1852). The heroine of Ellinor Kelly's *Alice Ferrar* (1865) is a "ballet-girl" at Covent Garden who rejects marriage to a suitor who disapproves of her profession and instead opts to support her drunken father and family on her earnings. Jewsbury, reviewing the novel, complained of the author's "vague ideas of theatrical matters" (June 3, 1865, 749). For women writers of limited experience, lack of authentic knowledge of the minutiae of paid employment may have proven a practical barrier to rendering it fictionally convincing. Describing the duties of a governess in a private home was, at least in theory, within many more women's sphere of competence.

Governessing, therefore, remained the most feasible option for writers who wished to send their heroines out to work. It was moreover, the only female fictional employment that received any sustained critical attention. The figure of the governess seemed to function as a signifier for women's employment in both fiction and in wider public debates, and concern for her welfare (both in reality and as experienced vicariously through the governess-heroine) was to a large extent the self-interest of the middle classes looking out for the less fortunate among their own number. Kathryn Hughes suggests that the familiarity of the governess, as quoted earlier from the *English Woman's Journal* is in fact an inadequate explanation for the amount of concern she elicited, and that the majority of the readership of the middlebrow periodicals in which many discussions about the issue appeared "neither worked as governesses nor employed one to teach its children"(1). According to Hughes: "What these articles do illuminate is the way in which the tensions which the governess seemed to embody – concerning social responsibility, sexual morality and financial self reliance – touched a raw nerve with a whole swathe of middle-class Britain" (xiii).

Of the numerous periodical articles considering the social problem of the governess, a significant number were written by women or featured in magazines conducted by women. Elizabeth Rigby and Sarah Lewis wrote about the problem in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1844 and 1848 respectively,⁵ and Rigby published a review of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution's Annual Report alongside her notorious criticism of *Jane Eyre* in 1848.⁶ *Eliza Cook's Journal* published an article on aspects of the governess plight in 1849 (Sept. 15, 305-7).

The *English Woman's Journal*, sought to raise awareness on the governess situation with articles such as "Going a Governessing" in August 1858 (396-404), and its first issue in March of that year quoted extensively from the G.B.I.'s Annual Report (1-13). The governess herself was not simply an object of debate but addressed directly by numerous manuals offering advice such as *Mothers and Governesses* (1847), by Mary Maurice, *Hints to Governesses* (1856) and Emily Peart's *A Book for Governesses* (1869). A journal intended for a governess readership entitled *The Governess: a Repertory of Female Education* was founded as "a medium through which friends of Education might communicate their ideas and stimulate each other in the good cause" (Thomson 41), although it survived only from 1854 until 1856.

While a range of issues, both practical and ethical, preoccupied many prose writers on the subject of women and work, the novels of the period do not faithfully mirror these debates, writers perhaps finding some of them too dry and academic to turn to fictional advantage. The question of training, for example, topical at the end of the 1840s with the founding of both Queens and Bedford colleges in 1848, does not seem to emerge in fictional portrayals of governess life.⁷ The plight of the retired impoverished governess, a preoccupation of journalists and the patrons of the Governesses' Benevolent Fund, is another issue that it is unusual to find any fictional engagement with. Katherine West, in her 1949 survey of governesses in fiction claims to have found only one example of a superannuated governess, Miss Briggs in *Vanity Fair* (West 68). A story by Harriet Martineau, "The Old Governess" in her *Sketches from Life* (1856) seems to be an attempt to raise consciousness on this

issue, and the retired governess does occasionally appear as a marginal figure, as in Charlotte Yonge's *Hopes and Fears* (1860), but typically, most popular fiction tends to concentrate on the plight of the younger, marriageable heroine.

The possibilities for identification and empathy with the fictional governess were numerous, and her much publicised "plight", as later commentators such as Mary Poovey and M. Jeanne Peterson have pointed out, had significant implications. Below the seemingly impermeable surface of Victorian middle class life, it seemed there lurked a perilous fate to which even the most well-bred young woman might succumb. In a newly industrial society where the old certainties of class were perceived as being under siege, breeding and gentility offered no safeguards for women. Heartrending tales of sensitive, unprepared young women facing the hardships of governess life spoke volumes about the underlying fears that women readers and writers had about their own precarious economic security and the unreliability and impermanence of class identity. Female critical responses to the myriad of governesses in popular fiction, as I later discuss, tend to confirm the centrality of this issue of social disjunction and what Peterson refers to as "status incongruence" (3).

Although a proportion of governesses emerged in sensation fiction as social interlopers presenting a threat to family stability, such as Lucy Audley; Miss Gwilt in Wilkie Collins' *Armadale* (1866); and Sophia May in Ellen Wood's *Parkwater* (1870),⁸ their occupations have tended to be in some senses tangential, a means to an end rather than a fixed identity. Books which dwelt on the day-to-day aspects of governess life were typically of a more domestic

nature, but mirrored the sensation novel's anxiety about the violation of the home (in this case usually the governess's own) and the threat to the social order posed by the break up of the middle-class family, its cherished daughters transplanted many miles away from all that was dear and familiar to them. The term, "white slavery" coined in a letter to the *Times* (Jan. 20, 1858, 12) and reprinted by Barbara Bodichon in her *Women and Work* (1857) (Lacey 65-7)⁹, while primarily used to indicate the subsistence level of payment for the occupation, was emblematic also of the idea that such young women were wrenched painfully from their families and subject to transient placements with employers potentially in a position to deny their caste and denigrate and humiliate them in numerous small but telling ways. Many readers and commentators were genuinely horrified and indignant at the idea of middle-class girls placed in this situation; nonetheless it afforded a frisson of excitement to be exploited by the opportunist novelist.

Fictional accounts of the financial circumstances which prompted young women to become governesses seem to accord with details from the Governesses' Benevolent fund as analysed by Pamela Horn in 1989. Horn demonstrated that "the largest single cause of daughters becoming governesses was premature parental death or severe illness. It was closely followed by unwise business ventures or an inadequate parental income" (336). Many governess stories of the period begin with the failure of the main provider, a reminder to women readers of their own dependence on male relatives, whose death, insolvency or fecklessness might throw themselves or their daughters on to the market as casually as any of the slaves in Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852).

Mary Maurice, in her book *Mothers and Governesses* (1847) conjures up the threat that the occupation held for the middle class family; hanging over the happy home like the sword of Damocles:

[L]et us picture to ourselves the family of a country clergyman, which has been carefully brought up under the eye of a tender mother. The children are growing up happy members of a peaceful home, where all the charities of life are in full exercise, where each heart is bound to each, by the holiest bonds, and the parents live for them, for each other, and for God. (Broughton and Symes 16-17)

The family grows in size and "sickness enters the dwelling". Economies are made but it becomes "painfully evident" that the elder daughters must earn their living as governesses: "they quit the spot so much endeared to them - sisters who have never been separated before, must go out into the cold world " (17).¹⁰

Harriet Parr in her series of essays *In the Silver Age* (1864) describes poignantly the contrast between the comfort and security of her own home compared to the isolation she experienced as a young governess:

Don't I remember Christmas Eves and Christmas Nights - with mother-love in the midst, and a bunch of children's rosy faces round the hearth at home, and fun, and nuts, and stories, and cake-and-cheese, and holly sprigs, and all of us together? And don't I remember other Christmas Eves and Christmas Nights spent in solitary ease by my school-room window, with the blind up, looking out into the snow-stormy darkness, when I felt, oh so forlorn and prematurely philosophical; and can I persuade myself that I was as happy in my want of cares as my good mother with her double load? (vol. 2, 70)

Among the earlier crop of Victorian books commenting in detail on the role of the governess were Lady Blessington's *The Governess* (1839) Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook* (1839) Elizabeth Sewell's *Amy Herbert* (1844) Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847) and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). All to some extent attempted to prod the Victorian conscience about the situation of

the governess. Lady Amberley writing much later in her diary noted, "read *Agnes Grey* ... and should like to give it to every family with a governess and shall read it through again when I have a governess to remind me to be more human" (Thomson 53).

Elizabeth Rigby's now infamous response to *Jane Eyre* in the *Quarterly Review* dwelt much on the governess aspect of the novel. Rigby repeated the rumours that the anonymous author of *Jane Eyre* was Thackeray's former governess, and by insinuation his mistress,¹¹ and had provided the model for Becky Sharpe. Condemning Jane's behaviour as inappropriate to her social position, Rigby then expands the discussion to the anomalous position of the governess in Victorian social life:

A governess can have no equals and therefore can have no sympathy. She is a burden and restraint in society, as all must be who are placed ostensibly at the same table and yet are forbidden to help themselves or to be helped to the same viands. She is a bore to almost any gentleman, as a tabooed woman, to whom he is interdicted from granting the usual privileges of the sex, and yet who is perpetually crossing his path. She is a bore to most ladies by the same rule, and a reproach too - for her dull fagging bread-and-water life is perpetually putting their pampered listlessness to shame. The servants invariably detest her, for she is a dependant like themselves, and yet, for all that, as much their superior in other respects as the family they both serve. Her pupils may love her, and she may take the deepest interest in them, but they cannot be her friends. (Dec. 1848, 177)

Brontë, although thwarted by Smith and Elder from inserting a stinging and sarcastic reply as a foreword to *Shirley* which had advised Rigby, "just turn out and be a governess yourself for a couple of years: the experiment would do you good" (Barker 606), instead responded by inserting most of the above passage verbatim into chapter twenty-one of *Shirley*, quoted as issuing from the arrogant former employers of Mrs. Pryor. Despite Brontë's indignation, many of Rigby's

comments simply echoed the alienation of the governess as expressed in fiction by other writers including the Brontës themselves. Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*, enlightening Mr. Weston on the relationship between herself and her pupils, had confided, "they are good company sometimes, but I cannot call them friends, nor would they think of bestowing such a name on me" (185). Harriet Parr described the anomalous situation of the governess as "always in the family and never of it" (*In the Silver Age* vol. 2, 214), while Smith, the lady's maid in Emma Worboise's *Grey and Gold* (1870), who believed that governesses ought not aspire to being members of the household, complained that they were "neither here nor there; they are not fish, nor flesh, nor yet fowl" (74).

Eliza Cook's Journal frames its position on the governess situation rather more tactfully, but in content it is not too far removed from the Rigby article. It cites the familiar story of class disjunction engendered by the role of governess:

We can conceive no more unhappy fate for a girl than to be thus placed out as a governess ... She has no well-defined place in the family she has entered; she stands utterly isolated and alone in it; treated as a kind of upper servant, though possessing all that delicate sensitiveness which shrinks at the appearance of harshness or uncivility; regarded often as but a better bred sort of menial, though cherishing, perhaps, ideas of gentility equal to the highest station; placed midway between the drawing -room and the servants'- hall, yet permitted to be a denizen of neither; proud of her respectability, and it may be, no inconsiderable share of mental culture, yet obliged to succumb before vulgarity... ("Governesses," Sept. 15, 1849, 305)

The possibility that well-bred young women might be forced into a position where they had to "succumb before vulgarity" was the focus of considerable anxiety, signifying not simply concern for the individual governess, but more generally that the social hierarchy was being reversed. Despite economic downturns in the "hungry forties," the mercantile classes were gathering

momentum and the idea of the parvenu bourgeoisie holding sway over the daughters of the established upper middle classes was disquieting. In *Agnes Grey* (1847) the heroine finds no consolation in employers of any class, although Mrs. Grey, herself the daughter of a squire, had advised her that she would be better treated by the family of a gentleman "than those purse-proud trades-people and arrogant upstarts" (112).

After the stir caused by *Agnes Grey* and *Jane Eyre*, governess stories continued unabated as a feature of the domestic fiction of the 1850s. Their number included Dinah Mulock's *Bread upon the Waters* (1852), Rosina Bulwer Lytton's *Very Successful* (1856), Matilda Betham-Edwards' *The White House by the Sea* (1857), Georgiana Craik's *Riverston* (1857) and Anna Carter Hall's *The Governess* (1858). Surprisingly, given the glut of fiction on the subject, there seems to be a dearth of critical comment from women about governess-heroines featured in novels during the middle of this decade, or even periodical articles about the governess, although there was a resurgence of interest in the late 1850s, particularly following the founding of the *English Woman's Journal* in 1858.

The stereotype of the downtrodden governess seems to have gone largely unchallenged in female discourses about fiction in the period following Rigby's diatribe. The impact of the Brontë family tragedy on the public consciousness may have been a factor in this lull. There was increasing awareness, especially in literary circles, about the lives and death of the Brontë sisters, so closely associated with governesses - Anne Mozley, writing in the *Christian*

Remembrancer referred to Charlotte as "the novelist of the school-room" ("New Novels by Lady G. Fullerton and Currer Bell." Apr. 1853, 423). This may have produced public sympathy for the role, and induced some degree of critical guilt, especially following Charlotte's own death in March 1855 and the publication of Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) two years later, which poignantly described aspects of Charlotte's governess career such as Mrs. Sidgwick's response to her three year old son's effusions - "love the *governess* my dear!"(187). Rigby's article had elided real life and fictional figures, and Gaskell publicly condemned the "cowardly insolence" (304) of her remarks, pointedly drawing attention to the publication date of her review in December 1848, the very month that Charlotte buried one sister and saw the beginning of a decline in another. Cynicism about tragic governesses in these circumstances may have been seen as inappropriate. The *Christian Remembrancer* although defensive about its past treatment of Brontë, later acknowledged Gaskell's biography as "a lesson to weigh words" (Allott 370).

Although not unsympathetic, Jane Williams adopts a flippant tone in her review of *Clara Melville* (1858), an anonymous governess novel which features, unusually, a young married woman who is required to "drudge as a daily governess in the families of the singing mother, the strong-minded mother, the Latin-root mother and the novel-reading mother"(June 5, 1858, 720). Williams' here is perhaps in tune with the attitude of amused scepticism about the "governess problem" that was beginning to gather momentum by the end of the decade, and by 1860 had become a fairly predictable critical response to the type of novel that aimed to elicit sympathy for the put-upon governess. As

Jewsbury stated in her review of yet another anonymous governess novel, *All Right* (1860):

We confess to being very weary of interesting young heroines, born in easy circumstances, obliged, by sudden misfortune, to leave the sweet home of their childhood, sell the pony-chaise, and go out into the world as governesses, till they become

Too wise and good

For human nature's daily food. (Aug. 12, 1860, 194)

The advent of the incubus governess in sensation fiction perhaps again rendered her fair game for public comment and by the beginning of the 1860s, the cumulative effect of long-suffering governesses in domestic fiction was beginning to take its toll as compassion began to pall among reviewers. Harriet Martineau's *Once a Week* article in 1860 complained of governesses' lives being used as "tragic material for fiction" referring to "the well known descriptions and appeals, of which the world's heart is weary" ("The Governess," Sept. 1860, 269).¹² Martineau distances herself from this type of governess story, initiated, she claims, by the Brontës and repudiated by governesses themselves.

I have too much sympathy with the class which suffer keenly and indignantly under such picture drawing as the Brontës, and many other novelists have, thrust into every house. Keenly indignant women may reasonably be, who know that the Brontës' prodigious portraits and analyses of love-lorn governesses have been read by their employers, and their pupils, and every visitor who comes to the house. They feel that they have their troubles in life, like everybody else; and that they ought, like other people, to have the privilege of privacy and of getting over their griefs as they may. They have no gratitude for the Brontës; and will have none for any self constituted artist, or any champion, who raises a sensation at their expense, or a clamour on their behalf. (269)

In fact fictional portrayals of governesses, according to Lena Eden, not only caused disaffection among governesses themselves, but impacted upon other fictional governesses. She criticises the attitude of the governess, in Julia Addison's *Effie Vernon* (1861), who apparently bemoans the fact that "for one in

my situation, there is no greater crime than to have an attachment or enjoy a pleasure" (Feb. 2, 1861, 155). "This is not true" Eden rebukes sharply, "and we believe that Miss Brown's mind was brought to this morbid state by reading the exaggerated pictures of a governesses life which are now so much disseminated" (155). Although governess novels continued to proliferate in the 1860s there was beginning to be a sense that the downtrodden governess had become too much of a cliché to be taken seriously. Jean Ingelow's young heroine, Fanny, in "Dr Deane's Governess" reads a novel about a genteel orphan who has lost her fortune and is forced to accept a place where "the people are very vulgar and treat her with insolence" (Broughton and Symes 123). Fanny then constructs an imaginative provenance for the rather more prosaic Deane family governess, Ann Salter, and reads her a series of sentimental governess stories which lead her to become dissatisfied with her own position in life. Fanny is eventually forced to recognise the mischief of these fictional portrayals when taken to visit Miss Salter's family who patently fail to live up to her expectations of gentility.

Although the ambivalent status of the governess, as many later commentators have noted, generated a great deal of class anxiety surrounding the loss of caste for women employed in subordinate positions in the households of their social inferiors, this in turn provoked exasperation from female employers who felt that their governesses were putting on unnecessary airs and were guilty of "false pride," a recurring concept in the governess debate. Responsibility for the treatment of female employees usually lay with the woman of the household. As Rigby had noted in 1844, "the modern governess system is a case between

woman and woman" (573). Such women were becoming increasingly defensive about being placed at a social and moral disadvantage by the cult of governess martyrdom. Martineau, while sympathetic to the plight of the governess, acknowledged that the worthiest of them would readily acknowledge "the hardships of the employing class who are at present very unpopular" (269).

Kathryn Hughes suggests that by 1850 "the question of the governess' domestic comfort had become a litmus test which measured the gentility and morality both of the family which employed her and that of society at large" (89). The more authentically aristocratic the employers, the less threatened they were deemed likely to be by any pretensions of birth or breeding that the governess might appropriate, unlike those of more ambiguous social status who considered it prudent to mark out a requisite distance between employees and the family. The recurring figure of the mistreated governess functioned as a slight on the reputation of the middle-class family who, it seems, did not know how to respond to gentility, being so evidently lacking in it themselves. This perception reflected particularly upon the mother of the family, and few women would wish to be associated with the vulgar and selfish employees that proliferated in governess stories.

Lena Eden, while not denying the existence of the apparently ubiquitous ill-bred employer is brisk and pragmatic about her manifestation in *Effie Vernon*:

The despairing governess, called Brownie by her pupils, who cries and sighs her way through this book, engaged herself to a vulgar, ill tempered Mrs. Monro; but she does not suffer more from this vulgarity and ill-temper than do Mr. Monro and the Miss Monros and Effie. (Feb. 2, 1861, 155.)

Eden, reviewing in the 1860s, seems to be representative of the unsentimental view of the governess dilemma which was rapidly gaining credence, at least among critics if not among devotees of the circulating libraries, taking it upon herself to monitor fictional representations of the governess during her period of reviewing for the *Athenaeum*. Eden displays scant sympathy for the ill-used governess, even when feminine dignity is compromised. In her review of *Effie Vernon*, Eden expresses general indignation for the way governesses were being portrayed in fiction:

The vice of the book - as of so many foolish novels - is the figure of an ill-used governess. Are governesses the ill-used race which it is now the fashion to consider them? They are generally represented as lodged in a dreary unfurnished attic, treated by the servants with open contempt, persecuted by the lady of the house with unrelenting tyranny, and confined entirely to the society of rude, unmanageable children. This we believe - from what we have seen and known - to be wholly untrue. (155)

Eden makes a similar accusation later in the year when she reviews Mary Eyre's *A Family History* (1861):

A governess in a novel is invariably a poor, miserable, nervous creature given over to the scorn and contempt of her fellow mortals, and apparently created for no other purpose than to submit to the whims and caprices of her employers. (Aug. 17, 1861, 216-7)

Responding negatively to the wave of sympathy elicited by the fictional governess required the invocation of an alternate ideology, and solidarity for the middle class girl, ostensibly a lady but treated as a servant, met its counterpoint in the belief that young women, rather than agitating and complaining, ought to be quietly doing their duty and finding satisfaction in whatever circumstances they find themselves placed in. Miss Brown, Eden believes, has, like all governesses, the responsibility for contentment in her own hands:

She might lead a gayer life if she were a duchess; but we cannot all be duchesses, and we appeal to our readers, if a good governess, who does her duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to place her, is not usually respected and well treated by the family in which she lives. (Feb. 2, 1861, 155.)

Eden would no doubt have approved the resigned stoicism of Martineau's Maria Young in *Deerbrook* who claims, "let a governess learn what to expect; set her free from hankering after happiness in her work, and you have a happy governess" (21). Miriam Sedley, the governess in Parr's *Maude Talbot* (1854), adopts a similar attitude, explaining to her young charge:

It is a mistake to represent us as an ill-used race. There is a great deal of cant abroad respecting our social position. The main fault lies with ourselves. we expect too much, and feel ourselves martyrs when we are disappointed. Our life is, of necessity, a lonely one; but it needs not be wretched. (177)

Despite Parr's bout of nostalgia in *In the Silver Age*, her attitude towards governessing was generally unsentimental and robust. This view attuned with the ethos of endurance and hard work which writers like Ellen Wood were affirming as an appropriate ideology for womanhood under prescribed circumstances. Wood showed disapproval of women going to work in factories and neglecting their families in the case of the female glove-makers of Honey Fair in *Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles* (1862), but she disapproved equally of the dependence of women capable of economic self-sufficiency. The widowed Mrs. Halliburton takes in both sewing and paying guests to support herself and her family, and the heroine of *Mildred Arkell* (1865), a gentlewoman fallen on hard times, goes out as a lady's maid rather than accept financial support from her brother - "I could not live upon him for very shame" (81).

There was a persistent belief among a spectrum of women that paid work, undertaken from necessity or by choice, could prove liberating. Jewsbury, in a fairly unsympathetic response to what she called "the Condition of Women question" ("*A Woman's Preaching for Woman's Practice*," Nov. 28, 1857, 1479.) proclaimed, "Money is power; and if women once set to work to earn it, all minor points of right and wrong would settle themselves" (1479). Brontë herself had espoused the view that work could prove ultimately satisfying, although in *Jane Eyre* it was somewhat muted when Jane embraces the idea of going out as a governess as "a new servitude" (94). By 1849 when the humiliation of Brontë's own governess experience was unlikely to be repeated, she is more forthright about its advantages:

Come what may - it is a step towards independency - and one great curse of a single female life is its dependency ... teachers may be hard worked, ill paid and despised - but the girl who stays at home doing nothing is worse off than the hardest - wrought and worst paid drudge of a school. (Barker 602)

Although Eden, coming from a conservative aristocratic background, may have given voice to a degree of insensitivity in her crusade against the image of the downtrodden governess, noting of the heroine of *A Family History* "she is much better waited on than she was in the house of her father, a curate on 80*l* a year" (Feb. 2, 1861, 155), it would be unfair to dismiss her contribution to the debate as motivated entirely by class arrogance. Eden's stance seems more influenced by wholehearted enthusiasm for the therapeutic value of the work ethic than any desire to denigrate lower-middle-class employment:

If once a governess could make up her mind that there is nothing degrading in earning her own livelihood, but on the contrary, that a love of honest independence and a life of toil is always an honourable and dignified profession, perhaps she might be induced to take more interest in her work for its own sake, and to think rather less about herself and her "wounded feelings". (Aug. 17, 1861, 216-7.)

Despite the melodrama indulged in by fiction writers about the humiliation of well-born women in straightened circumstances, Eden's attitude is in many ways more in tune with the spirit of the industrial age as espoused by Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus* (1838). Just as Jewsbury was rejecting the dramatic excesses of self-sacrifice as a destructive and self-indulgent ideology for womanhood to be promoted in fiction, exhorting an alternative doctrine of simple every-day duty, Eden constructs a moral and ideological framework in which the self-pity and introspection encouraged by governess novels are held as anathema to ideals of female excellence. While good breeding, a central tenet of femininity, continued to underwrite the figure of the heroine, the privileging of good blood and ancestry over the credo of duty was becoming a much less tenable proposition. This belief provides the moral of Parr's *Maude Talbot*, in which the aristocratic Maude, despite her attraction to Philip Warburton, is unable to overlook his less illustrious ancestry. Maude fails to do her duty to her tenants and her misplaced pride results in a lonely spinsterhood, while the industrious and upwardly mobile Philip immerses himself in good works, becomes Prime Minister, and is eventually elevated to the House of Lords. Eden, while extending her discussion of Elizabeth Neville, the heroine of *A Family History* to that of governesses in general, recognised that good birth must not stand in the way of duty and the work ethic:

Where the ill-used governesses take their stand is, on being "lady-like" and well educated, or "lovely and delicate". They quite forget they are human beings whose work it is to do their duty in the state of life in which God has placed them. ... However well-born she may be, however well educated, she is for the time being *a governess*, and nothing but a governess. It is a very brave and a very praiseworthy thing to do, if done heartily, cheerfully, and thoroughly. (216)

Eden is singularly unimpressed with Eyre's Miss Neville, who, far from embracing duty, "broods over her wrongs and 'the degradation of being a governess' till she is half crazed":

Elizabeth Neville is one of the worst specimens of an ill-used governess we have ever yet had the misfortune to meet with in any work of fiction. Instead of taking any interest in the progress of her pupils, or trying to engage the good-will and confidence of their parents, she spends her time in watching who shakes hands with her and who does not - whether she has a fire in her room and whether the servants treat her with respect. If she is asked to join the family circle in the evening, she is a victim because she does not engross the attention of the whole party, and is not expected to take the lead in conversation. If, on the other hand, the lady of the house kindly hints that Miss Neville may prefer to have her evenings to herself, she employs an hour writing some verses called 'The Cry of the Broken Hearted' and thinks "it is no wonder that so many governesses go mad". (216)

Conceding that she is unlikely to get the same affection or attention from her employers than she would from her own family, Eden argues "but why make such a fuss about it? There is not the least occasion to have a nervous fever, or to go mad, or to write a novel, because life is not that perfect delirium of happiness we should like it to be" (217).

While the victimised governess had already begun to lend herself to parody, like Ingelow's Miss Salter and the over-sensitive Miss Bracy in Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* (1856), who as Emily Lowe¹³ noted in her *Athenaeum* review of the book "had feelings" (Apr. 5, 1856, 420), this did not stem the numerous fictional accounts of her suffering. Not all governess - heroines, however, evoked such a jaded response. The inequality between the daily life of the poor governess and her wealthier counterpart, similar to the model of *Amy Herbert*, is described in Anne Thackeray's *The Village on the Cliff* (1867) in terms that Eden found more acceptable. Both the governess, Catherine George, and the elder daughter of the house are given the same name to make the

comparison more pointed. Eden comments, "The chapter which paints the contrast between the lives of these two young Catherines is one of the most interesting in the book" (Mar. 23, 1867, 382). The governess in this case is less self-pitying than many of her fictional counterparts, and suffers no exaggerated ill-treatment, which is probably why she avoids Eden's censure, but she cannot help but be conscious of the gulf between herself and her namesake, and all day long "hears voices calling to this happy, favoured Catherine, who has so many loving friends, and who goes out riding, and pays visits, and has flowers sent her, and who has a Mr. Beamish to come and see her (382). Margaret Oliphant also approved Thackeray's sensitive depiction of Catherine:

Nothing has ever been more daintily, more delicately done than the revelation of her feelings when she was the kindly-treated yet solitary governess among all those cheerful Butlers. (Novels, Sept. 1867, 280.)

Charlotte Yonge offers an array of governesses in her fiction but despite Patricia Thomson's accusation that "the ladylike submissive, slightly pathetic governess" (51) was a feature of her novels, she in fact consistently avoided any exaggerated accounts, even offering a critique of the image in *The Daisy Chain*. In *Hopes and Fears* (1860) the young Unitarian governess channels her introspection into religious angst rather than her equivocal social position, eventually finding consolation in the Church of England. Christabel Fosbrook, the nineteen year old governess in *The Stokesley Secret* (1861), despite being undermined by resentful servants when left in sole charge of the seven boisterous Merrifield children, performs her duties with enthusiasm and is much commended by Eden, "we heartily wish she could serve as a model for all governesses" (Nov. 2, 1861, 580). In *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) Alison Williams finds satisfaction in her work as a daily governess to the

widowed young Lady Temple and her seven children, and is accorded proper respect and even friendship within the wider family of her employer. She refuses to abandon her charges or her independence when her sister is able to offer her financial support following a prestigious marriage.

Ellen Wood, whose own two sisters kept a school in Worcester,¹⁴ allowed her fictional governesses a degree of respect. In *East Lynne* (1861), Isabel Vane suffers many agonies, and has the indignity of hearing her daughter pointedly referred to as "Miss Lucy" in her presence (477), but in the well ordered household of Archibald Carlyle she is not deliberately slighted. As Wood informs us, "governesses at East Lynne were regarded as gentlewomen; treated well and liberally" (460), a point which Eden is careful to note and approve in her review (Oct. 12, 1861, 473). In Wood's next published novel, *The Channings*, (1862), Constance Channing goes out as a daily governess to the unruly Yorke daughters. Explaining to her fiancé the necessity for her employment, she pleads "it is honourable to work - it is right to do what we can. Strive to see it in the right light" (31). He, predictably, is delighted that Constance has no "false pride," (32) proving her to be eminently qualified for a future career as a clergyman's wife.

The governess, in novels like Martineau's *Deerbrook*, Sewell's *Amy Herbert*, and Parr's *Maude Talbot* featured to illustrate the struggle to overcome adversity and afforded the opportunity for a display of female friendship, but her primary purpose was often to provide romantic interest. A typical plot line, involves the genteel young heroine, temporarily eclipsed by the flashy elder daughters of the

house, but eventually triumphing in effecting a marriage to either the young man of the family or an eligible suitor whom the family had thought to appropriate as a match for one of their own number. This type of story was ideologically appealing, not because it promoted upward mobility, but by returning the governess to the mode of life she was entitled to by virtue of birth, it routed vulgarity and restored a more conservative displaced social order. Lady Blessington's *The Governess* had contributed towards establishing this model for the governess romance as early as 1839, despite its regency setting and untypical episodic structure which incorporated a little too much excitement for the average governess.

Jean Ingelow's *Fanny* describes the latest governess novel she has been reading, about a genteel young orphan who bears all her trials with meekness and discretion. Dr Deane speculates about whether the heroine's fate lies with the young man of the family or the curate, but Fanny reveals that "she marries a young baronet, who is struck by the pensive sweetness of her face, as she takes the children out for a walk" (Broughton and Symes 123).

Eden does not generally approve this sort of romantic conclusion, but is willing to allow it in some circumstances, particularly if the governess has acquitted herself appropriately during her working life as in Charlotte Hardcastle's *The Cliffords of Oakley*. (1862):

The family of vulgar and pushing would-be fine ladies trying to get into country society and failing, and the great man of the neighbourhood, the object of everybody's ambition, falling in love with the pretty, ladylike governess, are amusingly described, and put us in mind of some of Miss Austen's novels. (June 28, 1862, 851.)

The Austen reference may give a clue to Eden's tolerance in this instance. Dealt with tactfully the governess-romance could conjure up satisfying images of a previous era when social position, in retrospect at least, appeared a more stable entity, and governesses like Miss Taylor in Austen's *Emma* (1816) did not burn with righteous indignation and could appropriately be found a match within the social circle of their employers.

Despite Eden's general approval of Anne Thackeray's *The Village on the Cliff*, she shows herself to be wary about the romantic aspirations of its heroine:

The governess becomes acquainted with her hero; and because he is always civil and good natured to her, she believes him to be a kind of Prince Geraint, and she thinks a good deal more of his fair curly hair and sleepy blue eyes than is at all proper in a governess. (Mar. 23, 1867, 382.)

The eponymous heroines of Charlotte Smith's *Anne Cave* (1864) and *Ruth Rivers* (1864), whose motives are rather more transparent, come in for even more censure from Eden. Both women "invariably find favour in the sight of the gentlemen of the families wherein they reside, but they are not equally popular with the ladies" (July 9, 1864, 49). Ruth Rivers, in particular, clearly oversteps her position:

Ruth goes out as a daily governess and flirts with the brother of one of the pupils in a barefaced manner, which quite justifies all the mammas and aunts of the little sea-port in feeling greatly scandalized at her conduct, and a little afraid of employing her in their own families. (July 9, 1864, 49.)

The kind of suspicion that had been voiced by Elizabeth Rigby almost twenty years earlier in response to *Jane Eyre* still appeared to be current. The developing relationship between Rochester and Jane had been cited by Rigby as illustrative of Jane's manipulative nature. Jane's response to Rochester's

questioning about her expectations of a gift in chapter fourteen was condemned by Rigby: "a more affected governessy effusion we never read," and their courtship viewed with cynicism, "governesses are said to be sly on such occasions, but Jane out-governesses them all" (169). Eden can be seen allying herself to this position over fourteen years later when reviewing *Bella Donna* (1864) by Percy Fitzgerald. Jenny Bell, Fitzgerald's ambitious and careerist heroine, causes disgrace and suicide amongst the family that initially employs her, and Eden, while acknowledging the more obvious Becky Sharp comparison, observes that when Jenny moves on to her next post in the household of a London lawyer with a sickly wife, she "strives to ingratiate herself with her master, much after the manner of 'Jane Eyre' in a similar position" (Apr. 2, 1864, 473).

While Eden and Rigby might have been particularly judgmental about their view of Jane Eyre as an adventuress, they were not the only women expressing disquiet about the ethics of governess love stories. The idea of the governess, not only seeing herself as socially or morally superior to the section of society that employed her, but carrying off its most eligible males in triumph, although perhaps fictionally satisfying, was rather more problematic as a template for reality. There was a fine line between recognising and affirming the status of a well-bred governess and encouraging girls in straightened circumstances to imagine that such perceived equality afforded romantic opportunities. The path to matrimony in the anonymous *Margaret Stourton* (1863) runs a little too smoothly for the comfort of the reviewer in *Victoria Magazine*. Margaret, the daughter of an officer and cousin of a baronet, unlike many fictional

governesses is not slighted by the family she resides with, but given every encouragement to pursue a romance with Mr. Stratton of Stratton Park, "a model English gentleman" ("Literature of the Month," Sept. 1863, 478). After some initial resistance her fiancé's sisters are persuaded that despite her governess status "she was not at all beneath him after all" (478). The reviewer is not convinced by the moral message the story seems to be promulgating:

It would seem scarcely necessary to point out the glaring unlikeness of this picture to the life it professes to represent. Nine out of ten governesses are neither pretty nor ugly, neither attractive nor repulsive, neither vulgar nor specially ladylike. Few are well educated, fewer still well born. They are as unlike Margaret Stourton as the lot provided for her is unlike what usually falls to their share. The fable is too fabulous to bear the moral appended to it. Half-educated girls engaged in or preparing for governess life, on whom alone this book can be supposed to have any influence, may find in it materials for castle-building. They certainly will not learn from it to respect their work, or to accommodate themselves cheerfully to the real exigencies of their position. (478)

Jewsbury echoed this view in her *Athenaeum* review of the book, claiming it to be "more calculated to excite discontent with that particular station of life than all the dismal and distressing annals of the schoolroom we have read" (Aug. 29, 1863, 267).

Even Harriet Martineau, who did much to champion the cause of the governess, warned of those among them who were "adventuresses who hope to catch a husband and an establishment" ("The Governess" 269). Emily Peart in *A Book for Governesses* (1869) counsels governesses against pursuing such romances:

Whatever the daily annoyances of your present life, whatever the stinging memories of the past, whatever the crushing fears for the future, whatever terrors a lonely, dependent, needy old age presents, do not mar the beauty of your womanhood by stirring a finger, by taking a step, by fashioning a circumstance with the view of gaining a husband and home.... a thousand times rather live and die a pitied 'poor thingied' old maid, than be a wife,

conscious that her husband is but the ably-earned result of her own successful scheming. (102)

By the 1860s, it seemed that the backlash, of which Elizabeth Rigby was a forerunner, had become a more normative response to attempts to elicit sympathy for the fictional governess. Women such as Eden, Yonge, Martineau, Jewsbury and Parr, all single and self-sufficient, could hardly be expected to wallow in sentimental pity at the fate of middle-class girls having to engage with the world of work until they could find a man upon whom they could be economically dependent. Jane Williams approves this belief in the value of work in her review of *The Sisters* (1858) by Sarah Tomlinson:

Mrs. Tomlinson discourses on the necessity which exists for womanly self-dependence; and she tells us in 'The Sisters,' a tale illustrative of the increased cheerfulness, freedom and self-respect experienced by those who are able to maintain themselves. We hope the day is not far distant which shall see girls brought up with a definite object, which shall supersede the old stratagems for husband-netting, by making women independent by their own exertions. (Jan. 1, 1859, 17.)

In some senses it was simply an inevitable cyclical reaction that the figure of the governess would eventually undergo a shift in critical perception from feted victim to cliché, ripe for parody in Punch cartoons.¹⁵ Mary Poovey suggests that social and economic change was responsible for less sentimental attitudes towards the governess:

By the late 1850s, what had begun as concern for individual cases of economic suffering had yielded the recognition that the governesses "plight" articulated the contradiction between the moral role women had been assigned to in capitalist society and the economic position into which they were being driven in increasing numbers. (162)

Although Poovey is correct in her analysis, it was not simply changes in the relationship between women and work that rendered the individual governess's

plight less pertinent but the new ideology that served to accommodate those changes, an ideology that women commentators played an active role in constructing and maintaining. The disjunction that Poovey points to between the ideal of women's domestic function in society and their growing participation in the world of work, was in fact being elided by reviewers like Eden who sought to assign the same kind of moral imperative to women's working lives that previous commentators like Sarah Ellis had to their domestic ones. One of Jewsbury's objections to *Margaret Stourton* was that it did not affirm the moral value of work:

Instead of the calm recognition of its having been her distinctly marked *duty* to do what she could to lighten the burden upon her parents, and making Margaret express thankfulness for the opportunity and for the great comfort of her situation, there is always an undercurrent of afflicting consciousness that after all there is hardship to a woman in having to earn her living, which is false and morbid. (267)

Governessing may not have constituted the ideal, but in Carlyle's terms it did represent the "actual" of many women's lives and as such needed to be seized as an opportunity for duty and self-fulfilment rather than self-pity. Jane Carlyle herself corresponded with a young governess, Mary Smith who aspired to a more literary life.¹⁶ Admiring Smith's endurance in remaining in her uncongenial position, Jane Carlyle confirmed, "it is not the greatness or littleness of 'the duty nearest hand' but the spirit in which one does it, that makes one's doings noble or mean" (Bliss 256).¹⁷ Parr, reflecting on her ten-year period as a governess, espoused this belief in making the best of things claiming, "those whom Heaven does not permit to choose, must take what is given them" (*In the Silver Age*, vol. 2, 212). She goes on:

It was a tedious life, but I would not let it be a perpetual grind. We have a duty to do towards ourselves as well as our neighbours, and that duty is to make the best of our lot, and to look on the bright side of things. (214-5)

Later studies such as Jeanne Peterson's have stressed the symbolic nature of the governess within the middle class family as a displacement of female labour which allowed the mother to take on an ornamental rather than functional role. Peterson states, "the new ethos of the ideal woman was that of a woman of leisure" (5), but few women writers seemed willing to subscribe to an ideology of indolence. "Fine Ladyism" was condemned, not just as a symptom of social climbing but as an expression of morally suspect female inactivity. The most popular novelists of the period, Wood, Braddon and Yonge consistently exhorted women to employ their time and talents usefully,¹⁸ disseminating this message to a significant readership of women.

Such writers, far from being ideologically out of step, were manifestly in tune with public opinion, particularly female opinion, as evidenced by prose pieces supporting this view such as Dinah Mulock's *Woman's Thoughts About Women* (1858) which warned young women about not making productive use of their time: "If you waste it, you waste not only your substance but your very souls - not that which is your own, but your maker's" (13). Margaret Oliphant, writing in *Blackwood's*, is so convinced of the existence of female industry that she refuses to accept even the terms of this debate. Dismissing the entire premise of Mulock's argument, and moving on to demolish another unnamed tract by a woman writer about the "scandal" of women wasting their time, Oliphant sneers at the supposed existence of indulgent parents who allow their daughters unlimited leisure and luxury:

Where, oh where, are to be found those adorable papas who delight to give their daughters everything they can desire? - those mammas most dutiful, who take every domestic care off their hands? Are they in Bloomsbury? Are they in Belgravia? Might we have a chance of finding them in beautiful Edinburgh or in rich Manchester? ("The Condition of Women," Feb. 1858, 149.)

Oliphant cites daughters across a range of social classes, not only making themselves useful in the home, but helping their fathers in business by acting as secretaries and keeping accounts, and claims that such unsung female workers "ought to find some account made of them in books about women" (150).

What Oliphant suggests is that the leisured young lady was little more than a chimera constructed to enable writers like Mulock to indulge in polemics:

Those who find in the young girls of our families only helpless nosegays of ornament, unqualified to do service either to themselves or other people, are either totally unacquainted with household life, or other people, or have a determined "cast" in their vision, not to be remedied. All these things are patent and visible to every simple observer who has no theory to support. (150)

Whether or not the leisured young lady was a reality, or a figure conjured up by hostile commentators in what may have constituted a moral panic about the trivial nature of women's lives, it is clear that ideal femininity, for reviewers like Eden and a host of her contemporaries, was not ornamental but useful, practical and pragmatic. Fictional governesses who unduly resented their enforced labour or showed themselves inadequate to the challenges of adversity, were themselves liable to be pilloried for the failure of their creators to embrace the new female heroic.

Critics like Eden did not, of course, stem the tide of novels about tragic governesses in the 1860s. Many writers remained intent on making capital out

of the pathos supposedly inherent in the position of the governess-heroine, only relieved when she is subsumed by marriage back into the domestic ideal. Yet although such books abounded in the realms of popular fiction, perceptions of the low status this type of novel enjoyed may well have led writers with more serious aspirations to avoid what was by now becoming a formulaic and parodied genre. Despite falling out of favour with reviewers, the governess novel continued to thrive far beyond the 1880s when Wood was regretting lost fictional opportunities. Katherine West's material in her 1949 book, *A Chapter of Governesses*, did not show signs of exhaustion until after the Second World War. For writers and readers, the appeal of the stock figure of the governess in women's popular fiction was sufficiently potent to withstand such critical opprobrium. Nonetheless, by policing fiction that was slow to adapt to cultural change, and approving or censoring the value systems articulated in women's writing, women reviewers and commentators were able to contribute towards shaping a restructured ideology of womanhood and work that demonstrated a more adaptive response to market forces and the demands of an industrial age.

Notes

¹ Patricia Thomson (39) erroneously quoted this figure as issuing from the 1851 census instead of the 1861 census. This seems to be the source of the incorrect figure of 25,000 being frequently cited for 1851, (e.g. Peterson, 4, Poovey, 127). Horn (333) cites "nearly 21, 000" for 1851, as does Hughes (22). The figure for 1851 cited in *The Census of Great Britain in 1851: By Authority of the Registrar General* (Longman 1851) is 21, 373 (64). It is worth drawing attention to the fact that commentators such as Poovey who noted the relatively small number of governesses compared to the attention given to the "governess problem," were overestimating the official total by almost a fifth.

² Sally Mitchell (*Fallen Angel* 47) discusses one such example, "The Slave of the Needle" appearing in the *London Journal* commencing 16 Feb. 1850. Mitchell points to the influence of Henry Mayhew's series on needlewomen appearing in the *Morning Chronicle* (Nov. 6-23, 1849) which suggested that some needlewomen found it necessary to supplement their income through prostitution.

³ Merle Bevington in the *Saturday Review* (334) suggests this reviewer was most likely Mary Bennett, author of "*The Cottage Girl*" (1853) and "*Don't Tell*" (1858).

⁴ By the mid 1870s Edwards' illustrations were regularly credited in the *Argosy*.

⁵ "Hints on the modern Governess system." (*Fraser's Magazine*, vol. 31, Nov. 1844, 571-83) is identified by Broughton and Symes as written by Elizabeth Rigby [Lady Eastlake] (209). [Sarah Lewis] "On the Social Position of Governesses," *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. 37, Apr. 1848, 411-414.

⁶ [Elizabeth Rigby] "Vanity Fair; a Novel without a Hero. By William Makepiece Thackeray. *Jane Eyre; an Autobiography*. Edited by Currer Bell. Governesses' Benevolent Institution - Report for 1847." *Quarterly Review*, 1848, 153-85.

⁷ The only specific reference I have found to governess training in the review columns is in a review by Florence Doran in the *Athenaeum* of the anonymous novel *The Schoolmistress of Herondale* (1865). Doran notes that "a few pages are devoted to a hit at the examinations for those aiming at certificates from Government, Queen's scholarships, and other appointments" (Dec. 23, 1865, 887).

⁸ Originally serialised in *New Monthly Magazine* Apr. - Dec. 1857. Sophia, the daughter of a lawyer's porter, forges false references to obtain a position with the family of a countess. She bears an illegitimate child to the countess's brother which she later murders when it proves an inconvenience to a marriage with the son of her father's employer.

⁹ *Women and Work*, including the text of the letter to the *Times*, is reprinted in *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon and the Langham Place Group*. Ed. Candida Ann Lacey. 36-73.

¹⁰ Several extracts from Maurice and a number of other pertinent texts such as Emily Peart's *A Book for Governesses* (1869) and Jean Ingelow's "Doctor Deane's Governess" are reprinted in Trev Broughton and Ruth Symes' anthology, *The Governess*.

¹¹ Rigby wrote: "There seem to have arisen in the novel-reading world some doubts as to who really wrote this book; and various rumours, more or less romantic, have been current in Mayfair, the metropolis of gossip, as to the authorship. For example, Jane Eyre is sentimentally assumed to have proceeded from the pen of Mr Thackeray's governess, whom he had himself chosen as the model of Becky, and who in mingled love and revenge, personified him in return as Mr. Rochester" (174).

¹² Katherine Hughes in her bibliography to *The Victorian Governess* (240) identifies this article as having been written by Harriet Martineau.

¹³ The online *Athenaeum* index gives no other indication of this reviewer's identity other than "Miss E. Lowe". She contributed 23 reviews between 1856 and 1859 mostly on travel books. This seems to have almost certainly been Miss Emily Lowe who wrote a series of travel books between 1857 and 1859 on "unprotected females" travelling abroad.

¹⁴ The 1851 Census reveals that Henrietta Price and the widowed Jane Simpson, Ellen's other sister, were running a small academy in the Tything of Whistones, Worcester. In a later Trade Directory (Billings 1855) it is described as a boarding house. Wood's *House of Halliwell* (1890), appearing in *Bentleys Miscellany* throughout 1858 describes the experience of two sisters running a school and resorting to taking in lodgers to supplement their income. It seems likely to have been modelled on her sisters' experiences.

¹⁵ Again Broughton and Symes are an invaluable source of reference, reproducing several governess caricatures from *Punch*. Peterson (207) suggests Alison Adburgham's *A Punch History of Manners and Modes, 1841-1940*, London: 1961 as a further source.

¹⁶ Smith later wrote about her relationship with Jane Carlyle (*Autobiography of Mary Smith*, 1892).

¹⁷ Jan. 11th, 1857.

¹⁸ Some of Wood's early stories are virtual manuals of practical household management. "Rushing into Marriage" (*Bentley's Miscellany*, vol. 43, 1858, 316-30) and its sequel "Three Hundred a Year" (449-474) illustrate how marital harmony on a limited income can be achieved by women not too proud to work side by side with their servants. Too much leisure was partly at the root of Isabel Vane's troubles, as pointed out by Elaine Showalter (*A Literature of Their Own* 110). Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) shows a woman who is effectively excluded from the day to work of the household and spends her leisure time reading novels. After the death of both husband and prospective lover she devotes the rest of her life to useful good works. *The Lady's Mile* (1866) deals with the pernicious influence of leisure on women. Yonge, as well as espousing positive views on the therapeutic value of work in the novels already discussed, later articulates the necessity for women's usefulness in *Womankind* (1876).

CHAPTER FOUR

PIETY AND IMPROPRIETY: MARTYRS IN PINAFORES

Gertrude, 'in a beautifully-fitting dress of spotted muslin, which displayed her taper waist to advantage' is one of those diluted angels so popular in semi-religious novels.

(Geraldine Jewsbury, "*The Lamplighter*," Apr. 29, 1854, 522.)

Given the proliferation of pious young ladies in nineteenth-century novels, the identification of a specifically religious heroine, as opposed to an ordinary domestic angel, can prove problematic. The term "religious novel" is in itself rather imprecise due to the extent to which Christianity seeped into the whole spectrum of Victorian fiction. Any writer whose province was the domestic found it an almost impossible theme to avoid and the religious and didactic elements in many ordinary novels render a separate category of specifically religious fiction somewhat elusive. As Valerie Sanders points out, aspects of Christian observance so permeated the middle-class home that "few writers, male or female, who reported on domestic life, could afford to ignore the practical and emotional impact of religious habit on women's experiences" (*Eve's Renegades* 167).

Some novels, nonetheless, do fall into a discernible category of religious fiction and critics used the term "religious novel" frequently enough to indicate that this was a recognisable genre.¹ Novels that centred around church communities were distinguishable from novels of spirituality and the term "Church novel"² was sometimes used to differentiate between stories set against a clerical background and those of a rather more pious intent. Even this term remains

something of a catch - all and does not adequately account for the diversity it might embrace. Nor does the inclusion of a proportion of clerical characters necessarily locate a book in this canon. The clergyman suitor had long been a familiar figure in nineteenth-century romance and his occupation, in many cases, was significant only as an emblem of his social class. As Q.D. Leavis pointed out, "Jane Austen's novels usually contain one or more clergymen, but they are just like her other young men - nothing to choose between the Rev. Mr Collins and Mr John Dashwood" (12). Geraldine Jewsbury describes *Maud Bingley* (1858) by Frederica Graham as "a novel by a young lady, peopled by young officers instead of young clergymen," (Nov. 27, 1858, 682) suggesting that clergymen in a novel might serve as eligible bachelors in a romance plot rather than indicating any particular religious interest.

The notion of the religious novel was further complicated by the range and variety it represented, and there were a number of different schools emerging, necessitating further sub-genres of classification.³ As early as 1853 *Eliza Cook's Journal* noted:

We have had Puseyite novels, Catholic novels, Evangelical novels, Covenanting novels, Protestant novels, Mrs Trollope's Vicar of Wrexhill,⁴ and other anti-Anglican novels. ("*The Wide, Wide World*," Feb. 19, 1853, 259.)

A rapidly growing body of English clerical novels was beginning to find favour in the mid to late 1850s, particularly following the publication of Anthony Trollope's Barsetshire series in which began in 1855. George Eliot followed on with *Scenes of Clerical Life*, beginning in *Blackwood's* in February 1857, and Margaret Oliphant's Carlingford novels cover broadly similar territory. Such

novels, sometimes dealing with dissenting communities, but more typically focusing with warmth and humour on the foibles of Church of England clergymen, were considered a more prestigious form of the religious novel than those with an overtly didactic message, but despite the dominance of Trollope in this field, it was still a genre that tended to have feminine associations.⁵ Ellen Wood, with her Worcester Cathedral background was able to find a niche in this market with stories such as "The Prebendary's Daughter"⁶ featuring the rivalry and squabbles between the minor canons and prebendaries of the cathedral cloister.

The generally low status of certain types of religious fiction has specific resonance for Lyn Pykett's notion of a "gendered discourse" (22) about women's writing in the Victorian period. As with other forms associated with the feminine such as the domestic and sensation novel, it was frequently women commentators who took it upon themselves to monitor and police the representation of womanhood within this genre, but surprisingly, as I discuss in this chapter, although some religious heroines fell into the domestic angel or too-good-to-be-true category, the bulk of criticism they received was concerned with their over-assertiveness, hypocrisy and pre-occupation with fashion and flirtation. Unlike the put-upon women that have dominated the previous three chapters, the religious heroine can more usually be ranked with the sensation heroine or the girl of the period in terms of the way her behaviour and demeanour were characterised by women commentators.

Among the various categories of religious novel there were gender specific hierarchies to be maintained. The High Church novel tended to be a female preserve, dominated by writers such as Yonge, Elizabeth Sewell and Felicia Skene.⁷ As Nicola Thompson has discussed, the association of Yonge with the feminine often worked to her advantage in critical terms (*Reviewing Sex* 96-7), but despite the legendary status of *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), allegedly read by "Cabinet ministers, royalty and officers in the Crimea"(Dennis vi), this left her firmly anchored in the second division of novelists. Oliphant, giving qualified praise to Yonge and Sewell, asserted that "in this second rank of eminence, the magnitude and variety of the female professors of our art do somewhat pale the glory of our literary craftsmen of the nobler sex." ("Modern Novelists," May 1855, 562) thus confirming both the reduced status of High Church fiction and the dominance of women in its production.

Any speculation by Jewsbury that a novel might be written by "a young lady" was generally a pointer to its inferior status. She refers to *Redmarsh Rectory* (1858) by Nona Bellairs, as "a sentimental High-Church Novel by a sentimental young lady," suggesting that the writer "had better have kept to working Ecclesiastical cushions or embroidering altar cloths" (Nov. 27, 1858, 682).

Jewsbury considers the different approaches by male and female writers of Church novels, again stressing an intellectual hierarchy based on gender, where male writers tend to agonise over points of doctrine while women use the medium more as a vehicle for romance. This charge, however, is not levelled at Yonge, who according to Sanders, allegedly rejected an early fictional

submission from the young Mary Ward to the *Monthly Packet* on the grounds that "the love interest was too prominent" (*Eve's Renegades* 46).⁸

In her discussion of *Redmarsh Rectory*, Jewsbury notes that when men write High Church novels, "they always trouble their young clergymen with scruples about the lawfulness or, at least, the advisableness of clergymen taking wives" and that any marriages that do occur usually come to a speedy end: "The lady dies of consumption, or else the young man himself is carried off by some interesting illness induced by his devotion to the parish". She points to a more idealised romantic approach by young women writers:

When a young lady is the painter of men and morals, the young curates, though of course, models of beauty and heavenly grace, and all the excellence of practice and precept that can be distilled out of the Rubric and the Thirty Nine Articles, fall in love with the angelic heiress, who has been created and described and endowed for their benefit with all the virtues under heaven, and who for their sake has refused the nobility and gentry for miles around. (682)

While the field of Broad Church novels was populated by male writers such as Charles Kingsley, the prolific Frederick William Robinson, and William Conybeare,⁹ Evangelical fiction, although not an exclusively female domain,¹⁰ was probably the most feminised of all areas of religious writing. Julie Melnyk notes how writing religious novels became an authentic way for women to participate in religious debates of the day, and disseminate their own "sermons" to a wider audience: "Denied the opportunity to preach from the pulpit," observes Melnyk, "many devout Victorian women decided to 'preach' in the Circulating Library"(107).

The partisan approach adopted by many women writers did not always win critical approval and Jewsbury was acerbic about books intended to promote specific religious creeds or sects. "The chief fault of 'religious stories,' " she objected in a review of *World-Worship* by Eleanor Griffiths (1854), "is that they professedly bend all incidents to illustrate some particular doctrine; so that once the doctrine known [sic], the course and catastrophe of the narrative are known likewise" (Mar. 11, 1854, 310). Mary Alicia Taylor's *Clouds and Sunshine* (1854), prefaced by an admission that it was written as a warning against Puseyism, is dismissed by Jewsbury as manufactured "from that well known firm of stuff and nonsense". Jewsbury appears amused by the fact that all the characters who hold High Church opinions or Roman Catholic doctrines are condemned by the writer to misery and a remorseful death, "whilst those who are Evangelicals marry happily" (Sept. 2, 1854, 1065).

In the aftermath of the Oxford Movement there arose a spate of popular novels featuring scheming Jesuits and cunning or credulous papists, and Jewsbury was not alone in expressing amused cynicism. Lena Eden, reviewing the anonymous *Great Catches and Grand Matches* (1861) a book which she pronounces to be "evidently the result of a series of bad nights, consequent upon heavy and late suppers," observes that "nobody can stir hand or foot without stepping into some hidden snare or some 'diabolical Popish plot' No one hires a footman or a ladies' maid, but, under this disguise we find a Jesuit priest or a nun" (Aug. 24, 1861, 247). Women writers such as Frances Trollope, with her *Father Eustace: A Tale of the Jesuits* (1847) and Jemima Luke, author of *The Female Jesuit* (1851) were well represented in the field of anti-Catholic literature, and

Ellen Wood, showing her usual propensity for embracing market forces, contributed the lurid story "Seven Years in Wedded Life of a Roman Catholic" to *New Monthly Magazine* (Feb. 1851, 145-55) followed by two articles entitled "A Word to England" about the dangers of Catholicism (Feb. 1853, 182-92, Mar. 1853, 335-342).

Anti-Catholic literature can, of course, be located in its British historical context,¹¹ but it also had a natural constituency in Protestant America. Margaret Mason describes how Catherine Sinclair's *Beatrice* (1852), "bursting with indignation against 'Papal Aggression,' " enjoyed enormous popularity across the Atlantic "where dozens of New York clergymen recommended it from their pulpits and a hundred thousand copies were sold in less than a month" (172). The traffic in these novels flowed both ways and the *Athenaeum* reviewed a number of American novels which appeared to consist of little more than diatribes against Roman Catholic clergy. Jewsbury is scathing about the American novel *The Convent and the Manse* (1854) by Jane Dunbar Chaplin, although on this occasion shows herself to be pragmatic about the effect of such propaganda:

Of course, all the virtues under heaven are represented as growing on the Protestant side of the hedge, whilst the Catholics are left bleak and barren on the other. This style of begging the question is little likely to promote brotherly love between the parties; - but as Catholics in their turn, write pretty little picturesque stories in their own behalf, we can only suppose there are individuals on both sides who enjoy the exercise. (Oct. 7, 1854, 1198.)

Although some Catholic women writers such as Agnes Stewart, Frances Mary Oxenham and Lady Georgiana Fullerton had attempted to portray Catholicism in a better light, they appeared to be rather too much in the minority to redress

the balance. Anne Mozley reviewed Fullerton's work in a long article in the *Christian Remembrancer* ("New Novels by Lady G. Fullerton and Currer Bell," Apr. 1853, 401-443), contrasting, among other things, the difference in religious viewpoint of her recently published novel *Lady-Bird* (1853) with Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), a comparison which furnishes a reminder to the modern reader of how pertinently *Villette* can be placed in the context of sectarian novels of the period.

Villette was condemned by Harriet Martineau for its intolerant tone: "we are rather sorry for it, occurring as it does, at a time when catholics and protestants hate each other quite sufficiently" (*Daily News*, Feb. 3 1853, 2).¹² Mozley does not accuse Brontë of outright prejudice, but quotes from Lucy's first schoolroom encounter at Madame Beck's pensionnat, accompanied by the observation; "we would hope that the following pictures of girlhood are exaggerated" (432):

I beheld opposite me a row of eyes and brows that threatened stormy weather-eyes full of insolent light, and brows hard and unblushing as marble. The continental 'female' is quite a different being from the insular 'female' of the same age and class; I never saw such eyes and brows in England. (432)

Mozley, on the contrary, asserts that "these eyes and hard unblushing brows are to be found in our island" (433). While Brontë blames the pernicious influence of Catholicism, Mozley suggests that it is the school system that allows young women the opportunity "to associate in wild unrestrained companionship" that is responsible for engendering such boldness.

Unlike Martineau, Mozley is more concerned about Brontë's depiction of Protestantism than her denouncement of Catholicism. She rejects Lucy as a

suitable Protestant role model, insisting, "We are not at all proud of her a representative of our reformed faith" (433). Writing about Madame Beck's constant surveillance and spying on her young English teacher, Mozley suggests that such supervision was not unwarranted:

We own we should be sorry to subject any child of ours to the teaching and insinuations of the mind here pictured; whose religion is without awe, - who despises and sets down every form and distinction she cannot understand, - who rejects all guides but her Bible, and at the same time constantly quotes and plays with its sacred pages as though they had been given to the world for no better purpose than to point a witticism or furnish an ingenious illustration. (433-4)

Mozley, on this occasion, betrays her own High Church sympathies,¹³ vilifying Brontë on the grounds that "the 'Bible and the Bible only' is her religion" (402). Robert Lee Wolff specifically points to "the key place taken in Evangelical thinking of 'the Bible and the Bible alone' " (*Gains and Losses* 203), and Mozley's references are a clear attempt to connote Lucy as a zealot and Brontë herself as vulgar peddler of Low Church dogma. Despite Brontë's indictment of the Evangelical clergyman Carus Wilson in the form of Mr Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre* (1847), this appears to be a perception that underwrote other criticism of her novels.¹⁴

Jewsbury claimed impartiality from sectarian considerations, insisting, "on points of doctrinal theology the *Athenaeum* always abstains from giving an opinion" ("*Perversion*", "May 24, 1856, 643). Eden, in a similar spirit, praised the neutrality of the second volume of Mrs. E. Burrows' *Household Proverbs or Tracts for the People* (1861) approving "the total absence of all party-spirit in the religious truth inculcated therein" (Dec. 7, 1861, 763). Despite their protestations of tolerance, it is interesting to note that it is the forms of the

religious novel that were perceived to be the most feminised that women critics appeared to find most fault with.¹⁵ High Church novels by women, for example, were subjected to a certain amount of supercilious amusement.

Reviewing Nona Bellairs' *Redmarsh Rectory*, Jewsbury writes:

A parsonage covered with roses, daily church-going to a church rejoicing in candles on the altar, and a churchyard turned into a flower garden. make up the Paradise of most of the novels written by High-Church young ladies. (Nov. 27, 1858, 682)

Not all High Church novels were as bland as this description might suggest, and Yonge created some lively and memorable female characters who were not necessarily viewed by critics as appropriate models for her readers. Eden objects to the example set by Lucilla Sandbrook in Yonge's *Hopes and Fears* (1860):

This book is apparently written for the edification of very young ladies; but on what principle they are to be initiated into talking slang we cannot imagine. To be repeatedly told that Cilly Sandbrook "in her wildest moments is always thoroughly lady-like" might lead some unsophisticated young woman to suppose that all real ladies are in the habit of making use of such expressions as the following - I can't resist the charms of *hooking* a Marshal or a prince or two. (Nov. 3, 1860, 591.)

Eden elaborates further:

Now if Lucy Sandbrook were represented as a frightfully vulgar, detestable woman, whose example could not be too much avoided, it might be very well to repeat all the coarse and unseemly expressions of which she is so lavish; but when Cilly is given to us not only as a specimen of all that is fascinating, engaging and irresistible, but even as the type of a class, we think we have a right to remonstrate. (591)

Sewell and Yonge, the leaders in the field of feminine High Church fiction, did tend to be credited with more sincerity than their many imitators, and despite Eden's reservations, their more conventional heroines generally met with critical approval. Jewsbury describes Sewell's eponymous Katherine Ashton as "a very

excellent young woman"(July 1, 1854, 812), and Violet, the young wife in *Heartsease* (1854) as "a charming creature" (Nov. 18, 1854, 1396). Mrs Bennett writing in the *Saturday Review* referred to "the exquisite portrait of Violet Martindale" drawn with "delicate refinement" (Dec. 8, 1855 102-3) and Eden praised the "fine character" of Albinia, the heroine of *The Young Stepmother* (1861) whom she describes as "courageous, impetuous, full of life and spirit, with a restless craving for 'work,' and an unlimited supply of energy and good-nature" (Dec. 21, 1861, 838-9).

High Church novels by women, although seen as lacking in serious intellectual credibility, at least suggested to readers and reviewers certain connotations of good taste, whilst earnest Evangelical tracts, often favoured by a lower middle-class readership, are denied even this distinction. In her *Westminster Review* article "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" (Oct. 1856, 442-61) George Eliot lambasts the pretentiousness of "oracular" (455) High Church novels written by women, but her severest criticism is meted out to Evangelical novels which she labels "the white neck-cloth species" (456). Although Eliot's target is the type of society novel featuring supposedly aristocratic Evangelicals, she still perceives a clear class division both between the two genres and their producers:

These novels differ from the oracular ones, as a Low Churchwoman often differs from a High Churchwoman; they are a little less supercilious, and a great deal more ignorant, a little less correct in their syntax, and a great deal more vulgar. (456)

Even during her period of Evangelical fervour, the nineteen year old Eliot was too fastidious to embrace religious novels, which she asserted were "more hateful to me than worldly ones" (Ashton, 28). The later Eliot was not trenchant in her dislike of Evangelical fiction, but she advocated a realistic rather than

didactic or over romanticised view of Evangelical life. Her disappointment with Julia Kavanagh's *Rachel Grey* (1855) is precisely because it fails to deliver what it promises; an accurate and convincing portrait of an unremarkable Evangelical dressmaker. It offers instead, "an Evangelicalism which has no brogue" (*Leader*, Jan. 5, 1856, 19). Rachel's piety is "an abstract piety...quite disembodied of sectarian idiom" (19). Savaging Caroline Scott's *The Old Grey Church* (1856) as an "Evangelical travesty of the fashionable novel," Eliot appeals "Why can we not have pictures of religious life among the industrial classes in England as interesting as Mrs Stowe's pictures of religious life among the negroes?" ("Silly Novels" 457). Eliot's *Scenes from Clerical Life* (1858), commenced only ten days after writing this article (Ashton 163) seems to be her own attempt to provide this kind of sociological picture.¹⁶

Jewsbury was more enthusiastic than Eliot about both *Rachel Grey* (Jan. 12, 1856, 40) and *The Old Grey Church*, going so far as to recommend that "for those who like religious novels [*The Old Grey Church*] is one of the best of its class" (May 24, 1856, 648). Many of Jewsbury's objections to Evangelical fiction were on moral rather than aesthetic grounds. In a review of the anonymous novel, *The Cousins* (1855), Jewsbury specifically objects to the way Evangelical fiction encourages its readers to privilege religious feeling over all other duties, claiming "we cannot pass over what we consider the mischievous tendency of the school of religious tale writing to which this book belongs" (Mar. 3, 1855, 263).

The heroine of *The Cousins*, Mary Melville, "being of tender years, but mature consideration," finds herself in continual conflict with her mother "who is represented as a vain, weak-minded woman" (263). Mary's Evangelical fervour leads her into repeated disobedience, and as Jewsbury notes, "this same 'sense of duty' is made the excuse for all the good people in the story thwarting all who hold different views to themselves". She suggests that this kind of moral justification has become commonplace in certain types of religious fiction:

It is the fashion to represent the parents and all those placed in authority, as vain, weak, frivolous, worldly persons; or if endowed with any fine qualities, they are made of none effect, - but rather treated as sins, because unaccompanied by a certain phase of religious feeling, indicated by a certain terminology to which it is difficult for impartial or uninitiated people to attach any meaning. (263)

She concludes:

We are old-fashioned enough to think that obedience to such parents as it may have pleased Providence to give them is the first, best virtue children can learn, - far better than setting up to be precocious young martyrs in pinafores. (263)

The following year Jewsbury makes very similar complaints about the eponymous heroine of *Clara Howard* (1856). Clara is an earnest Evangelical young heiress, who "has vague scruples about going to balls and operas, without exactly knowing why" (June 28, 1856, 809). When induced to attend a ball by her father "she goes with religious reluctance" explaining to her cousin, a "worldly young woman" the inappropriateness of being adorned in diamonds.

Jewsbury states:

It is placed to the credit side of her virtue that she "went attired in a simple white dress, with small pink rosebuds in her hair and bosom, and, with the exception of a pearl necklace and bracelets, *entirely without ornament*". (809)

For good measure she adds the withering comment, "the delicate distinction between the virtue of pearls and the vanity of diamonds is thus indicated" (809).

Like Mary Melville in *The Cousins*, Clara Howard's Evangelical fervour leads her to neglect more conventional duties in favour of her religious calling, and she abandons her estate and tenants to marry a clergyman and go out with him as a missionary to India:

She has a fixed idea that she ought to give up everything for the sake of her religion; and she is held up for admiration because she forsakes all the duty that lies close at hand and goes to do it precisely "in the station to which it has" NOT "pleased God to call her". (809)

Like the self-sacrificing heroines discussed earlier, Mary Melville has a misplaced sense of duty, opting for the large dramatic gesture rather than the duty close at hand. Worse still, in Jewsbury's eyes, after a period back in England with her young family she prepares to return to the missionary field leaving her children behind, thus placing her own spiritual fulfilment above more mundane maternal responsibilities. As Jewsbury quotes, "she loved him and her Master's work too well to think of quitting her post; and she was resolved to return, still to labour in the glorious work," adding her own sarcastic commentary: "Angels are not expected to be human, - which may explain the calmness with which this heroine delegates her maternal duties to her eldest son, a boy of some fourteen years" (809).

Another concern of reviewers was that writers were simply using the religious novel as a vehicle for romance, and this had particular relevance for Evangelical fiction. Novel reading was notoriously disapproved of in Evangelical circles, but could be deemed acceptable if reading material conveyed a heavily didactic

message supported by appropriate biblical allusion. Such thinly disguised tracts needed to be rendered more palatable if they were to succeed in the marketplace, hence the inclusion of a highly charged romance plot in which the potential spouse would either serve as spiritual mentor or lost sheep to be brought back into the fold by the eager and willing heroine. As Eliot noted, "for Evangelical young ladies there are Evangelical love stories, in which the vicissitudes of the tender passion are sanctified by saving views of Regeneration and the Atonement" ("Silly Novels" 456).

Lena Eden describes *Agnes Lowther* (1860) by Josceline Grey as "one of those useful little works that profess cunningly to combine amusement with religious instruction" (Sept. 29, 1860, 414). She observes:

Young ladies who are not allowed to read Walter Scott or Miss Austen may yet be permitted to extract as much romance as they please from the pages of any trashy story which appears to be proportionately besprinkled with texts and moral reflections. (414)

Nonetheless she finds the book well written and "may be safely recommended to the youthful patronesses of this species of fiction". She is less tolerant the following year about *Gabrielle; a Tale* (1861) by S. B., and C. D., "A religious novel where texts and flirtations are placed alternately one on top of the other" (Nov. 22, 1861, 688). Eden asserts, "We have serious doubts whether this mixture of romance and religion has a very good effect upon the rising generation" (688).

The trivialisation of literature purporting to be of a religious nature appeared to be a significant cause of concern for critics during this period and much of the

cause of this was being attributed to the growing numbers of American Evangelical novels that were being imported. Already hindered by connotations of class and gender, this type of fiction became a further target for critical ridicule because of its provenance. Jewsbury observed in a review of Jane Chaplin's *The Convent and the Manse* (1854) that "A great flux of words comes from American women just now; they consider themselves to have received the gift of teaching and preaching, and use it without stint or mercy" (Oct. 7, 1854, 1198).

The wave of American fiction that swept Britain in the early 1850s was dominated by female Evangelical writers who were finding an outlet with specialist publishers such as Sampson Low and Co., American agents for Harpers. Susan Warner, who wrote under the pseudonym of Elizabeth Wetherell, was one of the most popular American women operating in the British market, and was known particularly for *The Wide, Wide World* (1851) and *Queechy* (1852). Maria Cummins achieved success with novels such as *The Lamplighter* (1854) and *Mabel Vaughan* (1856). Harriet Beecher Stowe, initially seen as a more literary heavyweight due to the reputation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), was increasingly viewed as a more populist writer after the publication of a variety of didactic novels of an overtly Evangelical tone. There were also a significant number of less well-known American women writers being reprinted in Britain. In the 1850s and 1860s the *Athenaeum* periodically featured a column entitled "American Novels" which frequently reviewed books of a religious nature by women writers. Jewsbury, in the introduction to one of

these columns, made reference to the "small fry of American books which come in shoals into our cheap literature" ("American Novels," Jan. 12, 1856, 40).

The discourse surrounding American Evangelical fiction appears to locate it as the site of particular anxiety about manifestations of feminine identity. The growing popularity of American fiction, particularly amongst young women readers, caused critics to examine the kind of role models that were being touted as appropriate for young British women, but it is specifically the Evangelical heroine that comes under serious critical scrutiny, there is little evidence in the review columns of any other constructions of American womanhood permeating critical debates about appropriate feminine behaviour.¹⁷

Much Evangelical fiction, like the High Church fiction of Yonge and Sewell seems to have been targeted at the late adolescent market; as Anne Mozley remarked, "the real patrons of exciting religious fiction are the young" ("A Religious Novel," *Blackwood's* Mar. 1866, 278). Such books tended to feature girls of a comparable age. Charlotte Yonge's Ethel May is fifteen at the beginning of *The Daisy Chain*; both Ellen Montgomery from Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, and Fleda Ringan, the heroine of *Queechy*, are somewhat younger. Judith Rowbotham, writing about *The Wide, World*, comments on the appeal of the book's fictional characters to the British market:

Although set largely in America, the heroes and heroines in *The Wide, Wide World* are of well born English or Scottish stock, and they act accordingly. This meant that the stereotype of a good girl growing up with the promise of becoming a good woman given in the novel was considered perfectly applicable to the English reader. (24)

Rowbotham, while usefully highlighting the social class indicators in the novel which are inextricably tied to its Christian message, underestimates the cultural differences between British and American attitudes to religious fiction which women critics were immediately alert to. Oliphant objected specifically to "those dreadful perfect little girls who come over from the other side of the Atlantic to do good to the Britishers like the heroines of *Queechy* and the *Wide, Wide World*" ("Modern Novelists," May 1855, 567). Oliphant seemed to be referring not only metaphorically to the importing of this type of heroine to a British readership, but literally to the fact that in both novels the precocious young Evangelical girls spend a period in Britain extolling the American way of life.

Anne Mozley, writing about Warner's *The Old Helmet* (1863), was not convinced that this type of story translated credibly to a British setting:

Though the scene is laid in England, and she desires to give her heroine English characteristics, she betrays an entire ignorance of our manners.' ("A Religious Novel" 279)

Jewsbury reiterates this view that American writers fail to in their attempts to bridge cultural gaps: "When American authors will insist upon imitating the tone and texture of European cultural life the result is invariably coarse, false and nonsensical" (Nov. 18, 1854, 1397). In her review of the anti-Catholic novel *Anna Clayton* (1854), she expresses amusement about American writers failing to grasp even the nuances of speech: "English priests are made to talk a peculiar dialect, composed of American provincialisms, Irish peculiarities, and the remains of murdered grammar" (July 28, 1855, 873). Lena Eden, writing about *Marion Graham* by Meta Landor in 1861 notes cultural differences between

American and British religious fiction, commenting on "the contrast that American manners and conversation present to English habits and language" (Mar. 23, 1861, 393). Eden makes reference to the "strange jargon which in the familiar dialogues of the tale passes for English" (393).

The open expressions of religious feeling found in American Evangelical novels were frowned upon by British critics, and the tendency of American heroines to be overcome with emotion when discussing their beliefs, did not suggest the kind of subtle religious sentiment that was more congenial to the British middle classes. Fleda, for example, the heroine of *Queechy* "her very heart gushing out at these words" entreats her aunt, "*dear* Aunty, Christ came for just such sinners - for just such as you and I" (256).

High Church British writers such as Yonge could always be relied upon to exhibit appropriate British reserve when it came to references to the Almighty. Despite highly emotive religious scenes such as Guy Morville's death in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, none of Yonge's characters are ever in danger of giving voice to anything that might be construed as vulgar or embarrassing and it is inconceivable to imagine one of the Edmonstone or May girls posing the earnest question, "do you love Jesus?"(163), as the young Julia Powle does in Warner's *The Old Helmet*. Georgina Battiscombe comments that for Yonge and her fictional characters "religion was the guiding force in life ... yet they speak of it as little as possible". Writing about Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* she comments "I think I am right in stating that in the whole course of the novel the word 'God' appears only once" (673).

While High Church writers avoided invoking God because they felt it was irreverent. Writers of more generalised clerical novels avoided doing so because they tended to deal in social comment and observation rather than proselytising. Inhabitants of Oliphant's Carlingford could be relied on to exercise appropriate discretion, from the Wodehouse sisters in *The Perpetual Curate* (1864) who go amongst the poor dressed in grey cloaks, dispensing comfort and spirituality to the people of the canal district, to the three Evangelical aunts in the same novel, identifiable because of their disdain for candles, vestments and other Anglican accoutrements rather than any untoward expressions of piety. Oliphant's dissenter heroines such as Phoebe Beecher, the heroine of *Phoebe Junior* (1876) are equally reticent when it comes to religious reference. Overt references to God, whilst not uncommon in British Evangelical fiction, were invariably seen as in rather bad taste and critics did not welcome the increase in this trend that came with the expansion of the British market in American fiction.

Mozley, who had a similar Tractarian background to Charlotte Yonge,¹⁸ was perhaps particularly sensitive to American over-zealous attitudes to Christianity, as evidenced by her sustained attack on Warner in *Blackwood's* in her article "A Religious Novel," but this cultural dissonance was shared by British critics of many diverse religious backgrounds and led to charges of hypocrisy against American Evangelical fiction that appeared more virulent than those levelled at their British counterparts. Jewsbury, for example, dismissed Beecher Stowe's *Dred* as "full of cant." (Aug. 30, 1856, 1079), and described an American

reprint, *My Brother's Keeper* (1855) as "full of sickly religious sentimentalism" (May 26, 1855, 873).

Eliza Cook's Journal was fairly sympathetic towards Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* but objected to the idealisation of both male and female characters, and makes a wry point about Evangelical disapproval of fiction:

To give an idea of the length of which Miss Wetherell goes, we may mention that she makes the perfect man of the book, Mr John Humphries - strongly and seriously advise Ellen, the pattern girl of the book to "read no novels" to which her answer is- "I never do, John: I know you do not like it" & c. Now this seems to us to be carrying things too far, else, if "novels" are not fit things to be read, why does Miss Wetherell write them? (Feb. 19, 1853, 260.)

Interestingly the heroine is allowed "two or three new English periodicals" (*The Wide, Wide World* 468) which contain no fiction. One can only speculate whether contributors like Oliphant and Mozley may have taken issue with the passages where Ellen is advised by her mentor not to read *Blackwood's* (482).

Eliza Cook's Journal voices particular objections to the general saintliness of Warner's heroine. When it is discovered that her American aunt had concealed vital information about Ellen's wealthy Scottish relatives, it is noted that "Ellen of course forgives her, for her pious nature forbids her any sense of being wronged". The reviewer concludes:

We feel throughout as if Miss Wetherell were carrying the doctrine of Christian forgiveness too far: It is reduced by her to sheer namby - pambyism, bringing to mind the Italian proverb that "one may be so good as to be good for nothing". (Feb. 19, 1853, 260.)

Heroines that were too good to be true, as I highlight in the following chapter, were a common feature of novels of the 1850s. Jewsbury regularly railed

against their appearance in domestic fiction, but she seemed to find the American variety particularly unpalatable. She describes the central character of *Helen Lincoln* by Carrie Capron as "one more of those miraculous American heroines who, from poverty and the poor-house, grow up to be full not only of goodness, but of learning and wisdom also" (Aug. 23, 1856, 1051). Another Evangelical good girl, Maria Cummins' eponymous Mabel Vaughan, is dismissed as "a model heroine of the *Queechy* school" (Oct. 24, 1857, 1320), but her objections to other American religious novels are more specific. She complains less about the impossible piety of their heroines than the forwardness and lack of decorum they display. Writing in 1856, Jewsbury expresses the view that changes are taking place in the American religious novel, claiming that "gentle dullness and mild zeal of a semi-religious character" have generally been the worst faults of previous schools of American religious fiction. She goes on; "some novels from the same prolific sources, which are now before us, are of a more pretentious class, and have sins of a deeper die" ("American Novels," Jan. 12 1856, 40). The heroines of this new breed of religious novel, whilst denouncing materialism in the most strident tones, seemed determined on a path of rather more stylish sainthood than Jewsbury was prepared to countenance.

Jewsbury's subsequent review of *Helen Leeson* (1859) summarises what seems to be a somewhat bizarre tale of kidnapping and enforced marriage by a man the heroine has never seen before, but who loved her from afar, and was apparently unable to come up with any other strategy to attract her attention. Realising this was perhaps an inopportune way to initiate a relationship; he sets sail for Europe

after the wedding, leaving Helen to confide in her friend Anna of her growing love for her mysterious abductor. Jewsbury's plot summary pays much attention to the heroine's dresses, which apparently are described in minute detail throughout the book. When Helen is kidnapped she is "looking surpassingly lovely in a dress of white tulle embroidered with gold, her fair brow crowned with a wreath of golden grapes" Eventually the couple are re-united. Jewsbury sums up:

But there is yet a moral to this tale, which is too characteristic to be omitted. Shortly after marriage, Helen is invited to a family festival, for which she has no dress. She receives a box containing a white moire antique dress, with thread lace flounces, and an exquisite coiffure of white feathers. - "How have I deserved so much love?" exclaimed Helen, - "By walking steadily in the path of duty," whispered Anna. (40)

Jewsbury concludes acerbically, "The reward of virtue *can* no further go" (40).

Jewsbury continues her theme in a review of *Lily* (1859) in the same issue, accusing it of "the same original sins of pride, vanity and vulgarity" (40). Two years earlier she had issued similar complaints against Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter*, "another American reprint issued under a fine flourish of trumpets" (Apr. 29, 1854, 522). Gertrude, the heroine, struggles throughout the novel with her volatile temper as sincerely as any of Yonge's characters, but Jewsbury is dismissive both of her and also her blind friend, Emily, whom she describes as "a second good heroine - of the crushed lilly [sic] genus" (522). Again the pre-occupation with dress and "finery" seems to be one of Jewsbury's main objections to a novel which purports to have a serious purpose.

There does seem to be a change in perception evident among critics around this period that the angels of American religious fiction, despite being paraded as

paragons of domestic life, were becoming increasingly fashion conscious, flirtatious and bold. Eden, in her review of Meta Landor's *Marion Graham* (Mar. 23, 1861, 393) comments disapprovingly, "Marion, the heroine, is totally unlike an English young lady - indeed, unlike any other young lady with whom we have the good fortune to be acquainted" (Mar. 23, 1861, 393). Eden gives a humorous account of Marion's succession of "violent attachments" who variously prove to be theologically or doctrinally unsuitable. While barely recovering from a painful bout of unrequited love, Marion is called upon by her first serious suitor, the "infidel" Maurice Vinton, "armed with German grammars, German dictionaries and German nonsense," and as Eden informs us, "they study themselves into a mutual passion" (393). After abortive attempts to convert him by reading aloud "unintelligible" extracts from *Sartor Resartus* Marion realises they will have to separate. Following his flight to Jerusalem she becomes entangled with the Mephistopheles-like Mr Perley, who steals her fortune, insults her grossly, "hisses out profane adjurations" (393) and appears unmoved by her bible readings and attempts to take him to church. Fortunately deliverance is close at hand:

She is saved from his violence by a Mr. Sunderland, an excellent clergyman whom she finally marries; and an hour after the wedding has taken place, the morbid Maurice Vinton, who has become a Christian in Palestine, suddenly reappears. He and Marion rush into each others arms and a scene of passionate endearment takes place, which is only interrupted by the presence of the "unconscious bridegroom" who must have been considerably astonished at what he saw - and at his bride's assertion, - "Mr Sunderland, you have killed me; Maurice, I am his wife - pity me". (393)

Anxieties about the construction of heroines in mainstream fiction were beginning to surface during this period following a perceived transition from the "good girl" of domestic fiction to the sensation heroine and the "Girl of the

Period," so it is perhaps unsurprising that a discourse about religious novels should also reflect tensions about the appropriateness of certain types of feminine behaviour. The popularity amongst the reading public of zealous but immodest Evangelical heroines and the critical and ideological disapproval they engendered has parallels with the reception of sensation fiction; and the ensuing discourse evokes many familiar issues, both implicit and explicit, of gender and class.

As with sensation fiction, popular religious novels which were deemed to have a bad influence on their impressionable female audience could be reviewed on moral rather than artistic grounds. *Blackwood's*, although comprehensive in its coverage of fiction, would not typically give much column space to novels of this status; but just as Oliphant deemed it necessary to raise the profile of novelists like Annie Thomas and Rhoda Broughton and other writers of "nasty novels" ("Novels," Sept. 1867, 275) on the basis that they were beginning to pose an ideological threat to the young female population, Anne Mozley is able to devote a complete article to Warner's *The Old Helmet*, thus demonstrating that "a religious novel may be more mischievous than most novels that make no profession at all" ("A Religious Novel" 286). Mozley sees this novel as an ideological tool which "has done its best to disseminate the new morality" and acknowledges that popular novels may "have a powerful influence on manners" and "may indicate what things are going to be, and foreshadow the changes time is on the eve of working" (276).

The heroine of Warner's book, as Mozley describes, finds herself in defiance of convention and propriety as a result of her efforts to find Jesus. Since elucidation of his teachings can most satisfactorily be provided by the charismatic young Methodist minister, Mr Rhys, Eleanor is able to continue her pursuit of both with a clear conscience. Her prior engagement to the rather more materialistic Mr Carlisle provides a few obstacles, but Eleanor refuses to be diverted from the path of righteousness. The "Old Helmet" of the title, as Mozley explains "is a patronising synonym for the helmet of salvation" (279) which the Christian wears as an invisible armour to protect against evil. At first Eleanor has a little difficulty grasping this concept despite explanations from Mr Rhys, but as Mozley quotes "of its reality there could be no question; she had seen its plumes wave over his brow" (280).

Mozley, noting disapprovingly that "heroines in American religious fiction are represented as changing their lovers with the facile flippancy of our housemaids and 'area belles'" (279), does not look indulgently on the coupling of Eleanor's religious and romantic entanglements, and comments sternly that "every step of spiritual progress tramples on some duty or propriety". Despite Eleanor's growing attraction for Mr Rhys she continues her engagement to her earlier suitor. As Mozley points out:

She always likes Mr Carlisle when she is with him and tolerates an amount of kissing we can only say surprises us. We will be bound to say that there are more kisses between the boards of the little volume we hold in our hands than in Walter Scott's collected works. (281)

Mozley notes that "A certain muscular Christianity leads this writer to dwell much on horsemanship" (282). Despite the fact that Eleanor does not want to

continue her engagement to Mr Carlisle and "the thought of her marriage stings her like a serpent" (282), Mozley is bemused to find that when she comes into contact with him "there is riding together and kissing as before" (283).

What particularly pre-occupies Mozley, however, is the predilection of American writers for strong-minded young heroines, whom they invariably cast as the central figure in their religious novels, a trend which seems to have reached its apotheosis in Eleanor Powle. Mozley is concerned about the impact this tendency might have on British fictional images of womanhood, or even more alarmingly, young women themselves:

We confess, however, to have fancied for some time that we could trace, in the young ladyhood of a certain religious school, the influence of American religious fiction. We notice an independence of conventional restraints, a freedom of accost, an ease in asserting and enforcing opinion, a looseness from the old deference to elders, an aptitude to engraft flirtation on schemes of active good. (277)

Mozley's concerns accord with Jewsbury's earlier objections to British Evangelical novels, *The Cousins* and *Clara Howard*. Heroines of this type of fiction proclaimed obedience to God and their conscience before all other considerations, their high-mindedness apparently absolving them from ordinary filial responsibility to parents who were frequently depicted as worldly or misguided. Encouraging young girls to set themselves above their elders, Mozley contends, is unnecessary; "parents in our day are not strict disciplinarians ... and the young people now dance, or not to please themselves" (277). American novelists, however, were presenting a different picture:

Mothers, never in great favour with novelists, are sinking deeper and deeper in their black books - there is a positive jealousy of their influence; while the father in the religious tale, as opposed to the moral or sentimental, is commonly either a scamp or nowhere. The heroine has, so to say, to do her work single-handed. (278)

It is unlikely that Mozley would have intended this description to refer to High Church fiction or anticipated any misunderstanding on this issue. Patient and long-suffering mothers in Yonge's novels, for example, were generally granted elevated status, idolised by fond daughters.¹⁹ Although she does not specify that she equates "the religious novel" solely with Evangelicalism, her description of *The Old Helmet* clearly signals that it falls into this category and she relates the book to earlier English Evangelical fiction such as Hannah More's well-known *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808) and Grace Kennedy's *Father Clement* (1823). Mozley's readers, acutely attuned to these signifiers would be alert both to her message and her constituency

Like Jewsbury, Mozley appears concerned about the extent of hypocrisy and worldliness in Evangelical fiction. She notes that "Eleanor will not dance in her converted state, because she does not see how she can further her master's business in the dance; but flirting is clearly another thing" (284). She also makes disparaging observations about Warner's attention to the minutiae of fashion, particularly as she describes Eleanor's various changes of clothing on her trip out to Fiji to become a missionary:

The subject of dress must exercise the minds of all young readers of this exciting narrative. Eleanor has long forsworn trimmings, her bonnet is crossed with chocolate covered ribbons. The point is, How will she look when Mr Rhys sees her? But we have not been left to our own guesses in this particular. The pattern of her dress had been asked for, and it sits admired. (285)

Even though missionary life, we are assured by the author, is to be austere, Mozley draws attention to the fact that soon after her arrival, "Eleanor visits her husband in his study, in exquisite white muslin robes (duly set out, we are allowed to gather, by crinoline), and hair charmingly dressed" (286), and her aunt has fortuitously shipped out to their missionary home every conceivable item required by a civilised household, including dinner napkins and delicate china.

Mozley is perhaps inconsistent in this type of criticism. Charlotte Brontë's contempt for worldliness appeared as distasteful to her as Warner's supposed materialism: "She is jealous of the dress side of life: being, for some reason, cut off from, and by her peculiar class of faults and deficiencies ill adapted to it" ("New Novels" 431). Mozley may have been expressing antipathy to what she saw as Evangelical fervour, whether hypocritical or otherwise, yet there remains a surprising degree of consensus amongst women reviewers, if not about what was acceptable, at least about what was unacceptable in a heroine purporting to represent any particular religious sect, or section of the established church. The preferred model of spiritual femininity seems to be one that avoided extremes and practised discreet piety rather than overt proselytising. This did not bode well for heroines intent on spreading the Christian gospel on either side of the Atlantic, but American Evangelical women writers, hampered not only by prejudices of class and gender, but by national, cultural, and in some cases religious difference appeared to be more significantly out of tune with critical perceptions of what constituted the feminine ideal in matters of faith.

Such ideological gulfs fortunately did not appear to hinder their popularity with the general public. As Eliot noted in her review of *Dred*, those critics who sneered at this type of overt religious fiction "are something like men pursuing a prairie fire with desultory watering cans" (379) and could not hope to stem its success. In the circulating libraries, heroines of numerous religious persuasions received a rather warmer reception than in the pages of many British periodicals, and readers from diverse religious backgrounds appeared to find as much satisfaction in reading about Elizabeth Montgomery's attempts to find the path to salvation by poring over her red bible as they did in following Ethel May's struggles to attain spiritual growth through the fulfilment of her dream in the consecration of the church at Cocks Moor in *The Daisy Chain*.

Part of the reason for the poor critical reception of Evangelical fiction lay in its status, but a contributory factor for the level of hostility aroused lay in the nature of Evangelicalism itself. Olive Banks in *Faces of Feminism* (2-27) comments on the role of the Evangelical movement in the development of early feminism in America, and how it enabled women to have a public voice in campaigns and moral causes such as temperance and anti-slavery, while Julie Melnyk suggests that Evangelicalism offered women more empowerment than many other religious forms. Melnyk notes also that the class disadvantage associated with Evangelicalism could actually work in favour of Evangelical women. Unencumbered by notions of gentility, they "were allowed much greater scope for action" (110). Melnyk argues that an emphasis on emotional rather than intellectual response in a "religion of the heart" predisposed Evangelicalism towards the feminine. The centrality of the Bible to Evangelical

belief was largely predicated on the individual's right to interpret scripture independently. This had specific implications for women's spiritual autonomy in the sense that their reading did not have to be mediated through male clerical authority. This may have encouraged a level of assertiveness in Evangelical women which permeated through constructions of the feminine in Evangelical novels.

More recent feminist interpretations of Susan Warner's work have been discussed by Shirley Foster and Judy Simons:

According to such analyses, the story of a young girl's triumph over adversity covertly articulates more radical or iconoclastic possibilities of female autonomy and empowerment"(41).

Although, as Foster and Simons argue, given her frequent exposition of feminine submission "there is no evidence of [Warner's] commitment to a clearly feminist position" (42), it seems that British reviewers such as Jewsbury and Mozley were acutely alert to what Joanne Dobson has referred to as "strategies of subversion" (224) in the novels of Warner and other female American Evangelical writers. Dobson, although claiming that "It would be a mistake to consider these novels as feminist statements", notes how Warner and her contemporaries "were sharing with their readers a clear-eyed understanding of the losses and limitations imposed upon individual women by close adherence to the societal text of feminine identity" (239). While modern commentators still appear relatively tentative in the degree of subversion they can credibly assign to what seem to be essentially conservative texts, nineteenth-century women critics had no doubts that the images of womanhood such novels were promoting were unsuitable and inappropriate. The Evangelical

heroine, whether American or British, could not hope to win critical approval while she privileged individualism above obedience, sought salvation in dramatic missionary work instead of mundane domestic duty, or showed any inclination towards fashion and flirtation. The type of fictional heroine constructed by Evangelical women writers may have proven exciting and inspiring to their female readership, but there was a degree of ideological slippage between the British and American feminine ideal which women critics this side of the Atlantic, ever vigilant in their role as monitors of fictional standards, were not disposed to overlook.

It is difficult to assess whether or not the influence of American fiction presaged any specific ideological change to British femininity but it was certainly a locus of anxiety. Mozley concludes that Warner's work is more dangerous in its potential than in its actual effects: "We are happy to think that it does not describe our young ladies as they are; but does it foreshadow what any circle amongst us may come to?" (286). What this disquiet about the religious heroine does illustrate however, was the sensitivity of women critics to cultural shifts in fictional manifestations of feminine identity, and their active and vocal response to any perceived digression from the script of the feminine that they themselves were negotiating in critical discourses about women's writing.

Notes

¹ For example, Lady Caroline Scott's *The Old Grey Church*, (May 24, 1856, 648); the anonymous *Clara Howard*, (June 28, 1856, 809) and Mrs Mackenzie Daniel's *The Old Home* (Jan. 31, 1857, 148) were described as religious novels by Geraldine Jewsbury in the *Athenaeum*. Anne Mozley entitles her *Blackwood's* article on Susan Warner's *The Old Helmet* (1863) "A Religious Novel".

² Even this is a loosely defined genre. When Margaret Oliphant referred to Charlotte Yonge's novels as belonging to a category "which we will not call 'religious' but rather 'Church novels' " ("Modern Novelists," May 1855, 562) she seemed to be indicating that her books were not overly didactic. Yonge's novels were certainly infused with subtle High Church sentiment and occasionally featured inspirational clergymen such as the blind Mr Clare in *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865), but they were not located in clerical circles and were a world away from Oliphant's later Carlingford series. Other reviewers such as the author of the *North British Review* article "Religious Novels" (Nov. 1856, 112-22) had no qualms about including Yonge as a religious writer.

³ Robert Lee Wolff's *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (1977) gives an illuminating and comprehensive picture of such sub genres. His categories in the Garland Reprint Series include: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Novels; Tractarian and Anti-Tractarian Novels; Evangelical and Anti-Evangelical novels; Broad-Church Novels; Novels of Dissent; and Novels of Doubt" (507-511). Amy Cruse's *The Victorians and their Books* (1935) contains a useful survey of different types of religious fiction, as does Margaret Maison's *Search Your Soul, Eustace* (1961).

⁴ Frances Milton Trollope's *Vicar of Wrexhill* (1837) was well known for its anti-Evangelical sentiment. Trollope was criticised by Oliphant for the "venom and bitterness" ("Modern Novelists," May 1855, 556) in her portrait of the Evangelical clergyman, Mr O'Donagough, in *The Widow Barnaby* (1839).

⁵ Nicola Thomson offers an interesting discussion of gender and the reception of Anthony Trollope in chapter four of *Reviewing Sex* (1996) she notes Trollope's decline in literary esteem around the mid 1860s, suggesting that a shifting critical perception of feminine aspects of his writing proved damaging to his reputation.

⁶ Originally published in *New Monthly Magazine* in October 1855, (215-228). It was reprinted in the *Argosy* Vol. 14 and 15, 1872 under the title "A Cathedral Story in Two Parts".

⁷ Yonge was certainly the leader in this field, followed by Elizabeth Sewell. As the *Saturday Review* noted: "at present the writer of *Hopes and Fears* [Yonge] has no rival, unless the authoress of *Ivors* and *Ursula* [Sewell] is to be considered one" ("Hopes and Fears," Nov. 10, 1860, 593).

⁸ William S. Peterson quotes Yonge's letter to Mary Ward in *Victorian Heretic: Mrs Humphrey Ward's Robert Elsmere* (53) dating it as "Sept 21, (1870?)".

⁹ Oliphant notes that "the Broad Church, in the stalwart person of the Rev. Charles Kingsley, is rather more than a match even for the Heir of Redclyffe". Wolff's Garland reprint list of Broad Church novels (510-511) is exclusively male, whilst in other categories women are well represented and often predominate.

¹⁰ One of the most popular Evangelical novels of the nineteenth century was Frederick William Farrar's *Eric; or Little by Little* (1858).

¹¹ England's volatile relationship with Catholic Europe in the early nineteenth century was of course another prominent factor in the topicality of anti-Catholic feeling, as were debates about Catholic emancipation and the influx of Irish immigrants in the 1840s. The decision of the Pope to restore the Catholic Church hierarchy in England in 1850, dividing the country in twelve papal dioceses, is frequently cited as instrumental in stirring up further hostility (Leavis 45, Maison 171).

¹² Martineau describes further disputes with Brontë about her intolerance of Catholicism in Volume 2 of her *Autobiography* (382). She relates also how she clashed with Dickens on this issue and refused to contribute to *Household Words* following its serialisation of *The Yellow*

Mask in 1854 featuring a "wicked priest" (421). She wrote to Dickens' editor, William Henry Wills: "The last thing I am likely to do is write for an anti-catholic publication; and least of all when it is anti-catholic on the sly" (422).

¹³ Both writers had close connections with members of the Oxford Movement, Yonge with John Keble and Mozley with John Henry Newman. Mozley edited many of Newman's early letters in *Letters and Correspondence of J. H. Newman during his life in the English Church* (1891), although she regretted his defection to Rome: "Such was our guide, but he has left us to seek our own path; our champion has deserted us" (Martin 72).

¹⁴ Miriam Allott's *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage* reprints many Brontë reviews which contain criticism of this nature. Claims that Charlotte Brontë made too much reference to the Bible or did not treat such allusions with sufficient reverence tended to suggest this sort of critical agenda. The *Christian Remembrancer* complained in 1848 of Charlotte's flippant use of scriptural allusions, "at which one is rather sorry to have smiled" (Allott 89). The *Atlas* objected to "a jesting of Scriptural names and a light usage of Scriptural expressions (121)" While the junketing of the three High Church curates in *Shirley* was condemned by the *Daily News* as "Vulgar, unnecessary and disgusting (117). Albany Fonblanque detected "a strong sympathy with Toryism and High Church" (*Examiner* Nov. 3 1849, 692) but seemed to be referring to Charlotte's political sympathies and his perception of an undercurrent of snobbery in her novels rather than any definite religious indicators. In chapter five of *Everywhere Spoken Against* (1975) Valentine Cunningham details the Brontë family's association with Church Methodism, asserting that "The Brontë novels are effectively rooted in the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival" (113).

¹⁵ Comparing criticism of the more masculine-orientated Broad Church novels to what I have defined as feminine religious writing, it is clear that although some reviews are negative, these novelists seem to have escaped the worst excesses of sarcasm from women critics. Jewsbury reviewed at least 9 books by F. W. Robinson. Although she disliked his *House of Elmore* (Dec. 8, 1855, 1432-3) her notices were mostly favourable. Lena Eden gave variable reviews to 3 of his novels, commending *No Church* particularly as containing "not one atom of religious cant" (Apr. 13, 1861, 496). Oliphant gave good notices in *Blackwood's* to Robinson's *Owen; a Waif*

("Sensation Novels," May 1862, 581-4) and *Church and Chapel* ("Novels," Aug. 1863, 178-183) commenting on the latter's "true Christian charity" (183). William Conybeare got less favourable reviews from Jewsbury (May 24, 1856, 642-3) and George Eliot (*Westminster Review*, July 1865, 257-261). Eliot praised Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* in the *Leader* (May 19, 1855, 474-5), commenting that "In purpose and execution it is a worthy and very brilliant book" (475) but her views appear somewhat tempered only two months later when she reviewed it for the *Westminster Review* (July 1855, 288-294). Although she still expresses "high admiration" (294) for Kingsley's works she appears more alert to the book's religious agenda: "In his glowing picture of that [the Elizabethan] age, Mr. Kingsley would have carried with him all minds in which there is a spark of nobleness, if he could have freed himself from the spirit of the partisan" (292).

¹⁶ Eliot's review, "The Natural History of German Life" published in the *Westminster Review* in July 1856 (51-79) offers a detailed exposition of her belief that fiction is lacking in accurate descriptions of working class life.

¹⁷ Eliza Lynn Linton in her "Girl of the Period" essay cited the traditional English girl to be "as brave as an American but more refined" (*Saturday Review* Mar. 14, 1868, 340) which at least suggests some positive attributes of the American girl. Jewsbury commended the eponymous governess heroine of *Katherine Morris* (1860) as an example to English governesses, noting; "there is an amount of good sense and good healthy feeling in the portion of the heroine's experience which may be recommended to the sisterhood in England" (Aug. 11, 1860, 194).

¹⁸ Merle Bevington describes Mozley as "a member of one of the most influential high Church families in England" (31). Her brother, Thomas, a clergyman, was married to John Henry Newman's sister, Harriet. Anne, Thomas and another brother, the Rev. James Bowling Mozley, all wrote on religious matters. In 1843 Anne published *Church Poetry, or Christian Thoughts in Old and Modern Verse*.

¹⁹ Mrs. May in *The Daisy Chain* (1856) "a lady with a beautiful countenance of calm sweetness" (4) dies in a carriage accident in chapter three, but her influence sustains the family throughout the novel. The mothers of young cousins, Henrietta and Beatrice Langford, in *Henrietta's Wish* (1850) were based on a similar pattern. To be fair to Warner, Elizabeth Montgomery's mother in

The Wide, Wide World (1851) is a model of maternal excellence, forced to abandon her daughter because of her own ill health and subsequent death.

CHAPTER FIVE

FROM SAINTHOOD TO SENSATION: FALLING ANGELS

Doves, though tender, are insipid. A vinaigrette, too, is preferable to dried roses; and your saucy belle is far more amusing than your romantic maiden.

(Jane Williams, "*Rose-Coloured Spectacles*," Apr. 9, 1859, 484.)

In her contribution on Ellen Wood to the 1897 *Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign*, Adeline Sergeant described Wood's tragic Isabel Vane as "a protest against the conventional heroine and a portent of her time" (181), claiming that "*East Lynne* owes half its popularity ... to that reaction against inane and impossible goodness which has taken place since the middle of the century" (181). As a reader for Bentleys throughout the 1870s and 1880s (Gettmann 198), and an established novelist in her own right, Sergeant seems well placed to judge the popular mood. The rise of the sensation heroine in the 1860s may well have represented an inevitable backlash against the idealised and unrepresentative manifestations of femininity that were so prevalent in the previous decade, as what Margaret Oliphant referred to as "the angel of ordinary novels" ("Novels," Aug. 1863, 172)¹ began to present a rather tired and familiar figure to female readers and critics.

Reviewers like Geraldine Jewsbury, actively engaged with the world of work, were perhaps understandably frustrated by mid-Victorian portrayals of women as ineffectual weaklings unable to cope with the rough and tumble of everyday life. Jewsbury indicates that the central character of Julia Melville's *Old Memories* (1856) is not an appropriate heroine, since she "does a great deal too much crying and fainting". Jewsbury advises that "no young lady aspiring to the

'leading business' of a novel can be indulged in more than one 'flood of tears' wherewith to relieve exhausted nature, and a single fainting fit of ordinary duration is ample allowance" (Oct. 25, 1856, 1307).

Poor health was frequently construed by novelists as a suitable accompaniment to a perfect feminine disposition. The "angel on the couch" was a popular figure in the fiction of the period and her purpose was to counter suffering with endurance, thus demonstrating how women might fulfill the demands of duty under the most difficult of circumstances, and certainly, in Carlyle's terms, illustrate how a meaningful life must be lived "here or nowhere" (*Sartor Resartus* 149). Writers of domestic fiction often portrayed this type of character as an exemplar of feminine goodness and patience. Although physically passive, such women were generally adept at giving emotional direction to other members of the household. Charlotte Yonge in *The Daisy Chain* (1856) demonstrates how Margaret May, the invalid elder sister of the family, provides a calming influence on the more impulsive Ethel. In its sequel, *The Trial* (1864), set after Margaret's death, it is the turn of the younger May sister, Gertrude, to benefit from the presence of an invalid in the family, in this case the delicate wife of her elder brother, Tom:

Her sofa is almost a renewal of the family centre that once Margaret's was; the region where all tidings are brought fresh for discussion, all joys and sorrows are poured out, the external influence that above all has tended to soften Gertrude into the brightest grace of womanhood. (374-5)

Ermine Williams' calm goodness in Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) is counterpointed against the misplaced energy and idealism of Rachel Curtis, although Ermine at least is allowed a more active role than Margaret May

nine years earlier, earning her living through periodical writing under the pseudonym of "the invalid" and eventually being allowed to marry, perhaps a concession on Yonge's part that this type of heroine was presenting a rather dated figure in the era of sensation writing. While such depictions were intended to inspire, they unfortunately had a tendency to slow the pace of a novel and perhaps dampen the spirits of the reader. Dinah Mulock's popular *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), published in the same year as *The Daisy Chain*, featured a fragile young paragon, the blind Muriel Halifax, unfortunately destined never to reach adulthood. Jewsbury, while noting that the character is well drawn, suggests seemingly without irony that "she might have died earlier with advantage to the book" (Apr. 26, 1856, 520). Jane Williams' telling comment in her *Athenaeum* review of the anonymous *Chilcote Park* (1860) that the author had "fallen into the obsolete practice of presenting us with a sickly heroine" (June 30, 1860, 885) suggests that these models of feminine goodness, while still popular with a certain class of readership, were beginning to be perceived as rather old-fashioned. As Williams added cynically: "Consumption is no longer regarded as a romantic affliction; and a cough, being slightly unmusical, is not included in the list of a lady's charms" (885).

Many heroines with sturdier constitutions aspired to fictional sainthood, but did not always win critical approval. Alongside her campaign to eradicate the elevation of self-sacrifice by women writers, Jewsbury complained time and time again of idealised female role models. Reviewing *The Heiress of Somerton* (1854), Jewsbury described the demoralizing effects of such images on women coping with the realities of everyday life:

The impression left by the generality of novels is that it is far easier to be an angel than a good woman. The good heroines of very moral stories are enough to drive to despair those women of natural life, who painfully practise a few domestic virtues and find their strength - very weakness. It is humiliating to see the quantity of virtues dashed off by ordinary heroines with apparent ease, contrasted with the wear and tear of patience and the self-control and good management required to steer through the difficulties of a weekly washing day with one stupid maid of all work. (Mar. 11, 1854, 310.)

The heroine of the anonymous *Yesterday* (1859) was singled out by Jewsbury as another example of unreasonable feminine perfection:

Mabel is a young girl whom the author (with that lavish generosity which distinguishes novel writers and dramatists) endows with every imaginable virtue. It sometimes strikes us that if the original saints in the calendar could come back to life, they would have the 'patience of a saint' tried to see the ease and dignity with which the amateur saints in novels practise the difficult virtues and the graceful minuet of their walk through this life without one trip or stumble, and the beautiful celestial rosy light which shines on all their thoughts and actions. (Feb. 12, 1859, 220-1.)

Jewsbury's dissatisfaction lay with her belief that such women presented unrealistic and inaccurate pictures of femininity. Reviewing *Minnie's Love* by Matilda Anne Mackarness (1861), she claimed that "the character of Minnie is too sweet to be natural" (Mar. 2, 1861, 293). The heroine of Mrs. Mackenzie Daniel's *Our Brother Paul* (1861) also attracts censure: "Grace, the good angel of the book, is *too* good for anything - too gentle, - and her charity of judgment verges on weakness (June 29, 1861, 860). Jane Williams expressed frustration with the submissive heroine of Mary and Elizabeth Kirby's *Rose-Coloured Spectacles* (1861):

The heroine, who persists in clinging fondly to the villain of the piece, in spite of his selfishness, cruelty, and deceit, exhausts our patience, and requires a dash in the horse-pond to give her life and sense. (Apr. 9, 1859, 484.)

The move towards a livelier, if flawed, heroine was welcome to some women reviewers, as Margaret Oliphant was to demonstrate by her whole hearted

approval of Anne Thackeray's *The Story of Elizabeth* (1863) which I discuss in more detail in the following chapter; but the demands of the fictional market place frequently pushed writers towards more extreme measures. The explosion in printed media during these two decades and the rise of the circulating libraries brought a demand for increasingly new and varied literary fodder for mass consumption and stretched the capability of popular writers to produce anything fresh or original within the formula of domestic fiction. As Oliphant noted in 1855:

We suppose it is a natural consequence of the immense increase of novels that the old material should begin to fail. It is hard to be original in either plot or characters when there are such myriads of "examples" treading in the same path as yourself, and prior to you; and many a shift is the unfortunate fictionist compelled to, if he should put some novelty into his novel. ("Modern Novelists," May 1855, 560-1.)

Putting "novelty into the novel" was probably the main impetus behind the sensation writers' drive to find a niche in an already overcrowded market. Numerous theorists have usefully traced the sensation novel's provenance from stage melodrama to sensational journalism to divorce legislation,² and the genre has become a fertile site for feminists to interrogate ideological struggles around issues of gender. Lyn Pykett has demonstrated how the sensation novel can be read as "a medium which registered and negotiated (or failed to negotiate) a wide range of profound cultural anxieties about gender stereotypes, sexuality, class, the family and marriage" (*The Improper Feminine* 50-51). While sensation writing was undeniably a response to the social and cultural uncertainties of the period, it also represented an opportunity for writers to exploit such anxieties in pursuit of their own commercial success. Shiress Will, commenting on sensation writing in *The Rose, the Shamrock and the Thistle*, clearly acknowledges the

commodification of this type of fiction, claiming that "It has now become, like our tea and sugar, an indispensable luxury of life" ("Evanescent Literature," Feb. 1864, 373).

Sensation writing, in its simplest and most practical terms, can be viewed as an opportunist attempt to invigorate the tired medium of the domestic novel. As domestic fiction had already been designated as a feminine genre, it unsurprising that it was largely a new generation of women writers who sought to breathe life into what was becoming a stagnant form and thereby seize an opportunity to promote their own careers. Rhoda Broughton, in her 1894 novel *A Beginner*, was perhaps describing her own disillusionment with the popular success of writers like Oliphant, Mulock and Henrietta Keddie who did much in the fifties to maintain a vogue for Scottish domestic fiction. The aspiring young writer of Broughton's novel, Emma Jocelyn, is informed by Mr. Lockwood, her publisher, that "the only perfectly safe line is the domestic" and recommended their latest title, "*Hame! Hame Hame!*" (252-3). Needless to say, Emma finds the book to be "unspeakable twaddle" (256) and blames the reviewers for inflating its popularity amongst the reading public.

Polarised comparisons of the "domestic fifties" with the "sensational sixties" are useful in helping to identify the characteristic features of sensation writing that distinguished it from that of the previous decade, but tend to obscure the amount of sensational plotting that had already emerged in the 1850s. As Mary Braddon noted in her depiction of popular writer Sigismund Smith in *The Doctor's Wife* (1864):

That bitter term of reproach "sensation" had not been invented for the terror of romancers in the fifty second year of this present century; but the thing existed nevertheless in divers forms, and people wrote sensation novels as unconsciously as Monsiour Jourdan talked prose. (10)

Summaries of plots in numerous book reviews of the 1850s, by both men and women seem to support Braddon's assertion. George Eliot, writing in the *Westminster Review* about William Conybeare's *Perversion* (1856) seems unsurprised by the story of George Armstrong, who contracts an apparently false marriage, travels to America and "disposes" of his wife to Mormon elder, returning home to remarry under an assumed identity. He later stands trial for bigamy and his second wife commits suicide as a result. Although *Perversion* was ostensibly a broad church novel,³ taking the reader on a topical journey through a variety of religious persuasions, Conybeare, like Sigismund Smith, was clearly of the view that what the public wanted was "plot, and plenty of it" (*The Doctor's Wife* 40). Despite its dramatic incidents, Eliot's verdict is that "the story is uninteresting" ("Belles Lettres and Art," *Westminster Review*, July 1856, 259). Making a distinction between serious literature and novels which aim to exploit popular issues of the day - albeit in this case religious ones, Eliot comments tellingly, "take them up a few years later ... and you are amazed that they could have made even a passing sensation" (258).

Monica Fryckstedt highlights several comments by Jewsbury at the end of the 1850s which support the idea that sensation and melodrama were a strong feature of this decade and that the checklist of themes so frequently cited as intrinsic to sensation fiction were already becoming monotonously familiar to the

devotee of light literature. Fryckstedt points out that in May 1859 Jewsbury protested against "murders ... lawsuits, disinherited heirs, faithless wives, people reputed dead and authentically buried returning to life" (*Geraldine Jewsbury's Athenaeum Reviews* 76). In October, as Fryckstedt notes, Jewsbury was complaining, "if there is a wedding it is ten to one but a bigamy" and in February of the following year, she commented on the questionable expedient of bringing back the supposedly dead first wife, "who had been authentically dead for more than twenty years" suggesting "it has been so often used that one doubts whether it can carry an author safely much longer" (76).⁴

As outlined in chapter two, "madness" novels appear to have been undergoing a particular vogue throughout the mid 1850s. Although their role tended to be more peripheral than in the 1860s, women who were both mad and bad were flourishing in the domestic fiction of this period and their creators were often those very women who appeared to represent the antithesis of sensationalism or even went on to condemn it. Dinah Mulock, for example, had depicted, albeit rather unsympathetically, the adulterous Caroline Brithewood in *John Halifax Gentleman*, and a plot summary of her 1855 *Head of the Family* reveals a melodrama that one might have expected from the pen of Mary Braddon in the 1860s rather than Mulock herself, who was to establish a reputation as the unassailable Mrs. Craik in the following decade.

Rachel Armstrong, one of the central female characters of Mulock's novel, claims to be married to the strangely elusive Geoffrey Sabine, but her precarious sanity and his non-appearance leads friends and relatives to dismiss her belief as

delusional. Geoffrey, sporting an obligatory dual identity, eventually emerges to enact a bigamous marriage to the blameless heroine, Hope Ansted, (believed to be an heiress but actually living in daily fear of her profligate father's arrest for debt). The volatile and vengeful Rachel has meanwhile left to join a theatre company and becomes a famous dramatic actress, her performance-enhancing madness barely simmering below the surface. Eventually all ends satisfactorily with Hope, now penniless, finding solace in a legal second marriage, previous entanglements having been disposed of by appropriate authorial despatching of unlawful and insane spouses along with Hope's inconvenient illegitimate offspring.

It is hardly surprising that Oliphant cites Mulock as one of the writers "touched by the spirit of Jane Eyre" ("Modern Novelists" 560). Oliphant meanwhile was not averse to spicing her own fiction with the occasional melodrama. *Salem Chapel* (1863), her foray into sensation territory features the mysterious Mrs. Hilyard/ Mildmay whom, it is revealed, has attempted to murder her errant husband. She is described by Oliphant as possessed of "a wild will that would stop at nothing." (136) with "hot eyes that burned in their sockets" (138). Chapter Three of *Salem Chapel* was actually appearing in *Blackwood's* in the same issue as Oliphant's article "Sensation Novels" in which she famously complained of "the violent stimulant of serial publication" (May 1862, 568). Oliphant, whose moral and aesthetic sensibility may have conflicted with her desire for commercial success, was no doubt grateful for the tradition of contributor anonymity.

The initial lure of sensationalism appears to have seduced even Yonge, who was sufficiently swayed by popular trends to feature a murder mystery at the centre of her 1864 novel, *The Trial*. The most plausible explanation for what seems to be a change of heart on the part of women like Oliphant, Mulock and Yonge is simply that like other writers in the 1850s and early 1860s, they perceived it legitimate to inject some excitement and variation into otherwise mundane domestic plots. It wasn't until sensation writing began to be identified as a distinctive and potentially controversial trend - with a newly defined status as "literature of the kitchen"⁵ that writers saw the need to locate their own position in relation to this medium. As the 1860s progressed and critical disapproval began to gather momentum, women writers such as Oliphant and Mulock who had established reputations in the previous decade seemed to be making a deliberate effort to define their work in opposition to sensation writing and thus disassociate themselves from the genre.

Just as John Cordy Jeaffreson, in his unfavourable *Athenaeum* review of Oliphant's sequel to *Salem Chapel*, *The Perpetual Curate* (1864), had suggested that it might find favour with readers who eschew sensation: "A thrill of excitement, a shudder, a cry of joy, are results which the author of *Salem Chapel* is most anxious to avoid" (Nov. 12, 1864, 269), two years later, Jewsbury similarly acknowledges Oliphant's now established distance from anything associated with populism or sensation writing. Reviewing Oliphant's *Son of the Soil* (1866) she comments: "It is not a mere book of amusement, and circulating library novel readers may take up Miss Braddon and leave *A Son of the Soil* alone" (June 9, 1866, 765-6). Jewsbury's judgment on Mulock's somewhat

mawkish novel, *A Noble Life* (1866), featuring a severely disabled hero who maintains a brotherly relationship with the heroine, Helen Cardross, is rather less forgiving:

In her determination to keep clear of sensational or emotional interest, the author has gone to the opposite extreme, and denied herself and her readers the lawful elements of human passion. She has grudged every touch of colour that tended to enhance the effect or contribute to entertainment. All expression of feeling is systematically avoided. (Mar. 3, 1866, 296.)

It is simplistic therefore to assume a clear-cut division between didactic domestic novels of the 1850s and sensation fiction of the 60s. As Sally Mitchell points out, "that decade had no monopoly on the sort of light literature that depends on exciting incident, strong emotion, and characters who vary from the stereotype only in the particular perversion that expresses their villainy" (*Fallen Angel* 73). Some established writers made use of sensational plots in the 1850s and then became trenchant about reiterating the value of didactic stories of everyday life during the following decade. Nor were portrayals of women as evil, insane or transgressive the sole preserve of the 1860s. Such fictional representations appeared frequently in novels of the previous decade, but without the moral panic⁶ engendered by the identification of a new and subversive genre they provoked little critical comment. The absence of critical attention given to periodical publications in which writers like Wood and Braddon served their apprenticeships also meant that many emergent prototypes of the sensation heroine went unremarked. Wood's most notable madwoman for example, Charlotte Norris in *St Martin's Eve* (1866) first appeared in the pages of Harrison Ainsworth's *New Monthly Magazine* in November 1853 (327-342). Many of Wood's sensual temptresses such as the scheming Lady Ellis in *The*

Redcourt Farm (1868), who Jewsbury later described as the "proud, selfish, fine, lady rival" (July 25, 1868, 107) for the affections of the husband of the timid Clara Lake had also emerged in the previous decade,⁷ although Wood seems at a loss with what to do with her twice-married seductress and like many of Wood's early sensation prototypes are not fully realised characters.

The influence of the gothic on sensation fiction, or more pertinently, the jettisoning of gothic motifs which helped characterise its development as a distinctive fictional form has been discussed by Patrick Brantlinger who suggests that sensationalism might be perceived as "the reduction of romance to fit Biedermeier frames" (4). While fifties domestic fiction had already eschewed exotic settings in favour of more familiar locations, foreign ancestry could serve to provide a feasible explanation for female behaviour that was aberrant or disruptive. Madness had always provided a useful device for allowing female deviance, but perceptions of the "otherness" of non-British womanhood offered an additional context in which women's violence, criminality or inappropriate sexuality could be allowed. Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason, both mad and foreign was connoted as the antithesis of English femininity. Ellen Wood's passionate Signora Varsini who stabbed Antony Dare in *Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles* (1863) had an association with untrustworthy European Catholicism, while Laretta Carnage, the violent and volatile heroine of Wood's *Ashley* (1897),⁸ had a much remarked upon West Indian heritage.

Other femme fatales such as Mulock's Rachel Armstrong, and slightly later examples such as Oliphant's Mrs. Mildmay, although British, were distinguished

by a variety of markers to signal their separation from the ordinary domestic heroine. They presented recognisable physical pointers to signify their histrionic temperaments. Mulock's Rachel Armstrong has "a passionate intensity in her look" (21) which first impresses the hero, Ninian Graham, who "had scarcely ever seen such a striking looking woman"(20) but he soon perceives "that if not positively insane there was in her mind some strange warp" (21). It was not until transgressive characters began to shed this sense of otherness, and incipient madness became rather less heavily signposted that these women began to emerge as fully-fledged sensation heroines.

Monica Fryckstedt in *On the Brink* (113) discusses an 1866 *Spectator* article entitled "Tigresses in Literature". According to the *Spectator*:

No novel is now complete, and very few novels are successful, without a specimen of a bad woman of a peculiar kind.... Nine times out of ten they have odd physical peculiarities, green eyes or violet eyes, or yellow hair, or sinuous figures or eerie laughs. (Mar. 10, 1866, 274.)

A distinction between the concept of the "tigress" and women such as Lucy Audley, who despite possession of prerequisite yellow hair, assimilate easily into domestic life, is perhaps useful in understanding the changing image of womanhood presented by the sensation heroine. The tigress of the *Spectator*, "a woman beautiful with weird beauty but dangerous to everyone who approaches her" (274) bears more than a passing resemblance to female characters created by Oliphant and Mulock in the 1850s and seems to trace a direct lineage from that decade. Madame Hortense in Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853), for example, was the only credible candidate for the murder of Tulkinghorn, given her French background and peculiar looks, most notably her "feline mouth" (132) which is

later given to a "tigrish expansion" (485). This figure was still in evidence in the 1860s. In *Our Charlie* by Vere Haldane (1865), the hero, as Jewsbury explains, "meets his nemesis in the shape of a flashing, fascinating tigress of a woman, to whom he has made love and will not allow herself to be thrown over" (June 3, 1865 749), but she had largely been eclipsed by a rather less melodramatic version of the female villainess. Fryckstedt comments: "While recent scholars have drawn attention to dangerous, beautiful women in sensation novels, little attention has been paid to the 'tigresses' in non - sensational fiction." (113). The explanation may be simply that the tigress was seen as a stock figure who, despite the concerns of the *Spectator*, was not particularly topical but actually rather dated by 1866. Women reviewers, who tended to have established their own literary careers during the 1850s, were familiar with this character and her narrative function, which is perhaps why they did not perceive manifestations of the tigress as a specific challenge or feel it incumbent to establish a debate around such an image.

The heroine of Wood's *St Martin's Eve* both confirms the image of fictional womanhood posited by the *Spectator* and explains why the article failed to generate any moral panic. Charlotte Norris might seem to represent Wood's closest likeness to Lucy Audley, but there are significant differences which perhaps elucidate the disparity in critical responses to the two novels. Her madness, although shrouded in mystery, is evoked more dramatically than Lucy Audley's, and the European sub plots involving scheming Papists and the public viewing of the corpse of Adeline de Castella propped upright in her wedding dress betray its germination in the previous decade.⁹ Charlotte's jealous hatred

of her small stepson culminates in locking him in a room to burn to death, but Wood's account of Charlotte's final ravings place her closer to Brontë's Bertha Mason than Lucy Audley. When Charlotte finally loses control, Mr. Pym, the surgeon, aided by the servants, struggles to restrain her:

She eluded him with a spring, pounced upon the unsuspecting and terrified Honour, and in another moment was grappling with her, a fight for dear life.... Honour was released, terrified nearly to death, bruises on her arms, and a bite on her cheek, of which she would never lose the mark. (446)

Surprisingly, these graphic depictions inspire little critical comment. Jewsbury appeared to have no qualms about its theme or heroine. Her main criticism of the book is Wood's "tendency to prosiness" (Apr. 7, 1866, 457-8) and drawing out incidents at too great a length, the implication being that the book tends more to tedium than terror. Wood, in an earlier scene, described Charlotte as "seizing the child somewhat after the manner of a tiger and beating him furiously" (40). Perceptions of her as an old-fashioned tigress rather than a modern sensation heroine who might feature as a potential role model to young womanhood may well have led to her being viewed as no threat to the social fabric, unlike many of her fictional counterparts who committed less disturbing offences than child abuse and murder.

The early sixties saw boundaries being blurred as the emergence of a more appealing villainess became another new variable for writers to conjure with. Wood broke new ground with her sympathetic treatment of Isabel Vane, who, despite her fall into the abyss of sin, is neither mad, malicious, nor in any degree feline. Although Braddon's heroines are frequently coupled with Lady Isabel in discussions of transgression, Braddon seems to have taken little direct influence

from Wood. Braddon has been judged "more dangerous, more subversive" (Hughes 109) than Wood, but in the text of *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) she makes use of a censorious authorial aside to remind readers that the suffering of the errant wife ought to be seen in the context of the horror she has inflicted upon her family. Braddon here clearly distances herself from expressions of sympathy for female transgression and her comments could be viewed as a riposte to *East Lynne* (1861) which had been published the previous year:¹⁰

The wife's worst remorse when she stands without the threshold of the home she may never enter is not equal to the agony of the husband who closes the portal on that familiar and entreating face. The anguish of the mother who may never look again upon her children is less than the torment of the father who has to say to those children, "My little ones, you are henceforth motherless". (284)

In her 1862 article "Sensation Novels," Oliphant offers a possible pointer towards the germination of Lucy Audley. Citing Wilkie Collins' Count Fosco from *The Woman in White* (1860) as heralding a significant shift towards a new and subversive type of villain to whom the reader is encouraged to feel attraction rather than repulsion, she foresees that this type of character is "destined to be repeated to infinitude, as no successful work can apparently exist in this imitative age without creating a shoal of copyists; and with every fresh imitation the picture will take on more and more objectionable shades" (568). Oliphant however, fails to predict what was to become the most obvious, and to her the most objectionable variation of this trend, and one which Braddon was able to exploit to such advantage, the added piquancy gained by subverting gender expectations and allowing this role to be fulfilled by a woman.

Jewsbury was not consistent in her criticism of female sensation writers or their fictional creations. She had appeared untroubled by Isabel Vane's transgression in *East Lynne* which she encountered in her role as publisher's reader for Bentleys.¹¹ Her objections to sensation heroines appeared to gather momentum as the decade progressed but she was sensitive, not simply to subject matter, but to its authorial treatment. She rejects the depiction of the adulterous heroine, Lady Helen, in *Forbidden Fruit* (1863):

She is set before the reader as the most charming, excellent, high-principled of her sex; she is never mentioned but with words and epithets of admiration, - and all this to soften and beautify the fact that she is faithless to her husband. (July 25, 1863, 110.)

Jewsbury objects to the authorial sanctioning of the heroine's infidelity: "The story of her temptation and her fall is told with a lack-a-daisical sweetness which confuses right and wrong until nothing is left but a mush of helpless amiability" (110). Lady Helen, at the end of the book, "dies elegantly of a broken heart" (111), but unlike Lady Isabel, it is her lover she grieves for on her deathbed. Jewsbury is scathing about the writer's preoccupation with fashionable society at the expense of morality, "there is no pretence of anything but perfect sympathy and admiration for men and women who yield to temptation, provided always that they are handsome, fashionable and *well - dressed* " (111).

Jewsbury, it seems, was quickly becoming disenchanted with the sensation phenomena. Only two weeks later, reviewing another anonymous novel, *Altogether Wrong* (1863), she proclaimed: "We devoutly hope that 'sensation novels' are running themselves to seed" (Aug. 8, 1863, 172). She appears genuinely scandalised by the plot of this novel:

Talk of the coarseness of our old novelists! Fielding, Smollett, even Aphra Benn herself, would have hesitated before they represented a married heroine, for whom all along 'the high consideration' of the reader had been bespoke, as accepting and reciprocating a declaration of illicit love when within a few weeks of her first confinement; neither do we think that the authors of 'Tom Jones' and 'Roderick Random' would have made the bedside of the heroine immediately after the 'interesting event' the scene of a tender farewell interview. (172)

Altogether Wrong appeared to Jewsbury to mark a turning point. She concludes her review: "A more helpless ending or a more repulsive story we have seldom read, it marks the decline and fall of the 'sensation novel' " (172). Faced with the task of continuing to review sensation fiction despite her evident distaste, she does however discriminate between individual novels within the genre. *Avila Hope* (1865) she describes as "a third-rate sensation novel, written, we should imagine, by a very young lady" (Mar. 25, 1865, 420) yet she is fairly tolerant in her assessment: "It is a weakly-written and foolish story, but the author writes with such evident enjoyment of her labour, that the reader is induced to feel good-natured in spite of the nonsense that prevails from the first page of the book to the last" (420). Annie Edwards' 1865 sensation novel, *Miss Forrester*, which seems to draw heavily upon *Lady Audley's Secret*, is subject to a more ruthless dissection by Jewsbury. Honoria Forrester, Jewsbury notes, has "a complexion of delicate pink and white, perfect small square teeth, firm red lips and hair, not very profuse in quantity, but exquisitely fine, and yellow as fresh spun silk" (Oct 7, 1865, 466). Jewsbury observes, "Golden hair is become as plentiful in the modern female novel, as if some new gold-field had been discovered and thrown open" (466). Honoria, a hired companion, comes to her employer, Mrs. Forsyth, with impeccable testimonials from a school where she had supposedly been employed as a French teacher, but as Jewsbury reveals "her

private trunks are filled with bouquets and testimonials of another kind" (466). Honoria has a secret past as a dancer on the French stage, but now seeks respectability through an advantageous marriage. She allows her elderly charge to starve to death, benefiting from a £200 legacy as a result, and manipulates her way into a marriage with Henry Bryanstone. She lives constantly on the edge of exposure but eventually, "a grand catastrophe makes an end of Honoria and her yellow hair altogether" (466). Jewsbury sees current fictional trends among women writers to be antithetical to any aspirations to the heroic:

There is a low condition of moral health which will readily develope [sic] into specific vices. The female writers of fiction of the present day are, with few exceptions, doing their utmost to bring about this state of things. There may not, in their books, be any one scene, or incident, that transgresses the bounds of conventional decorum, but there is a total absence of all noble and heroic element. (466)

As I have already discussed, the disapproval of commentators such as Oliphant and Jewsbury to the sensation heroines created by Wood and Braddon has received much attention, but condemnation amongst other women critics was by no means universal. One of the earliest reviews of *East Lynne* was by Lena Eden in the *Athenaeum* in October 1861. She gives a lengthy and enthusiastic plot summary which offers no moral judgment about Wood's portrayal of an adulterous wife. Her reference to Lady Isabel's fate as, "martyrdom ...such as we trust has never in real life fallen to the lot of an erring woman" appears sympathetic, and Eden pronounces the book "one of the best novels published for a season" (Oct. 12, 1861, 473). The brief notice of the book given in the *English Woman's Journal* the following month is fulsome, praising the book's "intellectual honesty" (Nov. 8, 1861, 193-4), and again voices no reservations about the prominence given to an errant wife. Other women's periodicals gave

Wood favourable reviews. *The Rose, the Shamrock and the Thistle*, wrote earnestly of Wood's "genius" in a review of *Mrs. Halliburton's Troubles* (1862). The review focuses on the religious tone of the novel and the suffering depicted as a result of the Halliburtons' financial distress without any reference to the sensational murder that enlivened the plot (June 1863, 215-218). In April of the same year they reviewed *Verner's Pride* (1863). Ignoring the central "apparent bigamy" plot, the reviewer noted that "the weakness of man, and the fortitude and sweetness of woman are undoubtedly good themes for the pen of a lady author," observing that "these formed the groundwork of Verner's Pride" (566). Other women expressed similar admiration for Wood. Harriet Martineau was apparently "amazed at the power and interest of *East Lynne*",¹² and voiced enthusiasm for early chapters of *Verner's Pride*.¹³

Most of the opprobrium heaped on Ellen Wood appeared not on immediate publication of *East Lynne* but in later reviews, when Wood, in her haste to consolidate her success, flooded the market with both new and recycled fiction of sometimes dubious merit.¹⁴ Reviewers who became aware of her unpropitious background as the bourgeois writer of a prize-winning temperance novel were more easily able to categorise and dismiss her work. As *The Christian Remembrancer* noted, "Mrs. Wood won the hundred pound prize, but it materially detracts from her right to any high stand in our literature" ("Our Female Sensation Novelists," July 1863, 217).

Although much of the hostile criticism was class and gender based, there is little widespread evidence of disquiet from women about the type of female characters that Wood created. She suffered in the general backlash against sensation writing, fueled by reviewers such as Oliphant, Henry Mansell, E. S. Dallas and W. Fraser Rae,¹⁵ but there seems to be no overwhelming evidence that women reviewers found sensation heroines specifically abhorrent. Jewsbury gave a half-hearted objection to the fast and flirtatious Charlotte Pain, "a questionable young lady" (Jan. 23, 1864, 119) who stalks the pages of *The Shadow of Ashlydyat* (1863) with riding habit and whip. Jewsbury notes that, "even the female reader will be constrained to forgive Miss Charlotte Pain, unprincipled as she is, for the sake of her thorough good nature" but seems to object more to the saintly Maria Godolphin who is "sure of the reader's sympathy; she is a sweet and perfect wife" (119), but according to Jewsbury's own analysis "too perfect, for if she had expressed her own good sense with more emphasis, it would have been better, though not so pleasant for the erring George". Jewsbury appears clearly impatient at the subservient nature of a wife who allows her husband to be all but seduced under her nose by an audacious rival.

Most of the hostility to Wood focused not on her depictions of wayward women, but on her faulty grammar, and supposed vulgarity and cant. Eliza Lynn Linton, in a merciless review of *Elster's Folly* (1866) in the *Saturday Review* complained of all three faults, laying much of the blame on the "haste and shallowness" which had characterised Wood's recent productions, but even Linton was willing to concede that "In *East Lynne*, she touched a chord that vibrated through every woman's heart" (July 28, 1866, 118).

Eden reviewed a number of Mary Braddon's novels for the *Athenaeum*, and appears similarly undisturbed by the heroines they depict. She notes that *Lady Audley's Secret* "contains the history of one of the most beautiful and bewitching fiends ever met with in the annals of literature" (Oct. 25, 1862, 525-6) and identifies a family likeness between Lucy Audley and Thackeray's Becky Sharpe. She describes the book as "well written and worth reading" and her review of *Aurora Floyd* (1862) the following year is even more approving. Eden's only real reservations about Aurora's behaviour concern the scene where she horsewhips "the softy" Steeve Hargreaves. Eden refers to it as "revolting" and "not in accordance with the rest of Aurora's character". Otherwise she is extremely positive about Braddon's depiction:

Aurora is a passionate, wilful creature, acting solely on impulse, (and not always the right one), who is continually getting into scrapes; but in spite of all her faults, her masculine manners, her low tastes, her violent temper, Aurora is a woman, - not a fiend, nor a maniac, but a warm hearted, generous, loving woman, with an earnest desire to do what is honourable and just and true. In this respect therefore she is a far more pleasing heroine than her predecessor, Lady Audley; and we cannot help liking her and sympathising with her, in spite of our better reason and judgment. (Jan. 23, 1863, 144-5.)

Jewsbury seems similarly taken with *Aurora Floyd* which she proof read and recommended to Bentleys, although her advice about remuneration led to the book's eventual rejection (Gettmann 202). Reviewing Braddon's *Eleanor's Victory* (1863) Jewsbury notes Eleanor Vane's resemblance to Lucy Audley but finds her a more appealing character, "she is good, honest, true". She notes that Braddon "has the power to draw character, and she has some experience of her own heart" and objects not to her subject matter of a young heroine who plots

revenge for her father's death, but only to the haste in which it was written and the general melodramatic tone, suggesting it "bears indications of great ability turned to vulgar use" (Sept. 19, 1863, 361).

Braddon however, did not fare as well with *The Rose, the Shamrock and the Thistle* as Wood. Its reviewer allows that "while the novelist has to depict society, its wickedness cannot be passed over" (Nov. 1862, 82) but nonetheless challenges the premise of *Lady Audley's Secret*, that domestic angelhood could mask something more sinister:

For we cannot call to memory a single instance in the history of devilry played by such a smiling fiend as the authoress portrays. It is the one great mistake of the book. A man may 'smile and smile, and be a villain'; and so indeed, under a smiling face a woman may conceal the cruellest hatred and all uncharitableness; but such a fair haired, child-like, petted, virtuous-seeming simpleton never in nature carried a blight through the green landscape, as does Lady Audley through the novelists pages. (82)

The response of *The Rose, the Shamrock and the Thistle* to *Aurora Floyd* is also fairly conservative. Aurora herself appears to be forgiven for her actions when she "becomes legally and openly the wife of the honest man and noble gentleman, John Mellish, and a happy mother of children" and is then able to demonstrate that "her instincts are womanly and right when under new and happier circumstances, she has no excuse for the wilful indulgence of a proud and irregulated nature" (Apr. 1863, 565). The reviewer, while acknowledging the appeal of the sensational elements of the book, finds fault with its general tone:

The popularity of this novel is very great, and the coarse events and rugged passions of the story excite surprise, occurring as they do, in a lady's book; but we do not think the picture overdrawn; nevertheless, the painting, however powerfully executed, is one that can only astonish - it can never please and never elevate. (Apr. 1863, 565.)

If the reaction to sensation writers and sensation heroines appears fragmented and contradictory it is perhaps ingenuous to expect a homogenous response from women to a phenomenon that was in itself fairly disparate. Braddon's warm-hearted Aurora Floyd was not a bigamist in the same calculating way as Lucy Audley, and seems intended to provoke a more sympathetic response. Nor does Lucy Audley fit into the category of fast women such as the Cigarette, the heroine of Ouida's (Marie Louise de la Rameé) *Under Two Flags* (1867). The martyred Isabel Vane shared little common ground with Braddon's Eleanor Vane, or very few other heroines of the genre, and Broughton's outspoken female characters are more properly "Girls of the Period" than outright transgressors, yet tend to be categorised with bigamists and adulteresses in discussions of sensation writing that attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the genre.

Just as the heroines themselves were calculated to provoke differing responses, Women reviewers did not always have the same ideological agenda. Magazines "conducted by women" proffered responses from enthusiasm to conservatism. Among the more mainstream periodical writers, professional rivalry from the old guard of purveyors of domestic fiction may have sometimes translated into elements of critical disapproval, but it is important to be sensitive to changes over time in the critical response to sensation writing. If any trend in this response can be identified, it seems best characterised as a drift from early naive and often appreciative appraisals of novels that at least offered an escape from the humdrum, such as expressed by Lena Eden about *East Lynne* and echoed by Samuel Lucas's famous review in the *Times* (Jan. 25 1862, 6) and also *The*

Saturday Review who considered Wood could appropriately bear comparison to Charlotte Yonge ("East Lynne," Feb. 15 1862, 186); to an outraged recognition of the element of gender subversion contained in sensation writing, from critics such as Oliphant, who in 1867 summed up what she saw to be a significant trend in the portrayal of gender:

The last wave but one of female novelists was very feminine. Their stories were all family stories, their troubles domestic, their women womanly to the last degree and their men not much less so. The present influx of young life has changed all that. It has re-instated the injured man in something like his natural character, but unfortunately it has gone to extremes and moulded its women on the model of men, just as the former school moulded its men on the model of women. ("Novels," Sept. 1867, 265.)

Although Oliphant's earlier 1862 article is entitled "Sensation Novels," she does not at this stage discuss the role of women in the production of this genre, making only passing reference to Ellen Wood. The article is in fact devoted to three male writers, Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Frederick William Robinson.

A flurry of periodical articles in the early to mid 1860s united in condemning sensation fiction, most of them clustered around 1863 when the *Quarterly Review*, the *Christian Remembrancer*, the *Examiner* and *Fraser's Magazine* all published pieces specifically targeting women writers.¹⁶ It seems to have been slightly later in the decade when the bulk of women commentators more fully digested the gendered implications of sensation writing and began to launch their own attacks. Linton, writing in the *Saturday Review* in 1866, pronounced sensation writing to be "unhealthy" ("Hester's Sacrifice," Apr. 1866 481-2). She published her scathing assault on Wood's *Elster's Folly* the same year, by which time Wood was already established as an easy target for critical opprobrium.

Jewsbury, in 1866 showed herself particularly concerned about women's lack of moral direction in fiction, commenting in a review of Florence Marryat's *Woman against Woman* (1866):

It is curious that the most questionable novels of the day should be written by women. To judge from their books, the ideas of women on points of morals and ethics seem in a state of confusion. (Feb. 17, 1866, 233.)

Jewsbury's vociferous criticism of Broughton came in readers' reports of 1866 and in her review of *Cometh up as a Flower* (1867) the following year. Oliphant's most sustained critique of the genre also came in 1867 when she seems to have woken up to the fact that the sensation heroine was an overwhelmingly female creation:

The fact that this new and disgusting picture of what professes to be the female heart, comes from the hands of women, and is tacitly accepted by them as real, is not in any way to be laughed at. ("Novels," Sept. 1867, 260.)

She concludes:

We are no preacher to call English ladies to account, and we have no tragical message to deliver even had we the necessary pulpit to do it in; but it would certainly be well if they would put a stop to nasty novels. (275)

The timing of women's responses to female sensation writing was probably influenced by practical considerations. George Eliot was unusual in establishing a journalistic career for the *Westminster Review* before becoming a successful novelist. To be taken seriously by the more prestigious periodicals women generally needed to have first achieved some degree of literary celebrity. Men's career trajectory on the other hand often began with professional journalism and diversified into fiction writing later. When the sensation phenomenon first exploded, women reviewers like Linton, Oliphant, Eden, and more general

commentators like Yonge and Mulock were still actively writing fiction, although Jewsbury's novel writing was just drawing to an end, her last published book, *Right or Wrong*, appearing in 1860. It may well have appeared prudent for these women writers to assess the implications of the sensation school for their own careers before rushing to condemn it. Even George Eliot, who had launched into an attack on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists" before she commenced writing fiction the previous decade, made no public declaration of disapproval of women's sensation writing in the early 1860s, and made use of sensational elements in both *Felix Holt* (1866) and *Middlemarch* (1871-2). While contributor anonymity makes it difficult to generalise about gender, and even more problematic to track the writing career of many commentators, it may have been significant that the main identifiable male objectors to sensation writing such as Henry Mansell, E. S. Dallas and W. Fraser Rae, were not themselves novelists and had no personal calculation to make regarding new fictional trends. Another male commentator, Alfred Austin, is an exception, but significantly, his assessment came later, at a time when denouncing the ethical and artistic standard of sensation writing had become an all too familiar critical response.¹⁷

If writers such as Oliphant and Jewsbury had appeared dissatisfied at the insipid vision of womanhood presented by women writers at the beginning of the decade they found no consolation in the wayward, sexualized or criminal women that the female dominated sensation phenomenon had allowed to rampage through the ideological sanctum of the Victorian home. The angel of the hearth however, was in no real danger of becoming redundant, even by the end of the decade, and domestic fiction benefited at least in some small way from the backlash which

had been generated by the emergence of the sensation heroine. Linton, for example, savages Eliza Tabor's *Hester's Sacrifice* (1866), claiming the author to be "too tame and timid" (Apr. 21, 1866, 401) yet she concludes her review on a more positive note:

Sensation novels are unhealthy enough; and though we have spoken of *Hester's Sacrifice* as being weak and inartistic, yet it will do no harm, and it is that inestimable treasure to British mothers, safe family reading-which of itself is praise, if not of the highest artistic kind, yet of a satisfactory moral kind perhaps more to the purpose. (401)

Linton may have recognised the moral value of "tame" fiction, but domestic angelhood was not to her taste. Despite her denouncement of modern womanhood in her infamous "Girl of the Period" article, she, like Jewsbury, showed impatience with idealised and unfeasible representations of womanhood. Her review of *A Life's Love* (1866) by Miss Urquhart¹⁸ focuses on two such unsatisfactory heroines. The first, Elison Erskine, "an uncomfortable little creature from the beginning, and far too good for any ordinary human being" (*Saturday Review*, Jun. 30, 1866, 789) is betrothed to Angus Ramsay, a man who betrays her trust by initiating a relationship with Violet MacFarlane. Linton comments:

We can hardly blame him for his preference, though so blameworthy in his duplicity; for Elison, though meant to be all that a woman should be - graceful, pure, angelic, and heavenly - was something too shadowy and high-set for a decidedly earthly sinner like Angus. (789)

Linton's preference also seems to be for the "flesh and blood naughtiness" (789) of Violet, although she too "becomes too angelic on her side in the end" (789). Violet and Angus subsequently elope, but Linton has little sympathy for the wronged heroine.

After this poor Alison becomes very dreary and wearisome. She mainly dresses in white, and seems to spend her life in singing appropriate hymns, either to her harp in the twilight, or out of doors in lonely places when the weather is seasonable. She carries her eyes either cast up to the clouds in an ecstasy of sorrow, or cast down to the earth in dumb and gentle despair; for she loves Angus Ramsay all the same in spite of his disloyalty, and she cherishes this love and a broken heart with a persistency which, at first very soft and tender, at last palls on the reader terribly, and makes him inclined to be utterly savage with both author and heroine. (789-90)

Eventually Violet has another offer of marriage which she initially rejects, "but being brought to see the solace lying in an active wholesome life, and having a dim suspicion that her moonings are but a poor use of time, and her hymns but sad stuff" she changes her mind and prepares herself to "make a canny housewife before she dies" (790). Unfortunately death pre-empts this happy ending. Violet perishes in a shipwreck, and she is buried, as Linton informs us, "with lilies on her breast" (790). Violet, meanwhile, had not had a much more satisfactory time with Angus who turns out to be a thief and a forger. She is obliged to become a milliner to support her young family, and undergoes a dramatic transformation in character, "from having been passionate, proud, wilful, and, we must add, selfish, she becomes so wonderfully saintly that she gets to be as tiresome as Alison herself" (790). Linton finds neither heroine an appropriate representation of the feminine:

Indeed, they are both too much like pre-Raffaellite [sic] portraits for any healthy humanity to take an interest in them, and have evidently been modelled on the features of that school. They are women with white robes, and opal jewels, and lilies born crosswise, and loose hair diademed. They are subjects for poetry, not prose fiction, and would do better for a picture than a novel. (790)

Linton concludes by advising Urquhart "to infuse a slight admixture of iron into the blood of his future Elisons, and to keep the seraphic wings a little less visible and more closely folded " (790).

Just as both Jewsbury and Eliot had praised Anna Ogle's *A Lost Love* (1856) on account of its credible depiction of young womanhood, Linton's expectations are that fiction has a requirement to produce honest and true-to-life portrayals of women. While the pendulum swung from sainthood to sensation, this was not being realised. Neither Lucy Audley nor Elison Erskine could provide reviewers with an image of womanhood that they could approve. The potential for disruption that the sensation heroine now presented had generated perceptions of femininity that were rather less stable than admitted by the conventions of 1850s domestic fiction, yet disappointingly for reviewers, offered an ultimately unwelcome, and as they saw it, unfeasible picture of woman as deviant. It was not the adulterous married women that women reviewers considered as a possible antidote to the domestic angel, nor the criminally insane adventuress, but rather the sensation heroine's less transgressive, although in many ways equally contentious sister, the "Girl of the Period," the subject of my final chapter.

Notes

- ¹ Margaret Oliphant uses this phrase to distinguish the central character of Anne Thackeray's *The Story of Elizabeth* (1863) from the stereotypical heroines of domestic fiction.
- ² Patrick Brantlinger, "What is Sensational about the Sensational Novel?" looks at many of these factors in the development of the Sensation Novel. Thomas Boyle in *Black Swine in the Sewers of Hampstead* focuses mainly on the role of sensational journalism.
- ³ Robert Lee Wolff categorises it as such in his wide-ranging assessment of religious fiction of the period, *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England*. (1977) 283-298.
- ⁴ The reviews Monica Fryckstedt refers to are: "*The Man of Fortune*. By Albany Fonblanque," (May 28, 1859, 710), "*Wreck and Ruin*. By Kinahan Cornwallis," Oct. 15, 1859, 497), and "*Atheline; or, the Castle by the Sea*. By Louisa Stewart," Feb. 25, 1860, 268).
- ⁵ The most frequently quoted use of this phrase is perhaps by W. Fraser Rae in "Sensation Novelists - Miss Braddon," *North British Review*, 43, September 1865, 180-204.
- ⁶ Christina Boufis (117) uses sociologist Stan Cohen's concept of "moral panic" in this context.
- ⁷ *The Red Court Farm* began its serial run in *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1857, Vol. 41, 169-182.
- ⁸ *Ashley* first appeared in *New Monthly Magazine* in July 1856 but was never a fully realised novel. A collection of four stories/novellas under this title was published posthumously in 1897 and included *The Engagement of Susan Chase* (which loosely preceded the narrative of *Ashley*) and two of Wood's other stories which had previously made up short serials
- ⁹ *St Martin's Eve* was serialised in *New Monthly Magazine*, commencing Vol. 99, 1853 although Wood extended the story for publication in 1866.
- ¹⁰ As Andrew Maunder confirms in his introduction to the Broadgate edition of *East Lynne* (37), Wood's novel was first published in hardcover in September 1861. *Lady Audley's Secret* commenced publication in the journal *Robin Goodfellow* in July 1861 running until the end of

September when the magazine collapsed. Jennifer Uglow, in her introduction to the 1994 Virago edition of *Aurora Floyd* (xi) notes that Braddon left the work unfinished to start work immediately on *Aurora Floyd*.

The repeat serial run of *Lady Audley* commenced in January 1862 in the *Sixpenny Magazine* by which time Wood's novel was becoming rapidly established as a best seller and as such was likely to have been familiar to Braddon.

¹¹ Royal Gettmann (205) cites Jewsbury's Reader's Report, 19th June 1861.

¹² The original source of this comment is not clear. Malcolm Elwin cites it in his chapter on Wood in *Victorian Wallflowers* (247). Elwin's source was most likely Charles Wood's "Memorial" (*Argosy*, June 1887). Charles Wood claims that Harriet Martineau wrote this "in a letter to a friend" (441).

¹³ Martineau, in August 1862, complaining about the quality of Samuel Lucas's magazine *Once a Week*, wrote, "I can't understand his selection of matter. However we have got *Verner's Pride* now and may be thankful". (*Harriet Martineau's Letters to Fanny Wedgwood*. Ed. Elizabeth Sanders Arbuckle, 229.) *Verner's Pride* had commenced serialisation in *Once a Week* on 28 June 1862.

¹⁴ *The Redcourt Farm* (1868) was originally serialised in the *Bentley's Miscellany*, commencing vol. 41 1857. *George Canterbury's Will* (1870) was serialised in *Bentleys*, vol. 44 1858. *Mildred Arkell* (1865) and *St Martin's Eve* 1866) formed part of the same serial run in *New Monthly Magazine* commencing Vol. 99 1853, but Wood later separated them into two distinct books. *Adam Grainger* (1876) was put together with a selection of stories from *New Monthly Magazine*, featured from 1851 to 1853.

¹⁵ W. Fraser Rae in "Sensation Novelists - Miss Braddon". E. S. Dallas in *The Gay Science* (1866). For Mansell see footnote 16.

¹⁶ *The Quarterly Review* "Sensation Novels," [Henry Mansell] Apr. 1863 481-514. *The Christian Remembrancer* "Our Female Sensation Novelists," July 1863, 209-236. *The Examiner* "Mrs. Wood and Miss Braddon," (Reprinted in *Littell's Living Age* Apr. 18 1863 99-103). *Fraser's Magazine* "The Popular Novels of the Year," Aug. 1863, 256-265.

¹⁷ [Alfred Austin] "Our Novels: The Sensation School," *Temple Bar*, July 1870, 410-24. Austin's own Novels included *An Artist's Proof* (1864) *Won by a Head* (1866), and "fallen woman" novel *Jessie's Expiation* (1867) written under the pseudonym of Oswald Boyle.

¹⁸ Van Thal (67), taking his cue from Layard, includes a correction to a listing of Linton's reviews stating that this book is "probably *A Lost Love* by Ashford Owen [Anna Ogle]". From a reading of the plot summary contained in this review it is clear that this is not Ogle's *A Lost Love* (1855) which was reviewed in the *Saturday Review* on Nov. 3 1855, 17-18. The title given in Linton's review is in fact correct, and a footnote to the review (789) includes the additional information "by the author of *Heiress of the Blackburnfoot* " (1865). The British Library catalogue identifies this writer only as "Miss Urquhart".

CHAPTER SIX

FAIR GLADIATOR: THE GIRL OF THE PERIOD

Do you think that young lady is an angelic being, young gentleman? ... Unhappy youth! She is a fair gladiator - she is not an angel. In her secret heart she longs to rush upon you and try a grapple with you, to prove her strength and her equality. She has no patience with your flowery emblems. Why should *she* be like a rose or a lily any more than yourself?

(Margaret Oliphant, "Modern Novelists," May 1855, 558.)

According to Eliza Lynn Linton in her influential "Girl of the Period" essay published in the *Saturday Review* in 1868 (Mar. 14, 340), the "fair young English girl of the past" had been superseded by "a race of women as utterly unlike the old insular ideal as if we had created another nation altogether" (340). Linton neither specifies a time-scale for the evolution of this new phase of femininity nor refers to any fictional manifestation of it, although subsequent analysis of the article has inevitably focused on constructions of womanhood in contemporaneous sensation novels, most notably the heroines of Mary Braddon and Rhoda Broughton. (Terry 118, Colby 17). In this final chapter I explore the genesis of the assertive outspoken young woman of 1860s fiction and the critical response she provoked, tracing the ancestry of this "modern" girl as far back as Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

The association of *Jane Eyre* with the heroines of the 1860s is, of course, neither particularly contentious nor original. Before launching into an attack on sensation fiction, primarily the novels of Broughton and Braddon, Margaret Oliphant, referring to the "singular change" that popular literature had undergone ("Novels," Sept. 1867, 258) suggested that "the change perhaps

began at the time when *Jane Eyre* made what advanced critics call her 'protest' against the conventionalities in which the world clothes itself" (258). Elaine Showalter claimed that the sensation writers "saw themselves as daughters of Charlotte Brontë rather than George Eliot" (*A Literature of Their Own* 154), quoting from a letter by Mary Braddon admiring "the fiery force of genius" of Brontë (154).¹ Winifred Hughes noted how "the romantic and sexual motifs of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*" (9) were a feature of the sensation novel, although her comment that "Jane no longer runs away from the would-be bigamist; she is much more likely to indulge in a little bigamy of her own" (9) cannot fairly be applied to Broughton's impassioned heroines.

Comparisons made by later commentators, although pertinent, have tended to suggest Brontë's retrospective influence on what Kathleen Tillotson in her influential introduction to a 1969 edition of *The Woman in White*, "The Lighter Reading of the Eighteen-Sixties," hailed as "a development new in that decade" (x), and Hughes described as a genre with "no perceptible infancy" (6). I posit a more continuous model. I claim that the assertive young woman maintained a presence in the domestic fiction of the fifties and early sixties, and more pertinently for this study, that there was evidence of a sustained debate amongst women commentators about her legitimacy. I seek to demonstrate that concerns about female rebellion and transgression raised by the publication of *Jane Eyre* (1847) did not disappear, only to re-surface with the emergence of the sensation novel, as the dearth of academic interest in discourses on gender in the intervening decade might appear to infer. I contend that interrogation of critical material reveals that throughout the 1850s, anxieties about fictional

constructions of femininity remained significant, and that women critics and reviewers were articulating their belief that a new type of heroine had begun to evolve within the pages of women's novels and was already posing a challenge to the stereotypical angel of domesticity. She was young and outspoken, invariably volatile and impetuous, and while never quite trespassing into sexual transgression, was often in danger of being overwhelmed by the strength of her own passionate nature.

Linton's 1868 essay encapsulated anxieties that other women commentators had already expressed about aspects of feminine identity, and many of the images she evokes are familiar in the context of this study. Women selling themselves in the marriage market; - "the legal barter of herself for so much money, representing so much dash, so much luxury and pleasure - that is her idea of marriage" (340); women paying too much attention to the trivia of fashion, - "a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the first article of her personal religion" (340); and women expressing themselves too freely or boldly; - "talking slang as glibly as a man, and by preference leading the conversation to doubtful subjects" (340). It may have been, as Christina Boufis claims, the article's socio-political subtext linking gender, imperialism and class dissolution (102-3) that accounted for such an overwhelming reception of a message that was by no means original; or more simply, as Nancy Fix Anderson suggests, Linton's "sharp satiric wit" (*Woman Against Women* 130) and ability to distil an already pervasive idea into something "catchy and evocative" (130). Nonetheless, "The Girl of the Period" reverberated in the public imagination, going on to sell over forty thousand copies in pamphlet form (Bevington 110)

and ironically for a tirade against conspicuous female consumption, inspiring much associated merchandising.

Although the content of the article provoked debate, its most significant attribute was the catch phrase of its title which was immediately embraced as encapsulating the popular zeitgeist. The specifics of Linton's message became reduced to more generalised perceptions about the state of modern society which were reflected in a spate of copycat publications all keen to be associated with the article's success and topicality.² As well as the almanacs and the journal,³ there were title-related novels, poems and ballads, lectures, and even a play performed at Drury Lane Theatre a year after first publication of the article.⁴ As the phrase became submerged into popular culture, the Girl of the Period spiralled out of authorial control to inhabit the public imagination not quite as the aspiring demimonde that Linton had described, but closer to something that Vineta Colby describes as a "the pert modern miss of the sixties" (17), crossing contextual boundaries of empire to be transformed into French and Irish Girls of the Period in *The Girl of the Period Miscellany*, the American Girl of the Period in an 1878 publication,⁵ and even the Parsee Girl of the Period in the *Times of India* in 1884.⁶ Far from inspiring widespread contempt and disgust, she had become reconstituted as an icon of modern womanhood, slightly wayward, impetuous and assertive, and still liable to receive censure from less indulgent commentators, but certainly a more appealing figurehead than her creator had envisaged.

One of the earliest discussions of the role of fiction in this debate came in a counter article featured in *Victoria Magazine* four months later deploring "the pernicious and disgusting lucubrations with which our lady sensationalists have deluged us" ("The Latest Crusade," July 1868, 200). Oliphant, with some prescience a year earlier, had quoted disapprovingly from Rhoda Broughton's *Cometh up as a Flower* (1867) as an example of "what the young woman of the period considers sprightly, prepossessing and lifelike" (Novels, Sept. 1867, 265), citing Broughton as a "disciple" (265) of Mary Braddon. Both Braddon and Broughton appear to have recognised themselves as potential targets. Braddon responded with a signed article in her own *Belgravia*, suggesting, like *Victoria*, that some masculine responsibility should be assumed for this state of affairs ("Whose fault is it?" Aug. 1869, 215). Broughton's acknowledgement that her heroines were the type of women that Linton had in mind was somewhat more insouciant. In *Red as a Rose is She* (1870), St. John Gerard, looking "over the top of the *Saturday*", contemplates an unconventional woman whose virtue he is still uncertain of: "Shams, Flunkeyism, Women's Rights, Dr. Cumming, the Girl of the Period - they have all been passing through his eye into his brain, and, mixed with Esther Craven, make a fine jumble there" (109). Two years later in *Goodbye Sweetheart* (1872), Broughton's first book to be published under her own name (Marilyn Wood 3), she continues to exploit the association: "Girl of the Period," reflects the hero, Paul le Mesurier, about another of Linton's spirited young women, Leonore Herrick, "after all, the *Saturday* does not overcolour".⁷

Although the exuberant and vivacious female characters popularised by Braddon⁸ and Broughton were far removed from the vulgar, calculating and fashionable figure that Linton had conjured up, they have in many ways come to represent her apotheosis. Nancy Fix Anderson points out that Linton's own fictional representation of The Girl of the period in "Rose Blackett and her Lovers" published in *London Society* four years prior to her article receives a rather more sympathetic treatment than the pilloried subject of her later polemic. Linton describes Rose as "a 'girl of the period' after the best models of her kind; just a little too jaunty perhaps, and a shade too indifferent, but evidently a fine-natured, pure-minded, high hearted creature" (*Woman Against Women* 121). Rose is evidently drawn with the warmth that characterised many of the heroines of Broughton and Braddon, a far more generous interpretation of the rebellious young girl than Linton was prepared to allow in the *Saturday Review*.

One of the most significant attributes distinguishing the modern heroine from her earlier nineteenth-century counterparts was her willingness to abandon a passive role in love making and express her desires without embarrassment or equivocation. Geraldine Jewsbury in a reader's report of 1872 claims that an anonymous authoress "imitates Miss Broughton's warm & vivid descriptions of practical love making without a scrap of reticence or modesty" and goes on to make the same kind of connection that Linton had posited between immodesty and sexual morality: "If I were a man reading this MS I shd enquire 'are the young women of England trying to qualify themselves for courtezans?' – the breaking down of all sense of shame leads to that bottomless pit".⁹

Jewsbury was willing to recognise that women were capable of passion, it was its articulation she found problematic. Her reader's report on *East Lynne* in 1860 had exhibited no outrage at the elopement of Isabel Vane, it is the propriety of Barbara Hare's behaviour that is called into question:

I have not the least objection to the unrequited attraction of Barbara to Mr Carlyle – but that violent explosion after his marriage, that particular declaration *to him* needs to be re-written. She would have betrayed herself in one *small* way is certain but it must be in a less violent manner.¹⁰

Despite Oliphant's insistence that "the girls of our acquaintance in general are very nice girls; they do not, so far as we are aware ... pant for indiscriminate kisses, or go mad for unattainable men" ("Novels," Sept. 1867, 260), the female critical response to sexualised women does not generally echo William Acton's view that "the majority of women (happily for society) are not much troubled by sexual feelings of any kind" (133).¹¹ Oliphant's objections to *Cometh up as a flower* (1867) are not focused on the outbreak of uncontrollable passion but upon its casual dissection:

If two young people fall heartily and honestly in love with each other, and are separated by machinations such as abound in novels, but unfortunately are not unknown in life, and one of them is compelled to marry somebody else, it is not unnatural, it is not revolting, that the true love unextinguished should blaze wildly up, in defiance of all law, when the opportunity occurs. This is wrong, sinful, ruinous, but it is not disgusting; whereas those speeches about shrinking bodies and sexless essences are disgusting in the fullest sense of the word. (267)

Quoting from the scene where Nell, now married to Hugh Lancaster, throws herself into the arms of her beloved Dick M'Gregor pleading "Oh for God's sake take me with you!" she concludes that "this is very objectionable, no doubt, and as wrong as it can be, but it is not disgusting" (268). Oliphant acknowledges

both the existence and expression of female desire but will not countenance its trivialisation:

A woman driven wild by the discovery of domestic fraud and great wrong might propose any sin in her frenzy, and yet might be innocent, whereas a woman who makes uncleanly suggestions in the calm of her ordinary talk, is a creature altogether beyond the pale. (268)

Broughton herself appeared to recognise that exposing raw emotions to the opposite sex was a strategy that rendered women vulnerable. Kate Chester makes no attempt to disguise her infatuation for Dare Stamer, even agreeing to elope with him. Her lack of reserve emboldens him to admit to an earlier marriage and Kate recognises that her naivety may have left her open to misinterpretation:

'Was it,' she went on, in her clear low voice, 'because I showed you so plainly my love, because I did not cover it up under hollow affectations of indifference, as you told me just now other women would, that you thought me capable of this unspeakable vileness?' (*Not Wisely but Too Well* 127)

Not Wisely (1867) is in many ways a natural successor to *Jane Eyre*. The battle of wills between Kate and Dare where female integrity is privileged above desire (124-30) echoes the famous struggle between Jane and Rochester. Marylyn Wood (19) points out similarities between Kate's recuperation period in Queenstown with her cousins where she falls under the influence of earnest clergyman, James Stanley, and Jane's sojourn at Moor House and relationship with St John Rivers. As with *Not Wisely*, the articulation of female desire in *Jane Eyre* had drawn censure and it is pertinent at this point to examine the critical response, both to *Jane Eyre* and to novels published in its wake and perhaps subject to its influence.

In her denouncement of *Jane Eyre* in the *Quarterly Review*. Elizabeth Rigby had proclaimed the scene "in which Miss Eyre confesses her love" to be unparalleled, either in life or fiction; "new equally in art or nature"(Dec. 1848, 165), and further complained of Jane's forwardness after her betrothal to Rochester:

But if the manner in which she secures the prize be not inadmissible according to the rules of the art, that in which she manages it when caught, is quite without authority or precedent, except perhaps in the servants hall....Coarse as Mr. Rochester is, one winces for him under the infliction of this housemaid *beau ideal* of the arts of coquetry. (170)

Anne Mozley, writing in the *Christian Remembrancer* in 1853 criticises both Brontë and Georgiana Fullerton for promoting heroines that are rather too ardent, accusing Fullerton of regarding "love and passion" as "her peculiar province" ("New Novels," Apr. 1853, 410):

Afraid of no extremes, deterred by no ultimate consequences, she justifies while she portrays the absolute yielding of the soul to blind unreasoning passion; and despising all aids from convention and prescription, she chooses the subjects for the impulse, not from men, who are supposed to have more active control over their destiny, but from amongst women, who commonly make no pretension to the initiative, and claim only the veto. (410)

Mozley warns male readers that aspirants to the favour of the truly feminine woman cannot expect to be in receipt of "any such eloquent, unsought avowals as the maidens of modern romance succeed so well in" (443). She lays the blame for this trend in self-exposure at the door of women writers:

So long as *men* wrote romance, that heart was described as an all-but-impregnable fortress; the language of war and strategy could alone convey adequate ideas of the courage and policy necessary for its subjugation, - the conqueror's laurels alone express the flush of triumph when the reluctant prize yields at length. But now that our fair rivals wield the pen, the tables are turned. These spies within the walls reveal a different state of things. They show us the invader greeted from afar - invited, indeed, within the walls. They betray the castle to have all the time been wanting a commander. (443)

Not only were women writers offering up the intimate secrets of female desire for public consumption, they were also changing the terms of reference upon which that desire might be realised. Oliphant traces the effect of Brontë on contemporary writing, describing a more restrained model of romance that was previously the norm in fiction:

Ten years ago we professed an orthodox system of novel - making. Our lovers were humble and devoted – our ladies were beautiful and might be capricious if it pleased them, and we held it a very proper and most laudable arrangement that Jacob should serve seven years for Rachel. ("Modern Novelists" 557)

She then recounts how the figure of Jane Eyre disrupted the entire genre of nineteenth-century romance:

When suddenly there stole upon the scene, without either flourish of trumpets or public proclamation, a little fierce incendiary, doomed to turn the world of fancy upside down. She stole upon the scene - pale, small, by no means beautiful - something of a genius, something of a vixen - a dangerous little person, inimical to the peace of society. (557)

Jane was to set a new standard for heroines, she was, in Oliphant's words, "the impetuous little spirit, which dashed into our well ordered world, broke its boundaries and defied its principles" (557). After her appearance in 1847, the temperament, behaviour and even physical attributes of women in love appeared to undergo a significant shift. Oliphant, cites several examples of writers she believes to be "touched by the spirit of *Jane Eyre*", including Dinah Mulock, Julia Kavanagh; - "from Nathalie to Grace Lee she has done little else than repeat the attractive story of this conflict and combat of love or war" (559), and Elizabeth Gaskell, whom she suggests has "fallen subject to the same delusion"

(559) by employing the Brontë template of confrontational romance in *North and South* (1855):

It is perhaps better and livelier than any of Mrs Gaskell's previous works; yet here are still the wide circles in the water showing that not far off is the identical spot where Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, in their wild sport, have been throwing stones. (559)

To match a rebellious woman with an acquiescent man suggested too radical an erosion of sexual differentiation. Just as the injured wife had required, in Jewsbury's terms "a monster husband" ("*A Wife's Trials*," Apr. 28, 1855) and more pertinently, a potential replacement who represented the "proper" masculine," Oliphant notes the pairing of her "fair gladiator" with "the love-making monster" (560). In *Jane Eyre* as Oliphant recounts, "the lover is rude, brutal, cruel. The little woman fights against him with courage and spirit" (557), while in *North and South*, Margaret Hale's suitor, Thornton is "as ready to devour her as any ogre in a fairy tale" (560). Oliphant, meanwhile, gives an amusing account of the post - Brontë model of conflict-centred romance in popular fiction:

"A fair field and no favour," screams the representative of womanhood. "Let him take me captive, seize upon me, overpower me if he is the better man - let us fight it out, my weapons against his weapons and see which is the strongest." ... Whereupon our heroine rushes into the field, makes desperate sorties out of her Sebastopol, blazes abroad her ammunition into the skies, commits herself beyond redemption, and finally permits herself to be ignominiously captured and seized upon with a ferocious approbation which is very much unlike the noble and grand sentiment which we used to call love. (557-8)

Despite her tone of amused cynicism as a reviewer, Oliphant was not averse to making capital out of fictional trends. Her own novel, *Lilliesleaf*, published anonymously the same year, incorporated many of the components that she had accused other women writers of trading in. Mrs. Bennett, writing in the

Saturday Review, claimed that the "dramatis personae" of *Lilliesleaf* included "one Jane Eyre style of young lady with a gentleman to match." (Dec.1 1855, 84). Bennett suggests that Oliphant has over-rated her own importance by bringing out a belated sequel to the unmemorable and supposedly autobiographical *Passages in the Life of Mrs. Margaret Maitland* (1849), a book that induced only "tedium and drowsiness" (83). She expresses amusement at Oliphant/Maitland's supposedly inadequate reproduction of Scottish dialogue and her clumsy style, but her worst censure is reserved for the heroine, who is clearly not moulded in the style of any angel of domestic fiction:

The flighty young lady and gentleman to whom we have already alluded to are of course intended to be highly original conceptions; and if by originality be meant something totally unlike what we may expect to meet with in real life, Mrs Maitland has succeeded to admiration. Miss Rhoda Maitland's idiosyncrasy consists in a perpetual fancy for killing herself and hating other people. "I hated them all," she exclaims. "I was very near killing myself one time but I thought they would be glad to get rid of me so I did not do it." Really! How amiable and considerate! "Did you ever make up your mind to kill yourself?" she enquires of her pendant, Mr Bernard. Rather a curious question for a young lady to put to a gentleman on his first introduction to her. However, he seems to have something of the same sanguinary propensity as herself – only that, in his case, it is directed against others, for as he informs Rhoda "with a kind of haughty mirthfulness," that "there are some people whom he should feel a strong theoretical pleasure in shooting down". (84)

Quoting several more passages of Rhoda's violent opposition to the ennui of her existence: "I wish you would beat me, or hurt me – will you? I should like to have a fever, or something to put me in great pain" (84), Bennett opines that "ladies of Miss Rhoda's class are entirely beyond our comprehension"(84). Of Rhoda's romance with Mr Bernard, a taciturn hero possessed of a "grand manner," Bennett notes ominously that "the love making between the two is as original and true to nature as the rest of their characters" (84). In an unusual

reversal, Oliphant herself is condemned for disseminating inappropriate material to impressionable readers:

We feel that it is our duty, before we conclude, to enter our protest against books like these. We may be told that they are harmless. Our answer is that nothing which is false can be innocent – that any books which present to us unreal and impossible views of life must be prejudicial – and that everything which fosters sentimentality or a desire to imitate eccentric originalities like Miss Rhoda, in so far as they can be imitated, must of necessity be harmful, especially to young people, so much of whose daily food, alas! consists of works of fiction. If authors and critics were somewhat more heedful of their responsibilities, the shelves of circulating libraries would cease to be loaded with books, so many of which are really full of spurious religion and false morality. (84)

Oliphant's heroine meets a more favourable response from Harriet Parr some years later, at a time when "Girls of the Period" had become more commonplace. Parr nonetheless notes Rhoda's perversity:

There is a streak of genius in Rhoda, but she is a wilful passionate girl, who hates her dependence, and tells her long-suffering entertainers that she would rather work with the reapers in the fields than live at ease in their fine house and eat their bitter bread. ("Works by Mrs. Oliphant," Mar. 1, 1869, 308.)

Although Caroline Grey was absent from Oliphant's roll call of writers influenced by Brontë, Blanche, the central character in her 1854 novel, *The Young Husband* appears representative of the type of woman that Oliphant had cited as typifying the contemporary heroine. Plain, and proactive in her passions, or as Jewsbury succinctly puts it "remarkably ugly and desperately in love with the hero" (Nov. 11, 1854, 1363), although Jewsbury judges Blanche's boldness to be more of an aberration than a new trend:

We are not very severe judges of the fair candidates for perfection who are set up in novels; - but Mrs Grey departs too far from the usual tradition of what is becoming in heroines, when she makes Blanche not only desperately in love with Claude, but display it without the maidenly reserve which is an instinct even more than a principle. (1363)

Oliphant had cited an older generation of writers, Mrs Gore, Mrs Trollope and Mrs Marsh as "orthodox and proper beyond criticism" ("Modern Novelists" 555). Jewsbury goes back even further to makes unfavourable comparisons between the modern heroine and the types of women drawn by even earlier writers, commenting that "Miss Blanche much needed to be put through a course of Miss Edgeworth and Mrs Capone and other teachers of the three thousand feminine 'punctualities' " (1363). She quotes a passage from the book where the clumsy fifteen-year-old Blanche meets Claude after the absence of several years and embraces him with misplaced enthusiasm, whilst he barely disguises his disgust at her unprepossessing manner and appearance, Jewsbury cautions disapprovingly against such ill advised self - exposure; "one of Miss Burney's heroines would have perished rather than place herself in such a situation" (1363).

Brontë's work continued to provide inspiration for women writers, but reviewers were not so tolerant about its imitators. Jewsbury described Matilda Betham-Edwards' *The White House by the Sea* (1858) as "a pale production of the 'Jane Eyre' school" (Jan. 30, 1858, 145), and complained in her review of *The Morning of Life* (1859) by Mrs. Solms Boosey:

Because the Author of 'Jane Eyre' continued to interest all her readers in the rise and progress of her attachment to Mr. Rochester, it does not follow that *any* and *every* authoress should have the pretension to detail her love-story at full length, revelling in the use of the first person singular, and exhibiting all the rest of the world as subordinately employed in carrying out the destinies of the very ordinary young lady – self elected to be *la jeune premiere* of the drama. (Oct. 29, 1859, 564.)

The heroine of Margaret Colvile's *Martha Brown: the Heiress* (1861) as described by Lena Eden would appear to share some common lineage both with Jane Eyre and with Caroline Grey's Blanche:

Martha herself is not a captivating young lady: she is plain-looking, rough, hard, *brusque* and strong-minded to a painful degree, with enormous hands encased in dark gauntlets, and a general contempt for personal appearance and the conventionalities of social life. (Nov. 9 1861, 615.)

Ambrose Arnold, an altruistic young doctor, is secretly drawn to Martha but pointedly resists any intimacy for fear he might be taken for an adventurer and therefore "spares no opportunity of abusing the lady in unmeasured terms" and "all but insults her to her face" (615). He remains vocal in his dislike but this does not appear to be an impediment to Martha's affection. Eden observes; "altogether a more disagreeable lover can hardly be imagined. Martha Brown, fortunately, rather prefers that sort of thing..."(615).

Gaskell's biography published in 1857 had revealed Brontë's deliberate decision to eschew attractive women in her fiction. Gaskell described Charlotte's supposed argument with her sisters about idealised portraits of women, and her determination "to make her heroine plain, small and unattractive, in defiance of the accepted canon". (Gaskell 308). The perception that women writers had developed a penchant for unattractive heroines, is confirmed by an anonymous article in the *Saturday Review* in 1867, later reprinted with a selection of Linton's essays,¹² which asserts that "as long as literature was more or less a man's vocation...a successful novelist would as soon have thought of flying as of driving a team of ugly heroines through three volumes" ("Women's Heroines," Mar. 2 1867, 259). Women writers, according

to the reviewer, had a different agenda and it became the fashion. "to make all their fascinating heroines plain girls with plenty of soul, and to show, by a series of thrilling love adventures, how completely in the long run plain girls had the best of it" (259). Like Oliphant, the writer credits *Jane Eyre* as the original prototype who "opened the door to a long train of imitators" (259):

For many years every woman's novel had got in it some dear and noble creature, generally under-rated, and as often as not in embarrassed circumstances, who used to capture her husband by sheer force of genius, and by pretending not to notice him when he came in the room. (259)

Not only is Charlotte Yonge, named as an adherent of this school of thought: "we do not feel perfectly certain that [she] has not married her inky Minervas to nicer and more pious husbands than her uninky ones" (259), but the writer goes on to speculate about women writers depicting the moral superiority and strength of their heroines in the face of weak heroes, citing Linton's recently published *Sowing the Wind* (1867) as an example.

Eden's summary of a novel by Georgiana Craik would appear to suggest that the influence of Brontë, rather than being confined to sensation novels, was still flourishing in the ordinary domestic fiction of the early 1860s. Winifred Hastings, the heroine of *Winifred's Wooing*, (1862) begins life as an heiress, but after the financial ruin and death of her father, becomes a penniless governess under the wardship of her dead father's friend, John Bertram, the master of an iron foundry. At first she despises her guardian, a fusion between Rochester and Gaskell's John Thornton, but finds herself succumbing to his rough charms, despite hearing a report that he is likely to marry the daughter of her employers. Eden observes that the hero "taunted his ward incessantly for the avowed and

expressed purpose of 'breaking her in' " (Oct. 18, 1862, 492). She quotes an example of their continual struggles for mastery at a point in the novel where he has just informed Winifred that the death of the other guardian leaves her entirely in his charge:

'I have no objection to be sole guardian; I rather like it than otherwise, Miss Hastings: I am fond of power.' 'Do you imagine that you are going to exert any power over me?' The scornful young face was erect enough now - all thoughts of further stitching for the moment at an end. 'Certainly I do, whenever it may be necessary.' And then as she looked at him too indignant to find words, he looked at her too, and laughed. (492)

Although women critics expressed disapproval of women who articulated their passions too readily, it would be a mistake to assume that they were generally censorious about heroines who stepped out of the mould of domestic conformity. Lena Eden was enthusiastic about Braddon's portrayal of Aurora Floyd despite "her masculine manners, her low tastes, her violent temper" (Jan. 31, 1863, 144) *Jewsbury*, as discussed earlier, saved some of her worst censure for the idealised domestic angel, and found alternate female role models a welcome relief. She had praise for the heroine of Henrietta Keddie's *Phemie Millar* (1854) whom Monica Fryckstedt (*Jewsbury* 72) suggests may well have been an influence for Eliot's Maggie Tulliver:

Phemie Millar, with her crude, ardent, intellectual aspirations, in the midst of a commonplace, uncongenial domestic employment - with her oddness, her short-comings - her earnest simple minded desires to do better - her artistic instincts that have a touch of genius - the temptations, and hopes, and disappointments of her young girlish life, which ripens and develops into a rich and noble womanhood - make her as charming and unpretending a heroine as we have met with for many a day. (Apr. 22, 1854, 490.)

Jewsbury similarly admired Charlotte Beauvilliers, the secondary heroine of Julia Stretton's 1856 *Margaret and her Bridesmaids* (1856). *Jewsbury*

characteristically prefers her to the more idealised depiction of femininity that the eponymous Margaret represents:

Margaret, the heroine, is of course, a woman in the highest state of perfection, and so falls rather too smoothly, and with too little individuality, to lay much hold on our sympathy; but Lotte - the little, wilful, wild, brave, fascinating Lotte is the gem of the book and as far as our experience in novel-reading goes, she is an entirely original character. (Apr. 12, 1856, 458.)

As Fryckstedt points out, "it is to Miss Jewsbury's credit as a reviewer ... that in this throng of paragons of virtue, she singled out unconventional heroines like Phemie Millar and little Lotty for her praise"(73). Anna Ogle in the same year had expressed approval for Beatrice, "the spirited impulsive little heroine" of *My First Season* by Beatrice Reynolds (1855) despite her concern that "of mundane society, with its conventional restraints there is no appreciation. The lady runs about the streets alone and goes to the opera with a maid in a way that all right-minded peoples must think 'odd' " (*Saturday Review*, Feb. 9, 1856, 281). In this case the absence of romance proves a point in its favour: "Direct love-making is but little treated of, which in these days is of itself a recommendation" (281).

Lena Eden shows more muted approval of another "spirited heroine" in her review of Matilda Betham-Edwards' *John and I* (1862). Despite her view that "the author's notions of morality seem to be a little vague and uncertain" (Oct. 11, 1862, 457), she does concede that "originality is always refreshing, and a book that is quite unlike any other book we ever met with has, at least, one claim on our attention." (457). The wilful Hermine, "young, fair, fashionable and gracious-looking, with apple-blossom cheeks, light, loose, flowing hair,

bright eyes and piquant conversation" (457), is initially hostile towards John Brown, her mother's second husband, but eventually "a strange light in her eye, a triumphant smile on her lip" leads to the novel's narrator, John's brother, to suspect that "Hermine is lost to all sense of shame" and has become involved in a relationship with her young stepfather. Hermine has not actually transgressed, but an admission of her feelings for John culminates in a painful scene with her mother where she is ordered to leave the house. Both the plot line, the European setting, and the character of the impulsive heroine are suggestive of Anne Thackeray's *The Story of Elizabeth*, (1863) although the proximity of their publication indicates that any direct influence was unlikely.¹³

Jewsbury dismisses Thackeray's *The Story of Elizabeth* because of its subject matter of mother-daughter rivalry, "it trenches on the sin of incest and no mode of treatment can take away the taint" (Apr. 25, 1863, 552). She is not only unimpressed by the book's heroine but detects little authorial sympathy for her:

There is an absence of all genuine pity or sympathy in the book; indeed we cannot call to mind a work that seemed to come so little out of the author's own heart. It is written in a hard, arid spirit, that acts upon the feelings of the reader like an unseasoned frost. Elizabeth is sneeringly compassionated for being a fool. (553)

Oliphant on the other hand appears completely charmed by what she sees as the freshness and honesty of Thackeray's creation, and while Jewbury had claimed that "poor Elizabeth herself excites more pity in the reader than she does the author" (553), Oliphant believed her credibility rests on the fact that she is described "not from the outside at all, but from within" (171). She surmises the writer to be a young woman, an authorial identity that generally brings forth critical scorn, but Oliphant sees Thackeray's youth and gender as positive

attributes, enabling her to present "so vivid a picture of a girl's heart, made by the fittest of all painters – an artist on the spot and behind the scenes" (171). Oliphant devotes eight pages to her review of this novel, so significant and unique does she consider its representation of realistic and flawed young womanhood. She perceives Elizabeth as a seminal fictional figure, describing her as "the most daring sketch of a troublesome girl which we remember to have seen" (171). She goes on:

Elizabeth is naughty to an extent which no heroine of our acquaintance has yet attempted; she is cross, she is disobedient, she is sullen and perverse; and even perhaps the most unpardonable sin of all, she is untidy. When she is in a bad humour she does not even brush her hair, and nobody can know better how to make herself disagreeable. This sulky, wretched, discontented, troublesome girl, has the whole interest of the book centred in herself, and the issue is a story unique among the novels of the day. (171)

Oliphant continually returns to the theme of Thackeray's honesty in her portrayal of Elizabeth, admiring her in having "the courage to utter, so singular a disclosure of the secrets which lie within that mist of virginal sanctity and supposed angelhood in which the heart of a pretty girl is veiled from close inspection" (178). The strength of Oliphant's enthusiasm, and in this case, her sanction of exposure, is perhaps indicative of her profound dissatisfaction with polarised representations of women either as domestic angels or sensation demons:

The good girl of domestic life, the angel of ordinary novels, has nothing in common with this creature of glowing flesh and blood, who storms and cries at everything that comes in her way, and keeps up no appearances, and is bent only upon being happy. (172)

The sixteen-year-old Elizabeth, although capable of falling whole heartedly in love with the vacillating Sir John Dampier, the object of her widowed mother's desire, comes across as childishly wayward rather than sexually precocious and

the naivety of her portrayal precludes her being mistaken for a sensation heroine:

As for the Aurora Floyds, there are happily very few people living who would care to number that lady among their acquaintance, but the probability is that most of us have known, and possibly loved, something very like Elizabeth. (183)

Oliphant's distancing of Elizabeth from Braddon might appear to disqualify her as an incipient Girl of the Period, and Oliphant is insistent that the book bears relation to sensation fiction: "No crime, no trial, no complexity of incident – indeed, no incident at all to speak of – is in the little book" (171), but there is certainly a family resemblance between Elizabeth and Broughton's later heroines. According to Michael Sadleir's account of a reminiscence of Broughton in *The Times* (June 7, 1920) *The Story of Elizabeth* reputedly inspired Rhoda Broughton to begin her own writing career, "hearing that it was written by a girl not much older than herself she wondered why she should not write a book too" (*Things Past* 96). Whether or not the story is apocryphal, Elizabeth displays the same kind of verve and spontaneity as Broughton's outspoken and impassioned heroines, coming close to impropriety yet always maintaining a certain innocence, and displaying a lack of reserve in her relationships with the opposite sex that is frequently open to misinterpretation.

Given Jewsbury's distaste for Thackeray, it is perhaps unsurprising that she went on to become one of Broughton's most vocal critics, while Oliphant, although disliking vehemently the tone of Broughton's writing, professed a degree of reluctant admiration for the depiction of feminine character in *Cometh up as a Flower*. Oliphant's assertion that "the wonderful thing in it is the

portrait of the modern young woman as presented from her own point of view," ("Novels," 265) is, I suggest, largely ironic, but she does not entirely condemn Broughton's "free spoken heroine" (268) conceding that "she is not by any means so disagreeable, so vulgar, or so mannish, as at the first beginning she makes herself out to be" (265).

Although the discourse surrounding the Girl of the Period and her manifestation in fiction is often described as a dialectic between the old guard of "anti-feminist women" seeking to regulate and proscribe the work of a younger more radical generation of female writers,¹⁴ such an analysis does not do justice to the complexity of their various positions as evidenced for Oliphant's enthusiasm for Elizabeth, and her own later portrayals of strong idiosyncratic women such as Lucilla Marjoribanks who was in turn admired by the rather more conservative Harriet Parr:

She is infinitely more loveable and admirable than heroines of novels in general, and though we are meant to laugh at her good-humouredly throughout her trials and triumphs, we never lose sight of her honourable, liberal, serviceable qualities, or waver in our allegiance and liking. ("Works by Mrs. Oliphant" 310.)

One of Oliphant's objections to Broughton concerned her portrayals of women, which apart from the central character, tended to be unsympathetic. Oliphant notes that the unconventional heroine of *Cometh up as a Flower* disdains the company of her own sex, perhaps understandably, since all none of the other female characters are fully realised. She cites it as "a curious feature in second-rate women's books" that "as a general rule, all the women in these productions, except the one charming heroine, are mean and envious creatures, pulling the exceptional beauty to pieces" ("Novels," Sept. 1867, 266). Oliphant

rejects this picture as one "which only a vulgar mind could make" warning, "the man who scorns, or pretends to scorn, women's society, is generally a fool; but what should the woman be?" (266-7).

Jewsbury dealt harshly with Broughton in her role as publisher's reader denouncing *Not Wisely* as "the most thoroughly sensual tale I have read in English in a long time" and "a bad style of book altogether & not fit to be published" (Fahnestock "Geraldine Jewsbury" 260),¹⁵ although her motivation was almost certainly professional loyalty to Bentleys rather than any desire to conduct a personal vendetta against a young woman writer. Broughton's exchange of letters with George Bentley demonstrates that she was furious with the strictures of his reader: "Hoping that *this* tale may avoid offending your reader's *delicate* sense of propriety" (Sadleir *Things Past* 99), but it is not clear whether she was aware that Jewsbury was acting in this capacity. Jewsbury guarded her anonymity as a reader very closely, and may not have been identifiable to Broughton.¹⁶ Showalter describes Jewsbury's battle with Broughton as "particularly fierce" (177) alleging that Jewsbury "reviewed [Broughton's books] acidly in the *Athenaeum* when they appeared" (177). As I have discussed in chapter one, the only novel of Broughton's that Jewsbury reviewed was *Cometh up as a Flower*. Broughton was certainly aware of Jewsbury's role as reviewer for the *Athenaeum*. Her much quoted surprise "at the mildness of Athenaeum's abuse," and assertion, "I am sure I don't recognise Old Jewsbury's pen dipped in vinegar and gall. Last time they reviewed me they said, 'we will not pollute the pages of our magazine with any more quotations from this blasphemous and obscene production' " (Sadleir *Things Past* 104)¹⁷

certainly betrays some animosity, but she was not quoting Jewsbury's words but paraphrasing from Robert Romer's review of *Not Wisely* in which he referred to "the sickening blasphemy with which we must no more pollute these pages" (Nov. 2, 1867, 569). Moreover, despite Broughton's parody of Jewsbury as Rosalind Grimston, a failed writer, who has since "confined herself to tomahawking others" (142) in her novel, *A Beginner* (1890), again cited by Showalter (177), the denouement of the story involves the young Emma Jocelyn discovering that her most vociferous critic was not, as she had supposed, the formidable Miss Grimston, but a vulgar and pretentious young male writer.¹⁸

Although Broughton's work seemed to offer fictional exemplars of the type of women Linton purported to deplore, two decades later in *Temple Bar*, Linton was to write warmly of "the freshness, the naturalness and the audacity" of Broughton's work ("Miss Broughton's Novels" 196), and to praise her constructions of femininity. Linton writes approvingly of "the innocent abandon of the heroine" (196) in *Cometh up as a Flower*. Despite the admission of love from Esther Craven to Sir John Gerard in *Red as a Rose is She*, Esther attracts no censure. Linton seems to admire "the very passion and nakedness of her declaration" (199):

For although the normal rule is, of course, for the man to seek and the woman to stand still, whether she be sought or rejected, exceptions are pretty numerous when circumstances pull an inflammable nature and an impulsive character in the direction of passionate confession – despite the inherited pride and diffidence of sex. (198-9)

Linton is equally sympathetic towards Leonore Herrick, the heroine of *Goodbye Sweetheart*, Broughton's other admitted Girl of the Period:

The keynote of Leonore's character, by which all the rest is determined, is wilfulness shot through and through with folly. To an ordinary observer, that wilfulness looks like madness. Bound by no ties of prudence, conventionality, wisdom, good breeding, she flings to the winds both her fair name and her happiness, with a recklessness which goes near to destroy the reader's sympathy for her punishment, and which suggest the prosaic need for medical coercion. But here again we are held by that strong chain of sincerity which redeems so many faults. Morally suicidal as Leonore is, and provoking to a point that would have tried the patience of Job and the meekness of Moses, she is not intrinsically bad. She is irritating and faulty, but not corrupt. Her temper and her taste are both equally detestable. Her discretion is at zero, and her folly is unlimited. But she is true-hearted though wrong-headed; and all the time she plays at falseness – owing to the fatal strain of coquetry in her nature by which she is dominated and undone – she is really loyal, and is suffering more than she wounds. (201-2)

In many ways, a fictional Girl of the Period eludes definition as she encompasses a range of instabilities and contradictions. Dinah Mulock, reviewing a book of poems by Lucy Fletcher in *Macmillan's Magazine* in July 1864 ("In Her Teens," 219-223), had asserted "It is rather difficult now-a-days to find a 'girl' at all, they are every one of them 'young ladies' made up of hoops and flounce, hat and feather, plaits of magnificent (bought) hair, and heaps of artificial flowers" (219). She speculates about which phases of modern femininity are most harmful, "the foolish aping of men's manners, habits and costumes" or "the frivolous laziness, the worse than womanish inanity, which wastes a whole precious lifetime over the set of its hoops, the fashion of its bonnets, or the gossip of its morning calls" (219). Mulock sets up an opposition between the masculine woman and the superficial, inappropriately-feminised woman. The Girl of the Period, as constructed by Linton in 1868, appears to fall into the latter category, but as Anderson points out, in Linton's "Rose Blackett" story, the "fast girl" is identified with the masculine, although such behaviour is renounced when the heroine finds a proper "manly man" (*Woman Against*

Women 121). Linton appeared to recognise the relationship between opposing dynamics in her 1860 *London Review* article "The Fast Young Lady":

The fast young lady and the strong-minded woman are twins, born on the same day, and nourished with the same food, but one chose scarlet and the other hoddin gray; one took to women's rights to be dissipated and vulgar, the other to her right to be unwomanly and emancipated. (Dec.15, 1860, 568-9.)¹⁹

Although Braddon and Broughton's heroines were elided as "somebody who cometh up as a flower or throweth her husband down a well,"²⁰ there remain significant differences. Broughton's heroines are either too principled or at bottom, too ideologically constrained to commit bigamy or adultery, even unwittingly. Their inability to transgress renders their status as sensation heroines questionable, and they are perhaps the closest fictional representations of the "modern girl". The earnest women favoured by Brontë, with passions ostensibly repressed, but ultimately heightened, by undercurrents of Evangelical fervour, are sterner figures than their later counterparts, but as "fair gladiators" in the field of sexual politics, they share a similar battleground. Oliphant's claim in 1855 about antagonistic relationships in fiction, that "this furious love making was but a wild declaration of the 'Rights of Woman' in a new aspect" (557) supports the idea that feminine self assertion, in whatever context it found expression, represented a fundamental rebellion:

The old-fashioned deference and respect – the old-fashioned wooing – what were they but so many proofs of the inferior position of the woman, to whom the man condescended with the gracious courtliness of his loftier elevation! The honours paid to her in society – the pretty fictions of politeness, they were all degrading tokens of her subjection, if she were but sufficiently enlightened to see their true meaning. (557)

If a commentator such as Linton, despite her self-assured polemic, appears contradictory about the nuances of gender-acceptability and its appropriate

configuration, this confusion, itself was indicative of the multiplicity of conflicting ideologies of femininity to be negotiated. Linton's article achieved celebrity, not simply because of the outrage it provoked, despite the defensive tone of feminist responses such as *Victoria*, but rather because of the sense of recognition it engendered in a public not in thrall to what Elizabeth Langland refers to as "criticism's most stable identities: that of the domestic woman" (21); but already inured to fictional portrayals of vibrant and audacious heroines. Authorial control eluded Linton because the Girl of the Period was never entirely Linton's creation, she had already begun to accommodate herself in the public imagination in the form of women such as Oliphant's Rhoda Maitland, Thackeray's Elizabeth Gilmour, and Broughton's Nell le Strange. The "fair gladiator" that Oliphant had identified in 1855 as "not an angel" (558) had continued to develop in women's fiction over a period of two decades, and discourses about the appropriateness and validity of this figure served to provide a forum where ideas of the feminine could be contested and reconstituted.

Notes

¹ Showalter quotes Braddon's letter from Robert Lee Wolff's, "Devoted Disciple: The letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1862-1873." *Harvard Library Bulletin* XII (April 1974): 150.

² Those published in the same year included the anonymous pamphlet *A Defence for the Girl of the Period By one of the Sisterhood* (1868) Margaret Maria Brewster's *Fashions of the Period; or How do you Dress?* (1868), and an anonymous companion piece, *A Man of the Period* (1868).

³ *The Girl of the Period Miscellany* had a run of nine issues from March to November 1869.

⁴ Novels include *The Man of the Period* (1870) and *The Girl of the Period; Her Fortunes and Misfortunes* (1876) by Bracebridge Hemyng; and *The Youth of the Period* (1876) by James Frederick Shaw Kennedy. Examples of poetry are "Young Men of the Period; Simple Rules on how to Choose a Wife" [in Verse] by William Sandyfirth Grayson (1869). "The Papa of the Period" (A Ballad) (1870). A lecture on the subject appears on the British Library catalogue as "The Period; The Ways and the Wants, the Woes and the Worth of the Period. A lecture etc." (1870), although it does not state when, or if, it was delivered. The play was entitled *Girls of the Period; or the Island of Nowarpartickilar*. By Sir Francis Cowley Burnand. [A folly played as a lever du rideau at Drury Lane Theatre. Feb. 25, 1869. London: 1869].

⁵ *The American Girl of the Period; Her Ways and Views*. By Garry Gaines. Philadelphia, 1878.

⁶ *The Parsee Girl of the Period* by Mr. N.S. Ginwalla. Reproduced from the *Times* of India, Apr. 19, 1884. Eng & Guj. Bombay: 1884.

⁷ Quoted in Terry 118.

⁸ I have in mind characters such as the eponymous Aurora Floyd, and Eleanor Vane (*Eleanor's Victory*), rather than Lucy Audley, who despite being Braddon's most famous heroine is not her most representative.

⁹ Quoted in Fahnestock "Geraldine Jewsbury" 262. The Reader's Report can be found among the Bentley Papers, Add. MSS 46,659.

¹⁰ The full text of Jewsbury's Reader's Report of 19th June 1861 is reprinted as an appendix to Andrew Maunders's Broadview edition of *East Lynne*, 698-9.

¹¹ Quoted in Pykett 15.

¹² *Modern Women and What is Said of Them*. New York: 1868.

¹³ *The Story of Elizabeth* commenced its serial run in the *Cornhill* in September 1862. This was possibly the same month that *John and I* was published in hardcover (judging by its review in the *Athenaeum*), although Winifred Gerin (127) suggests that Anne Thackeray may have begun working on *Elizabeth* as early as 1853.

¹⁴ Fahnestock, for example, while acknowledging Jewsbury's unconventional portrayals of women in her own early novels, describes her as "a force of restraint on the material allowed readers born a generation or two later" ("Geraldine Jewsbury" 271). Bevington refers to Linton's early contributions to the *Saturday Review* as reviews of sensation novels "which she flayed with a ferocity hardly equalled by her male colleagues" (34) although Bevington herself only identifies 3 reviews, and 2 of these, *Hester's Sacrifice* [Eliza Tabor] and *A Life's Love* [Miss Urquhart], could not be described as sensation novels.

¹⁵ Bentley Papers, Add MSS, 46, 657, 2nd July 1866.

¹⁶ Royal Gettmann (204) notes how Jewsbury requested that her comments on Florence Marryat's *Love's Conflict* be re-written before being forwarded to the author in order to avoid Marryat recognising her handwriting.

¹⁷ Dated Mar. 8, 1870.

¹⁸ It is difficult to ascertain whether or not Romer was the prototype for the self-important Edgar Hatcheson. There is no DNB entry for Romer, although William Tinsley in *Random Recollections* (114-5) describes him as an exuberant character during his period as an actor at the Adelphi Theatre.

¹⁹ Identified by Anderson (*Woman Against Women* 97) as one of Linton's 'Modern English Women' series in the *London Review*.

²⁰ Mortimer Collins quoted in Cruse 333.

CONCLUSION

BREAD AND BUTTER MISSES

A woman is in reality a creature not a whit more holy and sacred than a man, though lingering chivalry has instituted, in theory at least, a different creed; and a female writer is not to be expected to invest her own- half of humankind with that visionary radiance which happily is inalienable from them in the eyes of every true man.

(Margaret Oliphant, "Novels," Aug. 1863, 173-4)

Although Margaret Oliphant, as a codicil to the above statement, goes on to plead for a more reverential treatment of maternity in fiction since "the position of a mother is, to both man and woman, sacred" (174),¹ her expectation here seems to be that it is the business of women to provide proper representations of femininity in novels since male writers were more likely to cloud their portrayals with exaggerated chivalry. It was, I argue, also the business of women like Oliphant to police such depictions of "supposed angelhood" (178) as thoroughly as depictions of more transgressive heroines, and this process of interrogating constructions of the feminine was a factor in determining their credibility. Mary Poovey, drawing on her study of "the ideological work of gender" concluded that "the middle-class ideology we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations" (3). While women writers contributed to this process by testing out a variety of possibilities of gender identities within fiction, the models they posited were further contested and moderated by women commentators who saw themselves as arbiters of what constituted appropriate manifestations of the feminine. In this way women had a duality of roles in the formulation of ideology, both as producers and mediators of texts.

The relationship between fiction and criticism was a complex one, facilitating a web of interconnections that reached beyond the reviewing and reviewed text. Commentators such as Oliphant, George Eliot and Geraldine Jewsbury were not simply pronouncing on the work of a discrete group of writers such as Harriet Parr, Anne Thackeray and Anna Ogle, but, in a more circular critical process, women writers and critics were engaging with each other's work, and were active and lively participants in discourses about representations of gender that were likely to have impacted upon constructions of the feminine in the novels of the period. I have privileged individual authors in this study, a necessary act to render visible those women who in Sheila Rowbotham's words have remained "Hidden from History" or, mindful of recent studies on women's writing and journalism, have begun to re-emerge on its periphery. Unlike Roland Barthes, I have no wish to celebrate "The Death of the Author," so many nineteenth-century women were denied the privilege of authorial acknowledgement it would be ungenerous to separate them further from their texts. But as Barthes has argued that "the writer's only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others" (146) I would point to the dialogic nature of women's writing which drew on numerous representations and contestations of the feminine in its struggle to give an account of what constituted women's nature and experience, what rendered their existence purposeful, and in what fictional forms their images could be moulded in narratives about their lives.

Although much of the fiction discussed in this thesis is not easily accessible to the modern researcher it is important to acknowledge that it emerged not only

from the same literary and cultural spaces that produced texts that have received a larger share of academic attention, but from the same discursive arena. The novels of Parr and Thackeray and their many contemporaries are of interest, not because they can be paralleled with the work of Eliot or Oliphant, but because they are interconnected and symbiotic, developing organically from each other, arising from and shaped by discourses both within and without fiction. This debate about how fiction should represent the feminine was in constant re-enactment by women commentators and by their storytelling selves, who told and retold in fictional form numerous versions of proper and improper femininity.

Analyses of various constructions of the feminine within fiction have enabled us to determine some of the models that formed part of the gender definitions of middle-class ideology. Examining how these models were received is useful in helping to evaluate how normative or disruptive they might be considered, although as I have indicated, there was often some degree of conflict between women's critical responsibilities and the commercial demands of the literary marketplace. Injustice against women, whether embedded in the constitutional laws of marriage or in the limited and poorly paid world of work available to the middle-class girl, were popular subjects for writers, but neither the downtrodden wife nor the slighted governess won much sympathy from women critics who sought to steer novelists, and ultimately readers, toward a more cheerful and pragmatic view of the female condition.

What appears to be an anti-feminist denial of women's oppression on the part of some critics can alternately be perceived as an assertion of women's strength and adaptability and a conviction that they could live satisfying and fulfilling lives irrespective of external constraints or gendered cultural assumptions about female emotional fragility. Although critics such as Jewsbury and Lena Eden often saw political solutions as secondary to women's own agency, they also celebrated women's capacity for individual empowerment, and their alertness to the possible negative ramifications of portraying of women as object rather than subject can be seen as a more affirmative act, particularly given their faith in the transformative value of fiction and its role in disseminating cultural norms.

I have deliberately avoided attempting to categorise the critics in this study as either feminist or anti-feminist, or conservative or radical, believing that such classifications are not only as unhelpful as the category of 'major' or 'minor' when referring to novelists, but frequently offer a gross simplification or misrepresentation of these women's complex, and sometimes seemingly self-contradictory responses. Such classifications are problematic moreover in implying a static position on particular issues when their views, like Victorian society itself, were often in a state of flux, being formulated, sharpened, or evolving as a result of the discourses in which they participated.

I have already articulated my concern that twentieth and twenty-first century studies have tended to privilege those writers and texts that tend to confirm our own contemporary concerns. It should not be necessary to establish feminist credentials, or even any degree of subversion in the women writers of the

nineteenth century as a justification for our interest in them; and to apply our own definitions of the feminist to a different social, historical and ideological milieu is to inevitably finding the vast majority of women wanting. Whether it was Oliphant or Mozley pouring scorn on the ideas of John Stuart Mill,² Eliot's lack of enthusiasm for women's suffrage³ or Eliza Lynn Linton complaining about the attributes of the modern young woman, the actions or utterances of these women often present difficulties for modern feminists, yet their overall stance often defies any easy or definitive response. While Oliphant has often been cited as a censorious, rather conservative figure, more recent studies by writers such as Merryn Williams and Elizabeth Jay have led to a re-assessment of the way she has been positioned on many issues.⁴ Jewsbury, judged by Broughton's caricature of her as Miss Grimston in *A Beginner* (1894), in which she is an active member of the "World's Women's Federation" (157) and "lectures upon subjects that women had better let alone" (149), seems to have been regarded by her contemporaries as having a rather radical reputation. Jewsbury's early novels were perceived by critics as contentious and outspoken (Sutherland 270, 688). Her publisher, John Chapman, according to Guinevere Griest, "nearly had a fit of apoplexy" (124) when he read the first printed copy of *Zoe*. Jane Williams in her review of Jewsbury's children's book, *Angelo* (1855), notes that "Miss Jewsbury is usually set down as a strong-minded lady who loves to deal with great passions and shake the nerves of grown up people" (Dec. 1, 1855, 1399), yet her frequent refusal to either recognise women's oppression or sanction any agitation against it would not convey such impression.

Critics such as Mozley and Eden equally give voice to comments that would appear to position them as conservative on a number of issues, not simply 'the woman question'. Eden, for example reviewing Margaret Maria Gordon's *Lady Elinor Mordaunt* (1860) is anxious that this writer's apparently democratic principles are not misinterpreted:

There are readers who may think this book democratic, - who may say that it has a tendency to Chartism, - that it is the work of a Socialist. To some extent it may be so, but it is the work of a *Christian Socialist*, of a Christian lady. It is the work of one who believes what she says, - of a refined, thoughtful woman who wishes to rouse others to work as she has evidently worked herself. (Jan. 19, 1861, 82.)

What is revealing about these comments, at least for the purposes of this study, is not so much what Eden herself thinks about the rights of workers, and as she re-iterates later in the review, she holds no brief for the levelling of rank, but simply that her frame of reference is informed, not by feminism or socialism, but by duty and Christian morality. These values not only provided a paradigm for the way Eden felt her own life should be lived, it served as a set of criteria for how characters in fiction such behave also.⁵ Such concepts are so far removed from contemporary notions of what literary criticism should embody that any reading of nineteenth-century reviews must be sensitive to a different, and to the modern reader, somewhat alien "horizon of expectations" (Jauss 28).

The value of duty was constantly affirmed in critical circles and under-pinned every representation of womanhood dealt with in these chapters, but its idealisation was in many ways unsatisfactory to those who sought to find exemplars that did not breach the critically preferred versions of "truth to life" female representation. As I have argued in chapter two, the notion of a female

heroic that could be enacted within the domestic sphere enabled the depiction of strong female central characters within women's writing. Norma Clarke's comment about Jewsbury's early writing, that she "was not content to represent women seen, thought, and desired by men, for she wished to be the hero of her own drama, the acting subject of her own life" (187-8) has relevance for many mid-century women writers. Despite the supposed tameness of domestic fiction it was significant in its privileging of women's concerns, although the emphasis on female renunciation as a medium for heroism brought with it its own problems of negotiating a balance between praiseworthy self-sacrifice and self-destructive martyrdom, a balance that had to worked out in many fictional situations to the satisfaction of reviewers, determined that if ideological messages about gender behaviour were to be disseminated to an impressionable female readership, they would not at least pass by without critical judgement on their suitability and credibility.

Although the mid-century preoccupation with realism is viewed by Winifred Hughes as a theoretically naive form of criticism,⁶ it does encompass more than just a belief that fiction should be mimetic. Since discourses about realism were significantly concerned with characterisation, of which gender formed a crucial component, truth-to-life provided a useful critical paradigm. It gave legitimacy to debates about the adequacy of female representation in fiction and served as a justification for the contestation of a variety of gendered types. Adrienne Rich, envisaging how feminist critical processes might properly function, notes that "A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been

led to imagine ourselves" (35), a sentiment which many nineteenth-century critics would have readily endorsed. While I would not wish to rewrite Victorian women critics as radical feminists, especially in the light of my earlier discussion, one of their primary frustrations was their inability to recognise anything approximating their own lives or experiences, or those of their contemporaries, in fictionalised depictions of womanhood.

"In its earliest years," notes Elaine Showalter, "feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images in literature as angels or monsters" (*The New Feminist Criticism* 5), but the contradiction that Poovey notes as written into the domestic ideal between "a sexless moralised angel and an aggressive carnal magdalen" (11) was one that nineteenth-century women challenged on their own terms, whatever their political persuasions. Their efforts to draw the attention of other women writers to the significance of portrayals of the feminine showed an awareness about the relationship between cultural representation and women's everyday lives that later feminists have to some degree paralleled in their concerns about the iconography of the female in twentieth and twenty first century media.⁷

It is of course disingenuous to over-stretch the comparison between nineteenth and twentieth or twenty-first perceptions of constructions of the feminine. A hundred and fifty years of texts, literary theories and cultural practices cannot so easily be elided, but if there is a point of contact between these two debates about women and realism it is the expression of a lack, not of idealised role models, but of alternate possibilities. As Myra Macdonald, in an introduction to

her 1995 study *Representing Women* commented: "When women complain about the lack of realism in the media's representation of themselves, they are criticizing lack of diversity in portraying and defining women's lives and desires, not asking for a hall of mirrors" (3).

Harriet Parr, writing in the *British Quarterly Review* objected to the degree of expectation set up by the heroines of sensation fiction, believing that they might lead readers to reject more prosaic versions of femininity put forward by writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell in *Wives and Daughters*: "Sweet Molly Gibson, loyal, unselfish, duty-loving, duty-doing, would seem, by comparison, a mere bread-and butter miss" ("The Works of Mrs, Gaskell," Apr. 1867, 425). It would be easy to add Parr's voice to the litany of women who objected to sensation, and Parr was certainly censorious about its effects, but if her comments are construed as a protest about women's lives continually served up as melodrama they take on a slightly different emphasis. It is of note that Parr approved not only Gaskell's depiction of youthful naivety in Molly Gibson but Oliphant's rather more cynical portrayal of Lucilla Marjoribanks ("Works by Mrs. Oliphant," Mar. 1869, 310-17), and Oliphant, as discussed in the previous chapter, was charmed by Anne Thackeray's picture of the "sullen and perverse" Elizabeth Gilmour ("Novels," 171). Isolating women commentators' condemnation of sensationalism from the context of wider debates about gender representation allows their concerns to be too easily dismissed as reactionary conservatism and an inability to deal with textual representations of female sexuality, but disapproval of sensation heroines or the "Girl of the Period" can be understood as something more complex when seen as strands of a discourse which embraced other contestations of the feminine. In some senses, whether

journalists and critics like Oliphant, Jewsbury, or Linton are construed as feminist or conservative in their pronouncements on the woman question is of less significance than an acknowledgement that their concerns were gendered ones, and their desire to see ordinary, imperfect womanhood reflected in their reading material is in itself evidence of an incipient politicisation, despite their evident resistance, in some instances, to reading the political as personal.

Lyn Pykett's notion of a "nineteenth-century crisis of gender definition" (23) although utilised by Pykett most specifically in the context of sensation and new woman fiction, has a wider application. Anxieties about how gender was constructed were not limited to the "improper" feminine of sensation novels in the mid-Victorian period, but can be detected in discourses about a range of women's writing, including the domestic and religious fiction of the 1850s and 1860s. By extending the parameters of current academic research to explore the responses of women commentators to alternate constructions of the feminine, including those constructions that were affirmed and validated as well as those that disturbed or outraged, and to give equal weight to discourses that contested the non-transgressive heroine, I contend that a fuller understanding of women's agency in the formation of gender ideologies becomes possible.

Notes

¹ Oliphant is engaged here with Anne Thackeray's portrayal of Mrs Gilmour in *The Story of Elizabeth* (1863). She writes: "no-one can contemplate the spectacle of a mother plotting against her daughter's happiness, and struggling with wild transports of love for her daughter's love, without a certain sickening sense of desecration" ("Novels," Aug. 1863, 174).

² Both articles were published in *Blackwood's* and are broadly similar in tone. Oliphant's "The Great Unrepresented" appeared in Sept. 1866, 367-79; Mozley's article, "Mr Mill on the Subjection of Women" in Sept. 1869, 308-321. Mozley dismisses Mill's arguments for women's intellectual equality and while adopting a masculine, or at least a neutral voice, insists that the majority of women would support her in this view: "We do not say that Mr Mill will meet with no woman to agree with him; but from admissions constantly implied, we do feel confident that no woman of clear reason and wide experience fully acquiesces in his line of argument, or adopts his tone in her own person" (313).

³ Eliot, for example, wrote to Sarah Hennell on Oct. 12, 1867 expressing her view that agitation for women's suffrage was "an extremely doubtful good" (Ashton 290).

⁴ As I have asserted earlier in this study, Elizabeth Jay's introduction to *Miss Marjoribanks* (1988) offers a useful discussion on this issue and includes references to a number of other studies.

⁵ Eden does indeed seem to have lived her life according to these values. In her review of *The Autobiography of a Working Man* (1860), Jewsbury pays tribute to Eden's reputation as "a genuine and successful missionary among the poor," and one who has "turned aside from the brilliant frivolities of social life in the highest ranks in order to carry light and comfort in the poor man's home" (June 14, 1862, 781).

⁶ Winifred Hughes in chapter two of *The Maniac in the Cellar* discusses at length the mid-century critics' preoccupation with realism. She perceives the realist agenda as primarily a moral one, arising from "an instinctive belief in the order and significance of the universe and of 'life as it is' "(51). Viewing responses to sensation fiction in this light she claims that Margaret Oliphant "with her usual dogmatism narrows the moral focus to her own conventional formulas of right and wrong" (51).

⁷ Studies on women and the media are numerous. Useful collections of essays include *Looking On: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and Media*. Ed. Rosemary Betterton (1987) and *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*. Ed. Frances Bonner et al. Supporting the point I have made that this was a major political issue for feminists in the twentieth century, Bonner and Lizbeth

Goodman, in an introduction to their study, note that the subtitle of their book "indicates its concern with one of the first areas where women's studies began critical work - cultural representation" (1).

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"*The Race for Wealth: a Novel*. By Mrs. J. H. [Charlotte] Riddell." Sept. 22, 363-4.

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1855

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1858

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